

**Aspects in the Cultural History of the Mizos during the Pre-  
British period**

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Fulfilment for the Award of the Degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN HISTORY**

**By**

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To My Teacher Dr. M.N. Rajesh

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## **DECLARATION**

I, MALSAWMDAWNGLIANA, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “ASPECTS IN THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE MIZOS DURING THE PRE-BRITISH PERIOD” submitted to me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. M.N. Rajesh is a bonafide research work. I also declare that this has not been submitted previously in part or full to this university or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date:  
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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “ASPECTS IN THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE MIZOS DURING THE PRE-BRITISH PERIOD” submitted by MALSAWMDAWNGLIANA bearing Regd. No. 04SHPH05 IN Partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in History is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

The Thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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Malsawmdawngliana



## MAP OF MIZORAM



## **Preface**

The reason why I have chosen this topic is to challenge the present colonial legacy of history writing that has internalised history writing of the Mizos for a long time. In opposition to colonial legacy, to justify my argument, we may state that the earlier Mizo history writers were colonial products. Here, Logocentrism is circled around the evangelical and philanthropic activities of the west which are imposed upon the 'inferior' Mizo culture, as well as the activities of colonial officials who superficially looked at the Mizo society carrying the load of the "Whiteman's burden", a belief that the white 'races' are more civilized over other cultures. Therefore, for the colonial writer and the internalized Mizo local writers, the practices of the Mizos were narrated as acts of barbarism, animism etc. However, if we are to shift the centeredness of this Eurocentric view we have to locate how these symbols have meaning in their existence from the perspective of the Mizo worldview and the multiple layers of meanings that are attached to its structure. The local knowledge cannot be abandoned at all, as it carries certain meanings that are clear to the views of the tribals themselves. Therefore, the important themes such as hunting and agricultural production have been chosen as the fields of investigation. These two themes can be looked upon as agents of change within the worldview of the Mizos. However, I feel that the earlier British writers and the subsequent writers did not give due importance to these two agents of change. I may project that they were silent about these subjects, but they might have picked these up "accidentally" to fulfil their own interests and agenda.

In this thesis the chapters are organised on the basis of thematic unity and arranged in a way that they bring about the narrative clearly. Therefore, the beginning chapter is on historiography of the Mizos, to examine the sources and the limitations for using these sources. The chapter also poses a challenge to normative-colonial periodising by using local knowledge of bamboo famine, the possibility and the limitations. Mizo history emerged from centuries of orality to textuality abruptly during the colonial period, thereby falling into the colonial trap of periodization. As a concept, periodization employed the colonial writers charted a tripartite of Indian history in which process the regional particularity in the Mizo case was totally

overshadowed. An interface with the sources has helped problematize this question and also showed a new path which this thesis proposes based on the Mautam.

As the continuation of the process, chapter 2 highlights important themes of Myth of origin and theories of migration. The myth of origin is circled with Khampat and Chhinlung which are reinvented and interpreted. The Myth of origin is highlighted as the important instrument of identity formation among different clans of the Mizos who now lived beyond the states and international borders in the present period of the nation states. Textualising and formalisation of these myths among earlier Mizo writers are also one of the topics discussed here. The chapter also takes a journey of migration basing the historicity of these myths and the progress of migration from the east to the present Mizo hills. The method here is based on linguistic affinity (taken from historical linguistics) and folk narratives of the Mizos and the neighbouring tribes, archival sources and the early literatures are used to support these arguments.

In the third chapter the central focus is on geographical spaces which are regarded as sacred, which gave meaning to their existence and the cultural networks that are imbibed within it. Though colonialism has uprooted many aspects of Mizo society and replaced them with colonial categories, the colonial concept of space couldn't be fully established as the earlier sacred geography continues to exist and resurface in many narratives like myths. Another aspect was accessing the impact of sacred in the psychic development of human beings which eventually affects their cultural progress. Thus, geographical markers and the sacred geography continued to co-exist in the construction of space.

The fourth chapter shows how social hierarchy is constructed in Mizo society. In this context we will be looking at Thangchhuah as the social ladder in Mizo society. We will also examine relationships between multiple semiotic modes used to construct hierarchy, and also show the importance of going beyond our traditional notion of language to look at how social actors employ a range of semiotic resources in organizing and interpreting social relations. These systems act oppositionally as well as cooperatively to produce situated ideas of social inequality, ideas built out of disequilibrium of bodies in space, of referents in language, and distribution of resources, as well as contradictions in the

interactions of these signs. Language, gesture, spatial relations, and food sharing are all used as resources to construct hierarchical relations in the imminent creation of rank among the pre-modern Mizo society. The language interpreted in dress, construction of the houses and ceremonies set up the order of hierarchy. At the concrete level these are the markers of change as they showed historical change over a period of time.

The summary of the research marks the final chapter wherein a detailed summary of the decision are presented beginning with a survey of the sources and the themes with their findings together with the discussion that informed these thematic surveys, summary of the whole work is presented discursively. Ultimately the thesis ends out by spelling the central focus.

# **Chapter – I**

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## **Historiography**

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Recent years have witnessed the emergence of a new and powerful interest in the study of cultural history, an interest that has produced important works in the social sciences. This had produced a play of a far-fetched array of theoretical, ideological, and methodological view points. However in the case of history writing on the Mizos and by extension the entire North east, history writing has lacked theoretical and empirical soundness. This has thus reduced the enterprise of history writing to an exercise of mere documentation rather than a serious interdisciplinary pursuit. One of the prime recent for such a situation is mainly because the earlier writers about the Mizos were British administrators, anthropologists and the Christian missionaries; who had superficially looked at the Mizo society and tended to view their practices as 'primitive' taking a scale of advancement of contemporary west.

Moreover, their writings were mainly based on the Rankean tradition of 'just to show how it actually was.' This was the product of British administrators whose main aim was just to maintain records for the efficiency of administration. Thus most of the records on Mizos followed this method, which will be elaborated more in this chapter. The representations which they had implied on writing Mizo history has to be deconstructed as a first step towards preparing the ground for a proper understanding. In order to meet this demand we have to locate the sources of Mizo history in the context of historiography beginning from the colonial period and secondly to proceed to examine the limitations that have followed from the use of these sources, suggesting the alterations in history writing by combining different theories which have been shaped/stretched in accordance with the particular region. In this investigation we felt that it is essential to understand from the "Worldview" of the Mizos. Engaging with the process we should also try to highlight the possibility of periodizing Mizo history by using local knowledge of bamboo flowering (Mautam) as a marker of dividing the period.

## 1.1 Understanding Cultural history as “Worldview”:

The idea of culture sits at the heart of cultural history. Despite its widespread use in everyday communication, and perhaps because of its centrality to a range of academic disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, literary criticism, cultural history and cultural studies, the concept of culture remains complex and contested. If it is impossible to define culture, can we establish any parameters around the field of cultural history? Common theoretical touchstones for recent cultural history have included: Jurgen Habermas's formulation of the public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere*; Clifford Geertz's notion of 'thick description' (expounded in, for example, *The Interpretation of Cultures*); and the idea of memory as a cultural-historical category, as discussed in Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember*.<sup>1</sup>

We shall examine how cultural history can be understood from the rubric of worldview. Umberto Eco in his book *A theory of Semiotics* subsumes the entire edifice of human culture under the discipline of semiotics. His two propositions are that:

- 1) the whole culture must be studied as a semiotic phenomenon
- 2) all aspects of culture can be studied as the contents of semiotic activity.

Stating it a bit differently he suggests that “the whole of culture should be studied as communicative phenomenon based on signification of systems” and that “only by studying it in this way can certain of its fundamental mechanism be clarified.”<sup>2</sup> In other words semiotics is best conceived as a general theory of culture, and all cultural realities can be explained and understood under the rubric of semiotics. This would include the cultural reality and the fundamental mechanism of Weltanschauung (Worldview). As a foundational component to

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<sup>1</sup> Extensive explanation on Cultural history can be found at *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere, An inquiry to into a category of Bourgeois society*

<sup>2</sup> Umberto Eco; *A Theory of Semiotics, Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p.22.

human culture then it is entirely appropriate to examine the nature and function of worldviews sub specie semiotica.

Consequently, we must connect semiotics as the science of signs with human subjects who use them so profusely. What is the nature of this apparently natural activity of making and managing signs- some in the form of dominant worldview? An answer may be found in essential semiotic nature of human persons. A defining trait of persons who possess logos is the ability to use one thing to stand another thing to section off one part of reality and employ it to refer to, mean, or stand for another part of reality. Most characteristically human being deploys sound in the form of speech to signify thoughts, feelings and ideas as well as people, places and things in the world. In turn they have developed a symbol of letters, words and written discourse to represent the same. By these primary semiotic activities people have been able to parse the cosmos and to create maps of reality.<sup>3</sup>

Recent thinkers have also emphasized the semiotic quality of human existence. For example, Charles Sanders Peirce recognized by many as the founder of modern semiology established his theory of signs on the notion that all thought and cognition and indeed human beings themselves are thoroughly semiotic in their basic nature. In his words, “the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Pierce adopted what we might call a “semiotic worldview,” that is a pan semiotic view of the universe in which signs are not merely regarded as one class of things among many non semiotic objects, but where “the entire universe is perfuse with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs.”<sup>5</sup> Hence for Pierce semiotics characterizes not only the universe but also human beings as essentially sign-begetting and sign-bound creatures.

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<sup>3</sup> For more comprehensive reading see, Everett M. Stowe; *Communicating Reality through Symbols* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966).

<sup>4</sup> *Charles Sanders Peirce, Collected Papers*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Vol.5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-58), p.314

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p.448



Ernst Cassirer in a similar manner posits in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* that human beings are primarily symbol-creating animals and that the comprehension of reality is possible only by semiotic means.<sup>6</sup> Cassirer thus promoted a pan semiotic epistemology, arguing that everything that has meaning is composed of “Symbolic forms.” This included such things as language, myth, art, religion, science and history each of which is based on its own set of symbolic laws and is independent of nature. According to Cassirer then sign systems are the only possible road to knowledge even though for him they do not in any way copy or imitate reality but instead create it.

Therefore it is clear that reading from their views we can argue that the power of signs and symbols vested across the whole spectrum of reality and human existence. They permeate the physical universe they are germane to all aspects of culture, they are essential to human thought, cognition, communication, they are efficacious instruments of either truth or falsehood. They create symbolic worlds in which people live, move and have their being. Indeed a certain string of symbols possess unique cultural power and determines the meaning of life. Those symbols which we can designate them as worldview. They provide a foundation and interpretation of life. They also inform the categories of consciousness and define human existence. Now the challenge which arises is that how this theory can be applied in our understanding of Mizo cultural history? Although Mizos belong to pre-literate society, symbols in different forms were practiced by them which spell out the meaning of their existence this will be elaborated more on chapter 4 of this thesis.

It is also worthy to note the contribution of Post-structuralist intervention on interpretation of worldview. In the pre-modern period there was substantial confidence on the part of the average westerner the Christian in particular to obtain a comprehensive review of the universe its facts as well as its values based

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<sup>6</sup> Winfried Noth; *Handbook of Semiotics, Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) p.35

on God and his self revelation in the Bible. In the modern period the center of gravity shifted from God to man, from scriptures to science, from revelation to reason in the confidence that human beings, beginning with themselves and their own methods of knowing could gain an understanding of the world, at least its facts if not its values. In the post-modern period confidence in humanity as an objective, omnipotent knower has been smashed, destroying any hopes of ascertaining the truth about the universe, its facts or its values. The result has been what Jean-Francois Lyotard has famously called an “incredulity towards meta-narratives,”<sup>7</sup> or to paraphrase, a disbelief that any worldview or large scale interpretation of reality is true and ought to be believed of socially and linguistically constructed meaning systems, each unprivileged, non homogenous and thoroughly tolerated. To play with Heidegger’s lecture title, postmodernism is an age of world pictures and is characterised by “an incommensurable plurality ways of speech.”<sup>8</sup> Post-structuralism attacked the traditional western confidence in language as bearing the freight of reality, and in the process have denied the accessibility to an extra-linguist domain of truth. All worldviews are reifications, the products of human construction and in human relations serves the interest of the stronger party in political ways.

We find approaches that can help us understand social scientific knowledge. Working at the interface of philosophy, history and literature, Jacques Derrida claimed that many key concepts are conjuring tricks for pretending that problems do not exist (using such a name as being, truth or objectivity to cover them up). Drawing upon Heideggerian phenomenology, Derrida placed such words ‘under erasure’, indicating their ambiguous status as inadequate but, in the absence of something better, it remains quite necessary. In particular, he argued that the concept of ‘the subject’ should be placed under

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard; *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, forwarded by Fredric Jameson, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol.10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

<sup>8</sup> William Rowe; “Society after the subject, Philosophy after the Worldview,” in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, ed. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw, *Christian Studies Today* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1989), p.174.

erasure in the same way. Using the critical technique, Derridean discourse analysis destabilises the key ideas upon which western knowledge is grounded; i.e. in logocentrism. Rather than searching for some underlying foundation or essence, this approach suggests that we should map the conceptual landscape for the metaphoric and metonymic relations which provide a sense of order.

In order to meet this, we have to engage in the interrogation of texts to establish their organization around certain oppositional categories; such as true/false, rationality/irrationality, objective/subjective, masculinity/femininity and same/other.<sup>9</sup> One side of the opposition is positively valued and placed in privileged position that is the dominant one. This approach has served well in the study of cultural differences where the distinction between same/other features heavily. By carefully mapping the relations of equivalence (of sameness) and difference (of otherness) we can identify the ways in which cultural differences are constructed around the ideas of insiders and outsiders and how they can be articulated with other oppositions, like rationality/irrationality, civilized/primitive, instrumental/expressive and so on. Cultures, identities and the boundaries used to mark the differences between them constantly shift through the dynamic practices of human beings which organize and recognize the built environment and their relationship to it.

Now the question is how we locate this theory in our understanding of cultural history of the Mizos. As we had already said the earlier writers about the history are the product of colonial legacy which had been followed even by the cotemporary Mizo writers. The Logocentrism is a circle around God and they believed that they are civilized over the other cultures. Therefore, for the colonial writers and the internalized Mizo local writers the practices of the Mizos during the Pre-modern period are seen as an act of barbarism, animism etc. However, if we have to shift the centeredness of this Eurocentric view we have to locate how

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<sup>9</sup> Derrida, J; *Speech and Phenomena*. Evanston, IL: North western University Press, 1973 and also indicated in two more of his book *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. *Writing difference*, London: Routledge, 1978.

these symbols have meaning in their existence from the angle of Mizo worldview. The multi layers of meanings that are attached to its structure. Therefore the arrangement and construction of the buildings have a certain symbols and meanings. These artifacts can be read as a text carrying certain meanings to the reader which can be best understood from the worldview of the Mizos. The binary of looking at the meaning, for example Patriarchy is seen as the nature of the society. But the other side feminity has been neglected. This investigation will also try to highlight the role of women and how patriarchy is also constructed as a result of negotiating with nature.

Michel Foucault the greatest of Nietzsche's modern disciples was a historian, philosopher, literary critic and even more, the objectivity of his exhaustive investigations stated in his own words, was to "Create history of different modes by which in our culture, human beings are made subjects."<sup>10</sup> The plethora of cultural forces at play in shaping human life seems to be his primary object of investigation. As Edward Said explains, "he researched and revealed technologies of knowledge and self which beset society, made it governable, controllable, normal, even as these technologies developed their own uncontrollable drives, without limit or rationale. Additionally, on the critical level as the "philosopher of the death of man," Foucault "dissolved the (modern) anthropological models of identity and subject-hood underlying research in the humanistic and social sciences."<sup>11</sup> Foucault made it clear that the way people functioned in society was not because they were free and independent Cartesian egos, solitary artists, gifted individual, or trained professionals, but because of the power of ideologies, disciplines, discourses, and epistemes that specified the a priori rules that ordered the thought, speech, and behaviour of all people. Foucault devised rules about such rules and exposed them for the power mechanisms they were. About these knowledge regimes, especially as they were embodied in such institutions as the clinic, the asylum, and the history of

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<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Said, Michel Foucault, 1926-1984, in *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p.1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp.10-11.

sexuality, Foucault brooked no illusions. Then the question is what role did the concept of worldview play in his analysis.

The notion of episteme is crucial to Foucault's thought, and it seems at least initially to bear a family resemblance to worldview. Pamela Major-Poetzl suggests as much when she writes that "The term discourse and episteme are frequently regarded as idiosyncratic expressions for the more common terms discipline and worldview."<sup>12</sup> There seems to be textual support for this contention especially in *The Order of Things*, where the exposition of the classical episteme has been interpreted by many readers as a basic and fundamental category underlying the intellectual productions of the seventeenth centuries. For example, Foucault writes: "In any given culture and at any moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether explain in a theory or silently in practice."<sup>13</sup> For Foucault the edifice of knowledge is a complex structure, and an episteme, which is analogous to a worldview, is a part of that deep complexity. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault affirms that an episteme may be suspected of being something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes one each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape- a great body of legislation written once and for all by some anonymous hand. This sentence is interesting for it contains Foucault's own description of both an episteme and a worldview, given their close association. Both entail an inescapable set of rules and regulations, a way of reasoning, a pattern of thinking, a body of laws that generate and govern all aspects of formal knowing.

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<sup>12</sup> Pamela Major Poetzl, Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Western Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of north Carolina Press, 1983), p.23. David Carr, *Interpreting Husserl: Critical and Comparative Studies* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), pp, 220-21, believes epistemes are equivalent to conceptual schemes or worldviews, though he recognizes that Foucault himself denies their isomorphism to worldviews or cultural zeitgeist.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, Michel; *The Order of Things, An Archeology of human Sciences*, Tr. Les Mots et les choses, Vintage Books, New York, 1994. p.168

At the same time Foucault confuses matters to some extent when he says that an episteme as a significant cognitive layer should not be identified with worldview. In his introduction to *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he admits that the absence of methodological sophistication in *The Order of Things* may have given the impression that his “analyses were conducted in terms of cultural totality.”<sup>14</sup> This would be a mistake! However, in the subsequent English edition of *The Order of Things*, Foucault states that the original purpose of the book was not to be: an analysis of Classicism in general, not a search for Weltanschauung but strictly ‘regional’ Study.”<sup>15</sup> Corroboratively, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* which he deems in part to be corrective in previous works, including *The Order of Things* – Foucault is clear in stating that his “aim is most decidedly not to use the categories of cultural totalities (whether world-views, ideal types, the particular spirit of an age) in order to impose on history, despite itself, the forms of structural analysis.”<sup>16</sup> Thus Foucault distance episteme from Weltanschauung as an aspect of his historical methodology. His quest to identify the former localized subterranean layers of belief must be not be confused with comprehensive explanation of reality.

Despite this lexical ambiguity, it is primordial and determinative field of the episteme that Foucault is most anxious to bring to light and to do so not by means of typical historical study but rather by means of his famed method of “Archaeology” and “genealogy.” Rather than focussing on what known (history) or why knowledge is possible (epistemology), he investigates how fields of knowledge are structures (archaeology). He not only wanted to know the structures of knowledge but also their ancestry (genealogy). Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*, Foucault tentatively defined the notion as “the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically

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<sup>14</sup> Foucault, Michel; *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Tr. A.M. Sheridan Smith, Routledge, London and New York, reprint 2010. p.16

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, Michel; *The Order of Things*, p.10

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, Michel (1993), op, cit, p.x

today.<sup>17</sup> By means of this genealogical investigation subjected knowledge would be identified, released and brought into play. Though in due course Foucault's deployment of archaeological description was eventually surpassed by genealogy, nonetheless he sought to keep them functioning in tandem.

The archaeological and genealogical investigation of epistemes is intimately bound up with Foucault's reflections on the subject of power. He sets before his reader s a view of the world in which human beings are trapped within language structures and knowledge regimes with no possibility of escape. Every human discourse is a power play, every social arrangement oppressive and every cultural setting tyrannical. In this Foucauldian universe, there are no privileged or transcendent discourses unencumbered by the relativities of history or the dynamic of denomination. The world is suffused with the will to power and no social relationships are uncorrupted by it. All discursive practices imply a scientific power of politics and epistemic despotism, for as Foucault explains, "Truth is not outside of power or itself lacking in power." Knowledge is also linked to power because of its connection with discourse that creates the world. The world which is created by discourse is the world of institutions, knowledge and practices that the present system of power finds advantageous. Knowledge is somehow independent of some stratagem and serves the common good. Rather, he makes this alternative confession:

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge ...; that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that doesn't pre-suppose and constitute the same power relations. These "power-knowledge relations" are to be analysed, therefore, non on the basis

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<sup>17</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) pp.83-85

of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system but on the contrary the subject who knows the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Worldviews as epistemic constructs must also be implicated in the power knowledge relation. As visions of life and reality and determinative of ideas, values and actions, they are not to be merely understood as neutral conceptual frameworks, but exist in service to some socio-political agenda and bastion of power (Lets say theism for the church, naturalism for marxism and darwinism etc). In sceptical Foucauldian terms worldviews are merely the linguistic constructions of power elite. They are the facades of an absentee reality and function as effective means of social oppression.

As intimidating hypotheses about reality that serve as effective instruments of coercion, all worldviews, however they may fit into Foucault's over all reckoning of the epistemological order must be associated with "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to...formalized systems."<sup>19</sup> As such they too must be submitted to archaeological and genealogical investigation, thereby exposing their intellectual structure and epistemic source. Such an investigation would manifest "whose justice and which rationality" worldviews do indeed serve. In a reincarnation of the spirit of Gorgias and Protagoras, Foucault is essentially saying something like this: nothing exists; if anything exists, it cannot be thought about or apprehended by humanity; even if it can be apprehended, it cannot be communicated; even if it can be

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<sup>18</sup> Foucault, Michel; *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, Tr. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1995), pp.27-28

<sup>19</sup> Foucault; *The Archeology of Knowledge*. p.191.



communicated (and it can), it is communicated in discursive practices that are always in the interest of the stronger part! In the final analysis the conclusion of a Foucauldian must be this: worldviews are nothing but pseudo-interpretations of an ultimate reality all dressed up in a linguistic power suit.

Thus in the context of post-structuralism worldviews have been subject to considerable reconfiguration. According to Jacques Derrida as logocentric systems of thought and belief, they must be deconstructed in order to expose them as self-referential symbol systems that fail to connect with external reality. Despite the time-honoured Western tradition of an objective reference point for philosophical assertions, there is really nothing outside worldviews “texts” which conceptualize the cosmos except a gaping metaphysical absence. Worldviews therefore are actually sophisticated reifications—which in Berger and Luckmann’s terms may be understood as ordained conceptual systems allegedly grounded in some recognized objectivity but whose human origins have been perilously forgotten. In describing worldviews as an associated product of cognitive layer of the first order epistemes, Michel Foucault has provided a basis to understand how worldviews are a part of knowledge/power relationship that serves the interest of the stronger party or the party seeking strength. A thorough archaeological analysis and genealogical investigation of the origin and the content of such systems will reveal their true nature and how they have functioned and are functioning socially in the shaping of the self and in the fundamental categories of human experience. Thus the transition from modern to postmodern epochs has resulted in a remarkable change in the understanding the nature and character of the concept Worldview.

## **1.2 Cultural History - Twentieth-century Developments**

The writing of cultural history expanded further in the twentieth century as textbooks and popular works presented the results of generations of research and interpretation. Notable examples were the one hundred volumes of Henri Berr's series *Evolution of Humanity* (begun in 1920); Egon Friedell's *A Cultural*

*History of the Modern Age* (1931), which, dedicated to Bernard Shaw and glorying in its journalistic style, carried the story from the Renaissance to psychoanalysis and the "collapse of reality"; Preserved Smith's *History of Modern Culture* (1934), which, in the spirit of Robinson's new history, surveyed early modern sciences, humanities, social control, and "spirit of the times"; and *European Civilization: Its Origin and Development*, edited by Edward Eyre (7 vols., 1934–1939), which included also global frontiers beyond the West. In such works the whole world, private and public, real and imagined, natural and social, becomes a field of anthropological inquiry, interpretation, and speculation.

From the beginning the defining feature of cultural history, shared with anthropology, has been an inclination to holism—the effort to grasp "the history of everything," in Berr's famous phrase, or as Harry Elmer Barnes wrote of the new history, "the recording of everything which has happened in the past"—but of course "in the light of twentieth-century knowledge and methods." Yet cultural history was turned to analysis as well as synthesis, and so in 1940 in the United States, for example, there appeared a volume, *The Cultural Approach to History* ("edited for the American Historical Association"), which explored a wide range of techniques of cultural analysis, means of analyzing social groups, nationality, institutions, and ideas as sources of cultural history.

In this generation little has changed save the rhetorical claims in the "new cultural history," so-called since the publication of the volume by the same name by Lynn Hunt in 1989, supplemented also by the "new historicism," which has made its own contributions to cultural history, and by the study of mentalities and cultural practices carried on from the *Annales* school by Roger Chartier. In general, recent cultural history has come to embrace a wide and miscellaneous range of topics, such as crime, madness, childhood, old age, gesture, humour, smells, space, and other items (appearing on the world wide web) from addiction to unbelief. In terms of theory this self-proclaimed "new cultural history" has arisen out of the wreckage of scientific and Marxist history, which sought the concealed mechanisms of social change beneath the surface of collective

behaviour. This is true in the sense not only that many new cultural historians such as Natalie Davis and Lynn Hunt have emerged from the materialist assumptions of socioeconomic historical practice and/or Marxist theory, but also that cultural history has always contained a powerful critique of such methods.

In general, cultural history rejects economic and political reductionism, gives up the noble dream of objectivity, recognizes the role of imagination in historical reconstruction, and, no longer aspiring to rigorous explanation, turns instead to what has been called "interpretive social science." As represented by Clifford Geertz and Charles Taylor, interpretive social science places understanding (*Verstehen*) above explanation and so hermeneutics above causal analysis as the principal access to a knowledge of the human condition, past and present. Explanation requires some sort of reduction of experience, or evidence, to crucial factors at the expense of excluding other experience, or evidence, which not only lends color or, as Geertz says, thickness to description but also qualifies simplistic and naturalistic notions of causation.

The new cultural history may entail a sort of relativism distasteful to historians of the older schools, but the positive aspect is a more critical awareness of the meaning of the historian's craft. Not only the objects of history but the works of historians are themselves subject to the conditions of their cultural environment, and so (in contemporary parlance) "culturally constructed." Yet the premise of the new cultural history that, as Hunt writes, "the representations of the social world themselves are the constituents of social reality," is an insight not unfamiliar to earlier cultural historians; for as Huizinga reminded us, "The historical discipline is a cultural process." And like culture it is still changing and renewing itself, though not always with much appreciation for its own history.

### **1.3 Writing Cultural history of North East India:**

The history of North east India has not been given adequate attention in main stream Indian history writings. Marginalization of the North Eastern region could be seen in the trend of historical writings in India. Well known intellectuals

of the academic world such as Peter Burke's '*popular culture*', Eric Wolf's '*people without history*', E.P Thompson's '*unsung voices of history*', Genovese's '*objects and subjects of history*', Hobsbawm's '*social banditry*', Ranajit Guha's '*subaltern studies*', Lacan's '*others*', Said's '*Orientalism*' Barthes' '*structural analysis of narratives*', Derrida's '*deconstruction*', Michel Foucault's '*history of the historian*' Skaria's '*hybrid histories*' and many others question the existing orthodoxy of historical discourse.<sup>20</sup> This is also true in the context of the North East as the regional specificity has been ignored by the academic community until the recent time. The greatest challenge to the Indian historians is to incorporate regional histories in the broader framework of Indian history.<sup>21</sup> There has been consistent exclusion of North East from the history of India. A well known historian from the North East Sajal Nag pointed that:

“Such neglect prompted the historians of North East India to take up research on the area but they failed to communicate them to the rest of India.” As a result North East continues to suffer from historiographical exclusion. But unless the stories of North East are integrated with the history of the rest of the country, a true national history can never be achieved.”<sup>22</sup>

This indifferent attitude towards the North East is evident in national curricula. Sirkka Ahonen rightly remarked in this context “the national curricula conveys narratives that are never inclusive of whole communities, and history curricula in particular need examination of their role as forms of ‘identity

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<sup>20</sup> Kate, Currie; *The Challenge to Orientalist, Elitist and Western historiography, Notes on the Subaltern project 1982-1989*, in George Pfeffer & Deepak Kumar Behara; *Contemporary Society Tribal Studies*, Volume Two, Concept Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997 and also in Shreedharan, E; *A textbook of Historiography 500 BC to 2000 AD*, Orient Longman, New Delhi.

<sup>21</sup> Kumar, BB; ‘North East India: Crisis of perception & Credible Action’ in *Dialogue Quarterly*, A Journal of Astha Bharatthi, New Delhi, Vol. 1. No. 2. Oct-Dec

<sup>22</sup> Nag, Sajal; *India and North-East India, Mind, Politics and the process of Integration 1946-1950*, Regency Publication, New Delhi, 1998, p.6

politics'. Minorities tend to be excluded from the master historical narratives".<sup>23</sup> The cultural history of various communities of the North East has hardly found space in national curricula. Their heroes are forgotten and instead fed with the stories of kings and kingdoms of the rest of India that largely do not appeal to the people of the North East. The struggles of Khasis, Mizo chiefs, Jaintias and Nagas against the British have no place at all in the history of India. This is not only sad but also extremely unfair. The question remains the same with when Gayatri Spivak asks 'Can the Subaltern Speak'!<sup>24</sup> The answer is still 'No' in Indian history unless a comprehensive change in the historical discourse of India takes place.

The colonial ethnographers and Christian missionaries were the earliest scholars who represented tribal culture with their European terms and pronunciations. Numerous literatures on tribal cultural history were produced by colonial ethnographers and Christian Missionaries like A.Z Makenzie, JH Hutton, J.Shakepear, N.E Parry, J.H Mills, J.M Lloyd, J.H Lorrain. Habitually, colonial and missionary' terms/terminology were ethnocentric in nature. In recent period, some scholars (*trained indigenous*) feel the burden of these ethnocentric terms and various efforts have been made on the decolonization of these local names/ terminology. In case of Mizoram, colonial names have been changed - *Lusei*, instead of *Lushai*, *Maras* instead of *Lakher* and *Aizawl* instead of *Aijal*. However, in many of the recent discourses (*including official discourse*) made by non locals both at the national and international levels are extremely ignorant on local language/terminologies. The capital of Mizoram, *Aizawl* is misspelt as *Aizwal* in news papers, academic discourses and even at airports. There has been repeated failure to run a correction, even after being asked. This is also evident in the academic field. For instance, one of the most popular

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<sup>23</sup> Ahonen, Sirkka; "Politics of Identity through history Curriculum: Narratives of the Past for Social Exclusion-or Inclusion?" in Journal of Curriculum Studies ISSN 0022-0272 print/ISSN 1366-5839 online, Taylor & Francis Ltd, <<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>>

<sup>24</sup> Spivak, Gayatri; 'Can the Subaltern Speak' in Cary Nelson & Lawrence; Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture. Ranajit Guha & Gayatri Spivak (Ed); Selected Subaltern Studies, 1988

referee's journals of Modern Asian Studies in 1987 writes "*The Negroids, who came from south and south-west China, are the present Nagas of Nagaland.*"<sup>25</sup>

Surprisingly, the editorial boards including this Indian professor have failed to notice that the Naga tribes belong to the mongoloid stock of Tibeto-Burman. No correction was made even in the continuous issues. Such ignorance has for a long time dominated the North East discourse scenario which damages image of the people and their culture. Naga Students' Federation (not the insurgency groups) who had forbidden a non-Naga to write on Naga history without their prior approval clearly indicates how people contested against such academic imperialism.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand the attempt to include North East history in the main stream discourse had been first taken up by S.K. Bhuyan between 1930s and 40s. Using the available resources Bhuyan first started his journey with much acclaimed *History of Assam*. He had a mission in his writings he acted as a crusader for placing Assam in the history of the Indian nation. His contributions during these periods are noteworthy and can be categorized into historical, biographical and miscellaneous. A historical sense has been preserved among the north east literate people through their respective chronicles and among the pre literate people in the form of folklore and folk songs.

#### **1.4 Sources of writing Mizo cultural history:**

The central focus of this theme is twofold, one to locate the sources of Mizo history in the context of historiography beginning from the colonial period and secondly, proceeding to examine the limitations that have followed from the

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<sup>25</sup> Singh, B. P.; *North-East India: Demography, Culture and Identity Crisis*, Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 21, No. 2. (1987), pp. 257-282.

<sup>26</sup> Prabhakar, M.S.; '*Object of history, on the politics of the Naga Students' Federation's warning against any academic research into the Naga people's history without permission*' in Frontline Magazine, 26, September

use of these sources. We will then focus on how these limitations are reflected in historical scholarship with special reference to the construction of the pre-colonial period.

Writing of Mizo history is still limited in the arena of theoretical approach as the majority of writings look drab and dry. This is mainly because the majority of writings on Mizo history lack theoretical approach and conceptualisation, but is reduced to mere documentation than history. There is very little awareness of the current debates in social sciences that have led to methodological advances forcing many historians to adopt analytical tools from diverse disciplines.

On tracing the ethnic background of the Mizos there is confusion over the question of the common nomenclature and origin. This is mainly because that the oral sources are not studied in comparing the relevant information with prevailing archaeology findings, that are available in the form of big memorial stones, that reveals about the past. eg:- Lung Au, Lungphunlian etc., which, reflect the condition of the past. However, the literary sources of the Mizos today belong to the British period, brought by the British officials during their short-term rule in Mizoram. Another limitation is that Mizo did not form a homogenous group with a single culture, as there are different clans within the Mizos; therefore in each practices of the clans there are also several variations. Thus the process of history writing should reflect the differences as the use of homogenous terms would lead to a different picture and would conceal the local diversities.

The sources of history of Mizo can be classified as:

- 1) Oral Sources,
- 2) Archaeological sources: Stone fragment, Megaliths,
- 3) Foreign accounts,
- 4) Existing literature (Anthropological approach, Colonial writers, Church history and Local writers)
- 5) Archival.

This may be elaborated and analysed as below:

### **1) Oral Sources:**

The most important sources of history are from oral tradition. The transmission of oral tradition may follow definite rules. Where special techniques and methods exist, their purpose is to preserve the tradition as faithfully as possible and from one generation to the other. Oral history gains impetus importance on interpretation of history. To quote Paul Thompson the discovery of oral history by historians... is not only a discovery but recovery. It gives a future no longer tied to the cultural significance of paper documents... Oral history tradition therefore played an important role in understanding the historical evolutions of those societies which do not have recorded history and where beginnings might have to be made with the interpretation of legends, myths and folklore.

There is a lack of recorded history in the case of Mizo history writing. The literary sources among the Mizo become available only in the later part of the nineteenth century after the advent of the British, when the two missionaries, JH Lorraine and FW Savidge introduced the Roman alphabet for the Mizos and started education in Mac Donald Hill Aizawl. Oral sources cannot be denied in writing Mizo history as there is a scarcity of literary sources. For today, oral sources are accepted as complementary to the recorded sources in the reconstruction of the past.<sup>27</sup> The traditional sources include all non-conventional sources like folklore, folk songs, beliefs, ceremonies, hymns, rituals etc.

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<sup>27</sup> Nikunja Behari Biswas; *Historical Research In Arunachal Pradesh: Oral Source and method*, Proceeding of North East India History Association (PNEIHA) Shillong, 1993, p.33.



Oral sources of the Mizo may be elaborated as under:-

(a) Chhinlung tradition:

Most of Mizo historians are of the opinion that Mizos originally came out of a big cave. Lusei, Hmar and other clans in Mizoram called it “Chhinlung”, whereas Thadous, Paites, Gangtes, Vaipheis and others called it “Khul” or “Khulpi” but the way they locate the place is different from one another. The word “Chhin” stands for covered and “Lung” stands for stone. Some believe that the ancestors of the Mizo might have been a cave dweller or they might have come out from a big cave.

This reveals that the people who sang this song had a nostalgic attachment for the place of their origin, which is “Chhinlung”, and they wished that they would go back one day. *Rochunga Pudaite* located that the word ‘Chhinlung’ to be ‘Chin Lung’, the name of the Chinese prince rather than a mere covering stone, who revolted against his father Shih Huangti of the Chi’n dynasty and who built a great wall of China in 228 B.C.<sup>28</sup> that the prince has first established himself somewhere in the Himalayan mountains and then migrated again to the present Shan State of Burma. The Mizo are believed to be a subject of Chin Lung whose name continued to be retained as Chhinlung connecting with their origin.

There is a story told by the Thadous that in the past there were in subterranean region seven important villages ruled by Noimangpa, chief of Noimang beneath the earth, the cutting up of a big snake who blocked the hole into seven pieces by Chawngthu the progenitor of the Thadous, who led the migration out to the upper world, and the seven members of the company including Chawngthu who emerged out of the Khul. The names of thereof the seven are mentioned. Those of the other four are not known but they are believed to include the progenitors of the Meitei, the Naga, the Burmese and the unknown

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.22.

Foreigner.<sup>29</sup> There is also another legend which gives an interesting piece of information, different clans came out of a big cave (Chhinlung) and that the last to emerge were the Ralte couple whose loud chattering made Pathian (God) shut down the covering stone for fear of over-populating the upper world.<sup>30</sup>

Pu Thangvunga who had gone in search of origin and migration of the Zos in 1941 explains that, the ancestors of the Mizo came from Sanghai, sent out by a Chinese king to be followers of his son who was to establish himself. But without following the prince, they cast lots according to which they proceeded in two groups, one group towards the southwest and the other to the south. The duration of the time they spent between Shanghai and Burma is not known, but the one in 1941 was counted as the 47<sup>th</sup> generation. When the group came to Burma the Burmese said, “The “Chinlu” are coming.” (Chin is abbreviated form for Chinese, and ‘lu’ means ‘people’ in Burmese. it is believed that “Chinlu” came to be known as “Chhinlung” in the course of time.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless contemporary historical writings and other recent works on the Mizo produced some clues on these claims. Certain writers believed that they abandoned Chhinlung because of their inability to check and defeat their enemies.<sup>32</sup> Nunthara contents that “All the writers on the subject and the traditional history of the Mizo verbally handed down through several decades agree that the term Chhinlung, whether a place or a person’s name, originated from China and that the Mizo and all the related tribes claim to have originated from this. From this account, even though a conjectural one, we can surmise that the original home of the Mizo is somewhere in the east.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kipgen Mangkhosat; *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, Mizo: Theological Conference, Aizawl, p.33.

<sup>30</sup> Shakespear, J; *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1912 p.93

<sup>31</sup> Zawla K; *Pi pute leh an thlah te chanchin* : Zomi book Agency, Aizawl,1993 (6<sup>th</sup> edition), pp 6-7

<sup>32</sup> Lalrimawia; *Mizoram history and cultural Identity* (1890-1947) Guwahati: Spectrum Publications. p.12.

<sup>33</sup> Nunthara, C; *Mizoram: Society and Polity*, New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1996, p.39.

The archaeology of migrations is not attempted and thus reliance on language without co-relation to material culture would make these conjectures unsteady. This aspect was never given much weightage in the writing of Mizo history.

(b) Earth Hole tradition: -

The folktale also indicates that the first man on this earth came out of the hole in the earth. When all men came out of this hole all were equal, but in a short time the cleverer men became chiefs and nobles and ruled over the less intelligent and energetic, who became the lower orders, and are known as *machhi*.<sup>34</sup>

The above folk tale shares common parallels with many folk tales of the contiguous regions and also in other parts of the world which explains the rise of different strata in society as the devices employed in narrating this tale clearly reveals.

(c) Totemistic tradition: -

There are only four clans among the Mara which appear to have any sort of totemistic origin: the *Bonghia*, the *Theutha*, the *Hnaileu* and the *Mihlong*.

The origin of the *Bonghia* and *Thleutha* clans of *Savang* is the same, both claiming descendent from a python. The story is that many years ago there was a girl called *Pithlong*, who was employed as a priestess for performing sacrifices to the *Khisong*, the abode of evil spirits. As she held a priestly office, this girl had to remain a virgin. One night, however the python came to the place where *Pithlong* was sleeping, and assuming human form, had a connection with her. In due course *Pithlong* gave birth to a son, *Bonghia* who founded the *Savang* chief's family. After *Bonghia's* birth, *Pithlong* again had connection with the snake, and a second son named *Thleutha*, was born. *Thleutha* also founded a clan. The

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<sup>34</sup> Perry, N.E; *The Lakhers*, Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, on behalf of Tribal research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, p.232.

*Thleutha* clan, though of noble birth, has never been a ruling house. Both the *Bonghia* and the *Thleutha* clans are snake clans. It is forbidden for them to kill or even touch a python, the belief is that if they so, they would die instantly. They regard the python, or *Paripi*, as they call it, as a good spirit, and as the special protector of all members of the *Bonghia* and the *Theuthla* clans.

The *Hnaihleu* clan of Saiko is a tiger clan; all members of it show special reverence to tigers, and it is forbidden for them to kill a tiger. The story of the origin of the clan is as follows.

The founder of the tiger clan was a man called *Hnaihleu*, whose name the clan still bears. *Hnaihleu* was a great friend of a tiger called *Nangtha*. *Nangtha* used to warn his friend whenever tigers were going to kill the village cattle, and consequently *Hnaihleu* always managed to save his animals. In gratitude for the benefits conferred on him by the tiger *Nangtha*, *Hnaihleu* laid down that none of his descendants must ever kill a tiger, never look at a tiger that had been killed, or ever take part in the 'Ai' feast, which is performed when a man killed a tiger. These prohibitions are observed to this day by all members of the *Hnaihleu* clan, and it is forbidden for them to break it. In addition to this, the *Hnaihleu* clan periodically performs a sacrifice to the tiger, which is called *Nangtha Hawkhei*.

Mihlong clan claim to be descendents from the hornbill. No member of this clan may kill a hornbill, and they say that if they ate hornbill's meat it would be equivalent to eating their father and mother. The Mihlong do not however offer any sacrifice to the hornbill. The Wazukumer clan of the Ao Nagas is another hornbill clan, similar to the Mihlong it is forbidden for this clan to eat the hornbill.

(d) Chieftainship tradition:

Paihte and Sailo claim that they both are the descendent of Niguite whose birth is narrated in the form of a folktale; Dongula had infringe sex with his sister Lalnemi who later gave birth to a beautiful boy named Niguite. This Myth reveals

the differences of the person from others which is a common character of many origin myths. These differences have its origin in the original conception. The child was named Niguite because he was born on account of the rays coming from the sun. The word 'ni' means sun and 'guite' means 'to burn' or 'to scorch'.<sup>35</sup> Later Niguite had two sons named Ngekguka and Bawklua, the progenitors of the Paihte and Sailo respectively. Bawklua married Lawileri who had given birth to Sihsinga who was a father of one Ralna. Ralna begot one Chhuahlawma, father of Zahmuaka who alongwith his wife named Lawilerhi had seven sons but one died in infancy. The name of the offsprings were Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluaha, Thanngura, Rivunga and Rokhuma who are believed to be the beginning of a clan as different tribes bear the name of their ancestor in the future. It was also believed that during this time a proper channel of chieftainship had been established as different clans started to have their own leaders and even when they migrated to present Mizoram that they kept this tradition.

There is a slightly different interpretation by J Shakespear in his book "*Lushei Kuki clan*"; he stated that all Lusei chiefs claim descent from a certain Thangura, who is sometimes said to have sprung from the union of a Burman with a Paihte woman, but according to the Paihte, the Lusei are descended from Boklua, an illegitimate son of the Paihte chief Ngehguka. The Thado say that some hunters tracing a serao noticed the foot-marks of a child following those of an animal, and on surrounding the doe serao they found it suckling a child who became the great chief Thangura, or, as they call him "Thangul". From Thangura the pedigree of all the living chiefs is fairly accurately established. The Lusei, in common with the Thado and the other Kuki tribes, attach importance to their genealogies; and pedigrees, given at an interval of many years; and by persons living far apart, have been found to agree in a wonderful manner. From him sprang six lines of Thangur chiefs, Rokhum, Zadeng, Thangluah, Paliana, Rivung, Sailo. Each clan in search of finding a suitable place for Jhuming cultivation started to penetrate towards the west until they found their settlement in the

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<sup>35</sup> Sangkima, "*Oral sources of Mizo history*" paper presented at the seminar on, Sources of the history of North-East India organized by ICHR-NERC, Guwahati, on March 12-14, 2002.

present day Mizoram, however some of them migrated till the neighboring regions such as Haflong, Tripura in the west, Manipur in the north and Chittagong hill tract.<sup>36</sup>

(c) The Lost tribe tradition (Mizo Israelism):

For around forty years this belief had revolved among the Mizo. According to Rev Lalbiaktluanga, the first man who claimed that the Mizo belong to the Israel tribe was Chala, a village man from Buallawn in 1951.<sup>37</sup> Whereas Levy Benjamin stated that it was in 1936 that two men named Kapa and Saichhuma claimed they belong to Israel tribe. Tracing back the origin of Mizo we cannot totally ignore this belief, that Mizo are the descendent of a tribe of Israel. There was a long lasting debate regarding this topic. According to the Holy Scriptures, in the Old Testament the Israel were the chosen people, but due to their unfaithfulness to God they were dispersed to different parts of the world. Therefore this had led to Diaspora in different parts of the world. But the scriptures prophesised that they will all be gathering again to the Promised Land. Therefore when Israel got independence in 1948 most of the Jews returned back to Israel. So, some of the Mizo believed they have the right to migrate back to Israel the place where they believe they belong. They had drawn every possibility of similarities between Israel and Mizo in terms of customs and beliefs.

There aroused different opinions regarding the Mizo – of which Israel tribe do they can encircle with? One group claims that they were Ephraim tribes who migrated to the east. For which they reversed the word “Luse” or “Lushai” as giving the meaning “Lu” as “people” and “se” as “tenth”, which they totally admitted that they belong to the tenth tribe among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Ms. Zaithanchhungi who had visited Israel several times, lately realised the Mizo to be Manasseh tribe. Having counsel by Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail she had

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<sup>36</sup> Shakespear, J; *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, Part-II : Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl reprint, 1975. p.3.

<sup>37</sup> Rev Lalbiaktluanga; “*Theological trends in Mizoram*” towards tribal perspective, 1989, p.66.

done a research over 8 years and she came to the conclusion that she had enough evidence to prove her research was reliable. <sup>38</sup> She had connected with the sacrifices made by the Mizo during olden days where if any man came home sick from Jhum, the sickness was caused by an evil spirit . In order to please the evil spirit the Bawlpu (the priest) then performed an offering by chanting the name “Manasseh”. However Rev. Chuauthuama on his book “Mizo leh Israel” ( Israel and Mizo ) crossfire the argument saying that as far as Mizo history was concerned, such things never appeared on the verse of sacrificial rituals chanted by the priest. He objected that chanting the name of “Manasseh” was self made history that does not have a sound basis.

The reason why this people claim themselves to be one of the lost tribes is the by product of Christian missionary. This opinion was shared by Dr. Myer Samra who said that although this was the product of teaching led by Christian missionaries however this was not even the intention of Christian missionary either.<sup>39</sup> Rev Chuauthuama was of the opinion that there was a strong economic motive which made them think that their life would be better.<sup>40</sup>

#### (d) Khampat Tradition:

The entire leading Mizo historians like Vanchhunga,<sup>41</sup> V.L Siama,<sup>42</sup> R.Vanlawma,<sup>43</sup> K.Zawla <sup>44</sup> (after the third edition only) and B. Lalthangliana mentioned about the existence of Khampat. Khampat was believed to be the oldest town ever built by the Mizo (believed to be the Lusei clan) in Burma (Myanmar) which was divided into more than ten sectors. The central block was called Nun Yar or Palace site wherein the ruler resided.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Zaithanchhungi; *Israel-Mizo Identity*, Mizo Edition p- iv.

<sup>39</sup> Dr.Myer Samra; “Judaism in Manipur and Mizoram...” Seminar papers, pp. 63-6.

<sup>40</sup> Rev Chuauthuama; *Mizo leh Israel ( Mizo and Israel )* p.11.

<sup>41</sup> Vanchhunga; *Lusei leh an vela hnamdangte chanchin*, 1977, p.22

<sup>42</sup> Siama V.L; *Mizo History* : Lengchhawn Press, p.8-9.

<sup>43</sup> Vanlawma, R; *Ka ram leh Kei*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 1989 ( 3<sup>rd</sup> edition) p.7

<sup>44</sup> Zawla, K; *Mizo Pipute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, Tribal Research Institute 1985, p.22-3.

<sup>45</sup> Lalthangliana; *Mizo Chanchin*, p.87.

The Mizo had migrated from the town due to the pressures of the enemies and the ongoing process of migration to the west. Before they dispersed they planted a banyan tree with a firm faith that they would return one day when the branches of the tree touches the ground.

By the time when a section of the Mizo returned to Myanmar and settled down in the areas around the Khampat site in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century A.D the branches of the tree had already touched the ground. Thus, many of them considered it as a fulfilment of prophesy.<sup>46</sup>

## **2) Archaeological sources:**

### **a) Megaliths:-**

Although the aspects of the spread and the development of megalith monuments are not known, megalith has two forms: dolmen and menhirs.<sup>47</sup> The dolmen consisted of several upright supports and a flat roofing slab. Another form of menhir (men-‘stone’ and hir-‘long’) which erected in the northern and western Europe and also in southern India. Menhirs were simple upright stones of great size visible from afar. Though the concept of megalith monuments is still in debate, all the monuments have certain similarities in architectural and technical features worldwide.

Surprisingly, this type of stones was found in different parts of Mizoram mainly in the form of memorial stone. However, these stones were not studied scientifically to be used as a reliable source of material. This is in spite of the fact that the megalithic culture of South and South-east Asia has been well researched and has brought out important findings that relate to chronology and settlement patterns.

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<sup>46</sup> Zawla K; *Mizo Pipute leh an thlahte chanchin*, 1989, p.22-23

<sup>47</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.7, Micropedia, 1998, p.1010



### 1) Sibuta Lung:-

The biggest Menhir in Mizoram was found in Tachhip village about 20 kilometers away from Aizawl- Lunglei road via Thenzawl. The stone is about 12 ft high. It indicates the selective memories of cruelty of the famous chief Sibuta.

The story goes that Sibuta, son of a concubine during his childhood was ill treated by Darlalpuii the daughter of Tachhip chief. Sibuta in his anger even told that one day he would take a revenge on her. Darlalpuii in her vain glory always ignored all these warnings; instead she replied that, “If you become a king, you can kill me to fulfil khuangchawi”.

As time goes by Sibuta attained the chieftainship. He had never forgotten the vow he had made during his childhood. One day it so happened that Sibuta performed Khuangchawi ceremony. In a normal situation, a gayal was sacrificed. But this time Sibuta decided to kill Darlalpuii in order to fulfil what he had told her before. The villagers were so shocked on hearing this brutal order of Sibuta, but could not resist because they were also in fear of being killed. So, he ordered them to bring Darlalpuii and tied her up at Seluphan (the sacrificial post). He took vengeance upon her by piercing her to death and hanging her head up at the top of the post. Sibuta Lung was erected by the villagers to commemorate his cruelty. There is one saying that one stranger from Chin Hills of Burma was put inside the hole where the stone is erected.<sup>48</sup>

### 2) Darthiangi Lung:-

This stone is located about 3 kilometers north of Farkawn village. Interestingly, the stone commemorates the imperishable love between Darthiangi and her husband Chertuala of Farkawn village. Darthiangi belonged to the Dulzawl village and was young and beautiful. She was married to Chertuala, the chief of Farkawn. But they could not bear any issue. At last they decided to

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<sup>48</sup> *Mizo Lal ropuite*, Published by Art and Culture Mizoram, p.37-45

separate and while packing up to leave her husband, Darthiangi wept bitterly and sang a song of her own composition.

A ia chan nuam che maw Zawllunghnemi,  
Kan khaw kar ah Hranglungphun thiang chang dun I,  
Chang dun ilang liankhua ah mi za selin.<sup>49</sup>

Which means:-

Darling, would you like to erect our memorial stone,  
To commemorate our deep and mutual love,  
Making everybody remember our names on this account.

The stone was erected jointly by Darthiangi and Chertuala.

### 3) Ridawpi Lung:-

The stone is round in shape and it is 5ft high, 2 ft thick and about 2 ton in weight which is situated in South Sabual about 45 kilometers South of Aizawl. It is the memorial stone of Ridawpi, the daughter of Lallula, the great Sailo chief. Ridawpi was the only daughter among the five children of Lallula. In the year about 1760, Lallula raided Thlanrawn and killed about 300 men. This is because Thlanrawn people used to collect tax in the neighboring villages for no reason at all which was disliked by the people. So, Lallula planned secretly to stop Thlanrawn for draining their wealth. So to train the people he first paid attention to the 'Jhum' and when they had enough crops, he diplomatically negotiated with the neighboring villages wherein, they promised to help Lallula in bringing down the Thlanrawn. He then let two ambassadors to the Thlanrawn chief asking them to collect wealth from their village as a compliment to their chief. So, a large number of Thlanrawn went to the village. At first they received a warm welcome. But the time came when they planned to kill their entire Thlanrawn guest. The Thlanrawn were gratified with a large banquet, after they had drunk enough they all got back to their respective guest houses. In the middle of the night a gong was

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<sup>49</sup> Chatterji.N; *Monoliths & Landmarks of Mizoram*. p.17

beaten and the people of the village started to kill their guests. Out of three hundred men only two or three men escape. This had an impact on peace among the neighboring villages also as they stopped paying tribute to the Thlanrawn. This was a time that Ridawpi the daughter of Lallula was born. When Lallula moved to Sabual his loving daughter died and in remembrance of her the chief erected this famous Ridawpi Lung. The stone bears the figure of a man and a woman with a smoking pipe.

#### 4) Mangkhaia Lung:-

Mangkhaia is a son of famous Mangthawnga, chief of Champhai who belongs to Ralte clan. He was captured by Chuaungo people and imprisoned by his enemy. He was ransomed by his relatives. But Vanpuia of Pachuau chief who did not receive his share in anger killed him on his way back home. His grief stricken father erected the memorial stone which is called Mangkhaia Lung. The stone is very huge which shows human figures and heads on it.<sup>50</sup>

Mangkhaia Lung can be seen at the southern part of the Champhai valley near Zote village. The uniqueness of this stone appears to be in response not only as a massive and huge structure which can be identified from far off places but also in the engraving of a series of human figures standing side by side with hands interlocked giving a really impressive idea of the large security their spirits offer collectively to the great chief in his celestial abode. According to A.G McCall, the stone is a monolith of the pre-Sailo occupation in early nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup>

#### 5) Lungphunlian:-

Lungphunlian is a collection of Menhir which is in six numbers. There is a village named after these stones. The tallest one rises to 14 ft high, 6 ft wide and with 2 ft thick. According to R.Buragohain this is believed to have been erected by

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<sup>50</sup> Shakespear, J; *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, Part-II : Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl reprint, 1975. p.137.

<sup>51</sup> A.G McCall; *Lushai Chrysalis* : Tribal research Institute, Aizawl, ( Reprint),1977, Plate No.XXVII (opp.to page 160)

the Meitei because another rock is found nearby with Bengali script on it.<sup>52</sup> Darchhawna is of the opinion that the stone is planted by the Reangs (Tripuris) who migrated from Manipur from Tripura in the latter half of the nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> While some other supposed that these stones were erected by Vangchhia (one of the Mizo clan) who moved from Zote village to Lungphunlian. If only the script were properly deciphered a new array might have crept in Mizo history.

#### 6) Laituma Lung:-

The memorial stone of a handsome young man named Laituma. The stone is engraved with figures of fish, animals and human heads. The stone is one meter and sixteen centimeters long and one meter four centimeters broad with a thickness of twenty five centimeters. The stone bears a figure of a man and fish. This indicates that Laituma due to his good looks and ability to win over girls was envied by all the man villagers as a result a plot was set up to trap him. One day it so happened that Laituma was asked to dive inside the water, and as soon as he entered the water all the men threw stones in the river. This had resulted in the death of Laituma.<sup>54</sup>

#### 7) Lalthangpuii Lung:-

Lalthangpuii Sailo was the eldest daughter of the chief, Lalsavunga Sailo. She had two sisters named, Laltheri and Chawngpuituali and her three brothers namely, Lalphunga, Vanhnuailiana and Thawmvunga were all famous chiefs. They migrated to Lamtual from Darlawng and then to Zatezo (Mualpheng). While they were in Zatezo, Lalthangpuii a virgin girl died of tuberculosis. As all her family took the untimely death very seriously they mourned for many days and as a result they had erected a stone in remembrance of her name. A hole was seen at

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<sup>52</sup> Romesh Buragohain; "*Lungphun as a source of Mizo history*" paper presented in the International seminar on Studies on the Minority Nationalities of North East India- The Mizo Mizoram on 7-9 April, 1992.

<sup>53</sup> Darchhawna, *Monoliths of Mizoram*, in Historical Journal of Mizoram Vol.I Issue I p.14

<sup>54</sup> Lianhmingthanga, ed; *Monoliths and Landmarks of Mizoram* : Firma Publication on behalf of Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl Mizoram.

the stone which is meant for hanging a gong. During that time Lalsavunga's territory extended up to Lamtual and Ruallung. This huge stone was removed and taken to the present position by the chief of three villages Zatezo, Lamtual and Ruallung. The stone was taken from 'Dilkawr' stream following by the eastern side about three kilometers away from its present position and half of the stone could now still be seen at 'Dilkawr'.

#### 8) Zawlmangi Lung:-

Zawlmangi Lung is located between the village Ruallung and Rulchawm. The stone is two meters thirteen centimeters high, two meters fifteen centimeters broad and seventy four centimeters thick. Zawlmangi Lung and Lungau lie side by side and the stone is engraved with naked female human figures. Though it is still a question when it came into existence, the assumption goes that Zawlmangi Lung might have been erected by the same people who erected Lungau.

#### 9) Lungau:-

Lungau is located on the eastern side of Ruallung village. It has the length of one meter fifty two centimeters with a breadth of one meter two centimeters and one meter five centimeters thick.

In the literary meaning 'Lungau' means a screaming stone or alarming stone. The stone has an interesting legend which is however, unnatural and hardly believable. It is said that in the olden days this stone used to scream when dusk falls terrifying the people that enemies were at hand. But when the people found that they were only deceived, the villagers in anger rolled the stone down the stream. However, the stone would again return to its same place. In the course of time a stranger (believed to be a man from Lai clan) cut a stone near the middle part so that the people in the village never heard the scream anymore.

#### 10) Lung Milem: -

This is indeed a unique stone in Mizoram as the engravings thereon plainly points towards a culture which doesn't seem to have touched the Mizo

either before or after their wholesale conversion into Christianity. The figures appear to indicate Buddhist or Hindu background. On the southern edge of the Tawikhawthlir hill under the jurisdiction of the Mualcheng village about 65 kilometers south of Lunglei, three pictures can be seen in bold relief against the stony background of the hills. These are about twenty inches in length, two of these in standing position and the other in a sitting posture. The third one in a sitting posture clearly indicates a typical meditation pose of Hindus or Buddhists. Figures of this type have not been located anywhere else in Mizoram and are indeed demanding of close research. <sup>55</sup>

#### 11) Other Stones: -

Besides all these stones mentioned above there are also some other important stones which had occupied a significant place in reconstructing the past history of Mizoram such as Lalruanga Lung, Chhura Lung, Lungvando, Lallunga Lung.

#### **b) Stone fragments: -**

No dependable inscription is found in Mizoram. Recently, a stone fragment (supposedly called an inscription) engraved on a stone tablet was discovered at Suangpuilawn about 150 Kilometers north east of Aizawl. An attempt is being made to make out the meaning of the script. When it is properly deciphered and a more linguistic approach will make our history a new look. According to some, the script is believed to be the old Bengali script; however they did not have enough evidence. The stone is still lying at State Museum at Aizawl.

At the same time there is a report about one copper plate inscription which bears the name 'Kukisthanan' (the land of Kukis). According to Suhas Chatterjee, Dharmadhar (Swadharmapa or Chengpha) was the Raja of Kailagadh. He invited

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<sup>55</sup> Chatterji.N; *Monoliths & Landmarks of Mizoram* : Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl Mizoram.p.36

a Kanuj Brahmin Nidhipati to his principality and granted to him is mentioned in the copper plate inscription. The second verse of The Sanskrit couplet states as;

Sri Nidhipati Vipraya Vastya Gotraya Dharmine  
Prehayang Longai Kukisthanan Pratichyan Gopala

Nade.<sup>56</sup>

The English rendering of the verse according to Suhas Chaterjee is:

To Sri Nidhipati, The Vatsya Gotra Brahman,  
the land bound in the east the Longlai and Kuki  
land and in the west the Gopola River. The date  
of the Land grant to Nidhipati is given as 1195.

### **3) Foreign accounts: -**

Information that we get from foreign account is as scanty as epigraphy. S.K. Bhuyan writes: “The old Assam Government did hardly come in contact with the tribes now living in the Lushai Hills though there is evidence to show that the Assamese did know the Kuki on their way through the Cachar Hills.<sup>57</sup> The neighboring plains people of the Cachar plains called Mizos as “Kuki” which means “wild hill people” as they found the early Mizo to be culturally backward.<sup>58</sup>

King Rudra Singha (A.D. 1696-1714) deputed two envoys to Tripura and the envoys reported that they had met some Kuki on the way who look like the Nagas. The two envoys proceeded up to the Barak River for four days and reached Lakhipur, the southern frontier province of the Kachari kingdom. From

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<sup>56</sup> Suhas Chaterjee; *Early History of the Mizos* : Proceeding of North East India History Association, Ninth Session, Guwahati, 1988, p.102

<sup>57</sup> Bhuyan.S.K; *Anglo Assamese Relations 1771-1828*, Lawyer Book Stall, Gauhati, ( Reprint),1974, p.46

<sup>58</sup> *Mizoram Gazetteers*; Directorate of Art and culture, Government of Mizoram, Education and human Resources Department, Aizawl. 1998. p.24.

there, they took another five days through the Barak to reach the frontier of the Tripura Kingdom. The two ambassadors wrote:

“...having halted there for two days, we proceeded for five days and reached the mouth of the Rupini River which is the boundary between Cachar and Tripura. There is no human habitation in that place. There are hills on the both sides. After three days we arrived at Rangrung within the jurisdiction of Tripura. The hills on both sides of the Barak River are inhabited by a tribe called the Kuki who are like Daflas and Nagas here. There will be about three hundred men at that place; their weapons are arrows, bows, shields and Naga spear. The Tripura Raja appoints governor over this place, and he is called Halamcha, who like the Naga Kunbaos in our country...”<sup>59</sup>

Sangkima said that the two envoys had passed through the village now called Sairang about 20 kilometers from Aizawl on the way to Lengpui Airport. Rudra sent the envoys to Tripura for three times.<sup>60</sup>

#### **4. Existing Literature: -**

With the advent of the British on the hills where the Mizo dwelt, the Christian missionaries started their mission towards the Mizo people. The two missionary J.H Lorraine and F.W Savidge started education for the Mizo in 1894 mainly for propagating Christianity among them. The script with Roman characters was introduced and this had bore a threshold for existence of literature among the Mizo. Tradition has it that once the Mizo were given a book

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<sup>59</sup> Bhuyan.S.K; *Tripura Buranji*, Gauhati, 1983,p.21-2.

<sup>60</sup> Sangkima; *Some sources of Early Mizo history- A chronological study*, Proceeding of North East India History Association, Jorhat, 1993, p.84.



(script) but due to carelessness, the dog carried it away. That was how the script was lost.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the first sources available are credited to the English.

The earliest works about the Mizo are done by military and administrative officers who had some connection related to the annexation and administration of the area by the British government, some of the earliest historical and anthropological works on the Mizo were in three books written by Tom Herbert Lewin: *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and The Dweller Therein* (1869), *Wild Races of the South-Eastern India* (1870), and *A fly on the wheel or How I Helped to Govern India* (1912). Another of this period was C.A. Soppitt's *A short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-Eastern Frontier with An Outline Grammar of the Rangkhoh-Lushai Language and A Comparison of Lushai with other Dialects* (1893). The military officers of the British army had given information about their military operations that were then referred to as the Chin-Lushai Hills. R.G. Woodthorpe's book *The Lushai Expedition, 1871-72* (1872), A.S. Reid's *Chin-Lushai Land: Including a Description of the various Expeditions into the Chin-Lushai Hills and the Final Annexation of the country, with maps and Illustrations* (1893), and L.W. Shakespeare's *History of the Assam Rifles* (1929). The opening up of the Tribal Research Institute sponsored by the Government of Mizoram has brought out many useful sources some of which are confidential reports of the government. One of these, *Foreign Department Report on Chin Lushai Hills, September, 1892*, describes the intense efforts made by the British government to bring the Chin Hills of Burma and the North and South Lushai Hills districts of India into single administrative units. Following up efforts resulted in two important books been published. The first of these was Bertram S.Carey and H.N. Tuck's *The Chin Hills: A History of the people, Our Dealings with them, their customs and manners, and Gazetteer of their Country, Vol. 1* (1896, reprinted 1976) and the other was John Shakespear's *The Lushei Kuki Clans, Parts I and II* (1912). Though the original purpose of these books related to the proposed combination of three districts into one, a proposal that was not

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

accepted in the end, they nevertheless made important contributions to our understanding of the essential unity of the people concerned. To these should be added William Shaw's *Notes on the Thadou Kukis* (1929) and G.A. Grierson's monumental work, *Linguistic survey of India*, III, 3 (1904), both of which make the same point from different perspectives. These books based on a certain degree of anthropological analysis show us that the nature of Mizo society and culture just at the time the area was beginning to come under alien administration. N.E Parry's book *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (1928) is another valuable insight on cultures of the Mizo which is meant for the outsider to read. These books significantly altered the image of the Mizo in the minds of literate outsiders.

The fourth group deals with the changes that occur in cultural behavior of the people, this is mainly to highlight the changes brought by Christianity in the life of the people. Robert Reid's book *The Lushai Hills* (1942) deals mainly about the political changes that had taken place which had been supplemented by anthropological works of N.E Parry's book *The Lakhers* (1932), Parry having contact with the southern part of Mizoram and Mara clan which the Lushai called the Lakher. He had touch deep inside the cultural activities of the Mara. A.G McCall's *Lushai Chrysallis* (1949) concerned about the traumatic cultural changes that had come upon as a result of the western contact through the Christian missionaries and government official. McCall puts that the main task of the government was to maintain law and order, however that had work to uphold and preserved the customs of the people. Parry also sought to preserve the pristine nature of the Mizo culture. Sharing the same opinion, McCall believed that some change was not only evitable but desirable. While admitting that change was inevitable, he pleaded that it should be indigenously ignited and properly guided, and not forced on the people by "over-zealous" outsiders. His book attempts to focus about the government policies in this respect, and also to provide guidelines for the moral and economic development of the people. In addition to this McCall wrote a book, *The Lushai Hills District Cover* (1972), prepared during 1938-39 as an official hand book for the administration of the district, which had

the same objective. Its rule on traditional, if slightly modified forms of government through the chiefs. Parry defended the institution of Zawlbuk (bachelor's dormitory) and successfully sought to revive it. Similarly McCall defended the Bawi system, and similarly failed. The accounts found in the above books are incomplete and certainly are not free from bias. However, they made good contributions to the understanding of certain aspects of the matter studied in this book, but not dealt with its subject directly.

J.D. Baveja's *The Land Where Bamboo Flowers* (1970) and L.B. Thanga's *The Mizos: A study in Racial Personality* (1978) provide fresh information about the Mizo socio-cultural life. Though one may not agree with his main thesis regarding the origins of the ills in Zo society, particularly the recent insurgency, Baveja's conclusions concerning the Mizo personality are noteworthy. Mizo, he noted, is a person with contrasting "moods" which are difficult to anticipate. Thanga agrees with Baveja that "A Mizo is not easy to understand. To understand the "mood" or, more accurately, the "mental aptitude" of the Mizo is, in fact, the key to understand the phenomenal growth of Christianity among them about which this book is concerned.

One way in which the interaction between Christianity and culture of those who embraced it has been studied is to look at the impact of the former on the latter. Example can be seen in John Vanlalhluna's *Church and Political upheaval in Mizoram: A Study of Impact of Christianity on the Political Development in Mizoram* (1985). Though it was not the main purpose of his research, Hluna devoted three brief chapters to the growth of Christianity. Without attempting an in depth analysis of the reasons for it, Hluna attributed the rapid growth of Christianity to the "Mission 'Policy' and its implication" and, additionally, to "the responses made by the Mizo people."

The study of the impact of Christianity upon Mizo society has been undertaken by a number of writers, both westerners and the Mizos. The perspective from which such writing is usually done is that of missionary

expansion. The earliest works of this type were Grace R. Lewis' *The Lushai Hills: The Story of the Lushai Pioneer Mission* (1970), M.E. Bowser's *Light on the Lushai Hills: The Story of our Foreign Mission* (1930), David Kyles' *Lorrain of the Lushais: Romance and Realism on the North-East Frontier of India* (1944). In common with most book of this type these were written mainly to inform western readers and to solicit their support for the agents, the missionaries – especially those activities that were successful.

The Mizo are mentioned as only the objects of missionary works. The descriptions of the people found in them are only a slight improvement over the newspaper reports. Their descriptions of the moral and religious life of the people were not reliable. This was because their purpose in writing was not to help their readers understand traditional Mizo culture sympathetically, but to solicit their support in bringing about changes “for the better” in that culture. It is clear that this approach is inadequate either for the purpose in developing self-understanding among Mizos who happen to be Christian or for providing adequate historical explanation.

An interesting recent work has been written by Prof. Lal Dena. While his book *Christian Missions and Colonialism* (1988), is mainly concerned with the relationship between the British and foreign missionaries in Manipur and Mizoram, he also has one chapter entitled “Modus Operandi of the Missions and the Impact” in which he describes the way in which the missionaries working in the two states used similar methods “the increase in converts was much more phenomenal in Lushai Hills than in Manipur.” He attributes this partly to the different structure of the churches in Mizoram and partly to the united efforts of the missionaries belonging to different missions working in the area. While these are certainly factors to be taken in consideration, they are certainly subsidiary to the main factor – the nature and consequences of the encounter between Christianity and the traditional Mizo culture which resulted in a distinctive kind of Mizo revivalism.

Nevertheless, an in depth analysis of these studies on the Mizo reveals that almost all of them are biased towards ethnography of the Mizo. They hardly go beyond the ethnographical details. Most of the studies are devoted to describe the paradigm rather than explicit analysis and interpretation of the Mizo society.

### **5) Archival Records:**

In the nineteenth century the official records and archival materials became relevant when the European archives gradually became available to the historians; these sources have had one of the most popular usages for historians. In the case of the historian of modern India, the opening of the archives of the colonial government for the researchers made available a flood of information which has contributed immensely to the understanding and assessment of developments in India during British rule. The availability of the official records of the British rulers made the writing of the history of India's colonial period both exciting and difficult in the past forty years or so. Till about a few decades back the sources available to the historian were limited to some studies of Viceroys, works on constitutional developments, some biographies and some general histories written mainly by British officers or British professional historians. But with the opening up of the official records and private papers the entire colonial history of India has come to wear a new look.<sup>62</sup>

With the annexation of Mizoram by the British in 1890 which was followed by a process of consolidation and investigation into the indigenous form of government. The Britishers in their quest to the unknown land began to explore and started to write about the ways of the people. These materials are available in the National Archives of India, New Delhi; State Archives, West Bengal, Kolkata; Record office, Assam, Dispur and Record office, Aizawl, now called State Archive, Record room, Deputy Commissioner of Cachar, Silchar. Documents relating to the vents of Mizoram under the British are also abundantly available in the

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<sup>62</sup> Sumit Sarkar; *Modern India* ( Madras, 1986 reprint) pp.4-6.

Commonwealth Relations Office Library, London. Also the National Library, Kolkata, the Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi, may also store valuable materials to supply evidences to the writing of history of Mizoram.

#### **1.4.1 Their Limitations:**

The most important task of the historian is to first relate the question of what kind of sources he/she had used and the second question is how the historian make the sources speak. Thus one can say that in a sense bias is the problem of the empiricist because every source comes with its own prejudices and it is up to the historian to recognize that bias and apply correctives.<sup>63</sup> The major task of the historian therefore lies in making the information animate, and so in any work of historical research there are two major procedures involved. The first is the formulation of questions in a given field and the second is the seeking of appropriate answers to those questions. However neither of the process is inevitable without the availability of the sources. In the antiquity of history the sources of formation was mainly of enquiry, interview and eyewitness because at that time the question of reconstruction had not been in the layers of writing history. In the Middle Ages there had been a turn towards a discipline in history writing as the church dominated, making it a main shell of a canon to their entire writing. Needless to say the renaissance brought the spirit of humanism later followed by the scientific invention and the growth of modern technology which started to affect the writing of history.

Oral history tradition therefore holds out hopes for understanding the historical evolutions of those societies without recorded history and where beginnings might have to be made with interpretation of the legends, myths and folklore. But unfortunately there is no question of enquiry 'as to why?' Or 'how it happened?' along the line of theoretical clarity and methodological soundness.

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<sup>63</sup> Manorama Sharma; *History and History writing in North East India*, p.28.

We should also acknowledge the part played by English anthropologists in the classification of the ethnographic artifacts in terms of a “march progress”. Anthropologists tended to view the practices of different cultures with an eye to their place on the scale of advancement with instrument social order of the west at the civilized end. This was represented through display of tools placed in sequential order from the simple general purpose devices to more specialised artifacts so that the audience could followed the movement from the primitive to the complex. In doing so, the audience situated themselves at the top of the scale of advancement and the ‘other’ the people to a position lower down. Henrietta Lidchi argues that ethnographic artifacts were taken as the ‘material embodiment of the social-cultural complexities of the other cultures. The interventions of ethnocentric anthropologists ensured that these representations came to be seen as a ‘true’ account of how western societies had emerged and how they came to be seen as advanced.<sup>64</sup>

The first sources in terms of writing were limited to the British official who had represented the Mizo as the abode of savages, barbaric and head hunters, blood thirsty etc. Their task was to maintain a record for the convenience of administration. Therefore they were bound by their officialdom. These were the first assumptions made by the outsider to their unknown land. The writing was the product of anthropologists who had taken the model of western society as the measuring scale of advancement. After their prolonged study on the African continent, the same strategy had been applied to their studies. A famous Kipling’s poem “A white men’s burden” takes its toll again, a feeling that it was the task of the white men to civilize those whom they regarded as a weaker in society.<sup>65</sup>

The missionary superficially overlooked the cultures and society of the Mizos. They started to write about the Mizos as they had done it mainly to enable

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<sup>64</sup> Mark.J.Smith; *Culture (Re-inventing social science)*: Viva book Private Limited. p.8

<sup>65</sup> Rudyard Kipling published "The White Man's Burden" in 1899, an appeal to the United States to assume the task of developing the Philippines, recently won in the Spanish-American War. As the poet of British imperialism, though being regarded as a beloved children's book author. Today he might yet gain appreciation as a transmitter of Indian culture to the West.

the easy spread of Christianity among them. The writing of Christian missionaries or Church men no doubt rendered valuable information in writing history. While writing about the Church expansion and activities of different churches and Mission, they failed to ask the question why Christianity found such a wide support base in particular areas of the region. What casual factors in the tribal society led to the expansion of Christianity? There is also a need to assess the impact of Christianity on the social, political, economical and cultural fabric of the communities.

By using the sources one has to be aware that these sources were the documents and to make the document animate is not an easy task either. The earlier writers about the Mizo failed to handle the sources by passing the document as it is. Instead of transcribing them to interpret history or locate them in the historiographical context, they followed the same footstep rendered by the Britishers.

### **1.5 Problem of Periodisation and the way out:**

An attempt will be made here to discern new trends in the historiography of the Mizos. I will take up the challenge of rethinking the colonial legacy of history writing, which could constitute a major paradigm shift. This shift is mainly with reference to the social memory concerning Mautam famine (which had occurred periodically) against the Eurocentric construction of periodising Mizo history, which has internalised Mizo history writing for so long. I will also highlight the advantage of this shift, but also the possible limits. Does Christianity/ colonial periodising of Mizo history suffice the need for demarcating the events that has occurred over the years?

#### **1.5.1 Applying Derridean discourse and a critique on “Logocentrism”:**

With regard to the historiography of the Mizos, we find an approach that can help us to understand it with social scientific knowledge. Working at the



interface of philosophy, history and literature, Jacques Derrida claimed that many key concepts are conjuring tricks for pretending that problems do not exist (using such terms as 'being', 'truth' or 'objectivity' to cover them up). Drawing upon Heideggerian phenomenology, Derrida placed such words 'under erasure', indicating their ambiguous status as inadequate but, in the absence of something better, remaining quite necessary. In particular, he argued that the concept of 'the subject' should be placed under erasure in the same way. Using this critical technique, Derridean discourse analysis destabilises the key ideas upon which western knowledge is grounded; i.e. in logocentrism. Rather than searching for some underlying foundation or essence, this approach suggests that we should map the conceptual landscape for the metaphoric and metonymic relations which provide a sense of order.

In the process we have to engage in the interrogation of texts to establish their organization around certain oppositional categories; such as true/false, rationality/irrationality, objective/subjective, masculinity/femininity and same/other.<sup>66</sup> One side of the opposition is positively valued and placed in a privileged position which is the dominant one. This approach has served well in the study of cultural differences where the distinction between same/other features heavily. By carefully mapping the relations of equivalence (of sameness) and difference (of otherness) we can identify the ways in which cultural differences are constructed around the ideas of insiders and outsiders and how they can be articulated with other oppositions, like rationality/irrationality, civilized/primitive, instrumental/expressive and so on. Cultures, identities and the boundaries used to mark the differences between them constantly shift through the dynamic practices of human beings which organize and recognize the built environment and their relationship to it.

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<sup>66</sup> Derrida, J; *Speech and Phenomena*. Evanston, IL: North western University Press, 1973 and also indicated in two more of his books *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976. *Writing difference*, London: Routledge, 1978.

Now the task is how we can locate this theory in our understanding of the periodisation of Mizo history. In opposition to colonial legacy, to justify our argument, we may state that the earlier Mizo history writers were colonial products. Here, Logocentrism is circled around the evangelical and philanthropic activities of the west which are imposed upon the 'inferior' Mizo culture, as well as the activities of colonial officials who superficially looked at the Mizo society carrying the load of the "Whiteman's burden", a belief that the white races are more civilized over other cultures. Therefore, for the colonial writer and the internalized Mizo local writers, the practices of the Mizos were narrated as acts of barbarism, animism etc. However, if we are to shift the centeredness of this Eurocentric view we have to locate how these symbols have meaning in their existence from the perspective of the Mizo worldview and the multiple layers of meanings that are attached to its structure. The local knowledge cannot be abandoned at all, as it carries certain meanings that are clear to the views of the tribals themselves.

### **1.5.2 The colonial construct of periodisation:**

In this world of "archive fever"<sup>67</sup> one of the problems in writing Mizo history is that, there can be no periodisation of history which is generally categorized as ancient, medieval and modern; we cannot apply the general rules of periodisation mainly due to the absence of written records. From the ethnocentric point of view the written 'text' is regarded as superior to the 'oral' one. Therefore, the process of writing history for the internalised Mizo writer at the beginning was linear and progressive. The question which can be posed here

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<sup>67</sup>Derrida Jacques, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, University of Chicago Press, 15-Oct-1998 - In the Note, Derrida begins not "even at the archive," but with the word. He traces its meaning from the Greek Arkhe which means "at once the commencement and the commandment." Through this Note, he explores the authority of archives from the Greek superior magistrates, the archons, and the domiciliation of the archives as physical locations and most importantly outlines the way that archives appear to have authority, physical location and consignment but ultimately seeks to "shelter itself and, sheltered, to conceal itself." This is what he wants us to realize before we even begin to contemplate the archive: the nature of an archive is to be both authoritarily transparent and authoritatively concealed.

is whether a society without a scripture can have no history at all. Does the oral tradition have a place in writing history in the modern context?

Mizo historians broadly classified the periods into those of the pre-British period and the post-British period, by taking the coming of the British as the dividing line between the two.<sup>68</sup> Dividing the period in colonial terms is entrapment in colonial legacy itself. Our paper seeks to explore the possibility of reconstructing this periodisation with the social memory pertaining to bamboo famine, which appear to be both traditional and scientific.

### **1.5.3 The way out: reconstructing with local knowledge:**

We argue that upon careful analyses and study, we can re-construct Mizo history through local knowledge of Bamboo famine. Now, let us examine the development of Bamboo famine. Despite significant contributions to the local economy, bamboo flowering causes two types of famine, locally known as “*mautam tam*” and “*thingtam*” – their occurrence usually being based on chronological sequences. In local language, *Mautam* or *thingtam* literally means larger bamboos withering or dying out. *Tam* meaning ‘famine’, *Mau/ Thing* meaning ‘bamboo’, the famine caused by bamboo is therefore called *mautam tam* and *thingtam*. According to folk tradition, the two species of bamboo (*thing* or *bambusa longispiculata* and *mautak* or *melocanna bambbasoides*) which grow in abundance in the hills, flower in a cycle of 30 years and 50 years respectively. The bamboo flowers soon produce fruits which are usually brown and green in colour. The seeds contain rich protein and are the favourite food of the local rats or *Sazu*. This is followed by a sudden explosion of rat population in the hills. Local people believe that bamboo seeds increase rat fertility and that even a single female rat is able produce more than ten babies at a time if it consumes

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<sup>68</sup> Sangkima in his paper “Sources of Writing Mizo history” divided the period between ancient and modern (naming pre-colonial and post colonial) using the advent of the British dividing line between the two, Whereas Lalchunngunga in his book *Politics of Regionalism and National Integration* (Reliance Publishing House) divided the period into: A- Pre British period, B- British period, C- The post- Independence period.

bamboo seeds. The bamboos soon die, leaving the rats without abundant food from the bamboo. C. Rokhuma says, “After eating up the bamboo fruits, rats started attacking paddy fields in the beginning of autumn season and in a matter of one night or two, such eye catching paddy fields were suddenly reduced into nothing but dead paddy straws.”<sup>69</sup>

Although, bamboo flowerings and famines are also known in Myanmar, Japan, Sri Lanka, South America and Southern Africa, they seem to cause more devastation in Mizoram. Despite the numerous researches conducted by environmentalists and scientists, the cause of bamboo flowering still remains unexplained and mysterious. Various hypotheses such as the pathological, genetic, periodical, mutational, nutritional, resource matching and bamboo wildlife cycle have been drawn. However, little is known about the mechanism responsible for determining when a species of bamboo bears flowers. Mizo folk traditions provide some references on numerous signs of unnatural ecological imbalance which took place before the bamboo flowering which goes as follows:

A host of insects locally called *thangnang* swarm the hills before and during the bamboo flowering. The Mizo elders are still able to recall the sound of the swarm of *thangnang* in the hilly skies which they said resembled that of a thunderstorm. Even the tree branches broke off because of the numerous *thangnang* that perched on the branches. It may sound like a mere myth to scientific communities, but there is proof that it is indeed true. In 2006, the State Agriculture Department reported that villages in the southern part of Mizoram witnessed large scale devastation of vegetables by giant snails. Folk

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<sup>69</sup> Rokhuma, C. (1998): *Tam Do Pawlin Enge A tih?* (The Secret of Famine Found). Aizawl, Mizoram, India. p.101

tradition called such incidents as *tam hmahruai* or the harbinger of famine.

The sub-tribe *Hmar* clans were believed to have migrated from Burma to the present Mizoram due to a famine that took place in 1500. One of the earliest known *Hmar* oral songs goes as follows:

*Shan khuaah lenpur a tlakin,  
Miza raza tlan their e.*

*“Because of the great famine that befell us in Shan State  
We had to leave it behind”*

The dominant sub-tribe *Lusei* was believed to have entered Mizoram sometime in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They must have probably experienced these periodic famines even then.

The local knowledge and the oral tradition testify Mautam famine as a marker of change which had occurred periodically, which is also attested to by scientific methods. These incidents in history can be used as methods of periodising Mizo history.

#### **1.5.4 The possible limitations:**

Using Mautam/Thingtam as a means of periodising Mizo history is the paradigm shift that we intend to suggest; similar to the way the Muslims have their Hijri calendar, how Hindus have their present Kali Yuga, and how Kerala has its Malayalam calendar. Mautam periodisation is presumably inclusive (since it is an environmental phenomena), although only of course up to where it physically stops.

Is it a touch macabre to periodize history around bamboo death and famine? Not only that, there is a possibility that this could only ever end up being a parochial category—a sort of 'resistance periodization' against the usual, British-normative periodization. How would we actually deploy it in practice? That is, do we refer to Mautam II for instance, when earlier ones existed though were not recorded, and when we do not know when the 'first' Mautam was? The whole business can get murky: the 2008 Mautam might have been the hundredth Mautam. It might have been the fortieth, the thousandth... “Projecting” Mautams back into time is perhaps possible, but there would surely be a margin of error compounded with each projection? This is an area which needs thorough investigation/research in order to avoid such complications.

The quest for something more than the usual colonial-normative periodisation is, of course, an enterprise that involves meticulous efforts and dedicated research in the survey of history. The course of western civilization too often moves mechanically from one time slot to another without raising issues of what key factors have changed, what has caused change, and whether an alternative periodisation might be construed. Our attempt here is to bring an insight into a deeper understanding of Mizo history. This paper is thus, an attempt toward suggesting Mautam famine as a means of establishing a periodised Mizo history through careful examination of the changes that have occurred over the years.

## **Chapter II**

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### **Theorising Mizo Myth of Origin and Migration**

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The main aim of this chapter is to highlight the origin of the Mizos and different migration theories that were evolved by the local writers and also to highlight the cultural progress in the pre-colonial Mizo society.

## **2.1 Myth and the theories of origin:**

The majority of the Mizo historians, while tracing the origin of the Mizos, did not fail to mention the Myth of Chhinlung and Khampat legend. A reference to the myth did not fail to infer the relatedness of the myriad tribes collectively known to the British administrators of the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as Kuki-Chin-Lushai, now known under various names and divided by international as well as state borders. It is indeed surprising to see how this myth holds an integral part of Mizo imagination, despite the recognition of its mythical nature. The syncretism of myth and history is quite a universal experience, in the sense that all societies take recourse to it. Myth and mythologies together with symbols value from the bowels of the earth. The beginning of the Mizo origin was translated into English by Lt. Col. J. Shakespear in 1912:

Once upon a time when the great darkness called  
Thimzing fell upon the world, many awful thing  
happened. Everything except the skulls of animals  
killed in the chase became alive, dry woods revived,  
even stones become alive and produced leaves, so  
men had nothing to burn. The successful hunters  
who had accumulated large stocks of trophies of their  
skill were able to live using them as fuel. After this  
terrible catastrophe, Thimzing, the world was again  
re-peopled by men and women issuing from the hole  
of the earth called 'Chhinlung'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespear, J; *The Kuki Lushai Clan*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1912, pp.93-94



## 2.2 Myth of Chhinlung and Khampat Legend:

The Mizo origin myth is said to be based on Chhinlung tradition. According to the story, a long time ago the Mizos emergence from Chhinlung which can be translated as a capstone. The popular imagination for the Mizos implies Chhinlung to be a hole in the ground, covered with a capstone. It was believed that the tribes of the Mizos emerged from this hole, and finally when the Ralte clan emerged, they created a ruckus that the owner/keeper of the capstone, thinking there were already too many (tribes/people), shut the hole with the capstone.<sup>2</sup> Lusei, Hmar and other clans in Mizoram called it “Chhinlung”, whereas Thadous, Paites, Gangtes, Vapheis and others called it “Khul” or “Khulpi” but the way they locate the place is different from one another. The word “Chhin” stands for “covered” and “Lung” stands for “stone”. Some believe that the ancestors of the Mizo might have been cave dwellers or they might have come out from a big cave. This tradition is seen in folk songs, which mention that:

Ka siengna Sinlung ram hmingthang,  
Ka nu ram, ka pa ram ngai.  
Chawngzil ang kokir theih chang sien,  
Ka nu ram ka pa ram ka ngai<sup>3</sup>.

Translated as:

My homeland Sinlung the famous one,  
I miss the land of my mum and dad,  
Only if it could it be called back like Chawngzil,  
I miss the land of my mother and father.

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<sup>2</sup> Liangkhaia, Rev; *Mizo Chanchin (Bu I & II hmun khatah)*, LTL Publications, Mission Veng, Aizawl, 2002

<sup>3</sup> Pudaite, Rochunga; *The Education of the Hmar People*, Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, Silemat, 1963, p.21

The above song reveals that the people who sang this song had a nostalgic attachment for the place of their origin, which is “Chhinlung”, and they wished that they would go back one day.

There is also a folktale which runs parallel with this tradition among the Mara which is called “earth hole” tradition. It indicates that the first man on this earth came out of a hole in the earth. When all men came out of this hole all were equal, but in a short time the cleverer men became chiefs and nobles and ruled over the less intelligent and energetic, who became the lower orders, and are known as *machhi*.<sup>4</sup>

The above folk tale shares common parallels with many folk tales of the contiguous regions and also in other parts of the world which explains the rise of different stratus in society as the devices employed in narrating this tale clearly reveals.

Another interesting legend emerges with the Mizos that the forebearers parted ways with Burmese. They planted a banyan tree (Khampat, identified as in Burma, Liangkhaia said it was a Burmese myth) and promised to meet when the roots that grow off the branches of the tree struck root once again. B. Lalthangliana mentioned about the existence of Khampat. For him Khampat was believed to be the oldest town ever built by the Mizos (believed to be the Lusei clan) in Burma (Myanmar) which was divided into more than ten sectors. The central block was called Nun Yar or Palace site wherein the ruler resided.<sup>5</sup>

The Mizo had migrated from the town due to the pressures of the enemies and the ongoing process of migration to the west. Before they dispersed they planted a banyan tree with a firm faith that they would return one day when the

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<sup>4</sup> Perry, N.E; *The Lakhers*, Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, on behalf of Tribal research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, p.232

<sup>5</sup> Lalthangliana, B; *Mizo Chanchi (History and Culture of Mizo in India, Burma & Bangladesh)*, published by Remkungi, RTM Press, Chhinga Veng, Aizawl Mizoram, 2001. p.87

branches of the tree touches the ground. When the people are about to leave the place they even composed a song:

Ka phun Bungpui dawi-ai ka sanna,  
Mi khawih loh, sa khawihloh te in,  
Thang lian la Khuanu leng hualin;  
I tangzar piallei a zam tikah,  
Seifaten vangkhua kan rawn dih leh nang e

Translated as:

I planted a Banyan tree,  
Not touched by the animals or a man,  
Let it grow up so high with god's care  
When the branch touch the ground  
We Lusei clan will return and rebuilt the town again.

By the time a section of the Mizo returned to the Myanmar and settled down in the areas around the Khampat site in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the branches of the tree had already touched the ground. Thus, many people considered it as a fulfilment of prophesy.<sup>6</sup>

Looking at these myths and legends we now have two reference points about the origins of the Mizos. It is essentially the historicizing of these myths and legends and also the journey between these two stages that are important for the Mizos imagination for identity makers and markers.

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<sup>6</sup> Zawla, K; *Pi pute leh an thlah te chanchin*, Zomi book Agency, Aizawl, 1993 (6<sup>th</sup> edition), pp.22-23

### **2.3 The methods of textualizing orality pertaining to Myth interpretation:**

Recollecting the past was not something new for the Mizos. The question is how this oral tradition is formalized in a textual form. This happened not long after writing was introduced to the Mizos by the Christian missionaries. The textualization of memories into history is something that the so-called educated Mizos have to take it as a challenge. What was new therefore was the narration of oral into written form. The first work can be attributed to Liangkhaia's book on "Mizo Chanchin" meaning "Mizo narratives" which was published in 1928. Other useful contributions were VL Siam's Mizo history in 1953, the first textbook for the Mizos commissioned by the Board of School Education. This was followed by Vanchhunga in 1955, Zatluanga in 1966 and K. Zawla in 1974. It was important to note that Liangkhaia was an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, VL Siam a school teacher and Vanchhunga an employee of Church as *Tirhkoh*. Having been trained in the colonial legacy the question is how much did colonial writing influence their writings?

According to these local writers who pioneer the history writing the need for textualising oral tradition are in two ways. Firstly, borrowing the words of Liangkhaia "One read the histories of other nations, but never of the Mizos." If we carefully observed his argument the need for writing Mizo history at first for him is placing the importance of Mizo history along the line of world history. The colonial context to which he was internalized made him recognize that the written text was to be given privilege over an oral one.

Secondly, Mizos origins and past life would soon disappear if the elders who knew such affairs died and then there would be no one to consult. Remembrance of the past is essential for the youth to know about their origin and past.

Therefore, his main aim at textualising oral history at the beginning was homogenizing the story of the Myth. In justifying his methodology, Liangkhaia claimed that he was careful in collecting multiple voices. He picked up a version which appeared to be the most appropriate one. In the process a number of voices have been abandoned. The question which can be raised at this stage is what would be the most important one? For them the method is simple enough that the knowledgeable elders were summoned which for them would gain legitimacy of writing Mizo history. Written narratives also served a purpose of legitimizing their claim as a valid ethos.

In the process of textualising myth as a history there can be a problem of sources from the informants. Thought still theoretical but more of practical nature which can be seen in a dialogue between the researcher and the informants. For instance the informants belonging to a particular clan might know the best legends and myth belonging to their own lineage, but nevertheless they might not be interested in collecting data from other families, or other clans. This can lead to bias in collection of memories, and the researcher can draw information to legitimize his/her pre-assumed ideas.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.4 Historicization of a Myth:**

The opening of the Mizo world to the wider geographical region often encouraged the Mizo historian to place their people in this cultural and geographical context. This was followed by the process of historicization. This systemization was based on the knowledge that they were exposed to and thus there were two or three ways in which this location was understood. In most of the earlier colonial ethnographies there was a tendency to try and link up the tribes into groups and tribes, a result of the age's needs for 'scientific' classification. This led the Mizo authors speculating their place with 'racial' (read

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<sup>7</sup> Strauss, Levi; *Myth and Meaning*, Routledge, London and New York, 2006 (reprint), pp.30-31

linguistic) categories. Also, Mizos also had to be placed within the Bible narrative scheme and finally there was also *Chhinlung* to be explained.<sup>8</sup>

The origin of the past could not rest on unencrypted myth alone. In the scientific age, with such a notion it is hard to believe that man came out of a hole/capstone. As K. Zawla wrote, since it became difficult to imagine that all tribes came from a subterranean abyss, the concept of *Chhinlung* required explanation.<sup>9</sup> Therefore such tensions were resolved by the emerging historians. The process of historicization of a myth therefore requires associating it with a name of a person or some geographical place.

The earlier historian Thangvunga started to locate the origins of Mizos with the Chinese. Thangvunga, a Mizo historian who went to Burma to trace the history of origin and migration of the Mizos in 1941, was told by the Burmese priest of Mandalay regarding the explanation of this myth.

The ancestor of the Mizos came from Shanghai, sent out by a Chinese King to be followers of his son who was to establish himself. But without following the prince, the cast lots according to which they proceeded into two groups, one group towards the south-west and the other to the south. How long they spend between Sanghai and Burma is not known, but the one in 1941 was counted as the 47th generation. When the group came to Burma the Burmese said, "The Chinlu are coming." (Chin abbreviated form for Chinese, and "lu" means 'people' in Burmese). It is believed that "Chinlu" came to be known as "Chhinlung" in the course of time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.152

<sup>9</sup> Zawla, K (1993), Mizo pipu an thlahte Chanchin

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp.6-7

Coming as it did from a neutral informant, this explanation has the advantage of being readily accepted. Interesting though it may be, however, it has no explanation for the belief long held by the Mizos that their origin goes back to a cave, the covering rock of the Mizos of Mizoram called *Chhinlung*.

The more likely explanation of the cave propounded by Rochunga Pudaite is the Great Wall of China. As he suggested the word 'Chhinlung' to be 'Chin Lung' the name of the Chinese prince rather than a mere covering stone, who revolted against his father Shih Huangti of the Chi'n dynasty and who built the Great Wall of China in 228 B.C. <sup>11</sup> To avoid severe punishments from cruel ruler, the prince first established himself somewhere in the Himalayan mountains and then again migrated to present Shan State of Burma. According to this believe the Mizos are said to have been the subject of *Chin Lung* whose name is continued to be retained as *Chhinlung* connecting with their origin. This evidence is also attested by a Hmar folk song.

Khaw sinlungah kot siel ang ka zuang suaka,  
Mi le nello tam e, hriemi hraiah.<sup>12</sup>

Translated as:

Out of the city of Sinlung  
I jumped out like a Sial<sup>13</sup>  
Innumerable were the encounters  
With the children of men.

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<sup>11</sup> Pudaite, Rochunga; *The Education of the Hmar People*, Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, Silemat, 1963, p.22

<sup>12</sup> Songate, L. Hranglien; *Hmar Chanchin (Hmar history)*, L& R Press, 1977, p.11

<sup>13</sup> Sial (Sial) is a domesticated animal among the Mizos and the tribes of North east India and Burma. In olden days it played important role in their social life. Prices were determined and measured in terms of Sial. It was a sacred animal of the Mizos. The British called it mithun and sometimes goyal.

The song indicates that they hurriedly left *Chhinlung* like a mithun leaping out of a cage. There have been compelling factors for which they have to leave *Chhinlung*. Nevertheless contemporary historical writings and other recent works on the Mizo produced some clues on these claims. Certain writers believed that they abandoned *Chhinlung* because of their inability to check and defeat their enemies.<sup>14</sup>

Another theory on *Chhinlung* myth is attached to a Chinese city of *Chhinlung* (Xinlong) at longitude degree 101 03' and latitude degree 31 in the Szechwan province of China. Its height is 1742 cm above sea level. The city is situated on the western side of the Yulung River and on the east of Yantze Kiang River. Old walls and defense fortifications which once surrounded the city are still visible. It had been the district headquarters under the various Chinese rulers and is still regarded as one of the most important cities in the province. During the imperial period, it had been an important port.

Another theory is Mizo Israelism, which is often regarded as a distortion of myth or history. According to this theory some of the sections of Mizos came to the conclusion that Mizos are among one of the lost tribes of Israel. For around forty years this belief had revolved among the Mizos. The methods were based on drawing certain folk songs or trying to locate similarities between Mizo cultural practices with that of the Israelites. According to Rev Lalbiaktluanga, the first man who claimed that the Mizos belonged to the Israel tribe was Chala, a village man from Buallawn in 1951.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand Levy Benjamin stated that it was in 1936 that two men named Kapa and Saichhuma claimed they belonged to an Israel tribe. Tracing back the origin of Mizo we cannot totally ignore the belief that Mizos may be the descendents of a tribe of Israel. There was a long lasting debate regarding this topic. According to the Holy Scriptures, in the Old

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<sup>14</sup> Lalrimawia; *Mizoram history and cultural Identity* (1890-1947) Guwahati: Spectrum Publications. p.12

<sup>15</sup> Lalbiaktluanga, (Rev); "*Theological trends in Mizoram*" towards tribal perspective, 1989, p.66



Testament the Israelites were the chosen people, but due to their unfaithfulness to God they were dispersed to different parts of the world. Therefore, this led to a diaspora in different parts of the world. The scriptures prophesized they will one day gather in the Promised Land. Therefore, when Israel gained independence in 1948 most of the Jews returned back to Israel. So, some of the Mizo believed they had the right to migrate back to Israel to which they thought they belonged. They had drawn every possibility of similarities between Israelites and Mizos in terms of customs and beliefs.

There aroused different opinions among the claimed-Mizo-Israelite to which tribe of Israel they belong. One group claims that they were Ephraim tribes who migrated to the east. They reversed the word “Luse” or “Lushai” as giving the meaning “Lu” as “people” and “se” as “tenth”, which they admitted that they belonged to the tenth tribe among the twelve tribes of Israel. Another group called themselves as Chhinlung-Israel drawing possibilities of affinities between Mizo tradition and Juda tradition. For them it’s not about shifting from Mizoram to Israel. They believed that they can get Independence in Mizoram itself under the protection of Israel government under the decolonization process.<sup>16</sup> So they have repeatedly send memorandum to United Nations for their cause. However their dreams about independence are not yet fulfilled till now.

In recent years there is a development with the Mizo-Israelite a progressive Mizo Scholar Ms. Zaithanchhungi who had visited Israel several times and who claims that Mizos belong to Manasseh tribe. Having been counselled by Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail she had done a research for over eight years, she came to the conclusion that she had enough evidence to prove that her research was reliable.<sup>17</sup> She made a connection with the sacrifices made by the Mizo during pre British period. When any man comes home sick from Jhum, it was believed that the sickness was caused by an evil spirit. In order to please the evil spirit The Bawlpu (the priest) then performed an offering by chanting the

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<sup>16</sup> An interview with Lalchhanhima Sailo in July 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Zaithanchhungi; *Israel-Mizo Identity*, Mizo Edition p. iv.

name “Manasseh”. However Rev. Chuauthuama, in his book “Mizo leh Israel” (Israel and Mizo) debates the argument saying that as far as Mizo history was concerned, such things never appeared on the verse of sacrificial rituals chanted by the priest. He objected to the notion that chanting the name of “Manasseh” was a self-made history that does not have a sound basis.<sup>18</sup>

If we observed carefully about the year of development as mentioned before the reason why these section of Mizos claimed to be one of the lost tribes is a by-product of Christian missionaries, as a belief of being a lost tribe of Israel by the Mizos begins only after the coming of the British and the spread of Christianity. This opinion was shared by Dr. Myer Samra saying that although this was the product of teaching led by Christian missionaries, this was not the intention of the Christian missionaries either.<sup>19</sup> A scholar from Aizawl Theological College, Aizawl Rev. Chuauthuama was of the opinion that there was a strong economic motive which made them think that their life would be better.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.5 Original homeland of the Mizos:**

The original home of the Mizos is shrouded in obscurity. There is a theory that runs along the linguistic pattern. Scholars have sub-divided Tibeto-Chinese family into sub-groups. In these divisions Mizos are grouped as a Tibeto-Burma family which speaks the Tibeto Burman language.<sup>21</sup> Recently, the emerging historian Sangkima, basing on Hall’s argument, emphasized that the earliest known home of the Tibeto-Burmese speaking people was somewhere between the

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<sup>18</sup> I personally interviewed one of the leaders of this group Mr. Lalthanhima at his office Canteen Kual, Treasury Square, Aizawl. During the interview he admit that he was in touch with the UNO office in Delhi and worked for the Mizo Israelites that they will get independence from Indian union under the umbrella of Israel. The general Secretary F. Lala informed me that the practices of the Mizos like preparation of dishes among the Mizos are quite similar to the Israelites and he also tried to connect some of the Bible scriptures to back up his evidence.

<sup>19</sup> Samra, Myer (Dr); “Judaism in Manipur and Mizoram...” Seminar papers, pp. 63-6

<sup>20</sup> Chuauthuama, (Rev); *Mizo leh Israel ( Mizo and Israel )*, p.11

<sup>21</sup> Keane, A.H.; *Man-Past and Present*, Cambridge, 1900. P.193 see also McCall, A.G. ; *The Lushai Chrysalis*, London, 1949, pp. 25-26 and Gierston, G.A.; *Linguistic Survey of India Vol-III, Part-III*, Delhi (Reprint), 1967, p.3

Gobi Desert and Northeastern part of Tibet, possibly Kansu.<sup>22</sup> The interesting question is how Sangkima had come to the conclusion that Mizo traditional home is somewhere in the southern part of China?

Tai and other non-Chinese like the Lolo, Miao and other tribesmen had come to Yunan from Sze-chuwan, Kuichaw and other provinces due to pressures from the Chinese. As a result, Yunan is found to be a cradle of these tribals; there are 18 larger minority nationalities in China.<sup>23</sup> Hence Lolo, Miao, Yao, Lashi, Li (Lai), Yi (li), Pai and others are the prominent tribes. Among these tribes Lalos have a linguistic affinity with the Mizos.

<b>English</b>	<b>Mizo</b>	<b>Lolo</b>
Day	Ni	Ni
Pig	Vawk	Va
Nine	Kua(pakua)	kue

**Table.1 A comparison of English, Mizo and Lolo language<sup>24</sup>**

Sangkima was of the opinion that the Mizos might have been with this tribe somewhere in the Southern China. Drawing his evidence from the above language comparison and asserting a close affinity of the Mizos with the hill tribes of southern China in languages, mode of living and cultural practices, he believes that the Mizos came in contact with other hill tribes and as a result there were mutual borrowings of language and culture. It is more likely that like other non-Chinese tribes of southern China, the Mizos too, moved down to the South possibly due to the pressure of the Chinese. From there they came to Yunan province and stayed for some time. Therefore, the southern part of China, particularly Szechwan, Yunan, Kweichow provinces and in wider context, the

<sup>22</sup> Sangkima, (Dr); *Mizos Society and Social Change (1890-1947)*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati: Delhi, 1992, p.13, see also Hall, D.G.E; *A History of South-East Asia*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1956, Reprint, p.34

<sup>23</sup> Lyall, L.A.; *China*, Ernest Benn Ltd., London, 1934, p.83

<sup>24</sup> Forest, R.A.D.; *The Chinese Language*, Faber and Faber Ltd., London,(n.d.), p.101

entire fringe of eastern perimeter of the plateau between Kansu and Burma, may be considered as the original home of the Mizos.<sup>25</sup>

Taking this view Prof. J.N. Phukan remarks that “The connections of the Mizos with the Burmese and the Shans in many of their cultural elements and civilization brings us to the theory that their late home of migration was southern China bordering Myanmar where even today many tribes lead their traditional life.”<sup>26</sup> Nunthara also contends that “All the writers on the subject and the traditional history of the Mizo verbally handed down through several decades agree that the term *Chhinlung*, whether a place or a person’s name, originated from China and that the Mizo and all the related tribes claim to have originated from this. From this account, even though a conjectural one, we can surmise that the original home of the Mizo is somewhere in the east.”<sup>27</sup>

These tribes were the descendants of early feudal rulers created by the Chinese emperors. They came to the South as a result of vast wave of population movements and also owing to certain Chinese pressures. In the period between 338 BC and 244 BC the tribal people moved to the south owing to the war between the Chin and Ch’u.<sup>28</sup> The imperial army of Ch’in put down the latter with a heavy hand and consequently this led to a large scale dispersal of the populations of Szechuan and the other provinces in the south. But in subsequent years, the people, after regrouping themselves in various localities amid hills and plains in Yunan, set up a number of small principalities.<sup>29</sup> One of the principalities was that of Ngai-Zeo founded by one prince called Chiu-lung. The major wave of population movement of the tribals to the south was also perhaps caused by the policy of Cheng better known to the history as Shih Huang (Wang) Ti (246-210 BC). Known as Napoleon of China and founder of the Chinese

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<sup>25</sup> Sangkima (1992), op.cit., p.14

<sup>26</sup> Phukan, J.N.; *The Late Home of migration of the Mizos, paper presented at the international Seminar on the studies on the Minority Nationalities of northeast India- The Mizo* at Aizawl on 7-9 April 1992.

<sup>27</sup> Nunthara, C; *Mizoram: Society and Polity*, New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1996, p.39

<sup>28</sup> Gogoi, Padmeswar; *The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms*, Guwahati University, 1968, p.38

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.39

empire, Shih Huang-Ti initiated the real pressure on the tribes during the time when the construction of the Great Wall vigorously went on.<sup>30</sup> So, he was responsible for the great revolution development in China.

## **2.6 Theories of Migration:**

People move for different reasons. These differences affect the overall migration process. Although a comprehensive theory is unattainable, it remains a crucial task of demographers to explain why people migrate. Theories of migration are important because they can help us understand population movements within their wider political and economic contexts.<sup>31</sup> Ernest Ravenstein is widely regarded as the earliest migration theorist. Ravenstein, an English geographer, used census data from England and Wales to develop his "Laws of Migration" (1889). He concluded that migration was governed by a "push-pull" process; that is, unfavorable conditions in one place (oppressive laws, heavy taxation, etc.) "push" people out, and favorable conditions in an external location "pull" them out. Ravenstein's laws stated that the primary cause for migration was better external economic opportunities; the volume of migration decreases as distance increases; migration occurs in stages instead of one long move; population movements are bilateral; and migration differentials (e.g., gender, social class, age) influence a person's mobility.

Many theorists have followed in Ravenstein's footsteps, and the dominant theories in contemporary scholarship are more or less variations of his conclusions. Everett Lee (1966) reformulated Ravenstein's theory to give more emphasis to internal (or push) factors. Lee also outlined the impact that *intervening obstacles* have on the migration process. He argued that variables such as distance, physical and political barriers, and having dependents can

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<sup>30</sup> Latourette, Kenneth Scott; *The Chinese- Their History, and Culture*, New York, 1947, pp 92-96. Also see, Gogoi, Padmeswar; op. cit. pp 32-37

<sup>31</sup> \_\_\_\_\_; *Theories of Migration*, < <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1170/Migration-Theories-Migration.html> > (accessed on 4.3.2010)

impede or even prevent migration. Lee pointed out that the migration process is selective because differentials such as age, gender, and social class affect how persons respond to push-pull factors, and these conditions also shape their ability to overcome intervening obstacles. Furthermore, personal factors such as a person's education, knowledge of a potential receiver population, family ties, and the like can facilitate or retard migration.

As discussed, Mizo migration from the east moved towards the south west also falls under this “push” theory. One of the factors for their migration is famine which is clearly mentioned in the folk tradition. In the pre-British period no written account was available regarding the nature and effect of famines. It was only through the folk tradition that we can refer to these incidents. The sub-tribe Hmar clans were believed to have migrated from Burma to the present Mizoram due to a famine that took place in 1500.

One of the earliest known Hmar oral songs is as follows:

Shan khuaah lenpur a tlakin,  
Miza raza tlan their e.

Translated as:

“Because of the great famine that befell us in  
Shan State We had to leave it behind.”

The dominant sub-tribe Lusei was believed to have entered Mizoram sometime in the middle of the 17th century. They must have probably experienced these periodic famines even then. (Rokhuma, 1998:96).

Mizos being a subject of Chi'n prince who revolted against his father Shih Huangti of the Chi'n dynasty and who built the Great Wall of China in 228 B.C.<sup>32</sup> to avoid severe punishments from cruel ruler, the prince first established himself somewhere in the Himalayan mountains and then again migrated again to

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<sup>32</sup> Pudaite, Rochunga; *The Education of the Hmar People*, Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, Silemat, 1963, p.22

present Shan State of Burma.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned before this evidence is also attested by Hmar folk song as mentioned before.

On the other hand James Scott had given us excellent idea why the hill people like the Mizos keeps themselves at arm's length in his book on "*The Art of not being Governed: An Anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*" Scott teases out the obverse of state-making and disrupts long-held views of hill peoples as "pre-state". The Art of Not Being Governed confronts us with a "radically different approach to history that views events from the perspective of state-less people and redefine state-making as a form of internal colonialism". Virtually everything about the communities inhabiting the "zomia" - their social structure, agricultural practices, belief system, orality - are/were designed to escape state or thwart state springing up within them. For example, Scott argument, "agricultural practices are not ecologically given, but are political choice", disjuncts conventional notion of shifting agriculture as pre-wet agriculture. This is a history of communities who chose to keep the state at arm's length.

An interesting theory of migration begins with GH Luce's theory of the origin of Tibeto-Burmans which is followed by other Mizo historians and anthropologists. According to this theory the Chi'ang were not just the ancestors of the Chin but of the entire Tibeto-Burman group and they "enjoyed a civilization as advanced as the Chinese, who disturbed them so much that they moved south. In order to legitimate this claim Professor Luce comments:

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<sup>33</sup> A number of other theories have been advanced in this connection, more noticeably by Sing khokai and Chawn Kio they both believed that the Mizos ancestors were either the Ch'ing or Ch'iang in Chinese history, which are "old generic designations for the non-Chinese tribes of Kansu-Tibetan frontier, and indicate the Ch'iang as a shepherd people, the Ch'ing as "barbarian tribes". See Sing Kho Kai, *The Theological Concept of Zo in the Chin tradition and Culture*, (BRE thesis: Burma Institute of Theology, 1984) and Chawn Kio, "The Origin of the Chin" in Ceu Mang, ed., *Khrifa Bukbau* (Haka: CCLR Press, 113)

With the expansion of China, the Ch'iang had either the choice to absorb or to become nomads in the wilds. It was a hard choice, between liberty and civilization. Your ancestor chose liberty; and they must have gallantly maintained it. But the cost was heavy. It cost them 2000 years of progress. If the Ch'iang of 3000 BC were equals of the Chinese civilization, the Tibeto-Burmans (including the Mizo) of 700 Ad were not really as advanced as the Chinese in 1300 BC.<sup>34</sup>

According to Enriquez, before they moved to the wilderness, along the edges of western China and eastern Tibet, the ancient homelands of Ch'iang and all other Tibeto-Burman groups lied somewhere in the Northwest possibly in Kansu, between Gobi and north western Tibet.<sup>35</sup> Thus, it is now generally believed that the Tibeto-Burman group and other Mongoloid stock who now occupy Southeast Asia and Northeast India migrated in three waves in the following chronological order:

1. The Mon-Khmer (Talaing, Palaung En Raing, Pa-o, Khasi, Annimite).
2. The Tibeto-Burman (Pyu, Kanza, thet, Burman, Chin, Kachin, Naga, Lolo).
3. The Tai Chinese (Shan, Siamese, and Karen).

The Tibeto-Burman group initially moved towards the West and thereafter subdivided themselves into several groups. They follow different routes, one group reaching northern Tibet, where some of them stayed behind, while others moved on until they reached Burma in three waves. These people were:

1. The Chin-Kachin-Naga group

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<sup>34</sup> Tun, Than; *Essays on the History and Buddhism of Burma*, Whiting Bay, Scotland: Kiscadale Publications, 1998, p.4

<sup>35</sup> Enriquez, C.M; *The Races of Burma*, Rangoon: Government Printing , 1932, pp. 7-8



2. The Burman and Old-Burman (Pyu, Kanan, Thet) group
3. The Lolo group.<sup>36</sup>

This migration theory has been mainly adopted by historians like Than Tun and Gordon Luce. However, anthropologists like Edmund Leach believe that “the hypothesis that the Southeast Asian peoples are known today migrated from the region of China is a pure Myth.”<sup>37</sup> The main difference between the historical approach and the anthropological approach is that while historians begin their historical reconstruction with the origins and migrations of the ancestors, anthropologists start with “the development within the general region of Burma of symbiotic socio-cultural systems: civilizations and hill societies.”<sup>38</sup> However, both historians and anthropologists agree-as historical linguistics, archaeology, and racial relationship definitely indicate- that the ancestors of these various people did indeed come from the North. But the anthropologists maintain their argument by saying that, “they did not come as social and cultural units we know today and cannot be identified with any particular groups of today.”<sup>39</sup> Their main thesis is that the hill and plain people are now defined by their mutual relationship in present sites, because for anthropologists, ethnicity was constructed within the realm of social interaction between neighboring reference groups.

Therefore, the idea and new line of approach shed by the anthropologists can be very helpful especially when we investigate the pre-historical context of the Mizos where written records are available. Thus, based on ethnic and linguistic differentiation, not on written document, Lehman was able to demonstrate that “the ancestors of the Chin (Mizo) and the Burman must have

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Lehman, F.K.; *The Structure of Chin Society*, Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1963, p.11

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

been distinct from each other even before they first appeared in Burma.”<sup>40</sup> He comments that:

Undoubtedly, these various ancestral groups were descended in part from groups immigrating into present Burma, starting about the beginning of Christian era. But it is probable that some of these groups were in Burma remote past, long before a date indicate by any present historical evidence. We are not justified, however, in attaching more than linguistic significance to the terms ‘Chin’ and ‘Burman’ at such dates. He concludes, by commenting that “Chin history begins after A.D. 750, with the development of Burman civilization and Chin interaction with it.

Anthropologists like T.S. Gangte seem eager to agree with Leach and Lehman. Like Leach and Lehman, Gangte rejects hypothetical theories propounded by K. Zawla, Liangkhaia and other historians who locate “Chhinlung” somewhere in China and Tibet, respectively as a myth. “In the absence of any written corroboration or the existence of the historical evidence to support them,” he said, “such hypothetical theories are considered highly subjective and conjectural. They are, therefore, taken with a pinch of salt. They remain only as legends.”<sup>41</sup> He nevertheless accepted the “Chhinlung” tradition as the origin of the Mizos and even claims that Chindwin is where Mizo history really begins. Similar to this opinion, Sing Kho Khai maintained that “Khuangsai source of Chin tradition mentions that the location of Chhinlung was somewhere in Chindwin area.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Gangte, T.S.; *Kuki of Manipur*, Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1993. p.17

<sup>42</sup> Sing Kho Kai (1984), op.cit., p.3

### **2.6.1 Sojourn in the plains of Burma:**

There has been no unanimity on the questions of the date when the ancestors of the Mizos migrated down to Burma. K. Zawla suggested 950 A.D.<sup>43</sup> as the estimated date on which the Mizos departed from Mandalay. He left the period blank before 950 A.D. F.K. Lehman and G.H. Luce agree that there is sufficient evidence to show that the influx of the Sino-Tibetan speaking peoples and particularly of the Tibeto-Burman into the South East must have taken place during the first few centuries A.D., but differs on the date of the Mizos entry into Burma. Luce suggest the probable date as the middle of the eighth century, while allowing for the possibility of a date as far as the fourth century A.D. B. Lalthangliana, who based his ideas on tradition, also gives the eighth century A.D. as the possible date for the Mizos arrival in the Chindwin Valley. Lehman, however, advocates a much earlier date than both, going even beyond Luce. He assigns the date some time shortly after the beginning of the Christian era.

Gordon Luce and Lehman based their reckoning on linguistics, the ethnic population spread and other factors which have relevance to the problem. This writer regards the earlier date as more likely for the following reason. First, Burma is believed to have witnessed at least three main waves of southward migrations from the north, all of the people belonging to the Mongoloid stock. The first of these was the Tibeto-Burman speaking people consisting of the Burmese, the Mizos and the number of other groups. The second and third waves included the Mon-Khmer and the Tai (Shan) races, respectively. Even if the Mizos were the last of the first wave, it could have been as late as the eighth century A.D. Second, the wide distribution of the Mizo family and the extent of variant cultural traits must have taken centuries of separation and hence an early date of arrival.

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<sup>43</sup> Zawla (1989), op.cit., p.7

The Chin (Mizos), according to Luce, descended from western China and eastern Tibet into the South via the Hukong valley,<sup>44</sup> which is a completely different route than the Burman had taken. Thus, Lehman's theory is quite convincing that the ancestors of the Chin (Mizo) and the Burman were distinct from each other even when they first appeared in Burma. There is ample evidence that the Chin (Mizo) were the first who settled in the Chindwin valley. The Pagan inscriptions dating from the eleventh century onward refer to the Chin (Mizo) of the Chindwin valley. There is also persistent reference in the legends of almost all the Chin (Mizo) tribes to a former home in the Chindwin Valley. Chin original myths uniformly refer to the ruling lineage when speaking of the original homeland in the valley.<sup>45</sup> Moreover archeological evidence supported this interpretation.<sup>46</sup> Sing Kho Kai claims that the literary meaning of the name 'Chindwin' definitely suggests that Chindwin area was primarily inhabited by the Chin tribe.<sup>47</sup> This argument is also backed up by Vumson who said that "When the Burman descended to the plains of central Burma, during the ninth century, the Chins were already in the Chindwin valley."<sup>48</sup> The settlements of the Chins in Chindwin valley also have historical evidence mentioned by Professor Luce while referring to Pagan inscription of the thirteenth century indicating the words "Chins and Chindwin" but not much of this settlement pattern have been found in the inscription. However, based on this inscription Luce had suggested the period of settlement will be possibly the middle of eighth century.

It is important to note that before the settlement of Chindwin valley there had been kingdoms of Mon and the Pye in the Burma River valley, Sak or Thet and Kandu in upper Burma and the Shan who settled on the eastern side. There

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<sup>44</sup> Luce, Gordon; "*Old Kyaukse and the Coming of Burma*" in Journal of Burma Research Society, Vol. XLII, June 1959, pp. 75-109

<sup>45</sup> Lalthangliana; *History of Mizo in Burma* (MA thesis: Madalay University, 1976), p.9

<sup>46</sup> Vumson in his book *Zo History* (1986) mentioned that the "remains of Chin settlements are still found today in the Chindwin Valley. Two miles from Sibani village, not very far from Monywa, is a Chin ritual ground. The memorial stone was in earlier days, about thirteen feet (4.3 m) high, but now decayed from exposure. The Burmese called it Chin paya or Chin god." p.34

<sup>47</sup> Sing kho Kai (1984) op.cit., p.36

<sup>48</sup> Vumson (1986) op.cit., p.35

had been a series of wars between the Pagan Burman with Thet, and the Kandu but never with the Chins. Instead the Chins were called “Khyan” meaning “friends” by the Burmese. Over the course of time, the Chins migrated from eastern bank of the river to the upper Chindwin called Kale-Kabaw valley. However it is difficult to draw definite years for their settlements in this valley. Lian Sakhong suggests beginning with the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth century. He came to this conclusion drawing from the Pagan dynasty which fell in 1295. Their inscriptions continuously mentioned the Chins. The reason for their migration is linked to a flood which destroyed their earlier settlement as oral tradition can be drawn on these accounts. As far as linguistic evidence is concerned, the Zophei group, who are under the branch of the Lai clan have carried on the memories of this flood. According to them the flood from the low valley had driven their ancestors to the mountains on the other side of the river where the name of the place ‘Khatlei’, ‘Khalei’, ‘Khale’ have root of the word ‘Kale’ which means “other side of the river.”<sup>49</sup>

It was believed by most of the Mizo Burma historians that it was because of the flood the Chins moved to the upper valley from their original settlements. Drawing collective memories of the Chins this period marks a very crucial place in the history of the Mizo. Firstly, this period is marked the splitting up of Mizo Sinto different groups or clans and formations of different dialects. Secondly, there is the absence of written documents. Many different myths and legends exist which explains the breakup of the group. B.S. Carey and NN Tuck recorded one of such stories:

The Chin (Mizo) became very powerful and finding no more enemies on earth, they proposed to pass their time capturing the Sun. they therefore set about a sort of Jacob’s ladder with poles, and gradually mounted

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<sup>49</sup> The term ‘Khale’ is Burmanized version of ‘Khalei’. Literal term for ‘Kale’ or ‘Khale’ means Children. Thus linguistic study confirmed that the Chin traditional account of flood story, but also the root of the word name ‘Kale valley’

them higher and higher from the earth and nearer to their goal, the Sun. However, the work became tedious; they quarrelled among themselves and one day, when half of the people were climbing high up on the pole, all eager to seize the Sun, the other half cut it down. It fell down northwards, dashing the people beyond the Run River on the kale border and the present site of Torrzam. These people were not damaged by the fall, but suddenly struck with confusion of tongues; they were unable to communicate with each other and did not know the way home again. Thus, they broke into distinct tribes and spoke different languages.<sup>50</sup>

Another story which runs parallel along with this story also emerged within Zophei (A sub clan of Lai) called “leather book”. How the written language came into being.

In the beginning, when the stones were soft, all mankind spoke the same language, and there was no war on earth. But just before the darkness called Chun-mui came to the earth, God gave different languages to different peoples and instructs them to write on something else. While the Chin ancestors carefully inscribed their language on leather, the Burman ancestors, who were lazy, wrote their language on stone, which was soft. However, soon after they had made the inscription of their languages, the ‘darkness’ called Chun-mui came and Sun disappeared from the earth. During the ‘darkness’ the stone became hard but the leather got wet. Before the Sun came back to the earth, and while the wet leather

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<sup>50</sup> Carey, B.S and Tuck, H.N; *The Chin Hills*, 1896, p.146

was still very smelly, a hungry dog ate up the leather, and this way, the Chin ancestors lost their written language.

When the Sun came back to the earth, the Chin ancestors realized that while they had lost their written language, the Burman language which was written on the stone had returned into 'the magic of letters'. Moreover, while the sons Burman spoke the same language, the sons of Chin spoke different language because their common language was eaten up together with the leather by the hungry dog. Thus, the ancestor of the Chin prepared to make war against the Burman in order to capture 'the magic letters.' Although the Burmans were weak and lazier, the Chin did not win the war because 'the magic letters' united all the sons of the Burman. Since the sons of the Chin spoke different dialects, their fathers could not even give them the war order to fight the Burman. It was for this reason that the Chin broke into distinct tribes and speak different dialects.<sup>51</sup>

The Lusei clan have different versions of "magic letters" which was recorded by Lt John Shakespear in 1912. According to this tradition God gave different talents as well: "to the ancestor of the Pawih or Laimi clan he gave a fighting sword, while the ancestor of the Lusei clan only received a cloth, which is the reason that the Pawih clan are braver than the Lusei. In contrast with the Zophei version of "magic of letters" the Lusei story tells that the magic of letters was given to the white man, not the Burman. Shakespear therefore concludes that

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<sup>51</sup> Sakhong, Pu; *Kan Pupa Thawh-keh-nak Kong*, Aibur: Manuscript, 1969, translated by Lian Sakhong in "The origin of the Chin", Robin, K; (2009) op.cit., p.23

“I was told he (white man) had received the knowledge of reading and writing- a curious instance of the pen being considered mightier than the sword.”<sup>52</sup>

According to Lian Sakhong the Chin lived peacefully in the upper Chindwin of the Kale-Kabaw valley for at least a hundred years, from the fall of Pagan in 1295 to the founding of the Shan's Fortress City of Kale-myo in 1395. Both Mizo historian Kipgen and Lalthangliana are of the opinion that during this period of settlement the Chin group founded a capital called Khampat which is regarded to be the most glorious period of their history. Most of the major clans, who now inhabit the Chin state of Burma, Mizoram, Manipur, Cachar and Tripura are believed to have lived together there under a great chief having the same culture and speaking the same language.<sup>53</sup> But the questions which should be asked are what kind of culture would run in that town and what would be their common language?

There are different varieties of opinion among the historians on the question of why they migrated from Khampat town. K. Zawla was of the opinion that the cruelty of the Chief coupled with a great famine was the cause for migration.<sup>54</sup> B. Lalthangliana was of the opinion that the departure from Khampat seems to have been caused by invasion of enemy stronger than the people of Khampat. He cites a Mizo legend which describes the hasty manner in which they left Khampat through the western gate, and how they trampled over the two clusters of bamboos in the process, leaving them reduced to dust.<sup>55</sup> He thinks that the stronger enemy wouldn't be the Burmans as other historian believed it to be the Shan. In the year 1395 when the Shan built the great city of Kalemio with double walls at the foot of what is called the Chin Hills, 20 miles west of the Chindwin River, a century of Kale-Kabaw valley had broken up.<sup>56</sup> The

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<sup>52</sup> Shakespear, J (1912), op, cit, p.95

<sup>53</sup> Kipgen, Mangkhosat (1996), op.cit., p.39

<sup>54</sup> Zawla (1989), op.cit., p.11

<sup>55</sup> Lalthangliana (1978) op.cit., p.88

<sup>56</sup> Luce, G.H; *The Chin Linguistic Tour*, 1959, p.26-27



Shan have supremacy over these regions after the fall of the Pagan. They continued to war with the Burman kingdom of Ava and finally conquered them in 1529. Kale-Kabaw valley remained under the rule of the Shan until the British period. During the next century after conquering the Chin of Kale-Kabaw valley they continued to annex Assam and established the Ahong dynasty which lasted for more than two centuries.

Drawing on the writings of Sing Kho Kai and Lalthangliana, the Chin did not leave the Kale-Kabaw valley as soon as the Shan conquered the region; they lived side by side with the Shan. The Shan who are now building the Fortress started to ask a force labour from the Chin.<sup>57</sup> Prof. D.G.E Hall was of the opinion that the Shan were the one who drove the Chin out of Chindwin valley into the western hills of present Mizoram.<sup>58</sup> According to the legend before they left Khampat town they planted a banyan sapling at Khampat they took to pledge that they would again return to their permanent home when the sapling had grown into a tree and when the spreading branches touches the ground.<sup>59</sup> It is difficult to know when the Chin left Khampat town for present Mizoram. However, the problem of chronology as suggested by Lian Sa Khong can be traced at least approximately, the periods from the Shan and the Burma Chronicles from the East and the Manipur chronicles from the West. The Manipur Chronicle mentioned the Chins as Kuki in the year 1554.<sup>60</sup> Thus it is certain that the Chin settlement in the present Mizoram began only after the founding of Kale-myo in 1395 and reached the far most region of their settlement in the present Manipur State of India in about 1554. Before they left Khampat town the oral tradition also shows that there was a dreadful natural calamities wherein people died in the hundreds. Therefore one can come to a conclusion that it might be a Shan advancement and the famine that occurred during that period as the reason for their migration from Khampat town.

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<sup>57</sup> Sing kho kai (1984), op.cit., p.43

<sup>58</sup> Hall, D.G.E; *A history of South East Asia*, London: St. Martin's Press, 1968, p.158

<sup>59</sup> Kipgen, Mangkhosat (1996) op, cit., pp 40-41, b-a 1976 pp. 87-89

<sup>60</sup> Shakespear, J; *The Kuki Lushai Clan*, in JRAI, Vol. 11. No.1. 1955, pp. 94-111 and also see Lehman, F.K (1963) op cit., p.25

### **2.6.2 Sojourn in Chin Hills, Manipur and Lushai Hills:**

The migrations of the Lushai Kukis from Burma are of three phases and the people here are identified under three names- 'Old Kuki', 'New-Kuki' and 'the Lushai'.<sup>61</sup>

The 'Old Kuki' or Hrangkaw, Biate, Langrawng, Pangkhua and Mung (Kawk) were the first batch in the migration. They were followed by the "New Kuki" and the Lushai followed them in the third batch. It is not precisely known about the exact date of their migration to the Lushai Hills (Present Mizoram) but from the folk narrative it is evident the two batches had been pushed, causing them to move as far as what is now known as "Zampui" Tripura State of India and Chittagong Hill Tract the present day of Bangladesh.

Soppit brings the date of their migration to the middle of the sixteenth century A.D.<sup>62</sup> but this conclusion may conflict with the account of the fact mentioned in annals of Tripura under the Raja Chachag or Roy Chachag who said to be flourished around 1512. A.D.<sup>63</sup> Chachag or Roy Chachag was a military commander of Dhanya Manikya who ascended the throne of Tripura in 1490. In 1513 A.D., the Raja issued a coin in his name and in the coin it is written as "conqueror of Chittagong".<sup>64</sup> During his reign a quarrel arose between him and the Kukis over the procession of a white elephant. The Kuki occupied the deep forest lying to the east of Tripura and the West of Lushai Hills. The Rajamala, the Chronicle of the Tripura Rajas have also an account on the Kukis to the Tripura

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<sup>61</sup> Gangte, M, Priadarshini; *Historical back ground of the Chins*, 2009. p.61

<sup>62</sup> Soppitt, G.A.; *A Short Account of the Lushai-Kuki tribes*, Aizawl (reprint), 1976, p.7

<sup>63</sup> Dalton, E.T; *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 110-11 and Grierson, G.A. (1967) op, cit., p.1

<sup>64</sup> Bhattacharaya, A.C; *Progressive Tripura*, New Delhi, 1930, p.19

Kings. The Chronicle narrates how the Raj Kumar fell in love with a Kuki woman.<sup>65</sup>

A large section of the group migrated southward and made permanent settlements at Tiddim, Falam and Haka and still others moved further down to Zotung, Matupi and Mara areas up to the most portions of present Mizoram. Apart from this some other groups who are called Pautus, the Hualngos, the Khawlhings, the Darlongs, the Hmars, the Thadous, the Gangtes and other allied clans moved westward and in due course crossed over the Tiau river entering into the hills that soon came to be known as the Lushai Hills by the British administrators. Not long after this group left the Chindwin valley for the Chin Hills the other group, the inhabitants of Khampat town also followed them up to the hills. After spending several years in Than Tlang (Tiddim Area) they moved across the Manipur River, which they called “Meitei Run” in contrast to the Chindwin River which they claimed to be their own run and settled themselves in Len Tlang (Len Range), K Zawla dated this as around 1466 AD.<sup>66</sup> This group generally called “Lushai” consisted of the Luseis, the Raltes, the Chawngthus, the Khiangtes, the Huhnars, the Chuaungos, the Chuauhangs, the Ngentes, the Punttes and the Partes who lived in clan-wise in twelve villages.<sup>67</sup>

The folk narrative gave us the evidence that the clans are at war with each other for certain reasons during this period. If we look at one of the folk songs which reveal about that period:

Pawih in stealth came,  
And Kawlni fell an easy game  
The open space where we celebrate in happiness  
Was now silence forever with sadness,  
Our braves lay dead underneath the trees,

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<sup>65</sup> Long, James (Rev); *Analysis of the Rajamala or the Chronicle of Tripura* (Reprint), 1955, p.8

<sup>66</sup> Zawla, K (1993)op.cit., pp.10-1

<sup>67</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 1938, 4<sup>th</sup> edition ed.1976, p.21

And this was the last scene of our beloved Suaipui  
Heads and guns were collected as trophies,  
And triumphantly went away our enemy.<sup>68</sup>

And a prayer beseeches:

Guard us from our enemies; guard us from the death...  
Bless us in Killing man...  
Guards us from spears, guard us from the dah.

## **2.7 Evolution of Chieftainship and formation new Identities:**

At settlements in Thantlang and Lentlang there were no chiefs; each clan had their own settlements and the picture that is imagined is traditionally that of homogeneous unit. There were, however, clans that were considered antagonistic to each other; taking slaves from each other in wars is quite a common feature, suggesting thereby increasing heterogeneity of the group. The rival groups thus push each other and the movement of these groups led to new alliances and new identities were being formed.

Among these clans the Luseis and the cognate clans are without a leader. In the absence of an authority to organize them, resulted in trounce to their neighboring clans like Falams, Hakas and the Suktes who are collectively called as Pawih. Therefore, the conflicts among these clans resulted in search of a capable leader who would lead them in times of war. The reluctant Zahmuaka was persuaded, through his ambitious wife Lawileri. Zahmuaka's sons were Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluaha, Thanngura, Rivunga and Rokhuma. The names of the offspring are the beginning of new identity formation as a clan, as their descendents in the future bear their names. In the process of tribal-feud the stronger clan pushes the weaker clans downwards. The directions in which they moved also formed a new name for identity of a clan like Hmar clan (Hmar

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<sup>68</sup> Lalthangliana (2001) op.cit., p.21

means North) and Paihte clan (Pai meaning go), Chhakchhuak Clan (Chhakchhuak meaning those who moved from the east) refer to an identity created in a movement. No doubt, all the names of the clans were not based on the direction that they moved but in the essentially cross-tribal scheme of such things, it does not appear as if the movement was that of a single tribe in one direction. While there could have been a predominance of one tribe, there were others who were also part of the movement. However the crystallization of that identity and its formalization came into a sedentary character.

The genealogy is back up by oral tradition according to this Paihte and Sailo claim that they both are the descendent of Niguite whose birth is narrated in the form of a folktale; Dongula had infringe sex with his sister Lalnemi who later gave birth to a beautiful boy named Niguite. This Myth reveals the differences of the person from others which are a common character of many origin myths. This difference has its origin in the original conception.<sup>69</sup> The child was named Niguite because he was born on account of the rays coming from the sun. The word 'ni' means sun and 'guite' means 'to burn' or 'to scorch'.<sup>70</sup> Later Niguite had two sons named Ngeknguka and Bawklua, the progenitors of the Paihte and Sailo respectively. Bawklua married Lawileri who had given birth to Sihsinga who was a father of one Ralna. Ralna begot one Chhuahlawma, father of Zahmuaka who along his wife named Lawileri had seven sons but one died in infancy.

There is a slight different interpretation by J. Shakespear in his book "Lushei Kuki clan" where he stated that all Lusei chiefs claim descent from a certain Thangura, who is sometimes said it have sprung from the union of a Burman with a Paihte woman, but according to the Paihte, the Lusei are descended from Boklua, an illegitimate son of the Paihte chief Ngehguka. The

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<sup>69</sup> This can be common with the Princess who claimed their birth connected with the cosmology, or royal animal like tiger. It is a political ideology for they think it is great to be on that lineage, this practice is common with the Medieval Tughlaq dynasty.

<sup>70</sup> Sangkima, "Oral sources of Mizo history" paper presented at the seminar on, Sources of the history of North-East India organized by ICHR-NERC, Guwahati, on March 12-14, 2002.

Thado say that some hunters tracing a serao noticed the foot-marks of a child following those of an animal, and on surrounding the doe Serao they found it suckling a child who became the great chief Thangura, or, as they call him "Thangul". From Thangura the pedigree of all the living chiefs is fairly accurately established. The Lusei, in common with the Thado and the other Kuki tribes, attach importance to their genealogies; and pedigrees, given at an interval of many years; and by persons living far apart, have been found to agree in a wonderful manner. From him sprang six lines of Thangur chiefs, Rokhum, Zadeng, Thangluah, Paliana, Rivung, Sailo. Each clan in search of finding a suitable place for Jhuming cultivation started to penetrate towards the west until they found their settlement in the present day Mizoram; however some of them migrated till the neighboring regions such as Haflong, Tripura in the west, Manipur in the north and Chittagong hill tract.<sup>71</sup>

Looking at the whole process of migration it is interesting to question why the culture of the Mizos get set back from civilized to the simple life? Is it really true to model Mizo identity as primordial or as pre-existing before the migration as most of the Mizo historians think it so. Answering to this first question Mangkhosat Kipgen was of the opinion that the difficult terrain of the highland which they came to inhabit and the influence it has on the life of the people was the reason for the set back. He further goes on saying that in the plains of Burma (excepting those offshoots that had separated themselves from the main group earlier) the people seem to have maintained something of a national character. Even after the separation when leaving Mandalay the two groups continued to be sufficiently large to maintain their common identity. Once they entered the hills with their steep mountains and deep gorges, things began to split up into smaller groups, often the same family of clan settling in the same village. On account of difficulties of communication between the now scattered villages maintaining contact with each other became difficult and infrequent. Naturally, therefore, each locality developed its own way of speaking, dressing manners and customs.

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<sup>71</sup> Shakespear (1912), op, cit., p.3

Feeling of close kinship between the different settlements was no longer strong, being replaced by clan identity and loyalties. On the few occasions when they meet it was often in the form of conflict over jhum land which created and perpetuated clan feuds. Once hostile attitudes were introduced, fighting among them became frequent, often on flimsy grounds. The scattered people completely lost their sense of national identity.

In attending the question on whether Mizo identity is primordial or pre-existent before the migration, if we look at the whole process of historical development whether it is a migration or a formation of chieftainship it does appear that the congeries of clans that moved allied with each other to form the whole in course of time. Thus for instance in stories such as creation of ruler among the clan, it can be seen to be true though there are contesting stories to point to this. In the version of VL Siama, this coming of the tribe as follows:

While the Mizos were on the west of the river Run, the Paihte were to the east. The Chhakchhuak and the Paihte fought a war in which the former took captive a man from among the Paihte, who became their slave. They treated him well and even allow him to marry. He had a son named Zahmuaka who marries a lady of the Lawitiang Clan. They had seven sons. The Hnamte lived in the neighboring hill and as their leader did not have a son, the clan and the leader felt it is appropriate to ask Zahmuaka to come and lead them. When the Hnamte leader died, Zahmuaka was approached. Initially Zahmuaka hesitated, but in the end he agreed, not because he wanted to but because the clan insisted. The Sailo who came to rule large parts of Mizoram was one of the sons of Zahmuaka.

If you look carefully at this narration, the creation of the rulers of the Mizo was from those who are not even considered Lusei. And in contemporary conceptualization, the Sailo clan do not considered themselves as Paihte by any degree of imagination. Many agree that those whose identity crystallized to form the 'Mizo' were those who came to be ruled by the Sailo chiefs across the length and breadth of the country. The rule under the Sailo rulers gave a sense of territoriality to the identity, which had earlier been in a state of flux. The British contribution was that of legitimizing their status.

This whole theory of migration forms vivid part of Mizo imagination of their identity as their identity is closely related with the movement whether it was in the creation of Chieftaincies of tribal confederations. The Pre-colonial culture as opposed to occasional colonial allusions to timelessness and status quo involved movement and change, which in fact was brought to halt by colonialism.

## **2.8 Cultural and Political development under Sailo regime:**

The Sailo chiefs set up Selesih, the first town of Mizoram in 1740 A.D.<sup>72</sup> because of fear of Pawih attacks and it needs to be elaborated here because of its historical importance. Firstly, a large town set up at Selesih by combining seven villages in the eastern part of Mizoram can be looked at as a process of state formation, as this measure was effective in checking the Pawih from further acts of depredation.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, Selesih was important not only because of its size and role in checking the Pawih. The settlement at this place marks Mizo's cultural development. It was under the wise guidance of the senior Chief, Pu Kawlha and

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<sup>72</sup> Kipgen, Mangkhosat, (1996) op.cit., p.44

<sup>73</sup> Vanlalringa; *Origin And Development of Chieftainship In Mizoram* (unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation), Department of history, NEHU, Shillong, 1991. p.55



other six chiefs that most of the customary laws and practices were introduced and formalized.

However the town declined because of the absence of modern system of cultivation and means for providing sufficient fuel to such a large population could not be sustained for long.

Though the breakup of Selesih town and the dispersion of its inhabitants was a setback to the ascendancy of the Sailo chiefs, as shrewd administrators, they soon consolidated their position. While many subjects deserted villages ruled by “the cruel and arbitrary rulers”<sup>74</sup> belonging to other families of the Lusei and other clans, thus weakening their economic and defensive positions, the Sailo chiefs improved their position by receiving such deserter into their villages. A plan was drawn up under which Sailo chiefs went about subjugating the chiefs of the Zadeng, Palian and Thangluah families into Lusei Clan. Though some of the villages of these clans were still at large, their discontented subjects would not show the bravery required of them, whereas the forces of Sailo chiefs fought with Great Spirit. By the early nineteenth century the Sailo Chiefs completed the campaign to subjugate the chiefs of other Lusei families, as also their associated clans like Chawngthu and Raltes. To achieve this objective the Sailo launched their campaign in east and the north. They had no problem in dispensing with the Hualngos, one of the clan who inhabited the hills before the Lusei and associated clans entered Mizoram. They were pushed back to the east across the Tiau river. However, the Sailo were advancement put on hold by the Suktes and therefore could not proceed beyond the Tiau river. The Pawih who settled on the west of Tiau river also dared not to encroach.

Prior to the coming of Sailo in Mizoram the Thadous and the Hmars were another group of earlier settlers in Mizoram. These clans mostly under the

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<sup>74</sup> Shakespear, J (1912) op.cit., p.4

Thadou chiefs, established themselves in the north dislodging the earlier inhabitants namely the Hallams, Hrangkhawls, etc. and enforcing them to migrate to Cachar, Tripura and Sylhet where they came to be known as Kukis.<sup>75</sup> After reducing all others into submission and securing their position, the Sailos were now in a position to take on the Thadous in the north. In the contest the Thadous lost to the superior forces of the Sailo chiefs who drove them out of the hills to the north into the plains of Cachar or the southern hills of Manipur in about 1848 A.D.<sup>76</sup> A few of the Thadou and about half of the Hmars accepted Sailo suzerainty and stayed in the then Lushai Hills (Mizoram). After the defeat and expulsion of the Thadous, the Sailo chiefs emerged as the undisputed rulers of the regions between the Tiau river in the east and the Zampui hills in the west except for the extreme south of Mizoram where the Pawih and the Mara chiefs enjoyed their supremacy. The victorious Sailo chiefs now proclaimed themselves as “those who glide between the Sun and the Moon”.

Many agreed that those whose identity crystallized to form the ‘Mizo’ were those who came to be ruled by the Sailo chiefs across the length and breadth of the country. The rule under the Sailo rulers gave a sense of territoriality to the identity, which had earlier been in a state of flux. The British contribution was that of legitimizing their status.

## **2.9 Contestation of common generic term:**

The most important criteria in creating a clear identity are through having a common name which represents the particular community of a region of which whose culture and practices were more identical than variations. As we have already pointed out that Myth of origin Chhinlung and Khampat acts as instrumentality in building a common identity. Whether belonging to different clans or sub clans they all agreed that they belong to one ancestor and origin.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.57

<sup>76</sup> Shakespear mentioned them as “New Kukis”, distinguish them from the earlier settlers who were called “Old Kukis”. Ibid, p.6

Mizoram is home to many clans belonging to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Mongoloid stock who trace their original homeland to somewhere in Southern China in the Szechuan province and the adjoining mountainous regions of Kansu and Shensi. With the coming of the British, the erstwhile tribal societies formed/ based on clan and village identities began to undergo a process of developing an ethno-tribal identity.

Almost always and most invariably sooner or later, the search for an ethno-tribal identity leads to an attempt for political unification or reunification with their brethren cognate clans (real and imagined) under one administrative umbrella. Notwithstanding the palpable differences in terms of dialect and ritual practices, etc that had accrued due to long period of separation, however, these tribes retain certain elements of their original traditional costumes, language, legends and folk-lore; the similarity of which make them understand that they were of the same stock and of the same ancestry. As S. Carey was of the opinion that the people were of the same stock; their form of government, method of cultivation, manners and customs, beliefs and tradition point one origin.<sup>77</sup> They also further summarize the common traits of all the Mizo as

...characteristics that can be universally traced and may be briefly enumerated as follows. The slow speech, the serious manners, the respect of birth and the knowledge of pedigrees, the duty of revenge, the taste for and the treacherous method of warfare, the curse of drink, the virtue of hospitality, the clannish feeling, the vice of avarice, the filthy state of the body, mutual distrust, impatience under control, the want of power, of combination and continued effort, arrogance in victory, speedy discouragement and panic in defeat are common traits throughout the hills.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Bertram S.Carey and H.N. Tuck; *The Chin Hills: A history of the people, our dealing with Them, Their Customs and Manners. And Gazetteer of the country*, Vol.1, 2 Vols (1986), p.2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.165.

An attempt had been made by the various scholars in building the common generic term for the Mizo. However the problem arises as the people did not agree with the name given by the outsider. They were given a name “Chins” or “Khyan” meaning “a friend” by the Burmese giving this name to the great Chindwin River and Chin Hills.<sup>79</sup> When the section of this people moved towards the hills and began to have contact with the plain people of Assam they were given a name of “Kuki”, and in Manipuri, “Khongjai” by the Meiteis. The colonial writers who first contacted the people had given them a name “Lushai”. This was indeed taken from Lusei, one clan of the Mizo. Though the name had been used to cover the entire section of the population large sections, the people did not favour this, as depicted by the 1901 census where the majority used the name of their particular clans.

Table I. Population of the Lushai Hills in 1901

<b><i>Name of the Clan</i></b>	<b><i>Population</i></b>
Hmar	10411
Lushai	36332
Paihte	2870
Pawih	15038
Ralte	13829
Total Population	78,480

*Sources: Rev Liangkhaia, Mizo Chanchin*

The named “Chin” had been first been mentioned in the Burmese history of ‘Pagan Period’ in the inscriptions around 1481 A.D. In the year 1490 the Tripura Raja *Dhanya Manikya* mentioned that from the east of Tripura a thick

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<sup>79</sup> Lalthangliana. B; *India, Burma leh Bangladesh a, Mizo Chanchin*, Published by Remkungi 2001. Here after cited as Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*.

dense forest is inhabited by the “Kukees”.<sup>80</sup> Francis Law, the chief of Chittagong Hill Tract, in his letter to Capt. Edward Ellesker, Commander of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion the word “Cokoos” had been mention.<sup>81</sup> In the year 1776 Capt. T.H Lewin mentioned the word “Cucis”. In 1792 and 1799 Rawlins and Dalton shared the same term given by him in *Asiatic Research Journal*. As mentioned by B. Lalthangliana the word “Kuki” might come from Bengali Script “Kukil” ( Bengali Dictionary” Bangla Vishwa Kosh” Vol. IV Edited by Negendranath Basu) which means “Parbat” and “Hill or Mountain” in English. Thus Bengalis and other Indians called them “Kuki” with a variety of spellings. The British, the common rulers of both nations combined the two and named it “Kuki-Chin.”

Therefore the word “Lushai,” “Chin,” “Kuki” etc had been a challenge in building up the common identity for different clans. The first attempt for the local writer is whether to locate “Zo” as the tools for hegemonising the Mizo identity.

The word “Zo” had appeared in the writings of Fan-ch’o, a diplomat of the Tang dynasty in China, in 862 AD, mentioning the inhabitants of the Chindwin valley whose princes and chiefs were called “Zo”.<sup>82</sup> Wherein others connected with “Zhau” dynasty of China (921-960), mentioning the named in connection to “Zhao,” “Zao,” “Jao,” “Jo,” “Zo,” “Yao,” “Yo.” But they did not have enough evidence in regards to customs and cultural similarities.<sup>83</sup> T.H Lewin, the first British administrator who had come to ‘Mizoram’ in The Lushai Expedition

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<sup>80</sup> Bhattacharya, A.C: *Progressive Tripura*, New Delhi, M.C Mittal, 1985 (reprinted), p.19.

<sup>81</sup> *Tui:* ( A quarterly Research Journal of tribal life and Culture, ), Agartala, Govt. of Tripura, Dec-Feb, 1994, Vol.2, No,1, P.73. Cited on S.Sailo: “The Kukis in special reference to the Kukis of Tripura”.

<sup>82</sup> Fan-Ch’o; *The Manshu : Book of Southern Barbarians*(862) cited in Vumson, *Zo history : With an introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and their status as an ethnic Minority In India, Burma and Bangladesh* ( Aizawl) P.1. and also in Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, Mizo theological Conference, Aizawl Mizoram, 1997, p.18. Here after cited as Kipgen, *Mizo Culture*.

<sup>83</sup> Singkho Khai , *Zo People and their Culture*, Churachanpur 1995, p.79 cited in Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, p.760

(1871-72) wrote that, “The generic name of the whole nation is “Dzo.”<sup>84</sup> However his writing was soon challenged by H.B Rowney and Alexander Mackenzie who had said that there is no common name for the particular region. And in 1945, H.W Carter, a BMS missionary working in South Lushai Hills wrote that like the Scottish people who called themselves as highlanders the same were being called highlanders by the people living in Mizoram who dwelt in the mountainous region.<sup>85</sup> The same opinion had been shared by J.M Lloyd, a Welsh missionary who had worked in the North Lushai Hills and who called the people as “people of the hills”.<sup>86</sup> Vanlawma was of the opinion that the term “Zo” does not merely signify highlanders, the place where the people dwell is a place of pleasant climate which in Lusei word is “Zo”. He goes on with basing the findings of F.K Lehman, a head of Department of History, University of Illinois in the United States, who had done a research on the people living in the Chin of Burma. Vanlawma said that it was not the people who derived their name “Zo” from the high altitude of their abode, but on the contrary it was the high lands and especially the farm lands there called “zo lo”, which derived their name from the Mizo people who cultivated the farms.<sup>87</sup> In regards to the word “Zo” many of the Mizo clan and villages earlier bore the name “Zo”. Some of the clan name such as “Zophei,” “Zotung”( both Lai clan) “Zokhua” and “Zote” ( Hmar Clan), and geographical names such as “Zotlang,” “Zohnuai,” “Zohmun,” “Zobawk,” and a famous “Zopui” village wherein ruled the powerful Lusei chief Lallula of the late eighteenth century, “Darzo” a Lai village on the eastern boarder of Mizoram.<sup>88</sup>

As most of the writers do not object indicating the term “Zo” as the common generic term, the next step in building the common generic term is whether to suffix “Mi” meaning “people” before or after the word “Zo” which will become “Mizo” or “Zomi” which relates the same meaning. I have used the term

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<sup>84</sup> Lewin, TH, *A fly on the Wheel, or How I help the Government of India* (1885), p. 246. Hereafter cited as Lewin, *Fly*.

<sup>85</sup> Mizoram Baptist Kohhran Chanchin (1945), p.1.

<sup>86</sup> Llyod, JM; *On Every High Hill* (c.1956), p.9.

<sup>87</sup> Lehman, F.K, *The Structure of Chin Society* (1963, revised ed.1980) pp.30, 53-4.

<sup>88</sup> Kipgen, *Mizo Culture*, p.20 also cited in George Scott, J, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and Shan State*, Part II, Vol III, Rangoon, 1901, p.413.

“Mizo” to cover the entire community because it has been accepted by majority of the clan living in Mizoram (see table 1 given above). However, the prevalent practice of using ‘Mizo’ as a common generic term is political rather than cultural. Therefore, indicating cultural identities is the best tool for making “Mizo” as the umbrella to cover the entire clans. K.Zawla had mentioned in his writing that once a hunter after killing a wild boar with “Puiraw” (bamboo spike) prided himself by singing a song in which he called himself “Mizo”.<sup>89</sup> Therefore the great zeal for making Mizo as umbrella to cover the entire clans had been flown in full swing. Therefore the common features had been shared by all these clans and it was being used even by the Britishers. T.H Lewin in 1874 had published a book named “Progress Colloquial Exercise in Lushai dialect ‘DZO’ or “Kuki” language”. And he started the first news paper which bears the name “Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu”. In the process various associations such as “Lushai Student Association” had been changed into “Mizo Student Association”, “Young Lushai Association” as “Young Mizo Association” (the most powerful voluntary organization in Mizoram). Even the first political party is called “Mizo Union”.<sup>90</sup> Therefore the family under Mizo came about clubbing them as under.

## MIZO

Asho Chho Ha-lam Hmar Lai Lusei Mara Miu Paite Ralte Thado-Kuki

Sources: B.Lalthangliana: *India, Burma leh Bangladesh a, Mizo Chanchin*,  
Published by Remkungi 2001. p.770

The suggestion of using the term “Mizo” as a common generic term on the other hand had to be undergone cautiously. The British administrators as well as

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<sup>89</sup> Dr. R.Doliana in his book *Mizo nun hlui leh hlale*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 1988, p.91,96 mentioned that Dr.R Zokhuma says that the song which the hunter sang was called “Ai a e” which was composed during the sojourn in Chindwin rivers.

<sup>90</sup> Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, p.762.

the previous local writers who had favored the word 'Mizo' did not draw the other clans on the main stream of Mizo history as their interpretation as the Mizo confined to the Lusei clan alone. As taking one good example that in Mizo history written by V.L Siama, had mentioned that the Pawi (Lai) of the east used to attack the Mizo.<sup>91</sup> This would mean that the author presented the whole community under Lusei Clan alone, neglecting the presence of the other clans, not only that, he regarded even one of the clans like Lai to be out of the Mizo umbrella whom he mentioned as being having a war with the Mizo( Lusei).

Moreover, advocating the Lusei dialect as the official language for the Mizo. However, we have to also note that within the Mizo there are different clans which have different dialects. This has to be also taken into account in building the common identity as the Mizo. This tendency of patronizing a single dialect and culture by the British administration and the earlier Mizo writer undermined the composite nature of tribal societies, and at the same time instilled a false sense of "superiority" in the psyche of the client. In the case of Mizo identity issue, this tendency of patronization of only the Lusei resulted in the false conception that the Lusei dialect and cultural practices are yardsticks/signposts for Mizo identity. Moreover this will lead to more confusion and for the other clans which would feel that they are being marginalized or alienated. In building the common identity one has to explore that different clans within the Mizo shared cultural elements as well as different dialects. In the process the history writing has to be re-examined again.

Using the generic term 'Mizo' in this dissertation, the main aim is to write in terms of integrating a confluence within the mainstream of Indian history. Despite several variations that prevailed within the practices of different clans, the main central core of the cultural fabric bears identical features, which will be highlighted in each of the chapters. Therefore the term "Mizo" had been used to represent the said community during the Pre-Colonial period.

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<sup>91</sup> Siama, VL; *Mizo Chanchin* : Published by Lengchhawn Press, 1953. p.30.



## **Chapter III**

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### **Mizo Cultural Worldview: Geographical Space and its impacts on Culture**

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This chapter will focus on the worldview of the Mizos with the geographical spaces which are regarded as sacred, gave meaning to their existence and the cultural networks that have been imbibed within it. Also accessing the impact of sacred in the psychic development of human beings this eventually affects their cultural progress.

The concept “world view” receives a distinguished place in the intellectual journey of thought. However, the term has acquired certain nuances during its development. As history that happens to a people is guided by a worldview of that particular society studying cultural history of the Mizos is inescapable without touching upon these particular areas.

The history that happens to a people is partly a matter of their ethos and world view since, in fact, it is people who make history happen; that is to say, every social group, in its reaction to the world and to other social groups, must inevitably contribute its own peculiar stamp to the historical transaction. But also and conversely, the current ethos is in turn a product of the past history undergone in common by contemporary members of the society.

Thus stated, this may seem to be a tautology, but it is intended rather to emphasize both historic cultural continuity and also the somewhat discontinuous reactions of one generation of person upon another. Any treatment of cultural history must take into account both patterns and change, that is, both the culture and its history.

Robert Redfield believes that “worldview” identifies one of those things that are most general and persistent about the people. It takes place among a constellation of other humanistic concepts such as culture, ethos, national character, and personality type. According to Redfield, “worldview” should be defined as “the way people characteristically look outward upon the universe” Culture, for example, designates the way people appear to be to an anthropologist, but worldview suggests how everything looks at the people, “the

designation of the existent as a whole” worldview is frequently associated with variety of issues; what is ought to be, patterns and forms of thought, attitudes, time, emotions, and so on.

### **3.1 Ethos World view and the Analysis of sacred geography**

Let us begin with Southern renowned novelist Pat Conroy statement:

My wound is my geography. It is also my anchorage, my port of call. Some wounds we are grateful to confess - never heal. They grew with us festering and prodding, reminding us often that the wound is what tells the story-teller his narrative powers. Most people, I believe, can plot geography of broken places in their lives, pointing to fierce landscapes. And threatening terrain they have negotiated alone or with others. Their wound became sometimes an anchorage. <sup>1</sup>

As a scholar dealing with the sacred geography and its importance in history, sacred geography reminds one of the wounds that refuse to heal. We live with it and take it to our grave. It involves every individual being and their relationship with others, understanding of nature which they inhabit. Therefore, the selection of this theme is also an outcome of this thinking. Firstly the focus will be made to understand the concept of ‘sacred’ and the series of web-networks that evolves within it (religious meaning imposed upon the land, a lasting source of remembrance and renewal for the most important aspects of individual and communal life in many cultural traditions). And, secondly, to access the impact of sacred in the psychic development of human beings which eventually affects their cultural progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Path, Conroy, *The Princess of tides*, Published March 26th 2002 by Dial Press Trade Paperback, p.1

### 3.2 -3.3 Understanding the concept 'Sacred':

Sacred geography includes the places that can be entered physically, as the outer geography defining the life in accordance with their own understanding and provides a means of access between the human world and the divine realities. Many scared spaces, even places that are central in the religious life of the community are unimpressive to someone outside the tradition. The form of place without the knowledge of what it signifies may not convey any religious sense. Let us take for example, in traditional Maori culture; the latrine marks the boundary between the world of the living and that of the dead. As such, it is the ritual place at which an unwanted spirit can be expelled or where the help of the spirits can be obtained. Nevertheless, it is still considered scared but it is still a latrine.

Likewise what is sacred for the Christian community may not be same with other cultures or religions. The perception of sacred for the tribal will also vary from the western concept of 'Sacred'. Unlike the westerners, the tribal concept of sacred may not be confined to particular areas/sites with easily recognized buildings or objects, but may consist of apparent unmarked piece of earth or a rock, or a ledge on a mountainside.<sup>2</sup> In almost every case, for the native or the tribal, the natural features like mountains, trees, springs, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, caves, upright stones, the roots of tree etc., often have spiritual significance. These natural sites composed and consisted of their conception of the 'Sacred geography'. Let us take an example from the people of Madagascar. For them, Tamarinds and *Ficus* trees are considered sacred; they are planted beside their ancestors' tombs- thus they are the signs that this area was inhabited in ancient times.<sup>3</sup>

The widely different ways in which sacred geographies have been organized show how humankind sought to grasp the perceived world and how he

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<sup>2</sup> Evans, Michael, J; Roberts Alexa; and nelson, Peggy; *Ethnographic Landscapes*, CRM Volume 24. No. 5.2001. U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Cultural Resources (Suite 350NC) 1849 C Street, NW Washington DC 20240. P.13

<sup>3</sup> Carmichael, David L., Hubert, Jane; Reeves, Brian; and Schanche, Audhild (ed); *Sacred Sites Sacred Places*, Roudledge, 11 New fetter lane, London Ec4P 4EE, 1988. P.83

has explained his place within the cosmic schema. An examination of sacred geographies thus points to patterns of environmental cognition and ordering and to the wide range of spatial definitions that have evolved in response to different cultural needs, historical circumstances, and ecological possibilities.

### **3.4 Establishment of Sacred:**

Sacred space is not arbitrary. Objectively and not only subjectively, a sacred place is different from the surrounding area, for it is not a place of wholly human creation or choice. Rather its significance is grounded in its unique character, a character that no human action can confer on discretion.

Sometimes the sacredness of a particular place will be attested by the myth involved in it. The Myth gives meaning to its sacredness. For example, *Rih Dil* is a geography which is sacred to the Mizos because of the belief that souls pass through *Rih Dil* on their way to *Mitthi Khua* (Village of the death) which originated from the Lusei folktales.

The Mizo belief in the immortality of the soul is amply evidenced by the folklores and legends much before their history was reduced to writing. Somewhere around the year 1935 one 'Sadawt' (a clan priest) by name, Hangpuia said: "Our knowledge about the immortality of the soul has been evident even from the story of Tlingi and Ngama." <sup>4</sup> Religious philosophers claimed that the root of beliefs is experience. The fact is that all religions, customs, cultures, knowledge and laws have their origin in experience. According to Hangpuia, the story of Tlingi and Ngama from which observance of Mimkut (the oldest of Mizo festivals) started may also be the source of the Mizo belief in the immortality of souls. A close examination of the story reveals that Tlingi and Ngama were lovers since their youth and their love for one another increased more and more after their marriage. Shortly after their marriage Tlingi died tragically and Ngama in

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<sup>4</sup> Laldailova, J.F.; *Thu Ngaihnaawm Bu*, 1978.

his sorrow cried himself to death inconsolably and gained entry down into the dead men's village. On meeting his beloved he found to his dismay that she had lost a lot of weight and had become lean and thin. He asked her why and she replied "I have become thin and also sad because of scarcity of food here". She beseeched him to go back and to bring her some of the harvested crops from their field. On waking up Ngama did exactly as his wife had told him by putting food near the water pots inside their house and beckoned her to take it.<sup>5</sup>

One day later on, in the beautiful autumn sunset Ngama was again in his nostalgic mood and pining for his departed wife he cried himself to death again. This time, as he entered the dead men's village he found that his wife had regained her weight and she looked happy; and she readily disclosed to him she had fed on the food that he had brought for her. Henceforth Ngama made it a point to keep aside a certain amount of his harvest for his dead wife. This practice soon gained popularity and the Mizo would put aside some amount of their harvest for the sake of alleviating the misery of the departed ones. It can therefore be said that this apparently simple story is the root of belief and practice in the olden Mizo society.

### **3.4.1 Rihdil (Rih Lake)**

In Mizo culture, the importance of Rihdil is mainly because of the belief that the spirit of the dead passes through this lake on its way from this life to the next one. The source of this belief has its origin in a dream. There is a story that long ago, when the Mizos had just migrated to this land, there was a lot of game in and around Rihdil. Game hunters used to have a good time there. Once, such a group of hunters set up their camp by the side of the lake. At the dead of night one of the hunters heard the sound of someone passing nearby. It was the sound of his wife's voice that he heard. Since there was no village nearby, he could not

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<sup>5</sup> Thanga, Mizo Kut Chi Thumte, *Thu leh Hla*(Fur Chhuak) 1965, pp.8-11 also in Rev.Zathanga, Mizo Kut Chhuahna Thu, *Robawm*, 1946 January & May Issue

make sense of it all so he went back to sleep. After sometime, he was again awakened up by the same sound and it seemed to be closer than before and the voice audibly said “Oh no! I had completely forgotten to tell my children about the meat I had kept over the fireplace in an earthen pot. With their father still out hunting, I’m afraid they would have to eat without meat.” On hearing this, the hunter became very restless. When he returned home he found that his wife had indeed died during his absence. He looked over the fireplace and sure enough there was some meat inside an earthen pot exactly as mentioned by the voice that he had heard.<sup>6</sup> It is because of this dream that *Rihdil* has been considered to be the passage way of the spirits soon after their release from the physical body. The Mizos believed that every departed soul passes through *Rih Dil* on their way to *Mithi Khua* (Village of the dead) or *Pialral* (Paradise for the Thangchhuah).

### **3.4.2 Pathway for the dead**

Sacred Geography can be linked up with the people’s conception of life and death and other association of certain natural phenomena with the other worldly connections. Each religion apprehended the profoundness of life and death in its own way and within a historical context.<sup>7</sup>

The *Mizos* believed in life after death and the soul’s way to *Mithi Khua* (Village of the dead) has a close connection with the geographical settings of their areas. Before they had permanent settlement in present day Mizoram, they believed that the soul had to pass through *Rih Dil* Lake which is identified as a location in the Chin Hills, Myanmar, bordering present day Mizoram. The above fact indicates the present knowledge of sacred geography amongst this community. It also shows the meaningful relationship between religious practices and geographical landscape, production and settlement patterns.

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<sup>6</sup> Lalmama, *Mizo Titi*, 1963 p.4

<sup>7</sup> Levine, Gregory J.; *On the Geography of Religion*, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series, Vol.11. No.4. (1986), published by The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers). p.428



***Picture: Rihdil***

The *Mizos* had a clear notion of sacred geography, an example of which is the existence of *Rih Dil* a lake located in the Chin Hills of Burma about 3 kilometers from Mizoram border. The sacredness has been attested by the folktale which is explained earlier. The Mizos believed that when a person died, the soul breaks open from the body at 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 *Rih Dil*. After reaching *Rih Dil* 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 person's usual seat during the supper and some food is 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 *Thitin* and the soul went back to *Rih Dil* from where it



proceeds towards *Mithi Khua*.<sup>8</sup> (This was the liminal period in the life cycle of the Mizos. When a person is in a state of liminality and the soul disassociated from the physical self is not yet integrated into the other world. They named the plant that grows near the lake Mithi-Pal,<sup>9</sup> meaning the dead-man's fence and the birds found near the lake were also known as *Mithi Ar*,<sup>10</sup> which meant Dead man's bird. From Rih Dil, the souls proceeded to *Hruaikawn* (Located near the eastern border of the present Mizoram in *Champhai* District). There is 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. When somebody died, some marks were often found on the rock of this cave. Hence, it was believed that the dead soul put marks on it<sup>11</sup> The earlier Mizo writer Saiaithanga pointed out that the marks which appeared on the rock were left by the souls of women using some iron materials.<sup>12</sup> Then the souls reached *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 it and plucking of the flower called *Hawilopar* made the soul lose all desire to turn back to their families and friends. Then the soul hastily proceeded to the entrance of *Mithi Khua* which is called *Zingvanzawl*.

They would now proceed undisturbed towards *Mitthi khua*. On reaching it they would be greeted by a massive individual called Pawla, holding his pellet-bow in his hands. His pellets are as big as eggs. He would interrogate the new comers. If he is not satisfied by their answers as to their eligibility for entry (that is, possessing the highest recognised social accreditation achievable only by well to do persons or outstanding hunters who can bring home specified number of

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<sup>8</sup> Lalrinawma, (2005), op cit., p.95

<sup>9</sup> Dokhuma, James; *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, J.D. Press Publication, Aizawl, 1992. p.65

<sup>10</sup> Lalthangliana, B; *Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of Mizo in India, Burma and Bangladesh)*, RTM Press, Aizawl, 2001.p.324

<sup>11</sup> Sangkhuma, Z.T. (Rev.); *Mithite Kalkawng*, Zorimawi Monthly Literary Magazine, Aizawl, September 2000. p. 28

<sup>12</sup> Saiaithanga (Rev.); *Mizo Sakhua*, Lengchawn Press, Aizawl, (Second Edition) 1994. p.53

games of prescribed varieties) Pawla would volley shots of massive pellets from his bow. The effect of a hit from his bow is said to result in painful injury lasting for three years. The socially accredited persons and renowned hunters were alone eligible to pass unharmed. For instance, the renowned hunter would ceremoniously pass through by riding on the deer he had killed, while putting on a multicolored turban with two tails of drongo sticking out of it. Twining the horns of the deer would be a king cobra that he had also killed. An eagle that he had captured in his lifetime would fly above his head. In his front and back there would be an entourage of wild animals that he had killed to achieve the coveted accreditation. Those approaching Pawla with such grandeur would be allowed to pass through without being questioned.

Babies are also permitted to pass. The reasons are that when Pawla would aim his bow at them the babies would challenge saying “Would you dare to shoot us? If only you had let us grow up till our maturity, who could not tell what great and gifted individuals we would turn out to be? It is your fault for taking us before we could prove our worth” <sup>13</sup>

The non-privileged ones would definitely be shot by Pawla and so out of sheer fright they would hesitate to approach him to the extent of hiding here and there but would be mercilessly dragged out of their hiding places by Pawla’s wife, - Sanu so that they could be shot at by her husband. If there are no souls to shoot at on any given day Sanu would enthusiastically run around and snatch the lives out of unfortunate ones and bring them to be shot at by her husband. She would perform her duty with so much zest and gusto that her daily chores like weaving would always be left with very little progress. This is the reason that when someone dies suddenly and unexpectedly there is a saying that Sanu has taken him/her.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.7

### 3.5 Functions of Sacred Space/Geography:

Nicholas J. Saunders, points out the importance of sacred geography, “Sacred landscapes are manifestation of world-views which populate a geographical area with a distinctive array of mythical, religious, or spiritual beings or essences. Each culture brings its own ideas to bear on the land it inhabits and, consequently, any analysis of sacred landscape or the sacredness of place is a part of analysis of how culture conceptualize and classify (i.e., bring order to, and make sense of) the natural world.”<sup>14</sup> In traditional societies, the whole land of a culture is normally sacred. The Mizos had a clear cut definition of understanding between *Khua* and *Ram*. *Khua* is for dwelling areas inhabited by the people whereas *Ram* denotes a place outside the village. They have the sense of sacred space both in the *Khua* as well as in *Ram*.

Even in the domestic space the notion of sacred exists in the form of *Khumpui* which was considered sacred and out of bounds for those other than the members of the family.

In the countryside other than the village they believed that certain big stones, springs, caves and mountains were guarded or haunted by the spirits. Therefore they treated them with utmost care. An animal like tigers were considered as sacred animal and they did not dare to call it even by name, instead they called it by another name ‘Sapui’. Whenever the Tiger is killed they used to perform *Ai* sacrifice.

In the Mizo world view every forest, big cave, spring etc., are haunted by a spirit called “Huai”. The word, huai means spirit that haunts certain places, or objects or things; it manifests to man in different forms, manners and can disappear instantly. J.H.Lorrain in his Dictionary of Lushai Language defines huai as evil spirit, a demon, a devil. Lt. Col. J Shakepear in his book “The Lushai

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<sup>14</sup> Carmichael, (1998), op cit., p. 172

Kuki Clans” mentioned that, the Lushai believes the hills, streams and trees are inhabited by various spirits. These are known as huai, those inhabiting water being called Tui huai and those residing on land known as Ramhuai. To clarify his definition he mentioned some accounts of the doings of huai which were narrated to him by Suakhnuna. Of these accounts one is as follows, “A woman of Lalbuta’s village went out of her house at night for purpose of nature. Her name was Mangami and she was pregnant. The huai of the Tuitlin precipice caught her, and forced out the premature child and then carried her off down the rocks. The young men of the village went to search for her and found her naked in the jungle at the foot of the precipice where the spirit had left her. She knew nothing about it when she recovered her senses”. Also he mentioned, “There is a lake called Dil, between the southern border of the Lushai Hills and the Aracan Hill tracts which was credited with being abode of many Tui huais. No hill man would go within sight of the water. The story is that, some foreigners visited the place once and one of them climbed on a tree overhanging the water, hence he dropped his knife into the lake and sent one of his men to fetch it. The diver returned without the knife, but with tales of wonderful beings beneath the water. The foreigner fired his gun into the lake, whereupon number of Tuihuai emerged and chased the whole party of intruders catching and carrying off all except their leader who made good his escape”.

Huai is a spirit which is numerous in Mizoram. We may discuss one by one as follows in detail:

**3.5.1 Sih Huai :** There are numerous small springs which generally rise in muddy soil in Mizoram called Sih, the spot remains damp and moist all through the year and the water is generally warm and often brackish which is liked by wild animals and are, therefore, frequented by them. Mizo of the past believed that there was at least one family of Sih huai in every Sih. Sometimes the family members of Sih huai would laugh so happily that even human beings often could hear it. There is a poetical expression, “Sih Nau Ang Nui”, which means laughing

like the children of Sih huai. In some of the bigger springs, many huais lived together under their Chief named, Chham, who was said to be very lazy and would sleep underneath all the time. The chief was fed by other members, he even passed out his excreta in sleep which is, reddish in colour. When the excreta came out to surface it could be seen by naked eyes and was called Chham ek , that means the excreta of Chham. Since Sih huais were attributed to causing illness and sufferings, nobody would like to have such spring within their jhumland or paddy field. Sih huai, in fact would not welcome any human intruders within their jurisdiction. While in the course of selecting jhumland, if sih could not be avoided totally, then in such cases, one had to perform Sih Siam sacrifice in order to appease the huai.

To perform Sih Siam sacrifice the following ingredients were needed :

- A Set of Gongs,
- Red cock - one,
- Hen - one,
- Bungpui - Banyan tree made of bamboo,
- Mithun - 5, made of clay,
- A couple of fishes - made of clay,
- Theirual 5 - small bamboo tubes each of 4 inches in length,
- Priest and his assistant.

On the day of sacrifice the plot owner, the priest and his assistant with all the ingredients required for the purpose went to the jhumland. The assistant with the hen stayed at jhum hut and the owner and the priest went to the spot with a red rooster and other materials. Reaching the spot the priest would go down to the Sih and chanted incantation as follows :

Are you your parent's children? – (He himself answers) No.

Call them, "Manmasia has come,"

Do they come home? – (He answers) Yes, what do you want?

Nothing, but I ask health and long life,  
 For Lala's family (The owner of the plot)  
 Oh Great one, here I bring five mithuns to your home (He would  
 perform the act of driving mithuns).  
 Here I planted a big Banyan tree – (He says) You may do it. Oh  
 Pathian above, May I put Banyan tree here? -  
 You may do it. Here I offer my mithuns, my fishes, my rawcheh  
 And my set of gongs.

Then he would cut the throat of the cock and allowed its blood to drop over all the materials except the Banyan tree. The priest would then recite his incantation - "Turung turh, turung, turung turh," and would dance while singing. Then he offers saserh which includes tip of the wing, beak, leg and tail of the cock. After that the priest and the owner would go back to the jhum hut and cut the hen also. Then they would cook and eat the meat in the jhum after which they would go home. The Sih huai may not then be troublesome to the owner of the jhumland. Mizo believed in a number of Sih huai and their names are suffixed after the names of the animals that frequented the 'sih'.

**3.5.2 Zawng Sih Huai :** Zawng means monkey and Zawng sih huai is huai living in Zawng sih which is frequented by monkeys. Zawng sih huai were most ferocious and dangerous to man.

**3.5. 3 Sakhi Sih Huai :** This means huai of a spring frequented by barking deers. This particular huai was also said to have been very dangerous.

**3.5.4 Sazuk Sih Huai :** Spirits of springs frequented by sambar deers and were said to be kind and calm.

A tale is told as follows - "Once a man stayed overnight in his jhum hut for some days. One night a Sih huai made a 'kuk' (a Mizo equivalent of

'Halloo') and the man responded with the same cry. The huai came nearer and nearer to the man, at last it opened the door and entered the hut in the form of human figure. The huai invited the man to come for a drink of beer. Without question, the man lit his bamboo torch and followed the huai not knowing that it was a huai. They went on a flat and smooth foot-path for a while till they reached a good Mizo thatched house, which appears to be a house of well to do family; entering the house, the man just tucked his smoking pipe on the front Bamboo wall. Then he joined the drinking party happily. Later, the man went back to his jhum hut and slept as usual. In the morning he happened to realize that, he forgot his smoking pipe in the house where they had drunk beer the previous night. He then traced back the path he had followed and could find out his way with the help of ashes left along the path, though the path had been very smooth that night, in reality it was very rugged, passing through cliffs and precipices. At last he reached the place and found that his smoking pipe was tucked at the edge of a crab's hole. Such was the relation between man and Sih huai in the past and it was the belief of Mizo that holes in springs were doors of the houses of such spirits.

**3.5. 5 Tlang Huai:** Mizo attributed that, all the major hills and mountains in Mizoram had their respective huais. The precipices, the cliffs and the shelves or ledges on the face of precipices were their good dwelling places. Tlang huai lived in groups and their system of administration was something akin to the system of Mizo village. The head of a group was known as Chief whose authority was unquestioned by other members. With a view to extend their domain, the chiefs would fight wars among themselves. For instance, the chief of Chhawrpial huai was in dispute with Reiek huai and wanted to punish him. But he knew that, he was not strong enough to do it, so he made an alliance with the huai of Tlawng River. The battle commenced and Tlawng huai tried to destroy Reiek Mountain by strong force of current from the south. However, the mountain was too firm and strong for him and failed in his attempt, as a result of which it had to make

an abrupt detour just to the south of Reiek Mountain which is now called, 'Tlawng nuar' (abrupt change in the direction of river flow).

A tale of battle between Inbuk huai and combined host of Khawpuitan and Reiek Huai is one such event. Inbuk is a big mountain with peculiar shape in the Len range in Chin Hills of Myanmar and its Huai being conscious of his mighty prowess was very boastful in behaviour. Khawpuitan huai (near Chawngtlai village) could not tolerate the arrogance of Inbuk huai and planned to launch a surprise attack. To ensure complete success, Khawpuitan huai sought the alliance of Reiek huai. Then a big host of army in the form of Sialsir (a kind of swift flying hawk) moved to invade Inbuk huai. However, Inbuk huai had intelligence report of the impending danger and prepared to ambush the combined army on their way and amassed as many number of fighting force as he could collect and moved out to meet their enemy in the form of Sialsir. The two hosts of Army met just above Haimual Village a few miles to the north of Rih Lake. They fought a very fierce battle in the air. There was continuous thunderous sound in the air. The people of Haimual village could not do any work but watched that magnificent battle. In the course of fighting, a great number of Sialsir birds dropped down dead and the battle lasted for many hours which ended ultimately in a draw. It was said that a large number of dead Sialsir were lying on the ground when the battle was over.

The huai often wage war among themselves and at the same time would enter into matrimonial alliances with one another. In doing so, they adopt the system of distribution of subsidiary marriage prices to near relatives as was prevalent in the Mizo society. For instance a huai girl of eastern belt married to a huai boy of western belt would give morning mist, as Pu Sum (subsidiary portion of girl's marriage price payable to maternal uncle to huai of Hmawngva stream), chief of Pukpui huai received Tualthu, as Palal, (subsidiary portion of girl's marriage price payable to male relative) and chief of Saza mountain received



Mungek as Ni ar (subsidiary portion of girl's marriage price payable to maternal aunt).

Phawngpui Mountain had a son who fell in love with the daughter of the chief of Chiria Mountain in Chin Hills, Myanmar. So Sangau sent a mediator to Thunbawng chief of Chiria, after some negotiations both the parties came to an agreement for the marriage. According to their agreed terms, Chief Sangau had to pay a couple of gibbons sans its future off-springs and chief Thunbawng had to give one pine tree as dowry. It is said that the gibbons had no issue till their death and the pine tree of Phawngpui had no offshoot and stood solitary till recently. By now the Forest Department planted a number of pine trees and made a very good pine forest.

### **3.5.6 Dil Huai( Huai of lake ) :**

To Mizo, big lakes and deep pools in rivers were the dwelling places of huai. One story of Dil huai described by J. Shakespear in his book 'Lushai Kuki Clans' has been mentioned earlier. We may now discuss stories of few Dil huai to clarify the nature of such huai. Rih lake, the largest lake ever known to Mizo had its own huai who were not harmful to man in normal situation. The lake was so large that nobody could swim across except one Darkawlchhuna. One day while Darkawlchhuna was swimming across the lake he felt so proud of his ability and shouted out loudly, ' Here I am swimming across Rih lake and I will never drown,' whereupon the huai got annoyed and attacked him in the form of a snake with ferocious fins and killed him.

In the Mat river there is a deep pool named, 'Vanzema - Li and the story of this deep pool is commonly told as, 'Once there was a community fishing in this particular deep pool, a young man named, Vanzema, a very good swimmer dived deep into the water. At the bottom of the pool he found a dry cave with an

old man splitting bamboo for making baskets. The old man told him never to come again otherwise he would surely die. Coming to the surface, Vanzema told his friends what he saw at the bottom of the pool but nobody believed him. Vanzema vehemently asserted adding that if he were to dive again he would surely die. Still his friends refused to believe him and demanded at least a piece of bamboo brought from the bottom of the pool would make them accept his story. Vanzema refused to be called a liar and just to prove his story he decided to dive again on condition that, they should tie his leg with long rope and hold it. And as soon as he tugged the rope they should pull him up. So Vanzema dived again and after a while the rope was tugged and immediately they pulled up and Vanzema came out headless. Since then the pool was called Vanzema-Li (Vanzema's pool). It may be assumed that huai of water were harmful only when they were provoked.



**Picture: Mat river**

### **3.5.7 Lungpui Huai ( Huai of rock ) :**

Big rocks particularly of unusual shape were believed to be inhabited by huai, who could be harmful to man but helpful if one pleases them. Phunhnawma a great hunter was said to have offered sacrifices to the huai of rock mount in North Vanlaiphai area. As a result he became a close friend to them and they offered him wild animals for his game. According to the traditional practice followed by Mizo, if a man could kill a prescribed number and varieties of wild animals he would attain an honoured status in the society called Thangchhuah. In fact Thangchhuah was the highest social title a Mizo could attain in life; he was respected in the society and entitled paradise after death.

### **3.5.8 Thing Huai ( Huai of Tree):**

Big trees especially, Banyan trees are also believed to be inhabited by huai. There is another kind of tree called, “Thing lu bul” which is also taken to be the abode of huai and could cause illness or even death so people would never like to touch it or fell it. While selecting land for jhumming they would avoid those areas having such Thing lu bul. The huai of tree were dangerous and harmful to men. One. R. Darhlira, Electric Veng, Aizawl described huai of Banyan tree in his book entitled, “Khawkil Bung huai”, that gives us clear idea about Thing huai. Let us reproduce few lines of this Book as written records of the story of huai is very rare. ‘Khawkil was once a respectable village with more than 300 households. It was a village of a famous Sailo Chief Lalburha but the village is no longer in existence now and its location is somewhere in the area of the present Darlung village. There was a big Banyan in the outskirts of Khawkil village which was the abode of huai. As mentioned by .Darhlira, one evening when young men of the village as usual, were courting one girl, suddenly there was an unusual atmosphere prevailing in the village in that animals like pigs, goats and mithuns moved around in panic. Then the huai of Banyan caught a hen which cried out continuously and very loudly. Young men rushed out to catch the hen but the

sound moved up to the top of the Banyan tree and sometimes to the ground. So it was very difficult to locate the exact place where the hen was. The chase to retrieve the hen ended in failure. Similar terrifying incidents were often told in the olden Mizo society.

On another occasion in Khawkil, children playing outdoors in the evening heard a cry of a boy in the nearby jungle. The adults did not pay any attention. But in the late night, it was found that a boy of about 9 years old was missing and the whole village was in red alert. All the able male members of the village rushed out in search of the boy. They could hear the voice of the boy but could not locate the exact place. The village people searched hard for many days but failed. After a week or so the dead body of the boy was found in the deep jungle. Everybody believed that the boy was taken by the huai of Khawkil Banyan tree.

### **3.6 Sacred Place as a source of existence:**



***Picture: Khampat Bung***

Sacred geography is a place that gives meaning to their existence. Joined by the network of sacred places, the land itself became symbolic, affirming a coherence of the physical and mythological domains. Amongst the particular community, sacred geography was the source of authority as well as the source of their identity. Taking an example of a legend, according to the forbearers, before leaving *Khampat* they planted a Banyan sapling on the palace site and took a pledge in the presence of their *Burmese* neighbours that they would return to *Khampat* - their permanent place when the sapling had grown into a tree and when its branches touched the earth.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, *Khampat* is the geography that signifies a source of identity and ethnicity.

Sacred spaces are places of interaction with divinity, places where they meet the spiritual being. For example, *Lasi* were feminine spirits who inhabited *Lurh* Hill and *Tan* Hill but they also moved around in the jungles.<sup>16</sup> *Lasi* were concerned with wild animals and had power of control over the animals.



**Picture: Tan mountain**

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<sup>15</sup> Kipgen, (1997) op cit., p.40

<sup>16</sup> Saiaithanga (Rev.); *Mizo Sakhua*, Lengchawn Press, Aizawl, (Second Edition) 1994. P.4





***Picture: Lurh mountain***

In the Mizo belief, there are various spirits or supernatural beings which, at certain times of their choosing can assume the form and likeness of real human beings. Those spirits are called Huai(*Demon*), Phung(*Spook*), Thlahrang(*haunting spirit*), Khawhring(*evil eye*), Tualsumsu(*possessed person*), Zunhindawt (*wraith*), Hmuithla (*Apparition*), Chawm (*a kind of demon*), Ramhuai (*a devil*) and Lasi(*fairy*) in accordance with their different characters and manifestations. All these spirits except Lasi, are considered to be malevolent and to encounter them is a horrifying experience. Lasi are generally seen in dreams and are considered to bring good fortune. All the wild animals are under the control of Lasi and any hunter who is possessed by a Lasi will be very successful in hunting.

Lurh tlang (Lurh mountain) and Tan tlang (Tan mountain) in the eastern side of Mizoram are the main habitat of Lasi and is called abode place of Lasi. The king of Lasi is Lalchungnunga and his wife is Tantinchhingi. This couple

were the supreme commander of Lasi and they had a handsome son called Thangchina. Just like human beings Lasi also used to call each other by name and as such their names are known to us through their calling. The other identified Lasi are Partinchhingi, Lamritlingi, Thliahlala, Tlukpuiliana and Dartinlala. Those names are to be found in the old song as this -

*Lurhpuia mi, Tan ami tuan in rel emaw,  
Tuan kan rel lo ve Lalchungnungan laimi man e,  
Serh kan kham reng e.  
Lamritlingi te, Dartinlal lan rawh,  
Thliahlalan dawn rawh e.*

Though Lasi were usually seen in dreams, there are certain people who had encountered them in real life. Lasi would observe the daily activities of human beings with great interest and they were fascinated to watch a hunter in the forest and in the process the female Lasi would pick and choose men of their liking. Married men or bachelors would be very happy if they saw Lasi in their dreams and sometimes Lasi damsels would try to entice men to marry them with a promise that they would be able to shoot any wild animal of their liking. Such intimacy could go very deep in dreams, however no man is known to have married a Lasi in real life. Such men who had romantic link with Lasi in dreams are known as ‘possessed by Lasi’ and they would be very successful in hunting. Not to be outdone, old and aged Lasi ladies were known to woo men with the same result.

Possession by Lasi could come to an end at certain times and in such cases the concerned person would have to perform certain rituals and sacrifices called ‘Lasi Khal’ and if the sacrificial offerings are responded by Lasi the old relationship could be restored and the man would become possessed by Lasi once again.

It is believed that the first generation between Lasi and human beings originated from one Lianlunga who married a girl called Rohniangi of Zawngte Village which was situated in the east of Tiau river. Lianlunga with his friend Rokhawliana migrated to the west of Tiau river and both of them belonged to Hualngo clan. Lianlunga had two sons - Lianchia and Thalunga and also a daughter called Chawngtinleri who had grown up to be a very beautiful damsel. This couple did not live long and Chawngtinleri was under the care of her brother, Lianchia.

Thangchina, the son of Lalchungnunga, the king of Lasi was deeply attracted to Chawngtinleri and Lalchungnunga, the king also liked Chawngtinleri to be his daughter-in-law and to look after the wild animals with care. He then sent emissaries to ask for the hand of Chawngtinleri for his son, but Lianchia being conscious of the beauty of his sister did not give a positive response to the offer of marriage. But the Lasi king was very determined to win the hand of Chawngtinleri at all costs and was ready to give anything for the bride to the extent of parting with even his most valued animal 'Nghalphusen' (a special species of wild boar).

Once more the Lasi then sent emissaries to Lianchia, who on that particular evening was in a drunken mood and readily agreed to the proposal offered. The emissaries went back home with full satisfaction. When the morning came Lianchia on coming to his senses wanted to cancel his commitment of the previous night. But by then, it was too late because while Chawngtinleri was pounding rice in the morning, the Lasi party had come and taken her away. All that he could hear was the scream of Chawngtinleri saying 'My brother Liana, save me' and the sound of the falling pestle with which she had pounded rice in the morning. Lianchia was crestfallen and then set out to search for his sister and wandered about endlessly at Tan tlang in his search. Even the Lasi did not fully endorse the matrimonial alliance made with the human female and they declared



a rest day in which no normal activities would not be carried out and sang a lamentation for the human girl as follows -

*Those at Rih and Lurh mountains,  
Will you do your normal chores ?  
We ourselves will toil not  
For Lalchungnunga's elopement we approve not  
We will have a rest day instead.*

One day Chawngtinleri, without making herself visible, spoke to her brother saying "Big brother, do not trouble yourself searching for me for I am in this situation due to your own decision." Lianchia also did not have much to say and he had no other alternative but to reconcile himself as such. So this was the first marriage between human beings and Lasi.

Thereafter, the Lasi as promised gave Nghalphusen to Lianchia for him to bag during his hunting at Saikhum. The Lasi however told him not to smile when Nghalphusen appeared before him. When Nghalphusen did actually come out before Lianchia, he found, to his surprise that the boar turned out to be an absolutely fine and splendid game and out of sheer happiness he could not help smiling, whereupon the Nghalphusen grunted and sped away. The Lasi were bent upon letting Lianchia shoot Nghalphusen and they let the animal to appear before him three times, but each time Lianchia could not resist smiling ultimately leading to his failure to bag the prize game. Sometime later on, the Nghalphusen moved to Tawi mountain and this, Hualtungamtawna, another famous hunter and his friend had come to know of and they made great attempt to hunt down the splendid animal and the attempt resulted in the accidental death of Hualtungamtawna caused by this wild animal. It is said till today traces of Nghalphusen could still be seen at Tawi Mountain clearly.

Chawngtinleri then had a baby-son but would not let her brother see the face of the baby. But once in her absence, her folks chanced to see the face of the baby and to their horror they found that the head of the baby was that of a goat. This incident had greatly annoyed the Lasi so much so that they made the eyes of Chawngtinleri slanting in a vertical way. Then Chawngtinleri lost her human form and actually became one of the members of Lasi family.

Chawngtinleri used to weave cloths, the length of her loin loom spread from Lurh mountain to Tan mountain and she used Sialsir ( *a kind of hawk*) to carry the warp yarn to and fro over the great chasm for her weaving. In course of time, the family moved from Lurh and Tan area to Theiriat of south. Chawngtinleri and her brother Lianchia still missed each other very much and she told him that she would wave white cloth when her family reached Theiriat. And when they did reach Theiriat, Chawngtinleri true to her words, wove a white cloth which was seen by her brother from a long distance. The place where she wove the white cloth has become known as 'Chawngtinleri Puan thin tlang' (the hillock where Chawngtinleri waves her cloth) even to this day.

Many traces of Chawngtinleri can still be seen in and around Tan and Lurh areas and one cave is known as 'Chawngtinleri Puk' (Chawngtinleri's Cave) and below this is a good flat land called 'Chawngtinleri hmun hlui' (Chawngtinleri's old site) where Buizova (*the legendary male singer of the Mizo*) and others performed chai (one of the Mizo community dances) with great enthusiasm and in high spirit to such an extent that even the Lasi around this place could not sit still and all became excited. The event came to be known as 'Chawngtui Chapchar Kut hmang' in Mizo history.

There were some other persons who were 'possessed by Lasi' and one such man was Rokhawliana who was a good friend of Lianlunga, the father of Chawngtinleri. Though Lianlunga himself was not possessed by Lasi but his wife,

Rohniangi was and this was the reason why Lianlunga was very successful in hunting.

Once Rokhawlana and his friends went hunting in Tan mountain and in the course of their hunting they reached a certain place where they found a young Lasi girl weaving cloth. The girl happened to be very beautiful and they became enamoured with her beauty and sat around her. After sometime they asked her to tell her name but she refused to tell; however due to their repeated requests she said that she was the elder sister of Thangi. When the day drew to a close, she persuaded them to leave her promising them that they would shoot certain wild animals on their way home. Accordingly, one of them shot a big deer and the other a kawlfung (*a bison*). In spite of her fervent pleas, Rokhawlana alone would not leave her. The Lasi at last rolled up her loom and suddenly disappeared among the rocks and Rokhawlana was at his wit's end. As it was already dark, he wanted to request the lasi to guide him home and made his request like this –

*The sun has already set for a hunter like me,  
I beseech the fair lady to take me home,  
And I will relate all this to my mother at home.*

Then as he was about to leave the Lasi suddenly reappeared and they were together up to the wee-hour of the night till the girl gave him a small ball of a size of cherry plum and told him to toss the ball in front of him and it will show him the way home. In the morning, when Rokhawlana looked again at the ball he found a single red bead and then he became a '*lasi possessed*' and he successfully shot many wild animals.

Once Rokhawlana was performing 'se chhun' (one of the important festivals that only a rich man could perform) and he also invited the Lasi who had obliged him by coming to the festival. Rokhawlana told his mother, "Mother, give those children food", at which they became greatly annoyed particularly at

being termed as 'children' and all ran away. Rokhawliana immediately pursued and searched for them in Lurh and Tan mountain till he found them, but could not take them back to his 'sechhun'.

Hranghleia of Chawngtlai was another case of Lasi possessed who died at 88 years of age in 1942. Those Lasi who possessed him warned him not to clap his hands at community singings ever failing which his death would be near. When he became 80, once his friends were successful in their hunting trip and they chanted hlado (successful hunting song) at the entrance of their village and he became so nostalgic that climbed at the top of leikapui (a raised platform adjoining a house) and responded their hlado this way-

*I'm so nostalgic recollecting my old days of hunting,  
Now I became old as a dying flower,  
With no strength to go a hunting.*

That night they celebrated the head of the kill as custom demands at Ralkhama's house with drinks and they soon became highly spirited singing and dancing. Tears streamed down the cheeks of Hranghleia as he looked back his hey-days of yore. He could no longer refrain himself and clapped his hands once but suddenly remembered what the Lasi had told him whereupon he could only groan uttering "Oh my good Lord". But it was too late and he died on April 10, 1942. The wild animals shot by him inscribed in his memorial stone are – Elephant: 2, Bison: 15, Tiger: 3 and others: 300.

This small presentation encapsulates how the old Mizo experienced the existence of Lasi and 'lasi zawl' (*lasi possessed*). Their main habitats were Lurh mountain and Tan mountain situated in the border of Mizoram and Myanmar in the east, Lurh is 6350 ft high while Tan is 6320 ft high.

### 3.7 Colonial encounter and continuity of intangible culture:

The British set their foot on the Lushai hills spreading Christianity which was dressed in western garb, bringing back the old idea of Whiteman's burden, a self-imposed responsibility carried by the Whiteman on the task of civilizing the rest of the world whom they regarded as uncivilized. A limited knowledge of their indigenous culture- or failure to appreciate the importance of that culture vis-a-vis Christianity led the earliest writers to dismiss the pre-modern 'Mizo' as "Savages" who is not likely to change for the better .<sup>17</sup> However, history has proven them wrong. Not only have the 'Mizo' adapted themselves to the changes that modernization brought to their area, but in the process they created an identity that had many new elements which is deeply rooted in the cultural history of the people. The cultural continuation and the existence of their conception of life after death from the traditional belief systems can be seen by the following 'Mizo' Christian lyrics composed for the purpose of offering condolence.

*Rih tlang a pheì 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 ngailo,*

*Hringnun hi an ngai tawh lo ve.*

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<sup>17</sup> Kipgen, (1997) op cit., p.313

The meaning of the words may be translated as:

*Rih hill stretches afar,  
Where the spirit pass along,  
As they proceed on,  
They reach the heavenly paradise,  
Those who dwelt in that place,  
Never regret nor miss the place they left behind.*

The above translation of the lyrics and its incorporation into present day religious life as part of Christian lyrics clearly points out to the residual nature of the religious practices. It further indicates the manner by which such residual practices have been negotiated, accommodated and reformulated in the present day belief system.<sup>18</sup> They also give meaning to the relationship between man and land in Mizoram that are encoded in the sacred geography of worldviews.

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<sup>18</sup> Lalzarzoa; *Traditional Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Lusei in Pre-Colonial Period*, (Unpublish M.Phil thesis) Department of History, University of Hyderabad, 2008.

## **Chapter IV**

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### **Moments of hierarchy: Social stratification and symbols of portraying**

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The method is modest, in this chapter an attempt will be made to see how social hierarchy is constructed in Mizo society based on the study variety of primary sources. In this context we will be looking at Thangchhuah as the social ladder in Mizo society. We will also examine relationships between multiple semiotic modes used to construct hierarchy, and also showing the importance of going beyond our traditional notion of language to look at how social actors employ a range of semiotic resources in organizing and interpreting social relations. These systems act oppositionally as well as cooperatively to produce situated ideas of social inequality, ideas built out of disequilibrium of bodies in space, of referents in language, and distribution of resources, as well as contradictions in the interactions of these signs. Language, gesture, spatial relations, and food sharing are all used as resources to construct hierarchical relations in the immanent creation of rank among the pre-British Mizo society. The language interpreted in dress, construction of the houses, ceremonies set up the order of hierarchy.

#### **4. 1 Thangchhuah as a social ladder:**

Firstly, our journey to understand Mizo social stratification begins with the understanding of the important concept “Thangchhuah” and its implications in Mizo cultural worldview. By and large the process of Mizo cultural development is the product of their interaction and understanding of nature which had shaped their thinking and their cultural worldview. The Mizos are the tribes who struggle hard to survive in a rugged terrain forest; their main subsistence of living at this stage was agricultural and hunting practices. They work hard throughout the years keeping themselves at arm’s length uninterrupted by the outside civilization. Their main competition was cycled within these two contexts – harvest and hunting. Those who got more crops and shot more wild animals were regarded as the wealthy men of the village. There were times when their crops were the prey of wild animals. Therefore it was the task for a man to protect his jhum field and survive with the animals who shared the same forest they had inhabited. And in the process hunting became crucial in



the minds of the people; it was not merely a game for the Mizos. Such successful hunters known as Thangchhuah became a social ladder for upward mobility in the society. Thus the formation of 'individuality' began to take its shape as a person attaining such a position started to have public persona. They became the protector and provider for the village community. The privilege that they enjoyed was not confined to this life alone as he was also attributed to lead a better after life. Thus the cultural activities began to take its form.

## **4.2 Understanding the Concept Thangchhuah:**

Bisecting of the binary words "Thang" and "Chhuah" testify the true meaning of Thangchhuah as suggested by K. Zawla. According to him "Thang" stands for "fame" and "Chhuah" stands for "accomplished" in combination of the two he put it as "Thangkim" which means "all famous". All the fame in the Mizo worldview could be attained by either Ramlam Thangchhuah or Inlam Thangchhuah. Distinguishing himself by being a successful hunter, he has to kill certain prescribed animals and perform a series of feasts called Ai for each animal killed. Another way is by performing a series of feasts which was very difficult at those times.

### **4.2.1 Inlam Thangchhuah (domestic or within the village):**

This could be attained at home. The title *Inlam Thangchhuah* was perhaps the most difficult to achieve and certainly had clearer implications in the belief system of the Mizo. To earn the status of *Inlam Thangchhuah* one had to give a series of feasts of merit in a prescribed order for the Lusei clan- Chawng, Sechhun (Sedawi), Mithirawplam, Sechhun (Sedawi) again and lastly Khuangchawi.<sup>1</sup> The period for these practices began during the sojourn in (Run leh Tiau Inkar) Burma as stated by Rev. Liangkhaia around AD 1000-1500.<sup>2</sup> As for the Mara clan

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<sup>1</sup> Liangkhaia, Rev; *Mizo Chanchin*; Published by Mizo Academy of Letters 1976, p.24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.21

the series of feasts included Phidong, Vothawthi, Vori, Seichhong, Beibei, Chakei ai, Khanchei.

A person who is an aspirant for the title of *Inlama Thangchhuah* must possess adequate and sufficient material wealth to render a series of community feasts and perform significant ceremonies, known as *Khuangchawi*. No specified time frame is made regarding the completion of fulfillment of the different feasts, as it usually involved a large number of domesticated animals to be killed for the community feast.

As the feast involved the whole village and even relatives from the other villages, they were very expensive. The practices of *Inlam Thangchhuah* series of feast are almost identical in all the different clans of the Mizos viz, Lusei, Mara and Lai clan. However, we should try to designate the variation with regard to Lusei clan, Lai clan, Mara clan by mentioning the practices of the Lusei as well as the Mara. Mostly the first series of feast among the Lusei clan is *Chawng*, which could be described as a modest beginning which nevertheless cost the giver two males and one sow, 52 Zu-pots, and in addition, enough rice for everyone for four days. But for Lai clan this was replaced by the buh-za-ai. The follow up feasts, beginning from *Sechhun* or *Sedawi* included the killing of a Mithun as well as a male pig (A vawkpa sutnghak as in the Chawng), which was an even larger expenditure. Sedawi has to be done twice among the Lai clan. Each feast in the series was more costly until the most expensive of all, the *Khuangchawi* was given. For the preparation of the last feast the giver had to kill two male and one female Mithun. For the actual feast he had to kill two male and one female *Mithuns*. Another Mithun had to be provided for the invited guests from outside who would perform a dance called *Khuallam* arranged in honor of the father-in-law. As always, a male pig (Vawkpa sut nghak) also had to be slaughtered. Besides, there had to be two to three hundred pots of Zu and a huge amount of rice to last throughout the four days of celebration. There would also be an unspecified but always large amount expended as gifts in the form of ornaments, clothing, brass pots, gongs, and even *Mithuns* and guns ( the last two represented by tokens at the feast, but followed in kind later). These items would be thrown

on the ground and the people would scramble for them. The man, his wife, and other members of the family were then carried in procession around the village streets in a large palanquin to the accompaniment of beating drums or *Khuang*, from which the great feast derived its name.

The Mara except for one sub clan, had no great series of feasts, like the Lusei *Thangchhuah* feasts. The Khichha Hleuchang, the royal clan of Siaha performed a series of feasts intended to assist the giver to attain to Paradise.<sup>3</sup> Strictly, the ceremony is Lai, and not Mara, the Khichha Hleuchang, the only Mara clan that performed it being a Lai origin and they were influenced by their Lai origin.<sup>4</sup> The picturesque ceremony called *Mithirawplam*, which is an important part of the Lusei *Thangchhuah* feasts, was not performed by the Mara clan and Lai clan.<sup>5</sup>

The first series of feast for the Mara was called *Phidong*. The *anahmang* (certain articles usually put only for the purpose of sacrifice) are all placed at the foot of the Verandah wall on the side of the house higher up the slope of the hill, and a sow of three fists is killed close immediately after sunrise by the giver of the feast. After an interval usually of three months, the next feast, called *Vothawthi* takes place. For this a boar of five or six fists is killed. The animal is killed in the evening after sunset, beer is prepared before hand, and many people are invited. Mara clan believed that the women should be served first in the feast and they were being treated with special kindness because of their inferiority. The next feast is called *Vori* a sow of two fists is killed by the head of the house. The pork may be eaten only by fellow clansmen as it is forbidden for the others to partake of it. The next feast is called *Seichhong*, and for this a seven month old Mithun calf is used. The next feast is called *Beibei*; it is held whenever the aspirant has the required animals. On the fixed day of the sacrifice, the two Bull Mithuns and three pigs are slaughtered. The larger Mithun is killed first, and its meat is

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<sup>3</sup> Perry, N.E; *The Lakhers*, Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, on behalf of Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1976, p.372.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.378.

<sup>5</sup> Perry, N E; *A Monograph of Lushai Custom and Ceremonies*, , Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, on behalf of Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, pp. 103-6

distributed raw to all the villagers. The smaller Mithun and three pigs are cooked and used for the feast. This lasts for seven days. The next feast is called *Chakei Ai*, performed over the head of a tiger to lay its ghost. For this purpose the man who performs the series of feasts has to wait till someone kills a tiger. The ceremony is held only for the men and not for the women. This involves dancing of men dressed as women around the dead tiger nine times. This is done as a belief that a brother of the slain would stare from the distance of his brother's body. If he saw a man dressed as a woman he would think that his brother is being killed by a woman and he would regard his brother as being careless allowing him to be killed by a woman. However if he saw a man on his own appearance he would get angry and would take revenge for his brother.

After completion of the series of feasts he can rightly be called "Thangchhuah Pa" which means (One who had fulfilled all the sacrifices and feast for the community).

The acquisition of *Thangchhuah* confers a man certain privileges and status, esteem and honors not only in his lifetime but also after his death.

He was entitled to various privileges such as:-

- 1) To open windows in his side wall according to his pleasure,
- 2) To open create dividing walls in his house.
- 3) To construct his house with *Vanlung* (or verandah)
- 4) To wear especially distinctive design cloth, known as *Thangchhuah puan*.
- 5) To wear a special kinds of turban.
- 6) To enter Pialral (Or Paradise) directly.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The list of the credit have been mentioned by all the Mizo historians and English writers, See K.Zawla's *Mizo Pipu leh An thlahte Chanchin*; Perry, N E, *A monograph of Lushai Custom and ceremonies*; Dr Sangkima's *Mizo: Society and Social change (1890-1947)*

#### 4.2. 2 Ramlam Thangchhuah (outside the village or in the forest):

The other social ladder for upward mobility was through Ramlam Thangchhuah, getting “all fame” from the forest. It was a difficult task even for a sharp hunter to attain *Thangchhuah* in *Ramlam* (Forest). As one has to kill one each of the following species of animals which are Barking deer, sambhar, bear, wild boar, wild Mithun, and elephant.<sup>7</sup> Besides these animals one must also kill a large snake called Rulngan, a flying lemur (Vahluk), and an eagle (Muvanlai) to gain greater honor.<sup>8</sup> The difficulty in achieving *Thangchhuah* in this respect is difficult because although one may kill many number of animals but if he had not killed even one of this listed animals he could not be called *Thangchhuah*. Moreover, killing small species could not be counted. The hunters must have a great skill, courage and perseverance. Insofar as the animals, they were not always easy to find or track, good fortune was also required. Hence the aspirants usually sought the friendship of *Lasi*, the presiding deity of wild animals.<sup>9</sup> The community also assisted them by performing the annual sacrifice called *Kawngpuisiam* to ensure prosperity of the village especially for success in hunting and trapping wild animals.<sup>10</sup>

*Thangchhuahpa* were honoured persons and occupied a high status, privilege and prestige in the traditional Mizo society. They are entitled to certain pattern of stripped cloths; to open window in the side of their house, erect a shelf at the end of their beds and, a beam on their veranda. They were economically, politically and socially distinct from other villagers, and were entitled to enter *Pialral*( Paradise) for the Lusei and *Peira for Mara Clan* straightaway.

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<sup>7</sup> Hrangthiauva & Lal Chungnunga; *Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of the Mizos)* Lalrinliana & Sons, Aizawl, 1978, p.46.

<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare; *Lushei kuki Clans*, Parts I and II, 1912, reprinted by Tribal Research Institute, 1975, p.63.

<sup>9</sup> The Russian also believe in a spirit like the *Lasi* who rules over all animals and whose good-will depends success in the chase. The Russian named it *leschiy*. Vide Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Part I, Vol.II,pp.124,125

<sup>10</sup> Saiaithanga, Rev; *Mizo Sakhua*, Maranatha Press, 1994, p.33.

According to Lorraine:

*Thangchhuahpa* is the title given to a man who distinguish himself by killing a certain numbers of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title and their children were also allowed to wear the *Thangchhuah Puan* (a specific Shawl) the procession of this title is regarded by the Lusei Clan as passport to *Pialral* or Paradise<sup>11</sup>.

#### **4.3 Construction of Patriarchy:**

It was a tradition for the Mizos to celebrate chivalry and courage as demanded by the nature they are struggling with. When a baby was born the parents wished them to be active and *Pasaltha* (the quality of being brave). As soon as a baby boy was born they uttered a word “*Mi huaissen, Sa kap thei*” which means “A brave and good hunter”. This was regarded as a kind of blessing for the new offspring.<sup>12</sup> When they grew up they had to be ready anytime for the village in times of danger caused by wild animals or enemies. So, the parents of the family advised their grown up male child not to cover themselves with any quilts while sleeping because they wanted them to be active always. If they did not act according to their expectation, they would admonish them for being cowards and they would ask them to put on a girl’s cloth. This sarcastic remark, if received, is indeed a great shame for the men folk. This is also how the system of patriarchy had been developed in the social structures of the Mizos.

The male child is nurtured to the code of chivalry which is circled around their hunting and agriculture production. The institution of family as well as the bachelors dormitory “Zawlbuk” acts as the centre of learning for the boys. The

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<sup>11</sup> Lorraine, James Herbert; Dictionary of the Lushai Language (4<sup>th</sup> reprint) Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1997, p.447.

<sup>12</sup> .....: *Mizo Ramchhuah Dan* published by Tribal Research Institute Aizawl, p.1

games played by the boys fostered them to be brave and courageous. This has been portrayed in the games of impersonating or stimulating a tiger. The boy who plays the tiger ties one end of a strip of cloth round his waist and lets the other end hang like a tail. He would then crawl around looking for a prey. Stealthily he would stalk his friends who were playing. He pounces upon one of the youngest boys and drags him away. The other boys would chase him and when they caught him, they would pretend to slash him with knives, made of wood and pierce him with bamboo spears. The tiger would escape and run away to lick his wounds, growling with anger and dissatisfaction. The boys who saved the friend would carry him on an improvised stretcher. In a few minutes, he is well and they are happily playing together again. The hungry tiger carries off another boy. All the boys chase the tiger and finally over take it. They attack and assault the wild beast and rescue their little friend.

The tiger then runs away. Two or three boys spy on him and discover his den. They call the other boys and all go to the tiger's den- but the crafty, cunning creature hides and watch them from the nearby hiding place. The boys challenge the tiger, singing and repeating the following song:

I occupy the tiger's den.

I have occupied the centre three times ten!<sup>13</sup>

With a roar, the infuriated tiger springs out of its hiding place and a terrific battle ensues between the ferocious tiger and his assailants. There are no rules and both sides try to win by any tactics they could think of. The fighting goes on till finally the tiger loses. It teaches them to be brave and daring to rescue and save their friends. This game is indeed a training ground for the youth to prepare them to be fit mentally and physically.

It became a kind of competition for the youngsters to become *Pasaltha* (a brave/valiant person). This had created a fair competition among the youth in

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<sup>13</sup> Lalthangliana, B; *Culture and folklore of Mizoram*, published by the Director, Publication division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Soochna Bhawan, C.G.O. Complex, Lodhi Road, new Delhi-110003, Delhi 2005, p.116

times of hunting, in times of need by the village, and also in times of danger. A person with such a quality was highly respected by all the village community. At the time of Khuangchawi (a grand ceremony) they were given an honor called 'Nopui' a full cup of beer (a cup made of Mithun horn) by the Chief of the village. When all stood to drink that beer (Sumdengzu) *Pasaltha* was the first one who would drink that beer as a sign of honor.<sup>14</sup> . The noted chivalry among the youngsters is honoured by offering Nopui, a special cup for rice beer. Thus, all the young men try to attain *Nopui* at least once in their life time. We can rightly say that the distinctive culture of being brave had been influenced greatly by the society and institution of the family.

#### **4.4 Moments of hierarchy: Position of Thangchhuah in political domain**

To know the important position of Thangchhuahpa one has to trace this institution from the political structures and the place they occupied in such a position. To begin with we will start from the political structures of the Mizo society from the top to the bottom. The Chief is the head of the village community. Regarding the origin and genesis of the institution of chieftainship, it was postulated that in the beginning, the privilege to govern the people was possessed by those persons who enjoyed the power and capability to command certain groups of individuals and to repulse any onslaught by their enemies and foes. According to the institution of chieftainship, it evolved in the physical prowess, intrinsic quality and intellectual calibre of an individual.<sup>15</sup> It is thus apparent that those persons who had the capability and flair to gather and organise a competent group of people become chiefs indicating that organizational and leadership abilities led to socio-economic elevation. The

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<sup>14</sup> Siama V.L; *Mizo History*: Lengchhawn Press, Bethel House, Khatla, Aizawl Mizoram. p.54

<sup>15</sup> Prasad, R.N, *Government and Politics of Mizoram*, New Delhi: Northern Book centre, 1987, p.49..



origin of the chieftainship can be traced back to the period when the Mizos were in the Chin Hills.<sup>16</sup>

The villages of Tlangkhua (the Hnamte clan) asked Zahmuaka and his family to be their chief, to lead the clan in times of war and to settle disputes among them. However Zahmuaka first resisted the invitation but Lawileri his wife agreed to it giving veneration for the invitation. So the lineage of Zahmuaka became the leading chief among the Mizos. Apart from a number of Lai, Mara chiefs who ruled mainly in the southern hills most chiefs belongs to the Sailo chief the decedents of Zahmuaka.<sup>17</sup> However the chiefs from the southern part belonging to Mara clan, Lai clan had never fallen under the Sailo influence and clout.<sup>18</sup> It is also important to know that the Mara and Lai have no single royal clan like the Sailo of the Lusei Clan; each clan has its own royal clan. At the outset, the chieftainship among the Mizos was a natural evolution but with the passage of time it became hereditary. Among the Lusei clan, the right of succession was preserved for the youngest son, whereas among the Mara and Lai clan, it was reserved for the eldest son.

Its own independent chief in accordance with the customary laws of their tradition ruled each village. As regards to the power, privilege and status of the Mizo chief, he enjoyed wide and comprehensive powers and a considerable amount of privilege in administering and superintending the day-to-day affairs of the village. He was the supreme administrative head whose order was law within the jurisdiction of his territory. In other words, he was the real centre of the authority in the village governance. To quote Lalrintluanga:

It is noteworthy that the chief's rule was undifferentiated and multifunctional and combined in him social, economic and political functions. Being the only sources of the

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<sup>16</sup> The Exact date cannot be indicate however it will be assume to be around 1500 AD.

<sup>17</sup> Kipgen; *Mizo culture*, Mizo Theological Conference Mizoram, 1997, p.58

<sup>18</sup> Chatterji, N,Dr; *The Mizo chief and his administration*, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975, p.3

highest authority in the village the chief was indeed the backbone of the village administration.<sup>19</sup>

When the chief and his elders adjudicated a case of discords, they were to acquire a fee known as *Salam* (in Lusei) and *Vopia* (in Mara), who normally spent the same on the feast. The village chief was entitled to the following dues from his subjects (villagers): *Fathang* (in Lusei) *Sabai* (in Mara) or paddy tax, equivalent to three mounds of rice; *Sachhiah* (in Lusei), *Sahaw* (in Mara) flesh tax; and *Chichhiah* or Salt tax. He also had exclusive right over Bee nests called *Kheiang* in Mara within his territory and no one could abstract honey or wax without the prior permission of the chief.

The Chief was assisted by the council of elders called Upa (in Lusei), Machas (in Mara). The council of elders was chosen from among the most influential persons of the village and generally the council of elders was appointed by the chief to aid and advice him in the discharge of multifarious duties and functions. The chief had the power to dismiss them as well. To quote Perry:

All matters of internal village government are decided by the chief assisted by his council of elders or *Upas*. Although all is theoretical in the hands of the chief, practically speaking he will never try a case without consulting his *Upas* and as a rule three or four *Upas* try a cases with the chief. The *Upas* are appointed by the chief and can be dismissed by him... A strong will control practically everything while the weak chief will be almost entirely guided by his *Upas*.<sup>20</sup>

Though the village chief had the prerogative of choosing the elders, he nevertheless chose them from different sections of the people.

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<sup>19</sup> Lalrintluanga, *The Emergence of Political Elite in Mizoram*, (PhD. Thesis Unpublished) NEHU, p.82.

<sup>20</sup> Parry, NE, *A Monograph of Lushai Custom and Ceremonies*, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975, p.1.

Mangkhosat Kipgen comments:

The chief was free to appoint whomever he deemed fit, but usually they were chosen from among the *Thangchhuahs*, who were reputed public figures and representative of the different clans found in the village.<sup>21</sup>

The term and size of the elders were not fixed rigidly. The number of elders could vary according to the size of the village. We can therefore postulate that the institution of village elders was universal in the traditional world of Mizo culture and practices.

While in theory the chief could give an order without consultation, and his subject could neither disobey it, in practice very few chiefs would attempt to do so for certain reasons. Thus, for instance if there was the case involving the chief's own relatives he would usually leave it for the elders to decide rather than being involved in the judgment himself. If a case is to be settled for the relatives of elders, the elders would entrust the trial case to others thus demonstrating the fairness in the way they formed judgments in trials and thereby avoiding opposition to their discussions.

The cases were attended to immediately and justice administered speedily. Although there was no written law as such, the administration of the village ran smoothly in accordance with the unwritten customs and traditions. All disputes were heard and disposed of in the chief's house and however much disagreement there might have been during the discussion of the case, the final judgment was always unanimous.

Now next to the chief, a *Thangchhuahpa* was the most privileged and respected person in the social structure of the traditional Mizo society. The elders were mostly chosen by the chief from the one who possessed a position of *Thangchhuah*.

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<sup>21</sup> Kipgen, (1997), op.cit., p.40.

As Thanga comments:

In administration of the affairs of his village, the chief was assisted by a council of elders, it is true that those elders were selected or nominated by the chiefs themselves; but as they were usually chosen from those who were *Thangchhuah*, that is one who had done *Khuangchawi* and were thus above petty jealousies.<sup>22</sup>

Besides the Upas, the chief also appointed the other village officials to assist him in governing the village. They were the Tlangau (village criers), the Thirdeng (blacksmith), the Puithiam (priest), the Ramhuals (advisors concerning land to be cultivated).

The Tlangau proclaimed to the village the chief's order and the Thirdeng repaired the village's tools. There were two types of Puithiam, only one of which - the Sadawt - was appointed by the chief to serve as the official priest for the entire village. The other, the Bawlpu, was appointed by the Clan group to serve its needs. Both served as healers and leaders of the village in all matters pertaining to religion and received their remuneration from the members of the community in proportion to their services. The office of Ramhual was coveted because quite a few could be appointed to it. They were experts in agriculture and for the service thus rendered to the community they were given the privilege next only to the chief of choosing the choicest plots to cultivate themselves. Of course they also had to pay a heavier tax called Fathang to the chief than the other cultivators. After the Ramhual other village officers selected their plots followed by the commoners all of whom had to pay their tax to the chief. In addition to the above mentioned officials there were other dignitaries called Zalen, free citizens who were exempted from paying Fathang to the chief. They were respected citizens, friends of the chief who helped him whenever he needed to entertain guests. Besides these there were commoners and below them Sal/ bawih (slave) in the society.

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<sup>22</sup> Thanga L.B, *The Mizos*, Gauhati: United Publishers, 1978, p.10.

With a careful examining of the status of Thangchhuah in political structures of the Mizo society, the position of Thangchhuah is different from others. While the position of the chief may be succeeded by law of inheritance, the position of Thangchhuah may not be ruled by law of inheritance. It is a social ladder determined by the deeds of the individual in the field of agriculture production and hunting. Even a lowest class in the society can become Thangchhuah if the requirements are fulfilled. This has been testified by the folk story of Liandova and his brother.

One of the most well-known Mizo folk stories is that of “Liandova and his Brother”. Liandova and Tuaisiala were orphans. Their father died when they were infants and their mother deserted them despite Liandova’s pleading. After some time Liandova said to his brother: “We are men and we must learn how to look after ourselves”. But as Tuaisiala was still too young, Liandova alone had to work to earn their living. His love for Tuaisiala had become for Mizos a model of loving kindness that one should show to others. For a long time the poor boys did not have enough to eat, but they continued to struggle hoping that one day as they told each other, “fortune may smile on us, and we shall be rich.” This proved to be prophetic, for later in their lives their riches were greater than any other in the village and Liandova could even take the hand of the chief’s daughter in marriage and celebrate Khuangchawi, the last and most elaborate and expensive feast given by one who would thus earn the coveted title of Thangchhuah.

This story of Liandova and his brother is told and retold as also are other stories, to convey to posterity the lesson that through determined self-help sustained by hard work and guided by honesty, courtesy and humble sincerity even the poorest of the poor may attain the coveted status of Thangchhuah.

#### **4.5 Symbols of portraying hierarchy the Mizo worldview:**

The language of public persona now had been projected in the forms of Thangchhuah and this portrayal is being exerted as a symbol of language through

interpretation in dress, construction of the houses and ceremonies to set up the order of hierarchy.

#### **4.5.1 Constructing hierarchy through composition of a name:**

Naming a person can be property oriented because the individual belonging to a lower section of the class couldn't name his/her offspring as he pleases. The name of the person itself defines demarcation of hierarchy; one can easily have a knowledge that man/woman is a lower or a higher class depending on the name. One of the significant features which distinguish a male from a female is that the names of a female usually ended with the alphabet "i" and "a" for that of male though again there are other clans in the Mizos who do not follow this pattern. Naming a child is a difficult one because they have to be careful not to offend their chief with their selection of certain names which the chief may not favour. Naming a child will depend on their jubilant expression of their accomplishment or deeds in agriculture production or success in hunting. The folk narratives often gave us the evidence of such incidents, for example a name like "Ngur" meaning "Chief" could not be named to a common man. A name like "Ralkapthanga" meaning having fame by hunting could be named to a person related with successful hunters, or "Laizawna" could be used for successful harvester. In this context the name itself is a signifier of the class to which he belongs. An individual couldn't name according to his will as for instance a lower class people carefully chooses a name which will not hurt the sentiments of the higher class, so they pick up the ones which are uncommon and which are not mostly used.

#### **4.5.2 Dress:**

Dress is another contested space of an expression of individual identity. A dress is also an expression of symbol determining social hierarchy in the society. Illusion of personal wealth and the forms also shows the skill of the makers.

Dress featured as social signifier and a form of visual communication that actively questions norms of gender and race as social constructions.



***Picture: Thangchhuah***





***Picture: Earliest traditional attire Siapsuap***

According to Lalthangliana the progress of traditional attire have reached quite a high standard during the time when the Mizos settled in Kabaw Valley. However due to the invasion from the Shan, the Mizos fled to Chin hills (The region between Than Hill and the river Run). The place was difficult to cultivate because of the barren, rocky and steep region. They faced a problem in procuring food for their living. They could not descend to the plains in the Kabaw valley to fetch new clothes because the Shans who had driven them out had occupied Kabaw Valley. Due to this circumstance he draws a conclusion that the culture and way of dressing of the Mizos had deteriorated and retrogressed.<sup>23</sup>

The first garment known to the Mizos is called Siapsuap (like a grass skirt) commonly worn by women. It was made of strips of fibbers from bark of the tree. The top of the Siapsuap was tied around the waist and was just long enough to cover their private parts. The men also covered themselves with the kilts like that of Siapsuap. However the standard of traditional attire improved in the later period of Thantlang settlements beside Siapsuap, they tied another short one, round the body just under the armpits to cover their breasts. The men also made kilts of Hrukhaui fibre and tied it round the waist. The men's fibre trapping was called a "Hnawkhal". It was during the settlement in Tiau river and the Lentlang mountain they learnt the art of weaving thereon the improvement was made in attire. Instead of wearing Siapsuap the well to do among them wore short cotton skirts which reached down to their knees. But since they had not yet discovered dyes, the skirts and Siapsuap might have been made of white cotton cloth or thread. The development of making cloth reached its zenith when the Mizos sojourn in the present Mizoram. They had discovered a black dye which they named "Ting". Using this black dye the first design they learnt to weave was called "Hmaram". Later on, they learnt to extract red dye from the barks and leaves of certain trees and plants. This enabled them to use three colours- white, black and red colour. The designs they produced became more definite, well

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<sup>23</sup> Lalthangliana, B; *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram*, Published by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Soochna Bhawan, C.G.O. Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi-10003, 2005, p, 111

defined, distinct and precise and various sheets, each with different designs were named- puandum, mangpuan, ngotekherh, puanrin, tawlhlohpuan, thangchhuah puan etc. To make their cloth prettier and the designs more interesting they copied the works of nature and wove beautiful flower designs and produced lovely materials such as the 'kawkpui-zik-zial,' the 'len-buang-thuam' and many other designs. These beautiful coloured garments were worn during important occasions such as festivals and ritualistic day.

The art of weaving is the contribution made by the women whereas men made it as a domain to show their position. It was the choice of a person to choose whatever cloth he can wear. However there are certain cloth which can be only worn by the chief and the Thangchhuah. Thangchhuah who distinguished himself as a successful hunter or by performing series of feasts now can wear especially distinctive design cloth, known as *Thangchhuah puan*. In addition to that he can wear special kind of turban on which a feather of hornbill is carefully tucked in. There is authority and power structures in the dress. Dress is also a space which distinguishes a person from the others. Thangchhuah will wear on such important occasions portraying that he also has a ticket to Pialral (Paradise) which has been explained in the previous chapter.

#### **4.5.3 Construction of house:**

The house constitutes a large part of everyday reality of the person and the structure itself is a symbol of hierarchy. As the Mizos were semi nomadic tribe who wander from place to place, the construction of the house is not permanent. The location and the structures of each house represented the division in the society.

The Mizo village is generally situated on the top of some high hill or ridge. In the pre modern Mizo society the life in the village was simple commoners



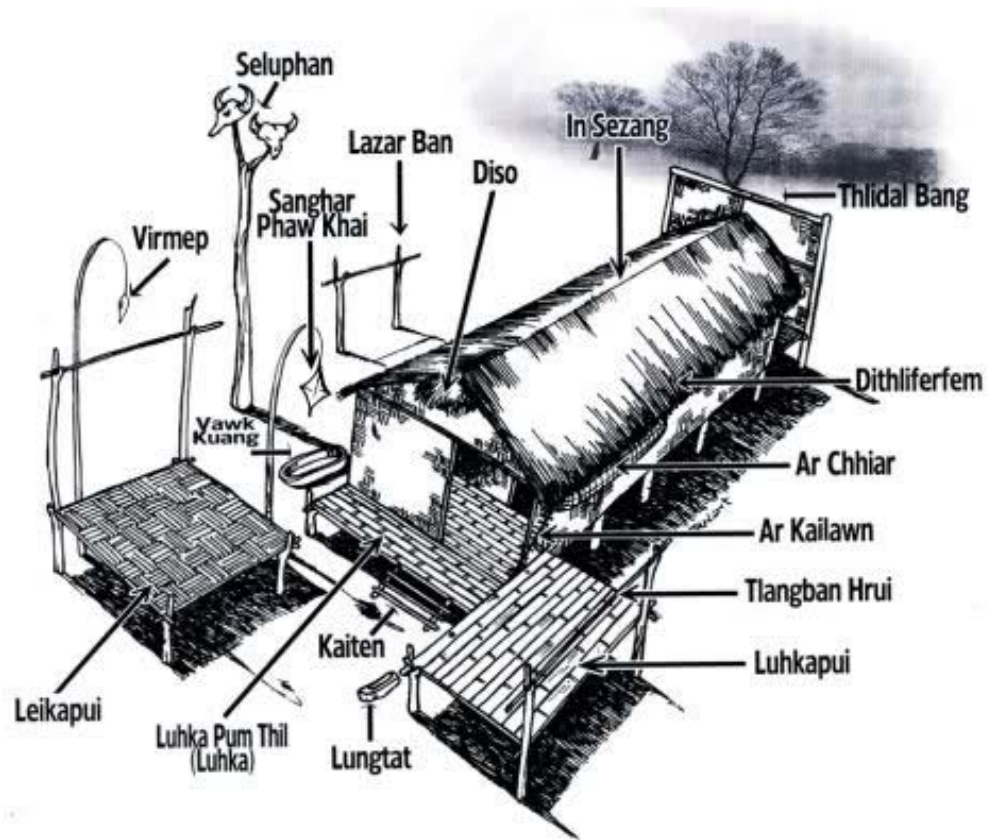
would construct the houses in two rows facing each other.<sup>24</sup> The size of the house may vary according to the size of the family. However, the chief's house and Zawlbuk will always be situated at the center of the village which is called Muallveng. The surrounding houses will be that of Upa and Thangchhuah followed by the commoners and lastly Pahmei (a man with only his wife to help him with the field work) house and Hmeithai (Widow) house. In front of each house there was a large verandah fitted with hollow basins scooped out of the tree trunks, in which rice was husked with long wooden pestles. The interior of the house was fitted with a large hearth of mud over which was suspended a large square bamboo framework, on which trays of grain and herbs were dried up. The houses for the commoner do not have windows or ventilations except the main door.



***Picture: Mizo village (source: <myzone.blogspot.com>)***

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<sup>24</sup> Lalrinawma, V.S.(Rev); *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, Published by Mizoram Publication Board at Lengchawn Press, Aizawl, 2005, p.3



**Picture: Thangchhuah house**

Thangchhuah on the other hand had a privilege to open windows in his side wall according to his pleasure, to openly create dividing walls in his house and to construct his house with *Vanlung* (or verandah). On the wall of his house there will be the skull of different types of animals he had shot which will be like a trophy for his success.

The practices of erecting sacrificial post or a wooden pillar near the house for commemoration of a feast of merit as well as memorials to the dead may be one of the common features of some of the tribal cultures. The tribal people living in northeast India particularly the certain Naga tribes and the Mizo prevails a custom of the setting up of a y-fork sacrificial post in their early society which were mostly connected with a feast of merit. The Mizos also have a custom of an erection of such sacrificial posts in their early society. Besides, a similar practice

of erecting such wooden posts was also made by the Sadang Toraja of Sulawesi (Celebes in Indonesia) for sacrificial purposes.<sup>25</sup> As it is connected with a series of a feast of merit, only the chief and a prosperous person were able to set up the post. Performance of a feast and setting up of a post is intended to enhance the prestige of the donor in the society. In the early Mizo society, the sacrificial post (ie. *seluphan*) is erected during the performance of Sedawi chhun, one of a series of a feast of merit.

Near the house a forked or Y-shaped post (*Seluphan*) was planted at the courtyard of the person who performs the feast of *Sedawi chhun*.<sup>26</sup> The word *Seluphan* is a combination of two words ie. *Selu* means 'head of mithun' while *phan* means 'a wooden post'. Thus, it is a wooden post of Y-shape on which the skull of a mithun was attached. The *Seluphan* was planted to commemorate the feasts, not for memorials to the dead. It is a symbol of ability and it is the highest ambition of the Mizo to have a long line of such posts in front of his house. The *Seluphan* was planted during the performance of Sedawi, one of the series of feasts to attain *Thangchhuah*.

A day before the feast, a group of men one of which should be the close relative of the performer led by the Sadawt (a village priest) would go to the jungle in search of a suitable wooden post which would preferably be the *Thingsia* (*Castanopsis tribuloides*) tree.<sup>27</sup> They took with them a sacrificial hen, food and zu(rice beer) in the jungle. When they found the tree, the Sadawt sprayed Zu from his mouth over the tree three times and chanted a hymn. Then he throws a pellet three times towards the upper end of the tree. Sangkima tells us that when the pellet of sadawt flied over the tree, others began to utter by saying '*a khum e, a khum e*' which means 'the pellet flew over the tree'.<sup>28</sup> He then cut down the tree with dao and says '*ka ar hlui khuangin a thai thluk e*' which

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<sup>25</sup> Shadap Sen, *The Origin and Early History of the Khasi-Synteng People*, Calcutta, 1981,p.40

<sup>26</sup> Already explained in the previous page of this chapter

<sup>27</sup> K. Zawla, *Mizo Pipute leh an thlahte chanchin*, pp. 23-24

<sup>28</sup> Sangkima, *Essays on the History of the Mizos*, Guwahati, 2004,p. 53

means 'the fall was caused by my crowing cock'.<sup>29</sup> The wooden post was erected at the courtyard of the feast-giver or performer in the evening of the first day of the ceremony. The sadawt (village priest) drew a circle on the ground by a porcupine quill and chanted the following hymn before the setting up of the post –<sup>30</sup>

*'Mu chhepa fuk nan ka ti lo,  
Sa chhepa fuk nan ka ti lo,  
Chalvawma lu chuan nan ka ti e.'*

*(The post was not meant for birds and other animals, but only for the head of the Mithun)*

When they erected, the Sadawt kept an egg at one end of the forked tree. The Sedawi ceremony lasted for seven days and in the last day, the skull of a mithun was placed on the higher spike of the *Seluphan*. The *Seluphan* was generally about 8-10 ft high. Shakespear has given us about the Seluphan in more detail as follows -

“the skulls of mithun killed on these occasions are placed on posts to one side of the entrance.....Each post is cut out of a tree of considerable size, which is dressed until the lower 7 or 8 feet are only some 8 or 9 inches thick. Above this, the tree is roughly cut into a plank some 8 or 9 inches thick, forming an irregular quadrilateral, the lower side being a foot or so long...at each of the upper corners there is a perpendicular projection some 12 inches long terminating in a spike, a short distance below which a ring of wood is left. The skull is placed on the higher spike...”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.116

<sup>30</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, Aizawl, 2001, p.341

<sup>31</sup> J. Shakespeare,(1975), op.cit., p. 90

#### **4.6 Cultural formation through Hunting practices:**

Hunting took an important place in the life and cultural practices of the Mizos. The only dream of any man in the Pre-modern Mizo society would be to become a successful hunter or a harvester. This was the product of their struggle of existence with nature. Nature had provided them food for their sustenance and in the mean time they have a stiff competition also with the animal that inhabited the same area. Therefore, because of hunting practices various cultural formations began to take shape and bounded their world view. Different ways of hunting started to emerge out of which we have Ai ceremony, practices of Ni Hrilh, and a customary law in dividing the shot animals which will be elaborated here.

If the young men in the village had gone for hunting or tracing trail of the animals, it was called “*Tharsahawl*” (For the Lusei clan) meaning ‘hunting for the fresh wild animals’. While the Mara clan has two names for hunting, *Sachadi* is tracking and stalking. *Rakhi* was a name given when a party of men went out to look for the game.<sup>32</sup> Hunting was usually handled by the men and it was not a job of a woman to interfere in such kinds of business. However, the lady of the family helped the hunter in many ways, especially in making flintlocks (gun) powder; which needed severe grinding. The art of making gunpowder is known from the Meitei, who had been taught by the Chinese merchants who visited the state during the reign of *Khagenba* about 1630.<sup>33</sup>

#### **4.7 Hunting and taboo:**

Hunting had affected the belief system of the Mizo as they were very curious in their practices. When the hunters got well prepared and started to step out for hunting they first assembled in *Kawtchhuah* (a place of gathering nearby the village). If a bird known as Bawngpui (Irliak) took lead towards the forest and

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<sup>32</sup> Parry, (1996), op.cit., p.136.

<sup>33</sup> Hudson, T.C (Thomas Callan); *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, p.38.



chirped loudly, the hunters believed it to be a sign of good luck for their hunting. If the bird came back with a loud chirp from the forest, they regarded as a sign of bad luck. If such kind of thing happened, they automatically retreated. If they saw a dead man in their dreams, it also signified a sign of bad luck. If they cried loudly in their dreams it was a sign of good luck. If they heard one of the animals Saphung (Tlumpui) cried out loudly it is also a sign of good luck. They used to say that “*We are entering a city of wild animals*” and used to get stimulated when such dreams occurred.

#### **4.8 The moral ethical code “Tlawmngaihna”:**

The Mizo cultural activities were bound by an ethical code called “Tlawmngaihna”. Usually, the eldest among the hunters acted as the leader of the hunting party and made every arrangement. But it was the task of the youngsters to lead the way as they had to search for a new route in the thick and dense forest with their *dao*. They settled in the hut for spending the night. A place with easy availability of water was always chosen. The courtesy has been rendered by the young men to the elder one. The young men had to respect the elder in any manners throughout hunting. In building the rest house the younger one took every necessary action. The elders only supervised the work; it was the duty of the younger one to fetch water, gather firewood and search for plants and food to eat while they were in the forest. They had tried to maintain *Tlawmngaihna* as far as possible. The elders were not allowed to carry any heavy baggage as the young men carried for them. However the elder’s on their part did not take any decision on their own, they also consulted the younger ones. If they unfortunately made a mistake in cooking or any other thing the elder never made a complaint. Instead they were in praise of the younger one in every possible way. We can say that there was a spirit of brotherhood among the hunters.<sup>34</sup> There is one story about *Taitesena* a valiant Pasaltha that one day while hunting; they prepared themselves for a night stay. After the dinner their leaders suggested that the

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<sup>34</sup> Once a hunting party set out Vanapa a famous Pasaltha was among them. The young man does not cook properly. All the food became very hard. Vanapa praise them saying the type of food they cook was his favorite.

flower of the wild banana be taken for breakfast the next morning. While all were asleep *Taitesena* got up and plucked it and made it ready for breakfast. And it so happened that one day an elderly man spoke about the nature of one particular piece of stone for a sharpener. It being heavy he did not pick it up. But to his surprise, when they reached home *Taitesena* showed what he had carried from the streams and said that he had brought it home for him. The elder was deeply touched by the *Tlawmngaihna* of *Taitesena*.<sup>35</sup>

It is the by-product of hunting practices which evolved the spirit of “*Tlawmngaihna*”. N.Chatterji puts it as a wonderful philosophy of life<sup>36</sup> which is so rich in meaning and so wide in scope, it is difficult to put in a single word or phrase of another language. There has been an attempt made by different writers in defining the meaning, all their effort could get them to the nearest concept. Some had suggested it to be “altruism” (Selfless concern for the well-being of others) while others believed it to be a kind of “chivalry”. The Christian Baptist Missionary J.H Lorraine tried to give the meaning in his book, *Dictionary of Lushai language*.

1. To be self sacrificing, unselfish, self denying, persevering, stoical, stout-hearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent (refusing any help)
2. To put one’s own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of giving up one’s prestige, etc; or of helping another, or of not disappointing another, etc.
3. To do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one’s own inclinations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *The Mizo heroes*; Tribal research Institute, Department of art and Culture, Mizoram, p.90

<sup>36</sup> Chatterji, N; *Zawlbuk as a Social Institution in the Mizo Society*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1975, p.15.

<sup>37</sup> Lorraine, JH; *Dictionary of Lushai Language*, p.513. also accessible on <<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/lorrain/>>

One of the fields where a man could best exhibit his quality as a *Tlawmngai* was at the period of hunting expedition. Hunting expedition offered an opportunity for the hunter to exhibit *Tlawmngaihna*. A man who possessed endurance and is able to go on all day with very little food, who is courageous in following up the wounded wild beast, who thinks of his friends before himself, took less than his share of the food, is industrious in building the shelter for the night and in collecting wood for the fire possess *Tlawmngaihna* and according to the dictates of good form, the young men are supposed to vie with each other in these respects. If two men one of whom had a gun come up to an animal, the man with the gun, if he follows *Tlawmngaihna* will offer his friend first shot. If a man gets hurt by a wild animal, his companions must stay and look after him and must not continue the chase and leave him alone. If a man got caught by a wounded bear or any other animal it would be a fearful disgrace if his companions ran away and left him to his fate, they were bound to stay and help him.<sup>38</sup>

We can say that a person who possessed *Tlawmngaihna* must be obedient and respectful to the elders; courteous in dealing with the weak and the lowly; generous and hospitable to the poor, give opportune moments in favour of others; ready to help those in distress; compassionate to a companion who falls sick while on a journey or becomes victim of a wild beast in the hunt by never abandoning him to his fate; heroic and resolute at war and in hunting; stoical in suffering and in facing hardship under trying circumstances; and persevering in any worthwhile undertaking however hard and daunting that might prove to be. A *tlawmngai* person should do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient that might be to oneself or to one's own inclinations; vie with others in excelling in sports or any other corporate labour; and try to surpass others in hospitality and in doing his ordinary daily task independently and efficiently. "Its dimensions", rightly observes Chatterji, "covered both

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<sup>38</sup> Parry, NE; *A Monograph of Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, Government Press, Shillong, p.20.

personal and collective levels of activities wherein self-interest was subordinated to the interest of others individually and collectively” and the ‘self-sacrifices for the needs of others was to come in spontaneously as a natural part of ones life.<sup>39</sup> Chatterji stated that Tlawmngaihna to a Mizo stands for that compelling moral-force which finds expression in self-sacrifice for the service of others.<sup>40</sup>

#### **4.9 The delivery of customary law in dividing the animal flesh:**

If animals are shot, the flesh of the animals is distributed equally to all the hunters who had gone together for hunting. However, if there were only two hunters, the person who shot the animal would have the head, abdomen, the upper part of the chest, the lower end of the spine, ears, both the kidney, and his friend would have one hind of the animal’s leg. The shooter can also give the ears to his friend if he wants to. The foreleg of the animal including shoulder left side is a meat due to the village chief called “Lalsachhiah”. If the meat dues are not paid to the chief they are liable to fine a mithun. A meat due is also paid to the blacksmith. Some portion of the back or the backbone is given but the practice may vary from village to village. The right side of the shoulder and some flesh of the animals are for the owner of the gun.

The killing of each animals specified was followed by the performance of ceremony called *Ai*. In which all those persons who had already performed such ceremony were invited. Mangkhosat Kipgen comments:

It was not enough simply to a successful hunter. One also had to be rich enough able to perform the *Ai* ceremony for each of the animals killed. This was a religious ceremony performed by the *Puithiam* (Sadawt) on the hunter’s behalf

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

to enable animals killed to accompany him with pomp and grandeur on his march towards *Pialral* after death.<sup>41</sup>

#### **4.10 Ai Ceremony:**

Ai feast or ceremony, a sacrifice connected with hunting and killing animals, was practiced by Lusei, Lai and Mara clans. The origin of Ai cannot be traced. Among the Mizo tribe, Lai clans are the first to perform the ceremony.<sup>42</sup> In order that a person, after death, may gain possession of the spirits of men or wild animals he has to kill, it is necessary for him to sacrifice a Mithun, goat or pig. This is called “Ai”.

The practice was the result of a belief that if “Ai” sacrifices are performed it would enable the spirit of the slain animals to remain servants for the hunter in the afterlife. And if *Ai* sacrifice is not performed the spirit of the deceased animals would haunt the hunter throughout his life. The word “Ai” has many meanings – among them are “to fascinate,” “to obtain power over”, and there is also a plant of that name, which in one of the folk tales is said to have the magical power of driving away any evil spirit at which it is pointed.<sup>43</sup> Therefore in order to gain or power over the spirit of a slain animal after life, *Ai* sacrifices are always practiced by the Mizos. In the beginning the practice was simple as the daughter or (any lady of the house) of the hunter who shot animal would invite her relatives and neighbors. The neighbor would assemble in the house with a pot of wine. They drink the wine and sing any of the animal’s songs (See Appendix I) they knew and eat the animals’ meat. They usually comprised of older people as it was a shame for the young man to interfere in this feast. After they had finished the dinner they would bless the hunter to bring more animals to the house. But as the time

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<sup>41</sup> Kipgen, (1997), op.cit., p. 121.

<sup>42</sup> An interview with Pu. Henmanga, Lawngtlai.

<sup>43</sup> Shakespear (1975), op.cit., p.78.

passed, the practice developed to an extent that everyone in the village was allowed to participate in the feast.

Before the skull of the slain animal could be placed in front of the verandah, a sacrifice had to be performed by the *Puithiam*(Priest). This practice is called “Sa lu-an-chhuang”- ie, “hoisting the head of the wild animal”. A small white fowl is given to him and the skull of the animal is placed in front of him. He then takes some Zu(wine) in his mouth and spits it out over the skull, and after muttering a charm in so low a tone that no one can hear him, he strikes the skull with the head of the chicken. If some of the feathers stick on the skull it means that he is very lucky. After this the skull can be put up. The young men and women gather at the hunter’s house where they all sit down and sing animal’s song till evening when the grand dinner is ready. After they finish the dinner, the beating of drums begins along with dances on the floor. The next day is for the elder people, they slay white chicken and with the leftover from the previous day’s feast, they have dinner again.

The commoners usually performed “Ai” with pigs or goats. But the wealthy man of the village used to perform with Mithun (a highly valued domesticated animal in terms of property). If they do so it is called “Ralvanphun”. They are highly respected by the villagers. Their sons and daughters can now bear a name like ‘Hranga’ meaning “brave man” as the commoners cannot do so.

The grandest ceremony of *Ai* was called Sakei Ai which was practiced by all the three clans (Mara, Lusei and Lai clan). When a tiger is shot this practice is always performed by the village chief or the wealthy man of the village, it requires killing of Mithun, goat, pig, dog and chicken. However, Mithun is not compulsory but if the chief organizes the ceremony it is a must. He must not sleep the night before the ceremony. When a young man cut the tiger’s tail off; he must also keep

awake all night. When the ceremony is about to begin the tiger is placed in the platform made of *thohmaw* wood (*Rhus semi alata*), which is much feared by the tigers' ghosts, as it is used to make gun powder. The performer would dress up as a woman, smoke woman's pipe. A crowd watches him and yells with laughter, but he is not allowed to laugh. After that he begins to take off his woman's dress and dresses himself as a man, and straps on a fighting dao and carries a gun. He also takes 'Sailungvar' (white flints) and puts them into the tiger's mouth while he eats the eggs. He then says to the tiger that:

'You eat the Sailungvar,' 'Let's see who will swallow them the quicker?' "I have out-swallowed you, you have not swallowed your; I have swallowed mine. You go by the lower road; I will go by the upper. You will be like the lower southern hills; I shall be like the high northern ones. You are the brave man of the south; and I am the bravest of the north."<sup>44</sup>

He then cuts the tiger's head three times with his dao. Then the men bury the tiger outside the village. If the tiger has killed a man before, his eyes are gouged out with skewers or needles and thrown away. It is forbidden to laugh while in the ceremony, and so he holds a porcupine in his arms, and if he laughs by accident they say, "The porcupine laughed". The idea of dressing himself as a woman was to humble the spirit of the tiger, thinking that it has been shot by a woman, and giving the flints while the performer eats eggs is to show the power of the performer over the tiger, as he eats the eggs easily, while the tiger is unable to chew the flints (Sailungvar).

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<sup>44</sup> Shakespear, (1975), op.cit., p.79.

The following night is *aoh*,<sup>45</sup> and the women may neither spin nor weave in the fear of the tiger's ghost. Next morning before anyone else leaves his house the giver of the feast sacrifices a small fowl on the village path, which ends the *aoh*, and the villagers may all come out of their houses and take up their daily tasks.

#### **4.11 Cultural Institution (Zawlbuk):**

The most important social institution among the different clans of Mizo was Zawlbuk (bachelor's dormitory) except for Mara Clan. Zawlbuk was established by chief and his villagers to meet the needs of the village. Zawlbuk was always located near the chief's house and it was constructed on the largest space of the village. The number of Zawlbuk varied according to the size of the village.

In administering the Zawlbuk, the chief recognised the leadership of Val Upa, but never held any official appointment. Val Upa were chosen based on qualities such as industriousness, efficiency, courage and success as a hunter.<sup>46</sup> The chief acted as a nominal head of Zawlbuk but in reality it was Val Upa who had upheld the power of administration. He was responsible for training the inmates in hunting, wrestling as well as obedience to the elders. The inmates were divided into two groups: Tlangval (young men) and thingnawifawm (boys). Val Upa appointed leaders among Thingnawifawm to see to it that the assigned responsibilities like fetching water and fire woods are carried out without fail. The young men were given a harder task such as carrying sick or any other necessary arise, digging grave, to be present whenever the chief called for them. Zawlbuk was highly respected by the whole village as they are the guardian of the village in times of war and in times of danger.

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<sup>45</sup> The day after the formal entry into the house is *aoh*, Perry, NE, The Lakhers, p.66.

<sup>46</sup> Kipgen, (1977), op.cit., p.61.





***Picture: Zawlbuk***

The functions of Zawlbuk had many facets. The dense thick terrain which the Mizos had inhabited is always threatened by wild animals and enemies for the neighboring villages. Zawlbuk acted as a centre of defence as the young men (Village warriors) of the village would rise up in times of need. Zawlbuk also acted as the centre of information of the village. Young men as well as the elders gathered in Zawlbuk at the end of the day to share with one another the news they had heard during the day. Even the travelers from other villages also spent a night in Zawlbuk and spread the news they had known from their village. Zawlbuk is also a centre for the young men to learn the art of warfare, hunting, and an institution that brought common brotherhood among them. Zawlbuk was also a well developed institution serving the needs of the society, shaping the personality of the young men through a strict discipline enforced in it. Parry had

remarked that Zawlbuk life and training was an excellent discipline.<sup>47</sup> He further indicated the comparison between Lusei clan and Mara clan, he was struck by what he found to be a strong contrast between the “much undisciplined” character and lack of control in the Mara villages with the situation among the Luseis. “A young Mara when ordered to do something by an elder,” wrote Perry, “will argue, where a Lusei will obey at once.”<sup>48</sup> He ascribes this difference to the existence of Zawlbuk among the Lusei and the absence of any such institution among the Mara.

Obedience was one of the qualities that emerged out of Zawlbuk. The other is quality of character usually called Tlawmngaihna.<sup>49</sup> Zawlbuk was placed as an important cultural institution among the Mizos.

#### **4.12 Thangchhuah as the theory of escapism:**

The definite concept of life after death was being formed among the Mizo right from the period of the sojourn in Chin Hills. They believed in the continuance of life beyond their grave either in *Mithi Khua* (the village of the death) or *Athikhi* or *Pialral* (Paradise).<sup>50</sup> *Mithi Khua* is the village after death usually for the commoners whereas *Pialral* is the place beyond *Mithi Khua* and it is only for the *ThangchhuahPa*, a title beyond the dreams of most people. Those who had a position to go to *Pialral* would enjoy plentiful supply of rice that did not require husking, meat and *Zu*.

In general the Mizos believed that when a man is dead his soul escapes through a crack at the top of the skull of the deceased, and the soul wandered in the village for three months. During this period the usual seat of the person in meal is always unoccupied, and some food are left for the departed soul as well. If

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<sup>47</sup> Parry, (1975), op.cit., p.27.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.28.

<sup>49</sup> Tlawmngaihna will be explain in different themes in this chapter

<sup>50</sup> Lorraine Dictionary, p.318.

a married man, the wife remained in the family home and if she had sexual relations with another man during that time she would be treated as an adulteress. After three months was over she was permitted to go back to her own relatives as they think that the journey of the soul to *Mithikhua* had begun. The Mara Clan believed that a death to a person was caused by the anger of *Khazangpa* or *Leuripa*. When a man is ill and about to die, his soul often entered into a pig and the pig sometimes makes a strange noise like a man groaning. Sometimes it entered into a tree, and the tree makes noises like a baby crying. People believed it to be the voice of the spirit of the man who is about to die. However it was believed that normal soul (thlapha) do not enter into animals or trees it was the mischievous soul (thlachhi) with which some persons are afflicted that indulge in these vagaries.

On the way the man first comes across *Rih Lake*, which is located in the Chin Hills of Burma about three kilometers from the Mizoram border. They would reach a high Hill called *Hringlang Tlang* from where they would see the world of living - their relatives and friends, thereby arousing the feeling to go back. Eventually they would reach a spring called *Lungloh Tui* (heartless water) and after they sip the water and wear *Hawilopar* (no turning back flower), their desire to go back disappeared and they started their journey again towards the next life. After this they had to cross a place *Pu Pawla Kawt* (in Lusei) or *Savawkhi* (in Mara) where they have to face the dreadful *Pu Pawla* or *Chhongchhongpipa* (in Mara) that guarded the narrow gate where all the seven paths from the world of the living converge.<sup>51</sup> There is a slight variation in interpretation in case of Lusei *Pu Pawla* and Mara *Chhongchhongpipa* in the way they had interaction with the soul which came their way. *Chhongchhongpipa* are the spirit of men who either from impotency or from any other causes, have never had sexual relationship with women. The Mara consider that such people have not fulfilled the purpose of their lives on earth, and so are unable to reach

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<sup>51</sup> Shakespear (1975), op cit., p.62.

*Athikhi*, but are condemned to remain forever hovering on the road between this world and the next world *Athikhi*. *Chhongchhongpipa* show the spirits their way to their abode but also used to make nuisance character by stealing the cloths of the spirits and make them go naked in the *Athikhi*. *Chhongchhongpipa* always steal the lowest cloth. Therefore, when the any of the Mara dies, in addition with the cloth he wore, a small piece of cloth is placed under his armpit for *Chhongchhongpipa* to steal. *Chhongchhongpipa* had always posed a task to the spirit by letting them to pick of his fleas, which are of hairy caterpillar which is extremely unpleasant to kill. Before any Mara is buried, sesamum seeds are placed between his fingers, and when *Chhongchhongpipa* ask the spirit to pick his fleas, the spirit crack his sesamum seeds with his teeth and says, “You hear, I have cracked your fleas,” and allowed the spirit to pass. The Mara believed that when adult spirit goes to *Athikhi* they never return. But the younger children are sometimes reborn in the person of a younger brother or sister.

The origin of Pu Pawla is not known and was also not a topic of historical investigation. But it is well known that he was believed to be a big man who guarded the narrow gate where all the seven paths which tilts with the slightest touch and makes a clicking sound which would awake Pu Pawla even if he slept. He then hurriedly rushes to his big catapult and the size of the bullet made of clay is of egg size, would strike at any spirit who comes along. This wounded tumors can acquire three years to heal. However *ThangchhuahPa* and *Hlamzuih* (in *Lusei*), (*naw-dawng*) in Mara first born children who died in infancy. But there is no mention about the Hlamzuih entering into Pialral although he/she was not shot by Pu Pawla. They would not be shot at as what they would become is not known. The young men who had sexual relationship with either three virgin girls until their death would be exempted by Pu Pawla from striking. However it was not at all easy as even for the woman who had remained a virgin until her death would also be exempted by Pu Pawla. The journey of the dead does not end at *MithiKhua* or the village of the death. The *Thangchhuah Pa* are entitled to enter *Pialral* or Paradise.

#### 4.13 Material culture reflecting in hunting practices:

There are two ways in hunting; hunting nearby a village is called "*Lehlang SapeI*" which means hunt for a day. If they shot animal in this manner it is called "*Thlawhhma Sakah*" which means "*Shooting animal at the cornfield*". Hunting which required spending several nights are called "*Ramchhuak SapeI*" which means hunting inside the forest. This includes hunting for a larger animal like wild boar, Elephant, Bear etc. Before they have flintlocks the main tools for hunting was bows, arrows and spears. Among the Mizo the Mara clan were the first one to use the flintlocks.<sup>52</sup> Before the use of these weapons the main weapons were very simple, however they were designed to meet the demands. Bows and arrows were made of iron or a strong bamboo. This had helped them in many ways because they can silently kill the animal without any notice from the animal. Spears are another weapon which needs to be handled with a lot of courage. The *Pasaltha* while hunting slink carefully in the wild boar den; while the wild boar sleeps the *Pasaltha* strikes at it and eventually killed the animal. There are different kinds of Spears (Fei) which are *Fei Bengnei*, *Fei Kemreh nei*, *Fei Kibar*, *Laifei*, *Muzuk Fei*, *Sa fei*, *Se Fei*. But in course of time better weapons had been acquired and this affected the hunting system of the Mizos. This also made it a lot easier to attain *Thangchhuah*.

The first way of hunting is mainly done in the corn field. At the time when the corn and rice ripen, animals usually come to eat the crops. Therefore, the hunter with their weapons hunts for these animals. The second way is that hunting which is done not to defend the corn field but wherein the hunter sets out for a longer period to fulfill *Thangchhuah* like bigger animals elephant, wild Mithun etc. Whenever they saw a group of animal they targeted it with their flintlocks. The eldest of the hunters was given the first chance to shoot at the animal and only after that the rest of the younger hunter shot whatever they had

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<sup>52</sup> NE Parry in his book *The Lakhers* mentioned that After the Napoleonic wars in 1815 most of the Musket Flint were exported through Chittagong and Akyab. Lakhers say that they have a gun during the time of Iakhai, father of Theulai, Chief of Saiko, who died in 1927.

found out to be left for them. In this way the manner of respect is shown to the elder one. When they had gone for the second way of hunting especially when they hunt for elephant they usually don't shoot the smaller animal. They do it only when they are in vain.

If the hunter goes alone and shot any of the animals it was not possible to carry all the meat on his own. Therefore he used to cover the dead animal with some leaves or with his *Diar* (Turban) or his cloth. This way of practice is called "Sachhawchhin". The hunter used to wipe with *Tuibur* (*narcotic liquid*) a smell which would shoo away the other animal. And the hunter cuts the animal's belly so as to prevent it from smelling. And he would summon the other men in the village for cutting the flesh of the animal. No one would feel like going out just to cut the flesh of another's shooting. Therefore the hunter would say he had shot an animal which then run away and ask for their help to trace the trail. In this way he would gain the attraction of the other members.

*Pasaltha* played an important and significant role in the inter-village warfare as well. Without the service rendered by the *Pasaltha* no village was completely safe from the attacks of their enemies. Those villages, which possessed and enjoyed the services of a large number of *Pasaltha* generally, triumphed in the conflict. During the feast ceremonies and public gathering *Pasaltha* were greatly honored, as a token of their recognition and acknowledgement of their services to the community.

#### **4.14 Hunting as a foundation of Folksongs:**

The culture of the Mizos is strongly combined with folk songs which are orally passed on from one generation to another. The Music tradition was well developed even before the advent of the British. Mizos are a people who love

singing and took pride in their own composition. K. Zawla, a famous Mizo writer, was of the opinion that Mizo are the richest in songs among the pre literate people of the world.<sup>53</sup> The songs greatly reflected the life of the land and the people. It seems that the rugged terrain and wide coverage of forest urged the people to get into melancholic moods as they had started to compose different types of songs. These songs were the products of their life situation which is composed in a simplest form and encircle with the event of making war or making peace, between love and hatred, expressing joys or sorrows. Hunting practices greatly contributed to the enrichment of the folksongs. The first Mizo songs were composed out of their hunting experiences.

There is no clear evidence about the origin of the folk songs among the Mizos. The earliest songs can be traced back to the period when the people lived in *Chhinlung*. According to tradition as narrated by folk tale there was once a complete darkness on earth which lasted for seven days and nights. During this time a shocking thing happened as most of the youths were lost. Thus, the first song-a song for lamenting and mourning the lost people-anointed as *Thuthmun zai* was born. It was so named as these songs were sung in the sitting postures.<sup>54</sup>

Another song is called *Salulam Hla* meaning 'songs for a dance and feast held to celebrate success in the chase, and to Ai the head of the animal killed' which is in Ralte Clan dialect. This is mostly sung to celebrate shooting a barking deer. The horn of the deer is used for jhum cultivation. As suggested by D.Sailo the period is confined in the year 1350-1450, the time when the Mizo left the Kabow valley and settled in the eastern part of the Chin Hills. The other suggestion is that the first song is composed in the year 1500 in the village of Lentlang in the western area of Chin Hills between Run and Tiau. According to

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<sup>53</sup> Zawla, K; *Mizo Pipute leh an thlahte chanchin*, p.317.

<sup>54</sup> Hrangthiauva, (1978), op cit., pp.300-1; Shakespear, (1975), op cit., p.91ff

K.Zawla and Thanpuii Pa songs began to be composed to accompany dances in celebration of the success of hunting expedition.

Which goes like this:-

My Father shot (killed) a wild gayal,

Our House is beautiful.<sup>55</sup>

And,

Below my cornfield, I killed the wild bear,

And with a shot I down the eagle.

My sons are on the track of the wounded beast.

What was it? a buffalo or elephant?

Oh, I did kill a bear with sharp teeth.

But what, my love has left

Drowning me in the well of loneliness.

It makes me cry.<sup>56</sup>

When the Mizo were in Chin Hills they had started to compose several songs. Pi Hmuaki of Ngente Clan was the first one who is well known for her brilliant ability to compose songs. There was a jealousy among men of her

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<sup>55</sup> Malsawma, J; *Zo Nun* : Aizawl Literary Society. 1980, p.142.

<sup>56</sup> Baveja, J.D; *The Land Where the Bamboo Flowers*, Guwahati Publication Board, Assam, 1970,p.44.



unceasing composition of songs that they buried her alive as they were afraid that she would exhaust all the songs to be composed by the younger generation.<sup>57</sup>

Among the songs composed in the Chin Hills *Hlado* and *Bawhhla* are the song attributed to the Pasaltha. *Hlado* is the cry which the successful hunter raises immediately after he kills an animal in the chase. Thus anyone nearby would know that he had shot an animal. *Bawh Hla* is a song that is chanted by the successful warriors, who would raise it on the battle field in order to call for his confidence to meet the danger he is going to face. The successful hunting party would sing this at the entrance place of the Village called *Kawtchhuah* (a meeting Place) and flintlocks would be fired in the air so as to let the villagers know that they are back successfully and it is also a sign of honor. He would repeat again when the head of the animal he shot had been celebrated in *Ai*. The chant of the warriors were provocative to encourage themselves in times of hunting.<sup>58</sup>

Hlado (the hunter's cry or chant which is raised directly when a wild animal has been killed in the chase, and also on the road home, and before entering the village) is one of the oldest among the Mizo. The origin of Hlado can be traced back to Thangliana a brave warrior of Halkha (Lai Clan). The Lusei clan secretly set up a plot to kill Thangliana in his sleep, but instead they killed his son. Therefore he wandered into many villages of the Lusei for his revenge and killed many villagers as well as wild animals. It was known that after he had killed a Gayal the first Hlado is cried out by Thangliana.<sup>59</sup> The first as a practice is known as the "Sethlangdin" which means that when there was a Khuangchawi ceremony Thangchhuah Pa and his relatives would circle and sing when the Priest made chanting for the sacrifice.

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<sup>57</sup> Zawla, (1993) op, cit., p.252.

<sup>58</sup> Malsawma, J; *Zo Nun* : Aizawl literary society. 1980, p.229-37.

<sup>59</sup> Kauva, *Pi Leh Pute Serh Leh Sang*: Published by MC Lalrinthanga, p.78.

Which goes:-

“Ti lum sialte aw  
Me fim fiam the rasuak aw  
Ka tum a silo  
Kawlin zileng a hawng aw”

Thangchhuahpa with his spear would slowly strike at the Mithun. And later it would be killed by the Sadawt. At the beginning the song was not even called Hlado. The meaning reveals that the hunter was in fight (Do) with wild animals throughout his life. Lai Clan was the first one to have Hlado. The Lusei Clan hunter at earlier used to shout like:-

“Ku ku kui, Vi vin vi viu”.

Soon the Lusei clan followed which had been long been practiced by the Lai clan. There are different types of *Hlado*. According to the types of animal they shot there can be different types of *Hlado*. Such as *Sanghal Hlado* ( Hlado for wild boar), *Savawm Hlado* ( Hlado for a bear), *Sai Hlado*( Hlado for Elephant ), *Tumpang, Sele* ( Kawlfung) *Hlado*, *Sazuk Hlado* (Hlado for a deer), Sakhi Hlado, Satel Hlado. Hlado had been sung at Sa Ai ceremony and also sung at Kawtchhuah (a meeting Place at the village entrance) to indicate that the hunting was successful.

#### **4.15 Reflection of hunting in the belief systems:**

The belief system of the Mizos was determined by their practices of ‘Sakhua biakna’. ‘Sa’ which means ‘meat’, ‘Khua’ means ‘village’ and ‘biakna’ means to ‘communicate’. But in religious connotation it goes much deeper in that

*Sa* stands for the god worshipped by the ancestor and *Khua* for nature or creation. Originally both in concept and in practice of worship, the two words were separated; *Sa* is being worshipped with pig as the sacrifice, and *Khua* being worshipped with a sacrifice of a Mithun. Later, the two were brought together as *Sakhua*. In *Sakhua Biakna* (A sacrifice to the guardian spirit of the clan or family) the chants of the priest invoked the family or clan deities, good spirits of former settlements and strategic places worshipped by the ancestors, to accept the sacrificial animal (pig or Mithun) in the first place, and second followed by the chant performed by *Sadawt* (a man in the village who performed sacrifice for the house holder or for the entire village) to ask for protection or blessing for the householder. Most of the practices among the Mizo clans bear many similarities. J. Shakespear had mentioned a good chanting performed by the *Sadawt*

Which are as follows:-

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from the village, Aw-w</i>                    |
|             | <i>And accept our sacrifice.</i>                       |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from the open spaces in the village. Aw-w</i> |
|             | <i>And accept our sacrifices.</i>                      |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from your dwelling places. Aw-w</i>           |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from the paths. Aw-w</i>                      |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from the gathering mists. Aw-w</i>            |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from the yam plots. Aw-w</i>                  |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from Bualchuam hill. Aw-w</i>                 |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from Khawkaw hill. Aw-w</i>                   |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from Buhman hill. Aw-w</i>                    |
| <i>Ah-h</i> | <i>Arise from above the road. Aw-w</i>                 |

*Ah-h Arise from below the hill. Aw-w*

*Ah-h Arise from Vahlit hill. Aw-w*

*Ah-h Arise from Muchhip hill. Aw-w*

*( the spirits of three more hills are invoked)*

*Ah-h Arise from the new village site. Aw-w*

*Ah-h Arise from the shelf over the hearth. Aw-w*

*Ah-h Arise from the village. Aw-w*

*Ah-h Arise from the floor. Aw-w*

*Ah-h Arise from the earth. Aw-w*

*Ah-h Spirits prayed to by our ancestors.*

*Accept our sacrifice.*

*Bless Luta's spirit (the householder's name)*

*Bless us with sons, bless us with daughters,*

*Bless us while in bed, bless us round the hearth.*

*Makes us flourish like a sago palm,*

*Makes us flourish like a hai tree.*

*Bless us while the sun shines.*

*May those above us bless us, may those below bless us.*

*Guard us from our enemies, guard us from death.*

*Favour us with flesh (May we have success in the chase)*

*Favour us with the produce of the jungle.*

*For ten, for hundred years bless us.*

*Bless us in killing man; bless us in shooting animals,*

*Bless us in cultivating our jhum; bless us in cultivating the beans.*

*Guards us in the presence of men, guard us in the presence of animals.*

*Bless us in our old age,*

*Bless us when our heads are bowed down.*

*Guard us from the spear, guard us from the dao.*

*Those whom our grandmothers worshipped guard us,*

*Those whom our grandfathers worshiped guard us.*

*Bless us in spite of the faults in this our chant,*

*Bless us in spite of the faults in this our worship.<sup>60</sup>*

The sacrificial practice in favour of good hunting and prosperous corn field is called “Kawngpuiisiam”, which may be literally translated as “making a path”. However, the nature of the ritual suggest that it is more than what it is interpreted to be when translated literally. It was usually performed before a large hunting party which usually starts every year beginning in the month of April. The practices were done by *Puithiam* (Priest) and two men of the village. As soon as it was dusk, they went down the short road which leads out of the village southwards taking a small pig with them and they make a fire, and kill the pig and cook its flesh. They drink some *Zu* (wine made of rice) from the gourd which they had carried with them. Presently, they inform the people not to come

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<sup>60</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clan*, pp.70-2 ( Bualchuam hills the hill in which the first men built their first village, Buhmam the hill on which the first bird's nest was built by the crow. The other hills mentioned give a clue to the village sites of the first Lusei chiefs. The omission of a prayer to be preserved from the danger of gunshots shows that the chant has remained unaltered in spite of the gun having superseded by the dao and the spear)

that way. And the *Puithiam* sweeps a place in the middle of the road and places some of the ashes from the fire there, and sings this chant:-

“Animals come, animals of the *Ri* Lake come, animals of the *Champhai* come, animals from the village come, animals of the Aizawl come, you with the tusks, you with the standing manes (bears) you with the branching horns come”.

Then the *Puithiam* picked up small stones and put them in the haversacks, and they returned. As they are about to enter the chief's house, they say, “We bring men and animal's heads”. Upa (elders) who assemble inside the Chief's house then reply back, “Are you enemy or a friend?” Then *Puithiam* reply “We are friends”. So they let them in and they put the stones in the basket as a sign of animal's head. As they enter they are given Zu(wine). The next day is called “*Hrilh*”(Tell or to solemnize) for the whole village. In the morning, they stand up to look at the ashes. If animal's footprints appear it is a sign of luck and if the footprint of men is seen it is a sign of bad luck. It is believed that a man from the village will be killed.<sup>61</sup>

All said, the literal interpretation of “*Kawngpuisiam*” ritual as “making a path” appear to fall short in explaining the true essence, and also in highlighting the purpose of the ritual. It would be more plausible to explain the ritual as a sort of consecration ceremony of the main pathway leading to the village so that the users of the pathway would usher into the village prosperity in jhum, in hunting and success in raids and war.

Therefore we had seen that the practices of the Mizos were determined by the environment they had interacted. The development of implements and tools had also affected the practices as well as the creation of hierarchy within the society. We also see that the structures of dress, housing pattern, naming etc acted as symbols and can be read as a text in portraying social hierarchy in the

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<sup>61</sup> Siama,VL; *Mizo History*, Lalrinliana,Aizawl, 1967, p.75

Pre modern Mizo society. Most of these folk songs etc., has studied as part of the cultural elements clearly reveal a strong material base that is rooted in the production process. In this case hunting was the main forms of production and the hunter was the ideal type who was abstracted in the form of an ideal Thangchhuahpa and became a model to aspired and followed by others.

## **Chapter V**

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### **CONCLUSION**

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Writing the history of the people who had a past but not a history is a daunting task that acquires importance and thus leads us to the part of innovation. In the post colonial period the colonised people like the Indians etc., started writing history in the language of the colonised as the counter narratives that provided new perspectives about their past with a view to reclaim their histories. Indian history has come of age and is able to engage with most of the issues in the global academia using the latest tools and methods. The linguistic turn of the 1980's that employed radical rhetoric and innovative methods taking from the works of Michel Foucault, Derrida and Heidegger had all been taken by the many Indian historians. However, these developments seem to have by passed the Mizo region and by extension, the whole of North East India. The first chapter therefore begins with a critique of the historiographical trends and goes on to explore the rich varieties of themes that one could engage with in reconstructing the Mizo cultural history based on the new paradigms and methods using wide variety of sources. The chapter ends by positing that the bamboo cycle or Mautam can be one of the most important frames of references to reconstruct the chronology of the Mizo history.

History of North east India and more specifically of the Mizo cultural area has primarily been studied under the rubric of political history; a cultural history on the other hand has more or less largely been studied under anthropology or political history. This is one of the vestiges of colonialism. Owing to the highly politicized nature of the context, cultural history has become labelled as exotic and thereby the practices were studied in isolation. At another level they have been studied as part of a project of the identity. A historiography of tracing the earliest writings by the European administrators and the colonial ethnographers is essayed in the chapter beginning from Shakespear, Alexander Mackenzie, Perry, Lloyd etc. The die was cast by these early writers who produced generalized images of Mizo cultural area. These encounters between the colonizers and the colonized brought in a new method of writing history based on the written records. In this chapter a detailed discussion about the problems of the inadequacy of such a project is explained here. The inadequacy begins with the fundamental fact of why the Mizo society was Oral, whereas the history writing was based on printed works. In spite of the prevalence of many sources like archeological, oral and other foreign accounts the European

method of history writing based on written records and the idea of progress became pre dominant thereby relegating the earlier accounts by de-legitimizing them and also considering them as inauthentic. In the 1960's the rise of new cultural history in the west followed by the linguistic turn in the 1980's have given us innovative methods to deal with such context rich recovery of the past. One needs to mention the presence of megaliths that are one of the most important sources like Sibuta Lung, Mangkhaia Lung and Darthiangi Lung. The oral sources associated with the megaliths also informs the myths that still inform the Mizos about their past. One such important myth is a Chhinlung Myth which is accepted by all the clans of the Mizos. Though the church discourse is a strong influence, the concept of Chhinlung, Rih Dil continued to exist posing a problem for the historians. These residual elements in the Mizo tradition are some of the rich repository of the cultural elements. Reconstruction of history by using these elements could make our reading of the past richer. The bamboo famine has been one of the most important events in the history of post colonial Mizo region. In such a situation the entire encounter with a new set of values and institutions was triggered off by the Mizo bamboo famine or Muatam. It is proposed here that the Mautam can be scientifically placed as part of the bamboo flowering cycle and dated with accuracy. This chapter thematically ends the discussion on historiography by proposing the use of Mautam as an important tool to re-construct the periodisation of Pre-British Mizoram. This will help to rehabilitate Mizo history and thus enable us to reconstruct the Mizo history using indigenous categories that are scientifically valid for understanding of the periodisation.

In the next theme the focus is on another area which takes from the historiographical trends by trying to problematise the Mizo myth of origin. In the north east with special reference to the Mizo cultural area that extend beyond to Burma shared not only a myth of origin but also a feeling of kindred oneness which is strengthened by the mutually intelligible languages. As mentioned earlier, the coalition of an oral tradition with a large scale well organized colonial narratives backed by both religious and scientific legitimacy possessing a written form took place. In this encounter, what emerged was the predominance of European narrative along with Christianity. It was hoped that the early Mizo historians like Vanchhunga,

still earlier were the first group of people who followed Shakespear, started a narrative that was more oriented towards biblical explanation like Liangkhaia's book on Mizo Chanchin. The prevailing climate expresses the view that these views would be dominated and the oral tradition would disappear in course of time. In the post colonial scenario the Mizos have one of the largest literacy rates in India and the world and also one of the largest percentages of church going followers. Given this objective condition the wishful thinking of the early missionary that the attitudes towards myth would be eroded and almost be a residual element has been proved wrong. Contrary to this, even today the Chhinlung myth is one of the most researched topics and all schools of history adhered to this as reference point. The Lushai, Chins, Maras, Lai, Mizo Israeli every one emphasize a fundamental beginning of their narratives from this myth. How does one explain this has been posited as a building block of the Mizo societies? The primordial feature of the Mizo society is firmly anchored on this origin myth which explains the importance of this myth. The building block, the primordial elements is reflected in this myth.

The various narratives that place the different clans take out from the shared myths and then fixed themselves. Thus we get the settlement patterns of the Lushai, Mara, Lai, the Old Kuki and the new Kuki, the Chins and the other cognate people in a stretch. This large area extending from Assam in the west to the hills of Burma, Manipur and Burma is the core area where the different cognate groups of the Mizos circulated. Why chieftaincy evolved a new polity based on clans or organize that led to political contestation among different groups. Such pulls and pushes of political expansionism of a resource and territoriality led to migrations. An examination of the narrative in this chapter gives an account of the migrations of the Lushai and the associated clans to Mizoram, the settlement of the Pawih and different clans like Chawngthu and Ralte. While it may be easy to question these claims and counter claims on the basis of conventional historiography that employs a set of source materials that are written in nature, orality does not provide an answer. The answer however lies deeper in the nature of political organization when we find that this large swath of territory from the borders of Assam to the borders of China including all of highland South East Asia is a term called Zomia. One of the central features of Zomia is the opposition to state and all statist apparatuses like writing etc., that

would mean loss of political freedom. Keeping this larger formulation in mind the lack of written documents to explain migration doesn't become an exception but a rule in Zomia. When we re-read these migratory narratives against the background of Zomia they give us an idea of alternate historical consciousness which is not rooted in any written narratives. These narratives engage with the landscape some of which are mythical like Pialral, mythical but with a specified location like Rih dil (Rih Lake) and places with a fixed existence. The interaction of the different groups of people in this highland terrain with the communication based on mutually intelligible dialects led to many cultural flows. The expression of such cultural practices is reflected in the everyday life and practices with the shared common origins. Though there are differences, they are primarily at the level of nomenclature with each cognate tribe claiming a different name. The chapter ends by positing that the term 'Mizo' may be a generic term as the cultural patterns and shared histories of these different clans Ralte, Chawngthu, Lai and Mara etc., converged towards a common cultural form which is proposed as 'Mizo'.

In the pre-literate Mizo societies, one of the main bases of identity was geography as it constituted a worldview formed out of the interaction with a definite terrain. In this case the highland hill regions of North East India stretching to Burma till the Chindwin river form the core area of the Mizo society with certain regions concentrated settlement Aizawl, Hakka, Tidim etc., a cursory description of physical geography would convey only an incomplete understanding of the Mizo culture. Borrowed from Robert Redfield's work on the 'worldview' along with the concept of sacred geography one finds that many of the places mentioned along with the myths gave a clear meaning when these concepts are applied, for example the story of Tlingi and Ngama leads us to the idea of the immortality. This immortality is not only spatially encoded but also tied up with the production pattern. Here we see that Thangchhuah and the others are only having restricted entry. This is tied up with the process of re-distribution. Similarly other functions served by the sacred geography include aspects of prohibition as found in the Dil huai where morality is stressed. The sacred geography is a series of places that served to explain the unexplainable and the agents of this process are the super-natural beings in the forms of spirits, demons, patrons of wild animals etc.,. By their functions, they give meaning and

approval to certain forms of conduct which lead to the regulation of society. Therefore, the organisation of society can be explained by an engagement not only with the real world that is physically discernible but also the unseen world which is invisible and believe to regulate many of the natural phenomena in all their multifarious aspects. Thus helping the individual to overcome one of the most primal fears, the fear of the unknown and in this process give a coherent worldview of the natural social and religious phenomena with their explanations. We have observed that in this juncture centuries old worldview with the colonial encounter and spread of Christianity. While the early missionary writings and church practices did not encourage these narratives, their persistence points to the solidity of their primordial foundation and as such remained as one of the sources of identity. In the recent days their incorporation in to the church lyrics marched a new process whereby the Mizos have negotiated to blend the aspects of past with modernity creating a form of Christianity wherein the rootedness within the Mizo cultural is firmly established.

While colonialism constructed the image of the pre modern Mizo as a savage, they were informed primarily by the hunters whose occasion was dubbed as ferocious. On a closer observance we find that the colonial view has challenged one of the ideals of the Mizo society; Thangchhuah Pa has not been fully rehabilitated in history. The final chapter is an attempt to restore the rightful place of Thangchhuah in history and also to problematise the concept of hunting as a very sophisticated form of production. In the process of hunting as the form of production, the Thangchhuah can be located as an institution in a clan based chiefdom. The economic basis of the chiefdom rested on subsistence jhum cultivation and hunting gathering, which were the constituents of the used economy. Therefore, the institution of Thangchhuah as a feast involved a sacrifice of a set of animals that were hunted. There are two ways of attaining this status Inlam Thangchhuah and Ramlam Thangchhuah.

As the feasts were an event and Thangchhuahpa had to spend a sizable sum and also mobilise recourses it needed both physical bravery and economic basis to enter the higher strata. Thus, the combination of bravery and economic prosperity regulated the entry of the potential Thangchhuahpa. In addition it also generated

symbols visible not only in names and titles but also in two important aspects – the construction of house and dress. While the construction of the house was a visible and tangible form of superordinate status, it showed the dynamics of stratification and also indicated the capability of a person. In a society where markers of status are symbolically encoded in dress the song of the Thangchhuah served as a semiotic currency which was recognizable everywhere in the Mizo cultural area more specifically in the immediate kin based chiefdom.

Tlawmngaihna is another important concept which outlined the ethics of hunting and also synchronises hunting in its social ecology. Long lists of taboos and do's and don'ts led to sustainable use and prevented over exploitation of the forest. The matters of rituals to the contribution of Mizo cultural formation is also reflected in the folk songs. The folk songs also reveal a clear material base emanating from the Thangchhuah practices. The war cry, the contents of the song are all reflective of the brave warrior in the rugged terrain. Further the direct input into the belief systems comes from the Thangchhuah which is clearly revealed as an etymological analysis of Sakhua biakna is done. The cycle of seasons of sacrifice are largely determined by the Thangchhuah.

Therefore we have seen that the practices of the Mizos were determined by the environment they had interacted with but we cannot label it as geographical determinism since a historical study shows the effect of human agency and veers towards a combination of geographical determinism and possibilism. The development of implements and tools had also affected the practices as well as the creation of hierarchy within the society. We also see that the structures of dress, housing pattern, naming etc.

Thus Thangchhuah reflects the process of re-distribution and reciprocity by regulating excess hunting and preventing unsustainable destructions of animal life. It also regulates the entry into social hierarchy by strong gradation based on redistribution of the resources which are the products of hunting. Similarly the clan egalitarianism is upheld by the reciprocity that is culturally enjoined and ritually sanctioned.

The cultural history of the Mizos during the pre British period can be written only with a fair use of the oral literature and a study of the practices of hunting and sacred geography by using new methods from cultural history and employing indigenous concepts and categories like Pialral and Thangchhuah. It accomplishes two things; firstly, to negate the negative colonial historiography and rehabilitate Mizo history by providing judicious reading based on combination of modern methods rooted in the Mizo cultural tradition. The thesis proposes that the concept of worldview and Thangchhuah are important makers that bring forth the Mizo identity in a wider canvas and give explanation to myths and legends that are in alienable part and continue to be so in the Mizo worldview even today. On a methodological note, the thesis ends by proposing the use of Mautam as a chronological marker that is both culturally consonant and scientifically valid along with the use of generic term Mizo. It is hoped that the employment of this term would give a full play to the various identities and their histories that are mutually intelligible societies which have now emerged as the Mizo.

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### **Interviews**

An interview with Lalchhanhima Sailo (L) the former President of Chhinlung Israel before he died on the subject "*Mizo Chhinlung- Israel*" at his residence, Canteen Kual, Aizawl, Mizoram.

An interview with F. Lala the former General Secretary of Chhinlung Israel "*Mizo Chhinlung- Israel*" at Chhinlung Israel Office, Canteen Kual, Aizawl, Mizoram

An interview with Pu. Henmanga on the subject "*Lai culture and history*" at Lawngtlai, Mizoram.

An interview with Dr. Chawngkhuma on the subject "*Mara culture and history*" at Siaha, Mizoram.

An interview with Dr. K.Zohra on the subject "*Mara culture and history*" at Siaha, Mizoram.

An interview with Rev. Z.T. Sangkhuma on the subject "*Mizo believe system*" at his resident, Aizawl, Mizoram.

An interview with Lalthangliana on the subject "Sacred Geography of Tan and Lurh mountain, at Farkawn, Mizoram.

An interview with Dr. J.V. Hluna on the subject "*Mizo culture and history*" at PU College, Aizawl, Mizoram.

## Appendix

### **Different type of Hlado**

Tumpang Hlado	Mual liai e, luaiah khan e, valpan tumpang kan chhaih awk e, Zantiang e, man man loh e, runah thangkim nan kan tlun e.
Savawm Hlado	Tulum e, rual lian maw le, thuam ang do lungphang lem hlah e, Vala e, zuk ngir ila, rum lian e, hrang lai kan tuk ni'n e.
Sakhi Hlado	Chuni e, chhimtawl run thlang rak phiat u law, Kawli e, sakhi le maw mal mi e, a zul duh ngai hlah e.
Sazuk Hlado	Run in e, kan sak hi e mawi maw, hreuthang ki sau tlung e. Bang rual e, kan tuah fawn e, mawi maw ka thai lengi kai ni e.  Chuni e, chhimtawl run thlang rak phiat u law, Kawli e, sakhi le maw mal mi e, a zul duh ngai hlah e.
Fahrah Haldo	Ka nu e, tap tuk hlah law, bilhpuan e, khumlai rak hlip u law, Thlafam e, nghilh nakah e, kawli e, vui tum lian a rak tlung e.
Khuannu hnena dilna Hlado	Kei chu e, ka nei hlah e, ar bang e, vai lang a hnuah e, Khuanu e, i tuah u law, ha tha e, ka run i rial hlah law.