Chapter VI

EVOLUTION OF SETTLEMENT IN MIZORAM

INTRODUCTION

Man by nature is a social animal and lives in a gregarious manner. He lives in communities, in a single collection of houses that form the settlement. Yet one can see various types and patterns of settlements as reflected by its environs. Settlements have gradually evolved over a long period of time and by analysing their sites, types, spatial pattern and functions, one could decipher the history of man's exploitation of the surrounding environment and resources.\(^1\)

---

The analysis of rural population and rural settlement is of immense importance in this context because of its dominance and the fast transformation which is experienced in the study area during the last three decades especially after 1967. The development and transformation is fairly at a progressive pace due to socio-political enlightenment and urbanisation. A number of rural settlements originally associated with traditional jhuming and forests are undergoing change towards urbanisation. The study of population and settlements in Mizoram has its distinct characteristics.

The study and growth of rural population, its distributional pattern, process and other distinctive characteristics and spatial pattern of settlements depends upon the scale of observation\(^2\). The present analysis attempts to examine the influence of physical and cultural environments and socio-economic as well as political factors affecting the settlement pattern in Mizoram.

EARLY STREAMS OF MIGRATION AND EVOLUTION OF SETTLEMENTS IN MIZORAM

It is a very difficult task to trace the origin and evolution of settlements in Mizoram. This is mainly due

to the fact that there is no integrated historical account of the region as it is occupied by ignorant tribals who have lived for a long time in physical isolation and have no scripts of their own. There is no evidence of pre-historic settlement in this region.

Before the advent of the British in this region, the Mizo people were isolated from each other due to difficult terrain, dense forest and lack of transport network. The lack of interaction with the outside world coupled with inaccessibility of the land left them comparatively untouched and, therefore, they remain primitive in character for long period of time.

Traditionally, the Mizo claim themselves the descendants from CHHINLUNG, a mythical rock, east of Shan State in Burma bordering China. Migration of tribal

3. Some writers believe that CHHINLUNG might have been the name of a cave from which the forefathers of the Mizo tribes came out. Their argument is that the word 'Chhin' means 'cover' and 'Lung' stands for 'stone' and therefore, Chhinlung denotes 'Covering Stone'. This legend is quite common among the other tribes such as Gangte, Paite, Thado, Vaiphei, etc. On the other hand, some writers like R. Vanlawma contends that 'Chhinlung' stands for the name of a Chinese ruler Chien Lung, during whose reign the Mizo moved out to the present habitat. On the other hand, B.K. Roy Burman, in his book, "Socio-Economic Profiles of the Hills Areas of North-East India" (1961, p.84) opines it to be the present Silung in China bordering Shan State in the eastern part.
groups seems to have had taken place as early as the beginning of the 15th century. This migration of different groups was retarded by several haltages at certain locations for longer and lesser periods through Shan State, Chindwin Valley and Chin Hills in Burma.

According to Zawla (1964)\(^4\), the Mizo migration to the hills began in 1463, whilst Professor Luce estimates the Mizo migration took place during the 26th Century\(^5\). Thanga (1978)\(^6\) writes about the settlement of Lusei in the Kabaw valley around Khampat: "That the Mizos belong to the Mongoloid stock is not disputed. That they came from the East is also not disputed. That their original home was in Mekong Valley and that they once lived in the Hukawng Valley was further corroborated by many including an old Burmese priest at Mandalay to Mizo historians who had visited Mandalay to trace the history of their origin and migration. According to him, the ancestors of the Mizos came from Shanghai, possibly in tenth century. By which route they came, and how long they took to reach Hukawng Valley in Burma is now lost in obscurity". According to

\(^4\) Zawla, K., Mizo Pipute leh An Thlahte Chanchin (in Mizo), Aizawl, 1964.
\(^5\) Vumson, Zo History, Aizawl, Mizoram, India, p.58.
Zawla (1964)\(^7\) ... they came to the Chindwin belt about 996 A.D.\(^7\).

Liangkhaia (1938)\(^8\) wrote that the first large-scale migration of the Mizos started from the Chin Hills by crossing over hill ranges bordering south-west Manipur. The Mizo tribes entered the present Mizoram in successive bands and the Hmars, a Mizo sub-tribe, were first to enter. As to the date of their migration from Chin Hills to Mizoram, Soppit (1976)\(^9\) believes that the first batch of the Mizo tribes after crossing Tiau river settled in Mizoram some time in the middle of the 16th Century. Liangkhaia (1938)\(^10\) also supports this view and agrees that a section of Hmars entered the Manipur plain about the middle of the 16th Century and the beginning of the 17th Century A.D.

According to Songate (1977)\(^11\) the Mizos entered Mizoram in four successive batches. The first batch included the sub-clans of Hmar such as Hrangkhwai, Pang,

\begin{itemize}
\item Liangkhaia, \textit{Mizo Chanchin} (in Mizo), Aizawl, 1938, pp.7-8.
\item Soppit, C.A., \textit{A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes}, Aizawl (Reprint), 1976, p.vii.
\item Liangkhaia, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.7-8.
\item Songate, Hranglien, \textit{Hmar Chanchin} (Hmar History), Churachandpur, Manipur (reprint), 1977, pp.145-146.
\end{itemize}
Mualthuam, and Chhunthang under their chief Chawnhmang who eventually migrated to Tripura. They were followed by Hrangchal, Ngurte, Darngawn, Lungtau, Leiri and Changsen.

Since each clan followed a particular route and built their own villages, the villages are to be known by the clan's name. To this day, many of these villages are in existence under such names like Biate, Chhungte, Darngawn, Khawbung, Khawzawl, Ngur, Thiak, Vankal, Zote and so forth 12.

The Mizo after reaching the present Mizoram, found the land to be very healthy and embracing climate and thought that it was the land which nature has provided for them. They were predominantly agriculturists in the form of shifting cultivation. They settled usually in a single collection of houses, situated on the hill tops than on low level ground with a view to secure easy defence organisation. It is important to note that before the advent of the Britishers in the present Mizoram, the Mizo were head-hunting tribes. The selection of sites for settlements was on the hill tops where they could have a better defence for the villages.

Each village was ruled by the Chief who looked after the welfare of its citizens and was the supreme head

in matter of handling village administration/disputes, distribution of land, etc. With a view to enlarge their territorial possession, the inter-village and inter-clan wars were the order of the day. This eventually resulted to dispersion and micro-regional migration.

In short, as a result of the wars among the clans and villages, certain clans of the Mizo origin have later migrated to different parts of north-east India. The sub-clans of Hmars fled to north and west to Manipur, Cachar, Sylhet and Tripura. A section of Biate entered Cachar district between 1730 and 1780 A.D. and some of them went upto North Cachar Hills and Meghalaya.13

Thus, it may be summed up that the Mizo are racially Mongoloid stock in origin, who migrated towards the present habitat somewhere from China during the 15th to 16th Century, following different routes by each clan at different stages with several haltages at different places. It appears that the first batch (of successive batches of migrants) entered the present Mizoram in the period between the middle of 16th Century and the beginning of the 17th Century. They were content to settle there as far as geographical environment was

concerned. But certain minority clans (sub-tribes) were forced out of the land as a result of inter-clan and inter-village wars. The advent of the British and the eventual attainment of Indian independence changed the way of living to a surmount extent that the Mizo started to adopt modern way of living and have settled down permanently till date, and the inter-village or inter-clan wars are no more experienced but form a part of history.

Although the prime factors in selection of sites and development of settlements might have lost most of its significance at present, but it is imperative to trace the evolution of settlement in this region.

The first settlers in a new and virtually untouched environment have to exist in a self sufficient manner. This was true of the early and isolated settlers of the present Mizoram. The first inhabitants, with their necessary limited knowledge, made more or less rational judgement concerning choice of sites for their villages. Important to them was the availability of cultivable land and close supply of water. In addition, building materials and fuel were also important.

The Mizo have always been particular about their place of residence, and a considerable thought was given to the subject of village sites. The highest hill top started as favourite and the site subsequently chosen would be that with proximity to cultivable lands, water supply and other positive hygienic considerations. A compact pattern of settlement was most common in the early development of villages. Houses were constructed close to each other with some sense of regularity arranged usually in two lanes, the front of the houses all facing towards each other and separated by a space treated as a village street. The physical configuration was responsible for the built up of the village structure; it determined the pattern and direction of houses or village street.

Nevertheless, the first settlers in a place must often have made false start and sometimes settled down permanently on a less good site even with a better site closeby. In a similar way, mistakes might have been made which could be seen clearly in the light of later development. Thus, we find some areas in a division of the original settlements into two with the prefix 'old' and 'new' attached to the original name. Although we see that shifting of village sites as a consequence of

development in respect of economic and social amenities in the region.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LOCATION AND GROWTH OF SETTLEMENT

The factors that affect spatial aspects of settlement are as complex and varied as are the patterns of distribution. Not only the physical environment is operative in determining location of settlement, but cultural environment and socio-economic and political factors also play a vital role in determining the establishment of settlement. Among the physical environment, topography, geology, terrain, climate, drainage, forest and soil are the significant factors.

In Mizoram settlements are mainly governed by the configuration of land surface, climate, water availability and proximity to arable land. The ethnogenetic factors like tradition, necessity of defence and security, and availability of land for traditional jhum practices have also exerted much influence on the sites of settlement.

Most of the settlements in Mizoram are located on the hill top or crest, that only a very few settlements are found located on the lower valleys or riverine banks. An attributable reason for the selection of hill top settlement is readiness for defence purpose. The early
Mizo were involved in conflict and constant war for territorial possession, as is found in most of the tribal history. The ruggedness of the topography gives no alternative place other than hill top as the existing small patches of level lands (riverine banks) can support only a few settlements.

Climatic condition is another important factor that influence the settlement in Mizoram. The hill crest have pleasant climate with good sunshine, while the low lying valleys are marked by humid, warm and sultry weather. Hence, the hill tops and crests offer the only alternative base for human habitation.

Another factor that helped in selection of settlement sites and growth is the availability of resource potentials and development of infrastructures. Despite the unpleasant climatic condition prevailing on the low valleys or along the river banks, certain settlements exist mainly because of availability of fertile land. The process of economic development, especially infrastructure like road development has led to the establishment of new settlement with a new function suited to its location.

Depending upon the above mentioned factors, the location of settlements in Mizoram can broadly be
described as follows:

i) Settlement on the hill top and hill slope

ii) Settlement along the watershed

iii) Settlement along the main road

iv) Settlement along the river.

i) **Settlement on the Hill Top and Hill Slope**

The location of settlement on flat hill top and gentle hill slope terrain was the marked characteristic feature of the hills as defence in the Pre-British period was the most decisive factor in selection of sites for settlement. This choice is also favoured by congenial climatic condition. A numerous settlements, both large and small are situated on the hill tops and hill slopes of the State. The researcher who conducted an extensive field work had no doubt that about 50 per cent of the total settlements in Mizoram are situated on hill top and hill slopes. The remarkable mountain ranges which support settlements of this type are Hachhek Range in the north-western part, Chalfilh-Ratu Range in the north central, Sialkal Range in the north-east, Zopui-Tan-Lurh Ranges in the east, etc. All these ranges are characterised by high degree of slopes and rugged topography that compels the inhabitants to occupy the hill top and hill slopes. The hill top and hill slope settlements are a common
feature in Mizoram and are found numerously throughout the region.

ii) Settlement along the Watershed

A large number of settlements are found located along and between the watersheds, and their distribution varies from place to place. The study of topographical maps reveals that quite a number of settlements are located along the watershed formed by numerous tributaries of different river systems or basins. For instance, North Vanlaiphai, East Lungdar and Khawbung are conspicuous example covered by Toposheet No.84E/4, issued by Survey of India.16

iii) Settlement along the Main Road

The development of transport route has also affected the feature of settlement in Mizoram. It has been mentioned that most of the villages in the region are situated on top of the hills. But when motorable road cannot connect them due to various engineering reasons, the villagers are tempted to come down to settle along the main road. By this process, villages like Rengdil, Dampui

(Plate 7.6), New Vervek, Baktawng, Khawhai, etc. have come down from their original hill top location to the road sides. This phenomena is seen taking place in all along the roads constructed by B.R.T.F. and P.W.D.

iv) Settlement along the River

This type of settlement is found on the low lying valleys of perennial rivers where agriculture or horticulture is practicable. The availability of fertile soil is the main factor for the growth of valley settlements. So that the adjoining areas of certain important rivers such as Tut, Teirei, Tlawng, Langkaih, Chhimtuipui, Khawthlangtuipui and Tuichawng are intervened by a number of settlements.

TRADITIONAL CHIEFTAINSHIP AS AN AFFECTING FACTOR OF POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT IN MIZORAM

The Mizo society as it exists today is indeed very different from what it was about fifty years back. Changes have swept over the region in an extremely rapid manner. Till the early fifties or so, the Mizo chief was the real centre of authority in Mizoram. It is said that the people had adopted the chief system so that they could be guided and governed in all activities of life. In due course of time the chief became hereditary, and the benefit of becoming a chief went to the eldest son. The
chiefs used to be the protectors of village life and property. The entire land and villages belonged to them and it was them who distributed the jhum lands for cultivation to the villagers. Besides disposing of land for cultivation the chief also used to administer justice according to the customary laws of the Mizo. They saved men from revenge and took them under their protection. A chief also have his cabinets called upa to assist him in the day to day administration of the villages under his jurisdiction.

The Chief was usually called Lal which means a lord in Mizo language. He maintained his position more through his personal qualities than hereditary rights, even though under normal circumstances the sons of the chief were provided by him with ample opportunity to build themselves up as Chiefs. Thus as soon as a Chief's son attained maturity, the Chief would set up a separate village with the mature son as its Chief and a few of the households from his village transferred to the new village. He was not supposed to pay any tribute to his father-Chief and was left to himself to establish his position as a Chief through his personal ability. 17

The Chief's position in the village was indeed that of a benevolent ruler. All those who lived in the village were looked upon as his own children. He was bound to help them in their adversities, counsel them in their difficulties, reward them in their achievements and punish them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or infringement of established customs. The villagers, in their turn, were to obey his orders implicitly, carry out errands assigned to them individually and collectively and help the Chief in all possible ways. It must, however, be mentioned that the Chief was not an autocrat, and in fact, could not afford to be so if he desired to retain his chieftainship as they would leave him and take shelter under different chief in another village if they found him tyrannical or indifferent to their needs and conveniences.\(^{18}\)

Just as the Chief had the right to banish from his domain any person who incurred his displeasure or whom he considered undesirable, a villager had also the corresponding right to migrate from one Chief's village to another's if the latter agreed. In fact, a strong good chief who administered according to customary law could get away with almost anything, while a weak chief

indulging in petty tyranny was likely soon to find himself a king without any subjects.

From the above text, it can rightly be perceived that existence of large size village was not applicable in the past Mizo society as a village was to remain under the rule of a king. It is important to note here that not only traditional chieftainship is responsible for small population size of the village, but want of cultivable land for jhuming has always been a key factor restricting the village size. Large population in a village would reflect in long distance to jhum lands which would give less time for the villagers to attend their jhuming, leading to a resultant reduction of jhum harvests.

Consequent upon these factors, the settlements in Mizoram has remained scattered here and there, containing only very few population. Of course, the society and the region has gone through the inevitable wind of change. There has certainly been a lot of improvement in various directions. The recent developmental programmes and modernization has shaped the typical village structure and population quality into transitory stage with better living condition of the population. However, it appears that the emotional and sentimental attachment to traditional and societal village life of the past still linger in the mind of elderly Mizo.
PLATE NO. 6.1 :: A hill-top settlement of Serhmun Village in western part of Aizawl district.
Note: 1) House type, made up mostly of bamboos
2) Kitchen garden with bamboo fencing, 3) Chillies being dried in the sun, 4) A Mizo girl carrying home firewood by a typical basket.

PLATE NO. 6.2 :: Hill-top and Hill-slope settlement of Cherhmun Village, south-eastern part of Lunglei district.
PLATE NO. 6.3 :: Kawrthah Village, an example of settlement on the watershed.

PLATE NO. 6.4 :: Settlement along the main road - Tuidam village in western Aizawl district.
PLATE NO. 6.5: A village water point. One has to go down a mile or so to obtain washing and bathing facilities, especially during dry season.

PLATE NO. 6.6: Collection of rainwater is a common practice, although only few families could afford to obtain storage.
PLATE NO.6.7 :: A new water point at doorstep is greatly welcomed. Kawrthah villagers rushing for water during the hour.

PLATE NO.6.8 :: A hill slope settlement of Khawhri village, Lunglei district depicting a typical Mizo village. Note the Church building and a Community Hall under construction.