Chapter III

Mizo Cultural Worldview:
Geographical Space and its impacts on Culture
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. ¹

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.

¹ 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. 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.

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

---

2 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
3 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 *Mithi 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.” 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

---

his sorrow cried himself to death insconsolably 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.5

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

5 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.6 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.7

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.

6 Lalmama, Mizo Titi, 1963 p.4
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*. 8 (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, 9 meaning the dead-man’s fence and the birds found near the lake were also known as *Mithi Ar*, 10 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. Khawleiki 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 11 The earlier Mizo writer Siaithanga pointed out that the marks which appeared on the rock were left by the souls of women using some iron materials. 12 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 *Mithi 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

8 Lalrinawma, (2005), op cit., p.95  
10 Lalthangliana, B; *Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of Mizo in India, Burma and Bangladesh)*, RTM Press, Aizawl, 2001.p.324  
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” ¹³

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.

¹³ 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.” 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

---

14 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 n 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 outskirt 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. 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. Lasi were concerned with wild animals and had power of control over the animals.

*Picture: Tan mountain*

---

15 Kipgen, (1997) op cit., p.40
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 -

\[
\begin{align*}
Lurhpuia mi, & \text{ Tan ami tuan in rel emaw,} \\
Tuan kan rel lo ve Lalchungnungan laimi man e, & \\
Serh kan kham reng e. & \\
Lamritlingi te, & \text{ Dartinlal lan rawh,} \\
Thliahlalan dawn rawh e. & 
\end{align*}
\]

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 Tantlang 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 Lalchungunga’s elopement we approve not
We will have a rest day instead.

One day Chawngtineri, 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 Nghaphusen 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 Rokhawliana 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). Inspite of her fervent pleas, Rokhawliana alone would not leave her. The Lasi at last rolled up her loom and suddenly disappeared among the rocks and Rokhawliana 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 Rokhawliana 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 Rokhawliana 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. Rokhawliana 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. 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.

\[Rih tlang a phei duai,\]
\[Rau thla leng kalna chu,\]
\[An kal zel a,\]
\[Van dung chung khua chu an thleng,\]
\[Chu rama lengte chuan,\]
\[Hnutiang ngaïin,\]
\[Suïhlung an chhir ngailo,\]
\[Hringnun hi an ngai tawh lo ve.\]

\(^{37}\) 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. They also give meaning to the relationship between man and land in Mizoram that are encoded in the sacred geography of worldviews.

---