Chapter IV

Moments of hierarchy: Social stratification and symbols of portraying
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.\(^1\) The period for these practices began during the sojourn in (Run leh Tiau Inkar) Burma as stated by Rev. Liangkhaia around AD 1000-1500.\(^2\) As for the Mara clan

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1 Liangkhaia, Rev; Mizo Chanchin; Published by Mizo Academy of Letters 1976, p.24.
2 Ibid. p.21
the series of feasts included Phidong, Vothawthi, Vori, Seichhong, Beibe, 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 sut nghak 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. 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. 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.

The first series of feast for the Mara was called Phidong. The anahmang (certain articles usually pot 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

3 Perry, N. E; The Lakhers, Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, on behalf of Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1976, p.372.
5 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.⁶

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⁶ 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.\(^7\) Besides these animals one must also kill a large snake called Rulngan, a flying lemur (Vahluk), and an eagle (Muvanlai) to gain greater honor.\(^8\) 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.\(^9\) 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.\(^10\)

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.

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

\(^8\) Shakespeare; *Lushei kuki Clans*, Parts I and II, 1912, reprinted by Tribal Research Institute, 1975, p.63.

\(^9\) 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

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\textsuperscript{11}.

### 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 huaisen, Sa kap thei_” which means “A brave and good hunter”. This was regarded as a kind of blessing for the new offspring.\textsuperscript{12} 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

\textsuperscript{11} Lorraine, James Herbert; Dictionary of the Lushai Language (4\textsuperscript{th} reprint) Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1997, p.447.

\textsuperscript{12} ..............: _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!13

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

13 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. 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. 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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14 Siama V.L; *Mizo History: Lengchhawn Press, Bethel House, Khatla, Aizawl Mizoram.* p.54
origin of the chieftainship can be traced back to the period when the Mizos were in the Chin Hills.\textsuperscript{16}

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.\textsuperscript{17} However the chiefs from the southern part belonging to Mara clan, Lai clan had never fallen under the Sailo influence and clout.\textsuperscript{18} 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:

\begin{quote}
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
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} The Exact date cannot be indicated however it will be assume to be around 1500 AD.
\textsuperscript{17} Kipgen; \textit{Mizo culture}, Mizo Theological Conference Mizoram, 1997, p.58
\textsuperscript{18} Chatterji, N, Dr; \textit{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.  

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.  

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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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.\(^{21}\)

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*.

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.22

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.

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: Thangehhuah
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.23

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 Hrukhau 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

23 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, tawhllohpuan, 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. 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 Mualveng. 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 Hmeitha (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.

![Mizo village](source: <myzone.blogspot.com>)

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24 Lalrinawma, V.S.(Rev); *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, Published by Mizoram Publication Board at Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl, 2005, p.3
Thangchuah 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.\(^{25}\) 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*.\(^{26}\) 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.\(^{27}\) 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’.\(^{28}\) He then cut down the tree with dao and says ‘*ka ar hlui khuangin a thai thluk e*’ which


\(^{26}\) Already explained in the previous page of this chapter

\(^{27}\) K. Zawla, *Mizo Pipute leh an thlahte chanchin*, pp. 23-24

means ‘the fall was caused by my crowing cock’. 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 —

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{‘Mu chhepa fuk nan ka ti lo,} \\
&S\text{a chhepa fuk nan ka ti lo,} \\
&C\text{halvawma lu chuan nan ka ti e.’}
\end{align*}
\]

(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 -

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

\[\text{\footnotesize 29} \text{ Ibid., p.116}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 30} \text{ B. Lalthangliana, Mizo Chanchin, Aizawl, 2001, p.341}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 31} \text{ J. Shakespeare,(1975), op.cit., p. 90}\]
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 inhibited 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 trial 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.\footnote{Parry, (1996), op.cit., p.136.} 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.\footnote{Hudson, T.C (Thomas Callan); The Naga Tribes of Manipur, Macmillan and Co., Limited, London, p.38.}

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 Kawutchhuah (a place of gathering nearby the village). If a bird known as Bawngpui (Irliak) took lead towards the forest and
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.\footnote{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.} There is one story about Taipesena a valiant Pasaltha that one day while hunting; they prepared themselves for a night stay. After the dinner their leaders suggested that the
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.35

It is the by-product of hunting practices which evolved the spirit of “Tlawmngaihna”. N.Chatterji puts it as a wonderful philosophy of life36 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.37

35 The Mizo heroes; Tribal research Institute, Department of art and Culture, Mizoram, p.90
36 Chatterji, N; Zawlbuk as a Social Institution in the Mizo Society, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1975, p.15.
37 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.  

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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38 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.\textsuperscript{39} Chatterji stated that Tlawmngaihna to a Mizo stands for that compelling moral-force which finds expression in self-sacrifice for the service of others.\textsuperscript{40}

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:

\begin{quote}
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
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
to enable animals killed to accompany him with pomp and
grandeur on his march towards Pialral after death.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{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.\textsuperscript{42} 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.\textsuperscript{43} 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

\textsuperscript{41} Kipgen, (1997), op.cit., p. 121.
\textsuperscript{42} An interview with Pu. Henmanga, Lawngtlai.
\textsuperscript{43} 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.”

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*).
The following night is *aoh*, 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. 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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45 The day after the formal entry into the house is *aoh*, Perry, NE, The Lakhers, p.66.
46 Kipgen, (1977), op.cit., p.61.
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.\textsuperscript{47} 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.”\textsuperscript{48} He ascribes this difference to the existence of Zawlbuk among the Luseis 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.\textsuperscript{49} 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 \textit{Mithi Khua (the village of the death)} or \textit{Athikhi} or \textit{Pialral (Paradise)}.\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Mithi Khua} is the village after death usually for the commoners whereas \textit{Pialral} is the place beyond \textit{Mithi Khua} and it is only for the \textit{ThangchhuahPa}, a title beyond the dreams of most people. Those who had a position to go to \textit{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

\textsuperscript{47} Parry, (1975), op.cit., p.27.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, p.28.
\textsuperscript{49} Tlawmngaihna will be explain in different themes in this chapter
\textsuperscript{50} 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 Mithikhuja 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. 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 of 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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51 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 Sapel” which means hunt for a day. If they shoot 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 Sapel” 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. 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 Kemrehei, 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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52 NE Parry in his book The Lakhers mentioned that After the Nepoleonic 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 shot 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 “Sachhawlchhin”. 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. 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.

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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53 Zawla, K; Mizo Pipute leh an thahtle chanchin, p.317.
54 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.55

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.56

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

56 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.57

Among the songs composed in the Chin Hills Hlado and Bawhha 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 Kawtechhuah (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.58

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.59 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.

59 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 householder 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:-

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\begin{align*}
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from the village, Aw-w} \\
& \quad \text{And accept our sacrifice.} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from the open spaces in the village. Aw-w} \\
& \quad \text{And accept our sacrifices.} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from your dwelling places. Aw-w} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from the paths. Aw-w} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from the gathering mists. Aw-w} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from the yam plots. Aw-w} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from Bualchuam hill. Aw-w} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from Khawkawk hill. Aw-w} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from Buhman hill. Aw-w} \\
\text{Ah-h} & \quad \text{Arise from above the road. Aw-w}
\end{align*}
\]
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.\textsuperscript{60}

The sacrificial practice in favour of good hunting and prosperous corn field is called “Kawngpuisiam”, 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 \textit{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 \textit{Zu} (wine made of rice) from the gourd which they had carried with them. Presently, they inform the people not to come

\textsuperscript{60} Shakespear, \textit{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.61

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

61 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.