

dialect which the better number of these tribes speak and write today. Their efforts to direct and channelize the spirit and vigour of youth towards tangible and meaningful ends are unparalleled. Aside from these traits they had a strong love for nature and is remembered for the many songs that they composed and also inspired to be composed through their deeds and character. In all, as a chief, they manifested the desired spirit of those times when life was closely related to the law of the jungle or the “survival of the fittest.” While feared by enemies they were considerate to the poor and the infirm. Within the harsh environment rife with feuds and vendettas, they were the pillar of succor. It is due to their outstanding figure that they were able to engender a trust form the other clans a place of chieftainship not only for his own progenies but also for the general Sailo. It was from the villages ruled by Sailo chiefs that most of today’s Mizoram was evinced.

## **CHAPTER- 6**

### **THE MATURE TRADITIONAL SOCIETY**

Within the span of about few centuries as the Mizo ancestors migrated from Chin Hills and reached present Mizoram, there was a process of development of a certain form that we may call the traditional society. The features and characteristics of the society are highlighted in the institutions that were developed by them. These institutions while are an articulation of their needs and propensities, are an embodiment of the norms and principles that guided communal living. They are a reflection of the promotion of values and etiquette, for direction of human energy and

individual ambition for social harmony. As these norms guided social life they also formed the basis of their conceptualisation of their abstract reality or world view.

Thus there were various social institutions that were established in the process of migration and development of society. Whereas the social background against which these institutions were established have been broadly explained, we may present, in greater detail, their function and role in the society. For further elucidation and clarity, these institutions may be grouped in two broad categories – those that stemmed from food production and those that were induced by war and social conflict.

However, since these social institutions are abstract notions and necessarily stem from the interplay between man and nature, it is necessary to first present the background and physical reality that determined the conditioning of social life.

### **The Village**

Since, the Mizo people were acquainted with, and practised agriculture, they could live together in groups - thus villages. However, shifting cultivation and the rugged and densely forested hills prevented large settlements. These factors made them break up into different groups who soon became hostile to each other. Therefore, life, aside from being a continuous struggle against nature, hung in perpetual peril from the perpetration of other kindred groups. Ensnared in an ecological niche where the main consideration of these 'wild tribes' was necessarily that of safety, the considerations that impinged upon these people at this time made

them settle on the top or side of hills and to conglomerate together for added strength and security. Naturally, a preferable sight for a village was on the top or high slope of a hill overlooking the neighbouring landscape so that it could be easily defended - despite the difficulties of having to fetch water and to carry whatever was needed up the hill slopes. As the Mizo also considered the hills to be naturally more healthy and pleasant than the plains, it was natural to select the higher slopes for their settlement.

The Mizo people called their settlements *Khua*. From the accounts given by the first British people who saw them, these *Khua* had population ranging from 500 to 2000 and sometimes even up to 3000 houses.<sup>262</sup> For a description of a Mizo village the account given by Shakespear may be cited-

‘When we first occupied the country, every village was surrounded by one or more lines of stockade made of timber, with several rows of bamboo spikes outside it. At each gateway was a blockhouse, and others were built at suitable places on the roads on which enemies were expected to come, and were occupied whenever an attack was apprehended...The gate itself was composed either of two large slabs of timber, or of a number of stout saplings from a cross bar cut through their upper ends; during the day these were drawn aside, but at night they hung perpendicularly in the gateways and were firmly secured between two cross bars. Passing through the gate, one finds oneself in a sort of irregular street leading up to the highest point of the village, where there is generally an open

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<sup>262</sup> C.Laitanga. *Paite in Mizoram*, Tribal Research Institute (TRI), Aizawl, 1996, p.8.

space, from which other streets branch off. On one side of this will be the chief's house, with the "zawlbuk" or bachelor's hall, opposite it. The villages of powerful chiefs are beautifully laid out in regular streets, which follow the natural features of the ground.<sup>263</sup>

When Colonel Lister in 1850 captured the village of Sentlang he was so impressed with the regularity with which the villages within sight were laid out that he was easily led to believe these were cantonments inhabited solely by warriors.

'If the village is a large one and contains a mixed population, it is divided into several quarters or "veng", which are generally inhabited by people of the same clan, and each will have its *Zawlbuk*, a large building constructed by the united labour of the men of the *veng* or the village.....A short distance outside the village by the roadside there generally are several platforms of logs with posts round them adorned with skulls of animals, gourds, rags and old pots.'<sup>264</sup>

The general layout of villages of the Mizo tribes was more or less alike throughout the region. They were all stockaded with the chief's hut located centrally and at the highest point. Near the chief's hut was located the *Zawlbuk* (Bachelors' Dormitory) and the huts of the important men of the village. Among the Lusei,

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<sup>263</sup> J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, TRI, Aizawl, 2008 (reprint), pp.19-21

<sup>264</sup> Alexander McKenzie, *The North-Eastern Frontiers of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p.291

*Zawlbuk* was a regular and fundamental apparatus.<sup>265</sup> Some of the Pawi did not have *Zawlbuk*, but they had an inner stockade inside where, when they were besieged, they would put away the women and children. There were other notable differences. Of the Lakher villages, Parry noted -

‘The villages are not laid out symmetrically, it is rare to find even one long street, and houses are dumped down anywhere according to the fancy of the individual builder. There are no rules as to the orientation of houses, and while a Lushei village is generally arranged in orderly streets, the Lakher village is merely an untidy collection of houses straggling over a considerable area, and at unequal distances from each other.’<sup>266</sup>

In their villages, the Mizo people lived in huts made from readily and locally available raw material. It was noticed by the British that, with the Lusei clans, houses roughly measured about 18 feet long and 12 feet wide and constructed in a uniform plan - all gable ended and raised some three or four feet from the ground. Timber and bamboo form the main materials for the construction with timber (seasoned hardwood trees) utilised for beams while bamboo of different species were used for framework for the floor, walls, and roof; and split and thatched as flooring and walling material. Grass of different types was used for roofing. The plan of the house was very simple. The huts all have a rough platform of logs.

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<sup>265</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Pi Pu Zunleng*, B. Lalthangliana, 2007, pp.4-7

<sup>266</sup> N.E Parry, *The Lakhers*, TRI, Aizawl, 2009, (reprint), p.62.

A village site was chosen with great care and consideration. Aside from the considerations already mentioned, other factors like abundance of good cultivable land nearby, availability of game were important, and given the orientation of the Mizo then, safety from malevolent spirits was a prime consideration.<sup>267</sup> If the site sought for is for an old village, the chief's elders were responsible for selecting, whereas for a new one (an offshoot of a prevailing one), the chief to-be and his chosen elders would go and choose the site. Before setting the shaman was consulted and he would perform 'Ai' to see whether it was auspicious to venture on that day. Only on the 'Ai' being positive would they set out. There were many methods of divination -

- One way of determining the suitability of a site was that a party takes a red rooster to the site and stays the night with it. The cock should crow three times before daybreak to render the site acceptable. If otherwise, the site was unfavourable.<sup>268</sup>
- The party takes with them rice grains and places the grains on a hole dug out at the site. The grains are placed over *chhawl* (shrubs) and covered with the same. If, in the morning, some grains were found missing, the site would be considered ill-omened.
- A rooster would be killed on the proposed site in the evening. If it did not shake its head three times before dying, the site was considered ominous.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> B. Lalthangliana, op.cit., p.2

<sup>268</sup> Personal interviewed with Saihnawla of Hmunzawl village, Mizoram

<sup>269</sup> Interviewed with Dengkunga, Khawlailung.

- An egg would be taken to the site. The top of the egg was cracked open and it was boiled after being propped up on stones, like a fireplace. As it boiled the contents should not spill over. It was considered even more ill-omened if the egg burst while being boiled.<sup>270</sup>
- Dreams were used for divination. When sleeping on the site if one dreamt of clear water or bright sunny weather the site was considered good.<sup>271</sup>

There would be as many as three attempts to get the right and positive divination of a chosen site. If all divinations indicated favourably the chief and his council chalked out a site plan for houses. The chief chose first, the elders, prominent figures and rich people followed. Generally, the elders and some other important men were to be near the chief's house. The widows and poor people were placed at the middle part of the village whereas the brave and warrior took the corner of the village.<sup>272</sup> When a new site was quite a distance away from the old village, the process of occupying it was called *Zuan* - meaning literally, to jump.<sup>273</sup>

As against this background, we can now placate the village with the various institutions which were evinced for the governing of society in the village and which were the key factors in determining the Mizo ethos. However, as we present these social institutions under different heads, it should be understood that these institutions are not enclosed and exclusive, rather they have a complimentary and symbiotic relationship with each other.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Interviewed with Saihnuna, Lungkawlh.

<sup>272</sup> C. Laitanga, *Mizo Khua*, TRI, Aizawl, 1998, p.29

<sup>273</sup> B. Sangkhuma, *Pawi Chanchin*, TRI, Aizawl, 2000, pp.28-31.

## INSTITUTIONS THAT STEMMED FROM FOOD PRODUCTION

As food is the first and basic need of all living beings, the primary institutions that were developed were in the realm of food production. As already noted, the Mizo survived on the dependence of food produced from agriculture combined with animal rearing, hunting and foraging. In the need of food and the pursuit that it entailed, while it was a social concern, within the tribal communal ethos, the society provided a scope for individual distinction. For this there were set and specific undertakings formally laid out. Upon the accomplishment of an undertaking the individual secures a special position with a designation for the deed performed. The benefits that accrued from these meritorious designations also overlap beyond temporal life to the realm of the spiritual as they are interwoven within the framework of the eschatology. The institutions that stemmed directly from incentive given to food production are *Thangchhuah* and *Pialral*.

### ***Pialral***

It may be stated that every society develops its own concept of belief systems built upon its needs, propensity and aspirations. Beliefs systems and practices may also be altered and modified in relation to the changes in the process of social evolution.<sup>274</sup> This is evident in context of the development of Mizo society from its infancy, that is, as far as can be traced back in time from oral traditions. One of the most significant concepts developed and advanced by the Mizo is its eschatology. This has been summed up in a word - *Pialral*. However, while *Pialral* denotes the whole of the eschatology, it is also the name of a place exclusive only to a privileged

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<sup>274</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion*, A condor Book souvenir Press, London, 1948, pp.17-18

few. In order to avoid this confusion and to put the whole matter in clear perspective, let us, at the outset, give a summary of the concept of *Pialral*. The Mizo believed that in passing from the temporal to the spiritual realm, the soul had to travel through various itineraries. Ultimately, there was a point where the route split. One led to *Mitthi Khua* (dead people's abode) and the other to *Pialral*.<sup>275</sup> On the one hand, those whose fate was bound for *Mitthi Khua*<sup>276</sup> had to contend with a final destiny of a world, dull and shadowy, laden with misery and anxiety, and with having to continue the rigours of having to eke out a livelihood. On the other hand, those privileged to enter *Pialral* were furnished all the amenities and creature comforts that could only exist in imagination in the world of the living.

It is important to give the background of this *Pialral* ideology in order to understand the whole development of the Mizo beliefs and practices and society over time. According to Mizo tradition, during their migration route to the present day Mizoram, they passed through the thick forest canopy in the Chin Hills of Burma particularly near the Manipur River (Run). The date for their settlement close to this river is roughly assigned to the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Mizos were in helpless condition when they were facing sorrows, suffering and miseries. Their anxiety knew no bounds. They needed comfort and solace at that time. They, therefore, began to seek ways and means to alleviate this state of affairs.<sup>277</sup> In that predicament, the situation compelled them to search for relief from some unknown power. According to Rev. Liangkhaia, 'the first known sacrifices were called "*Arte*

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<sup>275</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Nunhlui*, MBSE, Aizawl, 1990, p.36

<sup>276</sup> J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kiki Clans*, TRI, Aizawl, 2008, (reprint), p.62

<sup>277</sup> V.L. Siana, *Mizo History*, Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl, 2009 (reprint), pp. 10-11

*thlah*' and '*Bul thluk*'<sup>278</sup>. They were searching for a place where they would offer their sacrifice and make the supplication to someone. On a particular occasion, they would chant out the following which may be counted as ancestor worship:

*Pi biakin lo chhang ang che.*

*Pu biakin to chhang ang che*<sup>279</sup>

Answer me, whom our mothers worship,

Answer me, whom our fathers worship.

Apart from this, the Mizo strongly felt and believed in the existence of numerous malevolent spirits who were believed to cause all human misery, sufferings and misfortunes. The Mizo used to give sacrifices to these spirits to appease them. These evil spirits as a whole were called '*Huai*'.<sup>280</sup> Again, the Mizo believed in two classes of *Huai* – *Ramhuai* and *Tuihuai*. The *Ramhuai* class of *Huai* consisted of those who ruled over the earth, as *Ram* means land or earth, and *Tuihuai* were those who ruled in and under water, *Tui* meaning water. Therefore, they offered sacrifices thinking that the blood of the animal killed would satisfy and appease these evil spirits.<sup>281</sup>

As the Mizo were terribly afraid of these evil spirits, utmost care was therefore taken to avoid causing anger of these spirits. Hence they began to worship big trees, stones, mountains and water where, they believed, the spirit dwelt. They believed that these evil spirits also had human forms but were invisible. They also believed that

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<sup>278</sup> Liangkhaia, "*Mizo Sakhua*" in *Mizo-Zia-rang*. (Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters. 1975), p.11

<sup>279</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, LTL Publications, Aizawl, 2002, (reprint), op.cit., p. 45

<sup>280</sup> J. Shakespear, op.cit., p.61

<sup>281</sup> Liangkhaia, op.cit., p.52

these evil spirits could take any form they liked. Sometimes they appeared as tiger, or fire, or wind, etc. In the same way, the Mizo believed that the spirits could not be killed or harmed.<sup>282</sup> Therefore, the general way of life was full of uneasiness connected with taboos and superstitions.

Simultaneously the Mizo believed that there were good spirits or gods, who never caused harm to them. Such spirits were identified and given different names based on their relations with human beings. Although these spirits were considered to be good spirits, the overwhelming fear of the evil spirit shadowed the proper working of the good spirits. The good spirits were as follows:

*Pu Vana* :( Heavenly father): helper and watcher, the maker of thunder.

*Khuanu or Khuavang*: (guardian spirit or wife of Pu Vana), she was the preserver of the heavenly and earthly blessings.

*Vanchung Nula*: (Heavenly Maiden). She had the authority over the rain. When human beings needed water, she poured it out in the form of rain.

*Vanthrika*: The owner or keeper of wisdom, including knowledge of heaven and earth.

Whatever can be gleaned or deduced from the little evidence of those times suggests that there was no trace of the concept of *Pialral* manifested in the society then. It would seem that it was much later that the idea of *Pialral* took form. While it is difficult to establish with certainty the precise time that this belief system was conceptualized, there are certain aspects in the oral narratives that can serve as good

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<sup>282</sup> K.Zawla, *Mizo Pipute leh An thlahte Chanchin*, Aizawl, 1964, p.53

pointers as to where and when the idea developed its full form. For this, it would be convenient to present the eschatology in detail.

Upon death, a long sojourn awaits the soul of the deceased. However, there is unwillingness on the part of the spirit to depart from the world of the living. It hovered around the village. For a time, the family endorsed the spirit and would offer food during meals. But after a period of three months, the spirit is beseeched by the family to depart, and, for this, a small household ritual is conducted to sever the link.<sup>283</sup> Upon this, the spirit was obliged to leave the village and head for a place called *Hruaikawn* to join other spirits. From *Hruaikawn* the spirit then proceeded to *Rihdil*. It then continues to reach a place called *Hringlangtlang*.<sup>284</sup> From here, there is a clear view of the world of the living spread out for the spirit to see. This fills the spirit with grief and nostalgia. There is a great desire to return. However, the torment and anguish of the spirit is relieved by wearing a flower called *Hawilopar*<sup>285</sup> and drinking *Lungloh tui*.<sup>286</sup> Upon the dissipation of anguish the spirit resolutely proceeds on towards the final destiny. There was a place called *Zingvawnzawl* at which a certain man called *Pawla* (the guardian of *Mitthikhua*) settled waiting to see who was coming that way. Beyond *Pu Pawla*, the path opened in two directions – the final destination, one that led to *Pialral* and the other to *Mitthikhua*. Those who did not qualify to go to *Pialral* were showered with pellets by *Pu Pawla* and driven to the path that led to *Mitthikhua*. He shot his pellets at every spirit as it passed by, except that of someone

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<sup>283</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Pi Pu Zunleng*, op.cit., p.213

<sup>284</sup> The name of a mythical mountain on the way to *Mithikhua*. The literal meaning of *Hringlangtlang* is human visible hill.

<sup>285</sup> The name of a mythical flower, which grows on the road to *mithikhua*, its literal meaning is no longing back' flower)

<sup>286</sup> The name of a mythical spring on the way to *Mithikhua* beyond *Hringlang Tlang*. This may mean water that is believed to have the mystical power of quenching thirst.

who had died a *Hlamzuih* (a baby not more than three months old), or Thangchhuah couples and men and women who had sexual intercourse during their lifetime. Pawla could easily identify such men and women by examining them. So the song runs like this:

*Di neilo Pawla'n a sai an ti,*  
*Fam mah ila min sai bil tawh hlei lawng e.*  
*Ka nemrang puan tial ka Di zawna*<sup>287</sup>.

He who has not loved is shot by Pawla, so they say,  
I'd never be shot by him though now I die,  
My chequered cloth had I shared with my love.

*Mitthikhua* was a place associated with misery, suffering and pain. Firstly, its incumbents suffered three years of pain from the wounds inflicted by Pu Pawla's pellets.<sup>288</sup> For those who died at childbirth, they were led to Pialral by the egg which had been placed on their graves. Doomed to an eternal life of drudgery, they had to continue a life of unremitting labour in a world bereft of sunshine and nature's bounty. According to V.L. Siana the Mizo believed that the earth was composed of eight layers and the *Mitthi Khua* was placed at the last layer.<sup>289</sup> Even J.M. Lloyd cited the Mizo belief that in *Mitthi Khua* everything was in a much poorer condition and on

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<sup>287</sup> Zairema, *Pipu te Biak hi*, Aizawl, 2009, p.75

<sup>288</sup> Z.T. Sangkhuma, Seminar Paper on "Mitthite Thlarau Kalkawng Pipute Ngaihda" Aizawl, 2009, p.4

<sup>289</sup> V.L Siana, op.cit., p.56.

a smaller scale than on earth. Life was colourless and miserable there.<sup>290</sup> They believed that those who could not perform *Thangchhuah* would go to *Mitthi Khua* and were condemned to stay there eternally.

By contrast, *Pialral* was a place of plenty. Its prime denizens were those who had attained merit (*Thangchhuah*) in their life. They did not have to work but lived a life of ease and comfort. They were served husked rice. Enemies slain by them in their lifetime became their servants.

This eschatology evinced by the Mizo has interesting dimensions. *Pialral* is concomitant with productivity – or rather, to bolster and promote productivity. It emphasizes on rewarding of individuals with the ability to produce food surplus, which surplus is ultimately dissipated among the denizens of the village. At the same time, it clearly reveals a society where a certain level of social differentiations had developed. This could only happen in a society with a sizeable population where a certain amount surplus food was frequently produced. The surplus production was shared in the form of feast to the whole community in the event of this *Inlama Thangchhuah*. In a nutshell, the *Pialral* ideology clearly shows the symbiotic nature of traditional Mizo society. The primary considerations for survival and their religious belief system were directly linked.

It is interesting to make a geographical reading of *Pialral*. The spirit's way to *Pialral* and *Mitthi Khua* has a close connection with the geographical settings of their areas. The journey of the spirit to *Pialral*, indicates an eastward direction. As one old saying goes - “*Mi a thih in a thlarau chu khawchhak lam ah chho in Rihdil a han*

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<sup>290</sup> J.M. Lloyd, *On Every High Hill*, TRI, Aizawl, 1984, p.15.

*thleng a'* which means that when a person died his soul would go eastward and reach *Rihdil*. *Rihdil* is located just outside the Indian political boundary (roughly 5 Kms from present Mizoram), within the present Myanmar boundary. The geographical location of *Rihdil* suggests that the *Pialral* concept was born when the Mizo group had reached the present Mizoram.

The eastern side of Mizoram is a suitable place for rice cultivation and this place accommodated the conglomeration of the first big settlement called Selesih with 7000 households. The probable date for this Selesih settlement has been assigned to the period AD 1720 to 1750<sup>291</sup>. Carey and Tuck<sup>292</sup> mentioned the abundant availability of rice beer in Mizoram than in Burma; in the Chin Hills of Burma maize is the staple food due to unsuitable condition for rice cultivation. Therefore it can be assumed that the concept of *Pialral* emerged after they reached the eastern side of present-day Mizoram by around the time of Selesih. Thus we may place it as sometime before or in the early part of the eighteenth century.

### ***Thangchhuah***

*Thangchhuah* is the combination of two word *thang* (famous) and *chhuah* (outcome), and this is the highest position that could be attained by an ordinary person in the society. In fact, before chieftainship became entrenched and the monopoly of a lineage or lineages, a person who attained *thangchhuah* was effectively the primary citizen and leader of the village. However, after chieftain position followed upon

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<sup>291</sup> B.Lalthangliana, op.cit., p.214.

<sup>292</sup> B.S. Carey & H.N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, TRI, Aizawl, 2008, p.210

succession, performing the feat by an ordinary person could not promote him to the position of primary citizen though it did not lose its value.

Operationally, as there were two broad areas of enterprise within the tribal economic framework – agriculture and hunting, in following, the ordination of *thangchhuah* was also established along the same lines. Therefore, *thangchhuah* could be secured either through accomplishment in agriculture or through the successful kills of enemies and a number of specified wild animals.<sup>293</sup> Accordingly, a distinction was made in the naming in accordance with these two fields or areas of operation. As the person who achieved distinction in agriculture was designated *Inlama thangchhuah* the counterpart in hunting was designated *ramlama thangchhuah*. While the first - winning through agriculture points to domestic (*Inlama* -near home) the other, winning through hunting relates to the jungle and wilderness (*ramlam*).

The rewards that accrued to a person who had attained the status were manifold. Securing rite of passage to Pialral was only one side of it. A *Thangchhuah* first enjoyed respect and distinction in the temporal world.<sup>294</sup> His attainment of the status was symbolically expressed in wearing a special shawl and headdress in social occasions. Also, through the performance of the required rituals and ceremonies, the performer secured immunity from the attack and invasion of malevolent spirits in his house. While the common folk sought security in their hearth by not daring to leave any aperture that would serve as inlet to the demons and evil spirits, the *Thangchhuah* could proudly have windows.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Zatluanga, *Mizo Chanchin*, Department of Art & Culture, Aizawl, 1966, p.178

<sup>294</sup> J. Shakespear, op.cit., p.63

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

### ***Inlama Thangchhuah***

To accomplish *Inlama Thangchhuah*, a person had to give a series of at least five feasts to the whole village<sup>296</sup>. The series of feasts were – *Chawng*, *Sedawi-chhun*, *Mitthi-rawp-lam*, *Zankhuang*, and *Khuangchawi*.<sup>297</sup> For successful performance of the series of feasts, the minimum requirements were, besides the staple rice that was consumed in every feast, seven grown male pigs, two mother pigs, fourteen piglets, one grown female *sial*, eight full grown male *sial* and a male goat. Added to these was the considerable amount of fermented rice, *zu*, which was an essential ingredient at each and every process of the ceremonies. When a performer reached the climax, i.e., is *Khuangchawi*, the man and his wife were carried on a platform along the streets to throw off their valuable possessions to the crowd. The series could be completed only with great difficulty and by very few and usually covered a life time.<sup>298</sup>

### ***Ramlama Thangchhuah***

This was the plate of warriors and hunters. This attainment gave hunters and warriors a high status in the society as the then period witnessed constant war among the various groups and the fight for survival against predating wild animals. Meat as a delicious food item was provided by the hunters for the whole community. Thangchhuah was accorded for slaying a man of rival groups and villages and each of the following animals- elephant, bear, wild bison, stag, barking deer, a king cobra, an

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<sup>296</sup> Zatluanga, op.cit, p.81

<sup>297</sup> Z.T. Sangkhuma, op.cit, p.3

<sup>298</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, *Mizoram Transformational Change*, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Serampore, p.63.

eagle<sup>299</sup> . It was believed that all those human beings and wild animals a person killed in his lifetime would, in afterlife, accompany and serve the slayer in *Pialral*.

The rewards that accrued to a person who had attained the status were manifold. Securing rite of passage to *Pialral* was only one side of it. A *Thangchhuah* first enjoyed respect and distinction in the temporal world. His attainment of the status was symbolically expressed in wearing a special shawl and headdress in social occasions. Also, through the performance of the required rituals and ceremonies, the performer secured immunity from the attack and invasion of malevolent spirits in his house. While the common folk sought security in their hearth by not daring to leave any aperture that would serve as inlet to the demons and evil spirits, the *Thangchhuah* could proudly have windows. This particular privilege is significant. Though not mentioned directly, the successful performance of *Thangchhuah* indicates very clearly a triumph over evil spirits and demons, seen as virulent adversaries in the struggle of life, not only intimidating, but inimical to human wellbeing.

### **The significance of *Pialral* and *Thangchhuah***

The concept of *Pialral* and *Thangchhuah* in traditional Mizo society is highly significant. From it, we can understand much of the ethos of the society. However, as there is a direct link between *Pialral* and *Thangchhuah*, (since those who reached *Pialral* were those who had attained the status of *Thangchhuah*), like two faces of the same coin, it is necessary to understand *Thangchhuah* in order to have a clear understanding of the significance of *Pialral*. Acting in symbiotic relationship *Pialral* and *Thangchhuah* gave a powerful motivation and incentive which served to orient

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<sup>299</sup> J.Shakespear, op.cit., p.63

and organize society to a given direction. The underlying consideration was to enhance survival. They represent an important vehicle, a driving force which propounded and emphasised upon society the need to endeavour for securing and enhancing the primary means of sustaining life - food, defence against starvation and protection from predation. Clearly, the first message conveyed in *Inlama Thangchhuah* is an injunction to individuals that everyone should exert their utmost to produce as much food as possible. This same consideration also is spelled out in *Ramlama Thangchhuah* – to bring in meat from the jungle. But here is added the other important consideration – that of defence against rival groups. Hunters were encouraged to forage far and wide and to dissuade others from encroaching in the vicinity and to put their stamp on the surrounding area that would be needed for subsequent swiddening. While these were sanctioned by society as a means of gaining status, they were articulated in such a way that promoted co-operation and distribution of needed resources. The formalities that went towards ordination of status were social occasions where everyone participated in the festivity and merriment, in feasting and dancing.<sup>300</sup> This device, therefore, while encouraging the building of needed resources, also directed its use and dissipation that was in harmony with communal living.

#### INSTITUTIONS THAT WERE PROMPTED BY CONFLICT

There was a process of change due to the steady increase in surplus – surplus food and population. The increase in population affected the demographic structure in

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<sup>300</sup> Interview with Lalthansanga in 2007

two ways – increase in the size of a village, and of clan segmentation leading to the formation of new groups often represented by new villages.<sup>301</sup> Increase of population in a village did not affect only *increase*, but also alterations in the social structure. It became difficult for the singular clan based and structured society to retain cohesion. In the process, society became less and less a family. The kinship that was established on the basis of male genealogy and patriarchy, which tied and bonded people to each other, as they branched out and extended, became weak and inadequate in the face of teeming population. This was manifested in the labour process and sharing of resources. Internally, it affected destitution and poverty while externally, it resulted in the struggle to secure the natural resources that offered the best opportunities for production of basic needs. Increased production aggravated competition for natural resources and brought war. In the process of the struggle, there were overriding considerations prompted by the need for defence.<sup>302</sup> These resulted in the devising of various strategies for the arraignment and cohesion of manpower for maximum security. On the basis of these certain principles were established which promulgated a corresponding set of institutions. In this connection, the state of war directly prompted and advanced the institution of chieftainship and the *Zawlbuk*. On the other hand, as war brought the institution of chieftainship, it also brought problems of accommodation of the fruits of war in the society – booty and prisoners. Thus, for the adjustment of the destitute in the village and for prisoners of war, a corresponding set of institutions evolved to fit into the framework of society. Upon this was established the institution of *Saphun* and *Bawi*.

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<sup>301</sup> Liangkhaia, op.cit., p.48

<sup>302</sup> V. Lunghnema, *Mizo Chanchin*, Bethesda Press, Aizawl, 1995, p.79

Thus the advance of society in food production with a regular surplus gave a new dimension to the conditions of living and these ushered in tandem the closely interrelated institutions of *Saphun*, chieftainship, and *Bawi*. The institution of *Saphun* clearly predates the institution of chieftainship, whereas the *Bawi* system is clearly an offshoot of chieftainship. So we will discuss these in order of precedence.

### ***Sal and Saphun***

As food production improved through the cultivation of rice, there was a steady increase in population which resulted in the dispersal of population and clan segmentation. With the conflict that followed, people easily became separated and displaced. As difficult it was to survive, there was little scope of keeping intact familial ties and connections. In the torrid state of affairs there was a process of simultaneous fragmentation and of absorption in the clan structure, a regular ongoing fission and fusion of clans. Often, in the event of a raid, the number of a clan would be badly whittled down in size and its surviving members obliged to scatter and disperse, obliged to find shelter in other villages.<sup>303</sup> While this misfortune befell others, at the same time that there were clans which rose in strength and became more entrenched. Starting as the basic nuclei and founders of a village, they rose up through direct increase in population within and through the absorption of members from other clans who were those mostly brought in as *sal* (prisoners of war) or come in as stragglers from a decimated village. The method of absorption that was devised was called *Saphun*.<sup>304</sup> This was a formal but simple ritual to bind the two contracting

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<sup>303</sup> There were many instances; the Ralte and Hmar are one such example.

<sup>304</sup> *Saphun* is a term to describe a process in which a member of a clan changes his clan membership from one to another by adopting the name and religion of the imitated clan. The term is derived from two Mizo words- 'Sa' means guardian spirit of the village, 'phun' means to affiliate

parties. In order to gain entry as member of the host clan, the applicant had to sacrifice a pig and pledge his loyalty to the guardian spirit, *Sakhua*, of the host clan. The ritual entailed the sacrifice of a pig and the planting of a sacrificial tree on which he hangs the skull of the pig. From then onwards he is integrated into the clan and forfeits his own lineage. It was also obligatory on the part of the village denizens to accept his new identity and make no mention of his former affiliation. Mention or remarking on his previous identity was strictly forbidden and offend on this was punishable by way of a heavy fine imposed on the transgressor. The system of *Saphun* was a needed institution in the face of intermittent war between rival clans and villages. It facilitated the settlement of helpless and hapless refugees in times of war. From all accounts, it seems clear that such refugees and prisoners of war were not made to suffer unduly. They were allowed to live like ordinary citizen if they were not sold off. It is clear that this system was established before the institutionalisation of chieftainship. The political institutionalisation of chieftainship was after the inter-clan wars had resumed for quite a good length of time. Therefore, even with the chief established, a commoner retained the right of keeping as much *sal* as he could procure, while it was not possible to keep *Bawi*, which was the chief's prerogative.

### **Chieftainship**

As mentioned already in the previous chapter, chieftainship became formally instituted with the chief occupying a separate office secured through a contract for mutual benefit between the host village and employed warrior. For rendering time and effort as a fulltime sentinel, *Zahmuaka* was given a share of the rice produced from

every household of the Hnamte village.<sup>305</sup> This was a departure from the kind that grew out of the tribal ethos. Previously, there were two norms followed for award of leadership. One was the natural hierarchy which stemmed from the familial connections within a clan, the ties of kinship that threaded families together which emphasised on seniority. As against this, the other norm that developed for determining leadership was through attainment of *Thangchhuah*. This was quite a deviation from the biological seniority determination as it clearly denoted and emphasised strength, prowess and performance at the individual level. Here, leadership was earned, not inherited.<sup>306</sup> The performer of the *Thangchhuah*, by giving food and feast, secured against the whims of capricious and malevolent spirits, gains the appreciation of the whole village. The case of Zahmuaka is a more extreme departure as here we have a case of outright purchase of service outside the given tribal norm of designation of leadership. It was a case of extreme conditions necessitating extreme measures. It was mercenary in character. While a *Thangchhuah* earned his position through his provision of food and braving enemies and predators, with nothing given in return by the villagers in kind, Zahmuaka was given grains collected from the villagers he served. It was clearly political. Zahmuaka was not a member of the Hnamte clan, in fact not even a close kin.<sup>307</sup>

Interestingly, all these three norms of establishing leadership prevailed. In that sense, many clans never had a chief established along the principles that were laid down by the Hnamte clan and Zahmuaka. So long as the clan could retain a certain amount of numerical strength and cohesion to establish a village, it continued to

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<sup>305</sup> He was the first known chief who had received some amount of paddy due from the denizens.

<sup>306</sup> Liangkhaia, *op.cit.*, p.78.

<sup>307</sup> Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, The Mizoram Publication Board, Aizawl, 2000, pp.109-112.

function on the normal pattern of order and hierarchy as outlined by paternal kinship affiliations while performance of *Thangchhuah* was encouraged and accredited.

However, it would seem that out of these three systems, it was the political chiefship which dominated most. This indicates clearly, as it owes its origin to warring clans and villages, it was the system best suited for the circumstances. No doubt political chieftainship had inbuilt characteristics that could integrate the various propensities of tribal society which grew out of the microcosm of swiddening and hunting. It did not sever the prevailing bonds and ties of kinship or the means which society had ordained for bestowing of status and leadership; nor did it suppress, it merely superseded over them. Simply put, political chieftainship was an addition to, and not a subtraction, of the existing norms. In fact, the basic norms and custom of tribal ethos not only flourished, but were aggravated after political chieftainship had been established firmly and succession granted to a lineage. As chiefs were obliged to show exemplary action in line with the established norms they were wont to exert themselves for attainment of *Thangchhuah*.

In this connection, there was a clear indication of the degeneration of the chief from a warrior to that of a domestic chief. Most of the chiefs who attained the title of *Thangchhuah* got it from the domestic sector, *Inlama Thangchhuah* i.e., through giving of feasts in the village. This degeneration must have been a result of two developments. First there was an increase in the scale and intensity of wars. As population continued to increase, the size of raiding parties became much larger. They were also better equipped. It was impossible that one man's prowess could deter or counter such a force mobilised. Because of this, there was further change in village

organisation where a standing militia was constituted. The village had a ready force to take the frontal charge against, and lead in, raids. Secondly, over time, succession had a weakening effect; the progenies of Zahmuaka became effete with the luxuries that their progenitor had wrested for them. In fact, the progenies of Zahmuaka became more of village administrators than warriors and hunters.<sup>308</sup>

In fact, the increase in material prosperity after moving further westward from Lentlang had a residual effect on the chiefs in particular. There was a steady aggrandisement of their position in terms of goods and services that accrued to them. While having freed themselves from the commitment for which their ancestor had secured the office, they had extended their privilege and increased their larder substantially. As a given standard, the progenies of Zahmuaka received *Fathang* (two baskets of paddy rice), *Sachhiah* (a hindquarter of every wild animal killed), *Chichhiah* (a fixed percentage on salt tapped from brines), *Khuaichhiah* (a fixed percentage of honey secured from the jungle), from the village households.<sup>309</sup> They also had a host of *Bawih* (bonded labour) and usually kept a few concubines. While not given much to raiding, they enjoyed a good share of the spoils which the braves and warriors brought home. They had elevated themselves to such a position that they even inflicted capital punishment on innocent lads of the common folk seduced by their daughters.

### ***Bawi***

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<sup>308</sup> It is in this light that they have been understood by writers – as a sitting chief in council, surrounded by elders and over beer, mulling over a case or simply whiling away the time.

<sup>309</sup> Liangkhaia, op.cit., pp.78-80

There have been quite different opinions among writer in the understanding of *Bawi*. However, as contrary to some opinion, the little margin of difference that sets them apart from the *sal* would disqualify them to be called slaves. Unlike *sal*, they could not be sold, and secondly, they were only for the chief to keep. There was also no stigma attached particularly to their status that places them as inferior as against common denizens of the village. In fact, there were many benefits that could be enjoyed by a *Bawi* since godfathered by the chief. The understanding of *Bawi* may be clarified by presenting them in their relationship to the chief.

Categorically, there were three types of *Bawi* differing in status on the nature of their entry into servitude of the chief. These are

- *Inpuichhung Bawi*<sup>310</sup> – These are those who have given themselves to the chief on account of having fallen destitute. These are generally widows and orphans. They become a part of the chief's household, were allowed to acquire personal property and if they desire, to buy their freedom which is fixed at one *sial* (bison) or its equivalent in other goods.
- *Chemsen Bawi*<sup>311</sup> – These are criminals, who, in order to escape retribution, surrender to the chief for refuge and protection. When at the moment that such a villain is pursued, should he be able to enter the chief's hut and hold the *sutpui* (central upright beam) he is saved from his pursuers. However, for such a person, his whole life is forfeit as a *Bawi* and he is denied of redemption. He does not enter into the chief's household and live in a separate house.

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<sup>310</sup> J. Shakespear, op.cit., p.46

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p.47

- *Tukluh Bawi*<sup>312</sup> – *Tukluh Bawi* are prisoners of war who, in order to save their lives, pledge loyalty to the victor chief. They also do not enter into the chief's household and live separately. Sometimes, through threat and apprehension, droves of people of other villages are brought forcibly in this way

As can be understood from here, there were many ways by which people were reduced to servitude within the village perimeter. These all seem to benefit the chief. However, on closer look, in the context of the *Chemsen Bawi*, it must be acknowledged that it was a useful device for the health of the village community. The system was essential, if not critical for order to prevail in the village. It helped to keep the solidarity of the village. It was a system that allowed for impartial and automatic resolving of argument that could easily lead to homicide, which could have serious repercussions. A feud within the village would easily weaken the unity and make it vulnerable and exposed. As the village had become composite, with different clans living together, society was not anymore a cohesive unit where disputes were settled within the framework of the clan. Outside of the clan there was no rule of law except for the conventions and principles that guided social life. The ultimate point of resolving conflict was “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. So, the power that was vested with the chief in giving asylum to those harried by those stronger provided a sort of safety valve where boiling rage could be cooled down. In fact, at a time when “might was right” it must have saved many an innocent man from murder.

On the other hand, the system of *Tukluh Bawi* was a device for bolstering up the size and strength of the village. This also was an instrument

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<sup>312</sup> Sangkima, *Mizos: Society and Social Change*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992, p.146

## *Zawlbuk*

The *Zawlbuk* was primarily and effectively a building in which the village war machine was established and used as a barrack for the mobilization of the young men for execution of speedy, concerted and collective force for the defence of the village. While it was the sleeping quarter of the bachelors, it doubled up as a dormitory for itinerant males. In the days before the *Zawlbuk* was established and in times of impending danger, the young men slept together at the corridor of the chief's house. The *Zawlbuk* provided for concentration of potential man power in case of emergency in the village. e.g. digging graves, fire fighting, resisting enemy attack etc.<sup>313</sup> The *Zawlbuk* members were kept in readiness to resist any enemy attack or fight against the enemies as and when desired by the chief of the village.

A *Zawlbuk* was built almost invariably at a central place usually adjacent to the chief's house.<sup>314</sup> It was big in size, always the biggest building in a village, so that one could easily identify it as *Zawlbuk*. Depending on the size of a village, the bigger villages had more than one *Zawlbuk* - one which was closer to the chief's was considered the principal *Zawlbuk* than the other. In constructing the *Zawlbuk*, free labour of all the male members of the village at the command and instruction of the village chief was used to be employed.<sup>315</sup> Stout timber, matured bamboos and cane ropes on the slope of a steep ridge were used to build it. For providing sufficient support to the central line, stout wooden poles were used. This central line of the *Zawlbuk* was called *Tlung*. Again, to provide support to the sloping roofs on all sides

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<sup>313</sup> Zatlunga, op.cit., p.112

<sup>314</sup> Interview with Khuangchhungi of Khawhlailung who is 102 years old, in 2002

<sup>315</sup> J.Shakespear, op.cit., p.20

of the central line, timber and bamboo rafters were used cross-wise which was called *in-chhun*. Ends of sloping roofs were covered with leaves called *Di*.

### **Administration**

The chief of a village was, in theory, the supreme authority of the *Zawlbuk*, the nerve centre of the village. In reality, however, *Zawlbuk* was administered by its inmates through some sort of self-government. All unmarried males of the village except toddlers and infants came under the discipline of the *Zawlbuk*. As such, no one could interfere on the administration of the *Zawlbuk* except the chief in some matters.<sup>316</sup> The chief had some authority to command and control the *Zawlbuk* members. When the *Zawlbuk* members made much noise at night, the chief would throw a stone on the roof of the *Zawlbuk* which was signal to the inmates to calm down and not disturb the peace in his residence quite close to the *Zawlbuk*.

A *Zawlbuk* had one *Val Upa* who was the overall in charge, with members comprised of two sections - boys' not attained puberty called *Thingnawifawm* and those attained puberty called *Tlangval*. Each sectioned was monitored separately by a chosen leader from the respective peer group. The most industrious person as a worker and organizer, as also the most courageous and efficient one in all respects including hunting, among the *Zawlbuk* members was recognized by the chief as *Val Upa* of that *Zawlbuk*.<sup>317</sup> The *Val Upa* was the head and pivot point in the *Zawlbuk* administration. He was responsible for orderly conduct of all inmates of the *Zawlbuk*.

Each section had its own responsibilities and chores. *Thingnawifawm* boys were duty-bound to works related to laundry, running errands, collecting and carrying

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<sup>316</sup> Zatluanga, op.cit., pp.110-112

<sup>317</sup> Interviewed with Dengkunga in 2007

fire-wood for the *Zawlbuk* and also collecting bamboos and stones when graves were dug by the *Tlangvals*.<sup>318</sup> *Thingnawifawm Hotu*, the monitor, was entrusted to maintain discipline in the *Zawlbuk* and to control *Thingnawifawm*. He was exempted from doing the routine duties assigned to the peer group he monitored. There would be a roll call parade every morning and evening in the *Zawlbuk* to ensure the attendance and performance of work assigned. Those found unsatisfactory in their performance would be punished by the *Zawlbuk* authority. The punishment inflicted on the boy concerned would usually be in the form of double assignments next day. The members of the elder section had to do all those heavy works and social services beyond the capacity of *Thingnawifawm*. During normal time, they usually performed works such as digging graves, felling trees and the like.

While there drinking of *Zu* on certain occasions, drunken behaviour in the *Zawlbuk* was strictly prohibited. Again, theft of any kind in the *Zawlbuk* was viewed seriously.<sup>319</sup> All kinds of theft, no matter the value of article stolen were precious or not, were viewed as extremely disgraceful acts. Even up to a fine of bison (*Sial*) or equivalent to that would be imposed on the culprit, irrespective of the value of article stolen. Further, if a *Zawlbuk* member overheard any conversation of seniors and conveyed it outside, he was punished with a fine of pig or an equivalent item.

## **Functions**

The *Zawlbuk* acted as a centre of making a person disciplined, obedient, and industrious and a fine hunter.<sup>320</sup> Formal education is the preparation for proper living.

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<sup>318</sup> Interviewed with Hrangchhunga in 2007

<sup>319</sup> Zatluanga, op.cit., 113

<sup>320</sup> I gathered this information from the interviewed with Dengkunga, Khawlailung village in 2007

The early Mizo society did not have such formal education. It was only in the *Zawlbuk* that training of all possible kinds necessary for living in the society was provided to the Mizo youths. It functioned as a very strong instrument to embed into the minds of its inmates a life style best suited to their social structure. Therefore, the *Zawlbuk* also played an effective educational role.<sup>321</sup> It also served as a functionary that enforced the standard etiquette and manners of the denizens of the village. It exerted a tremendous hold over the denizens of the village. As an example, if there should be a case when a bachelor courted a girl and if he did not receive proper attention or if she showed some kind of disrespect to him, he would report to the *Zawlbuk* and all the *Zawlbuk* members would go to that particular girl's house. They in a body would rush to the house and vigorously shake the house until the whole house would almost topple down. This kind of punishment could also be used to the house of the young boy (*Thingnawifawm*) when the father of a boy had expressed his annoyance on the infliction of punishment on his son. This punishment given by the *Zawlbuk* inmates was called *Sawi*. This served as a deterrent for others about the consequence of interfering in the maintenance of discipline of the *Zawlbuk*.

While it was compulsory for every bachelor to live in the *Zawlbuk*, in some cases, a man stayed at *Zawlbuk* for two years after getting married; after they served their wife, they come back to *Zawlbuk* to sleep among the bachelors. Living together in the *Zawlbuk* for a long time in the prime period of life may contribute to the acceptance of community-based living pattern in the mind of every young member of the *Zawlbuk*. This feeling fashioned community lifestyle and bred gregariousness among its inmates. Thus, *Zawlbuk* acted as a philanthropic institution. When there

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<sup>321</sup> Zatluanga, op.cit., p.114

arose a necessity of helping the sick or helpless, it was the *Zawlbuk* members who undertook the task.<sup>322</sup> The inmates of the *Zawlbuk* used to organize recreational activities such as wrestling and other gymnastic feats. It functioned as a recreational centre,<sup>323</sup> as a place of gossip for all other young men of the village in the evening. The Mizo were in the habit of taking evening meal immediately after sun set, after which most of the young men would go to assemble at their *Zawlbuk* for a light gossip to relieve their day's tedium. Apart from the young men, the old men and married men also paid a visit to tell the success story of some powerful chiefs, the brave warriors, and the history of the people to the young men in the village. People who assembled there in the evening would sing, joke, smoke, or wrestle.<sup>324</sup> Located close to the chief's house, and with its given size, it functioned as the community hall in the village.<sup>325</sup>

### **Social Life**

A strong communal ethos necessarily prevailed. It was nakedly clear that, even given with the hoe and axe against the elements, life was in constant peril. Cooperation was the best defence, and therefore the constant factor that underlined social relations. The demands of collective survival generated in the communal life of traditional Mizo was furthered by the invention and promulgation of the word '*Tlawmngaihna*', a Mizo customary ethical code, which spurred and motivated the capacity for hard work, bravery, endurance, generosity, and selflessness and industriousness.

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<sup>322</sup> Interviewed with Lalthangfala in 2008

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Shakespear, op.cit., p.22

<sup>325</sup> Interview with Lalkhuma, ex-chief, Khawhlailung, dated February 25, 2005

The first and foremost need for the continuation of life was to secure food. As the village owed its very existence to food crops, accordingly, the village life was automatically regulated by the demands of agriculture. The rhythm of village life centered on the staple crop's cycle of life - from the preparation of the jungle to receive the seedling to the time the ears ripened and were harvested. Therefore, the year begins before the onset of the monsoon, with time and labour spent in the making of preparations for winning a good harvest.<sup>326</sup> Firstly, all the necessary tools and implements were made ready and utmost care was made to appease all the forces that may work to impede, hinder and thwart them in this effort. Then, throughout the year, men, women and children struggled together in various combinations of task force in work to complement the need of the crops. Though demanding and engaging, they could snatch short spells of breaks from the tedium which were used for gainful work and festivities. Thus, throughout the year, the whole village community spent their energy and time in toiling in the fields and traversing between field and village. In fact, those whose fields were located so far that it took too much time in commuting to and fro, were obliged to spend days and nights together away from the village. Temporary huts were made where people who had plots close to each other would sleep together.

It was only after they had a substantial harvest and safely stored away the grains in granaries in the house that there was real respite and relaxation. Between the completion of harvest and the preparation of the jungle for the next year's sowing, there was a substantial lull in the agricultural activity.<sup>327</sup> This was the moment which

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<sup>326</sup> Interviewed with Pakunga

<sup>327</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Pipu Zun Leng*, op.cit., pp.97-99

was looked forward to by everybody. This interlude between the two agricultural cycles (the completed and the oncoming) was a suitable time for the undertaking of various tasks at home and abroad. It was particularly conducive and opportune for undertaking expeditions to distant places it being a season free of rainfall and the accompanying mosquitoes and leeches that otherwise made excursions through the jungle uncomfortable and dangerous. Also, the streams and rivers, highly torrential during the monsoon, were spent of their fury and could be crossed and forded. As streams and rivers formed the natural pathways and highways for them, this was a very important consideration. At the same time, as the streams and rivers abated, it was also easy to tap them of the fishes, prawns and shrimps, crabs, snails, turtles, and all kinds of aquatic animals that were relished.

Thus, when freed from the regular demands of agriculture, hunting was a major preoccupation of all able bodied men. *Kawngpuiisiam*, a formal ceremony to assure hunting success for the village, is one of the most important occasions in the annual calendar of a Mizo village.<sup>328</sup> Hunting trips and raids were also occasions which provided initiation and training of young men in discipline, in survival, in the arts of war, where their dedication, courage, patience, and perseverance were tested. The thick jungle and underbrush teemed not only with myriad of animals, insects and plants, besides having pockets of other human groups, it was host to the most dreaded creatures of darkness which constantly stalked and consumed the Mizo. For this reason the Mizo had a special position reserved for the hunters and warriors. Each human head brought home was celebrated with fervour, the victors uplifted. The society devised methods of adjusting its honoured members to positions outside of the

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<sup>328</sup> NE Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, TRI, Aizawl, 1976, (reprint), p.91

chief's. They were designated *Pasaltha*. These men either endowed or attributed with qualities above the ordinary, enjoyed the adulation of the people. Though they led war parties and enjoyed the following of the young bucks, they did not seem to have striven to dethrone their chiefs but were content to live a normal life. The *Pasaltha* are revered in posterity as the shining example of self denial, sacrifice and courage, the virtues which were extolled by the Mizo as an ideal in their corporate life as icons of *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>329</sup>

For these reasons, this season was marked for the conducting of auspicious ceremonies and festivities and spelled ambition and hope for replenishing of diet with meat, for enhancing the larder, for gaining material assets. Thus, with the completion of harvest, the village bustle with activity and bristle with anticipation. As given to their own position and disposition, the inhabitants are busy with making preparations for various activities. At the domestic level, it was the time to cut wood and bamboo, to repair house, to fashion tools and appliances; for those who had stored up resources, to perform the *Khuangchawi* Ceremony; for young couples, to get married. On the other hand, for the warriors and hunters, and for the young bucks in particular, it was the time to go for long hunting excursions and forays outside the bounds of the village and agricultural perimeter.<sup>330</sup> It afforded them the chance to bring home vital resources and win respect and glory through bravery against the challenges of the wilderness and prowess in the theatre of war. Therefore, excitement over the prospect of the chase and escapades by which they win their worth in society and admiration and popularity of the maidens fill them with ardour.

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<sup>329</sup> Vanchhunga, *Lusei Leh Avela Hnamdangte Chanchin*, Department of Art&Culture, Govt of Mizoram, Aizawl, 1994, (reprint).

<sup>330</sup> Interviewed with Khuangchhungi.

However, it was a season fraught with ironies and paradoxes. Beneath the calm of nature, the atmosphere was highly volatile. As it was, the same conditions applied to all kindred of other villages all vying for the same. Therefore, this season of high anticipation of elevation often brought sudden and tragic reversals.<sup>331</sup> Mizo folk lore is replete with the suffering incurred by a village on the onslaught of a raiding party suddenly bursting upon the unwary in the midst of their merriment while enjoying the *Khuangchawi* Ceremony.

## CHAPTER-7

### THE FINAL PHASE

Well unto the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the life and culture of the Mizo tribes was conditioned, especially, in terms of material goods, by those that flowed out of the plains of Burma. From their inception the Mizo tribes were materially attached to Burma. While able to subsist on their own by way of food, without the goods from Burma, their life was effectively reduced to that of stone age culture. As such was the condition of life, the very struggle for existence greatly hinged upon their ability to procure these precious means for the support of life. Indeed, so prized were the goods from Burma that it aggravated the conflict and the struggle between these tribal groups. Because of this, even when life was secure by way of food, every effort and means were employed to secure these goods and items.

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<sup>331</sup> There were many example of this kind, one such instance was when Vanhnuailiana and his entire warrior were touring to the Cachar plains, their village was completely burnt down by their eastern rival called the Sukte in 1870s.