

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.³³¹ 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 19th 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.

³³¹ 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.

Therefore, from the early phase until the 19th century, besides other goods procured from Burma, brass gongs as prestige goods were a prime cause for issue between villages and chiefs. These conflicts intensified with the increase of population and the advent of muskets. Paradoxically therefore, Burma was the artery of life and of plenty and also the harbinger of death and destruction at the same time. The Pawih (Chin) who controlled the trade routes and served as the conduit for these goods used their position to gain leverage over their kindred.³³² As the relationship was not on even terms, this affected a retreat from the Pawih causing a ripple effect of these tribes on a movement away from the Chin Hills. Each fell upon the ones before. As they buffeted against each other, these kindred tribes were scattered within and over the adjacent areas of today's Mizoram – in the neighbouring states of Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Chittagong in Bangladesh.

As the tribes advanced towards the plains two important factors set in which upset the ongoing process of migration. One was that they (were coming) came from a relatively low populated (towards) to a denser populated area. The other was that much of the material assets for which they depended from Burma could now be gotten from these plains areas. As the first had a slowing down effect on the flow of migration, the second opened up the prospect for the Lusei to get on even terms with the Pawih in the Chin Hills. Subsequently, though not putting them in retreat, the Sailo chiefs were also able to effectively halt the Pawih. Thus, from 1856 onwards there was a relative reduction of war and raids conducted upon them by the Pawih. There was a notable change in the priority of the Lusei and Sailo chiefs. Though they could not totally ignore the Pawih on their rear they could afford, from time to time,

³³² B. S. Carrey and H. N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, TRI, Aizawl, 1976, (reprint), p. 157

to avert their attention from the Pawih and focus their attention and energy in making forays into their surrounding foothills. Therefore, the significant changes that were wrought upon the society from the second quarter of the 19th century were determined very little by the Chin Hills but immensely by their relation with the plains of Cachar, Chittagong, Tripura and Sylhet. On account of this we shall present this era by configuring it to the northern and southern borders where the significant matters were decided.

The nature of relationship between the Lusei and their surrounding hills and plains was described by raids and trade. Though these went hand in hand, we shall first present them separately and then sum up at the end.

TRADE

Peaceful exchange of goods was allowed for even in times of violent upsurge. There are considerable evidences of trade relations with their neighbouring tribes and people of neighbouring plains. Normally, the system of trade being barter, this would suggest that there prevailed either a passive or diplomatic relation amongst the bartering representatives which certainly was not founded at gun point. As H.N.C. Stevenson also remarks -

....of course condition were not always so terrible that it was dangerous to venture from the protection of the village-there were long period of peace and there is evidence that during this a quite considerable trade existed between villages-but internecine strife did result in the concentration of fields in areas easy to protect and close to the village,

and it did effect a division of labour whereby the men had to spend a large percentage of their time on defensive and offensive effort.³³³

Among the Lusei, those who moved to the south were the first to be exposed to trade. This was brought about by the cession of Chittagong by Mir Kasim to Robert Clive of the East India Company in the year 1760. Trade was opened up with the adjacent areas and intensely forested hill tracts to the west of South Lushai Hills inhabited by such men as the Chakma, Magh, Tripura, Mro, Khyeng, Khumi, and others.³³⁴ The traders were mostly Bengalis and Chakmas. The Mizo chiefs of Chittagong border began to sell essential goods, particularly cotton and cotton goods to the plains men. In return they acquired gun and gun powder, brass, tobacco, salt and other important items. Coincident with these developments on the Chittagong Lusei border areas extensive internal changes were occurring in Lusei itself which greatly influenced the course of Lusei-British relations. This trade in cotton was sustained and in the 1870's and the famous Thangluah chief Rothangpuia in the southern Lushai Hills had cotton fields which were marketed to Bengali traders of Chittagong.

While those who moved south were exposed to the market in Chittagong, those who migrated northward gradually came into contact with the traders of Manipur, Cachar and Tripura. These market networks and flow of goods into these hills seemed to have been chiefly an outcome of the Anglo – Burmese wars. After the treaty of Yandaboo (1826) Assam, Manipur and lower Burma came under the administration of the East India Company. The armies of the East India Company as well as the Burmese armed forces passed through

³³³ H.N.C. Stevenson, *The Economics of the Central Chin Tribes*, TRI, 1986, (reprint), p.12

³³⁴ Suhas Chatterjee, *Mizoram Under British Rule*, Printwell Publisher Distributors, Jaipur, 1999, p.3

the Chin-Lushai country and the Mizo became familiar with the gun and gun powder.³³⁵ According Lewin, Kukies of Akyab (Burma) also learnt the process of preparing gun powder from the Burmans.³³⁶ Therefore, these on the Sylhet and Chittagong frontiers used to purchase guns, flint glass, salt, etc, from the Bengali traders in exchange for money.³³⁷

There is a great amount of uncertainty, however, in establishing the exact nature of trade relations during these early times. It is unclear as to what extent the Lusei knew of the use of cash. As already mentioned, the Lusei, while being pushed by the Pawih or Chins, in turn, pushed other tribes (known as Kukis by the plainsmen) before them. Of these, those who had settled in Manipur, Cachar, Tripura and Sylhet were already familiar with trading, money and wage earning. There are ample references of such economic activities. As a reward for his assistance to the East India Company during the Sepoy Mutiny, the Governor General-in-Council awarded Rs 500 in cash to the Kuki Raja Munjihaw of Cachar frontiers. Even before that at the close of the 18th century, the Nawab of Pertapgarh (Sylhet) Raja Radharam, enlisted young Kuki men in his militia on wage basis. The Lusei of the frontier villages were brought within the ambit and became accustomed to these transactions. It is known that, Lalsuthlaha, the illustrious Lushai chief of north-east arrested by Captain Blackwood on 7 December 1844, when tried in the court, gave cash money to his defending lawyer, Manmohan Ghose, a barrister from Calcutta.³³⁸ The Cachar Deputy Commissioner in 1850's also introduced a levy in Cachar Kuki inhabited areas, which saw the presence of large Kuki scouts. Those Kuki (Mizo) were paid their wages in cash.

³³⁵ B.J.P. 27 Feb. 1850; No.36 Lister's Report.

³³⁶ T. H. Lewin, *Wild Races of the North East India*, TRI, Aizawl, 1998, p.149

³³⁷ Suhas Chaterjee, *A History of Mizo Economy*, Printwell Publishers Distributors, Jaipur, 1999, p.145

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.146

However, whether they knew the value or handling of cash, they had not much by way of goods to give in exchange for the items they needed from the plainsmen. Among these tribes themselves, the *sial*, or tame bison, had become the animal par excellence medium of exchange for big transactions³³⁹. The bison, had in fact, become the standard Mizo currency and bride price, the wealth of the chief or any other marriage contract the was counted in terms of *sial*. Penalties attached to breach of contract or fines imposed on any one for his or her offences were all in terms of *sial*. However, with the foreigners it was usually the elephant tusks or in some cases agricultural or forest products. Some Kuki chiefs used to pay *nazar* to the raja of Tripura, Manipur or the British officers of Cachar (1830-68) in the forms of elephant tusks. But foreign trade was very limited.

RAIDS

Lewin, undoubtedly the first white man who had a close relation with the Lusei tribes and was thoroughly acquainted with them and their way of life gave the following description of the general nature of these tribes -

They are constantly warring among themselves; or when a short interval of comparative peace comes, they make a raid upon the nearest British Territory to procure slaves.³⁴⁰

The Mizo tribes gained more cognition and attention on account of their raids on the surrounding foothills and plains. As already mentioned, latent aggression was a natural and logical outcome of the very nature of their existence. While it was prompted by the struggle for good agricultural land, raids provided means to social and

³³⁹ Interviewed with Dengkunga of Khawlaung village who is 83 years old in 15.8.1005

³⁴⁰ T.H. Lewin, op.cit., pp.138-39

economic advancement of the individual and also satisfied their spiritual needs. The letter of Ulich Brown, Officiating Commissioner, Chittagong Division to the Secretary, Bengal Government (29 May 1869) clearly mentions that the Lushai raids were extremely profitable and they sold the captives as slaves to the frontier tribes at the rate of Rs 100 to Rs 200 each.³⁴¹ They also looted cash with which they purchased arms and ammunitions and other necessities, thus it shows that they were quite conversant with the cash trading.

During the years between 1826 to 1871, series of raids were conducted by the Mizo on neighbouring areas of Cachar, Manipur, Sylhet, Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Account of raids

The first reported raid conducted upon British territory of Tripura by the Mizo in 1826 was the direct outcome of the trade relation with the plains. The traders used to give annual gifts to the Mizo chiefs for bringing their forest products to the market in the plains. But in 1826 the zamindar or trader of Pertabgur withheld the gift they expected that became the reason of their raid. The Mizo chief who led the raid was chief Buangtheuva.³⁴² Another raid took place in the year 1844, when two Sailo chiefs Lalsuthlaha and Bawtaia attacked Partabgur. They killed twenty people and took six captives which included Manipuri girls. The number of the raiding party was more

³⁴¹ I.F. Pol A.Dec 1869 No.282. Brown to Secy, Bengal.

³⁴² Alexander McKenzie, *The North-Eastern Frontiers of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1999, (reprint), p.281

than two hundred fighters. In retaliation, the British dispatched an expeditionary force into Mizo Hills in 1844 under Captain Blackwood to punish the offender. Lalsuthlaha was arrested and transported for life.³⁴³ In 1847 the subjects of Lalsuthlaha subjects avenged it by raiding Sylhet, whereby, killing eight persons and taking some captives.³⁴⁴

In 1847, Colonel McCulloch, Political agent in Manipur, reported of raids in which two hundred to three hundred persons were captured or killed. Another report came from the Magistrate of Sylhet in 1847 that mentioned a series of massacres by Kookies in what was alleged to be British territory, in that a hundred and fifty persons were killed.³⁴⁵ In November 1849, the Magistrate of Sylhet again reported a further series of Kuki outrages on the Simla River, and within British territory. Wood-cutters returning from the hills had been attacked, a village of Halams had been cut up, and another village plundered. Almost at the same time there were reports of attacks in the Silchar areas. Here twenty nine persons were killed and forty two were taken captive.³⁴⁶

In 1860, the Mizo raided Tripura where fifteen villages were burnt, 185 persons were murdered and taken 100 captives.³⁴⁷ The perpetrators were the followers of Thakur, who took refuge with the Thangluah chief Rothangpuia. Driven by the Tripura Rajah from his dominions, Thakur had formed alliances among various Mizo groups of the interior.³⁴⁸ In January 1861, a military force was sent to the hills to

³⁴³ Ibid.,

³⁴⁴ Lalhruaitluanga, *Zoram Vartian*, Fineprints, Aizawl, 2008, p.21

³⁴⁵ Alexander Mc Kenzie., op.cit., p.291

³⁴⁶ Op.cit., p.291

³⁴⁷ P. Lalnithanga, *Emergence of Mizoram*, TRI, 2010 (Third Edition), p.6

³⁴⁸ Report by J. D. Gordon in the Judicial Proceedings, November 1860, Nos 245-47

punish the offenders. The main target was chief Rothangpuia's village near Demagiri, in October, 1861, Rothangpuia tendered his submission.

In January 1862 a series of three raids carried by Kuki (Mizo) was reported from Sylhet and they plundered, burnt and large number of the inhabitant were massacred or many taken captives. The identities of the raiders were not known till 1863 when four women who had been carried away from Chundraipara made their escape to Cachar. From their statement, it appeared that the raid had been led by four chiefs, Ngursailova, Suakpuilala, Lalkhawliana and Hrangvunga. Suakpuilala, who had earlier made peace with the British, was again belligerent on the war path.

In January 1871, a series of raids were committed by different Mizo chiefs on a more extensive and organized scale, and a far more determined character, than any previous incursions of the kind. On January 1871 the village of Ainearkhal in the Hylakandy division was burnt and about 25 persons were killed and 37 taken prisoners.³⁴⁹ On the same day the Alexandrapore tea-garden was raided; Mr. Winchester, a planter was killed and his child, a little girl, captured. A few hours later, Cutlichera, the adjoining garden, was attacked. The Mizo raided and plundered more than twenty times in the months of January 1871.

Nature of these raids

As shown by British official records most of the slaves procured from the plains were of three types or categories – children, women below 35 years of age, and good physique teenagers. As mature men were difficult to manage most of the people captured from the raid were children, women and young lads who are capable of giving

³⁴⁹ P. Lalnithanga, op.cit., p.7

economic benefit to the village. The slaves were sold in return for high price. The rate of a male slave depended upon his physical qualities and age, one male slave usually equivalent to three *sial* or two guns. The beautiful female captives were usually kept in the household of the chiefs as concubines. Often, concerning the particular preference for women was also prompted by the economics of marriage. The young man who intended to set up a home usually met with difficulty. The bride price was high and man had to work hard usually for two years and sometimes more than that. There are many references of these times of Mizo youth marrying captive women.

An important target of raids was the guns which the plains men in the big villages used or the managers of the tea estates had in their possession. Guns were a prized possession as they enhanced the chances of success in hunting and increased the margin of safety for the hunter; most importantly, as the most destructive weaponry, the strength of a village depended greatly upon its stock of the arsenal. On a rare occasion, a powerful chief's death may be the occasion where a raid was urgently prompted. One such example of raid in connection with the funeral of the chief was seen in 1843 when Lalrihua died. After his body had been appropriately left to dry and wither over the household fires his son Lalsuthlaha and his cousin Bawtaia set off on a raiding expedition to procure a number of heads to ensure for Lalrihua a suitable bodyguard and staff of minions for his journey to the man's abode.³⁵⁰

Feuds, raids and the like were exalted by the Mizo chiefs as heroic deeds which were profusely reflected in their songs and folklores. Wars and raids were committed and connected with their mysticism and economic consideration. The raids were not only made to get heads but to loot and to get slaves. For the lust of wealth and procurement of slaves, raids were

³⁵⁰ AG McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, TRI, 2003 (reprint), p.39

often conducted while slaves were employed for various works in the *jhums* or for domestic works. Want of cultivable land, food, and to protect forest as their economic resources (hunting grounds and timber) often led them to go in for raids. The Mizo chiefs, wanting of gaining plunders, specifically guns and metals (*thir*) also resorted to frequent raids to these areas. Thus most of the raids were of an economic in nature.

Modus Operandi

Raids, by this time, were conducted quite on large scale. They were organized in a number of ways. Usually a raiding party was organised at village level. The *Pasaltha* would take charge of the enterprise. For big expeditions the bigger chiefs would form a coalition. A lot of effort went in the planning and preparation of these preparations. These included the divination of the shaman or *puithiam* on whether the time was opportune or auspicious. Weapons were primed up. "The Mizo could endure long distance journey to raid their bordering plains by meagre sustenance, yam and rice pounded together and rammed down into tubes of bamboo."³⁵¹ They were very clever in their strategy, sending out spies, and keep their main body in ambush". As attested by Lewin -

The whole art of war among them may be described in one word-surprise. They never advance openly to attack an enemy, but send forward spies to make sure of taking their foe unawares. Should their object be discovered, they at once abandon the attack, and retreat as they came.³⁵²

The Mizo avoided direct and open confrontation. There was no shame in abandonment when advantage was lost. They were clear in their objective. The aim of a raid was to gain the maximum at

³⁵¹ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, TRI, Aizawl, Aizawl, 2000, (reprint), p.58

³⁵² T.H. Lewin, *Wild races of south Eastern India*, TRI, Aizawl, 1996, pp.138-39

minimum cost. There were no scruples in the methods used in order to incur the least damage. They did not take unnecessary risks. They employed every kind of deception in order to gain advantage of their quarry. Again, Lewin give a very interesting episode from his own experience -

Late at night a loud knocking was heard at the gate of the stockade, and voices called out that a village of the Khyoung the distance some four miles, had been attacked by a party of Lushais, and prayed for assistance. The guard promptly got under arms, and headed by *Jemadar*, went off in the darkness to succour the distressed village, leaving only a few men to guard the stockade. As soon as the main bodies (bodies) of the defenders were at a safe distance the Lushai came out of their hiding place and escalated the stockade, killing my men, carrying off the women and children into captivity, and taking the heads of the slain with them as trophies.³⁵³

Usually, they would raid the territory of a prosperous chief or place, loot the valuables and carry off for chattel services the men and women. If they should be so successful in the raid, the honour and spoils are shared. Even if a person did not personally kill, all those involved in the raid are accorded the status of having affected a kill. If a chief was involved in the raid, booty was considered his property while he distributes the valuables to all the individuals who participated in the raid according to their achievements. In this way the share of the *Pasaltha* would be bigger than the other fighters since they were the real leaders as strategists and coordinators. It was under them that the siege was orchestrated.

BRITISH REACTION

As mentioned above in the account of the raids on British territory, the first retaliation of the British was on following the raid made by Lalsuthlaha and Bawtaia

³⁵³ T.H. Lewin, op.cit., p.246

on Partabgur. The British dispatched an expeditionary force into Mizo Hills in 1844 under Captain Blackwood to punish the offenders. Lalsuthlaha was arrested and transported for life.³⁵⁴ However, this had no effect at all as in 1847 the subjects of Lalsuthlaha subjects, while not able to save their chief, made an avenging raid on Sylhet, killing eight persons and taking some captives.³⁵⁵ The second punitive expedition was by Colonel Lister in 1850. This was following a report from the Cachar magistrate of an attack having been perpetrated on villages within the custody of the British. Colonel Lister marched from Silchar on 4th January 1850, and on the 14th arrived at a village belonging to a chief called Ngura, consisting of 800 to 1000 houses. Lister attacked this village by surprise on the 16th and burnt the village.³⁵⁶ However, as the defenders moved uphill to their well defended stockade Lister did not engage fully with them and retreated back to Silchar.

At first the British were quite ignorant of these tribes who were active and virulent on these borders. Aside from the local epithet of 'Kuki' used generally to designate these wild tribes, they hardly knew from where they came and disappeared to after their raids. When Edgar became the deputy Commissioner of Cachar, he took steps to address the problem. He made a survey of the tribes and came to conclude that pacification of the powerful chiefs would contain these wild tribes. In this, he particularly identified Suakpuilala as the major player and tried to win the confidence of this powerful chief. Knowing that one of the chief reasons for the undertaking of raids was for the procurement of necessary goods, Edgar also provided for the setting up of trade marts - Sonai market on the Sonai River, Changsil formerly called Bepari

³⁵⁴ Ibid.,

³⁵⁵ Lalhrualtuanga, op.cit., p.21

³⁵⁶ Alexander Mckenzie, op.cit., p.367

bazar on the Tlawng River. However, these moves from Edgar did not elicit the expected results from the Lusei end. As the chiefs were independent, they could not be held back against their own interests. In fact, on the other hand, the raids became more intensive in scale and occurrence. The establishment of tea estates and their expansion began to encroach upon the hunting grounds and also began to disturb the tribes as the forests provided a necessary boundary against intrusion from outsiders. However, it was the prospect of booty and slaves of the tea estates that most tempted the Lusei chiefs to raid them almost every winter. Ultimately, one such raid at Alexendrapore led to the Lushai Expedition 1871-72. This tea estate in Cachar was attacked and a planter, Winchester, was killed while his child, Mary, was carried off by the perpetrators. This was a major offensive conducted under the command of General Brownlow. Therefore, though the British did not want to incur expenditure in expeditions against the Lusei tribes, ultimately, they were left with no choice.

The Lushai expedition of 1871-72 brought the Mizo under the British sphere of influence. Although British rule was not extended in the Lushai lands, yet almost all the Hmar of the north and Kuki of the extreme east accepted the British suzerainty. The most important consequence of the expedition was the establishment of twelve trade marts (bazaar)-six in the north Lushai Hills and six in the south Lushai Hills. Changsil in the north and Kassalong in the south became very famous trade marts. The trade marts made the Mizo conversant with money and currency. Gradually its scope became wider. The business in those in the northern trade marts under the jurisdiction of Deputy Commissioner Cachar quickly amounted to annual transaction of Rs 8000 in 1879. This was a considerable amount considering the price index of

the time.³⁵⁷ Traders from both Chittagong and Cachar, who carried trade at great risk, were guaranteed security of their life and property by the Mizo Chiefs in their respective areas. In return, the Mizo Chiefs collected either in kind or cash or both from the traders. Thus the presence of trade marts generated a source of regular income for the Chiefs.³⁵⁸ However, despite the risks it involved for them, monetarily, the plains traders were the bigger beneficiaries.³⁵⁹ At TipaiMukh the traders were mostly Manipuri and at Sonai and Changsil bazars, it was the Bengalis and Cacharis from Cachar and Sylhet who dominated trading activities.³⁶⁰

The bazar at Demagiri was also set up immediately after the Expedition of 1872-73. It was opened due to the efforts of Col. T.H. Lewin, the Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts, who recommended the establishment of a frontier bazar at Demagiri. The Government of Bengal endorsed this suggestion in 1872.³⁶¹ Subsequently, in 1873 the bazar was opened at Demagiri. In 1873, Lewin reported that, "...a sum of Rupees 3,000 was sanctioned by the Government to promote the establishment of a frontier market at Demagiri.and eleven shops have been established under my supervision at Demagiri."³⁶² A committee was formed to monitor the prices in the bazar. This was mentioned by Lewin that, "The rates at which goods are sold in the bazar were decided by a mixed committee, over which I

³⁵⁷ Op.cit., p.152

³⁵⁸ T.H Lewin, *Chittagong Hill Tribes and the Dweller therein*, TRI, 1996 (Reprint), p.113

³⁵⁹ Since their establishments within six years, it was estimated that the sale proceeds from the articles like salt, iron, brass and copper, utensils, tobacco etc., received by the native traders were to the value of Rs. 484025/- in exchange of ivory, rubber, wax, etc.

³⁶⁰ Foreign and Political Department, Letter from Deputy Commissioner, Chittagong Hill Tracts to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, No. 396, dated Rangamatee, 28ⁿ April 1873.

³⁶¹ Ibid.,

³⁶² Op.cit.

presided, composed of Kookie Chiefs and hill shop-keepers."³⁶³ Bengali were the majority traders in this bazaar.

Initially, the Mizo and other tribes used to bring rubber at this bazar in 1873 in exchange for salt. This was reported by Lewin, who mentioned that "a certain quantity of India-rubber has been brought in for sale, and a trade in this article of commerce (which before this was unknown on this frontier) may be said to have commenced."³⁶⁴ Therefore, rubber became one of the most important items of trade for the Mizo in this frontier market. Transaction was mostly carried on through barter and the Mizo used to exchange rubber, ivory, cotton etc. for salt, iron, *dao*, tobacco and the like. However, by 1880s and 1890s the over tapping rubber led to almost complete exhaustion in the entire Lushai Hill, which was reflected in the Report on the Chittagong Hill Tracts for the year 1883-84. The Report mentioned that, "The decline in the import of rubber, noticed in the report for 1882-83, continued in the year under review. The quantity imported in 1883-84 was only 125 maunds against 183 in the year preceding and 906 mounds in 1880."³⁶⁵

In the early phase official record mentions that the Lushais had nothing but rubber to give in exchange for imported goods. However, the potential of cotton as a profitable trade item was soon realized and they started cultivating it in a more concentrated manner. Earlier cotton was grown in the *jhum* in the midst of paddy as a subsidiary crop. An official report mentioned that the Mizo, apart from cultivating food crops, "raise a considerable amount of cotton, and in ordinary years a good deal

³⁶³ T.H.Lewin, *A Fly on The Wheel*, TRI, Aizawl, 2005, p.186

³⁶⁴ Ibid.,

³⁶⁵ Resolution, Political., Calcutta, 1884, Letter from the Commissioner of Chittagong forwarding the Report on the Administration of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Frontier for the year 1883-84

of this is sold to the Bengali merchants at Changsil."³⁶⁶ Captain Shakespear, in his report on the administration of South Lushai Hills for the year 1892-1893 mentions that, "The cotton is of good quality, and the cloths made from it by the Lushai women are preferred by the sepoy to European cloth, as they last so much longer."³⁶⁷

There were certain factors which impeded the peaceful exchange of goods. One factor was that the chiefs and the traders could not settle upon a just and solid understanding. While the traders often took the opportunity to inflate prices, the chiefs were also quick to take advantage of the traders as they were within their jurisdiction. This inclination to take undue advantage from the side of the chiefs and the traders marred the relationship at every point. Also, these tribes hardly had any stable and regular goods for trade. Cotton was grown but its exchange value was not very good. Rubber was a better commodity, but its over-tapping soon brought it to an end. By 1875, trade was falling off, owing to the supply of rubber being effectively exhausted. Under these circumstances, with little to trade with, the traders also began to lose interest as the flow of goods degenerated to a mere trickle. As bad as things already were, the chiefs relentlessly continued to squeeze the traders. In fact, some of them resorted to outright looting of these bazars. This led to the closure of many of these bazars.

The nature of trade being such, it is difficult to determine who the biggest profiteer was. The British opened these bazars as a means to obtain information on the Mizo chiefs, their movement and inclinations. As expected, they proved to be

³⁶⁶ Assam Secretariat Proceeding, Foreign-A, May 1893, No.177, Annual Report of the North Lushai Hills for the year 1892-93, p.3

³⁶⁷ Report on the Administration of the South Lushai Hills for the year 1892-93, p.17

important sources of information on the Mizo. Through these shops they were able to infiltrate into once unknown territory and terrain. On the other hand, the chiefs also used the situation to their utmost advantage. Since the traders had little or no scruples in their moneymaking, they were used as suppliers of guns. This was prohibited but the lure of money made them engage in surreptitious smuggling with the chiefs. On one of such occasions the authority arrested two Manipuri with fifteen boats "laden with various articles, and amongst which were over two thousand *daos*, about a mound of zinc, and fifteen barrels of pieces of iron. The two men in charge of the boats had *parwanah* signed by the Deputy Commissioner giving them permission to take arms."³⁶⁸ There may have been many other similar instances, which went undetected in the arms trafficking from the plains to the Lushai Hills. On the other hand, in 1871, two of the Sailo chiefs, "Suakpuilala and Vuta complained that the Southern Lushais got gun powder and guns and sulphur from a bazaar near Koilasahur, a bazaar in the jungle, about a mile from the place."³⁶⁹

There was a severe famine in 1880-81 in the then Lushai Hills. The famine lasted about ten months. There was crop failure in 1880. Although the Cachar and Chittagong authorities of the British government provided relief measures but by November 1880 about 15,000 people mostly the and young children died of starvation.³⁷⁰ The relief operations had a tonic effect upon the Mizo economy. The Mizo sold out their wealth like ivory, gold and precious stones to the plains men. Huge quantity of Rubber (1000 mounds) were sold to the Cachar traders alone by the Mizo of the north. The value of that quantity was Rs 40,000. The famine resulted in a

³⁶⁸ Bengal Judicial Department Proceedings, June 1869, No. 251

³⁶⁹ Foreign Department, Political-A, October 1871

³⁷⁰ Foreign and Political Department Proceedings, 1889.

boom in the export and import business. A trading class came up among the Mizo and the chiefs who had the acumen plunged into the arena of trading. The Mizo commoners also got accustomed to the consumer goods, hitherto, unknown to them. Tea and tobacco became important imported articles in the Mizo Hills since 1881. The famine changed the lifestyle of the Mizo. The volume of commerce in the trade marts in 1881 increased tenfold since their establishment.³⁷¹ There was also the demand for spices. Formerly there was acute shortage of salt from the salt springs in Mizoram, but, now they got accustomed to the imported salt. In 1888, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar, in his report also mentions, "In addition to the trade at these bazars, there is an increasing trade in bamboos, cotton, and such other country produce which the Lushais bring down into British territory by the Sonai and Daleshwari, returning with salt, tobacco and utensils. Lushais are now constantly seen in the Cachar bazars in the cold weather even so far north as Silchar and Lakhipur."³⁷² In spite of great hardship and the intermittent closures of shops, the number of such marts increased gradually and the Mizo became more and more dependent on the articles of the plains for their necessities of life. Consequently they got accustomed to the peaceful trade which wrought tremendous change in their social and economic outlook.

New feature of Mizo society circa 1840 to 1890 A.D.

It is evident that from the second half of the 19th century the Mizo social formation underwent tremendous change due to contact with the surrounding plains. The proximity to the plains of Cachar, Syhlet, Manipur, and Tripura greatly enhanced the material life of the people in the Lusei villages. Whether it was through trade or raids,

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Cachar Deputy Commissioner's Reports of 1887-88

these surrounding areas facilitated a more regular and dependable flow of goods that were necessary for the sustenance of life at a higher material standard. Each village was equipped with blacksmithy and through which the villages enjoyed not just the benefits of iron tools and weaponry but even the manufacture of various trinkets and ornaments. On the other hand, there was a decline on the communal ethos of sharing and a slow buildup of village organization towards social stratification. The nature of relationship with these surrounding plains became more even with the British taking a hand in the matter.

Villages substantially increased population. Villages of four to five hundred households became a regular and standard feature. In fact, there were many who far exceeded these figures. In general, material life was improved. Rice production afforded a certain amount of regular surplus in food. This regular surplus enhanced material life in a number of ways. For every household, a certain amount was set aside for the brewing of rice beer, *Zu*, which became a necessary beverage. *Zu*, aside from being consumed to relieve the rigours of labour became a necessary item for celebrations, rituals and ceremonies. The surplus also promoted for the specialization of labour and improvement of skills in arts and crafts. It could sustain a professional blacksmith whose regular service was paid for in the form of paddy by those households he serviced. Large villages had blacksmiths catering to respective *veng* or locality.³⁷³ After a good harvest, agricultural surplus provided for leisure time and promoted concentration of labour on various fields during the winter season. Domestically, the season motivated for enterprise in the production of better tools and use items. Weaving received a great boost and garments became emphasised. A

³⁷³ Interviewed with Lalthangvunga in 2007

certain standard on clothing became established. Women were required to weave a set of clothing which they were to take along with them to the house of the husband when married off. On the other hand, men were responsible for the manufacture of all the necessary household items. Every householder aside from building his house had to facilitate the wherewithal for domestic living. He specialised in wood, bamboo and vine works and fashioned all the necessary tools for weaving and wove all kinds of baskets and containers. While it improved skills in arts and crafts, leisure time facilitated seasonal escapades for conducting hunting for scarce resources and raids for securing captives and booty.

While it strengthened the village it directly enhanced the power of the chief. As increase in population increased the volume of production force and production within a village, the chief's share of the produce increased with the increase of households as each was obliged to give him a share of their produce in food. Theoretically, the chief's granary was communal property in times of dire needs. However, it was seldom that such situations occur and the chief was hardly obliged to share his granary with the villagers. Rather he used the resource to endorse chattel service and concubines. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the chief was endowed with the authority to give asylum to criminals or anyone who were pursued within the village and in danger of losing their life in the hands of assailants from within the village.³⁷⁴ Harboring the fugitives and destitute in the village increased the size of his household. The chief benefited from these as in the event of any marriage of a member belonging to this category of people under his upkeep, he was the one to

³⁷⁴ Interviewed with Lalkhuma in 2007.

receive the brideprice. In the event that they should want to buy their freedom, he received a handsome payment.

In fact, the improvement in agriculture created further avenues for the chief to augment his holding and position in the village and power against rivals. The increase in population resulted in mounting land pressure and directly intensified conflict within and without. This resulted in the destitution of hordes of people; domestically from strife within the village with the weak seeking succour from the chief, and externally, from captives and refugees resulting from war between villages. Thus, every successful raid conducted by his village, whether in his charge or not, the maximum benefits accrued to the chief. He had a direct share in the booty and the success of the escapade would be greatly attributed to his capability. This acted as a powerful magnet which attracted more people to enter his domain – either as direct refugees or as entire villages seeking the protective enclosure of the strength that emanated from his village that radiated far beyond its ramparts. While the endorsement of new members directly enhanced strength by way of numbers, villages seeking protection were like satellites revolving around his village and casting a halo around it.³⁷⁵ Therefore, within the volatile atmosphere of contending villages, astute and determined chiefs could work the situation to their favour.

In this connection, the progenies of Lallula were able to build up and sustain their leadership for quite a good length of time. In fact, their very success almost went into their undoing. There was a surging of the chief's power manifested in the Sailo chiefdoms. Their power was enhanced through the gains they made by way of slaves

³⁷⁵ Interviewed with Dengkunga in 2007.

and prestige goods. Apart from *Bawi* they employed in their houses for agricultural works, they had offshoot villages from which they exacted a good amount of the produce. Those offshoot villages were normally occupied by the *Tukluh Bawi*. The free labour force they received from the *Bawi* and slaves uplifted their status in the society that set them far apart from the common people. By the 1870s the Sailo chiefs felt so elevated that they boasted “*Sailo ni leh thla kara leng*” – that they occupied the space between the moon and sun.

By the last decade of the 19th century, the Mizo under the Sailo had become more entrenched in their respective locales with villages orbiting within a radius of 20 miles or so. To the British, in accord to their territorial location, they came to be known as eastern, western, northern and southern Lushais. When the British finally came to occupy the Mizo in 1890, there were four groups of the Sailo chiefs who ruled over the then Lushai Hills. They were- (1) Western Sailo - the descendants of Suakpuilala, (2) Eastern Sailo - the descendants of Vuta, (3) Northern Sailo - the descendants of Vanhnuailiana, Southern Sailo - the descendants of Tlutpawrha. The first three were the descendants of Lallula and the fourth one the descendant of Lallula’s first cousin Lalchera.³⁷⁶

Having knocked out most of their other kindred such as the progenies of Zadeng and Palian, and effectively halted the Pawih, the progenies of Lallula began to lose their solidarity. They began to indulge in petty squabbles amongst themselves.³⁷⁷ Each chief wanted to be the most powerful at the cost of others. They often provoked their warriors and braves to undertake raids against each other. However, while they

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.76

³⁷⁷ Zatlunga, *Mizo Chanchin*, Department of Art and Culture, Mizoram, 1966, p. 245.

encouraged for skirmishes between their villages, they took steps to insulate themselves from actual peril. An understanding was there among them that enabled a condition to be followed. They decreed that no Sailo chief, even in war, should be physically assaulted or injured. Therefore in these bouts between the Sailo villages every chief stood to lose and gain materially, but his life was not at stake. On the contrary, there was absolutely no comfort for the commoners. As these progenies of Lallula were conscious of their domination they began wield a heavy hand and their villagers were becoming subjected to paying more and more dues and slowly deprived of their standing as free citizens. From then on, the Sailo chiefs exercised their power in such a way that they started confiscating the valuable properties of the common people. In the indigenous Mizo society, there were certain movable properties which were kept as treasures. These were guns, gongs, ornament such as necklaces, bracelets, hairpins etc. These properties were generally obtained from the Burmese frontiers.³⁷⁸ Concerning these prestige goods, there were conditions set for the commoners which slowly strangulated them. Liangkhaia observes that the preponderance of the Sailo was due, apart from their solidarity, to their benevolence which suited the physical and mental requirement of the people. On the other hand the other chiefs like Thangluah, Palian and Zadeng were cruel and irresponsible and that their subjects fed up with their despotic rule and welcome any change of the administration at the time of the Sailo war against them.³⁷⁹ However, having triumphed over chiefs of Zadeng and Palian, the Sailo chiefs' rule was gradually

³⁷⁸ Vumson, *Zo History*, op.cit., p.12

³⁷⁹ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, LTL Publications, 2002, (reprint), p. 39

turned against the will of the people. The common people became fed up with raid and war, which was at their expense and mainly for the benefit of the chiefs.

Ultimately, these grievances burst out in a mass revolt which was known as *Lalsawi*. *Lal Sawi* is compounded of two Mizo words in which *Lal* means ‘chief’ and *Sawi* means ‘to shake’. Therefore *Lai Sawi* means “to shake up the chief” or, in other words, to discipline the chief and his chieftainship. This event occurred in 1882-83 just after the famine of 1881. In this event the common people revolted against the domineering rule of the Sailo chiefs. The movement was spread far and wide and swept the better part of Mizoram. For a time, the chiefs were literally kept under house arrest in their own homes and villages. But there was not much that the people could do. Since accustomed to chieftainship they did not think of any other method of village administration; and in this regard, there were no clans who could substitute or replace the Sailo. The impact of long years of monopoly in that office by the clan had become too entrenched to be simply assailed away. Under these circumstances, all that could be done was that the chiefs were made to swear, on pain of death, that they would never again extort and exploit the people for their selfish ends. “The uprising halted the smooth running of the administration of the Chiefs. The result was however short-lived and brief because the unity among the common people could not last long. For this reason the Chiefs restored themselves to their previous positions without much difficulty.”³⁸⁰

In general, Mizo society had undergone substantial change with access to iron for agricultural implements and slaves reduced to servitude enhancing the production

³⁸⁰ Sangkima, *The Mizo uprising: A significant event in the history of Chieftainship in Mizoram*, Spectrum Publication, Gauhati, p.45

of food, goods and services. Labour became more specialized, organized, and hierarchical. A village may be roughly divided as composed of four visible categories. The first was the chief, followed by the *Upa*, the village elders who composed the chief's council with its members chosen from the *Ramhual*, (agricultural specialist) *Zalen*, (blood relations of the chief and exempted from giving *fathang*, or rice dues) *Thirdeng*, (blacksmith) *Pasaltha* (warrior), *Sadawt*, (the chief's appointed shaman) *Puithiam* (people's shaman) and *Tlangau* (village crier);³⁸¹ the third were the commoners; the fourth were the *Bawi* (pauper) and *Sal* (captive slave). However, except for the position of the chief, these distinctions and boundaries were neither fixed nor static, but rather, fluid and flexible. A commoner by virtue of wealth could attain the status of chief's council member; likewise, the slaves and *Bawi* could buy their freedom.

Theoretically, the chief's position in the village was that of a benevolent ruler. The chief was the sole centre of authority. The chief maintained his position through his personal qualities. Therefore, the power and function of the chiefs were not exactly the same due to varying degree of their personality. Shakespear had thoroughly described the chief's position in the village administration, he says,

“The chief held rather an analogous position. Normally he was a despot – I am speaking now of the state of things which existed prior to our occupation of the hills- but in reality his power was very much circumscribed, and his subject could so easily transfer their allegiance to some rival chief, who would probably be willing; for a consideration to champion the cause of his last recruit, that every ruler had to use tact as well as force. In fact, the amount of

³⁸¹ Ibid.

power he wielded depended almost entirely on the personal influence of the chief. A strong ruler, who governed mainly according to custom, could do almost everything he liked without losing his followers, but a weak man who tried petty tyrannies soon found himself a king without any subject³⁸².

Thus the chief was constrained to govern his subject according to custom. Any chief whose rule was unduly harsh would find his subjects leaving him. Although in theory the chiefs were all powerful and strong, they did not assume absolute power in the administration of the village. In the administration of the affairs of his village, the chief was assisted by a council of elders known as *Upa*³⁸³. This *Upa* were appointed or nominated by the chief himself generally from among the rich sections of the society. Again, along with the *Upa*, the chief used to distribute lands for cultivation for a period of one year to each family at the beginning of every year. The chief's council was the one and only court of justice in the village. All disputes were heard and disposed in the council. The chief and the *Upa* tried both civil and criminal cases in accordance with the custom. The chief could dismiss any *Upa* as he found necessary. There was neither fixed number of *Upa* nor fixed tenure for the *Upa*.

Besides the village elders, there were certain categories of functionaries in the village which set them apart for the common people. These are

Ramhual:

The *Ramhual* were those who advised the chief on matters related to agriculture. In consultation with the *Ramhual*, the chief would specify the land to be used for cultivation by the entire village for the year. The chief enjoyed the privilege of first choice of jhum land every year and this indicates that the most fertile land went to the chief every year. After him, the *Ramhual* selected their jhums and had to pay ten basket of paddy whereas the commoners paid six baskets of paddy to the chief. After the *Ramhual*, the common people selected their

³⁸² , J. Shakepear. Op.cit ., p.44

³⁸³ Interview with Tangliana, ex-upa of Bawktlang Village, dated Sep 17.2005

jhums. *Ramhual* were generally selected from any villagers who were good cultivators. The number of *Ramhual* was not fixed and therefore varied in different villages.³⁸⁴

Tlangau:

Tlangau was the village-crier, whose duty was to relay and proclaim important message of the Chief to the villagers. By way of remuneration, he was exempted from paying *Fathang* (paddy dues), apart from this each house in the village must give one basket of paddy to him at the end of every year. However this kind of remuneration varied from village to village. Usually the Chief had never more than one *Tlangau* in the village.

Thirdeng:

Thirdeng was the blacksmith. *Thirdeng* were of two types. The first one was the village *Thirdeng* and second is the private *Thirdeng*. The village *Thirdeng* had to make and repair the tools of the villagers. He made agricultural implements and weapons for the villagers. As remuneration he received a basket of paddy called *Pumhlawh* from each household after every harvest. The *Thirdeng* could also claim a little share in every animal shot or trapped by any villagers and this was known as *Thirdengsa*. The *Thirdeng* normally done their blacksmith work in the morning and in the evening and they used to work in their paddy field in day time. In big village, the chief could have more than one *Thirdeng* if he found it necessary.

In addition to the officials mentioned above, there were three other functionaries of some importance, namely *Bawlpu*, *Sadawt* and *Tlahpawi*. These were called priests. *Bawlpu* was a priest like a medical practitioner who felt the pulse of patient and prescribed whatever necessary. Every villager could use him to perform necessary sacrifice of healing.³⁸⁵ As remuneration for his services, he received a basketful of paddy from each house after every harvest.

Sadawt:

³⁸⁴ Interview with Mrs Biakzami, of Khawhlailung who is 90 years old, dated May 7, 2006

³⁸⁵ Lalsuaka, *Mizo Huntawng*, TRI, Aizawl, 1982, p.46.

Sadawt is the chief's private priests who conducted the Chief's sacrifices. He is the highest priest or *Puithiam* in the village and acted only as the official village priest. The *Sadawt* had to perform the religious sacrifices of the chief. The *Tlahpawi* was a sort of assistant to the *Sadawt* and was usually a friend of the chief.³⁸⁶ As for instance, during the sacrificial killing of a mithun, the *Sadawt* chanted incantation over the animal while the *Tlahpawi* was responsible for other items of ritualistic work connected with the sacrifice.

Zalen:

The chief had a number of persons who were known as *Zalen* or free men. They were man of profession, rich and were exempted from paying *fathang* to the chief, but they have specific obligation to help the chief if the chief ran short of paddy or fell into any other difficulty. This *Zalen* were normally selected from amongst the ministers or *Upa* by the chief. They were given priorities in selecting jhum-sites.³⁸⁷

The common people paid several dues to the chief. These were -

Fathang:

Fathang (paddy due) seems to have been the most dominant as their subsistence living depended chiefly on *jhum* cultivation. The chief was entitled to a share of the produce cultivated in his land. *Fathang* was payable in kind. We do not know the exact amount of *Fathang* in the beginning. Later on the amount was six baskets per house per year. According to custom, the *Ramhual* had to give ten baskets of paddy while the common people had to give six baskets of rice. The paddy due while it enlarged the chief's capacity for conducting feasts and ceremonies also put him in a position to help those of his subjects who were in extreme poverty and this seems to have a great influence in the society.

Chichhiah or salt tax :

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

³⁸⁷ K Zawla, *Mizo Pipu te leh an Thlahtute chanchin*, Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl, 1964, p.107

Salt was an important food item of the Mizo. But, there were few salt-spring in the Chin Hills and Lushai District. As a matter of fact, salt-springs became a valuable economic asset/property for the Mizo. There often arose inter-tribal feuds over the dispute of salt-spring possession in early times. The chief has the privilege to collect salt from his land. Whenever a salt well or *Chikhur* was found in a village, the chief was entitled to a substantial share of all collection made from there. This condition may need time for the chief to establish his authority firmly. Under that situation the practice of salt tax may be initiated after a series of tribal war. A due of one-tenth of the amount of salt collected by any party should be given to the Chief. Besides, the chief if he so desired, could collect as much salt as he like from any of his salt-spring. No villager was permitted to take salt from any Chikhur without prior permission of the chief.³⁸⁸

Sachhiah or meat tax

The chief received also one hind leg of every wild animal shot or trapped by any of his villagers within his land. No meat tax was taken by the chief in the case of the animal not slain by the hand of a villager – when killed by another wild animal or killed itself through accident.³⁸⁹ If an elephant was killed, the chief took one of the tusks in lieu of the hind leg.

Khuai chhiah or bee tax

The chief was entitled to little share of the larva of a bee or wasp and honey which was collected by any villagers within his land. We have references that wax was exported in 1870s as trade item.

The payment of meat due (*sachhiah*), salt due (*chi chhiah*), to the chief are binding only on the resources within his jurisdiction. Thus, the chief without any labour could have much more than his subjects. Failure to pay bee tax resulted in a fine.³⁹⁰ Besides these regular dues the chief received from his villagers, he also drew out certain benefits from them. These are –

Salam or fine

³⁸⁸ NE Parry, *A monograph on Lushai Custom and ceremonies*, RI Khasi offset Printers, Shillong 1928.op.cit, P.5

³⁸⁹ Ibid

³⁹⁰ Op.cit.

Whenever a case was tried by the chief, he had to receive a due known as *Salam* from the party who lost the case. The chief and his *Upa* would usually spend the *Salam* on a feast. The *Salam* fine was normally a sow.³⁹¹

Lal In sak or construction of chief's house:

This privilege was introduced by Vanhnuailiana, a Sailo chief. He raided and captured many Hmar and Thado clans who were living in the present north eastern part of Mizoram. After subduing them he forced Hmar people to migrate to his village to become the *Tukluh Bawi*. He then started forcing them to construct his house free of cost that became the beginning of constructing the chiefs' house. This was the genesis of an added privilege subsequently demanded by most of the Sailo chiefs upon their villagers.³⁹² This period is probably assigned to 1849 when he station at Vancheng village.³⁹³ But the practice of construction of Chief's house was never seen among the descendants of Rolura, who mostly lived in the southern part of Mizoram.

There was a large number of *Tukluh Bawih* in the Sailo villages. These people were conquered clans and were not allowed to leave the village. If any of them tried to run away, a party of young men would be at once sent off to kill or bring back the fugitives. They were greatly instrumental in supporting and keeping the chief at a higher standard of living as against the commoners. The *Bawih* were made to toil hard to keep the wheel of the Mizo chieftainship in motion. The slaves had the right to marry with the consent of the chief or the owner. A slave could marry a slave or a free person. A slave after the marriage had the right to set up his own house with his wife.

³⁹¹ Op.cit.

³⁹² But the practice of construction of Chief's house was never seen among the descendants of Rolura, who mostly lived in the southern part of Mizoram.

³⁹³ Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, Vanbuangi Gas Agency, Aizawl, 2000, p.463

If he wished to be free he had to render six years service free of charge to his master.

³⁹⁴ The chief himself or his sons could keep slave girls as concubines and the baby offspring born out of this union were not illegitimate children but very much the free citizen with higher status. However, their social status was not like that of the children of the legally married wife of the chief. When there is no legal son in the family, the children of the above mention could inherit the family property. The chief received the marriage price of each of the daughters as well as other dues.

Col. Lister expedition in 1850 to Ngura's village clearly mentions the population of slaves and *Tukluh Bawih* in a Mizo village. He mentions,

They have their separate cantonment with a number of dependent villages attached. In these cantonments the fighting men reside; in the dependent villages are located their ryots, who are merely used as coolies, and for tilling the soil. They consist, in many instances, of the captive they have brought away in their different expeditions, a great part of them probably taken as mere children and gradually reconcile to their captivity.....One gratifying circumstance attending the expedition I have now to record, which is, that during the confusion caused by the destruction of his (Ngura) cantonment, 429 captives made their escape from the villages dependent on Mullah (Ngura), and succeeded in finding their way into Cachar.³⁹⁵

When Shakespear visited chief Kairuma in 1891, he found some eighty houses of Thado, Biate, and other clans living in his village as *Tukluh Bawih*. When

³⁹⁴ Vanchhunga, *Lusei Leh A Vela Hnamdangte Chanchin*, Department of Art & Culture, Mizoram, 1955 (reprint), p.147

³⁹⁵ Alexander Mc Kenzie, op.cit., p.293

Kairuma's village was burnt by the British owing to its 'continued contumacious behaviour', all these people made their escape to the villages of their own clans.

Position of women

The Mizo society is basically a patriarchal society. The life of the Mizo women during our study was laborious, arduous and burdensome. Although there was no clear cut division of work between men and women prescribed by customary law, the more strenuous task like security for the village, clearing of the forest for jhum lands and collection of heavy materials for the construction of the house building and the jhum hut and agricultural tools and implements were done by men.³⁹⁶

Women had to work around the clock. Considered from a modern standpoint the daily life cycle of a Mizo woman was one of drudgery. She had to rise early in the morning, fill her basket with empty bamboo tubes, and trudge off before daylight down to the village spring which was generally some way down the hill, and the supply of water was frequently so scanty that it takes her sometime to fill her bamboo tubes.³⁹⁷ After that she has to set to work doing different kinds of household chores the whole morning.

Regarding household chores, the necessary amount of unhusked rice (paddy) has been dried the previous day on the shelf over the hearth, and this she proceeds to pound in a mortar in the front of veranda, and winnow on an oval bamboo tray (*thlangra*) till it is clean enough for use.³⁹⁸ While pounding the rice, it is also her duty to see that rice has been cooked properly in the hearth, even if her husband sits beside

³⁹⁶ Ibid., p.18

³⁹⁷ J. Shakespear, op.cit., p.16

³⁹⁸ Interviewed with Biakzami, who is 90 years old from Khawlailung village in 2005

it. Pigs and fowls were also being fed outside which she must supervise while doing other work. After the morning meal the real work begins. Having packed cooked rice wrapped with a green leaf for the midday meal; women would start hurriedly to the jhum after collecting the implements and tools to be used for weeding. She carries a basket full of food, tools, water, and working clothes. After working the whole day in the field she returns home from the jhum with a basket full of vegetables, firewood and other eatables after the laborious toil.³⁹⁹ As soon as darkness fell, female members of the family resume and continue household chores like cooking food for pigs, spinning and winding cotton to make cloth for the whole family from raw cotton grown in the jhum land. A girl who does not know weaving has no chance of getting a good husband. The Mizo women's weaving played a vital role in the social and economic life of the Mizo people. They wove clothes for the daily use of the family such as shawls to wrap themselves, blouses, shirts, bags, turbans and rugs for the family to cover them at night. They wove various types of traditional clothes which had special significance, to be worn on special occasions like festivals, ceremonies and for mourning. According to HNC Stevenson, the tribal women occupy a very important place in the field of production both in agricultural and domestic.⁴⁰⁰ He has assessed their share at 33 percent of the household's general agricultural production, 50 percent of the work of producing and harvesting cotton, and 66 percent of the total labour used in production of cotton thread.

Regarding women slaves and *Bawih* the chief receives the marriage price, and when this has been paid in full he has no further claim on the woman or her children

³⁹⁹ H.L. Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, TRI, 1998, p.73

⁴⁰⁰ H.N.C. Stevenson, *op.cit.*, p.47

during her husband's lifetime, but should she be left a widow, she is sometimes forced to re-enter the chief's house; but as a rule, if she behaves decently, she is allowed to remain on in her husband's house, and manage his property on behalf of his children, who were not considered *bawi*.⁴⁰¹ However, one aspect of safeguarding women in traditional Mizo society is the marriage price. It was exorbitantly high. Moreover, women were allowed to have partners of their own choice. A Mizo woman also had the right to complain to the chief for ill-treatment she had received from her husband.⁴⁰² The society permitted widow remarriage and allowed the mother to be the guardian of her infant sons. Even the wife of the chief could succeed to her husband's post till her husband's children attained maturity. There were some women chiefs, namely Pi Buki, Vanhnuaithangi, Ropuilianai, Ngura's wife etc. during 1840 to 1890.

Especially from the perspective of feminists, the status of Mizo women in pre-colonial times was pathetically low. They rub salt on the wound by citing old sayings such as – As crab's meat is not meat, a woman's word is not a word; Women and crabs have no religion; The wisdom of women does not cross the village spring; Weeds and unthreatened women keep pushing; Bad wife and bad fence can be replaced.⁴⁰³ The sayings certainly do convey a picture where women are reviled and belittled. However, if we contextualise them in the right setting of the historical time, they have a deeper meaning to convey. This was the time when a sudden turn of events could easily lead to peril. In this situation, the men were to safeguard the life of the village denizens. In order to promote security, there was a championing of masculinity and male aggression. To qualify a man and to have a social standing, a

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Lalkhuma, 75 years old, who is the descendant of Sailo chief, in 2005

⁴⁰² J.Shakespear, op.cit., p.17

⁴⁰³ A.G. Mc Call, op.cit., p.26

male had to undergo rigours of mental and physical trials. He had to prove his worth by showing courage in the face of peril. Therefore, the most respected were those who took to the wilderness and bring back needed resources and information that could make the difference between life and death for the entire village community. Such men were called *Pasaltha*. Therefore, such sayings as are thought to be to belittle women were in all likelihood, actually meant to hit deeper. They were meant to deride the men who though male in gender, did not actually perform the social role as expected of them.

CHAPTER-8

CONCLUSION

Key issues and findings of the Study

CHAPTER-1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses concepts of migration and social formation and those ideas found particularly relevant in relation to the subject under study. The second section gives a brief profile of the Mizo and their general way of life during pre-colonial times. The third section concerns the statement of the problems, objectives of the study and review of literature,