CHAPTER II

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MIZOS

Land and Brief History of the People

Land

Mizoram (Land of the Mizos) was formerly known as the Lushai Hills. It is situated in the North-eastern corner of India. It is bounded on the North by the Cachar District of Assam and the State of Manipur, on the East and South by Chin Hills (Burma), on the West by Bangladesh and the State of Tripura. It has an area of 21,087 sq.km. Mizoram has a population of 4,87,774; that is, male 2,51,988 and female 2,35,786, which is predominantly tribal and Christians. The density of population being 23 per sq.km. is one of the lowest in India.²

The Mizo Hills have ranges running from North to South. The average height of the hills is about 900 metres. The highest peak in the Mizo Hills is the Blue Mountain (Phawngpui) with a height of 2,165 metres in the Southern part of the territory.

Mizoram has a pleasant climate. It is generally cool in the Summer and not very cold in the Winter. In the Winter the temperature varies from 11°c to 24°c and in the Summer it is between 18°c to 29°c. As the climate on the hill tops is much better than in the valleys, which are humid and hot, the Mizos prefer to have their villages on top of the hills. The area is under the direct influence of the monsoon. It rains heavily from
May to September and the average rainfall is 254 cm per year. Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, has an annual rainfall of 208 cm.

The Winter is very pleasant. It is rainfree. The skies are wonderfully blue and in the morning the mist forming between the hills give an excellent view of white stretches resembling vast lakes.

The vegetation growth in Mizoram is abundant. It is full of trees, plants, bushes and grass. Bamboos grow abundantly everywhere. The hills are marvellously green. The vegetation and the climate of Mizoram offer ideal sanctuary to wild animals.

However, because of large number of guns issued to the people, the number of wild animals and birds decreased very sharply. With strict restriction on guns imposed now, wild animals and birds again appeared in plenty all over the hills. Elephants, tigers, leopards, bears, wild dogs, mithuns, deers, wild pigs etc., are now numerous. Some of these animals cause wide-spread damage to the crops. The majority of the total population lives in the rural areas and are still on the old pattern of agriculture, while the urban population constitutes 25.17 percent. However, it is noteworthy that there is no landless peasant, and there is no exploiting landlord in Mizoram.

People

The Mizos (Men of the Hills or Highlanders) belong to the Mongolian race. Legends say that the Mizos come from Chhinlung (A hole under a rock). After a great darkness and catastrophe, the ancestors of the Mizos are said to have come out of this hole. From what we know so far, the Mizos are comparatively new comers to their present land.
It is believed that they come from some area in the hinterland of Asia and that they migrated slowly in waves, through Burma across the Chin Hills. They moved restlessly on in little scattered lands and began to overflow into the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) some two hundred years ago.

Little was known about them to the outside world till the middle of the nineteenth century, when the fierce tribemen began to carry out daring raids in the neighbouring plains of Cachar, Shylet and Chittagong Hills Tracts. With the discovery of Assam Tea, plantation started on the foot hills, bordering Mizoram. Gradually, the forest gave way to planters' axes. This alarmed the Mizos at the encroachment of lands they led a number of raids into these tea-gardens, plundering, burning and killing. As a result, they earned lots of uncomplimentary names from British administrators and planters such as barbarians, border thieves, head-hunters, etc. Head-hunting was, in deed, one of their favourite past time. Heads of their enemies killed were brought home as war trophies and defenceless tea-garden labourers' heads provided good trophies even for those whose courage was questionable in other circumstances.

In spite of these hostile attitudes, tea plantation continued to expand and the Kizos made one concerted effort to stop it altogether in 1871. They attacked a number of tea gardens and also captured one small, European girl, whose daughters are still living in London. This was a good excuse for subjugating the wild Kizos, occupying their country in 1885 and disarming them.

It was these raids and plunders which provoked punitive expeditions from the British, and ultimately the annexation of what is now Mizoram
in 1891. At first the British divided the area into two districts; that is, North Lushai Hills under Assam, with headquarters in Aizawl, and South Lushai Hills under Bengal, with headquarters in Lunglei, which were placed under Superintendents. In 1898 the North and South Lushai Hills districts were amalgamated and brought under Assam. A Superintendent was placed in charge of the district, with headquarters at Aizawl. Apart from subduing the Mizos, the British had no interest in the land and the people, with a result that the district remained much neglected and isolated from the outside world.

**Chieftainship**

Careful not to disturb the existing system, British utilised the institution of Chieftainship to maintain law and order and to run the administration. The area was divided into twelve circles, each under an Interpreter, who served as a link between the chiefs and the superintendents. But the real administration was left to the chiefs called 'Lal' in Mizo language. They were supreme in their own villages. A chief would settle all disputes in the village, allocate to the villagers land for jhum, feed the poor and give shelter to ones seeking it. He was assisted by a council of village elders called 'Upas' appointed by him. He would also appoint a number of village officials to help him like the village crier or 'Tlangau', the blacksmith or 'Thirden', and the priest or 'Puithiam'. The chieftainship was hereditary, passed on to the eldest son. The Government had the right to dismiss a chief and elevate a commoner to that office. Since chieftainship was made hereditary and the council of elders selected by the chief of his choice to assist him was introduced, the position of the chief had become an unenviable one. The chief was the guardian of his people, leader and protector in times of attack by the enemy and above all, giver of food.
in times of scarcity.

In battle he led his warriors. The chief, being strong and powerful, never used absolute powers in the administration of his village. He had, thus, many executive and judicial powers that he used to exercise with the advice of his elders. Since the post of the chief was hereditary without any honorarium, he used to receive three maunds of paddy from each household per year, which was called 'Pathang'. In the long run, Sailo clan among the Mizos emerged very powerful and stronger, who ruled over many Mizo villages for many years, and also offered more resistance to the British annexation of this territory.

In addition, there were also many other ruling clans emerged among the Pawis and the Lakkers, inhabiting the Southern part of Mizoram, who also had a lot of administrative and judicial powers in the administration of their villages like the Lushai chiefs. But the organisation of the village administration of the Lakkers differed from the Mizos. In the Lakher society, the village community consisted of the chief, the patricians, the commoners, the village elders, and the village officials. In Lakher society, the chief families and patricians had certain privileges which were not enjoyed by the common people. But it is interesting to note that the Lakkers have no single royal clan like the Sailo. Each tribe has its own royal clan, but within the village, the same principle of mutual help between the chief and people prevailed. The Lakher chieftainship was also hereditary.

It thus appears from the history of the British expedition to Mizoram and their subsequent administrative control over the Mizos that the aim of the British rule, in the beginning, was to maintain law and order in the
Lushai Hills. So the contribution of the British rule to changing the Mizos was only because of law, order and a modicum (small) utility services all backed by a policy of upholding the social customs of the people. The village system of the government under the chiefs continued.

When chieftainship was abolished in 1954, Fathang (Paddy Tax) was discontinued, and there after it was being realised by the Mizo District Council and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council as land revenue. But after the elevation of the Mizo Hills District to the status of Union Territory, the land revenue in Aizawl and Lunglei Districts was realised by the Government of Mizoram, whereas in the Chhimtuipui District, the Lakher, the Pawi, and the Chakma District Council realised the land revenue. In addition, the chief was entitled to other privileges such as Thirdengsa (Blacksmith Tax), Khuaichhiah (Bee tax), and Chi-chhiah (Salt Tax). Salt was prepared by the villagers from salt springs with the permission of the chief. Later the chief also expected material benefits from the earnings of the villagers from horticulture and cultivation other than agriculture. He also received a portion of each fine levied. But all these privileges and rights of Lushai Chiefs, the Pawis and the Lakher Chiefs were, however, abolished on 1st April 1955, and 15th April 1956, respectively. After the abolition of chieftainship, the administration of the village was entrusted to the village councils.

**Religion**

The Mizos, like other primitive people, were originally animists. They believed in a spirit called 'Pathian', who was the creator of everything and a beneficial being. But he had little to do with spirits which inhabit the hills, the streams, the trees and the rocks. These evil spirits were responsible for all the ills and misfortunes in
this world. The malignant influence of the evil spirit often causes a variety of troubles to man in many ways. So in order to have a good health, good harvest and general well-being, these evil spirits had to be propitiated by a series of sacrifices and offerings. These sacrifices or offerings were made according to a certain scale or a type of illness. In one case, the sacrifice might be a pig, in another a hen, or a cock or some other domestic animal. It, thus, appears from the above that the Mizos did not know the worship of gods and goddesses in the beginning. No names were given to evil spirits as god or goddesses. But they had constant fear of the infinite and respect for nature. As one of the Mizo historians, Rev. Liangkhaia believes that "the religion of the Mizos had its origin in the consciousness of their need for deliverance from physical illness and from other misfortunes which they attributed to evil spirits."

The Mizos believe in the existence of soul and life after death or other worlds wherein the spirits of the dead lived. After death the soul goes to 'Pialral' or 'Mitthi Khua' (the abode of the dead). They also believe that in Pialral all the good things are available in plenty and those who enter the Pialral live and enjoy eternal happiness without having to labour any more and oblivious of the world they had left behind. The people who hunted and killed a number of dangerous animals and had given a number of feasts, according to their social customs, will go to Pialral, where they would live in luxury, comfort and happiness. Those who do not earn enough merit will live in Mitthi Khua, which is a place of sorrow. The souls of all the dead are believed to pass through Rih Lake, a beautiful natural lake located inside Burma, near Champhai, a bordering village of Mizoram.
The soul, according to the Mizo belief, had to cut off all connections with the earthly life while going either to Pialral or Mitthi Khua. Not only this, but according to legends, these two methods were devised for the different sections in the society. The rich could buy their way to paradise by sacrifices and meritorious deeds, while the poor could or common men could go there by passing through all the adventures. Thus, it seems from these two devices that there is no reference available to women going to the paradise. These ceremonies were meant for men and men only; not only this, but most of the Mizo festivals were also connected with the old Mizo religions. It, thus, appears from the foregoing narration that the faith of the Mizos is very simple. They do not indulge in idol worship.

The traditional religion or belief is, however, today of academic interest because all these primitive religious practices have since been discarded and forgotten as the Mizos have embraced a new religion, Christianity, with so much dedication and submission that their entire social life and thought process have been altogether transformed to an extent which is amazing. Thus, Christianity has made tremendous advances in the Mizo society.

The first Christian missionary, Rev. William Williams of the Welsh-Calvanistic Church stationed in the Khasi Hills, visited Mizoram in 1891 and communicated to the Mizos about the Christian God. But he stayed only for a month. In 1893-94, Rev. F. W. Savidge and J. H. Lorrain, both of the pioneer mission, came to Aizawl and stayed there till 1897. They toured the entire district and worked hard to learn and reduce the language to writing, using the Roman script with slight modifications. During their four-year
stay in Aizawl, they translated the gospels and also wrote a grammar and
dictionary containing seven thousand words, which was published by the
government in 1898. After it became the foundation of all educational
works in Mizoram. Thus, they gave the supreme gift "language and
literature" to the Mizo people and prevented Bengali from becoming the
trade and court language for the Mizo. They did this for communicating
gospels to the Mizo. Their pioneering work was subsequently taken over
by Welsh Presbyterian missionary, Rev. D. E. Jones, who established the
Welsh Presbyterian mission in Aizawl in 1897. Both Rev. F. W. Savidge
and Reverend J. H. Lorrain returned to Mizoram in 1903 to operate on behalf
of the London Baptist Mission Society at Serkawn (Lunglei District). The
Lakher pioneer mission was established at Serkawn by Rev. R. A. Lorrain.
This marked the beginning of organised Christian missionary work in the
Mizo Hills.11

Since the advent of Christianity in 1894 and the introduction of
modern education by the Christian missionaries more than 95% of them have
embraced the Christian faith and nearly 60% of them are now literate. The
Mizos have been enchanted to their new-found faith with so much dedication
and zeal that within a very short span of time, the entire social life and
their outlook on life and life after death have been altogether transformed
and guided by Christianity directly or indirectly and their sense of value
have also undergone a drastic change.12

The new Christians, while they were few, used to gather for worship
in homes, but as they grew in numbers, they had to have their own meeting
places. The Missionaries erected a building, which they used as school
class room by day and as meeting house by night. Similar buildings were
soon erected wherever four or five families became Christians.

The Presbyterians were organised into one unit with headquarters at Aizawl, and the Baptist followed the same pattern with headquarters at Lunglei. All the collections and gifts were centralized and sent to the headquarters. Expenditures for pastoral work and others were also paid from this centralized fund. A local church, if necessary, raises a separate fund for its own need. From early days every attempt was made to make the church self-supporting. As a start, every local Christian groups were taught to erect their own church buildings and not to expect help from the missionaries or other friends. Every new member was taught to tithe. A happy name had been given to the tithes and other collections raised. It is called "Pathian Ram" meaning "God's Kingdom", which can be used for all pastoral and other activities of the church.

From the early days women were also recruited for Christian work. Normally women everywhere are more conservative. Men can talk to them, but they will rarely express themselves infront of them. A man would think he has complete control of his family and even practice polygamy, if he can afford to pay the bride price. However, he often finds it more diplomatic to have only one wife for domestic bliss, even then he has to watch out constantly for flying saucers from the kitchen. The women workers, called Bible Women, organized special meetings where the ladies can help each other with their problems. Child care and rudimentary sanitary teachings were also imparted. These Bible Women were given first aid lessons and taught simple delivery cases. They played exceedingly important roles wherever they were sent. Prejudice against women taking prominent parts in public and religious affairs was strong, but in spite
of this, they played their parts well. The pulpit was barred and even
ladies missionaries dared not presume its freedom of use to avoid
scandalizing men. But more women than men often took a share of the
revival and joined charismatic movement. This may be due to their more
emotional make up. Hysteria and the like as a result occur more among
women. Prejudice against women taking prominent parts in the public life
is dying out. It is found that women evangelist perform generally better
than men among completely non-Christian elements. They can get into the
heart of families sooner, and where men workers are persecuted, women
rarely suffer due to natural chivalry. Our women are now taking more
responsibilities in the church, particularly, in raising collections.
They have stormed the pulpit as well but as to ordination as minister or
elder, St. Paul's injunction is clear enough—"An elder must be the husband
of one wife." A breach had been made even in this men citadel in Mission
Veng Church, the premier church in Mizoram. One woman candidate has now
been actually elected for eldership. She will be ordained soon.  

Culture

In Mizoram there are four different cultures—The Mizo, the Pawia,
and the Lakhers; although all are Christians, they have their own distinct
customs and culture. The Chakma are different from the others in
language, religion and culture.

Among the Pawis the most common clans are Chinza, Hlawchhing,
Bawitlung, Zathang, Hnialum, Khenglawt, Satheeng, Mualching. The Sub-tribes
are Tlanglau, Bawm and Pang. The Pawis call themselves Lai which is a
tribe commonly known as Chins in the Chin Hills district of Burma. The
Pawis speak Lai language at home and amongst themselves and they have
accepted Mizo as their language in the schools and for use with outsiders. Marriages between Pawis and Lakkers and between Pawis and Mizos are quite common. The Pawis and the Mizos have similar customs and ways of life. But the Pawis are less sophisticated and more conservative than the Mizos. The menfolk have long hair tied in a knot on the head. They generally wear hand-woven loin wrapper. The women wear a lot of beads. The Pawis in the North, who are in constant touch with the Mizos, are fast adopting the Mizo language and the Mizo culture.

The Lakkers have a distinct pattern of customs and traditions. The Lakkers call themselves Maras and say that the Lushais gave them the name of Lakker as a Lushai saw the Mara woman plucking cotton (la - cotton, kher - to pluck). The Mara language is different from the Mizo language. Most of the Lakkers, like the Mizos, are Christians. The common dress for a Lakker man is a shirt and a loin cloth, and for a woman, a short blouse and a red and black striped cloth (puan). The Lakker man prefers to keep the hair long and tied in a knot above the forehead. He also wears a turban on the head. The women keep the hair long and have hairdos fixing long hairpins. They use ornaments made of shells and old coins.

There are three principal clans amongst the Lakkers--The ruling clan (Hlychho, Choza), the higher clan (Khaila, Nohro), and the commoner (Asyu, Tlapi). Inter-marriage between the clans is allowed. But the ruling clans have marriage only amongst themselves or with higher clans. The bride price varies according to clan, from about Rs.60/- to Rs.10,000/-.

Amongst the Lakkers, the eldest son inherits the property. Although the Regional Council has allowed making of will of property, the Lakkers
have not accepted this departure from the custom and stick to their age-old system of inheritance. Marriage is generally arranged by the parents. When a son is about 15, the parents would get him engaged to a suitable girl. Child marriage is prevalent; Divorce is very rare. As the bride price is very high, and the arrears have to be paid in case of divorce, it acts as a deterrent to divorce. The Lakher society is conservative and is retaining many of its old customs and traditions.

Dances

The Mizos, the Pavis and the Lakhers have the traditional dances in common. Most popular of these dances is the 'Cheraw' or the bamboo dance. Six girls squat on the ground holding bamboo poles which are rythmically shifted and struck against one another. Sic other girls dance moving between the shifting bamboos. The dance has a fast rythm and symbolises the pulsating youth. 'Khual Lam' is a very popular dance of the Mizos. A group of boys in puandum (A special Mizo shawl) dance, keeping tune with gongs and drum beats. In 'Solakia', originally a Lakher dance, but now adopted by the Mizos and the Pavis, men and women dance round in a big circle to the accompaniment of drum beats. This dance is associated with hunting. On completion of a hunt, the villagers would gather together and dance around the hunt while a feast would be prepared.

In 'Chheihlam', the Zu - drinking adults sit in a circle and with the singing of anecdotes and drum beats each takes a turn to dance in the middle of the circle. All these dances are shown when a dignitary pays a visit to a village or there is a special ceremony. The young Mizo men and women now prefer the western music and dance for which they have a
natural flair. In all the villages, group of young men and women gather in the evening and sing and dance, sometimes the whole night. Of the instruments, they use only the Spanish quitar, which can be seen even in the remotest village. Like the Mizos, the Pawis also have taken to western tunes and dances, but the Lakkers in general stick to their old forms of entertainment.

The food habits of all these tribes are common. The staple food is rice, which is taken with boiled vegetables and liberal helping of chillies. Tea is very popular and also are cakes and sweets. There is practically no taboo on any food. Beef and pork are very much relished. The workers eat rice thrice—the first at sunrise, the second at noontime, and the third at sunset. After the early dinner in the evening, the people have enough time for amusements, gossips, and social and political meets.

The Buddhist Chakmas

The Chakmas are culturally entirely different from the Mizos, the Pawis and the Lakkers. The Chakmas are Buddhists. They worship the Budha, and also some of the Hindu gods and goddesses like Malakshminima (Mother Lakshmi), Gangamana (Mother river), and their own traditional deities like Sugolong (The deity of prosperity). Like their religious rites, the social customs of the Chakmas are also mixtures of Buddhist, Hindu, and old tribal customs.

Marriages are arranged by the parents. Free mixing amongst boys and girls is not allowed. Bride price in cash and kind is to be paid by the groom's father to the bride's father. Cash is retained by the bride's father but the articles like ornaments, utensils, etc., are given to the
bride. In marriage ceremony, first a feast is given in the bride's house. Next day she is taken in a procession to the groom's place, where a Buddhist monk recites mantras and solemnises the marriage. Divorce is allowed in case the husband and the wife cannot pull together. The divorce is always in the form of the husband writing a document divorcing the wife; remarriage is allowed.

After death the body is cremated. The Buddhist monk recites mantras at the time of cremation. The ashes are immersed in a river. The sons shave off their hair and perform purification (sradha) ceremony after seven days. The eldest son inherits the property.

The Chakmas have the Karbari system of social and village administration. A Karbari is elected unanimously by the villagers. He is the honorary head of the village and settles all social disputes and tries minor criminal offences in the Panchayat or conference of the old and wise men of the village. In case of major offences, the offender is externed from the village. In case of a minor offences, fine is levied and the proceeds are shared amongst the Karbari and the village elders.

There is some sort of a caste system among the Chakmas called Gaja. There are about 15 Gajas like Tungja, Bangsa, Dāme, Mulimia, Borbo gaja etc. This distinction is perpetuated through the sons. But there is no marriage restriction or professional distinction among the different gajas.

The Chakmas are semi-nomadic. They prefer to have their villages by river side. Hence, unlike the Mizos, they settle in the valleys. The Chakmas move from one village to another rather frequently. Recently
this habit has been checked to some extent by the grouping of villages.

The Chakma men wear very short loin cloth (gamoha) and vest or shirt; the women wear two pieces of hand-woven cloth. Tobacco smoking with bamboo pipe is very common among both men and women. Distilled alcohol called mad, is popular among the men. The women generally do not drink. The most popular entertainment is the open air theatrical performance (jatra) by the village drama parties.¹⁴
Notes and References

1 Rev. Zairema, *God's Miracle in Mizoram*, p. 1


3 A. C. Ray, *States of our Union, Mizoram*, pp. 1, 2

4 R. N. Prasad, n. 2, p. 1

5 A. C. Ray, n. 3, pp. 4, 6

6 *Heralding Mizoram State by DIPR & T. Govt. of Mizoram*, pp. 1, 4

7 Rev. Zairema, n. 1, pp. 1, 2

8 DIPR & T. Govt. of Mizoram n. 6, pp. 1, 2

9 R. N. Prasad, n. 2, pp. 9, 59, 62-63

10 DIPR & T. Govt. of Mizoram, n. 6, p. 7

11 R. N. Prasad, n. 2, p. 63-65

12 DIPR & T. Govt. of Mizoram, n. 6, p. 8

13 Rev. Zairema, n. 1, pp. 8, 30

14 A. C. Ray, n. 3, pp. 9, 12-15