

## INTRODUCTION

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONDITION OF MIZORAM

#### 1. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES :

Mizoram is situated between latitudes  $20^{\circ}20'$  and  $24^{\circ}27'$  North and longitudes  $92^{\circ}20'$  and  $93^{\circ}29'$  East and covers an area of 21087 Sq. kilometres. It lies in the extreme north eastern tip of India bordered by Burma on the east and south, by Bangladesh and the state of Tripura on the west and by Cachar district of Assam and the state of Manipur on the north. The population as shown in 1981 Census is 493,757 and the density of population is 23 per sq. kilometre.

The monsoon climate with moderate sunshine and heavy rainfall helps in abundant growth of bamboos, trees and thick foliage throughout the land. The whole land consists of ranges of hills some of which are very steep and rugged running in a north and south direction with watersheds between them. The rivers run mostly either northward or southwards. As the land is hilly by nature there are innumerable streams, brooks, gorges, ravines, and ridges overgrown with trees, bushes, bamboos, etc. because of which it looks like the surface of a green bittergourd when viewed from a flying aeroplane. The dense forests have disappeared in vast areas due to destructive procedure adopted for agricultural practices. However, thick forests full of exploitable trees still cover large areas of the land.

Mizoram is rich in flora and fauna. The vegetation has a great natural beauty. Almost all the tropical plants are found in abundance. The variety of fauna is large. There are different species of birds and the animals like tiger, leopard, wolf, deer, wild pig, monkey, gibbon ape, porcupine, wild cat, wild mithun, elephant, rhinoceros, etc. are found in large number. At present the elephant and wild mithun are rarely found probably because of gradual destruction of thick brush forests.

Mizoram has a pleasant climate throughout the year. The rainy season usually starts from the month of May and lasts for four months. The average rainfall is 250 cm in a year. During this season the climate remains fairly cold and pleasant. The temperature varies from 11°C to 21°C in winter and from 20°C to 29°C in summer.

## II. THE PEOPLE :

Originally the Mizo are descendants of Tibeto-Burma of Mongolian race.<sup>1</sup> As there is no written record of the original abode of the Mizo it is not possible to trace their original home. However, it is believed that they came from some area in the hinterland of Asia. Traditionally it is believed that the Mizo came from China and that they migrated to the present habitation through Burma. But there is no written evidence about the time of their migration from place to place.

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1. Liangkhaia, Mizo Chanchin, 1976, p. 1

According to J.H.Lorrain the ancestral home of the Mizo appeared to have somewhere in the neighbourhood of South East Tibet and Western China where from they had moved southward and westward to their present habitat by slow degrees through the centuries.<sup>2</sup>

There is a Mizo legend that the Mizo originally came out of a huge hollow rock known as "Chhinlung" the opening of which could be closed with a stone. Different groups of people came out of the hole of the rock and when the Ralte group was coming out of it they were chattering noisily so much that the hole was covered with a big stone and stopped the coming out of the rest of the Ralte.<sup>3</sup> Till today it is said among the Mizo that the Ralte are noisy in nature because of their excessive love of talking when they keep company with one another.

The traditional belief among the Mizo is that they originally came from Chhinlung which may perhaps be a place now called Silung in China bordering Shan state in the east. Chhinlung as an origin of the Mizo as told by the legend is extremely improbable and absurd but the word 'Chhinlung' is referred to by all the Mizo elders as their original place.

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2. Lorrain J.H., Dictionary of the Lushai Language, 1975 (Reprinted), The Asiatic Society, p. V

3. Zawla, K., Mizo Pi Pute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin 1964, Aizawl, p. 4.

The modern explanation is that during the latter part of the eighth century A.D. a Chinese Prince, Chhinlung by name left his home because of unmeasured and total disagreement with his father and moved south west along with his followers and settled at 'Awk satlang' in Burma and there they rose in population. After the death of Chhinlung the people scattered hither and thither. In course of time they identified and called themselves 'Chhinlunga chhuak' meaning 'originated from Chhinlung' after the name of their leader, Chhinlung. It is said that the descendants of the followers of Chhinlung are those who live in modern Chin Hills, Manipur, Mizoram and who are the hill tribes of Cachar and Chittagong.<sup>4</sup>

The above noted explanation has gained ground perhaps on the following propositions :

- (1) All the Mizo and other hill tribes residing outside Mizoram claim that Chhinlung is their ancestral home.
- (2) In the past the Mizo used to call themselves after the name of their noted leader or dwelling place.
- (3) Other Mizo historians like K. Zawla and Lalmama also hold the view that the word 'Chhinlung' is perhaps known to the Mizo because they were once under the leadership of the Chinese prince called Chhinlung who deserted his father owing to a quarrel between them. Zatlunga, one

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4. Liangkhaia, Op.cit., p. 1

of the Mizo historians is of the opinion that all the Mizo are descendants of Chhinlung, a Chinese prince who begot two sons namely Chawngthua and Chawngzaa from whom all other clans have sprung.

Regarding the origin of the term 'Mizo' Zatlunga opines that the ancestors of the Mizo are of Mongolian race. They first entered China and later on proceeded to the south west and reached Burma. They settled in the plain of the river Irrawaddy which flooded the plain frequently. Owing to the frequent occurrence of flood and an increase in their population most of the Mizo left the plain for Thantlang (Than range) which was much more higher than their previous habitation. While living at Thantlang (Burma) the name of their clan came to be known as 'Duhlian' and those still living in the plain called them 'Mizo' because they had become highlanders.<sup>5</sup> 'Mi' means 'person' and 'Zo' means 'highland'. Thus the word Mizo literally means highlanders (people belonging to the high lying place) B. Lalthangliana, writer of "History of Mizo in Burma" places the period of their settlement on the Thantlang between fourteenth century and mid fifteenth century A.D.

There is yet another explanation that the word 'Mizo' comes from Zopui town built by Lallula, Chief of the Sailo

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5. Zatlunga, Mizo Chanchin, 1966, p. 1

clan which was situated about 20 miles to the west of Tiau river in about 1765. The town dwellers always made raids upon their enemies successfully and they lived in prosperity for which they were proud of themselves. The name 'Zopui' literally means 'great highland' (zo = highland, pui = big or great). In the poems of Lallula's time the word 'Zo' was used to signify Zopui town. The inhabitants were, therefore, called 'Mizo' to mean people belonging to the Zopui town (Mi' means 'people'). Hence the name 'Mizo' seems to have originated from 'Zopui' in the late eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> One stanza of the poem exalting Zopui town in which the word 'Zo' stands for Zopui is given below :

Ka Zo khua hi dem lo u,  
Thalanrawn thlung lu kan lakna,  
Phan pui zur nguai aw e.

(Do not despise my Zo town,  
We beheaded the Thlanrawns,  
Phan tree is full of their heads)

Vanchhunga, one of the writers of Mizo history remarks that since the remote past the Mizo elders while talking about their past life used to identify themselves as 'Mizo' which is evidenced by their utterance, "We, the Mizo".<sup>7</sup>

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6. Lalthangliana, B., History of Mizo in Burma, 1977, p. 71

7. Vanchhunga, Lushei leh a vela huam dangte chanchin, 1955, p. 1.

Notwithstanding the fact that the exact time and place from which they were known as 'Mizo' cannot be ascertained it is clear that the term 'Mizo' has been in use since the unknown past before occupation of the present Mizoram.

When the British made contact with the Mizo in the latter part of the nineteenth century they found that the Sailo clan of the Lushei (Lusei) group had been the dominant rulers for quite a long time who firmly established supremacy in the better parts of the land. The British therefore, called the land 'Lushai Hills' and the inhabitants were called 'Lushai'. The word 'Lushai' is incorrect transliteration of the word 'Lushei' or 'Lusei'. So the word 'Lushai' is used in a wider sense covering the whole tribe of the Hills while the word 'Lushei' (Lusei) is used only for the clan of that name. Sometimes the Lushai spoke of themselves as 'Duhlian' and the general population is spoken of as 'Mizo'.<sup>8</sup>

Rev. J.H. Lorrain also mentions that Lusei is the name from which the English word 'Lushai' is derived. While the English speaking people apply Lushai to the entire tribe, the tribesmen themselves call the upper classes of people 'Lushei' meaning 'long heads' and the lower classes 'Lu tawi' which means 'short heads'. Thus the word 'Lushai' which

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8, Shakespear, J., The Lushei Kuki Clans, Part I, 1975, pp. 1-2.

9. Lorrain, J.H., Op. cit, p. 304

came out of the wrong pronunciation of the word 'Lushei' (Lusei) covers the whole tribe while the word 'Lushei' is the name of one of the subtribes of the land. The Kawl (Burmese) tradition regarding the origin of the term 'Lusei' is that there were once ten ethnic groups in the Kawl (Burmese) plain and each group was known as 'the first clan', 'the second clan' and so on. The tenth clan migrated westward and this clan was called 'Lusei'. The word 'Lusei' is a compound of two Kawl (Burmese) words 'Lu' and 'se' meaning 'head' and 'ten' respectively. Thus the term 'Luse' is derived from the Burmese word 'Luse'. Initially it was Luse and later on, Luse was modified to Lusei.<sup>10</sup> But this tradition seems to be obscure and incredible. It is most credible that the word 'Lushei' (Lusei) came into use after the name of their powerful leader or progenitor. It may further be presumed that the head of their noted leader was long in shape and the group he led, therefore, came to be known as Lushei or Lusei.

The Lushei sub-tribe consists of the following:<sup>11</sup>

Pachua, Chhangte, Chuaungo, Chuahang, Chhak-chhuak, Chawngte, Hauhnar, Hrahsei, Tochhawng, Vanchhawng and descendants of Zahmuaka. Different clans have sprung from each of these sub-tribes.

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10. Siana, V.L., Mizo History, 1953, p. 8

11. Liangkhaia, Op. cit, pp. 9-11



The original ancestor of the Paihte and the Sailo was Nova who begot Dongula and Dongula begot Ninguitea who had two sons namely Ngeknnguka and Bawklua. The descendants of Ngeknnguka came to be known as 'Paihte'. The pedigree of the Sailo clan was that Bawklua begot Chhuahlawma and Chhuahlawma begot Zahmuaka and Zahmuaka had six sons one of whom was Thangura who begot Thangmanga and Thangmanga begot Sailova. Thus the descendents of Sailova came to be called 'Sailo' as the name of their clan. The other sons of Zahmuaka namely Zadenga, Thangluaha, Paliana, Rokhuma and Rivunga set up separate villages and they all became chiefs at their respective villages. Such clans as Zadeng, Thangluah, Palian, Rivung and Rokhum had arisen after the names of these chiefs.<sup>12</sup> About this time the names of the clans usually came into being after the name of their noted leader or progenitor.

According to K. Zawla, the father of Rainaa was Sihsinga of Paihte clan and the names of the succeeding progenies are the same as above. The explanation that the Sailo are descended from Sihsinga who belonged to the Paihte blood group is supported by a Mizo tradition and is also accepted by the Sailo of the present generation. With the passage of time the Sailo of the Lushei group were becoming more and more powerful and came into prominence in the eighteenth century till the abolition of Chieftainship in 1954.

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12. Zatluanga, Op.cit, pp. 87-88.

### III. ECONOMY :

Agriculture is the chief occupation of the people. Shifting method of cultivation has been adopted since the remote past. During the months of January and February they cut down the jungle for their jhum and burn them in the dry season. Rice is the staple food and is grown in the jhum. Different kinds of vegetables like maize, brinjal, pumpkin, cucumber, water melon, mustard, etc. are also sown. They also grow cotton from which they make all the clothing for the household. Weeding is done periodically after the crops are grown. Rice is harvested in November after which the jhum is left and disused. The old khum becomes fit for re-jhumming after five or six years. Another jhum land is then selected for the next year's cultivation. Thus the economic condition of the Mizo is poor as it is based on agricultural resources only.

Trade : Before the British contract with the Mizo no currency had been introduced in the land but they purchased the goods of others through exchange. During the last part of the nineteenth century the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar began to maintain Bazar (market) at three places in Mizoram which were kept up by traders from Cachar till 1899. They were the Tipaimukh Bazar, the Sonai Bazar and the Changsil Bazar. The exact date of establishment of these Bazar is not recorded but the

latter two were spoken of before the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72.<sup>13</sup>

The Mizo used to sell rubber, cotton, wax, bamboos and other forest products to the traders and they also bought from the shops of the trading places utensils, salt, cloth and other requisites. At times, they bartered in exchange for the traders' goods.

When a terrible famine called 'Thingtam' occurred in 1880 a large quantity of rice was supplied at the trading places and was a great relief to the Mizo.<sup>14</sup> In Mizoram bamboos die down simultaneously at every fifty years after flowering and fruiting which is followed by immense multiplication in the number of rats innumerable which devour the rice crops before the time of harvest and thus cause a severe famine.

The Mizo started opening of shops at Aizawl in 1911.<sup>15</sup> The number of shops slowly increased and in 1922 it was as under<sup>16</sup>:

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13. The Lushais (1878-1889), 1978, pp. 41, 43, 50  
(Published by the Tribal Research Institute, Mizoram, Aizawl).
14. Ibid, p. 100
15. Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu, August, 1924, p. 174
16. Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu, August, 1922, p. 87

<u>Name of village</u>	<u>No. of shops</u>
Aizawl (including the surrounding places)	62
Sairang	13
Lunglei	4
Tlabung	8
Champhai	1
Rengte	1
Hmuifang	1
Tipaimukh	1
Tuirial	1
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Total : 92	

Industry : Handloom and handicrafts, blacksmithy, sawmilling and bamboo-cane works are the only cottage industries which have been established from the beginning of twentieth century. Handloom locally made and blacksmithy had been started even before the British administration.

With the progress of society under the influence of the British administration and missionaries' activities some people gradually changed their occupations and began to depend on trade, business, government services, carpentry, etc. for their livelihood.

#### IV. ADMINISTRATION :

##### (1) Indigenous rule by the chief :

Each village was ruled by a chief mostly belonging to the Sailo clan. There were also a few chiefs belonging to other clans. Chieftainship was hereditary. At a marriageable age, each son of the chief was given a certain number of households from his father's village and established a new village for his chieftainship. The youngest son remained with his father and he generally succeeded his father to the village and inherited all the property.

The chief was all-in-all in his own village. To assist him the chief appointed elderly men known as 'upa' and they formed a sort of council which was presided over by the chief. The council discussed all matters connected with the village and decided all disputes that arose between the villagers. The chief had the power to veto the decision of his council. Every household gave two loads of paddy to the chief annually (Three kerosine tins of paddy was one load as measured by the Mizo). This due was known as 'Fathang'. Each upa had to pay the Fathang of seven loads to the chief per year. The chief and his upa were highly esteemed and respected by the commoners.

Anyone who had committed a serious crime or behaved against the chief's rule could be expelled from the village or the ears

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or nose of the offender might be out off or capital punishment might also be inflicted on the culprit. On the other hand if the chief's rule was unduly harsh or appressive his subjects could leave him without his knowledge and they migrated secretly to other village at night. The chief, therefore, did not dare to rule wickedly and rather he was kind to his subjects and took care about them.

Polygamy had never been practised among the Mizo but the chief used to maintain concubines who did not get the status of the real wife. The concubines also gave birth to children who were entitled to some privilegas almost equal to that of a legitimate issue of the chief. If the chief had no legitimate son, the eldest son by concubine was to become the heir.<sup>17</sup>

(2) Other important officials :

Besides the upa the chief appointed village officials as below :

(a) The Ilangau (village crier) : He proclaimed with high pitched voice all important notices to the public by going round the street at night. He received one kerosine tin of paddy from each house as remuneration. He was also exempted from Cooly labour.

(b) The Thirdeng (village blacksmith) : There was the Thirdeng in each village who received one load of paddy from

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17. Interview with : (1) Khawzanghina, Ex-Chief of Sihphir.  
 (2) Selthanga, Ex-upa of chief Thangphunga  
 (3) Chhunbaia, Ex-upa of chief Thangphunga

each householder whose tools he repaired or forged.

(c) The Ramhual : The successful cultivators who produced sufficient rice every year were selected and were called 'the Ramhual'. They gave an advice as to where the jhums should be cultivated and were allowed first choice of jhum sites. The amount of Fathang they had to pay to the chief was five loads every year.

(d) The Zalen : These were the village elders and near relatives of the chief. They chose land for jhumming purpose after the Ramhual had done. They gave the Fathang of seven loads of rice to the chief.

(e) The Puithiam (village priest) : There was a village priest called 'Puithiam' who performed sacrifices to propitiate the evil spirits that caused illness to man. He felt the pulse of the patient and prescribed a domestic animal to be killed for sacrificial offering for recovery of the sick.

The Sadawt was another class of priest whose principal duty was to offer sacrifices to the good spirit called 'Pathian' (God). Each clan had its own religious rites and rituals for which they killed a pig which the Sadawt had to offer to the good spirit. The Puithiam and the Sadawt were remunerated in paddy for their services. The system of remuneration varied in different villages and was a matter of local arrangement.<sup>18</sup>

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18. Mizo Ro Bawa (An Anthology of Mizo Prose and Poetry)  
For Degree Course of NEHU, 1983, pp. 47-48.

Shakespeare, J., Op.cit., p. 43

(3) Bawi (Slave) :

The bawi were those who submitted themselves to the chief and lived in the house of the chief. They had to work whatever needed for the chief's family. The chief possessing more bawi was considered to be the great. The bawi might attain freedom to live independently on payment of a mithun or its equivalent in cash or goods. The bawi who became married couples had to live with the chief for six years after which they were entitled to emancipation. The male bawi married to non-bawi was to live with the chief for three years and after that they could live in a separate house. Such bawi were called "In hrang bawi" which means bawi living in a separate house. They had to render help to the chief whenever necessary and they also looked to the chief for assistance when they were in trouble.

Other three categories of Bawi :Inpui chung bawi : (Bawi within the main house):

Owing to poverty or distress a person who, at his own will, submitted himself to the chief seeking for maintenance and lived at the chief's house was called 'Inpui chung bawi'.

Chensen bawi (Red dao bawi) : A criminal who took refuge in the chief's house to escape vengeance became a chensen bawi, e.g. a murderer who was closely pursued by an avenger rushed into the chief's house and if he had time to catch hold of the 'Sutpui' (main post supporting the ridge-pole) inside the house



it was traditionally illegal for the enraged pursuer to attack the culprit. Such bawi did not live in the chief's house and his position was similar to that of the Inhrang bawi.

Tukluh bawi : A person of the defeated party in a battle who individually surrendered himself to his enemy promising that he would be a bawi was called 'Tukluh bawi'. His status was the same as that of the Inhrang bawi.<sup>19</sup>

Controversy on Bawi :

Dr Peter Frazer, a Welsh missionary to Mizoram who arrived at Aizawl in December, 1908 vehemently criticised the existence of slavery in Mizoram. He struggled hard for release of all the bawi on the ground that slavery was illegal within the British dominions. As he was strongly opposed to the bawi system he freed as many as 40 bawi at his own expense by paying customary ransom of Rs.40/- for each bawi to their respective masters.<sup>20</sup>

The Superintendent of the Lushai Hills asserted that the bawi were the poor who could no longer support themselves depending on the chief and became the members of the chief's family and that they were servants of the chief in the true sense

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19. Major Mc Call, A.G., Lushai Chrysalis, 1977 (Reprinted)  
pp. 121-122

Interview with (1) Lalropui W/O Hrangliana, Ex-chief of Sentlang.  
(2) Khawzanghina, Ex-chief of Sihphir.

20. Hawla, V., Mizoram Hmarchan Zosapte Chanchin (Welsh Missionaries 1817-1968), 1980, p. 39

and not the real slaves. A furious controversy, therefore, arose during 1910-11 between the missionary on the one side and the Superintendent who was supported by the chiefs on the other.

The matter became so complicated that the missionary was ordered to leave the land. The subject of controversy was brought before the Governor of Assam who took action in favour of the Superintendent. One member of the British Parliament brought the matter before the Privy Council for discussion after which settlement of the case was made by the government.

The settlement was that the use of the word 'bawi' had to be discontinued and the chiefs had to release their bawi but they could claim compensation or ransom because of the maintenance or help they had rendered to the bawi. Thus slavery was abolished through the initiative efforts of the missionary.<sup>21</sup> The chief who first emancipated his bawi was Khawvelthanga, chief of Maubuang who, among the chiefs, became the first christian. All his bawi were set free in October, 1909.<sup>22</sup> When the slavery was abolished many bawi preferred to live with the chief rather than emancipation or freedom perhaps because they remained satisfied with the treatment given by their masters.

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21. Liangkhaia, Op. cit., p. 108

22. Welsh Foreign Mission Report for 1909, p. xlix.

(4) Raid and Expedition:

Before and after occupation of the present Mizoram the chiefs of various clans used to raid and fight one another for supremacy. Sometimes they made surprise attacks on their enemies by ambush in the jungle or jhum, killed them and cut off their heads. At times battles were fought between the northern chiefs and the southern chiefs about the year 1856.<sup>23</sup> Later on, the eastern Sailo chiefs were at enmity with the western Sailo chiefs. The hostilities originated in a dispute about jhumland.<sup>24</sup> The eastern chiefs always raided the villages of the western chiefs and suddenly attacked them unawares and vice-versa. Both party committed horrible massacres upon the other. The raiders carried with them the heads of the slain as a trophy when they succeeded.

Besides, the Mizo frequently made raids upon the neighbouring people of the British territory for which punitive expeditions to the Lushai Hills were sent by the Government. According to Lianphunga, one of the Sailo chiefs, the reason for the attack was that the neighbouring people had settled in their best hunting ground and declined to move.<sup>25</sup> The first expedition in retaliation of the Lushai raid took place in December, 1844. But the chiefs in collusion with each other continued

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23. Liangkhaia, Op. cit., p.64.

24. Mackenzie, A., North East Frontier of India, 1981 (Reprinted) p. 321.

25. Allen, B.C., Gazetteer of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills, p. 11.

their raids and punitive expeditions to the Hills were undertaken by the British Government in the following years.<sup>26</sup>

1850, 1861, 1869, 1871-'72, 1888-'89, 1889-'90.

(5) British Administration:

The punitive expedition of 1889-90 was the beginning of the British administration in Mizoram. On the 22nd April, 1890, Capt. Browne, Personal Assistant to the Chief Commissioner of Assam was appointed as a Political Officer with his Headquarters at Aizawl.<sup>27</sup> Thus Mizoram came under the British administration forming a part of Assam in 1890. In the same year fortified military out-posts were set up at Vanlaiphai (Fort Tregear) and Lunglei (Fort Lungleh) in the south and at Aizawl (Fort Aijal) and Changsil (Fort Changsil) in the north Mizoram.

In the south a new district was constituted under the Bengal Province on the 1st April, 1891 with Mr. C.S. Murray as the Superintendent of the district but Capt. J. Shakespear soon succeeded him on the 16th April, 1891.<sup>28</sup>

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26. Mackenzie, A., Op. cit., pp. 289, 292, 301.

Reid, Sir Robert, History of the Frontier Areas bordering on Assam from 1883-1941, 1983 (Reprinted) pp. 1-2.

Col. Shakespear, L.W., History of the Assam Rifles, 1977 (Reprinted), pp. 85-86.

27. Chief Commissioner's letter no. 1468 - P, dated the 22nd April, 1890.

28. Reid, Sir Robert, Op. cit., p. 8.

Capt. Browne, Political Officer negotiated with the Mizo chiefs on June 13, 1890 but the chiefs in co-operation with each other attacked the British Forces at Aizawl and Changsil on September 9, 1890 and the Political Officer was shot dead in the course of fighting.

R.B. McCabe was immediately appointed in succession to Capt. Browne. Mr. McCabe undertook punitive expeditions to different chiefs and their villages were burnt down. Subsequent revolts took place at various places till 1895 after which the rebellions were completely suppressed. In the southern part, Shakespear also faced the rising of the Mizo chiefs and subdued them without much difficulty.

On the 1st April, 1898 the North and the South Lushai Hills were amalgamated into one district and was placed under the charge of an officer who was styled "Superintendent of the Lushai Hills" with Aizawl as the Headquarters. The district was brought under the control of the chief Commissioner of Assam. In the south a Sub-Divisional Officer was placed in-charge of the Lunglei Sub-Division.<sup>29</sup>

Under the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution the Lushai Hills District which was declared as an Excluded Area by the Act of 1935 became one of the Autonomous Districts of Assam.

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29. Chatterjee Suhas, Mizoram under the British Rule, 1985, pp. 106-108, 127.

The first General Election on the basis of adult franchise was held to the Autonomous District Council of the Lushai Hills in February, 1954 and the District Council was inaugurated on the 25th April, 1952. The Mizo Union, the first formed political party in the district which dominated the District Council got the name of the District changed from Lushai Hills District to Mizo District in 1954 by the Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act 18 of 1954.<sup>30</sup>

In 1972 the Mizo District attained the status of a Union Territory by the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 bearing the name 'Mizoram' and the District Council stood dissolved.

(6) Circle system :

Circle system of administration was introduced in 1901 dividing the district into 18 circles. A circle Interpreter was appointed for each circle to see that all orders of the Superintendent were carried out properly by the chiefs and the people of his circle and submit reports to the Superintendent. A village writer known as 'Khawchhiar' was appointed in each village to maintain all important statistics, i.e., list of houses and guns which were checked by the Circle Interpreter.<sup>31</sup>

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30. The Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act, 1954  
(Parliament Act No. 18 of 1954).

31. Ray, Animesh, Mizoram Dynamics of Change, 1982, p. 25

(7) Position of chief under the British administration :

The British left the administration of the village to the chief who continued to deal with all cases between his villagers except certain grave cases such as murder, severe wound inflicted on any villager by the other and rape which had to be reported to the Superintendent. Nevertheless, the arbitrary rule and certain traditional rights of the chief had been stopped and extinguished. Such extinction of certain rights lowered the status and powers of the chief.<sup>32</sup>

Definite boundaries had been demarcated for all the chiefs and every chief held a boundary paper known as 'Ramri lehkna'. The territorial jurisdiction of the chief was recognised by the government. The chief's son succeeded his father to the land when the latter died subject to the Superintendent's approval.<sup>33</sup>

(8) Abolition of Chieftainship :

The Mizo Union, the first political party fought the first general election to the Mizo District Council on the issue of abolition of chieftainship and won the election in 1952. The District Council passed an Act by which chieftainship was abolished in 1955 on payment of compensation. By the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of chiefs' rights) Act, 1954 (Assam

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32. McCall, A.G., Op.cit., p. 202

33. Parry, N.E., A monograph on Lushai customs and ceremonies, 1976 (Re-printed), p. 3.

Act XXI of 1954) the rights and interests of 257 chiefs were acquired by the government of Assam and handed over to the District Council on the 1st April 1955 (Vide Govt. notification No. TAD/R/103/52(a) dated the 23rd March, 1955). In the Pawl-Lakher Region the rights and interests of 50 chiefs were also handed over to the Pawl-Lakher Regional Council on April 15, 1956. In 1954 the District Council enacted for election of the Village Council to replace the chief's Council on the basis of universal suffrage.<sup>34</sup>

V. ZAWLBUK :

Zawlbuk was a large house in a Mizo village where all the youngmen of the community slept at night. It was not only a dormitory of the youths but was indeed an instrument of social control and organisation. Sungrass was used for thatching its roof, plaited bamboos for its wall and strong bamboos tightly inter-woven in a particular design for its floor. A hearth or earthen floor was constructed in the central portion of the floor for a fire-place. Every boy until reaching youngmanhood had to gather twigs everyday for the zawlbuk fire. Unquestioningly the boys had to carry out the order and duty assigned to them. Zawlbuk served several useful purposes for the Mizo society which may be briefly mentioned as below :

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34. Zatluanga, Op.cit., pp. 104-105.

Mizoram State Archives File No. 49/57.



(a) It acted as an information centre. In the Zawlbuk all the men and boys met together at night talking about the news of whatever they heard or saw. The older men sat by the Zawlbuk fire for hours recounting their past experiences and other informations to the younger ones.

(b) It functioned as a traveller's inn. The male travellers put up in the Zawlbuk for the night and wrestled with the local youngmen in a traditional style. This game brought about friendliness and social intimacy among themselves.

(c) It was the most useful institution for social education of its time. The dwellers listened to the talk of the older ones about the taboos, the brave warriors, the battles fought by their ancestors, etc. The young people were also taught to sing the traditional songs and do the bamboo cane works. It acted as a public school in which all the male members of the village were admitted.

(d) Zawlbuk, being the assemblage of the bachelors, was quite useful to face emergency or urgent works. For example, to chase wild animals like tigers, wild cat which attacked the domestic animals at night, or to carry home a sick or injured person from the jungle, or to transport the dead to other villages, etc., the inmates of Zawlbuk quickly ran to do the needful and when the village was raided or attacked by their enemies they all at once could encounter with the raiders.

(e) Zawlbuk sowed the seed of Tlawngaihna which means inadequately "self sacrifice for the needs of others". In English there is no a single word for Tlawngaihna. It includes self-sacrifice, unselfishness, perseverance, bravery, diligence, love, considerateness, courtesy, goodness, patience, etc., to do voluntarily whatever is necessary for the good of others or of the community without any hope of reward or personal gain. A man having tlawngaihna is always ready to help others unmindful of his own loss or suffering that may arise and do whatever the occasion demands or give way or vacate in favour of others. Zawlbuk was an institution where the young people received training for the Tlawngaihna in theory and practice. A real sense of sacrifice for others was inculcated in their minds through the informal training in the Zawlbuk.

(f) It was also used for counsel. They settled matters concerning communal labour or participation and made other decisions connected with the community.

(g) Zawlbuk created and maintained co-operation, social solidarity, obedience, loyalty, sense of respect for those older than oneself, sense of mutual help, etc. Various forms of well organised activities fully in keeping with the requirements of the society generated a healthy harmony and enabled the village folks to become effective members of the Mizo society.<sup>35</sup>

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35. Lalluia, C., Mizo (MIL) Prose Section for Pre-University Course, 1979, pp. 11-12.

Interview with Pu Awngthanga, past dweller of Zawlbuk.  
Challiana, Pi Pu Nun, 1985, pp. 16-18

### Total Extinction of Zawlbuk :

Formal education introduced through establishment of schools and missionary activities for the general welfare of the people slowly eroded the importance of Zawlbuk. The Mizo christians began to resist the Zawlbuk way of living which, in some respects, did not conform to the christian way of life. The disciplined life and organisation in the Zawlbuk were gradually replaced by the church organisation and school discipline.

Raids, which necessitated Zawlbuk system were completely prohibited and stopped by the government. Further, sight of foreign countries during the First World War and formal education had broadened their outlooks and they began to give up their old ways of living which might hamper the progress of their society. Thus the Zawlbuk was totally abandoned in the early fifties of this century.

### VI. RELIGION :

The old Mizo religion is monotheism but they also believed in the existence of minor gods bearing different names.

They believed in the existence of a male supreme god called "Pathian" (God) or "Pu Vana" which literally means "Mr. Heaven" who was considered to be supreme in power and who lived in heaven above. He possessed all authority on every creature but had little concern with men. He was so kind and gentle that he could not be

provoked to anger. As he never ill-treated or tormented human beings an offer of sacrifice to appease him was unnecessary. He protected and guarded men against all dangers and blessed them with fortune. When they were in danger the Mizo used to say, "May God be merciful on us."

According to their belief, Pathian or Pu Vana was the creator of all things. He was omnipotent, and omni-scient as well and ruled in heaven and on earth. He lived in heaven from which he clearly saw everything on earth.

There was also an inferior lady god called 'Vanchung nula' which literally means a lady on the heaven. The Mizo said that rain was the water spilled by Vanchung nula as she fell down while carrying water and the thunder was a sound caused by Pu Vana in pulling his large dish.

Khuanu was another god, the owner of all blessings who took care of man. Sometimes Khuanu was regarded as an inferior god having more concern with men.<sup>36</sup>

There were also good spirits called Vanhrika (god of science) who handed over scientific knowledge to human beings and Khuavang (guardian spirit) who was considered to have much more concern with men and was inferior to Pu Vana.

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36. Challiana, Op.cit., pp. 24-25

37. Zawla, K., Op.cit., p. 40

Evil spirit : The Mizo believed in the existence of various demons which caused illness and other bodily sufferings to man. When they fell ill they called in the Puithiam (Priest) who prescribed necessary sacrifice to be offered to demons for recovery of the sick. They conceived that demons cast their eyes upon humans at all times and gazed at every act of man. Hence the Mizo were in constant fear of them. Even after conversion to Christianity most of the Mizo are not free from the belief of the presence of evil spirits as conceived in the past.

The demons were given names according to their spheres of influence or dwelling places. The following are the notorious ones among different kinds known to Mizo.<sup>38</sup>

(1) Tlang lai, a wicked super natural being that lived on high mountains. Unless he was made contented while moving about his dwelling places he caused heavy rain and storm. A goat was used in offering to him.

(2) Khawhring, a gluttonous spirit that always entered into the human body causing much pain in the abdomen. Khawhring was very greedy and was covetous of whatever the people were eating. Parents forbade their children to eat anything in the street where they could be easily seen by this spirit.

(3) Khawmu, a malignant spirit and a human kidnapper. A man was often carried off in the jungle by this spirit and he had

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38. Ibid, pp. 40-43.

no sense of going home because of the mysterious spell of the spirit.

(4) Pheichham, a one legged spirit whose footprint was the same as that of a baby. It was seen walking by bounds along a stream. He who happened to meet Pheichham should catch hold of it immediately telling what he wanted to have and the Pheichham would give him at once whatever he had requested.

(5) Taumeichher chhi, the Mizo wil-of-the wisp that could bring illness to man. It was seen at a distance and looked like lighted fire-brands in a row as if they were carried by men who were following one another.

(6) Tulum, an evil spirit which was said to be in the habit of entering into the body of the dead person or animal animating the dead. It was said that the animated body was much stronger than before.

(7) Huai, an evil spirit that inhabited whirlpools, big trees, large rocks, caves, precipices, cavities or holes in the earth, etc. Any visitor of these dwelling places was made ill by the Huai. Moreover, the root of a tree crossing a stream, a dry skull of monkey and a tree having only bare living trunk with no leafy head were believed to be haunted by Huai and these were greatly feared by the Mizo.

(8) Chawm, a large female ghost having big breasts that was seen walking along the river downwards in the lonely jungle. A stream that flows in the humland of Buhban village where Chawm was seen in the past is still known as Chawm lui (Chawm river).

(9) Phungkur, a gigantic spectre or bogey, as high as a tree that occasionally appeared at mid-night in the village. It was so high that its stride extended over three houses. It frightened and menaced the villagers with its monstrous appearance.

(10) Lasi, the exquisite female spirits who were believed to live mainly at the precipices of Lurh and Tan. If they saw a hunter in the jungle they fell in love with him. They exercised complete control over all the wild animals and hence they could be possessed by the hunter. In the hunter's dream the Lasi promised him to give any wild animals he wanted to shoot if he obeyed her or agreed to marry her. The one who had agreed to fulfil her request became thenceforth a skilled hunter and often killed many animals with the help of the Lasi. Such a hunter frequently saw the Lasi in his dreams and enjoyed a deep feeling of love between them. The hunter having such connection with the Lasi was called 'Lasi zawl,' Till recent years the Lasi zawl were found practically among the Mizo.

Abode of spirits of the dead:

The Mizo believed that human beings and natural objects like trees, animals, etc. had souls or spirits. There

was a dead man's village known as 'Mithi khua' somewhere inside the earth where all the spirits of the dead persons lived together following the same way of living as in their lifetime.

On the outskirts of the Mithi khua there was a man called Pu Pawla who had a big pellet bow with which he shot at the spirits of the dead coming to the abode or hades. However, he never shot at those who had performed 'Thangchhuah' during their lifetime and a man who had enjoyed at least three virgins or seven women if not virgins. A baby and a female virgin also would escape his shoot.

One who had killed five prescribed wild animals in the chase or who had given a series of special public feasts which also required a large quantity of rice-beer was known as "Thangchhuah". Only a good hunter or well-to-do people could be the Thangchhuah. Such people were highly respected and were qualified to live at Pialral (Paradise) after death.

Pialral was not far from the common souls' abode (Mithi khua). The spirits of those who had obtained Thangchhuah title lived there with the greatest possible pleasure and happiness depending on plenty of ready-made food and drink.

If a baby died, a hard boiled egg was buried with the dead body. The egg would roll along the dead's way and the baby's spirit would follow the rolling egg till they reached the abode of the dead.



If a woman happened to die in childbirth an axe was buried with the corpse in the grave so that the spirit of the dead would clear all hindrances on the way with the help of the axe. Even if the baby was born alive, the dead body of the mother was put upon the baby so that it died consequently.<sup>39</sup>

All the departed spirits were supposed to go straight to the Rihdil (Rih lake) to the east of Mizoram from which they returned and stayed in their earthly home and its surrounding places for three lunar months during which the bereaved family made offerings to the spirits of the departed. The spirit was still treated as one of the members of the family and a seat was also arranged at every meal time. Small offerings of food and other eatables were placed for him on a shelf in a carrying basket. Other things like gun, cloth, beads, etc. which the deceased was fond of in life were also put near the offerings. At the end of the period of stay of the spirit in the earthly home the bereaved family performed a ceremony after which the spirit had to leave the home in grief for Nithi khua (dead man's village).

On the way to Nithi khua the departed spirit was believed to climb up the 'Nringlang tlang' (meaning mountain from which living persons are visible) from which he looked back and viewed with longing the human world and wept bitterly. Going further beyond the mountain the spirit drank Lungloh tui (meaning water

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39. Challiana, *op.cit*, pp. 34-36

that extinguishes longings) and lost all his longings for the world of man. Besides, the spirit plucked Hawilo par (Flower for not looking back) which bloomed near the Lungloh tui and wore the flower in his hair and ears. After that the spirit had no desire to look back upon the earth which he had left behind and then he went on and entered the Mithi khua.<sup>40</sup>

#### VII. MARRIAGE :

If a man wants to marry a girl he has to send two representatives called 'Palai' to ask for consent of the girl's parents to marry their daughter. Before approaching the parents of the girl a prudent man secretly persuades the girl to agree to marry him. The parents will then ask their daughter if she likes her suitor. In spite of her refusal some parents compell their daughter to marry a youngman whom they think is good and desirable. If there is no objection for marriage the Palai and the parents of the girl fix the wedding day and settle about the girl's price to be paid by the bridegroom.

In the earlier time the bride's price was paid in the form of mithuns, necklace of beads, pigs and guns. The amount has differed from time to time. At the beginning of 20th century it was normally Rs.80/- or four mithuns which was later increased to Rs.100/- or five mithuns. (One mithun was worth Rs.20/-). At present it amounts to Rs.400/- in cash. The marriage price paid by the bridegroom is divided among the relatives of the bride

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40. Zawla, K., Op. cit ., p. 46

Shakespeare, J., Op.cit., p. 63

and each share is named as below:-<sup>41</sup>

- (1) Palal: Rs 5/- payable to a male relative of the bride's father or any person whom she adopts as her father especially when the girl gets married to other villager.
- (2) Pusum: Rs 6/- which goes to the bride's maternal uncle or maternal grandfather.
- (3) Sumfang: Rs 8/- which is given to the bride's uncle.
- (4) Ni ar: Rs 2/- payable to the paternal aunt of the bride.
- (5) Naupuakpuan: Rs 2/- which goes to the elder sister of the bride or any one she adopts as her elder sister.
- (6) Nu man: Rs 2/- payable to the bride's mother only when she has separated from the bride's father by reason of divorce.

The bride is provided with a customary dowry which consists of the following:-

Thul: This is a large basket made of cane with a close fitting conical lid used as a receptacle for cloth, etc.

Puandum: This is a cloth woven out of red, black and yellow thread. When the husband dies his body is to be wrapped with this cloth.

Puanpui: It is a thick white rug or quilt usually made up in tufts of unspun cotton.

If any one of these properties is not brought to her husband on their marriage, a reduction of Rs 20/- is made in the marriage

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41. Lalluia, C, Op. cit, pp. 20-21

price. Besides these essential possessions of the woman, she usually takes also the following properties to her husband:-

Ordinary clothes, skirt, weaving loom, spindle, carrying basket used for everyday woman's work and a string of beads.

These woman's possessiona are taken back if she is divorced but if she commits adultery her husband is entitled to confiscate all her belongings.

#### The wedding day:

On the wedding day the bride's family kills a pig for public feast and half of the pig's meat and its head is given to the bridegroom's family. A large quantity of rice-beer (Zu) prepared beforehand for the marriage feast is distributed at both houses of the bride and the bridegroom.

In the evening the bride is conducted to her husband's house by her friends. On the way she is teased and pelted with rice, soil, mud, etc. but a man appointed to protect her from being disturbed on the way called 'Lawichal' protects her with a long bamboo. If the bride falls down for fear of being be-sattered with mud, etc. she must return and the marriage will be cancelled. Moreover, the Lawichal has authority customarily to lead back the bride to her father's house unless the bridegroom's family gives him what he demands.

When the bride reaches her husband's house the Sadawt (Priest) kills a pullet and utters an incantation wishing the couple long and prosperous life bearing children.

The husband will not cohabit with his wife on the actual day of the wedding. The bride returns to her father's house but she is taken back again to the house of the groom in the next evening and then she remains with her husband.<sup>42</sup>

#### VIII. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE :

In Mizoram there are various sub-tribes like the Lushei, the Hmar, the Ralte, the Painte, the Pawi, the Hualngo, etc. having different dialects of their own. Of these sub-tribes the Lushei which further consisted of many other clans was in absolute majority. Most of the chiefs belonged to this group and dominated the great majority of the whole people. For this reason the Lushei dialect (also called Duhlian dialect) was the lingua franca of the land.

The British administration which started in 1890 was soon followed by the advent of christian missionaries. In 1894 the pioneer missionaries prepared an alphabet consisting of 24 letters in Roman character for the Lushei dialect or language which could be used throughout the land and they wrote books in the Lushei language. As the different sub-tribes or clans were collectively known as Mizo the most common dialect had come to be known as 'Mizo tawng' (Mizo language). The introduction of education by the missionaries gradually absorbed the other dialects in many places.

When the Mizo had no written language of their own traditional cultures, folktales, poems, chants, etc. were handed down orally from one generation to another. There were always little differences in their knowledge of word or words of the same poems from

village to village as they were handed down orally. The missionaries opened schools in which the Mizo were taught to read and write in English character as adopted by the pioneer missionaries in their Grammar and Dictionary and the knowledge of reading and writing soon spread in the land. Moreover, they translated the Bible and English hymns into Mizo and wrote other necessary books for day schools as well as for Sunday schools. Therefore, it can be rightly said that the missionaries are the founder of the Mizo literature.

A pen picture of the socio-economic and socio-cultural life of the people of Mizoram has been depicted above in order to understand the background in which the missionaries had to work. A thorough study of activities of the missionaries and their contributions to the growth and development of the Mizo language and literature will be made in the subsequent chapters.