CHAPTER III

THE HMARS - The Model of the Study
3.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Though the Hmar community is one of the oldest in the North East India region, yet, not much work has been done so far about them.¹ The Hmars have no written history in the past, their origin and history can only be constructed with the help of oral traditions. Oral testimony certainly reflects more ancestral imagination than historical facts. But, one cannot altogether dismiss it because it forms the raw material from which true history can be derived and which is known must be pieced together from racial memories, from song and story, folklore and legend.²

The Hmars are the first tribe among the Chin-Kuki-Mizo who moved from the Chin Hills to make contact with the 'Vais' *, the common term used by these tribes to mean the plainsmen, especially the Bengalees. They (Hmars) were known as 'Kukis' by them (Bengalees). As for the origin of the term 'Kuki', different views are expressed by different writers and people. One of those says that, when the Bengalees travelled deep in the jungles in the east, they met these tribals and asked them who they were. The Hmars, thinking that they were asked where their village was, replied, 'ku khi' meaning 'up there'. The 'Vais' then used the word to call the tribe as 'Kuki'.³

³ Vai: The term ‘Vai’ is believed to be the corrupted form of the Hindi word ‘Bhai’ which means, ‘Brother’. When the Hmars and Bengalees were in first contact, the latter frequently said, ‘Bhai’ when interacting with the Hmar tribals. And then afterwards, the term was surprisingly used to denote these non-tribals. For these tribals any Indian of Aryan and Dravidian stock are a ‘Vai’ even till today.
Another theory also says that the term KUKI was derived from the sound of one popular musical instrument of these people called 'tumphit', a simple bamboo pipe, which sound 'Knu-khi, Knu-khi'. Still, another theory suggests that the term 'Kuki' has been derived from the Baluchistan word 'Kuchi' which means 'nomadic or wandering'. The term 'Kuki' was first used in the state of Tripura, which further proves the theory that the term was originally coined by the Bengalees (Vais). The first time the term Kuki was used to mean to a group of people in English is a book called, "Cucis (Kukis) or Mountaineers of Tipra (Tripura) Vol. II", (page-12), written by Rawlison and published by the Asiatic Research in 1972.

The Hmars, at no time accept the term 'Kuki' as the name of their tribe as they thought it to be a 'not so good' term. The British officials, ethnographers and linguists were all aware that this term had no popular acceptance. After some time, the Thadous who moved closely behind the Hmars, made contact with the Vais. They were quite different from the people which the Vais called Kukis, and as such gave them another name, 'New Kuki'. The Hmars were then grouped as 'Old Kuki'.

4. Ibid
5. Gangte LS, Who are we?; In search of identity; Published by Kuki-Chin Bahtist Union at KIB Press, Imphal, 1986, p.11
6. Rawlison, Cucis (Kukis) or Mountaineers of Tipra (Tripura), Vol. II, Asiatic Research, 1972, p.12, see also Keivom L, Op.cit, p.168
In the words of W.W. Hunter,

"The term ‘olā kuki’ is applied to a tribe living on the farther side of the Barak river in the North Cachar, who appear to have nothing in common with the Kukis proper or, Lushais. Their system of village government is democratic, and in contrast with that of all other tribes to which the name of Kuki is applied, the ‘old kuki’ speak a language akin to that of the Tipperahs, whom also they resemble in physical appearances. The names of their principal clans or sub-tribes are the Rēnkhol (Hrangkhols), Khelmas (Sakechep) and Banglong"." 9

When the term ‘Old Kuki’ was used, it included the Hrangkhols, Darlongs, Biete, Aimal, Kom, Chiru, Anal, etc., who but now, have their own separate identities and dialects. It is clear that these ‘old kukis’ in those days, did not have one common term of their own to refer to themselves, but preferred to call themselves by the name of their clan. One of these ‘old kuki’ groups, the Ihmars were the last group to move westwards as they settled in the present Mizoram for a long time. They at last moved towards the ‘north’ to reach Manipur as they were pushed away by the Thadous and the Lushais. These people used the present HMAR dialect, which is very close to that of the Lushais. In those days, this dialect was known as “khawsak tong” meaning, “the dialect of the east” by those who moved westwards ahead of them. These tribes, on the other hand were known as ‘Khawthlanghai’ (westerners) by those who remained settled in the Chin Hills. 10

In the words of Vumson,

_When the British annexed Assam and Manipur they came in contact with the Hmars whom to the British were no doubt related ethnologically to the Lushei, but who were not exactly Lushei. Hmar is a Lushei word for ‘North’ and the Hmar people were so named because they lived in ‘the north of Lushei’. Hmar people had come to Manipur and Tripura sometime during 1600s and they were called Kukis by their neighbours (Bengalis). By about 1850 the Thadou or Khuangsais started to appear in Cachar and Manipur; and the British adopted ‘Kuki’ for the Hmars and ‘New Kuki’ for the Thadous.\(^{17}\)_

J.W. Edgar contends that the term ‘Kuki’ which the Bengalees used to refer to these people is not at all accepted by them. He however, does not find any trace of a common name for these people and concludes that they seemed to consider themselves as belonging to different families rather than a single group.\(^{18}\)

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18. “J.W. Edgar was a Civil Officer who accompanied the Cachar column of the Lushai Expeditionary Force, on 3rd April, 1872 to Tipaimukh, Manipur” as cited by Alexander Mackenzie, _The Northeast Frontier of India._ Mittal Publications, Delhi (Reprint-1979), p.427
The second school of thought advocated mostly by the Hmar historians and writers themselves including Hranglien Songate, \textsuperscript{19} HV Vara, \textsuperscript{20} Luois L. Keivom, \textsuperscript{21} and Darliensung \textsuperscript{22} however, believe that the term ‘Hmar’ had been used from time immemorial. They are of the opinion that the word Hmar was often inferred or mentioned in the oldest folk songs of the Hmar that have been handed down from generation to generation. Again, there are different views regarding what is exactly meant by the term ‘Hmar’ and when it was used for the first time and by whom.

One of the oldest theories which originated from a local tradition (legendary) maintains that there were two brothers Hrumsawm and Tukbemsawm. Hrumsawm, the elder tied his hair in a knot on his forehead because of a sore on the nape of his neck; and Tukbemsawm, the younger tied his hair in a knot on the back of his head. The tradition further maintains that the act of tying one’s hair in a knot on the back of one’s head was called ‘Hmarh’. It is therefore quite possible that the term ‘Hmar’ might have originated from the word ‘Hmarh’ and all the descendants of Tukbemsawm are called ‘Hmars’. The descendants of Hrumsawm, who wear their hair in a knot on the forehead are afterwards known as ‘Pawi’, \textsuperscript{23} another tribal group of the same family.

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\textsuperscript{20} Vara HV, \textit{Hmar Naiphung (The Hmar Culture)}, L&R Press, Churachandpur, 2000, pp.1-10
\textsuperscript{21} Keivom Luois L, \textit{Hmar Tolung (A study of Hmar History & Genealogy)}, Goodwill Press, Imphal, 1990, pp.50-67
\textsuperscript{22} Darliensung, \textit{The Hmars}, L&R Printing Press, Churachandpur, 1988, p.1
\textsuperscript{23} Songate Hranglien L, \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.34
Hranglien Songate further extended this theory by saying that the "Hmarh" or "Hmars" includes several other tribal groups including Lushei, Paita, Thadou, Lakher, Sailo, etc. However, this theory is based on legend and, "legend cannot be wholeheartedly accepted as a fact, because it is contradictory to known facts of how 'man' originated".

It is difficult to accept the above theory for two reasons. One, all those who tied their head in a knot on the forehead were not called Pawi. One group of people who also descended from Burma and, who are now settled in the Chittagong Hill Tract of Bangladesh, and whose dialect is very close with that of the Hmars, the Banjogi also tied their hair in a knot on their forehead. Two, there is no mention of any traceable words in which those who tie their hair on the back of their head are called Hmars. Again, there is no mention of when and where this story began to develop.

Rev. Liangkhaia bends towards the former school of thought by saying that, "The Hmars settled earlier than the Lushais in Mizoram. Places like Zote, Chhungte, Khawbung, Vankal, Khawzwai, Darangawn and Thiak are all the clan names of the Hmars. They were afraid of the advancing Lushais and moved towards north and they are known as Hmar".

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24. ibid
Zatluanga also writes,

"Many Mizo tribes crossed the Thantlang Hills and Run (Manipur) river. While occupying this areas there was not yet any tribe name, but is increasing by the day. The name of one person came to be known as tribe name and as such many tribe came up".\textsuperscript{28}

L. Keivom maintains that clan-wise separation within the Mizo society was there only after they had crossed the Chin hills and that the old Kukis (the term used by the Bengalis to refer the Hmars) used to call themselves by using their clan, and not the tribe and as such different clans have different dialects such as Leiri dialect, Zote dialect, Thiek dialect, Faihriem dialect, Biete dialect, Hrangkhol dialect, etc.\textsuperscript{29}

It can be assumed that had the different clans who are now under Hmar tribe refer themselves as a ‘Hmar’, many of the tribes whom outsiders had grouped them as ‘Old Kukis’, including Anal, Chothe, Kom, Koireng, Aimol, Biete, Hrangkhol, Durlong, etc. will definitely identify themselves as HMAR, and not in the name of their clan even in the present days. But it was not so, as they regarded their clan higher and more important.

\textsuperscript{28} Zatluanga, Mizo Church, Aizawl, 1976, p. 3
\textsuperscript{29} Keivom L., Zoram Khawvel I., Op. cit., p. 169
The most common criticism and doubt put forward before accepting the Hmars as ‘Northerners’ is that, if a group or groups of people living on the northern side of the then Lushai Hills are called ‘Hmars’, why were not other tribes or people, such as the Mirawng (Rongmei Nagas), Meiteis, and all other tribes or people living on the north of the present Mizoram are also not called Hmars?. But this question of doubts does not hold water as the people in question are not given any name because they are not in much contact with the Lushais or in other words, the other Mizo tribes and then, the Britishers who brought in the modern system of governance and census.

Putting his view on the above argument, Lal Dena writes,

This (the Hmars as ‘northerners’ theory) implies that the term came into use only after the Hmars had settled down in Mizoram. It should however be pointed out that all the Hmars do not necessarily live in North Mizoram. As a matter of fact, majority of them live outside Mizoram and were called Hmar. Therefore, the theory that they live in the North Mizoram and were called so does not have substantial historical evidence.  

Another view maintains that a Hmar famous poet during the Shan valley settlement once sang -

Lairil tamin Shan khuo / Hmar tlangpui a sawihuoi e
Rama kaihran Zampaipa / Dam zo naw ning

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30 Lal Dena, Early History of Hmars, Unpublish Mss
English:

* A great famine shook Shan / And the Hmar hills
    * Zampuipa will not survive / Alone with forest yam

The protagonist of this theory asserts that, had not the term ‘Hmar’ been used during that time, people would not use such term as ‘Hmar tlangpui’. 31

Suoka Pudaite said that, “the term ‘HMAR’ had been in use while they (the Hmars) were in Shan state settlement”. According to him, even the names of different clans and sub-clans had already emerged during that period. He cited a poem in support of his contention as follows -

*Taitepan changsi a zeua
Tuifurah lan hre de ning

English:

* Taite man burned a seed of millet
    * Whether spoilt or not will be known only when the rain falls.

Citing the above point, Rosiem Pudaite opines that they (Hmars) knew each other by clans or sub-clans while they were in Shan state in Burma. 32 Taite is the name of a sub-clan within Ngurte clan of the Hmar tribe. 33 It can also be one sub-clan within the Thieck clan often written by some people as ‘Tryte’. This theory proves that the Hmars first of all seemed to know each other by the names of their clan, sub-clan or their family, and not as a tribe, HMAR.

31. Suoka Pudaite, 95 years was interviewed by Rosiem Pudaite on 27.3.1988, see also Pudaite Rosiem, *Oral tradition: A study of the genesis of some frontier tribes between Burma and North-East India*, M.Phil Desertation, M.U.,1991, p.13
32. Ibid
There are again writers like Darliensung and H.V. Vara who acknowledge that people called ‘Hmar’ had once lived in Burma in the first century A.D., during the years of Shan (Burma) settlement and that there were wild cows in Upper Burma which the Burmese used to call ‘Hmar Bawngai’ (Hmar Cows). This theory however lacks substance and sounds a mere conjecture and unreasonable because of the fact that not only the Hmars, but most of the Mongolian stock during their early history were not associated with the domestication of cows.

L. Keivom explains this opinion in the following words,

“We started rearing cows and drink its milk only after we made contact with the ‘Vais’ (meaning Indians or for that matter Bengalees) and after the Britishers ruled over us. We also did not find any mention of cows and oxen in our folk songs, rituals and ceremonies. However, Mithun is very popular among us. Not only we, many of the Mongolians, including those in Indonesia and Malaysia are not associated with the domestication of cows and taking its meat and milk.”

B. Lalthangliana also believes that the ‘Mizos’ started to rear cows only after the British came to their land after 1890 and called it ‘bawng’ after the Hindi word ‘Bail’. At first they used to call it sebawng as it resembles siel (mithun), one of their most common domestic animal.

37. ibid
W.W. Hunter, while mentioning about the Kukis and Lushai, also states that, "They, as well as the Nagas, have an extreme dislike to milk and butter, but it has been noticed that those who live in the plains gradually acquired the taste of these articles" 39. One's likes and dislikes usually depend upon the availability of the items. Milk is not liked by the hill tribals many years ago as the item was not found in abundant whereas, those who lived in the plains liked it as they were found in abundant.

It will not again be out of place to go a little further on the term 'Hmar' and the 'dialect' which is now used as 'Hmar dialect'. First of all, there is no doubt that this dialect (Hmar) has been used from many years ago as proved by many old Hmar old songs mentioned already. The group of people who had used this dialect were first known by others as 'Kuki'. However, when the Britishers, who popularised this term were in closer contact with many other 'Zo' tribes, they discovered many differences among them. As such, they gave the term 'Old Kuki' to refer to those tribe with whom the Bengalees first made contact and, 'New Kuki' to denote the other groups especially the Thadous and their offshoots. 40. The tribes or clans who are put under these 'old kukis' include, Hrangkhol, Biete, Aimol, Hallam, Langrong, Anal, Chiru, Hiroi-Lamjang, Kolhren (Koireng), Kom, Purum, Chothi, and other. 41

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41 Ibid
Since there are very few people who used HMAR to refer to all the above mentioned tribes in those days, many people just regard it (Hmar) to be another tribe or clan of these groups. Even though ‘Hmar’ is the common name to refer to all the ‘old kuki’ tribes before, many groups within the tribe prefers to call themselves in the name of their clan or family. As such, ‘Hmar’ was also afterwards regarded by many as another clan or family. The fact that these people called themselves in the name of their clan or family was supported by the following villages in the present Mizoram such as, Zote, Chhungte, Khawbung, Vankal, Khawzawl, Damgawn and Thiak which are all the names of Hmar clans and sub-clans. The first two Hmar villages in the present North Cachar Hill district such as, Tuolpui and Leiri villages were also named after a Hmar clan. Tuolpui village was established in 1795.

In the words of L. Keivom -

Although many of their (Hmar) old songs mentioned the name of their clan or family but not even one mentioned a name which can refer to all of them (Hmar for that matter). May be they are not used to in using the name of their tribe in those days. There is of course many instances where they mentioned the name of other tribes in their songs. Besides, they have no such organ to cover all their whole tribes. The fact that they are all ‘Sinlung suok’ (those that come from Sinlung) is the only bond that binds them together. The different family chiefs that ruled in different villages composed songs that mentioned their family or clans. There is no such ‘nationalism’ as we have these days. But, they knew the relationship between, and that is what unites them together.”

42. ibid
43. Personal interview with Hribokhun Thiek 65 years at Muolhoi Village in NC Hills district on December 11, 1999, 9AM
The ‘Hmar’ dialect, which is one of the most popular and common among those mentioned above in the present day, and the dialect which is being used by those people under the present study, we are told, was known as ‘Khawsak tong’ by those who had moved and settled towards the west ahead of them. The Thadous on the other hand knew these people as ‘khawthlang’ (Westerner) as, they are always there ahead of them during their westward movement. This ‘Khawsak tong’, is not the dialect of one clan or one family, but is a dialect which comes with the mixture of different ‘old Kuki’ dialects. The dialect is fast growing as it is easy to learn and is common to all; since the dialect is very close to Lushai dialect, many linguists thought it is the bridge between the different old Kuki dialects and Lushai dialect. 

During these periods the inter-tribal and clan war did not end and all the different clans sworn by their own clan and known each other by the same. As such they knew each other as Lushei, Hrangchal, Khawbung, Zote, Darlong, Hrangkhhol, etc. and none of them used and called themselves or others as ‘Hmar’. As such, it is believed that the group of people who now called themselves as ‘Hmar’ did so not from very long years ago.

45. Ibid. p.267
IV) FAHRIEM
01. Saivate 02. Khawral 03. Khakhien 04. Tuollai
05. Tumtool 06. Bapui 07. Tusing 08. Khawlum

V) HIMAR LUSEI
01. Netirh 02. Luophul 03. Hnechong 04. Lamthik
05. Chonzik
(Huolgo, Huolhang & Dulien are also included as Hmar Lusei)

VI) KHAUWBUUNG
01. Fente 02. Pangamte 03. Pazamte
04. Riengsete 05. Laising 06. Muolhei
07. Bungling 08. Phunte – Siertlang, Siersak

VII) KHAWHARING
01. Lungn 02. Thlaute 03. Midang 04. Leidir
05. Suokling 06. Chunthang 07. Lozun 08. Pielte

VIII) LUNGTAU
01. Mhriemate 02. Songate 03. Thlawngate 04. Intimate(Fimate)
05. Keiorn 06. Sunate 07. Intoate 08. Tanhrang

IX) LAWITLANG
01. Hrangchal – Laiasung, Sielasung, Dasasung, Thungte, Tangtal, Thlawmte
02. Sungte – Chonsim, Pautu, Pielte, Khiengte
03. Varte – Khuppong-Valte, Rawite, Suomte

X) LEIRI
01. Neingate 02. Pudaite 03. Puruolte 04. Pularite
05. Puhoongte 06. Thlandar

XI) NGENTE
01. Dosak 02. Dothlang 03. Kongte 04. Zuote
05. Lailo 06. Laitui 07. Laihimg 08. Bawlte
09. Chonghoih 10. Cholongong

XII) NGURTE
01. Sanate 02. Saingur 03. Zawlienn 04. Bangran
05. Chifon 06. Parate
3.1.2 THE HMAR CLANS AND SUB-CLANS

Many Hmar writers and Historians including Hranglien Songate, H.B. Hrangchhuana and Darliensung has included Kom, Sakechek, Hrangkhawl, Darlong and Chongthu among the Hmar clans. The list of Hmar Clans prepared by the Hmar Senior Citizen Forum, Churachandpur and reproduced by Hmar Welfare Society, Shillong also did the same. They are however deliberately avoided here as Kom are listed as a separate tribe in Manipur; Sakechek, Hrangkhawl and Darlong in Assam and Tripura. It may however be noted that, few families of these tribes are found to have identified themselves as HMAR in the area of the present study. Although some Chongthu families settled and identified themselves as Hmar, majority of them speaks the Thadou-Kuki dialect and are pushing hard for their recognition as a separate tribe in Manipur.

Although Bites in Meghalaya identified themselves as a separate tribe in Assam and Meghalaya, a large number of these clans are present among the Hmars of Manipur and identified themselves as Hmar. The rest of the Hmar Clans are as follows:

I) BIETE
   01. Nampui    02. Ngamlai    03. Damei    04. Hmunhriing
   05. Puiloh    06. Thienglai   07. Chungngol  08. Betlu

II) CHANGSAN
    05. Hranhnieng 06. Chaileng   07. Thangngeu  08. Kellu
    09. Arnci

III) DARNGAWN
     01. Ruolngul   02. Faihng  03. Sanate    04. Tlau
     05. Banzang – Sinate, Faminhote, Chonghmunte, Lanchangte
XIII) PAKHUONG
01. Khuongpui
02. Hrangngul
03. Buongsui
04. Khelte
05. Sakum

XIV) THIEK
01. Athu
02. Amaw
03. Buhri
04. Tuolor
05. Thluchung
06. Kungate
07. Selat
08. Ralsun
09. Chonghekte
10. Tuoite
11. Thlhuban
12. Zate
13. Kangbur
14. Killaite
15. Tamlo
16. Taite (Tryte)
17. Hnunte
18. Khawzavol
19. Chonnel
20. Vankal – Pangulte, Pangote, Khawbuol
21. Pakhumate – Khumthur, Khumsen

XV) VANGSJE
01. Zapte
02. Theidu
03. Dosil
04. Invang
05. Vanghoih
06. Tlukte

XVI) ZOTE
01. Saihmang (Saiate)
02. Hrangate
03. Neitham
04. Chonkhup
05. Ngaite
06. Buonsuquito
07. Chongtuoltu
08. Darkhawlai
10. Parate
11. Thlunte
12. Hriler
13. Chawngsiekim
14. Chonghau
15. Chongyawr

(Source: Hmar Senior Citizen Forum, Hqrs. Rengkai, Churachandpur)
3.1.3 THE HMARS OF MANIPUR

The Hmars of Manipur at present settle in compact mostly in the Thanhlon and Tipaimukh Sub-division of Churachandpur district in the south west of Manipur, which shares a common border with Mizoram and Assam also occupied mostly by their own tribesmen; the Jiribam Sub-division of Imphal east district and the area around the Khuga river in and around Churachandpur town and of course, the Imphal capital too. There are also a good number of Hmars in Morch and Muolcham in Chandel district.

Hmar was recognised as Scheduled Tribe in Manipur in the year 1956 and the government of Manipur allowed Hmar medium to be used as a medium of teaching up to the Middle School level and the 'Hmar' dialect is permitted to be studied as Major Indian Language up to the level of Class XII from 2001. The process for extending the same facility up to graduation level is also now almost completed.

46. Under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Orders No.316-A. Ministry of Home Affairs, dated New Delhi, October 29, 1956
See also - James and Marti Hefley; God's tribesman, Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1981, p.21
47. As per the meeting Resolution No. 21 of the CHSS, Manipur held on May 8,2000 and office Order No. 3/27/99-HSC, dated May 22, 2000
There are divergent views and opinions on the exact time when these people had started to settle in these regions. Alexander Mackenzie believed the date to be around 1770 A.D.\(^{48}\) whereas, Lt. Col. J. Shakespeare believed to be around 1780.\(^{49}\) In the meantime, Col. J. Johnstone said that - “These people (Hmars) moving westward from Burma started to settle in the hill areas of Manipur from the 16th century onwards’.\(^{50}\)

Till the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Hmars, like other tribals, moved from one place to another to suit their mode of searching food and agricultural habits, commonly known as ‘shifting cultivation’. They never settled and occupied a fixed place for generations to establish a big and powerful village as they now do. Pressure from other warring tribal groups might also be the other reason for this frequent movement. For instance, the people of Senvon village, before permanently settling at their present village, had settled for a few years at Kawnzar, Hmunte, Lohawi, Zopui, Damkhur, Thlakhat hmun, Pamthul, Chawngmhawl hmun, Thosi bawk and Zamsawi bawk.\(^{51}\)

Likewise, Bulhmang and his father Neilal, the chief of Saikul village in Mizoram during 1860-80, before settling at the present Pherzawl village in 1901 also settled in a number of places including Naupanglawm, Hmuntha, Saitu and Ramhui.\(^{52}\) The Hmars of these regions, as stated earlier, mostly came from the present Chin Hills state of Myanmar after settling in Mizoram for quite a few generations.

\(^{48}\) Alexander Mackenzie, History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of North-East Frontier of Bengal, Calcutta, 1884, p.437
\(^{51}\) Keivom L. Zoram Khawvel VI, Lungchhawm Press, Aizawl, p.31
\(^{52}\) Hrjeta L.T. Laksanghei-Saidan Lal, HL Lawma Press, Churachandpur, 1993, pp.1-9
‘A History of the Mizos’ by Verghees and Thanzawna writes that -

Due to exigencies of cultivation, resulting from lack of ‘jhum-able’ plots, it was common that the whole village moved from its own site to a more suitable one, for which prior permission of Superintendent located at Aizawl was obtained. The government rendered help in their movement by exempting the whole village population from ‘forced labour’, thereby enabling them to build their houses and refixing the whole village at the new site, according the direction of the chief.  

While many of their tribesmen instead of settling in Manipur proceeded to Cachar, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong district of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and the Chitagong Hill tract in Bangladesh. Some other groups who came down along with them, such as the Chirus, Koms, Kolhrens (Koireng), Aimuols, Chawthes, Anals, Moyons, Monsangs, etc. settled for sometime in the present ‘Ronglevaisuo’ (Tipaimukh) and then moved eastward by following the hill range of Pherzawl and Kailam to reach the present Churachandpur town area. 

In fact Aimol and Kom tribes are the first tribes to occupy and settle in the present Churachandpur valley. They then moved out from Churachandpur area by taking through Thangzing hills and Ningthiching on the west of Moirang. Some group of Chothes were left near the present Bishnupur town, and the other group still moved on to at last, reached the Imphal plain. However, when they looked towards the east from the Imphal plains, they were really fascinated by the lovely hills and mountains. They so moved again towards the hills in the east and reached the area around the present Tengnoupal. The Anal, Aimuol, Moyon, Monsang, Lamkang and a few others had remained there till today. Days and months passed and after some time, their dialect and behaviour differed from that of the Hmars and as such they were afterwards regarded to have a distinct identity. The Rev. William Pettigrew, the first christian missionary in Manipur, made them to convert to American Babtist Mission and taught them some verses and songs in Meitei. After some time, they have the Bible and hymn books in their own dialects.

The fact that many of the above mentioned tribes especially Komrems (Aimols, Koiengs, Purums, Chothes and Koms) of Manipur, Hrangkhols and Darlongs of Tripura, Bietes of Meghalaya and, Sakehek of Assam gave an emotional and religious regard to 'Ruonglevaisuo' (Taimukh) till today proves that these tribes had actually lived and settled around this place for some generations or, even had originated from this place.

57. Ibid, p.88
Those that remain in Mizoram were afterwards driven away by the Sailos and they fled towards the present state of Manipur and later formed the bulk of the Hmar population there. These people on their northward movements reached as far as the present Imphal valley. But, as they were not acquainted with life in the plains, they retracted their journey and settled in the hills only. 69

Traces have been found that the Darngawn clan during the earlier part of the 19th century moved out from Khawlien village in Mizoram and had come as far as Meihlang (Moirang plain) and settled in such areas as Thangtingzo (Thangzing hills), Nabil, Phoilen and Santing, etc. for a short period. They however, returned to their same old village in Mizoram which was under the famous Sailo chief Vanhnuaila. 60 Many Hmars who preferred to stay back in Mizoram under the Sailo chieftainship were latter completely assimilated by the Lushais and now had forgotten their dialect and customary practices. 61

A memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister of Manipur by Hmar Students' Association, General Headquarter on July 21, 1980 also claims that,
The Hmars celebrated their winter festival, Sikpui Ruoi in a Hmar village called Lamlangtuong, now officially called Bishnupur in the year 1802 AD. This important festival lasted for two months and a flat sheet stone called 'Zawilung' on which the ceremonial dances were performed can be traced out if anthropological investigations or researches are conducted to identify the exact location of the place.  

Since the Hmars in Manipur were under constant threat from the Sailos in the south and the Thadous in the north, they could hardly have a popular chief among themselves. As such, many of the Hmar big villages in the present Tipaimukh area of Manipur including Parbung, the sub-divisional Headquarter, Sevon - the biggest Hmar village, Taithu, Tinsuang, Lungthulien and Parvachawm tactfully had a Thadou chief.

Even those Darngawns in Khawlien village in Mizoram, after their Sailo chief Vanpuilala had left them to establish another village, were also on the look out for a chief among themselves for a long time. As they could not find anyone among themselves they at last came and requested Letzakai Sithlou of the Thadou tribe of Motbung village near Imphal, who gladly accepted the offer.  

62. Memorandum of HSA Gen.Hqrs. to Chief Minister of Manipur on Dt.21 July, 1980
However, it is not only because of the inter-tribal clashes and wars that there were very few Hmar chiefs in Manipur. Khawpuibung village, one of the first Hmar village in the Churachandpur valley established in the year 1911 had no chief for a long time, as none of those who established the said village accepted the offer for chieftainship. They then, at last, as their parents and great parents used to do, went down as far as Laimanai village near Imphal and got Bakpu Singson, who it is said, was not a very healthy and sturdy man, to be their chief. 64

Giving his comment on the fact that many big Hmar village in Manipur surprisingly have a Thadou chief, L. Keivom remarks -

May be they are coward or, they are looking for their own physical safety or, that they preferred to remain in a peaceful atmosphere, or still, they are so adventurous that they are always looking for new and unoccupied territory, the Hmars are one of the most dispersed tribes among the Zo groups. It will however be wrong to conclude that they could not have a permanent chief family because of their cowardness, as there are many faithful, brave and famous warrior of great repute Hmars, under the Sailo or Thadou chiefs. In fact, the Hmars are a priestly class as the Brahmins are to the Hindu society and Leviites to the Israelites. The numerous ceremonial rites and songs (mantras) the Hmars had in comparision with the other Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes is a very clear proof of this theory. 65

65. Ibid
However, these Thadou chiefs and their relatives, because of a very unfortunate incident in the year 1968 were driven away by the Hmars, as the latter had the feeling that there is a dirty politics hatched in those periods by some vested interests wherein all the Hmar tribes would be forced to be under the banner of Kuki, the term which they had rejected many years ago. From thereon, all those villages which are now without a chief are being governed by elected Village Councils. 66

66. Personal interview with Selkai Hrangchal. 75 years on 22nd October, 2002 at Old Lambulane, Imphal
3.1.3.1 THE ANNEXATION OF THEIR TERRITORY

One thing that has long remained a mystery to the Hmar people is the way in which their land was annexed to the British India and how the rulers divided their territory without any negotiation with the British agents. The annexation of the Hmar territory was based on two factors. First, to subdue the war-like and aggressive tribes. ZZ Lien writes -

"At the time when the aggressive west (Britishers) was piercing into these hermetically sealed regions the people were hesitant to acknowledge their supremacy and behaved in the most hostile way. As the people became a constant threat and menace to the British rule, the government has proposed the fragmentation of these regions into various administrative units."

Second, it was the desire of the British to prevent the Burmese invasion of Assam by strengthening the power of the Manipur Rajah that led to the secret annexation of the Hmar territory in the southwest of Manipur and Cachar. Burma was also a constant threat to Assam. Joytimore Roy, in his book, 'History of Manipur' put his view on this reason by saying that,

The prevailing anarchy and disorder called for British intervention, if not annexation. The nobles of Assam, like the Rajah of Cachar, implored the Governor-General again and again to save the unhappy land from desolation and ruin. But the East India Company refused to interfere until Burmese aggression forced their hand and rendered a radical revision of their North Eastern Frontier policy an imperative necessity.  

Recommendations were invited by the Supreme Government from the three British agents namely, Captain Grant, Captain Pemberton and Major Jenkins concerning the future of these areas. All three agreed that the Rajah of Manipur, Gambhir Singh, who was then in Cachar was influential and a powerful prince. The three gentlemen were also perfectly aware of the fact that the hill tribes, who were strong in their mountain fastness, had never rendered submission to the Rajah of Manipur or Cachar.  

With regard to the tribes in the 'eastern division of Cachar', Grant and Pemberton were in favour of conceding the areas to Gambhir Singh so as to alleviate the government from the burden of administrating those unproductive regions, and problem thereof. However, Major Jenkins was against these ideas of merging on the mere ground of Burmese phobia. He stated that the reasons which had induced the Government to refuse Gambhir Singh to farm out the whole principality of Cachar should hold equally good against granting any part of the country.  

69. Roy Jyotirmoy, History of Manipur, Calcutta, see also, Pudaite, Op. cit., p.28  
70. Pudaite Rochunga, Op. cit., p.28  
Major Jenkins assured the supreme government that the Burmese would never venture to enter Manipur until fully prepared for a general war with the British, and that if the British government had not secured the faithful attachment of the Rajah, it was in vain to seek other pledges. He finally begged the supreme authorities for the sake of civilization and humanity to extend their effectual protection to a people that had fallen under their administration by the extinction of the royal line.  

However, "after consideration of all these divergent views the Governor-General-in-Council on July 23, 1832 accepted Pemberton's recommendation and confirmed Gambhir Singh in the possession of the tract eastward of the Jiri River", and the hill people "might be permitted as before to bring away timber and other articles of trade from the hills without interruptions from the officer of Gambhir Singh". The policy of appeasement triumphed and under mistaken fear of the Burmese invasion Gambhir Singh was given the power over the tract eastward of the Jiri River to an indefinite area where the Hmars dwelt in ignorance of the changeover.  

The second and final stage of annexation took place in 1871 when the General Lord Roberts marched into this territory. The hillmen, in their resentment against the 'nominal submission' of their land subsequent to the action of the Governor-General-in-Council in 1832, showed unfriendly gestures against the British settlements. Organized marauders made constant incursions against plainsmen and the British agents in Cachar. In 1871 the combined forces of Lushais tribe and the Hmar tribe attacked Cachar district, and killed hundreds of tea garden employees at Alexanderpur Tea estate, including the Manager, Mr. Winchester. The Winchester's little daughter was captured and carried off far into the Lushai Hills. 

73. Ibid
74. Ibid
General Lord Roberts was commissioned to conduct a punitive expedition against these hillmen. The southern column led by Brigadier-Generals Bronlow came through Chittagong. And the northern wing led by Major-General Bronlow came through Silchar along the Barak river. They reached Tipaimukh, the confluence of river Tuivai and Tuiruon on the tri-junction of Assam, Manipur and Mizoram state on December 11, 1871. Senvon, the largest village and stronghold of the Hmar people, some 15 kilometres on the north of Tipaimukh was captured.

Chief Buola, the last of the great Leiri chiefs, unconditionally surrendered to the British Crown. The news shook the country and the war against the British was over. The hill country hitherto undefined territory, was devided into three segments and merged with the larger and contiguous districts of Manipur, Cachar and Lushai Hills. Chief Buola was deposed, and the Political Agent brought in a little boy, Kamkholum to become the chief of Senvon, who latter become instrumental in introducing education among the Hmar people. 76

Consequently the Hmars are found under a strange set-up of Government. The Cachar district soon was annexed to the Sylhet District (latter on to the state of Assam ) with legal rule, the Lushai Hills became an excluded area of strict tribal administration, and Manipur became a native state under British protection. Giving his comment on this division of Hmar hills, R.Pakhuongte said that, “.... When the British came, their (Hmar) hills were divided and handed over to the neighbouring states seemingly for the sake of administrative convenience, and of course, without the knowledge or consent of the Hmar people themselves.” 77

76. Ibid, p.67
However, during these periods, the local village chiefs usually have full responsibility in the administration of their own villages as the Maharaja of Manipur did not have such a direct control over the local administration of this region. In every aspect, the local people had a better relationship and contact with their own people in Mizoram than Manipur. Even Christianity, which ultimately brought about a great change in the socio-cultural, politics and economic life of the people of this region also came from Mizoram.  

Even though the Hmars of this region had a bitter relationship with the Lushais politically, in the socio-cultural aspects, they are closely inter-linked. This was evident from how the Hmars in one way or the other, showed their love and fondness for Lushai songs and dialect. Whenever they discussed any topic of importance and solemnity they used their own dialect; but in such places where they are in festive moods, including sharing of jokes and wines among men, they usually used Lushai dialect, no matter whether they are fluent with it or not. Many of the songs they composed during these periods were also in Lushai dialect.  

Besides, the first Christian missionaries including the Englishmen and the native ‘teacher-evangelists’ preached in Lushai dialect, studied Lushai script and text and above all, composed their Christian hymns in Lushai dialect only for many years until one of the pioneer Hmar Christian poets, Pastor Thangngur who, L.Keivom prefers to crown as ‘Father of Hmar Literature’. composed his first hymn in Hmar which says -

_Sandamu hi ka hrietchieng hma chun, Midang Pathien ka lo sawn a;
( Before I understood my savior I thought he was the God of others)_.

79. Keivom L, Hmasawma Sirbi - HISA Delhi Millenium Seminar 2000, p.20
Had the Christian pioneer, leaders and missionaries, the Britishers in particular had made a little effort towards the integration of all the tribes, (Hmar and Lushai in particular) the different dialect and tribe that now exist in this part of the region may no longer exist in the present days.

The principal village with more than 500 in population and those included in this study are Pherzawl, Tinsuong, Hmuizawl, Taithu, Parbung, Lungthulien, Senvon, Patpuhmun, Sartuinck and Ankhasuo in Tipaimukh Sub-division; Lamka, Rengkai, Muolvaiphei, Saikot, Khawpuibung, Ngeurte, Tuiring, Langza, Saidan, Khawmawi, Hmarveng and Sielmat in Churachandpur sub-division.

There are at present One Higher Secondary School, 5 Government high schools, 7 government recognised private high schools in Hmar dominated areas of the state. All the above private high schools are under various Christian missions. Besides, in Tipaimukh Sub-division alone, the Government have 14 Junior High Schools, 22 Junior Basic Schools and 6 Lower Primary Schools also known as 'schoolless villages' which employed more than 100 persons as teachers of different grades and qualification. Besides these, there are about 5 schools managed under the District Council.
within the Hmar tribes has more than 100 schools of various type. The Independent Church of India, one of the largest denominations that operates among the Hmar tribes alone has 20 schools in Churachandpur district alone, employing about 50 teachers and spending about Rupees One Lakh per month.

3.1.3.2 THEIR PRESENT AREAS OF SETTLEMENT

In Manipur state alone, the Hmars at present occupied in large number, the Tipaimukh Sub-division in the south-western Churachandpur district, and on the banks of river Jiri and Barak in Jiribam Sub-division of Imphal East district; Lamka, Rengkai and Sielmat within the Churachandpur municipality, on both sides of river Tuithapui (Khuga) in the Churachandpur Sub-division. There are a good number of Hmars in Tuiring and Langza villages in the Samulamlan Block of Churachandpur mixing with the Kom tribes. They also settled in good numbers in the Imphal city and Moreh town in Chandel district.
Table No. 5

Showing the details of Government High Schools and Junior High Schools in the Hmurs dominated areas

A. High Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>No. of teaching staffs</th>
<th>No. of non-teaching staff</th>
<th>Students' Teacher-Pupil ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senvon High/S</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25 : 2:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parbung High/S</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>41 : 1:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pherzawl H/S</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>64 : 1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saikot High/S</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>151 : 1:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rengkai High/S</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>630 : 1:18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Junior High Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School</th>
<th>No. of teaching staffs</th>
<th>No. of non-teaching staff</th>
<th>Students' Teacher-Pupil ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chingman</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>94 : 1:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haongzungkai</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>53 : 1:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>98 : 1:32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangreng</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>106 : 1:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lungthulien</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>106 : 1:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patpunhmun</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>106 : 1:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Hmunte</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>83 : 1:09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parvachawm</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16 : 1:04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawvakot</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>81 : 1:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sartuinek</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>114 : 1:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibuphurikhal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>115 : 1:38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taithu</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>88 : 1:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thingpukuol</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23 : 1:05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Munlan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100 : 1:13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL.</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>1183 : 1:13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides these government schools, various Christian denominations
3.2 SOCIAL LIFE - PAST AND PRESENT

3.2.1 VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

As has been stated before, the Hmars were once a nomadic tribe and their frequent movements and migrations were solely motivated by economic factors, that is, the search for a better 'jhum-land'. In their grim struggle for existence and their constant war with other tribes, they must have needed at that stages of their evolution a strong leader who could maintain the cohesiveness of the society and also protect it from external aggressions. Besides, it is the nature of man to have someone to be the leader whenever there is a group or a team for a specific purpose. Even wild animals have leaders.

Thus, a person who has the capacity to lead the people in their struggle for existence and constant anxiety in times of war, ability to command obedience from others - a certain charisma and the readiness on the part of his followers to conform to the institutions or models laid down by him, emerges as chiefs. Such persons who conquered new territories and built new villages were also eventually recognised as chiefs. There are also instances that 'folk-heroes' who earned a 'name by heroic deeds', killing wild animals or taking an enemy's head were often portrayed as the greatest leader, for the supreme huntsman of animals and men. In fact, many ancient great kings and rulers are always someone who had shown great skill and effort in wars and battles.

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3.2.1.1 THE CHIEF

The Hmar chiefs, though they wielded immense power, never lost their
democratic character. Theoretically though all the lands belong to the chiefs, yet
practically, all the people belonging to his community were the owners of these
lands. The chiefs were only the distributors of these lands. But as the distributors
of the lands also, they had to act abiding by the advice of their Council of Ministers
and the society's prevailing customs. He was hardly able to take decisions
independently.\(^1\)

In the words of Rochunga Pudaite,

*Significant among the Hmar system of village government is the fact
that the land belongs to the people. It is the common property of the
people and the chief. The chief and ministers are trustees with the
power to see to the rightful use and distribution to each homestead
for cultivation. No one can claim full ownership of land. It belongs
to him as long as he uses the land, and ceases to be his when he
moves or abandons the land.*\(^2\)

However, Lal Dena did not agree with this view and argue that,

*The villagers were sort of tenants-at-will, paying to the chief - One,
Busung -Sadar, the practice of paying every year a certain specified
quantity of paddy and surrendering the fore-legs of every animal
shot or trapped within the chiefdom, and two, rendering forced
labour which involved building and rebuilding the chief's house or
any other community works.*\(^3\)

\(^1\) R. Bhatacherjee, *The Hmar Tribe-Their Society and Some Aspects*, Proceedings of North East
India History Association, 4th Session, Barapani, 1983, p. 79
As stated above, the village Chief was given every year a certain specified quantity of paddy by his subject. The fore-legs of every animal shot or trapped within his chiefdom was also his share. He also had a share of honey extracted from a honey-comb by the villager within his land. If a villager decided to migrate to another village regardless of the chief's order, his property could be confiscated by the chief. And if he sold a 'mithun' or any other cattle to another villager, some specified portion of the price was to be given to the chief.

Above all, the chief also has the right to employed, even forcefully the service of his people in any community works and also that of building and rebuilding his own house. The right of the chief to these services was in fact the foundation of his political power and his accumulated wealth enabled him to command the respect and loyalty of his own clan or tribe and other clans or tribes conquered.

This practice actually amounted to virtual recognition of the chief as the supreme authority and sole owner of the land. In this connection, Hranglien Songate remarks that one Himar chief during their Burma settlement was exceptionally rich and was said to eat only on plates of gold. This would appear to suggest that the chief for all practical purposes depended upon the labour and production of his subjects.  

3.2.1.2 THE COUNCILLORS

In each chiefdom, there was a village council. The specific character, composition and methods of functioning of the council varied from clan to clan or from village to village. The chief was the supreme head of the council. Below the chief were his Council of Ministers known as ‘Siehmang’ or, ‘Khawnbawl’ headed by the ‘Siehmang Upa’ (chief councillor). There are also some influential and well-to-do members of the society called ‘Muolkil mitha’ who are inducted as members of the village council.

In the absence of the chief, the chief councillor took the place of the chief and presided over the meetings. The councillors who were selected by the chief himself were normally wealthy and influential groups of persons, kinsmen or close friends of the chief. They were rewarded with the most fertile jhum-land and also exempted from forced labour. Thus, the chiefs and the councillors in a sense constituted a privileged group in a traditional Hmar society and the village council, through which they operated, tended to serve their narrow and vested interests.

When the Village Authority came to power after the enactment of the Manipur Act of 1956, the office of the chief was practically abolished. In fact, in the bordering state of Mizoram, the institution of the chief was wholly abolished in 1946 with the then Mizo Union, the first political organisation of the Mizos spearheading this movement. Under the Manipur Act of 1956, the chief was made the chairman of the village authority without any other descretionary power. Even the benefits they usually get in the past, such as ‘Busung-Sadar’ and Free voluntary service from his subjects were also no longer given to him.
The Village Council combined in itself both judicial and criminal. Before it heard any dispute, the complainant was under obligation to offer rice-beer (zu) to the councillor and, if he won the case, the other party not only re-embursed his expenditure but also fined ‘Salam’ (a line of pig) as the case may be. The most serious offence committed by a person if found guilty by this council will be fined with a term called ‘Siel le Salam’. The chief was armed with extra-judicial powers which nobody questioned. For instance, if a criminal or adulterer managed to touch the middle post (Sutpui) of the chief’s house, the avenger would be considered guilty or enemy of the chief if he continued to make attempts of vengeance.

There could be a public trial of the case. But the chief had the authority not to bring up the case if he thought that the offender’s life was likely to be in danger. However, murderers involved in heinous crimes and offences could not escape for long because the moment he crossed the premises of the chief’s house, the murdered family could take revenge. The moment the criminal sought protection from the chief, he automatically became the latter’s Bowi (slave). Of course, he could buy his freedom back later on. This practice was condemned by the British rulers and the Christian missionaries so vehemently that it was soon abolished in the beginning of the last century. Dr. Peter Fraser, the medical-doctor missionary, the man who brought Watkin R. Roberts along with him to India played a very important role for this work.

85 Keivom I., Zoram Khaevel VI, Opcit, p.5
The Hmars did not have any book on criminal or civil laws of their own. However “the chief maintained peace and justice among the people according to the Hmar customary laws. He was the protector of the village’s life and property”\textsuperscript{86}. The village court adopted different methods depending on the nature of the case.

They generally displayed a tiger’s head in the council hall. The chief and the councillors usually decided the final case by asking the culprits to swear an oath in the name of god which goes as, "If I told a lie, let a tiger bite me today/tonight."\textsuperscript{87} The accused was instructed to bite the tiger’s tooth and to declare himself innocent. In case he refused to do so, he was declared as the main culprit.\textsuperscript{88} Luois L. Keivom further states that, “some of those who make false oath were really carried away by tigers. But not all who made false oath”\textsuperscript{89}

The chief and his councillors also had the right to declare ‘Khawtlang ensan’ (boycott by the whole village) to any of the families who disobeyed the orders of the village court or who in the opinion of the village court were trouble makers for the village. It was a terrible thing for the families who were boycotted by the village. When a member of a boycotted family died, the whole village did not even go to console the dead nor did they help dig grave for them. This kind of punishment was so severe for the bearer that everyone tried to obey the orders of the village court. In this way the chief and his councillors administered justice to the people.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{86} Pakhuongte R. Op cit, p.12
\textsuperscript{87} Luois Keivom, Op cit, p.23
\textsuperscript{88} Darliensung, Op cit, p.125
\textsuperscript{89} Keivom Luois L. Op cit, p.23
\textsuperscript{90} Songate, J., A Historical Study of the Changes in the Hmar Society of Manipur Resulting from the Introduction of Christianity 1910-1935, Unpublish Dissertation for the degree of D.Miss., Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, USA, 1999, p.64
3.2.1.3 THE PRIEST

Another very important official next to the Chief and his Council of Ministers is the Thiempu (priest). All case which the council could not decide for want of evidences were usually referred or transferred to the priest. This transferring of cases show that in the Hmar traditional 'pre-christian' society, their politics, religion and judiciary were interdependent. Such cases which are referred to the priest by the village council were normally settled by administering an oath or subjecting the party concerned to ordeal to test innocence or guiltiness.

One of the methods performed by the priest is called 'Thingkuong deng'. Under this system, a pot of rice beer is kept and filled with water up to the brim. The Priest then chanted, “God of heaven, god of the universe, reveal his/her sin and may his/her picture appear on the 'water' of the rice-beer. Give him fear and let him live only for one lunar month”. After this, the real culprit used to disclose his hidden crimes fearing that the priest will be really calling the spirits. It is also said that the face of the culprit sometimes really appear on the rice-beer pot. The final method of bringing justice employed by the priest to find out the offending person is called, Tui Lilut (water immersion).

For this trial or final traditional judgement, the two persons who have the dispute are taken to a nearby river after performing a certain rite at the chief's house before they moved out along with the chief and his ministers. On the bank of the river, the priest sprinkle the blood of a fowl on the top of their head and if the blood flow down the nose line of either of them, the onlookers would straight away think that he is the innocent of the two.

91. Ibid. p.65
"Chunga pattien, hnaoia pattien,
Hionghai pahni hi, thudik hril chu tlatlum sien;
Thukhel hril chu burse inlangin inlang raw se".  

English -

"Ye God of above and God of under...
Who ever tell truth between these two
Let him immerse in the water and whoever tell lies,
Let him float like an empty can".

After the priest chanted these lines, the innocent person always sank
himself deep into the water and came out with a handful of sand from the floor of
the water but, the guilty person miraculously can never survive inside the water for
long no matter what a good diver he is. The responsibility of the priest is
automatically transferred to the church Pastors and church Elders after the Hmars
as a whole embraced Christianity which came to them from the first part of the
year 1910.

H.V. Vara mentions that there were three different types of priest in
the traditional pre-christian soociey who performed different types of roles in
the society. They are - Thiempulal (chief priests), Khawtlang thiempu (village
priest) and Hnambing thiempu (clan priest).  

93. Ibid
Thiempu Lal

Thiempu Lal (Chief Priest) was regarded as the highest priest and the whole tribe had only one such thiempu. He would on behalf of the whole tribe perform a solemn sacrifice once in a year invoking the unknown 'khuonu-khuopa' (the all powerful god), to give him thanks for the blessing he had showered upon the tribe, asked his forgiveness for the sins they had committed and also to spare them from illness and epidemics.

No one was allowed to make even a feeble noise or laugh while the 'high priest' performed these ceremonial sacrifices. Anyone who did so accidentally or intentionally would be ex-communicated by the tribe and the whole process re-started from the beginning. The tribe before going for war or on a hunting expedition would always seek the blessing of the priest.

Khawtlang Thiempu

The Khawtlang thiempu was usually responsible for the ceremonies associated with the agriculture and village life of the people. Besides giving his hand in identifying a guilty person when two persons had both claimed to be the innocent, he also played an important part in what was known as 'Khawthar sai' (selection of a new village site), 'Tuikhur siem' (cleansing of community pond) and 'Khawser'.
Whenever a new village was to be selected the priest followed by the village chief and his Council of Ministers will set out for the site selection. Upon reaching the spot they desired to occupy, the priest will let loose a cock he took along with him. If the cock meekly stood still and did not crow, they would think that the place was not fit for habitation, and they would move on to search a more suitable place. However, if the cock gayly flapped its wing and crow, the priest would immediately proceed to select site for the chief’s house by following certain rituals. The house of the priest and the Buonzawl are usually located at both side of the chief’s house. The Ministers will then choose a site for each of them. Only after all these, the commoners will choose site for themselves.

Selection of a village site will also be to a great extent determined by the availability of a suitable stream for use by the people. They will always make a kind of small pond on these streams for their domestic use and called it as ‘Tuikhor’. As the Hmar traditional religion believed that every tree, rock and river had its own soul and spirit, they always tried their best not to displease any of these spirits. Until and unless the priest by following certain rituals cleansed the streams, they regarded them as unclean and not useable. They followed the same rituals in cleansing every small stream they intend to use near their jhum-land. Making these ‘Tuikhor’ contaminated by any means was regarded as a great crime and punishable.

The other very important role played by the village priest is when the village observed a ritual known as ‘Khawser’. This ceremony was performed in order to worship the spirits that dwell on the high mountains and also to invoke the protection of the gods against mass destruction such as epidemics, etc.
When 'Khawser' was arranged in a village, young men would go to each and every house of the village and put off all the fire in the hearth. After that, they would make a new fire in the chief's house following the traditional method and re-distributed to each and every house again. No outsiders were allowed to enter the village on the day this ceremony was performed. Signals would be put on the entrance of the village as well as on the front-porch of their houses by putting what they called 'Sulhna' (leaves of plant). Even fowls were taken out in the night and kept them at a nearby place so that they make no noise in any way. A spot near Senvon village where the villagers in the olden days used to keep their fowls known as 'Arthakzawl' is a living evidence of this ceremony.

Hnambing Thiempu

Hnambing thiempu are those priests who were employed mostly by their own clans in times of such rituals as Sakhawhmang, Sesun Inchong, marriage, child naming, death and rituals involved with sacrifices because of sickness, injuries and accidents. Sakhawhmang is a sacrifice done by a family by killing a pig. A pig is always reared by every family for this particular sacrifice. The religious consciousness of the Hmars was shown by the fact that this particular pig which every family reared cannot be taken away from them even if they committed a crime and were fined 'Salam' (a fine of pig) by the Village Court. Sesun Inchong is a ceremonial sacrifice performed by a well-to-do family who had attain certain greatness at home or outside the home by killing a mithun. The soul of those who had performed this sacrifice are believed to have a direct entry into heaven after their death.
3.2.1.4 VAL. UPA

The next important official in the village council is the Val Upa' (youth commanders) who usually operated through the organisation of Buonzawl/Zawlbuk (bachelors' dormitory) by imparting strict discipline and vigorous training in the art of tribal warfare, defence, etc. to youngsters (excluding women). In times of peace, the youth commanders mobilized the youths and rendered free but compulsory service to the society. Their influence was so great that even the chief and his councilors could at times be subject to the will of the youths.

All the male youths of the village who had attained puberty are supposed to sleep in this dormitory in the night. Each boy in the village is under obligation to supply firewood for the Zawlbuk and failure of which will be shamefully reprimanded or punish. The Val-upas will, in those events let the child know that the failure to perform one's duty is much more painful than the punishment given to him.95

This very important traditional house of education was completely abolished in the then Lushai Hills in the year 193896 and, although the Val-Upas are still there in the villages to lead and command the youths in certain social activities, their work and importance is taken up by the Hmar Youth Association, an umbrella organisation of all the youths of the community which had its branches and units in almost all the Hmar villages.

95. Ibid, p.23
96. Sangkima: Zawlbuk and its Abolition: A significant event in the history of the Mizo; Proceedings of NILA, 8th Session, Kohima, 1987, p.307
3.2.1.5 THIRSU AND TLANGSAM

Other important officials of a Limar village government were the Thirsu (blacksmith), Tlangsam (village messenger) and Val-upa (youth commander). The role of a ‘Thirsu’ was very important in any tribal society. His main function was to make weapons and agricultural implements which include axe, hoe, spade, spears, knife, sickle, etc. He did not at once charge any fees but received a certain specified quantity of paddy annually from those who utilised his service. The ‘Tlangsam’ proclaimed the orders of the chief and the councillors; and he was also exempted from forced labour or any other community labour. The chief used to share some portion of the paddy he received from the villagers or else the villagers made contribution of paddy at the end of the year. The Tlangsam also had his share of meat in ‘Salam’ or, in other words, a fine of pig, imposed by the village council to any guilty person under a village court system.

In the present days, with the advancement of modern systems of governance and equipments, the functions of the village Blacksmiths and Messenger have lessen considerably. With their benefits of exemption from compulsory social services no more, and the donation of paddy for them no longer enforced, blacksmithy is taken up by whoever had the talent and a village messenger is usually employed by the village with a certain amount of monthly salary.
3.3 LAW OF INHERRITANCE

The Hmars have elaborate customary laws. The Lalship and Khawnbawlsip and the right to inheritance went to the youngest son of the family. But certain clans such as the Leiris, the Faihriems and the Changsans give inheritance right to the eldest son. In a family in which there are no sons, the right of inheritance is to be decided by the kinsmen of that particular family. Women are not allowed to inherit any property.

Adoption called 'Saphun' was also being practised among the Hmars. The chief or any villagers who have favourite slaves sometimes grant an admission of the slave to their clan. This is done in a simple ceremony. The adopter calls a village priest, and a fowl or pig was slain and sacrificed, and a prayer to propitiate the spirit of the clan which the man is abandoning is made. He is then accepted as a full-fledged member of the clan. A person may not necessarily be a slave to go for this 'Saphun'. If the kinsmen or children of the person who do 'Saphun' would like to take him back or return to their own clan by themselves, they have to follow the same procedure that was followed before.

In the present days, many non-tribal plainsmen, who came to settle among the Hmars as a manual worker, business or government and private works often married a Hmar girl. Many of these persons usually go for 'Saphun' and are counted along with the clan of his wife or his local gurdians. Great care is taken by those in the parent clan so as not to make their new kinsmen feel lonely or being inferior to others.
3.4 MARRIAGE

In a Hmar society, the clan and the family did not determine much of the partner in marriage, because one can marry any girl except his sister, aunt, mother or, grandmother. The preferential marriage was, however, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, though some people hold prejudice against marrying such from the father's side. There is a belief that when one marries the daughter of his maternal uncles, they would be blessed in every walks of life. The son of a village chief however usually looks out for the daughter of another chief, which also often results in first cousin marriage on both sides.

Before marriage, the parents of both the prospective bride and bridegroom usually had a close watch and detail observation of each other's family history to prevent taking of a spouse from a family having a hereditary disease. While selecting a son-in-law, the economic condition of the family was considered to be more important than the boy's personality, provided he had no physical or mental deficiencies.

Likewise, in the case of a daughter-in-law, the greatest attributes were physical beauty, physical health to ensure progeny, efficiency in domestic work, ability to exert hard labour in agricultural and domestic chores and also a good reputation which literally means that the girl was not known for clandestine pre-marital affairs with another persons. This was mainly because of the cultural value on virginity of a girl and social approval of illegitimate child.
While the Hmar society was tolerant of a free mixing of boys and girls, there was social degradation on pre-marital sexual affairs on the part of the girl which did not permit intimate relationship with boys. Pre-marital sexual affairs had by a boy however, surprisingly is not that much taken into account. Boys usually take pride in the number of girls with whom they have pre-marital affairs.

One should also not ignore the fact that the Hmar society was an open society where there was a free-mixing. What was very common and rather institutionalised way of approaching girl was wooing known as 'nunghak leng'. A boy, soon after his evening meal, would visit a girl. The boy would sit around the girl gossiping, cracking jokes and discussing topics of common interest till late at night. There are some very interesting and exciting story about this courting between a boy and a girl by using one very strange item, that is cigarette. It is through this rolling of cigarettes known as Dumzuol through which the message of love and affection is conveyed between a boy and a girl.

A boy usually sets out along with a pouches of tobacco when he went for 'nunghak leng'. He would ask the girl to roll him his Dumzuol. It was a common practice, to tie the cigarette with a piece of thread so that the roll was not loosen and it was from the colour of this Dumzuol’s ‘waistband’ that the girl would convey her heart to the boy. If the girl used a white thread she meant to say that, "I am not interested in you", and if it was with a red thread, it means, ‘a blatant rejection, hatredness and anger’. On the contrary, if the girl used another colour usually, a green or blue, it would indicate a reciprocated love and acceptance. In such a unique use of a language of love, the girl would sometimes use her own strand of hair to bind the boy’s cigarette, to mean that, "I dedicate myself to you".

Further, when the girl prepared a bundle of cigarette for the boy, and if there were a pair or two, which was bound together among the bundle, the boy would understand that the girl is saying, "I am waiting for your response and am ready for whatever you say." If the girl for that moment was undecided and did not know how to respond his suitor, she would simply use a white coloured waistband which indicate that her mental frame of mind was in a 'neutral state' and therefore her suitor had to wait while scores of white banded Dumzaol were being reduced to ashes during the conversation of the night's visit.

During the pre-Christian life, the Hmars were in use of what was known as 'Singtur Dumbel' (smoking pipe). Even during those periods, when a boy would like to know to what extent his 'sweetheart' reciprocated his love, he would send a child along with his pipe to the girl. He would then understand how the girl accepted his approach and reciprocated his love and feeling towards her from the manner she stuffed the tobacco in his pipe. If it was really tight, it meant that the girl was not interested in him, and if it was just loose enough, it meant that the girl 'wishes him the best and that she is also interested in him'.

Although, courting by using 'Singtur Dumbel' and 'Dumzaol' are more or less abandoned in the present days because of the availability of readymade cigarettes and other forms of tobacco, 'mungdak leng' is still very much alive and practised even till today by the young Hmar boys along with the western form of 'dating' outside the house.

When the boy or the boy’s parents made their choice, this choice was first made known to the girl’s parents. This pre-negotiation stage was a very important period because decision as to whether the marriage was possible or not was to be taken. Once this stage was over, the boy’s parents would call their kinsmen and here, affinal kinsmen known as ‘laibung’ played a crucial role in working out the details of marriage. Marriage was mostly conducted during winter months from October to March, when everyone was usually free from his agricultural works.

Marriage was usually not fixed during the month of September, as this month is a tabooed month for marriage. They called the month ‘Thlaram thla’ which means, ‘the month of destruction’. They regarded the month of September as ‘Thlaram’ because, it is the month when the cricket dissapeared and even yam leaves had fallen to the ground. Therefore they assumed that those who got married in the month of September would face many difficulties and their offsprings would also not survive.

Some selected kinsmen (laibung) and the boy’s sister’s husbands (makpas) would act as go-between (palai) and go to the house of the girl’s parent with white a cloth, a hoe and a pot of rice beer or tea. If the articles are accepted, formal negotiation follows and the brideprice is decided. The hoe is called “thirdam” and is regarded as an instrument of peace and, the cloth is called “inhiavu” (pleasant home). The amount of bride price differs from clan to clan and this brideprice cannot be interpreted as a commercial transaction.

3.4.1 BRIDE PRICE

In 1940, the Hmars revised this bride price for the convenience of all and fixed Rs 40/- to be equivalent of a 'Siel' and in 1990, under the aegis of the Hmar Youth Association the full bride price was re-fixed as follows:

1. Manpui : Rs. 800/-
2. Panghak : Rs. 50/-
3. Pusum : Rs. 100/-
4. Nisum : Rs. 50/-
5. Sangdawn : Rs. 20/-
6. Ukhelman : Rs. 100/-
7. Zuorman : Rs. 10/- (for outside the village & Rs. 5/- if the marriage is between the same village.

The leader of the 'zuors' (zuor upa) as a tradition gets double of what the ordinary 'zuor' use to get. The type of marriage in which all the regular features, process and rituals are being performed is called 'Songpuiia innei' or 'nisa hnaoia innei' (marriage under the sun). When a marriage takes place after completing all these formalities and the 'bride price' being paid by the boy's family. The father of the bride is supposed to kill a four-legged animal (pig, cow or mithun) which is known as 'sum kmum sa'. Half of the animal that was killed excluding the head and the internal parts but with the tail, known as 'sa krup' is taken to the house of the boy by the 'makpas' (boy's sister's husband). The 'zuor' and a few selected close relatives of the girl are supposed to feast with the girl at her father's house in the morning and at the boy's house in the evening or the next day.

102. HYA Dan Bu, Published by HYA. Gen.Hqrs., Churachandpur, 1999
103. Thaoente. Opc. it. p.13
A Hmar bride price is normally classified into various shares which are as follows:

1. Manpui: if received in kind, it consisted of a mithun, a gong, etc., and this went to the bride's parent.

2. Panghak: some portion of the brideprice given to the parent's kinsmen.

3. Pasum: a portion given to the bride's maternal uncle (pu).

4. Nisum: a portion given to the bride's father's sisters.

5. Sangdawn: a portion given to the bride's elder sister.

6. Ukhelman: a portion given to the elder sister of the bride if she is still unmarried.

Besides the above bride-prices, the groom family also has to pay a nominal amount called ‘zuor man’ to the sisters of the bride who come to drop the bride to her new home on the day of marriage with the nominal dowry of the bride.

As the Hmars have not maintained any records in writing, the settlement of marriage and bride-price is solemnised in a simple way. The different parts of the animal that is killed is cooked and is eaten by two close relatives from the boy's side and two from the girl's side. This is called 'sabor', and those who dine this special meal stands as the ‘witness’ for all these ceremonies. This practice is still practised even today although people usually prepare a written record of all those who share the bride-price and other important things, the date of negotiation, marriages, etcetera.
The Hmars practise monogamy and there are very few instances of polygamy. The child born of extra-marital indulgence is not uncommon. The child born of unregulated relationship is called 'sawn' and the boy is to pay fine called 'zawllet' to the girl's parents and 'salam' (a fine of pig) to the village council. If he however decided to marry the girl, he would be exempted from these fines and he will have to follow the same process followed in other forms of marriage.

It may be interesting to note here that it is a common practiced that the bride price was never paid in full at a time. The bride's father when accepting the bride-price will always customarily returns a token amount to the groom's party. This conveys the message that the groom's family still has not yet fully paid their bride price and that they still owe 'something' to the bride's father for giving them his daughter. It is not also mandatory for the groom's family to pay this due in due course of time.

As for the ceremonies and rituals involved, or the role of the priest in this traditional form of Hmar marriage, lesser records are available. The sisters and close women-relatives of the boy come to the girl's house in the evening led by the groom's 'zawlpa' (closest traditional friend) to take the bride to her new home. The village priest soaks a broom with water and wipes the legs of the girl before she leaves her father's house and chant -

\textit{Khuonu khuopa'n malsawn sien la che}

\textit{Bu sang bu za va thlo la}

\textit{Nau le te inhringin mi kaldung kalkhang va zau rawh.}
May you be blessed by the gods and goddesses
May you go to have plenty of paddy (rice)
May you go to have sons and daughters to
Multiply the families of your new home. 104

The girl (bride) then steps out with her right leg first from her father’s
house and is followed by her ‘thiennu’ (bridesmaid) and then by others. On their
way young boys will tease the bride and try to make her dirty by throwing at her
with muds and cowdung. When they finally reach the boy’s house, those inside
the house will close the doors and windows and would said, “Are you a good
fellow or bad fellow?” The leader of the bride’s party will then reply, “We are
good fellows, we are to have sons and daughters, to work hard to have plenty
of rice, to increase the family.”105 The door will then be opened, and the priest
will wipes the right leg of the girl with broom as she enters her new home.

After the mass conversion of the Hmars into Christianity, marriage is
solemnised by the Pastors in the church but, bride-prices and all the other process
and activities including ‘sabar’ are still practised and followed although they
have made a written record of all the settlement involved in it. If a marriage is to
take place in the church, a notice will be put up on the church notice board by
the local church Elder for atleast a week before and whoever is willing to make a
complaint against the marriage is allowed to do so during this period only.

104. ibid
105. ibid
As for the other form of marriage which is called 'arasi hnoia inmei' (marriage under the stars), it is a marriage which takes place against the consent of the parents, similar with what is commonly known as 'eloped'. After the boy and the girl reached the house of the boy, a messenger is sent to the girl's father to inform him of the elopement. In such cases, the girl's father can refuse to take up all those needed for the marriage to be agreed and confirm. If so, no bride price will be paid and the boy's parents have to wait for the convenience of the girl's father for official marriage or to formalize the marriage.

There is also another form of marriage although not very common known as 'Thu'. If a girl is madly in love with a boy in spite of the boy very enthusiastic about the affairs, the girl can go by herself to the boy’s house. If she can manage to spend a night no matter the boy sleeps with her or not, she is successful in her attempt. If the boy still refuses to accept her and sends her back home, he has to pay the same amount paid by those who divorce their wives, which is called Makman. If he instead decides to accept her, he has to pay the usual bride price. The same thing can be done by a boy to a girl.

If the boy can stay at the girl's house for two consecutive years, he may be exmuted from paying the normal bride price. If he however decided to move out along with his wife, he will have to pay the normal bride price. Nothing can be said or done if he moved out all alone. On the other hand, he the girl send him out before completing the requisite formalities, she has to pay a fine of 'sekhut' to the boy and the boy will no longer treat her as his wife.  

3.4.2 DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

The bond of marriage in a Hmar society is extremely loose and divorce and separation is more simple and easy although the practice was not common especially in the pre-Christian life. A girl seeking divorce simply has to persuade her parents to agree to refund the bride price they have received. This is called 'sum insuo'. In case the boy seeks divorce, he gives 'sekhat' to the girl. This payment by the boy is called 'mak man'.

There is another form of separation on mutual consent on both sides known as 'peksa chang'. In this form of separation, as it was done on mutual consent between the husband and wife, the former would not re-claim the bride price he had paid nor the latter would demand the husband to pay her the amount of bride price which was returned by her father on the day of bride price settlement. If the two have separated by mutual agreement and wish to remarry, they can do so.

Adultery is rare among the Hmars. When a woman commits adultery with another man, the husband has the right to send her out of the house with the only dress which she is wearing at that particular time, and she loses all her property. She above all, have to refund the price her husband paid for her. If a widow remarries six months after the dead of her husband, she is still reckoned as committing adultery. However there was no specific laws to punish her.
Other than the above forms of separation, husband and wife may also separate on the issue of insanity on either of them after their marriage. In the case of such an unfortunate situation happening on the wife, the husband will customarily try his level best to make her wife return to normalcy for a period of at least three years. If he still fails, he would dutifully take his wife to her father's house and divorce her by paying 'mak man'. In the case of such incident occurring on the husband, the wife can leave him as was done in 'sum insuo'.

In Hmar society there is no law or custom preventing widow remarriage and therefore widows remarry. There are few cases of polygamy and child marriage is almost unknown though they have the system known as 'chong molak'. The parents of both the boy and the girl agree to let their children marry when they attain a certain specific age. Whenever, the boy's family perform any ceremonies they will invite the girl, but, the girl is not supposed to spend the night there. The actual marriage will take place only at the stipulated fixed time.

The status of a woman who has committed adultery is very low in the society. The church has a strict rule to those who are guilty of this sexual promiscuity which can lead to expulsion from the church membership and forbidden to become church Elders or another Christian marriage. However, one weakness in this practice was that while women are humiliated, men are not given any punishment. This perhaps may surely be one of the shortcomings of the Hmar customary laws.\(^{107}\)

Again, even though, the equivalent amount of the traditional fines and prices in the Hmar customary laws are being revised and up-dated from time to time, it is strange that the amount of money fixed to be equal with ‘siel’, one of the finest and most costly possession their fore-fathers had is fixed at a dismal sum of Rupees 40/- at present. Also, ‘salam’, which is made to be equal with a live pig if not given in money is fixed at just Rupees 20/-. This measure is well and good when one has to pay the price of a bride or a ‘fine’ for an offence; on the other-hand those who are on the other side of the settlement always find that this amount is too less to compensate them in their loss.

For instance, if a person commits a crime as serious as murder, the Hmars unless they go to a government’s court, are supposed to fine the offender with Siel le Salam, which in the present context is a fine of Rupees 60/- only (Rs. 40/- for Siel and, Rs. 20/- for Salam). There are as such, many instances in the present days where this customary laws are deliberately ignored when crime as serious as murder occurs in the community.
3.5 SLAVES

Slavery used to be very common among the Hmar people in the olden days. The practice was condemned by the British rulers as well as the early Christian missionaries. But it was not until Christianity had completely captured their hearts and imaginations that the practice was truly outlawed.\textsuperscript{108} Mention may also be made of the name of Dr. Peter Fraser, the medical missionary of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission Society and also, the man who brought Watkin R. Robert along with him first of all to the then Lushai Hills and ultimately to the 'Hmar land'.

There are several ways of becoming a slave or obtaining a slave. The following are the different classifications of slaves:

a) \textit{Inpai Suok}: These slaves are widows and orphans who are unable to support themselves. Since they have no relatives who willing to take care of them they go to the chief's or rich man's house for safety. They are employed according to their ability but receive no wages except food, shelter and clothes. They are allowed to marry and start their own home.

\textsuperscript{108} Pudaite Rochunga, \textit{Op.cit}, p.54
b) Chemsen Suok: They are murderers and adulterers who, in order to escape from the consequences of their evil action, take refuge in the chief's house. The chief is the only one who could protect such a criminal and the avenger would be counted guilty or enemy of the chief if he continue to make attempts of vengeance. His safety area was however limited to the chief's house, and the murdered family could take his life at any opportunity outside the premises of the chief's house.

c) Tuklut Suok: They are voluntary slaves who sought refuge in the house of the chief or a rich man during famine or persuance by a stronger tribe in the tribal war. Tuklut suok might be asked to be freed after the famine, or when the war is over.

d) Sal: They are born slaves captured in tribal war. They have no status and they are brought and sold. Even if the owner murders his slaves, nobody can complain against him.\footnote{Darliensung, Op.cit, p.113}
3.3 ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

3.3.1 Agriculture

The main activity of the Hmars centre around food-production and almost all their festivals are connected with it. The age-old mode of production was shifting cultivation (jhumming) which is still in practice. The village council had a session at the beginning of every year which they called ‘Pam rorel’ and opened a certain region of land for cultivation. As mentioned earlier, the councillors were given the first opportunity to select the site of their choice for ‘jhum’ and then the commoners were given by lot. No individual member could claim permanent ownership of land and the land ceased to be his as soon as the harvest is over.

The striking feature of a Hmar economic activity is ‘Lawmpui’ (corporate labour) and mutual assistance. Various stages of food-production which normally involve corporate labour are - clearing the forest tract by cutting down the jungle; dibbling and sowing of seeds; weeding; harvesting; thrashing and storing. In all these stages, the Hmars would either join in corporate labour or help one another. The most popular corporate labour among the Hmars was ‘Butu Khuonglawm’ which was organised at the time of sowing of seed. There are times, as Pudaite remarks, “When as many as five hundred persons would work together. They would start from the farthest fields and move gradually towards the village. They sing as they sow and make a festival out of it.”110 The villagers of Leisen, one of the oldest Hmar village of Manipur have this ‘seed sowing festival’ as late as 1912.111

111: Nghaka HF: Leisen Chanchin, Churachandpur, 1985, p.4
This kind of corporate labour was highly cherished by the Hmars. For young man, this kind of activity was like ‘dating a girl in a modern society’ and the demand for work partnership was accordingly high for beautiful girls. Even after, the traditional Buth Khuonglawm was no longer practised, a group of young men and women in particular still do their own private ‘Inlawm’ (corporate labour) by helping each other in their agricultural works, which is both productive and enjoyable.

It has also been observed that the social interaction in the ‘jhum-land’ were of intrinsically intimate characterised by perfect co-operation. It was precisely because of this nature that the sentimental value of attachment to the agricultural land was so great among the Hmar people. This has been confirmed by many folk songs, festivals, folk tales and love songs. Lal Dena, a senior Professor in Manipur University also candidly remark that, “Agricultural work in the village, although very tiresome is enjoyable throughout the year, right from the cutting of forest to harvesting of grains”.

Internally, the traditional Hmar society was economically self-sufficient as they could produce almost all their locally consumable items including food stuffs such as rice, cereals, maize, yam. chilly, beans, cucumber, water melon, pumpkin and tobacco. They also produced their own meat requirement by rearing livestocks such as chicken, cow, mithun, pig, dog, etc.

112. Sanate Crossthang, Op.cit, p.72
113. Personal interview with Lal Dena at Manipur University, Canchipur on 9.10.02, 11AM
3.3.2 WEAVING

The Hmar women are also no less important in this subsistence economic society as they produce all their clothing requirements by weaving. A girl, at the age of about five, is provided with a toy-loom called 'Tatehem' by her mother on which she learns the process of weaving. Thus, by the age of fifteen, a girl is capable of making all kinds of designs and is expected to produce the family requirements in her spare time. The weaving, known as 'Puonkhowng', is excellent, and is done on complicated indigenous hand looms, home grown cotton being used.\(^{114}\) The Hmar males, on their part provide all the materials needed for this 'Puonkhowng', including the raw material and also the different equipments required for the same, the making for some of which required a really artistic talent. They also made their own baskets and other containers which they require for their day to day life.

3.3.3 POTTERY

Pottery is the work of the Hmar woman before the modern industry is available for the domestic requirements and they are expert on it. They produced different kinds of pots which they required for cooking, covering and those for making local wine. When a village site was selected, great importance was attached to the availability of 'Bepil Khur' (potter pit). For iron works, it was the responsibility of Thirusu, the village blacksmith, who was paid for his work usually in terms of rice at the end of the year.

3.3.4 HUNTING AND FISHING

The Hmar people were also fond of hunting and fishing. In order to satisfy their hunger for meat, they snared for the smallest hawks to the biggest hornbill, and the smallest squirrel to the largest elephant. Elephants were captured by digging pitfalls on narrow bridges between precipices known as 'Tlak' or by conducting a hunting party. Tigers are trapped under a platform of heavy logs known as 'Mankhawng'. Monkeys are tricked by putting beans or ears of corn at the end of a bamboo pole which is partially severed. Underneath are scores of sharp bamboo spikes on which the monkey finds himself impaled. Children learn all these traps and tricks not only to catch the birds and beasts, but also to protect themselves from being the unlucky victims.¹¹⁶

However, a Hmar is happier with big game and guns. Each village owns a certain number of muzzle-loading flint-lock guns. Great preparations are made for hunting expeditions. The hunters camp on a certain spot for weeks, until they are satisfied with the number of animals they have killed. A small number of youth are allowed to participate in these expeditions, and the youth selected not only considers himself fortunate, but accepts it as a mark of distinction. His conduct in the jungle is closely observed and his worth would soon be proved by his grown-up associates.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.74
¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p.51
Similarly, fishes were caught by ordinary nets and spears. Catching of crabs and snails are also done in large ways. Their frequent raids on small rivers and streams for crabs had also made them informally learnt the cycles of rainfalls in a year by having learnt that crabs are more fat tasty if they are caught before late monsoon rainfall which usually occurs in the month of September and October. This particular rainfall which usually rains for three to seven days continuously is known to them as ‘Aïruo’ meaning ‘crab rain’. They somehow learnt that after this ‘ai ruo’, crabs usually hibernated in their holes and are no longer available from outside till the winter season is over.

Before the introduction of money economy, production and appropriation involved little of profit motive. As indicated above, certain specified quantity of paddy was given to the chief, the priest, the blacksmith and the village messenger. Thus, the process of distribution or appropriation of product involved channelling upward of products to socially determined allocative centres such as the chief and the priest, etc. In fact, the traditional Hmar society was marked by a constant ‘give and take’ and the wealth, given and taken, was one of the main instruments of social and economic organisation - of the power of the chief, of the bonds of kinship and of relationship law.
3.3.5 DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

At the turn of the twentieth century when contact with the civilized world was on a limited scale, Hmar men’s dress was the simplest thing consisting of a single piece of cloth about six feet long and four feet wide. One corner was grasped in the left hand, and the cloth was passed over the left shoulder behind the back. Then it was brought under the arm across the chest and the end is thrown over the shoulder. Since it was loosely worn it looked as though it would continually fall off, and yet accidents of that sort seldom happened.\(^{118}\)

During winter, one or more clothes are worn, one over the other, and also a white coat of thigh length fastened at the neck. Another cloth was used for lower body from the hips down to the knees. This is called ‘Hrenpereng’ and was used as a substitute for modern half-pant. Hats used by common men were made of bamboos and canes which were generally flat and circular in shape.

As regard to the women folk, they worn better dress than their male counterpart. Indigenous Hmar women had a great fascination for coloured cloths neatly designed. A Hmar women used a cloth of such a length as to go round the waist down to the knees. The other garment for covering the upper portion known as ‘Hmar Am’ which is unseamed petticoat, fastened with a string at the waist.\(^{119}\)

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118. Ibid, p. 47
In general, the Hmars grow their own cotton. They have two types of cotton, pure white and light brown. Before their contact with the outside world, they usually dye their white cotton in black with one wild fruit known as ‘Hmuoe’. More varieties of dye and cotton yarns have been imported and colourful clothes are woven with magnificent design and patterns on the small handlooms in which every Hmar girl is a master.

The Hmar women now take pride in having a specific cloth to wear on different kinds of occasions such as death, marriage, social functions, etc. A girl learns the art of weaving from her tender age with a small loom known as ‘Tachem’ and gradually learns to handle the big ones. By the time she is fifteen, she is capable of making all kinds of designs and is expected to produce the family requirement in her spare time. Though the woman weaves the cloth, the man is responsible for the making of all the instruments needed for the loom.

Hair dressing was also an important aspect of a Hmar habit. In fact, there is a theory which believes that the Hmars are the progenies of Tukbensawm, a man who tie his hair in a knot at the back of his head. Hmar women plait their hairs into two straps and makes an interlacement or a knot above the forehead by bringing forward such straps above the ear. This hair style is also known as ‘Samkim’. They also used a wooden or brass comb and a hair pin called ‘Tawmkwoi’.

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120. Interview with T. Khuma, 65 years at Saikot, Churachandpur on May 25, 2001, 1PM
Both traditional Hmar males and females were fond of using and wearing ornaments on different parts of the body. Both men and women have their ear pierced and wore earring made of wood, dry bones and even ivory in different shapes and size. They also wear necklaces made of precious stones, amber, etc. which are believed to be found in abundant during their stay in Burma. A tiger tooth were also often worn around the neck which were thought to have magical properties.¹²²

The Hmars manner of dress and ornaments have a drastic change after their conversion to Christianity and have now adopted a dress almost similar with the westerners. Men have started cutting their hairs soon after their contact with the Englishmen and after the First World War. Many women also have started wearing long pants like their male counterpart. Few others also wear traditional Indian dress such as Kurta Pyzama, Saree, Salwar Kameez, etc.

In fact, this westernization in the form of dress has made such a massive impact on the people that there are now a good number of traditionalist even among these tribal population who would like to impose certain restriction on dresses and uniforms worn by students in the schools and colleges. It is difficult to predict which way this movement will go in the near future.

3.3.6 FOOD AND DRINKS

To the Hmars, food means cooked rice. Other items such as maize, yam, etc. are supplementary and are taken when rice is not available to them during emergencies and famines. They usually have three heavy meals of almost identical preparation. They have ‘zing-bu’ (morning meal), ‘sun-bu’ (noon meal) and ‘zantieng-bu’ (evening meal). Grown up man and woman are usually satisfied with the morning and evening meals when they are not attending to any heavy works in the jungles or jhum-land. Besides, they do not prepares the ‘noon meal’ separately. They usually prepares food more than their normal requirements in the morning meal and pack it for their noon meal with the leaves of banana or ‘huathiel’ for the noon meal. In general man eats almost any kind of meat, but women are usually very discriminating in eating these meats.

One of the most important dish in which the Hmars are proud is ‘Sathu hme’. They fermented fattish pork by stuffing it in a dry gourd and put it near the fire for a three-four days. They mix this with vegetable along with a local soda known as ‘Changal’ (salty ash liquid drained through a pipe) and hot chillies. Other dishes includes ‘Hmepok’ (stew), ‘Chartang’ (mixture of meat, vegetable and hot chilly), and ‘Chial Hme’ (cooked vegetable with salt alone). They occasionally also fry their curry by using fats extracted from pig as oil. They are also very fond of boil vegetables which they called ‘Hme But’.
A child especially the girl child learn to cook all these curry from a very tender age. A survey indicates that the food is far from balanced and children below the age of five cannot drink even half a glass of milk a week. Their temperament and general health is greatly affected by the poor diet on which they have to subsist.\textsuperscript{123}

When it comes to drinking, the Hmar people has a very simple tastes. With his meals he occasionally sips the soup of the curry sparingly. Intoxicating drinks (zu) are taken only when they have full leisure to enjoy them and in company with a party or friends. This ‘rice beer’ is served when celebrating the arrival of successful hunting expeditions, festivals, harvest, death, marriage, and return of a good friend from a long journey, etc. After their mass conversion to Christianity, tea has taken the place of ‘zu’ in all occasions.\textsuperscript{124}

Some of the important Hmar staple food items and vegetables are pumpkins, mustard, onions, brinjals, yams, cucumbers, melon, water-melon, beans, ginger, and other wild fruits and leaves including bamboo-shoots. Their chief fruits are banana, papaya, guava, mango, plums, tamarind, mulberry, etc. Honey was a luxury item and the Village Chief was, by custom, entitled to ownership. Anyone who got haul of this item has to share a certain quantity to the chief. They also catch fish, crabs, snails, etc. from rivers and streams.

\textsuperscript{123} Pudaite Crossthang. Op.cit, p.46
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid
3.4 TRADITIONAL RELIGION

3.4.1 CONCEPT OF RELIGION

The traditional religion which the Hmars practised can best be characterised as Animistic Religion which means that they believed in the presence of soul in all objects and living things. Lack of consciousness and also inability to comprehend the objective force of nature made them to develop certain superstitious ways of beliefs and worships. They worshipped some peculiar objects such as rocks and trees or supernatural beings, which excercised tremendous influences over their behaviour.

The mode of worship and sacrifices was determined by the objects to which sacrifices was to be made. There were various complicated methods of sacrifices and the person who could master all these methods eventually emerged as a priest (thiempu). The source of authority of the priest was on the assumption that he could control certain natural phenomena-epidimics, floods, droughts, famines and diseases, etc. all of which loomed large and affected the means of livelihood and production.\(^\text{125}\)

The Hmars believed in the existence of beneficent being, whom they called God (Pathien). Surprisingly enough, all their prayers and sacrifices were offered not to the supreme being, but to the spirits or devils, which were believed to have caused illness and misfortunes. These evil spirits or devils were known by different names such as:

\(^{125}\) Lal Dena, The Hmars through the ages, Op.cit. p.127
a) Khawchum (who used to kill domestic animals)
b) Khuovang (name of a guardian spirit)
c) Zasam (a dreaded one who live in the forest)
d) Phung or Khawhring (who cause sudden dizziness and miserable sickness) and,

c) Lasi (good feminine spirit who blessed the hunters and often married them)

Thus, "the Hmars spend a great proportion of his time, money, cattle and food to propitiate the spirits". The priest was supposed to know which spirit was causing trouble and illness and what type of sacrifice was necessary. The most important duty of the priest was thus to perform sacrifices for sanctification of the village clan or sub-clan from the influence of these evil spirits.

3.4.2 LIFE AFTER DEATH

Another interesting feature of the Hmar religion was the belief in life after death. The first place of the death differed according to his virtue and achievement while on earth. This spirit world is called Mithikhuo (village of the death), Pielral (beyond the river of death), and Vanram, (kingdom in the sky or heaven).

*Mithikhuo* is the place where most of the death regardless of their deeds, except the Thangsuos would go. Immediately after death, the soul hovered either over the village or in the firmament for some time. The soul of a man who died an unnatural death used to disturb the members of the bereaved family and the people who were involved in his death and this phenomenal reappearances of the deceased in spirit was called 'Thlahrain'.

The belief in the distinction between man and man as, between the slave and his master still persisted and the former continued to serve his master in this spirit world. All the slaves they had captured in earthly life were also expected to become their servants in this spirit world. They also believed that the wild animals and bird they had killed during their life time will guard them in the *Mithikhuo*. This *Mithikhuo* is believed to be an underground abode, perhaps very much alike the Hebrew *Sheol*. ¹³³ This is not the final abode of the death. The Limars believed that the children’s soul found extremely difficult to adapt to *Mithikhuo* and their parents had to prepare special meals which were placed by the priest on the grave for a fixed period and this rite was called *Pakhuo*. In case of a grown up soul, the priest performed *Thitit* (dead departing rite) accompanied with feast and placed colourful clothes, skirts and feathers of birds over the grave and only then, the soul finally entered *Mithikhuo*.

Before reaching *Mithikhuo*, one’s departed soul was believed to pass through *Hringlang Tlang* where one could see all the land of the living which made the departed soul lonesome and tempted by the past life while alive in the world. But when the spirit drank the water called *Lungto Tui* (heartless water which remove feelings) and plucked the *Hawilo Par* (no look back flower), the spirit is being released from the desire for the land of the living. ¹²⁸

The next stage was Pielral, which was considered to be the 'abode of bliss'. Only the soul of the 'Thangsuos', who performed heroic deeds, for instance, by killing certain specified animals by or by cultivating certain specified quantity of paddy and celebrating the occasion by killing one or two mithuns, could reach it. On this occasion, he or she would be publicly honoured with turntairang (special head gear) and Puondum, which are a kind of qualification or ticket for direct entry to Pielral. In this 'abode of bliss' the 'Thangsuos' are expected to be fed with rice and meat by fair maidens. The privilege is extended to the wives of the Thangsuos. The spirit of the departed 'thangsuos' was believed to have the power to bless, and constant 'sakhuo' (religion) was observed to invoke his blessing, especially for his sons.

There was perhaps no prescribed length of period each departed soul had to spend in each of the two stages. It would, however, appear that the soul of a wicked man could not pass beyond the Mithikhuo, but the souls of the Thangsuos and those who suffered in life for no fault of theirs are entitled to enter Pielral. The Hmars also believe in the existence of Vanram which the Christians use today as a synonym of the Bible's heaven. Every spirit after spending a considerable length of time in Mithikhuo and Pielral was at last expected to go to Vanram. Those who are given entrance to Vanram will enjoy equal rights and status, and there will be no distinction as on earth, in Mithikhuo or Pielral. Beyond this, little is known or said of what Vanram is like or what will happen there.
The Hmars were known to be very religious minded people. L.Keivom compares them with the Brahmins of the Hindu society and the Leviites of the Israelites. 129 Darliensung states that, "whenever they live with other tribes, they are usually given the priestshood." 130 Considering all these facts, it is not surprising to find a good number of Hmars employed and engaged in the Christian missions and churches both as full time. For instance, in Imphal there are as many as 12 Pastors and 20 church Elders among the Hmar community whereas the Paites who are almost two times more than the former in terms of population have just 4 Pastors and 25 church Elders among them. 131 How much of man power and financial resources is spent on religion and religious activities by the Hmars can be ascertain from this simple figure.

The priest played a very important role in the political as well as the religious life of the Hmar people. He acts as the mediator between the people and god and, offered prayers and sacrifices for the prosperity and blessing of the people. 132 The common man cannot perform these sacrifices by themselves alone. Although they believed in the supreme being 'Pathien', their lives and activities were controlled by the evil spirits. The Hmars were afraid of offending these spirits and as such, always offered sacrifices and worshipped them. These numerous number of sacrifices had their toll on the economic life of the people in their traditional religious life to a great extent. One of the reasons why the Hmars as a whole embrace christianity within a short span of time is also attributed to the simple and easy ways of approaching God by the common man without involving much on their parts.

131. Booklet of Evangelical Babtist Convention, Imphal Division 18th Conference, October 19-20, 2002
3.4.3 FUNERAL SYSTEM

The Hmars from time immemorial practised burying the dead body. The youths under the leadership of the ‘*Vat-upas*’ had a great responsibility in such event. In the pre-Christian life, when a person was declared dead, the body was immediately washed by the village elders and family members. They applied hair oil on the head and combed the hair properly. They turned the dead body to face towards the backside of the house. While the dead body faced towards the backside, the relatives sat on the left side of the dead body and were offered rice-beer for drink. Tea replaced rice-beer as the common drink in the Post-Christian Hmar society. When the middle child of a family died, they removed the west side of the wall and carried out the dead body through the wall for burial. They removed the wall because they assumed that if his body was carried out through the main door other family members would follow him immediately.\(^{133}\)

All the sisters who are known as ‘*Farnu*’, within the clan are bound to cover the dead body with cloth and sit beside the dead body until it is taken out from the house for burial. The sister’s husbands on their part are to do the household works including preparing meals for their ‘in-laws’. The Hmars, as mentioned earlier have the practice in which the maternal uncle of the deceased come with wine known as ‘*Pu Zu*’ which is given to all those that gather on the day.

The occurrence of death in the Hmar traditional society was rather expensive as the deceased family had to kill a four legged animal called *Ruok Nghasa* (funeral feast), which was arranged mostly for friends and relatives who came from other villages for the funeral. Whenever this *Ruok Nghasa* was prepared, it was customary also to kill a dog whose meat was usually distributed among old men or otherwise cooked along with the *Ruok Nghasa*. This was known as ‘*Ui Lamzawng*’. The next day after the burial ceremony the *Farnus* and *Luihungs* had to go to the graveyard and placed leaves which was known as ‘Famzar’. They also made a kind of fencing to the grave known as *Thlaisich* and place cattles and drinks on with after which they returned home.\(^{134}\) The forefathers of the Hmars “encouraged their youngsters to take an active part in the funeral in order to comfort and share the sorrow of the bereaved family.”\(^{135}\) Therefore when any member of their village or locality died, the whole villagers observed ‘*Umni khow*’ by not going for work.

When the maternal uncles of the deceased reached the latter’s house, they would often cry out and tried to kill the spirits that had taken away the life of their relative and shouted, “*who has taken away the life of my beloved sons/daughter?*”. In any Christian forms of rituals and ceremonies which are in vogue these days including death, marriage and other celebrations, these maternal uncles, known as, ‘*Pu*’ are always given the chance to speak before those that gather for the day.

\(^{134}\) *Ibid.* p.26
\(^{135}\) *Kelvom Luois L.*, *Op. cit.* p.28
A distinctive feature of the Hmar society is their love and concern in their treatment of the bereaved family. In order to help the immediate need of the bereaved family, the young ladies collect firewood from each house in the village and the boys would collect a cup of rice from each house. All the ladies help the family by cooking food for them and their relatives. Volunteers will be despatched to another villages to inform the relatives of the dead person no matter what time of a day or night the death occurs. This sending of messenger is known as 'thangko' and volunteering for this task which are sometimes very arduous and tiresome is a show of 'hawmngaina' for the boys.

After the dead body was buried, which was always done before sunset, all men and women, the unmarried one in particular gathered at the bereaved family's house for three consecutive nights and consoled the family by singing 'Semrak Illa' and 'Lamkhawzo' in the pre-Christian life and Christian Hymns of praise after becoming Christian with deep sense of sorrow sharing. Even in the present age, if the death occurs in the afternoon all young men and women will continue to sit together and sing these songs which is known as 'Lengkhawmu' for the whole night. If the dead however occurs before noon, arrangement will be made to bury the dead body on the same day.

13n. Ibid
3.4.4 TYPES OF DEATH

The different types of death accounted in the traditional Ilmar society are as follows:

a) Thitha: All those who died of the natural dead are regarded as 'Thitha'.

b) Ilanzui: A baby who died within one month of birth is regarded as 'Ilanzui'. The dead body is usually buried within the campus of the family, in a grave dug by old people of the village. Ceremonies and rituals usually involved in the natural death are not necessarily performed in this type of death.

c) Sarthi: Unnatural death such as accident, suicide, murder, etcetera are known as 'Sarthi'. Arrangements are usually made to bury the dead body within a day if any sarthi occurs.

d) Raiche: Raiche means a woman who died in childbirth or miscarriage. This kind of death is considered the most unfortunate death. Young men and women do not attend the condolence as they are scared that the same fate might befall them.

In the olden days, they even kept the live baby under the dead woman to suffocate them. They did not feed the baby with cow milk, as they feared that the child would have a cow's mind and would not behave properly. 137 Death of a Chief, Val-upas and unmarried youth are more solemnly administered and their grave is usually dug deeper than the normal graves.

137. Thumte, Op. cit. p.21
As mentioned before burial of the death always takes place in the evening. A person who dies before noon was usually buried on the same day and those who die in the afternoon were buried on the next day. This practice, it is believed was followed in order to give enough time for the deceased’s family to call their near and dear ones who might not be at home when the death occurred or who had settled in another villages. The death are usually buried in a fixed place called ‘Thlanmuol’ graveyard usually situated on the outskirt of the village.

Young men under the leadership of the Val-upas will dig the grave which is usually six feet deep, seven feet long and four feet wide. After the approximate depth is dug, a smaller hole just enough to hold the corpse is further dug. When the corpse is lowered to its exact position inside the grave after all the ceremonies and rituals are done, the body is sealed with wooden logs known as ‘thlankhar’. Only after the corpse is covered and sealed with this ‘thlankhar’ the grave is filled with earth.

In order to practise this ‘thlankhar’ sytem big and wide graves are required which means an extra labour on the part of the youth and young men. The practice was necessitated by the fact that no good coffin could be prepared in the olden days. As such problems are solved in the present days with even ready made coffins available in the market, and also because of the fact that the modern days village cemetry with the high value of land are also usually small and congested, the practice of ‘Thlankhar’ system is more or less abandoned now.
3.5 Festivals and Dances

The tribals express their joys and celebrations are held at the community level. No social gathering is complete without music and dance in a Hmar society. Most of the Hmar festivals are related with their agricultural cycle. Incidentally most of their important festivals are held when they are usually free from their busy agricultural work. They observe these festivals and dances with joyful occasions of entertainment, which include rice-beer, feasting and dancing. Some of the important festivals of the Hmars which are usually associated with its own forms of dances are briefly described herewith.

3.5.1 Sikpui Ruoi

Sikpui Ruoi is believed to be the oldest festivals of not only the Hmars, but all the Chin-Kuki-Mizo family. This festival is associated with feasting, drinking rice-beer, merry making and dancing throughout the night. The festival, which is associated with Sikpui Lam is said not to have any connection with religion. It is a social entertainment for the whole village and, is generally observed in the month of December. The festival is believed to have been started by the Hmars while they were in Shan in the present Myanmar.

The term ‘sikpui’ has two meanings. First, it means a community sharing of rice-beer and meat collected from each household. Second, as ‘sik’ in Hmar also means ‘winter’ and, since this festival falls in winter, it is believed to be known as winter festival. Still, there is another opinion of the term Sikpui, which said that since ‘sik’ in Hmar also means ‘harvest’, hence, the festival is more appropriate to be called Harvest Festival.

One thing however is clear. That is, Sikpui Ruoi is a festival usually celebrated during winter just after the harvesting season is over and wherein each of the villagers would bring together their share of rice-beer to enjoy it together at an appointed place and where they dance and feast. Sikpui Ruoi is more significant, popularised, much discussed and controversial to a great extent in the present day not because of the festival and its derivative meaning but, because of the theme-song which strangely enough mentioned the history of these people which told that they had crossed a 'red-sea which was seperated into two; that they were being fed by manna and birds from the sky and water from the stone - a story which was similar with that of the Israelites.

The song runs thus:

Sikpui inthang kan ur lai a,
Chang tuipui aw sen marili kang intan.
Ke ra lawna ka leido aw,
Sun a sun ang zana mei lawn invak e.
An tur a sa, thlu a ruol aw.
In phawisal le in ralfeite zuong thaw ro.
Sun za rula ka leido aw,
Ke ra lawna mei sum ang lawn invak e.
Sun za rula ka leido aw,
Laimi sa ang changtuipuiin lem zova.
A va ruol aw la ta che,
Suonglunga chunga tu zuongput kha la ta che.
Free English translation:

While we were preparing for the sikpui feast,
The big red sea becomes divided;
As we marched fighting our foes,
We were being led by a cloud during day;
And a pillar of fire during night,
Our enemies, O ye folks, are thick with fury,
Come out with your shields and spears;
Fighting our foes all day,
We march along as a cloud-fire goes afore;
The enemies we fight all day,
The big sea swallows them like beast;
Collect the quails,
And fetch the water that springs out of the rock.

Because of this particular song there are quite a number of people from the 'Zo' family who claim themselves to be the descendants of Manashe, the second son of Joseph found in the book of Exodus of the holy Bible. This claim seems to be gaining ground in the recent past with words reaching the Israel Embassy in New Delhi and the Israel government is also trying to verify the claim by arranging an expert in this field to these people. It may also be noted that there are already some families and individual who have migrated to Israel based on this claim.

Sikpui Ruoi, before it was revived with its modernised form since 1965 was celebrated in its traditional form as late as 1913 at Vanchengphai village in Tamenglong district. There are also clear evidences which tell us that Sikpui Ruoi was celebrated in Senvon village in Churachandpur district before the coming of the christianity in their land in 1910. The stone popularly known as ‘Zawhlang’ on which the leader of the dance and singing party known as ‘Zaipu’ sat was still lying unremoved in Zopui near the present Senvon village. There is also another stone inscription at Zote village in the eastern border of Mizoram which mentioned that the Hmars used to celebrate their Sikpui Ruoi at that place. Darliensung mentioned that Sikpui Ruoi was celebrated by a group of Hmars when they settled in between Phullen and Zawngin of the present Mizoram in the year 1880, which was so much enjoyed by the revellers that the festival lasted for more than two weeks.

Sikpui Ruoi was celebrated in such a solemnised and stoic manner that the festival was not celebrated when there was death or any other natural calamity in the village during the past one year. It is also celebrated only when the whole village had a good harvest. The Sikpui festival has different stages which are all associated with their own form of dances and songs. The first was known as ‘Buontlaw IIIa’ and was regarded as the opening song and the song mostly mentioned about their bravery, their days of settlement in Burma and the valley of river ‘Run’. And after that, the theme song was sung and the dance performed with all solemnity. No one is to laugh or smile when they sing this theme song. Until and unless this song was sung, they did not begin the drinks and dances.

141. Ibid. p.128
After the theme song Hlaserh, Hramthli Hla, Lamluangle Hla, Saia Ke Tet Hla, Sim Sak Hla, Tangkawing Vailak Hla and, Inran Hla followed one after another and was ultimately wind-up with the fare-well song known as Tinna Hla. The dances were usually led by the old men and women alternately followed by the fathers and mothers, the youths and the children forming the tail. The young boys and girls always thought that it was impolite and uncivilised to approach each other as soon as the dance began. So they had to wait sometimes till late in the night when children and the elders usually retired for the night.\textsuperscript{142}

\textbf{3.5.2 SESUN INCIHONG}

This festival was celebrated usually by the Thangsuos and by well-to-do families wherein they treated the whole village for three consecutive days and nights. A man can be regarded to be Thangso in two ways. One, if he had killed a certain number of animals in the jungles including elephant, bear, sambar, barking deer, wild boar, wild mithun, a poisonous snake called ‘Rulngan’ and a bird called ‘Vahlup’ and a Muvanlai (a hawk).\textsuperscript{143} The spirit of a Thangso when he died is believed to be guarded by the Rulngan and shaded from heat by the Hawk on the way to Pielral. Two, if he harvested a specified amount of paddy in a year or attain richness in terms of silvers and brass. It was done so as to ask for good health and blessing to God and the spirits of their fore-fathers. When this Festival was being arranged, the whole villagers will get themselves busy by helping the man who is to perform this festival in his domestic work and other preparation.

\textsuperscript{142} Pulante JH, Imphal Hmar Sikpui Ruo SOUVENIR, 1999, p.3
\textsuperscript{143} Shakespeare J, Op.cit, pp.63-64
On the day of the festival, the man will come out from his house dressed in his traditional gear and said to the mithun -

*Kun nun siet ka tlat siet leia kun thaw che an nawh,*

*I thla suke bok naw law, Lu le ban inthlan dinga fe ding i nih.*

English:

*We did this to you not because of our arrogance nor cruelty,*

*Do not be dejected. You will be going to deliver heads and arms.* \(^{135}\)

He will then pierce the mithun just behind the fore-leg just once and then quietly return back to his house. Other male members will then kill the mithun and a great feast will be prepared. One who performed this Sesun Inchong for three times in their life-time, will do one more for the final and is called Khonogeawi. The soul of those individuals who had performed this festival are believed to have a direct entry to Pielral, which is meant only for the ‘Thangsaus’. \(^{136}\)

One of the most recent observations of this solemn festival was performed by Kailien Joute, the grandfather of JC Chongkolien, the present chief of Rengkai village, Churachandpur. Kailien performed this ‘Sesun Inchong’ with all solemnity while he and his people occupied Thlanbung, some eight kilometres north of the present Churachandpur town during 1911-1918, by killing his famous mithun which was fondly called ‘Chalnawi’ by the people of that time. The head of this particular mithun still adorns the house of JC Chongkolien. \(^{136}\)

\(^{135}\) Thumute, Op. cit., p.45

3.5.3 BUTU KHUONGLAWM

As briefly mentioned before, Butu Khuonglawm was regarded and associated more with the economic aspects of the Hmars rather than the Festival of enjoyment and merriment. It can also be termed as ‘Seed Sowing Festival’. On the first sign of rain after their ‘jhum land’ was burnt and made ready for the seed sowing, the whole village would join together in corporate labour. Male and female were alternately placed in a line; there would be then the leader with a drum and his hand and another who would usually beat the gongs. They would start from the farthest fields and move gradually towards the village. Each of them would have a small hoe in his hand. He digs little holes with the hoe and drops a few grains of paddy in each hole. They sing as they sow and would make a Festival out of it.\(^\text{137}\)

The owner of the field of that particular day was supposed to arrange food and drinks for the whole party. The work of such mingling cannot be done with great care and the farmers would feel fortunate if the rains come at night. In fact, such a crowd often the weak ones cannot keep pace with the strong and drop seeds without digging a proper hole for it. They justify the actions as they sing:

\[\text{Thing ka tuk thinga ka thlak/Lung ka tuk lunga ka thlak}\]

\[\text{Ei chung khuongruo a sur pha leh/ Ama'n khurbi zong de nih!}\]

\(^{137}\) Fadaite Rochnaga, Op. cit, 45
English:

I hit a stump (of tree) I sow on the stump.
I hit a rock, I sow on the rock.
When the rain falls from above,
It will seek a hole for itself. \(^{138}\)

There are two probable reasons why the Hmars specifically had this 'corporate labour' festival. First, it may be because manual work is a tiresome and demanding. It is more so if one works alone or with his own family. As such, it is more enjoyable to work in groups. Secondly, it may be because of their security concern. In the olden days, everyone was in constant war with one another. As such they prefer to stay together in groups even when they are outside their fortified villages.

3.5.4 HRANGLAM

Hranglam is a dance-like festival celebrated when one comes home with an enemy's head. It was one of the most important events in the life of the ancient Hmars. From the songs associated with this Hranglam, one can understand the fact that the Hmars were second to none in bravery in wars and in hunting. One can also understand how they fought with each other, how they compete with their peers to become a 'thangsuo', what things they admired, difficulties and hardships they had faced, their mournings and weepings from these songs.

\(^{138}\) Ibid
One of the most important song associated with ‘Hranglam’
reminiscence about their beautiful and uninterrupted life in Shan with the following
verse -

Shan khuo fieratui a tha var indang,
Naufan hnam chem ang an chawi;
Thlangfa nghaknu lien inthang,
Lawnlei insa khawmuolin a hawi.

English:

Remarkably pure and fresh were the waters of Shan,
Which young boys and girls fetched.
Girls were remarkably beautiful;
Like the flowers of Lawnlei, And adorned the place. 139

Another song put their encounter with their enemies in the following verse.

Ko Pa lamtlak a tha’n dang,
Sintlung lamtlak aw a tha’n dang;
Shan khuoah tha po in vang,
Tuoichwngin hranlu a tlunna;
Thlomu sieka ke min hril,
Zainghawngah hranlu bah kan sal.

139. *Ibid*
English-

My father's step were remarkably good,
Sinlung steps were indeed, remarkably good:
Few are good men in Shan,
Where Tuoichong brought the enemy's head;
You talked of tips with eagle's paw (meaning war)
And we hanged the heads high with ropes. 140

3.5.5 CHAPCHAR KUT

The Chapchar Kut which literally means 'Spring Festival' was also
a popular festival of the Hmars in the past. It was usually held during the month
of March or April when the whole villagers had finished cutting the forest for
their respective jhum-land and are yet to burnt it. The festival usually lasted for
about four to five days. On the first day, they kill pigs late in the day so that by
the time the feast was ready, they can start drinking wine. Every members of the
village spent the second day also by drinking the traditional wine by offering
each other drinks and meats.

140. Lalrinawma, Settlement Patterns of the Hmars in North East India. NEIHA 3rd Session.
Imphal,1982.p.44
The third and fourth days are also spent on dancing, drinking and feasting. On the fifth day, it was customary to try and finish all the wine and meat prepared and collected for the said festival. Though the Hmars do not maintain any written record about the exact beginning of these festivals, some traces can be made through their traditional songs and legends that they might perhaps begin these festivals at the time of their Shan settlement.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{141} Sanate Crossthang, Op.cit, p.83