Chapter – 6

Chieftainessess – Resistance by Collusion
In the study of political participation of women in Mizo society, historians have paid little attention to the circumstances of women’s lives, for women have not been regarded as important factors for political development. Hence, recorded history tells us only what men have done in the past and left out women from the earlier history. Earlier scholars have tended to portray most of the war as male led, in which women were largely silent and submissive, compliant rather than contentious. It is often an implicit assumption that because women are generally considered passive, women who are publicly aggressive are either acting pathologically or through ignorance or male control. However, many women quite strategically inject themselves into visibly violent events such as riots and resistance movement in their respective areas. There are records, however, of cases of ‘exceptional’ women, women who challenged the norms of that time, therefore influencing the structure of its political and social institutions and determining the opportunities open to women and men.

Key word - ‘Collusion’

‘Collusion literally refers to secret or illegal cooperation or conspiracy in order to deceived other’.

In Mizo society, despite the deep entrenchment of patriarchy in the society, there were two women rulers viz Darbilhi and Ropuiliani who played a very significant role during the advent of the British. The former belonged to Muallianpui\(^1\)(Fanai) clan and the latter to the Haulawng\(^2\)(Southern Sailo)

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1 *Muallianpui* is a small village located in the Southern part of Mizoram. The *Fanai* clan concentrated in and around the village as well as the neighbouring villages such as Vanlaiphai, Thingsai etc. Hence the British used the term *Muallianpui* to refer all the villages dominated by the Fanai.

2 *Haulawng* is a village of the descendants of Rolura, they belonged to Sailo Clan. Hence, Haulawng referred to all the villages dominated by the Southern Sailo.
Though their way of dealing with the Britishers was totally different from each other, their intelligence, bravery and diplomacy were extraordinary in their own way. Even though it was considered women to be the inferior one in the society, these women clearly depicted that women were truly important in the society, depending on the circumstances, they proved that women could perform their duty sincerely and bravely like the male. Therefore, this chapter deal with their role in the resistance movement, and factors that facilitate them to play this crucial role and their limitations. Owing to the non-availability of much historical data it is difficult task to have an in dept study on women’s political participation. The life of these women highlights how important women were, despite the fact that women were considered to be the second class citizen.

The political contact of the British with Mizos began only after their occupation of Cachar in 1832. Due to the scarcity of food and fertile land, the Mizos began to invade the Cachar and Chittagong Hill Tract came under the British administration, the authorities in Cachar had to send expeditions against the Mizos. The first expedition of the British started in 1844 under the command of Captain Blackwood. Ever since the Mizos were in constant hostilities with the British till the first half of 20th century. The coming of the British in Mizoram occasioned the rise of chieftainesses in the political scene. Since the British tried to control the whole of Mizoram, they introduced many rules and regulations regarding chieftainship. The British invasion of Mizoram however, did not lead to the capitulation of all the village chiefs and it did not bring peace and tranquillity. It in turn led to the outbreak of revolt against the British in 1891 – 1892, 1893-94. In the political history of Mizoram, there were a number of Chiefs famous for their active participation in the struggle against the advent of the British. Among them were also female rulers who were of considerable influence. Some Mizo women contributed immensely to the political administration in the village since the earliest times. Even after the
British consolidated their administration, there were also few women who became the village Chiefs. In the southern Mizoram J. Shakespeare reported that out of eight villages, four villages were under Ropuiliani and her three daughters in law. However, in the Northern Mizoram, R.B McCabe, records only three female rulers- Pawihbawiha Nu, Who ruled Saitual village, Buangtheuva Nu, the ruler of Hualtu village and Kairuma Nu, out of 25 village rulers.

Gerda Lerner said that no one would seriously maintain that any war in history could have been won without the supporting activities of women, but because no focus is made on them, they were lost from the historical records. This notion is also true in the cases of Mizo women also played an important part in the wars by giving complete support to their male folk and they also sometimes acted as strong inspiration behind their bravery. A good example can be found in the role played by these two women rulers- Darbilhi and Ropuiliani. With this in view, this chapter will concentrate on these women as they clearly depict the role played by the Chieftainessess during the resistance movement. British records also mentioned that there were some Chieftainessess who became a ruler after the death of their husband. From the British records of 1884, mentioned was found ‘Darbilhi Rani, who holds the position of a chief over the Shindoo village’, a village which was located in South Lushai Hills. Another woman chief, Ropuiliani, daughter of Vanhnuailiana was a strong women ‘remained a bitter enemy of the British’.

4 Report from FB Peacock, Secretary to the Government of Bengal to HM Durand, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department. Foreign Department 1844 – A Political E, Pros, February 1884 Nos 302 – 309,p. 17. NAI
6.1 Darbilhi

Darbilhi was a daughter of Thlantlang chief Zahuata, situated in the then Chin Hills in Burma. They are descended from a Chinzah family, Chinzah clan was a chief clan and hold a respectable and prestigious status among the Lai clan. Her father Zahuata was a rich and powerful chief. He possessed a huge amount treasure like beads, gongs and other articles. Hence, he named his daughter DARBILHI (One who possessed a large amount of treasure). And usually during those times, people belonging to Chief clan always gives themselves a name which shows they are above others.

Chinzah clan were very powerful and all the other clans wanted to have a peaceful relationship with them. One important way of maintaining a relationship was matrimonial alliances. Thus, people used to search for their partners from different clans in order to assert their political position. Darbilhi was married to Nochhuma, son of Kualsawia, a Fanai chief of Muallianpui, Darzo, Lungpuitlang and Darzotlang. She was a beautiful, smart and was married when she was in her twenty’s. Among the Fanai sub-tribe, ‘Pakhup’ clan was a ruling clan and Nochhuma belonged to this clan. Nochhuma was a tall, short-tempered and a brave person.

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8 Since there is hardly any written record on Darbilhi, the present study largely depended on the interview with Dr. F.Lianchhinga conducted on 2nd July, 2012 and an unpublished article written by the same.


* Genealogical tree of Fanai clan -

The Mizos were known to fight with each other since earlier times. During this time, the Fanai’s were neighbouring with the Southern Sailo. Among the Southern Sailo, Vandula was the main opponent of the Fanai’s. Both the clan wanted to secure their position strategically in order to extent their territory. The Sailo’s were considered to be the greatest ruling clan. Therefore, the Fanai had to seek a way to defend themselves from the Sailo. Among the Fanai, matrimonial alliance with the Lai was not a novel thing. Since the time they were residing at Daidin and Rungtlang areas, we see Hretai of Rungtlang, the Chinzah Prince married a Fanai princess Ngunchiangi, sister of Zachhuma. After the fifth generation, a Fanai prince, Aithangvunga alias Samtawia married Tawlthliahi, the princess of Lungzarh. The marriage was diplomatically arranged by Rorehlova, Fanai Chief as he wanted to secure his position to face the Southern Sailo chief. He also came into peaceful agreement with Lallula of Northern Sailo group. Thus, he strategically secured his position from all sides.

One event which enhanced the bitter relationship between the Southern Sailo and the Fanai was the incident which took place at Khawnglung. Khawnglung was a village situated at the top of the hill and both the clan wanted to covet the place as it was strategically safe. At this time, Tawlthliahi, the widow of Aithangvunga occupied the village. Lalthuama, the youngest son of Vandula forcibly settled with the widow. As time passed on, Lalthuama contrive to deprive the widow off the village. This developed a strained relationship between the two clans. The Fanai could not tolerate this action of the Sailo and they tried to take out their sister from Khawnglung. On the other hand, the Southern Sailo were aware of the diplomatic alliance made by the Northern Sailo and the Fanai and besides this, Tawlthliahi belonged to Chinzah clan, who were much powerful than the Sailo. They knew that they will not be able to bear the combine force of these clans, hence they did not allow the Fanai to take out their sister. But the Fanai, having a revengeful thought in their mind insisted that, they were
going to perform a mithun festival and took out their sister. As planned by the two groups, the alliances siege Khawnglung village at night and destroyed it severely.

Many Sailo bravemen died and a number of residents were taken as slaves. This siege became a noticeable event in the history of Mizoram known as ‘Khawnglung Run’ (invasion of Khawnglung) since it was brutally done. Since then, the Fanai were in bad terms with the Southern Sailo chiefs due to the brutal siege of Khawnglung. Khawnglung incident was believed to take place in the year 1854\(^\text{10}\). Such was the relationship between the Southern Sailo and the Fanai and for this reason Khawtindala, the leader of the Fanai clan felt the need to strengthened their political position. Therefore, in order to stabilised his position against his competitors, Khawtindala planned for marriage between his brothers son with the princess of Chinzah chief, the ruler of Thlantlang, who was much stronger than either the Fanai chief or the Southern Sailo Chiefs. Delegates were sent to Zahuata, Chief of Thlantlang and arrange marriage alliance forthrightly. Hence, Khawtindala’s elder brother’s son Nochhuma married Darbilhi, daughter of Zahuata, the Thlantlang Chief. Hence Darbilhi became a wife of Fanai Chief.

Even after the marriage, the relationship between Sailo and the Fanai continued to be a bitter one. The Southern Sailo could not forget the humiliation they faced from the Fanai at Khawnglung. They left no stone unturned to punish the Fanai and when they came to know the expansion of the Fanai territory near the Zo (Mara) territory. Thawnglian, Zo (Mara) Chief at Serkawr was instigated by the Sailo and plundered the new Fanai abode at Muallianpui. They killed seven men, and captured the Chieftainess, Darbilhi who was pregnant along with her son and husband. While they were waiting, the Zo (Mara) realised that their Chief was not with them. They thought

that the Fanai captured him and they threatened to kill Nochhuma. Here, a brave man called Taiinga from Sangau village tried to kill Nochhuma with his Dhao (big knife). Darbilhi knew very clearly that they would not dare to kill her. In order to save her husband, she stood infront of him. When they learnt that the captive was the daughter of a great chinzhah Chief, Zahuata, a strong and powerful chief. They released her forthrightly. They feared the probable retaliation from the great chief, Zahuata, if his daughter report it to him. Therefore, the Serkawr chief sent peace envoy to Darbilhi of Muallianpui. The envoy was accompanied by Sangau envoy named Taiinga. He was the man who tried to kill Nochhuma, husband of Darbilhi, during the war. Nochhuma killed Taiinga for ratification of peace and as an offering for agreement.

Then, the Fanai Chief Khawtindala settled safely at the range – spur of Muallianpui with three hundred houses. Khawtindala escorted Pahnuna, the younger brother of Nochhuma, down to Muallianpui from Thingsai. He divided the land between Nochhuma and Pahnuna. In 1880, Khawtindala, the youngest son of Rorehlova, divided his domain to the two sons of his brother, Pahnuna got Lungleng tlang and Bualpui, while Nochhuma got Muallianpui, Lungpuitlang, Darzo and Vanlaiphai. Pahnuna was escorted to Lungleng tlang by Khawtindala alias Pawta. Nochhuma moved to the Western range and made his village at Darzo. The name was coined after the name of Darbilhi. At first, it was known as Darbilhi Zo. Later it was called Darzo to make it short. He let Muallianpui handing over the charge of administration to Thlahaia, his near relative with about fifty houses. Probably, they settled in their hurriedly new huts in that village. Thus, Nochhuma became an independent chief.
6.1.1 Darbilhi ‘The Chieftainess Of Muallianpui’:

In the year 1881, there was a severe famine, called ‘Mautam’\textsuperscript{11}. Fortunately, this famine evade the Fanai territory instead they had a very successful harvest. Many people immigrated from the neighbouring village. Soon, Darzo village grew bigger. But, unfortunately her husband Nochhuma died of stomach failure in 1882. The exact place of his burial was not known, but was believed that he was buried at a place called ‘Zathlir’. His son H rangkulha, who accompanied her during the war with Serkawr also died. Another misfortune that befell her was the mental weakness of her only son Lianbuka. Therefore, she was compelled by circumstances to take over the chieftainship with family responsibilities. She was constantly assisted by her sympathising and intelligent councillors. To console her and to encourage her determination, she invited Saikuti\textsuperscript{12}, the famous poetess to visit her. She came and stayed at Muallianpui for almost a month. Saikuti was known by her husband’s family since the time they were residing at Thingsai village.

She was the one who stirred up the Fanai young men by her inspiring and sensational songs, when the Fanai decided to built a new village at Muallianpui. She composed a song which says -

\textbf{Mautam} - Timely flowering of the bamboo which used to take place after every fifty years

\textbf{Saikuti} belonged to Fanai clan and was resided at Thingsai village, she died at the age of 80 on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} April, 1921 at Thingsai village. She was a famous song composer during the pre-British period.
Ka han thlir Muallianpui khanlang a dum dur e,
Khantlang a dum dur e,
Thantum val zawng lallai chhawn nen kai nan a tha e

which means

I gaze upon the rolling hills of Muallianpui
So lush and so green,
Such destination for the valiant and the courageous.

Darbilhi became a Chieftainess in the year 1882 after the death of her husband Nochhuma. Darbilhi was known for her diplomacy and intelligence. Right from the time she took the responsibility of Chieftainship, she knew that it would be safer for her clan to be in good terms with the other clan. She played an arbitrator between her father and the Sailo clan. Darbilhi’s father, Zahuata, became so powerful and used to go for head hunting raids to the Sailo village. On the contrary, his daughter, Darbilhi, was ruling in the neighbourhood of the Sailo. So when Darbilhi requested her father to make peace with Sailo, Thlantlang chief, Zahuata was not hesitant to make peace with the Sailo. On the other hand, she appealed the Sailo chief, Thangduta, to send mediators to Zahuat. Thus, peace accord was made between the two parties. This was possible due to the intelligent political contrivance of Darbilhi. Therefore peace was acquired between them by performing customary ‘Sa - Ui - Tan’\(^1\). Thangduta, Sailo chief of Kawlhawk represented the Sailo and Vannghina, brother of Darbilhi represented Thlantlang. There is no proper record when it took place but it believe to take place around 1880 at a place called Tiauchhun village, which is situated between river Tiau and Chhimtuipui river. In order to ratify there treaty, Thangduta, who was a Lusei gave his son a Lai name ‘Rungnawla’, and Vannghina gave his son a Lusei name ‘Lalluaia’.

\(^1\) ‘Sa ui tan’ was usually perform in order to make a treaty between parties, they used to kill an animal to ratify the treaty

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Another incident which shows Darbilhi’s diplomacy was, since ‘Thlanrawn’ which took place around 1760 at Zopui village\textsuperscript{14}, (Here, Lallula, the Northern Sailo Chief and Rorehlova, who belonged to Fanai clan, conspired against the Zahau clan in order to wipe them out. Lallula invited the Zahau clan to come to his village for a feast, but instead massacred them and killed almost all the guest as planned) incident, Zahau clan became the long standing rival of Fanai. Even though they did not declare full fledge war, both have been killing each other secretly. And their partner during this incident, Vuttaia, the youngest son of Lallula made peace with the Zahau and this agreement was known by the Fanai. Therefore, Fanai clan knew very well that it was safe for them to make peace with the Zahau. Also, Khawtindala suggested that they should make peace with the Zahau after his death. In pursuance of the death-bed words of Khawtindala, Darbilhi suggested for peace talks with the Zahau Chief, Thlahcheuva of Zahau clan. Before they sent emissary, they kept Zaduna, grandson of Aithangvunga (Samtawia) as hostage by Zahau for retaliation. This act came to the knowledge of Khuangli sub-tribe. Formerly, Lallula, the Northern Sailo Chief and Rorehlova massacred the Zahau sub-tribe. During that brutal killing, the Fanai Chief saved the lives of Khuangli Chief. The Khuangli Chief wanted to recompensate the kind gesture of the Fanais, so the Khuangli sub-tribe warned the Zahau, and compelled him to release Zaduna, the Chief complied with their pressure and then Zaduna was released unconditionally. Darbilhi sent Ralduha and Hleichhama alias Bengseia as her delegate. Ralduha was one of her braveman. The Zahau people demanded Ralduha to be killed for ratification of peace. But Ralduha could not tolerate their demand any longer and was shouted in anger in front of the Zahau elder. The Zahau find this act very brave, they did not demanded Ralduha any longer, instead they killing an animal and peace agreement was finally made. It is believed that this

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\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Mizo Lal Ropuite, TRJ, Aizawl, 1996, p. 21.}
incident took place just before the first British expedition in 1882 after Mautam famine at a place called Zathlir village.

One blunder she committed was that she issued an order to her brotherly Chief Hleibawra of Thingsai village and Bualpui to massacre believed to practice witchcraft. The incident took place at Muallianpui in 1900. The killing of the suspected witch was taken seriously by the Britisher and the leader of the killing squad Dokapa was sentence to life imprisonment. Some people sang a song while drinking rice beer (zu), which indicated that Fanai clan were responsible for the massacre. The song says -

\[
Dokim tualrawt Aichhung keimahni, \\
Kan laka sang chuang an awm lo, \\
Van zawl chung turni lo chu.
\]

Free translation

\[
There is nothing higher than us except the blazing sun in the sky, we are the brave and fierce Fanai family who destroyed all our enemies.
\]

In 1882, after the death of her husband Nochhuma, Darbilhi became the ruler as her only son Lianbuka was not mentally fit to run the administration of the village. Being an intelligent lady, she knew it very clearly that if Lianbuka did not produce a son who could take up the throne, then her territory would go to Pahnuna, the younger brother of Nochhuma. At this point, Lianbuka married her mother’s relative from Thlantlang but divorced her the next day. He then married a girl from a non-ruling clan but she gave birth to a girl child. Lianbuka felt shy among his friends thinking that his friends would make fun of him since he cannot produce a male child. He then divorced her again but later married a women of Fanai Zarep clan after a long and hard persuasion of his mother. Finally, she gave birth to a son and Darbilhi was exceedingly happy as she knew that her grandson could take up the throne. She was filled with joy and she ran from door to door and shouted, ‘Lianbuk nih fapa a neih’, (Lianbuka has
a son). After a few days, for the good health of her grandson, she performed customary religious rite called ‘Arte hring ban’. To her happiness, her daughter-in-law begot two sons and four daughters. She was happy and contented as she knew that her territory would be inherited by her descendants. Had Lianbuka did not produce any son, it was not possible for them to inherit her husbands territory since a daughter does not have the right to inherit her father’s property.

She died on the 6th January, 1890 and was buried at a place called Lungphun, Darzotlang.

6.1.2 Darbilhi And The British:

During the second British expedition, Darbilhi established a new hamlet at Vanlaiphai. Darbilhi came to know about the advent of the British through some mediators while she was shifting from Lungphun village to Lungpuitlang village. During the expeditions to the Shendus, the Pois and the Muallianpui people were the regular intruders to the British territories of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Southern Sailo clan had already felt the British might. The British knew very well that the Muallianpui were the leading head-hunting intruders. They not only raided the British subjects but also the Western Lusei villages. This was confirmed by the British reports,

‘In January, 1882 a body of two or three hundred men described as Shendus and Muallian Puis, headed by a chief named Hausata, attacked and took a village belonging to a Lushai chief Lalseve(Lalchheuva) situated about four miles beyond our borders. Twenty nine Lushais were killed, seven wounded and ninety nine

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15 Arte Hring Ban - In such rites, a very young chick was sacrificed
persons carried off as prisoners. Lalseva applied to us for help,
But this was refused on the ground that the village did not lie within British territory.¹⁶

When Captain J. Shakespeare became the Superintendent of South Lushai Hill, Darbilhi established hamlets and satellite villages and she herself was stationed at Darzo and Lungphun villages. According to some elders, she gave a careful thought whether to shoot the British or not for she knew that they were much stronger than them. At the same time she did not want to surrender. Therefore, she decided to flee before the British reached her villages. Unfortunately, to her surprise Capt. J. Shakespeare and his troops appeared at her doorstep. At this point, she knew that it was useless to run away, therefore, she greeted them as if she was waiting for them. She took them inside her house and offered them Zu (rice beer) and they had a friendly conversation. She signed treaty with the British representative, Captain Shakespeare. She intelligently abstained from fighting the strong force of the Britishers. She clearly knew that she was unable to resist them, so she rather played for her survival. She allowed the British troop to build a Fort at Darzo village which became known as Fort Tregear by the British after the name of General Tregear, Commander of the British expeditionary force.

The next day she told Capt Shakespeare that she does’nt have a brother, so she invited him to be her foster brother by killing a mithun. Therefore, she made peaceful agreement with the British by performing a customary Sa – Ui – Tan. After seeing and hearing the British skills in war, Darbilhi knew that, the Mizo Chiefs could not compete with them. So, she sent an order to all her fellow Fanai chief not to shoot the British. So, Fanai did not retaliate against the British.(except zakapa) .R.S Hutchinson

¹⁶ A.S Reid, Chin-Lushai Land, FKLM, on behalf of TRI, 1976, p. 38.
in his letter to the superindent of South Lushai hills on 15th December, 1891, mentioned that he received 50 rifles and 40 coolies from Dopura and Darbilhi.

The following report confirmed that Darbilhi was in good term with the British,

"the British reconnaissance party, consisting of Captains Browne, Shakespeare, Mulaly, Lieutenant Bythell, and Mr Walker, Assistant Superintendent, Telegraphs started on the 2nd February from the bridge camp on the Mat river (22 miles from Lungleh) to visit the Malliam Pui chieftainess, Darbilhi who had supplied us with guides for the advance on Hausata's village during the expedition of 1889. The old lady was a widow, her husband having been dead for seven years, and lived in a village on the Darjow Klang, at an elevation of 5,100 ft above sea level. Although the mutual relations between her and the British government had hitherto been of amicable, she seemed to have taken alarm at the capture of Lalthuama, and, report said he had fled to the village of Dopura, situated six miles from her own. The objects of the expedition were to reassure the chieftainess, obtain the submission of Muallian puis, survey the country and if possible, open communication with General Symon's column by heliogram.

The party marched on the first day to Lalthuama's village and thence to the Kolodyne, on the east bank on which encamped the river being here a clear swift stream, about 200 yards in width, and running between precipitous forest clad mountains. The

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17 Simla Records 2, 1892/ Foreign/ External – A, Relations with the Lushais, p. 2, NAI.
second days marched led them to the Darjow Klang...Here they were met by messengers from Darbilhi with friendly assurance. After a long and tedious march the party arrived at the village of the chieftainess on the afternoon of the 4th February, and was well received by her, the bond of friendship being subsequently cemented by an oat h taken in the usual manner. Captain Shakespeare representing the British Government on the occasion. Information was also received through Darbilhi that Vantura, Dokola, Hausata’s brother, were anxious to come in and make terms. And that Jahuta wished to tender his submission. She was told that if the chiefs wanted to treat they must come in, and it was explained to her that Government wished to take over the whole country, that it would treat all as friends who showed friendly spirit towards us, and would punish those who resisted us.\textsuperscript{18}

Darzo range was chosen to build a fort called ‘Fort Tregear’ as they got permission from Darbilhi since it was strategically safe and has a good supply of water, was selected for further advanced post.

As soon as Fort Tregear was completed a British contingent under the command of Murray moved to Zakapa village, Khawhri, with a number of coolies from Darzo. Zakapa had already received a message from Darbilhi not to antagonize the British but to give friendly submission to them. Murray and his troops were provided coolies by Darbilhi. Pachhuna, and Kaphleia Fanai were among the coolies. But Murray’s behaviour was not very friendly and demanded girls for the night. Since Zakapa could not find one for him, he threatened him to take his wife for the night to quench his

\textsuperscript{18} A.S Reid, op.cit., pp. 196, 197, 198.
sexual desire. This angered Zakapa and quarrel broke out between the two. Zakapa openly showed refusal with his gun. Out of anger Murray burnt the granary of Zakapa and on their way back, they were ambushed by Zakapa and his bravemen and chopped off two sepoys head. The other troops of Murray disappeared in the jungle. This incident was brought to Court at Calcutta and the case was won by Zakapa and Murray was discharge from his duty. This incident took place on the 10th February, 1891.

Pachhuna, a resident of Zakapa’s village, who witnessed the incident said that Kaphleia shot one sepoy who guarded Zawlbuk. Kaphleia was seized and punished at Fort Tregear. Like a brave warrior, he only smiled at them while they tortured him. Darbilhi, in retaliation, honoured Kaphleia and the coolies and received them with rice beers like successful head hunting expedition. The good tie between Shakespeare and Darbilhi made Shakespeare to stand on the side of Zakapa till the case was tried and settled.

Thus, we can conclude that Darbilhi did not openly resist the British, instead befriended them and convince all the Fanai chiefs (the Muallianpui) not to act against the British but to show kind gesture towards them. She did this because she considered it useless to fight the British, who were much stronger than them. She strongly believed that if she fight the British, she and her people will definitely fall under the British hand. She believed in peace. Before the British entered her village, she heard that even the Sailos could not withstand the might of the British. However, she did not want to surrender in the British hand but preferred to be an ally of the British in order to expand and safeguard her territory. She made peace with all her neighbours, thus, secure her position on all sides. Even though she was a woman, she was accepted as their ruler by her subjects and other Fanai chiefs. This is clear from the fact that she could manage to convince all the other Fanai chiefs not to shoot the British within their territory.
From the following songs composed by Saikuti, it is clear that Darbilhi proved to be an able ruler even though she was a woman. It also shows the militancy and valour displayed by women in their fight against injustice and oppression. And women were accepted as their rulers by their subjects -

The song says-

\[ \text{Khuatin rawnfang ka chung kawlngo leng khaw daiah,} \\
\text{Hmar tlang chena Aichhung lai lai a sang va ti u.} \]

\[ \text{Lallianbuk nu'n nau a awi e sawnga lerah,} \\
\text{Hmawng liai luai I run thim ruai, do kim sal banna.} \]

\[ \text{Nangmah hi maw an hril lenkawl tawpah,} \\
\text{Hmuh ka nuam I run thim ruai ali dar za in banna} \]

\[ \text{Nghosai lemma ka thlang Muallianpui kai,} \\
\text{Min sello u Rolura chawin} \]

\[ \text{Zawl lo kian u chinlai zawl lo kian u,} \\
\text{Rodanga chawi laiah sakawl note kan lenaah e.} \]

\[ \text{Chinzapui leh Aichhung an leng za e,} \\
\text{Lallai kan rel tu'n min sel u, Sel lo u,} \]

Free translation

The poetess tells the bird which flies over the villages and roam the earth to sing of the glory and majesty of the great Fanai chief. Lallianbuka’s mother (Darbilhi) puts the child to sleep as the poetess sings of the splendour of the house of the Chief where many bonded labour found freedom. The poetess exclaims at the sight of the Chieftainess, whose fame had spread far and wide, in
the dark and richness of her house. The poetess tells of the
togetherness and unity of the Chinza and Fanai clans, exhorting
others not to blame them.

Do reng rawh zathang ral chu,  
In chelh loh leh dar khawpui,  
Khuafur hawktui angin kan lian leh dawn e

Free translation

Always stand against the enemy, if you don’t hold against them,
then the city of Darbilhi will come like a raging flood.
6.2 ROPUILIANI

It is assumed that Ropuiliani was born in the year 1828. She was the daughter of Lalsavunga and spent most of her maiden years in Aizawl. Disciplined and as a daughter of great chief and later a chieftainess herself, Ropuiliani was extremely conscious of her heritage and position. This is clear from the fact that she declined to perform 'chai' with villagers saying that she cannot dance with a commoner called 'Hnamchawm' since she was the Chief's daughter. At times, it reaches the mark of haughtiness, that she refused to speak to a commoner. The marriage between Vandula and Ropuiliani took place around 1848 or 1849 approximately. During the time of their marriage Vandula was at Belpui village and Ropuiliani at Vanchengpui. After their marriage the couple stayed with Tlutpawrha (father of Vandula) for a considerable years at Chhiphir village and from here he migrated to Kawmzawl and started ruling as an independent Chief.

Some British records shows that Ropuiliani was the daughter of Vanhnuailiana. In Captain. John. Shakespear's 'Report on Ropuiliani, widow of Vandula and her son Lalthuama at present prisoner in Lungleh,' written on September 1893, he wrote, 'Ropui Lieni is a daughter of Vanolel.' Suhas Chatterjee in his book, Mizoram under the British rule called her, 'Ropui Leni, the widow of Vandula and the daughter Vanolel.'

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20 Chai – 'Chai' is a popular dance performed on the occasion of 'chapchar Kut', one of the most important festival of the Mizo's. In this dance, men and women stand alternatively in circles, with women holding on the waist of men, and men on women's shoulder. In the middle of the circles are the musicians who play the drums and the mithun's horn.


22 Suhas Chatterjee, Mizoram Under the British Rule , Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1985, p. 121.
According to Ngapkynta, While the Lushai expedition of 1871-72 was sojourning at the village, information was received that Vanloel had already died. Vanloel's widow had already been established at Champhai overlooking (It is called Champhai valley) the river Tao to Burma border. The force under General Bourchier came to Champhai on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 1872 and recovered the captives, muskets and other things, the raiders had carried off. The widow of Vanolel definitely had established herself not only as a protégé but as a ruler. This was proved after her household’s possession consisting of hostages, arms and ammunitions as well. It was here that Ropuiliani was fostered, She was associated with public affairs undoubtedly. Ropuiliani was quite aged in 1883, the widow refered to must have been herself.<sup>23</sup>

But Padma Shree Lalsangzuali Sailo<sup>24</sup> says that it has been handed down to generations that Ropuiliani was the ‘daughter of Lalsavunga’. The British records may have been wrong because of inept interpreters or careless translators.

The Mizo words ‘fanu’ (daughter) and ‘farnu’ (sister) sound very similar and hence could have confused them. Therefore, she opined that, Ropuiliani was in fact the daughter of the Chief of Aizawl, Lalsavunga and Vanhuailiana, her brother. She might have been either the Chiefs youngest or second youngest child. Her father Lalsavunga was the son of L alpuiliana, the eldest son of Lallula. Lalsavunga was the Chief of Darlawng village. He died in around 1840.


<sup>24</sup> Lalsangzuali Sailo- She is the granddaughter of Zabiaka, Grandson of Ropuiliani, She was awarded Padma Shree in 1998 in the field of Literature and Education. Ropuiliani – Dotawna – S. Vanchhuma – Lalsangzuali Sailo.
at a young age and was succeeded by his son Vanhnuailiana, the eldest brother of Ropuiliani. The children of Lalsavunga were:

1. Vanhnuailiana – one of the famous Mizo chiefs, also called ‘father of Dothiauva’
2. Lalphunga – Father of Pawibawiha
3. Lalchawngpuii – popularly known as Laltheri, a famous composer.
4. Lalthangpuii – died unmarried
5. Chawngpuituali – wife of the great chief Vanpuilala
6. Ropuiliani – wife of Vandula
7. Thawmvunga – Son of Tuantiali, whom Lalsavunga did not marry.

In pre-colonial Mizo society, the sons of Sailo chiefs could only marry the daughters of other Sailo chiefs. Ropuiliani was married to Vandula in the year 1848 or 1849 while Vandula was living in Belpui. Vandula belonged to the Southern Sailo (Haulawng) ruling family. His ancestors goes like this - Chungnunga (c.1700), the Sailo Chief of Southern Mizoram, had four sons – Lalhluma, Rohnaa, Lalchera (c.1730) and Thangphunga. Lalchera sired a son Rolura (c.1755). Rolura had two sons, Lalrivunga and Tluptawrha (Laltluta/Lianzatluta). Tluptawrha married Lalchhingvungi Pachuau, daughter of Khawzalula. In 1820, their first child a son was born whom they named Vanpuiliana (popularly known as Vandula)\(^\text{25}\).

6.2.1 Vandula And Ropuiliani:

In 1848 or 1849, Vandula the handsome and famous son of the southern Chief, was married to Ropuiliani, the daughter of the great Chief Lalsavunga of the North. The new couple later moved to Kawmzawl and lived there between 1851 to 1856. He even became the Chief of Hnahthial, Ralvawng and Denlung villages. Vandula and Ropuiliani finally settled at Denlung and the other villages which were under their control were given to their sons. They were successful couple as a ruler because wherever they shifted, they managed to earn well and their subjects were happy during their rule. While they were ruling at Hnahthial village between 1874 to 1878, they held many ‘Khuangchawi’. All through these years Ropuiliani faithfully followed her husband and performed her duty as a Chief’s wife very well.

6.2.2 VANDULA - An Enemy of the British:

Vandula was an outstanding chiefs over a large territory which comprised almost half the total area of South Mizoram. It comprised of Rotlang, Leite, Vanhmun, Ralvawng, Denlung, Aithur, Thiltlang, Hnahchang, Hnahthial, Khuanghlum and so on.

Capt. J. Shakespeare wrote of Vandula, Ropuiliani’s husband as being ‘the most powerful Chief in South Lushai Hills’. He also mentioned that the chief was a great opponent and sworn enemy of the British. Between 1871 – 1872, a column led by General Brownlow easily befriended Seipuia, Vandula’s younger

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26 Ibid., p. 67.

*Khuangchawi* - A feast that chiefs and well to do families held for.


brother but they could never win Vandula. Capt John Shakespeare also wrote that Vandula refused to sign a treaty extended to him by the British Political Officer, Mr C.S Murray in 1888. His staunch opposition against the British earned him notoriety with them. Capt. John Shakespear further says, ‘Tlutpawrha’s eldest son was the most powerful chief in South Lushai Hills, and that unlike his brothers, his influence was hostile to the British’.29

While his brothers Vanhnuachawna, Lalthangvunga, Seipuia and Lalluauva were easily won over by the British, Vandula did not like them to interfere in the affairs of his subjects. He showed great diplomacy and tact in his dealings with the British and never allow them to underestimate his status. He did not like the presence of the British as he considered them to be a great disturbances for his people. And he prevented entry of the Britishers to his village30. Before applying a strong armed policy against Vandula, the British had tried hard to induce him, but in vain. In 1871 – 1872, Seipuia had to make peace with the Britishers31.

Captain Shakespeare also wrote that during the conflicts between the Lushai and Pawi clans, Vandula was not only frequently at the head of affairs but was often responsible for their outbreak. Till his death, Vandula was the greatest and most influential among the Lushai Chiefs in the Southern Mizoram32. They could not persuade him to come to their side even through his

30 Major Saibuanga, Rolura Thlahte Chhuina, Aizawl 1985, p. 52.
31 Lalsangzuali Sailo, op.cit., p.17.
own brother Seipuia, who was an ally of the British. Failing to convince him, the British thus considered Vandula an enemy.

6.2.3 Ropuiliani as an Administrator:

Vandula, who was considered as the greatest Chief of South Lushai hills, died at Denlung in the year 1889. Before he died, Vandula was the head of all the Haulawng Chiefs. Not only that he was the recognized leader among the Haulawng Chiefs he also extended his influences upon the Shendus. Vandula split up his village among his five sons — Savuta, Hrangphunga, Sangliana, Thahulha, Dotawna and Lalthuama. Lalthuama ruled at Vaitin village which is about 2 Kms from Leite. His elder brother Dotawna, Darlung chief died leaving two minor sons — Zabiaka and Saihnuna. Denlung being the village of their father, Vandula, was ruled by a ged Chieftainess, Ropuiliani, who ruled as regent of Saihnuna. Her youngest son, Lalthuama always visited her and helped in all her needs. At the same time Ropuiliani, a brave Chieftainess, encouraged her son not to submit to anybody more particularly to the hands of foreign invaders.

Ropuiliani inherited all the stubborn and resolute qualities of her husband and her father. She was the born enemy of the English. She was determined to act similarly even after their death. She saw the changes that was taking place among the Lushais since 1889-90 and she did not like it. The British involvement became deeper and they started administering the chiefs. During this time many of her husband’s one time ally had befriended the Britishers. But her youngest son Lalthuama was totally under the influence of his mother. The

33 Sangkima, Ropuiliani, Her Role in the Struggle Against the British in Mizoram in Lalneihzovi (ed) Role of Ropuiliani in the Freedom Struggle, Andrew Lalsangzuala, Aizawl, 2005, p. 119.
British realised that they always find difficulty in collecting taxes, making demands etc in their villages and it was Ropuiliani who instigated her people to disobey the British. She knew that it was her duty to protect her land and people. When the British imposed house tax and forced labour, she said, ‘our people never contribute any labour or taxes to foreign people. We are the owner of the land and we will drive the foreigners away from our territory’

*It has always been difficult to get tribute from them*. Even though she was much weaker than the British in terms of arms and men, she preferred to fight than befriending and enjoy the benefit of being a British friend. Therefore, as soon as she took the responsibility on behalf of her son, Ropuiliani was determined to act similarly even after his death because –

(a) She knew that it was her duty to protect her land and people and

(b) She could not tolerate the British and their soldiers whom she thought were intruding upon the lands, hills and people that he ruled over as Chieftainess.

She accused the British of trying to colonize Mizoram and people, hated their levying of taxes, their huge demands of rice and eggs from the villagers and forcing them to act as coolies, abhorred their intrusion into her domain where she was the sovereign ruler and rebuked all their offers of negotiation.

By this time almost all other Haulawng Chiefs (Rolura’s descendants) surrendered to the British and agrees their terms. Ropuiliani and her son, Lalthuama declared sovereignty and refused to with the British’s dictated terms

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34 Lalsangzuali Sailo, op.cit., p. 66.

35 Report of J. Shakespear, 1894/Foreign/External B/March/File No 152-159, p. 2. NAI.

36 Lalsangzuali Sailo, op.cit., p. 69.
to the Mizo Chiefs. They said that they were Chiefs from the ages, and that they never paid any tax to anybody. No nations had ever imposed on them any forced labour and even if they did, they would never accept it at all. Ropuiliani did not allow her son, Lalthuama and her citizens to surrender guns to the British. She advised them to collect as many guns as possible and to drive the British out from the soil at the first convenient time. She blamed other Rolura’s descendant (Haulawng chiefs) submission to the British as shameful act of cowardice. Ropuiliani and Lalthuama started preparations to free the land from British hands. She said to the other Haulawng chiefs, “Even if you all (Rolura’s descendants) surrender, I am here the daughter of Lalsavunga, the brave ruler of the north, who will never surrender to the foreign rulers. I will call the sons of my brothers from the north, and we will surely push back the foreign power from our land and free our nation.” Eversince the north and south civil war of 1849 – 1856 and when the northern chiefs won the war, the relations between the northern Chiefs and southern Chiefs could never be cordial. The Haulawng Chiefs regarded Ropuiliani to be proud of herself for being descendant of the great northern Chief and insulted the Southern Chiefs. They reported to the British that their problem of complete surrender was due to the proud Chieftainess Ropuiliani and her powerful son, Lalthuama.

Captain J.Shakespeare, the superintendent of South Lushai Hills district found it extremely difficult to tackle her. When she assumed power she became a danger to the British for their future plans. She had an absolute command over all the descendants of her late husband. This was possible mainly because after the death of Vandula the Haulawng chiefs were without any able ruler and they had to continue their resistance against the advent of the British. Therefore, it


38 Ibid., p. 40.
was inevitable to give recognition to her leadership without any question. Now future relations between her leadership and the British thus solely depended upon her. Regarding her relationship with the British Ropuiliani had to choose either the policy adopted by her late husband, or a policy of reconciliation deviating from the legacy of her husband. In the end, she chose the former which she adhered to it till her death. Now confrontation with the British became her sole aim in life. In fact, the British occupation was resisted by freedom loving people.

6.2.4 Incident at Rangamatti:

On the 3rd February 1889, the first military expedition was despatched which resulted in the killing of Lieutenant J.F Stewart and his party. This incident took place near Rangamati in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. When Lt. J.F. Stewart was killed along with his two English bodyguards and a sepoy near Rangamatti in the Chittagong Hill tract. Hausata and Lalthuama were suspected and in 1892, the Government identified the responsible Chiefs but Lalthuama, the youngest son of Ropuiliani was also accused as having hands behind the murder by harbouring of the killers.

Later through investigation, it was found out that Lalthuama had certain complicity with the murder of Lt. Stewart as well as Chief Dokulha and Vantura. Actually, the government had suspected the loyalty of Lalthuama, encouraged by his mother, was again suspected as giving guided to the Shendus who killed a Bugler. This was made known to the British by Seipuia, brother

39 Sangkima, op.cit., p. 11.
40 Rangamatti - is located in the northern part of Bangladesh
41 A.S Reid, op.cit., p. 192.
42 Suhas chatterjee, op.cit., p. 122.
of Vandula. He however, said that the men supplied by Lalthuama were taken by force.\textsuperscript{43}

This incident greatly provoked the British and it was felt inevitable for them to sent an expedition for the fact that it was the duty of the British to protect the men living within their declared boundary and not to avenge murderers would be a breach of faith. Murray who was one of the team members declared the British policy in the strongest term and says: “Every white man is held to be a Chief.”\textsuperscript{44} The Bengal Government was determined to take actions against the Chiefs whom they considered responsible for the murder.\textsuperscript{45}

With this, the British strongly felt the need to subdue the remaining tribes who were still fighting the British. Therefore, another detachment known as Chin –Lushai expedition of 1889 -1890 was reinforced to accomplish the task assigned to the previous one and to take control of the whole situation caused by the incidents that were taking place during the intervening period. In short, the expedition achieved its objects by bringing the trio who killed Stewart and his party to book.\textsuperscript{46} In spite of its achievements, the operations of 1889 – 1890 were extended with a view to completing the punishment of the raiding villages, subduing the Chiefs who still put up resistance under the leadership of Ropuiliani or the Haulawngs, confirming the authority of the British Government over the tribes to the east who were still unsubdued, and opening up of communications across the hills to the Burma side.

\textsuperscript{43} A.S Reid, op.cit., p. 192
\textsuperscript{44} Robert Reid, op.cit., p. 49.
\textsuperscript{45} Sangkima, op.cit., p. 116.
\textsuperscript{46} J.Shakespear, Notes on Lushai Hills, its inhabitants and administrations since 1888, CB-1,Pol-1, File No 1895 J, Dated Shillong, 22\textsuperscript{nd}, March 1905, MSA.
As a part of operations, permanent post were established at Fort Tregear (South Vanlaiphai) and at Lungleh and a political officer was appointed at Lunglei. During the winter of 1890 – 1891 an additional post was built at Lalthuama’s village\(^{47}\) with a view to subduing Lalthuama and his mother Ropuiliani along with other Chiefs who were also making troubles to the British through the influence of Ropuiliani. The operations thus intimidated them and the situation became calm for a while.

But unexpectedly, another expedition had to be despatch due to the incident which took place between Captain Murray and Chief Zakapa. The injudicious action of Murray provoked Zakapa to rise against him. Murray and his party did not anticipate that any opposition would be offered to them. The party was attacked and they had to run for their lives\(^{48}\). But the expedition failed to capture the chief. On the other hand operation were on to bring all the Chief to submission who had refused to do so in earlier time. Among them were included Ropuiliani, Lalthuama and their collaborator who had an open hostility with the British\(^{49}\).Captain Hutchinsons military detachment made a considerable headway in dealing with the revolt chiefs. Besides the Haulawng Chiefs, Dokulha who had hands in the murder of Lt. Stewart was captured and he was sentenced to transportation for life in the Andaman Island and died there\(^{50}\). Again, this abated the situation for a while.

As has been since the beginning of their occupation, the question of coolie caused a great burden for the native. This was one the main reason for the

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\(^{49}\) A.S Reid, op.cit., p.191.

\(^{50}\) J.Shakespear – *Notes on Lushai Hills*, Political Branch, p. 6. MSA.
outbreak of the rise of 1892. The economic grievance of the people in general
and the Chiefs in particular were responsible for the outbreaks in 1892. The
establishment of new posts at Lunglei and Fort Tregear and additional
temporary posts of Lalthuama’s village was giving the Chiefs an extra burden
for they had to supply labour at the expense of their subjects. This was a part of
interference on the part of the British to the internal affairs of the Chiefs.
Whether the Chief was loyal or disloyal to the British he had to render and to
give tribute. Labourers should go from villages to 8 or 9 days journey in return
for a reasonable rate of pay. This system was not acceptable to the people as a
whole and it was not consonant with their custom also. W.B Oldham, the
commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tract was of the view that the system enforced
in 1892 i.e Labour system in the south was the sole cause of the troubles in the
last four years⁵¹. According to him it was a worthless kind with which the
government was interfered with. The system in 1892 cost Bengal Government
alone over 3 lakhs and over 2 lakhs in 1893. In spite of its economic impact on
the Government, the Government of Bengal did not allow it to fall into a state of
destitution. Yet, Oldham insisted that the continuation of the system would
retard the objects the British Government had in view including pacification and
the creation of labour supply system.

⁵¹ W.B Oldham, Commissioner of the Chittagong Hill Tracts to HJS Cotton, Chief Secretary to the Government
of Bengal, Chittagong, the 24th July 1895 CB 20, Pol Branch. MSA.
6.2.5 Ropuiliani, Lalthuama and the British:

The rising of 1892 was the creation of the British themselves. Though outwardly situations seemed quiet but the government was not hopeful of any rapid and peaceful settlement with Lalthuama and his mother because, besides the economic restraints as a result of impressed labour and tribute, as pointed out earlier, their clans were ruthlessly victimized during the rising itself. Hardened at heart by her experiences Ropuiliani thus inflicted a stiff resistance to the British inspite of her alleged age. Again when all the other Chiefs of his clan laid down their lives Lalthuama was the only Chiefs left to continue his father's policy towards the British. But he was under complete control of his mother Ropuiliani. She asserted her influence upon him and acted as a remote control. She directed Lalthuama in all his attempts to offend the British. In the eyes of the British, therefore Ropuiliani and her son Lalthuama were equally shared the responsibility for all the untoward incidents to the British. The British charge both Ropuiliani and Lalthuama as problem Chiefs for their clandestine role in inciting the other Chiefs of their own clan to ignite tension between them and the Chiefs. To make the situation worse, the British government realise later that in all the activities of Lalthuama against the British, the involvement of his mother, Ropuiliani was unearthed. To their great dismay, Lalthuama married to a daughter of Lianphunga who was the enemy of the British. The British highly consider the marriage as a plot to destabilise the whole situation, Captain Shakespeare thus led a punitive expedition against Lalthuama and his mother. While countering the hostility Shakespeare was besieged at Chhipphir of Vansanga's village. But he was able to hold out only

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52 Sangkima, op.cit., p. 119.

53 AS Reid, op.cit., p. 19.
through the help of Lalluava of Bualpui. Throughout his campaign in the South Shakespeare received considerable support from Dara an interpreter.

The government was not hopeful of any permanent and peaceful settlement with Chiefs until the powers of Haulawng Chiefs and their collaborators were crushed. Towards the end of 1892 there was a sign that peace might come at also in the south for the powers of some hostile Chiefs were broken and scattered. But the prospect for peace was overshadowed by a fresh revolt in the middle of the year 1893. It was learned that Lalthuama and his mother Ropuiliani with Kalkhama, a northern chief, were again conspiring another revolt. They wanted to show that they were not happy and satisfied with the British for their aggressive attitude towards them. They were the last to be subdued. The incident took place when some coolies and an interpreter were attacked. The authorities took immediate action with a view to containing the revolt within the South.

5.2.6 The Siege:

To suppress the rising, an expedition was despatch under Captain Shakespear. Before the movement was mobilised C.W Davies, the political officer, North Lushai Hills was also consulted. The despatch consisted of more than five hundred and fifty troops and more than 400 military police. It was done jointly with the northern column. The mission was intensely directed against Lalthuama and his mother Ropuiliani under whose leadership clandestine atrocities were actively organized. The government this time was determined to crush the powers of the Chiefs who were still unsubdued.

*Sangkima, op.cit., p. 120.*
The British felt that the presence of these two persons in the Hills is mischievous, even in confine and for some time to come, they cannot be enlarged. Therefore, forces approached Ropuiliani's village under the darkness of the night to surprise her and her son, after crossing the Mat river and at dawn the next day the village was reached while it was still dark. Without any resistance, the party captured Ropuiliani and her son Lalthuama. Their subjects were rapidly disarmed. Their weapons were confiscated\(^55\). With the capture of Ropuiliani and her right hand man Lalthuama, the Haulawng Chiefs, of Vandula's descendants lost their leaders and they were now without a leader.

The party returned to Lunglei with their sieged weapons. Ropuiliani and her son Lalthuama were also taken along with them. They were imprisoned there. But the British did not feel safe to keep them at Lunglei and feared that their presence there might escalate tension in South Lushai Hills. Shakespear, therefore, proposed to keep them outside Mizoram. When she was in Lungleh, she felt very helpless as she could not speak with the Britishers. And it is recorded that the authority provided interpreter for her\(^56\).

Accordingly the Government of Bengal directed the local authority to deport the prisoners to Rangamatti, the Headquarters of Chittagong Hills Tracts\(^57\). Thus, the prisoners were deported to Rangamatti from Lunglei on 8\(^{th}\) April 1894. But Ropuiliani could not survived the shock of the prison life and died on 3\(^{rd}\) January, 1895\(^58\) at the alleged old age. She was very weak when


\(^{56}\) *Letter to the Commissioner of Chittagong*, Dated 1894 from the superintendent of Chitthagong jail.CB-3,Pol-22,MSA.

\(^{57}\) *Letter to the Magistrate of Chittagong*. 25\(^{th}\) March, 1894 from the Superintendent of Chittagong Jail, CB-2, Pol-18. MSA

\(^{58}\) *Letter from R.W. Murray, the superintendent of the Chittagong, Jail to the Magistrate of Chittagong No. 23 Dated Chittagong the 6\(^{th}\) January 1895*. CB- 3, Pol- 18, MSA.
admitted on 18th April 1894 and her health was deteriorating when she was attacked with dysentery for a few days. This perhaps hastened her end. When she died her dead body was brought home in a coffin and Lalthuama was allowed to accompany her dead body home. This followed his release from imprisonment thereby allowing him to settle at his own village. It is hardly possible to determine her real age but when she died Ropuiliani looked over 70 years of age. In the prison, jail authority treated them as state prisoner and they guarded with wardens, not by police constable. It is mentioned, ‘political prisoner Ropuiliani and her son Lalthuama is ‘Imperial’ and debitable to the grant for ‘Refugees and State Prisoners’ under the head ’25 Political’. They were given quarters, it is mentioned, ‘a sum of Rs 239 was sanctioned for the Lushai Chieftainess.

The charges against them were –

1. Lalthuama is charge with harbouring Loncheyva, the murderer of a government interpreter.

2. Breaking his parole and absconding from Lungleh.

3. Refusing to obey my orders to go and live with Lalluova.

4. Seeing in plots against the government.

59 Letter to the Magistrate of Chittagong, Dated Chittagong, the 16th Jan, 1895 from R.W Murray, Superintendent of Chittagong Jail, CB-2, Pol-18, MSA.

60 Letter to the Inspector General of Jails, Dated Calcutta, the 10th December, 1894 from E.V Levinge, Under Secretary to the Government of Bengal, CB-2, Pol-18, MSA.

61 Letter to the Commissioner of Chittagong, Dated 15th November, 1894 from E.V Levinge, Under Secretary to the Government of Bengal. CB-4, Political-4, MSA.

62 Letter from W.A Scotland, the District Engineer, Chittagong to the Magistrate of Chittagong, the 4th August, 1894. CB-3, Pol-22, MSA.
Ropuiliani is charged with:

1. In citing Lalthuama to the above
2. Being actively concerned in plots against government\textsuperscript{63}.

British report says:

"In the following year, Shakespear reported the capture of an important person and a bitter enemy of the British in the shape of Ropuiliani, Mother of Lalthuama, widow of Vandula, an old enemy of the British and daughter of Vanolel, the chief against whom the Silchar column was directed in 1871-72. She was evidently a focussed of discontent and her capture led to the surrender of her son and another man, Loncheyva, who was wanted for murder. The woman and her son were dealt with under Regulation III and confined in Chittagong jail, where Ropuilieni died of old age in January 1895.\textsuperscript{64}.

The more elaborate statement, more rhetorically conveyed:

"During the cold weather of 1893, it was learnt that the Chief Lalthuama and his mother, widow of Vandula, living in the neighbouring village between the Mt and Koladyne rivers, were still the centre of disaffection and were intriguing with Doakama, a northern Chief, for revolt. The cutting up by them of some and interpreter took place and matters had to be taken in hand before

\textsuperscript{63} J Shakespeare Reports concerning Ropuilieni, Vandula widow and her son Lalthuama at present custody at Lungleh. CB-2, Pol-19, MSA.

\textsuperscript{64} Robert Reid, op.cit., p.35.
trouble could spread to Kairuma and other Chiefs, wanted but still at large. So in August, at the height of the rainy season, Captain Shakepear, with Massrs Pugh and Hutchinson and 80 rifles left Lungleh to surprise the widows village, and this incident is also typical of what the military Police were frequently called so to carry out. The last march was made in pelting rain, flooded had broken down parts of the road, and the Mat river was reached at nightfall, where the road was left. Through the night the party waded upstream often waist deep, and climbed with extreme difficulty through dense and dripping jungle alive with leeches. Just after dawn the village was reached and rushed. Surprised was complete, Lalthuama and his intriguing mother were captured and their people rapidly disarmed, their weapons being confiscated. At the same time message were sent to all neighbouring villages to come in at once with all their guns, to which they complied. The village of Thultlang also had rapid visitation and its teeth drawn by the seizure of all weapons. It was found that Doakama had been with Lalthuama and had only left the village the day before. Shakespear visit where they had been arranging for another rising. The party returned to Lungleh after as day successful outing in which it had been by initiation and well formed surprise nibbed in the bud what undoubtedly would have developed into another serious effort to force the British out of the Hills. Lalthuama and his mother were deported, and their village duly paid up the fines levied on them.

Thus the Britishers subdued most of the tribes but on the other side, they were aware of the fact that Ropuliani and her son were never going to

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65 L.W Shakespeare, op.cit., pp. 103, 104.
surrender. Instead, instigating their people and planned a rebellion. H.J.S Cotton’s letter mentioned, ‘They were charged with compassing a scheme for an attack on Lungleh but their designs were nipped and they were arrested in July 1893 and were kept at Lungleh guard room and proposal were made for their detention under Regulation of 1818 that they should be confined in the Chittagong jail as the resources of the South Lushai Hills or the Chittagong Hill Tracts are not always sufficient to provide for the safe detention of Lushai prisoners as two Lushai prisoners who were convicted of murder and sentenced to transportation for life by Captain Shakespeare succeeded in effecting their escape when they were imprisoned at Lungleh guard room\textsuperscript{66}.

With the arrest of Ropuiliani, Vandula’s clan lost its leader and it became easier for the English to subdue the Chiefs of lesser importance. But the English were not very sure of their success, considering the presence of Ropuiliani at Lunglei detrimental to the peace in the South Lushai hills and Shakespeare proposed the transfer of Lalthuama and his mother, Ropuiliani, from the Lushai Hills to avert further trouble\textsuperscript{67}. Because Ropuiliani stubbornly refused to speak to the British to make any good term with them. According to the instructions of the Government of Bengal they were deported to Rangamatti, the headquarters of Chittagong Hill Tracts where she was treated as state prisoner on 8\textsuperscript{th} April 1894\textsuperscript{68}. Their imprisonment resulted in the employment of some additional staff in the jail.

\textsuperscript{66} Letter to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, Dated Calcutta, the 31\textsuperscript{st}, January, 1894 from H.J.S Cotton, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, CB-3,Pol-21, p. 9, MSA.

\textsuperscript{67} BJP Political Department, November 1893, No 132, File L/681, WB Oldham, Commissioner, Chittagong to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, p.17. SAWB.

\textsuperscript{68} IF Extl, A, April, 1897. Nos 220 -228. General, Future Administration of the Lushai Hills, p. 72 SAWB.
The then inspector General of Prisons had proposed the employment of some police constables ‘to watch these two Lushai prisoners’. The then Lieutenant Governor did not agree and rather four additional warders were employed in the Chittagong jail on a salary of Rs 7 each per member purely for this purpose. They were given special care and were not treated like other prisoners. This is clear from the British record which says,

‘Ropuiliani should be kept in Chittagong jail where her loyal kinsmen, some of whom have often expressed a wish to come to Chittagong can visit her. The accommodation for a state prisoner of her rank and class and she would be frequently allowed to go outside the jail and see the local sight. Lalthuama could also be confined in the Chittagong jail though special accommodation for him as a state prisoner would have to be arranged for both he and Ropuiliani should be under restraint for least a year and I doubt if it will be wise to release Lalthuama for some years to come. The only object therefore in keeping him in the Chittagong jail instead of Hazaribagh jail would be for his mother’s sake’.

But Ropuiliani could not survive the shock of the prison life and within a year of her detention she died.

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69 Letter from the Under Secretary, Govt of Bengal to IGP dt 10.12.1894 (No 3061 Pol. Dept. A, Pol Branch, p. 37, MSA.

70 Letter from W. B Oldham, Commissioner to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal. Dated Chittagong, the 26th October, 1893, CB-2, Pol-12, p. 9, MSA.
6.2.7 Ropuiliani – The Freedom Fighter:

The coming of the British in Mizoram was a sad chapter in Mizo history. With it the freedom of their Chiefs was ended leading to the abolition of Chieftainship. Ropuiliani was a leader of the descendant of Tlupawrha as her husband Vandula had already passed away, when the British appeared in Lushai Hills for the second time. She subscribed evidently to the highest principles of patriotism in which the whole mankind shared in the decades past, that was to exalt the name of distinct patriots and nation builders. That the administrators did not spare her, all showed that she joined hands with other freedom fighters in upsetting the administration in many ways. Evidently she was opposed to the annexation of the Lushai Hills, obviously she was anti-imperialist. Her place, the account proves, through those decades, had served as the centre of patriots, although avengeful and retaliating they could have been to because of English and at times, sheltered other insurrectionists. When the British forces subdued all the Mizo Chiefs by this time, Ropuiliani, who by nature, was strong-willed had even refused to talk to them. She always carried her head high and never at any point of time allowed the British to disregard her dignity and high position.

Her greatness is proved even further by the fact that despite her hostility towards them, the British officers and soldiers recognised her great spirit and never looked down on her or humiliate her even in jail. In all their reports on her, the high respect she was shown by them is evident. Instead of putting her with other inmates like a common criminal, she was accommodated in the European ward of Chittagong jail which was meant only for Europeans. They afforded her the status of a state Prisoner and for her alone the posts of four personal guards were temporarily created, showing the esteem in which she was

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71 Hamlet B Ngapkynta, op.cit., p. 23.
held by her captors. She was very adept in matters relating to administering the whole village community. She must have imbibed the wisdom coming from the many deliberations that were made by her father and his elders. Notwithstanding this, it is believed that her husband Vandula had entrained her albeit inconspicuously the ways of handling any unforeseen circumstances or otherwise.

Ropuiliani may be called a Freedom fighter. She was never afraid of the British and never saw the need to talk to them. She probably had inherited a strong feelings that her forefathers had borne against the British. She was the central focus of all the Chiefs of South Mizoram had always met together at Ralvawng to discuss anti-British activities. It was also known that Dokhuma, the son of Lalpuithanga had also come to Ralvawng for the same purpose. The British also believed that if the activities of Ropuiliani and other Chiefs of the region were neglected, the anti-British feelings might spread to the other Chiefs of the north like Kairuma, who was considered the greatest among the Chiefs of the North. Such assumptions of the British clearly reveal the fact that Ropuiliani had become the focus or centre of spreading anti-British feelings.

She never hesitated to provide an asylum for those who opposed the 'white sahibs', even though she knew that it was a very serious crime. She spoke in contemptuous tone of other Chiefs who befriended the British. She decided to fight alone in order to maintain her dignity and integrity than asserting her political position by befriending the Britishers. It is clear from the report of J. Shakespeare, 'Her influence is directly hostile to, as is only natural when it is considered that she is the daughter of one great Chief who always opposed us, and the widow of another. Since her husband's death she has seen

his brothers becoming more and more friendly with us, and increasing their prestige by virtue of this alliance. She has held steadily aloof from us, keeping entirely in the background, so much so that I overlooked her entirely and attributed Lalthuama’s frequent faults to his own youthful folly. All the villages belonging to this group have been more or less troublesome, not actively hostile but passively obstructive.

Ropuiliani was very firm in her conviction towards her homeland. She had put up a brave face when confronted and the way she challenge the very strategies of the enemies that they had been very unfair and that her fighters were subjected to grave injustice, shows her true nature. She refused to be intimidated by the British and also hated anything that has to do with the British including the interpreter Satinkhara, who was a Tuikuk tribe, was killed by her warrior Hnawncheuva at her royal decree. The killing of Satinkhara by Hnawncheuva was not supposed to have any effect on them as anybody could be killed at once at the order of the Chief. He was killed because he asked the Chiefs to pay taxes, guns and free labours as per order of the Government. Ropuiliani said, ‘Slaves had nothing to do with us (Chiefs) he should be taken away from us quickly.’ But due to the intervention of the British, Hnawncheuva was arrested and imprisoned in Andaman jail for 19 years. But from the British record, it is said that in 1892, the British interpreter Satinkhara was murdered by Dokara, Lalthuama’s carbarie and few men at the order of Lalthuama. It was reported that the killing took place as Satinkhara possessed a gun and a powder flask, presented to him by Hutchinson and which was previously belonged to Dokawla. When Satinkhara was asked by Dokawla’s wife to return the gun and

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74 Lalituanliana Khiangte, op.cit., p. 98.
the powder, he refused. This unfortunately led to his death. At first, Ropuiliani was suspected to have masterminded the killing as she would never allow the British to live in peace and would do anything in her power to see that they left her land for good. As a precautionary measure, Shakespear arrested Lalthuama along with his mother and deported them to Rangamatti on 26th October 1893. Shakespear remarked, 'Her manner at present does not inclined me to think, that she has learned by experience and would likely to use her influence in our favour if she was released. Although Lalthuama by himself would not have given us so much trouble, yet, I think it is best that he should accompany his mother.'

One of the greatness of Ropuiliani lies in her firm and strong stance towards the British who tirelessly tried to intimidate her but till the end, they failed to do so. The way the British took her village, arrested her and her son Lalthuama as well as Hnawncheuva, and their colonial struggle all these built up in her fearlessness and strong conviction to her nation that was always seen in her nature. So, she knew exactly what she was standing for and her subjects also acknowledge this. She never failed to follow the strong words that her father and her husband had bequeathed her. Till her death, she did not take even a single step towards absconding her homeland. Her insistence that she be buried from near her husband’s grave shows her commitment to truth and conviction till her death. It was because of this will that she had instructed to her beloved son Lalthuama, who in turn, informed the commissioner about her last wish. So, as per order of the commissioner, that her body was embalmed with quicklime and transported to Denlung where she was finally buried.

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75 CB- 14, Pol- 141, p. 3. MSA.
76 B.J.P Nov 1893, Pol Deptt, File L/68, Feb 1895 (B) File 99-108 L/2, p. 10. SA WB.
Another thing is that mother and son had had fully coordinated and concentrated their efforts in league with other leaders prolong the movement. Yet another thing is mother and son suffering the cause of their land, accepted the punishment in being imprisoned for the rest of their life, hundreds of miles away. A series of capture affected had definitely weakened the cause of the movement. Since the beginning of their chieftainship, Lalthuama and his mother opposed stubbornly to comply with the British demand and prepare for war to drive the British out from their country, by inviting the latters nephews of the northern chiefs. On hearing this, Captain Shakespeare decided to attack Ropuiliani and her son, Lalthuama before the coming of the northern chiefs.

In March 1894 just after dawn Lalthuama’s village was reached by the British force led Captain Shakespear and rushed to Denlung, Ropuiliani’s village. Lalthuama and his intriguing mother, Ropuiliani, were captured and their people rapidly disarmed. It was only with the help of Lalthuama Sailo of Bualpui chief that Shakespear was able to hold out till the chief came in the form of a column from the North under Captain Rose of the first 7th Gorkha. In this operations, Captain Shakespeare received considerable support from one traitor, Pu Dara Ralte, interpreter and Lalthuama Sailo of Bualpui chief.

Although Ropuiliani did not participate directly in the struggle against the British, yet she bravely upheld her husbands anti British policy till she breathed her last in Chittagong jail in 1895. Ropuiliani may not be a well known personality in the modern days, but she deserves a niche in the history of the Mizo for her bravery and her strong determination not to yield to the British. Ropuiliani was courageous and a woman of strong will and determination. This

77 L.W.Shakespeare, op.cit., p. 104.

78 Major AG Mc Cole, op.cit., p. 61.
was seen in her refusal to yield to the British as well as to talk with them. As an administrator, she was as competent and capable as she continued her husband’s anti British policy till the end without wavering. Although no woman before or after her took over the administration, she was accepted by her people as their Chieftainess after the death of her husband. This also reveals that she had an influential personality that even the elders (Khawnbawl/ Upa) to her husband were subjected to her. Although Ropuiliani appeared to be arrogant, bold and obstinate, yet deep inside she was extremely sensitive, affectionate and benevolent. On the whole, she was a brave and a great woman. It is most significant that a woman like Ropuiliani could make a name for herself as a great Chieftainness who stood by her husband’s anti-British policy till the end, when in the then Mizo society, women were given a very low status.

But Ropuiliani was a woman of patriotic fibre and had an absolute command over the descendants of her husband. Both the father and husband of Ropuiliani were the most famous Chiefs who opposed the British. So it was quite natural that she did not miss any opportunity to obstruct the British administration. She was a proud Mizo, always conscious of her freedom and her independence. Although old in age, Ropuiliani organised the un-subdued tribes to rise against the British. Thus, it is interesting to recall that Ropuiliani was a personality of exceptional abilities. She was no matches for the British in terms of equipments of war, so as to remain strong and stable in her stand. Nevertheless, she was almost all alone in her fight against the British but turned out to be the most influential Chieftainness who heroically fought against the British. When the others easily surrender after negotiating with them, she preferred death to surrender. She was the Chieftainess who never compromised

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her standing with the British units, whatever the consequences would be and this is what made her totally different from the other Chieftainesses.

There were number of Chiefs and Chieftainesses for their active participation in the struggle against the advent of the British in Mizoram. Ropuiliani was one such personality. Like many chiefs, she sacrificed her own life for the good cause of the Mizo in general and of her own men whom she served and governed them in particular. By bravery and gallantry. She outwitted many Chiefs in the resistance against the British. Provoked and hardened by the ruthless killing of her own sons and relatives which she witnessed herself, Ropuiliani stood on the way to the British by forming a formidable opposition. She did not lack qualities which man had. She was not an ordinary woman by wit and tactic. She tried to preserve with all cause the sanctity of position which she inherited from her husband, Vandula. She asserted her patriotism by relentlessly fomenting all her efforts and abilities in dislogging the British in their attempts to suppress the chiefs and their subjects.

Her exceptionality was only seen after her husband died when she began to take control. Such quality of rare courage, courage, firm conviction and dauntlessness were all inherited from her father and grandfather who had all been well known in their times. And even the British did not fail to notice that when she was transported to Chittagong. The chieftainess was a remarkable woman. Ever unshakable in her ambitions, her high principles and commanding presence made even the male chiefs of the South look up to her. She refused to submit to the British even until death and although she yearned for her native land and the smiling faces of her, she never gave in to their demands on pressures. She proved herself to be a great and proud woman, truly a queen. Had she meekly obeyed the British, she would never have been put in prison.
From the discussion, it is clear that Chieftainesses functioned under patriarchal dominance where women were barred from directly entering the battlefield. The link between the revolution and the involvement of women in liberation struggles can be easily understood. Mizo women were under the traditional and colonial patriarchal rule and had no control over the economy, their powerlessness was grounded in traditional Mizo cultures. Despite all these, they were the one who took charge of the village affairs during or after the absence of their husband. They already felt the might of the British after losing their male kin who fought the British. Therefore, they have realised the futility of antagonizing the British openly, instead it was by means of collusion that they resisted Colonialism. As discussed in the earlier and present chapter, most of the Chieftainesses under study resorted to collusion as a means of resistance as well as protection for their respective villages. The discussion adds to the importance of understanding the dynamics of socio-cultural historical realities in which war is fought, and furthermore serves as an attempt to acknowledge the level of human suffering and the trauma that occurs during the resistance movement. The paper reveals, however, that, beyond all this, confrontational forms of resistance evolved in the colonial era among women in their own way as embodied in protest and women and joining in the resistance movement and Chieftainesses, like women in any revolution, have resilience and courage, even in harsh and unyielding environments.