Chapter - 2
Tribal Polity
‘Tribe’ means a social formation consisting of families or communities linked by social, economic, religious or blood ties, with a common culture and dialect, typically having a recognised leader. And ‘Tribal’ adjective of a characteristic of a tribe or tribes. Anthropologist placed ‘tribes or tribesmen’ in a position in cultural evolution above primary hunters and gatherers moving around in bands, among whom lineage or clan organisation are not developed or feebly developed\(^1\). The emergence of new ‘states’ and ‘nations’ among the tribals in India and other parts of the world has activated tremendous efforts at formulating and reformulating theories and models for providing guidelines for an understanding of the process of state formation and nation building among the tribals\(^2\).

2.1 Debate on Tribal Polity Formation

There appear to be a close resemblance of Tribal polity formations all over the world. Peter Skalnik states that it is important to question the early class character instead of a State. This is because the early state could be early perhaps even inchoate, but there was no doubt about the very concept, the state, as the political form which crowns the social development in pre-state periods. The early state was early because a mature state was to follow, the state which we know today\(^3\).

---


In most of the tribal societies, the system of administration was based on
the system of ‘chieftainship’. Therefore, the kind of early state formation among
the tribal was first seen in the form of Chieftainship system. The term ‘Chief’
cannot be equated with the term ‘King’ in many respects. But in some cases,
the use of king and Chief seems to be interchangeable as it is confusingly used
in many places. However, many a times, tribal Chief were also referred as king
depending on the size of population they ruled for example, the king of
Buganda in Uganda who ruled nearly two million people, and the ‘Chief’
implies smaller size of population, for example, Chief of Ubungu in Tanzania
who ruled about twenty thousand people. But the use of the terms king or Chief
does not have any conspicuous implication in the African context. Likewise,
the Mizo word ‘Lal’ signifies a person who is above all others, the supreme
head and military leader in times of war and the repository of all authority
within his dominion regardless of the number of subjects he had. Peter Skalnik
further observes from his field work in Nanun, South Africa that kingdoms and
monarchies were just states, which carried various epithets such as primitive,
archaic, traditional, tribal or early to distinguish them from the modern state.

Marshal Sahlin view that state represents the final stage of four stage of
four stage evolutionary process through which the early society develops. These
are: band, tribe, chiefdom and state. He says that the tribal state were
characterised by a segmentary lineage system and this lineage system is a social
means of intrusion and competition and t ends to be economically and
politically autonomous because they are fissioning down the generations and
occupying separated territories which too are further differentiated through
internal and external intrusion. This segmentation could be genealogical as well

---


5 Peter Skalnik, op.cit., p 2.
as territorial. In this state there is a virtual lack of economic solidarity, the polity therefore is fragmented, materially the society remains in a ‘simple Neolithic mode of production’ typified by shifting agriculture and simple pastoralism’. It is only when these segments begin to become rank differentiated internally, and several of them also become rank relative to each other, thus creating a more extensive polity, does the tribal society progress into next stages of chiefdom and state. They may form a segmentary hierarchy. A tribe tends to remain egalitarian in that no one of the families is politically superior or more powerful in hereditary ranks than any other. In a tribal system differentiation of structure, however, has not been carried to the point where separate bodies of political control, full economic specialization or true full time religious specialization have developed⁶.

On the contrary, Elman R. Service observes that, in contrast to the ideal egalitarian tribal system we find cases which involve rise in the prestige of the person holding the office of Chief. ‘Chiefdoms’ are thus characterized by hereditary ranks. Chiefdoms are closely related to redistribution as a mode of exchange, whereas in the tribes it is typically reciprocal. The chiefdom provide a centralized direction to a hitherto tribal society and gives greater productivity without necessarily any change in technological methods. But they do not have true government. The chiefdom is a development of the segmentary tribal system to higher level of integration. A chiefdom is, however, not a class society⁷.

Regarding egalitarian society, it is observed that, ‘political authority is uncentralized, and there is no permanent, institutionalized inequality among fundamental social units such as families and villages. Leadership tends to be


ephemeral, and the individual leaders that emerge do so because they exhibit unusual personal characteristics, like intelligence and bravery, that attracts followers. Leadership status is achieved, not ascribed at birth.

In Mizo society, the Chiefship in peace was based on the power one derived from his decent, kin connections, control on swidden land, forests, hills and rivers beyond his own village.

It is further argued that chiefdoms will inevitably evolve into states, nor as static. Besides, rather chiefdoms are prone to repeated cycles of political growth, marked by an increase in the power and resources (both human and nonhuman) controlled by the chief, followed by a period of decline. This proved to be true in the case of Sailo (Lusei) Chieftainship as their superiority was attained because of political power over time and subsequently in their interest they developed the notion of superiority by making the Chieftainship hereditary. Since the most prominent ruling clan in Mizoram became the Sailo, which will be discuss later, there was a feeling of strong solidarity which gave rise to the feeling of high rank and supralocal solidarity. In rank societies or chiefdoms, authority is permanently centralized in the office of Chief, which exists apart from the person who occupies it and upon his death must be filled by someone of similarly elite descent, high status is largely inherited. However, in the case of Lushai Chieftainship, the Lushai Chiefs, leadership was confined to their respective village units. In other words it was one - village authority. Despite the existence of chief clans and the chieftainship, the Lushai society

---


lacked centralised political structure. The villages did not form the smallest unit in the pyramid form of the social structure. Independent village chief did not combine themselves. In fact, the concept of the social structure of the society was alien to the tribe. The state organization and the pyramidal authority and leadership structure was conspicuous by their absence. There was no gradation of the Chiefs. All the Chiefs were independent in the areas of operation. The political authority naturally was widely distributed and diffused among a large number of villages.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and his compatriot John Locke propounded a social contract theory of the state according to which men in order to escape from the anarchy of state of nature made a contract among them to create a totalitarian despotic state. However, J.J Rousseau’s ideal state of nature which was a highly romanticised society. Men made contract among themselves and surrendered their ego to the society and not to the state. The general will of the society was thus evolved and it governed the legitimate government as the agent of the society. Likewise in Mizo society, Chief was not an autocratic ruler, in fact he could not afford to be so if he wanted to retain his chieftainship. Once he behaved in an autocratic manner the villagers would leave him to take shelter in another village under a different Chief.

Morton H. Fried (1978) states that ‘the political state is not only a structure not merely emergent from a long process of demographic, ecological and economic development but as a source of revolutionary transformation of culture in general’. Fried classifies the states into two types: namely the Pristine state and Secondary state. Morton Fried (1967) explains the evolution of the pristine states through three stages with corresponding social formations:

1. Egalitarian band and tribal society

2. Ranked society – chiefdom

3. Stratified society – State\textsuperscript{12}.

But among the Mizos ethnic/clan lineage based ranking was absent. However the people often tell that the number of mithun given in marriages as bride price by a family determined its rank position in the society. But this was a vague notion for there was no bar for the common people, who could afford, to pay more\textsuperscript{13}. In the Mizo Society the apex cohesive authority was lacking despite the existence of numerous chiefs who were dominant but independent of themselves. This absence of vertical leadership pattern has led to the emergence of the intermittent feuds among numerous village units under ‘La’ bring into sharp focus the prevalent power structure and relations in the Mizo society. In the absence of superordinate authority vested with machinery for enforcement of sanctions and decisions, feuds between the eastern and the western were a recurrent feature which will be seen in the following chapter.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{13} B.B, Goswami, op cit., p. 320.
2.2 Conceptualization of Tribal Political Institutions

We see a number of tribal societies in the Africa, Polynesian countries, Arabian Peninsula South East Asian countries and Australia. But all these societies bear a similarity in one way or the other. For example, in some African country, the village headman was considered to be a divine person wherein Divine kingship is a development of the function of the pastoralist ‘priest chief’ who symbolises in himself the will of the number of loosely organised political groups to cooperate at the different movements\textsuperscript{14}. The divine king is somehow in himself divine – a living pledge of divine favour and success for his people. He reigns rather than rule, and he is the focus of innumerable rituals, rather than the repository of real power. Divine kingship emerges where the various political segments are loosely bound together by an organisation devoid of any real political functions\textsuperscript{15}. For example, in many African societies, political and cultural identity was focussed on an individual who was wholly or mainly a ritual officer and even where the political and military functions were more discernible there were problems of hierarchies of chiefs and associations of chiefdoms.

In Polynesian countries, we find that Polynesian Chiefs are representatives, probably embodiments of the gods. They are called Sau or high Chief. Sau are continually being deposed for various reasons: one is that under his reign food does not grow, and the land is hungry. The connection between the sau and the food supply was not absolutely clear but it appeared that if the Sau offended against the god there would be a famine so they would give the


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.85.
Sau and the god to another. In ancient Tonga leadership and political authority happened to be vested in the hereditary spiritual rulers or Tui'i Tonga, later in their temporal successors, the Tui'i Hatakalaua and the Tui'i Hanakapolu, who descended collaterally from the Tui'i Tonga lineage. All of these rulers, when they held the position of Hau, or political king, ran the risk of challenge to their authority from within their own caste, and subsequent loss of power. Among the political power, as opposed to sacred status, was always accepted as the prerogative of the most successful Chief and that the challenge by peers was an essential feature of political life. The pattern of violence did not reflect a series of irregular events but was rather a natural sequence in the political life of Tonga. In each case the hau or paramount ruler of Tonga was being overthrown and replaced by a nother Hau who, as his or her designation implied, had become hero, champion victor – in effect, political king. In most Polynesian groups, however, except where geographical factors precluded it as in the Marquesas, there were long established customary means by which a Chief of royal caste could acquire a position of political paramountcy either for life or until his power were seen to wane. The two most common means for which evidence exists might be termed the Samoan or titular system and the Tongan or Hau system. The term ‘hau’ means to fight, combat, injure or kill, survive in the lau language of the Solomons and the Bima language of Sumbawa. In Mizo society, the priest used to have special function for the chief and used to make special figurines for him for Sakhua sacrificial ceremonies. They were first served in feast.


18 B.B Goswami, op cit., p. 319.
We see different kinds of chieftainship prevailing in Africa – Divine kingship, single and multi chiefdom and segmentary. Gideon S. Were in his book on South African Tribes, reflected on the practice of having chief but the system differs from tribe to tribe. He observed that, in each tribe, the Chief was highly esteemed as the symbol of tribal entity and as the focus of loyalty in the tribe. The Chief always comes from the central family and clan. Each tribe was made up of new members, who are partially absorbed in the due course, and original members who formed part of the central clan. The non royal or common families took pride in associating themselves with the traditions and practices of the ruling clan and this had the effect of strengthening tribal unity.

The Chief of South African tribes was powerful, but an autocratic and unpopular Chief could not last long as his subject could desert him and join a friendly and just ruler. He maintains that the chief had to rule according to local customs and accepted practices and with the advice of his leading elders. The Chief was assisted by his council of elders whom he appointed mostly from his close relatives. The chief was the head of the tribe in all matters relating to religion, the administration of justice, government and welfare. The Chief also has an economic control within his dominion and this was highlighted by Aylward Shorter where permission had to be sought from the Chief before a piece of bush could be cleared and also said that they were foremost in the organisation of ivory trade which enabled them to extend their influence.

In the case of Toro in Uganda, and the Alur of North Western Uganda, we find multi-chiefdom society a power pyramid compose of many chiefdoms,

---


20 Aylward Shorter, op.cit., p.44.

culminating at the apex is the founder chief. As chiefdoms expand their segments, they grew in numbers and the chiefless people are assimilated peacefully at the periphery. The proliferation of the chiefdoms must takes place as a result of the segmentation of the chiefly lineage. Each chiefdom unit in the pyramid is a microcosm of the founder chiefdom and the latter exercises a decreasing control over them\textsuperscript{22}.

In the Eastern side of Africa we see a single chiefdom society which are of two kinds - One is the small, traditional chiefdom which has preserved its autonomy and which is virtually unattached to any association of chiefdoms. The other is the empire created by military leader or Chief who deployed a patrimony and were thus able to wield a number of smaller elements into some kind of political unity. The small chiefdom of Ubungu in Southern Tanzania has known a single ruler for most of its history. However, there are examples of chiefs who built up an empire through conquest to deploy a patrimony especially in the nineteenth century when people became aware of the commercial value of ivory in Africa\textsuperscript{23}.

In Australia, we find another kind of Chieftainship where the natives are distributed in a large number of small groups, each of which occupies, and is supposed to possess a given area of country. The boundaries of which are well known to the natives. The natives formed in a local group and named themselves by the name of some animal or plant. There are various local groups of this kind (Kangaroo people) they called their headman as Alatunja. The Alatunja were the leaders within domain and take the lead in every sphere but has no power outside his group. If he possesses any generally recognised authority, as some of them undoubtedly have, it is due to the fact that he is

\textsuperscript{22} Aylward Shorter, op. cit., p.42.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp.43,44.
either the head of an important group or in himself tribe. Old age does not by itself confer distinction but only when combined with special ability. The following quotation reiterates –

‘He is not of recognised as the most important member of the council whose judgement must be followed, though if he be old and distinguished, that he will have great influence. The Alatunja has ex-officio a position which enables him to wield considerable power not only over the members of his group, but over those of neighbouring groups as well. However, this position he can enjoy only if he is a man of great personal ability and the head men of the neighbouring groups are inferior in personal ability to himself."

Thus, from the different kind of chieftainship mentioned, we see that all the chieftainship fall into one type or another viz., Divine kingship, single or multi chiefdom, Segmentary etc. which could be defined according to the nature and power of the chief. However, it is interesting to note that in most of the tribal societies, Women seemed to be silent as most of the tribal society were based on patriarchal system.

---


25 Ibid., p. 11.
2.3 Migration of The Mizos

In order to understand and analyse the origin of Chieftainship in Mizoram, it is necessary to trace the migration of the Mizos to their present habitat. The tribal polities similar to the forms as known from the earliest (since the 19th Century) may have taken centuries to evolve into chiefdoms or principalities through an intermediate phase of development. This is applicable where tribal chieftaincies are supposed to have evolved into principalities. When historical data are completely missing or not available, legends or even myths are given as much credence as is compatible with the nature of the events. With the absence of recorded history in the past, the early history of the Mizos remain obscure. However, the Mizos and all the related tribes claim to have originated themselves from what they have called ‘Sinlung’ or ‘Chhinlung’26. Many theories have been put forwarded regarding origin of the Mizo and their migration. Despite many confusion, majority of historians and scholars believed that racially they are of Mongoloid origin and they belonged to Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups whose origin is somewhere in central China.

From the various old references it appears that some Mongoloid or Tibeto Burman tribes migrated to the Lushai hills in the eastern corner of India long back and the process of migration continued till the end of the nineteenth century. Various tribes came to this hills from the east pushing the former inhabitants to the hills and plains in the west and the North. The Lushai, the principal tribe among the present Mizos, came to this territory in the eighteenth and in the beginning of the nineteenth century they dominated the entire northern portion of these hills forcing the Thados, the then inhabitants of the

---

26 C.Nunthara, op cit., p. 39.
area, to Cachar. The data regarding the migration of people from Southwest China and Southeast Asia to Burma somewhere between 4th and the middle of the 8th Century AD. Lehman states that Chin history begins 'after AD 750 with the development of Burman civilization and of chin interaction with it'.

According to R. Vanlawma, they were said to have forced to lead a nomadic life by their inability to repulse their enemies. This has been shown by many folklores and traditional songs common among the Mizos, Hmar, and other related Kuki tribes. According to B. Lalthangliana the Tibeto – Burmans, of which the Mizos formed a part probably once inhabited the T’ao valley of Kansu Province on the north-west of China. Because of the many disturbances made by the Chinese these people might have moved to North east Tibet. In 1,000 B.C, the Chinese under the Ching made further depredation and this drove them out of the country and escaped into south and eventually Tibeto – Burmans came to the border of Tibet and Burma. This journey took hundreds of years. Early Mizos were also the same stalk and they might also form part of the people who came to the Tibet – Burma border. Perhaps, it was through the Hukong valley that the Mizos came to the Chindwin Valley.

According to L.B Thanga their original home was in Mekong Valley and they once lived in the Hukawng Valley, which was further corroborated by many including an old Burmese priest at Mandalay to Mizo historians who had visited that place to trace the history of their origin and migration. According to

---


29 Ibid., p. 22.


him, the ancestors of the Mizos came from Shanghai, possibly in the tenth century. The roots and duration of their exodus to Hukawng valley was not known since there is now written record. Even legends and folklore with reference to their stay are very few that one can think that they did not stay in this area for long. According to K. Zawla, they came to Chindwin belt about 996 A.D. They lived here barely two hundred years. Then a cruel Chief ruled over them, and they wanted to go away from him. At this time, a great famine over-ran the country and thousands of people died. This precipitated their decision to leave the land. Legend has it that before they, they planted a banyan sapling at Khampat and took a pledged infront of their Burmese neighbour saying, ‘this is our land, and we shall come back when this sapling roots had turned into a new stem’. They emigrated from here into two groups; one went north and the other south – west, through which they entered into India.

The first westward migration of the Mizo from the Chin Hills to Mizoram started in about 1250 A.D. According to B. Lalthangliana, Karen tribe entered Burma in the 7th Century, Chin (Mizo) entered in the 8th Century and the Burmese in the 9th Century and the Kachin tribe by the end of 9th Century, Shan were the last to enter and they reached only by 13th Century. He further maintained that after the Mongol invasion of Burma in A.D 1283, Many T’ais came down south. In other words, T’ai invaded the places which had been occupied by Kadus and Mizos. Due to this Shan inroads, the Mizos were forced to moved to Chindwin and Irrawady rivers seeking new settlement sites somewhere on the apex of the Irrawady delta and this took place in the early


34 Ibid., p 18.

14th Century A.D. According to Liangkhaia, Mizo stayed between Run and Tiau valley between 1000 A.D – 1500 A.D.\textsuperscript{36}

According to L.B Thanga, the first stage of halt in this movement was at Lentlang\textsuperscript{37}, which according to K.Zawla occurred about 1466 A.D. Rev. Liangkhaia says that, the Mizos were in this area for about two hundred years\textsuperscript{38}. But Vanchhunga opined that their stay here was not less than three hundred years and not exceeding four hundred years\textsuperscript{39}. It was here that each family grouped themselves together and each sub-tribe settled in separate villages. Since they could not find a suitable place which was enough for settlements and they have to scatter and settled at certain places resulting in the development of their own way of speaking, dressing and customs. Lusei settled at Seipui, and Khawkawk, Ralte at Suaiipui, and Saihmun, Chawnthu at Sanzawl, and Bochung, Khiangte at Pelpawl, Belmual and Lungchhuan, Hauhnar, Chuaungo and Chuauhang at the Hauhnar hills, Ngente, Phunte and parte at Chawngawih and Siallam, Pautu at Pautu Hills Khawlhring at Khawlhring hills\textsuperscript{40}. There is a hill range a little to the West of Lentlang known as Pautu Tlang which must have been named after the sub-tribe of the same name who, with Rawite, Chente, Chawhte and Maipawl, lived here and then moved west as far as Tripura where their descendants are still to be found\textsuperscript{41}.

Vumson mentioned that the first settlements of the Lushais and their related clans were near Falam and the close affinity of the Mizos and Sizang

\begin{multicols}{2}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., pp. 13,14 and Rev.Liangkhaia, Mizo Chanchin, LTL Publication, Aizawl, 2002, p.43.
\item \textsuperscript{37} L.B Thanga, op.cit., p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Rev.Liangkhaia,op.cit., p.39.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Vanchhunga, Lusei leh a Vela Hnam Dangte Chanchin, Aijal, 1955, pp. 80-81.
\item \textsuperscript{40} B. Lalthangliana, op.cit., pp.14,15.
\item \textsuperscript{41} L.B Thanga, op.cit., p.4.
\end{itemize}
\end{multicols}
dialects suggest strongly their existence as a group in the Chindwin valley. Zatluanga said that Chindwin valley was a flood prone area and they built their house on stilts. Due to this natural calamity as well as increase in population they were forced to move towards Lentlang. While staying at Thantlang they were called ‘Duhlian’. At Lentlang they stayed during 1176 A.D. Than, Sukte, Ngawn, Vuite and Thado did not leave Thantlang. The period in which they migrated to the present Mizoram was placed between 1700 and 1730 by all Mizo Historian. Due to the absence of any written history, more accurate dating cannot be expected and thirty years are reasonable for a migration which could have been only in a series of movements.

Since there was a population explosion, the Mizos were forced to move Westward in search of new land since they practice jhumming cultivation. A.G McCall says that the first to migrate were the descendants of Pa liana who moved into the central portion of the present Mizoram, followed by the Paite and finally settled in the western part of Mizoram. Rev Liangkhaia says that they migrated not because they were ousted by their brothers but due to their want of occupying fresh and better land. ‘Lianpui Hmun’ at Khuangleng village was the place where Lianpuia, son of Paliana first settled Hmar entered Mizoram in the year 1526 A.D.

---

44 Ibid., p. 3.
45 B.B Thanga, op.cit., p.4.
46 B.B Goswami, op.cit., pp. 313.
48 Rev.Liangkhaia, op.cit., p. 83.
Second were the Zadeng and Paite who migrated along with them and moved to the northern part of Mizoram till they reached the Jampui range in Tripura. Liangkhaia said that they were followed by the Ralte and first settled at Champhai and subsequently moved towards Jampui range. They were very powerful and ruled for almost hundred years. Towards the South were the Thangluah and Rivung, Thangluah settled near Vanlaiphai but they had to move further westward due to the Pawi onslaught. Thangluah moved to present Bangladesh side (The Chittagong Hill Tracts) and Rivung moved as far as Demagiri in Mizoram. They were the one who moved to the Southernmost and settled at Senglawn range beyond Lunglei. They were invaded by Vuta and after that, not much is heard about them. Little is known about the migration of Rokhum. Liangkhaia said that they followed the Zadeng and settled at Ngentlang, Arbawm and Sihfa. Since they were not as powerful they did not rule for a long time. According to R. Vanlawma, Rokhum entered Mizoram at a place where Zadeng had penetrated. But they were not as powerful as their brothers and they were subdued and dispersed by other families. The Sailos were the last to migrate into present Mizoram in around 1750 A.D.

---

50 Rev. Liangkhaia, op. Cit., p. 87.
51 Ibid., p. 88.
52 R. Vanlawma, op.cit., p. 7.
53 Rev. Liangkhaia, op.cit., p. 89
54 Rev. Liangkhaia, op.cit., p. 90.
55 K. Zawla, op.cit., p. 19.
56 B. Lalthangliana, op.cit., p. 17.
Thus all the Lusei (Mizo) ruling families moved into present Mizoram by the end of the 18th Century.

2.4 Chieftainship in Mizoram

2.4.1 Origin:

Even before the introduction of the institution of Chieftainship, legends maintained that the existence of leadership system. But during their stay at Lentlang range, the Mizos developed the habit of fighting with each other. Inter-tribes and inter-clan feuds were very common, hence, every tribe aspired to be the strongest and each tribe felt the need of having a strong and able leader who could lead and protect them. Hence, Chieftainship appears to have grown out of a collective needs of group life which characterised tribal living. However, it is not possible to state clearly when and how in the past this institution took concrete shape. In fact, the institution of Chieftainship emerged at quite an early stage of evolution in group life.

While dealing with the evolution of the Lushai Chieftainship, it would be worth mentioning the other tribes, that is Kukis and Paite who claimed that they sprang from the same ancestor as that of the Lushais. Both the tribes believed that Nova was the farthest known progenitor of Paite and Lushai chiefs. Nova had two sons named Dongula, who had also a son Niguite. Niguite had two sons

---

- Bawklua and Ngeknguka. While the former was considered to be the progenitor of the Lushai chiefs, the latter was that of Paite Chiefs. The Lusheis in common with the Thados attached importance to their genealogies and pedigrees, at an interval of many years, and by persons living far apart have been found to agree in a wonderful manner. It is noted:

'The existing Lushai chiefs claim descent from a certain Thangura, who is sometimes said to have sprang from the union of a Burma with a Paihte woman, but, according to the Paihtes, the Lusheis are descended from Boklua, an illegitimate son of the Paite Chief Ngeknguka. The Thados say that some hunters tracking a Se rao noticed the foot marks of a child following those of the animal, and on surrounding the doe serao they found it suckling a child who became the great chief Thangura, or, as they call him, 'Thangul'. From Thangura, the Pedigree of all the ruling chiefs is fairly accurately established. The Lusheis, in common with the Thados and other Kuki tribes, attach importance to their genealogies, and pedigrees, given at their interval of many years, and by persons living far apart, have been found to agree in a wonderful manner. From comparison of the genealogies and from careful enquiries lasting over many years, I estimate that Thangura must have lived early in the eighteen century. His first village is said to have been at Thangkua, north of Falam. It is possible that he personally ruled over only a small area. From him sprang Six lines of Chiefs – 1. Rokhum, 2. Zadeng, 3. Thangluah, 4. Palian. 5. Rivung and 6. Sailo'.

---

[^60]: Zatluanga, op cit., p. 87.
[^61]: J. Shakepeare, op cit., p3.
[^62]: Ibid., pp. 2, 3.
According to Rev Liangkhaia, the farthest known Lushai Chief, Sihsinga belonged to one of the Lushai tribes – the Paite. Sihsinga had a son named Ralna. Ralna’s son was Chhuahlawma who had a son named Zahmuaka. From Zahmuaka started the Lushai chieftainship. It is thus clear that Sihsinga was the progenitor of the Sailo Chiefs. The Paite also agreed that Bawklua, the father of Sihsinga, was the progenitor of the Lushai chiefs.

After forsaking their Chief at the Chindwin belt, the Lushais lived at Lentlang range. It was during their stay at Lentlang that Lushais were always raided by their neighbouring Burmese. To counteract such attack a number of sub-tribes combined together to form into one village which they built at Selesih in 1740. It was at Selesih where the Lushai had again taken a new chief. Selesih was a very large settlement with more than seven thousand house. But such a large village could not sustain itself for long. There was not enough drinking water, firewood for fuel, nor suitable land for cultivation. For this the Selesih village was broken up. After it was broken up, the Lushais lived at different villages. The Chhakchhuak lived at Seipuikhur. At this time, Zahmuaka, a Lusei tribe of Seipuikhur was approached by the Hnamte clan to become their chief. Only Hnamte clan were known to have a Chief of their own.

While the Hnamte clan were stationed at Tlangkhua, their leader Chhanpiala/Thlanpiala died of unnatural death. The constant war with the neighbouring people necessitated a stable leader, and the Luseis soon realized this. Nevertheless, nobody wanted to be a Chief as there was no material rewards attached to the position at that time and no ritual power bestowed upon the incumbent, and yet one had to devote his full time for village administration and endanger his very life by leading the war party. According to Lewin, ‘The

---

63 Rev. Liangkhaia, op.cit., p.36.
64 L.B Thanga, op.cit., pp. 4-9.
Lal directs in war, he is the last in advance, and the rearmost in retreat. In that kind of circumstances, chiefship was not considered to be a particularly attractive position, and no clan would like to keep chiefship to themselves. He accepted the offer reluctantly due to the insistence of his wife Lawileri and Hnamte agreed to confer upon him a privilege of getting ‘paddy due’ known as ‘Fathang’.

According to R. Vanlawma and Mc Call, Zahmuaka had seven sons who became the Chief’s clan in their own right. They were Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluaha, Thangura, Rokhuma, Rivunga and Chenkuala. But as mentioned earlier, Shakespear, Liangkhaia, K. Zawla and L.B Thanga however maintained that Zahmuaka had only six sons Viz. Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluaha, Thangura, Rokhuma and Rivunga. The seven son according to them died at birth.

It may thus be concluded that the institution of Chieftainship started from the time of Zahmuaka. From him sprang six lines of Lushai Chiefs – Rokhum, Zadeng, Thangluah, Palian, Rivung and Sailo. His leadership supported by his six sons was supposed to be reliable. In no time, he acted as their chief and hence his six sons became the chronological chieftainship of the Luseis. The name of the Sailo clan is traceable to one of the sons of Thangura who prospered the most. He had two sons viz Chawnglula and Thangmanga, Thangmanga’s son was called Sailova, the most powerful Chiefs of all Luseis. It can therefore be traced back roughly that the Lushai chieftainship had started between 1500 – 1625 A.D. An account of the origin of Lusei chief may be

---

66 Rev Liangkhaia, *op.cit.*, p. 8
placed at around 1500 A.D\textsuperscript{70}. With the Passage of time, the Sailo became the most powerful chiefs and they ruled the entire Lushai Hills at the time of the advent of the Britishers.

Besides the Sailo Chiefs, other tribes like Fanai, Pawi, Paihte and Hualngo also formed chieftainship but only in a smaller number and they were subordinates to the Sailo Chiefs. In the meantime, there were some independent Pawi and Lakher Chiefs in the southern part of the erstwhile Lushai Hills who had never fallen under the influence of the Lushai Chief\textsuperscript{71}. The Chieftainship was however a little different. It was less democratic than the Lushais\textsuperscript{72}. It may also be mentioned that when the British occupied the hills the authorities appointed some government employees as Chiefs who were deposed of for various reasons.

Regarding the mode of succession, when the Chief died or he became unable to run the administration of his village, his youngest son succeeded him. With regard to succession, Shakespeare wrote:

\textit{The youngest son remains in his father's village, and succeeded not only to the village, but also to all the property}\textsuperscript{73}.

Each son was provided with a wife and also given a certain number of households from his father village and sent forth to the village of his own. Henceforth, he ruled as an independent Chief. His success or failure depended on his own talents for ruling.

\textsuperscript{70} C. Nunthara, op.cit., p.41.


\textsuperscript{72} J.Shakespear. op.cit., p.216.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 42.
The Lushai Chiefs usually had, in addition to their legal wife, several concubines. The children by the legal wife were known as Chhungpuifa. The children by concubines were illegitimate and were known as Hmeifa. Besides these children, the Chiefs always had one or two children as a result of clandestine unions with girls in the village. These children were also illegitimate and called as Sawn. In case a Chief had no legitimate sons, his eldest Hmeifa would succeed to chiefship. If a Chief had neither Chhungpuifa nor Hmeifa, a Sawn could even succeed him. Gradually in the east of Tiau river, the Mizo chieftainship grew in number as the chiefly lineage segmented. But the land for larger segmentation was limited due to the settlements of Pawis and Paites in the east, South and North of the surrounding areas, the Lushai clan moved towards west. According to Liangkhaia, the main reason of Lushai migration westward being the presence of Pawis in the east and south in their neighbour who used to raid them. This was coupled with the limitedness of accessible land for cultivation. They therefore started moving westwards as Pawis did not occupy western part and more land for cultivation was available.

2.4.2 Power And Functions Of The Chief:

In Mesoamerica, Peru, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus valley and China, it is observed that, the origin of bureaucracy can be found in those cases where chiefdoms evolved into the first pristine states through the process of primary state formation worldwide. In Mizo society, the Lushai Chiefs had more than

---

75 Rev. Liangkhaia, op.cit., p.48.
76 Ibid., p.49.
77 Charles S. Spencer, op.cit., p.4.
one village and the other village than his own was under a headman. The main village used to have during pre-colonial period upto 400 houses. In later times its number decreased. The Chief with his upa, Zalen and ramhual used to look after the Judicial as well as executive matters including the agricultural activities. The headman of a satellite village used to look after his village affairs in consultation with the chief. A big headman was allowed to trace his descent in the Patrilineal line he used to emphasised his blood relations with the Chief. The sons of concubines only in rare circumstances could become a Chief.

The right to rule over the people was enjoyed by the one who had the power and ability to command a large number of people and to repeal any attack by other Chiefs. Thus, chieftainship originated in the physical and intellectual power of a person. Or a person who had the power of giving security to the people became a chief. According to Parry, 'A chief is the repository of all power, and the fountain head of justice. He is also 'the father of his people'. His role is multi functional despite the institution of the chief's non-chiefly assistant.

As to the evolution of the powers of the chief it is said that:

*These powers of the Chief did not come overnight. It took centuries of rigor, trials and tribulations to build up, the career of the Mizo chiefs wound up with the development of their villages through their tortuous meandering and hazardous sojourn from the Chin hills.*

---


80 Parry, op.cit., 1928, p.4.

81 Ibid., p.6.
While they all prevailed on more or less the same ecological – technological considerations, their location at times either enhanced or threatened their existence. In all these, the scope was open to human endeavour, resilience, ingenuity and resourcefulness.  

Since earlier times, the Mizo villages were ruled by its own Chief with an independent entity. In theory the Chief was a despot within his own realm and his words were law. He enjoyed power to impose even death penalty. The Chief of the village, however strong and powerful, would not assumed absolute power in the government of his village. Democracy may be said to be in the blood of the people. In the administration of the affairs of his village, the Chief was assisted by a council of elders. It is true that this elders were selected or nominated by the Chiefs themselves, but as they were usually chosen from those who were Thangchhuahpa, that is one who had done Khuangchawi, and were thus above petty jealousies, or else from amongst those representing a particular sub – clan or sub – tribe, the rule of the council of elders was generally fair. According to Horton, ‘In societies of this kind political authority is widely diffused, such authority positions as exist touch only a limited area of the lives of those subject to them’. For example, if the son or daughter of a Chief was a party in a dispute for arbitration before the council of elders, the Chief would voluntarily withdraw from the deliberation of the case, and he would seldom interfere with the findings of the elders. Any of the elders would do the same if their children were involved.  

---


84 L.B Thanga,op.cit., p.9.
A Chief is in effect simply a hereditary headman, landowner, and Aristocrat, whose holding and connections beyond his own village are very extensive. If his home is the centre of power of a realm, the powers of the realm will tend to be concentrated in his person and office. In addition to the elders who were called ‘lal upa’, meaning Chief’s elders, there were a number of other persons equally privileged. They were known as Zalen (free). They were the rich in the village, who were approached by the Chief to come to his aid to give succour to the poor, or even to the Chief himself when he was in want. At the conclusion of harvest each year, the council of elders fixed the price at which paddy was to be sold, and none in the village could sell at a rate higher than this. The Chief and his upas had powers limited only by the temper of the people they ruled. Until they overstepped the mark the people had no other course open than to submit. Distribution of jhum field in the beginning of the year was another important function of the council of elders. The most common disputes were those arising out of matrimonial causes. Whenever the council of elders met, it was customary to feed them and give them drinks. The expenditure on this was to be met from Salam (meat for a assembling). The amount of salam was Rs 5 and this amount was usually borne by the guilty in dispute. In case a dispute was compromised, salam was shared equally by the two sides in the dispute. All disputes were heard and disposed of in the house of a Chief. Whatever might be the views expressed during deliberations, the final decision was always unanimous.

Since inter-clan feud was common, a site for the village was chosen after taking war strategy into consideration, ie, the advantages of defence and offence

and the surrounding terrain. Many Mizo villages were named after the Chiefs. The village streets were laid out from a central place where the house of the Chief was located. Near it was ‘Zawlbuk’, young men’s dormitory, which was a training place for warfare and a place to learn about the manners, etiquettes and other norms of the society. It was a guest house and a meeting centre. The Chiefs house being near it, he could call the youth any time. The Mizo Chief at this time became fully hereditary and became conscious of their superior breed.

2.5 Emergence of Sailo as a Ruling Clan

The Luseis (Sailo) as a group, became powerful force against the smaller groups. The Luseis powerful leadership reinforced their numerical strength and already dominant position. However, the Pawis were considered to be better warriors in the sense that they could carry many days supply of ration without hindering their movement in the jungles. This was possible because the Pawis were able to sustain themselves with simple food like yam and cereals other than rice which were easy to carry so that they could sustain long journey in the warpath. In this fashion, the Pawis became the dreaded enemy of the Luseis. Other sub-groups like the Raltes and the Khiangtes fought their own wars against the smaller groups of like order. But the less formidable groups of this kind were soon subdued and with the continued threatened aggressions of the Pawis and the Paites, they were forced to make alliance with the Luseis and came to term with them. In this way, the Luseis dominated the politically smaller groups and became a privilege group.

---

87 C. Nunthara, op.cit., p.41.
With the coming of the Lushais there came an era of dispersal of the tribes like Thado, Biate, Haulawng, Tlang, Hmar all over Cachar, Tripura and Manipur. Although the Raja of Tripura, the Chief of Manipur and some Chiefs of the Cachar area claimed from time to time authority over the Lushai Hills, actually this area had always been independent of any rule by outsiders. In fact the Chiefs of the different tribes in the Lushai hills not only were supreme in their areas, they also frequently raided villages in Tripura, Cachar and Manipur. In these raids people were massacred, properties looted and villages destroyed in the foothills and the adjacent Plains. This led to the desertion of areas near the hills. These places however taken over by the defeated tribes who escaped from the hills and settled down in comparative peace in the plains, a little away from the zone of constant raids by the marauding tribes.88

The group led by Thangura’s grandson Sailova came to be the most powerful group and eventually came to be called by his name ‘Sailo’. They became the largest ruling families in the Lushai Hills till the British came in 1890.89 Thangura belonging to the Lushai (now Mizo) tribe, lived north of Falam in Chin Hills in the early 18th Century.90 He was the Chief of small area, possibly not beyond two to three villages. The six Chiefs families almost ruled entire north Mizoram during the 18th Century, which was primarily the result of a pressure generated between the Burmans and the Shans, and the Burman invasion into Manipur. Out of the six Thangur descendants, the linage of Sailova were considered as the most powerful Lal (chief) family. The Sailo incursion started in 1780 and by 1810, they had consolidated their position and

---

89 Rev. Liangkhaia, op.cit., p. 48.
90 J.Shakespeare, op.cit., p. 3.
spatial claims. One of their descendants made territorial claims even upto Chittagong Hills Tracts\textsuperscript{91}.

It is noted:

\begin{quote}
The clans which live among the Lushais under the rule of Thangur chief have become practically assimilated by them. During the census of 1901 an unsuccessful attempt was made to get a complete list of the clans, families and branches. The causes of the failure were the ignorance of the people themselves as to what clan or family they belonged to and the tendency to claim to be true Lushai\textsuperscript{92}.
\end{quote}

At the time of the British occupation, almost whole of Mizoram was under the control of Sailo Chieftainship. The Western part was ruled by Suakpuilala and his family, the Eastern part was under the control of Vanhnuailiana and his descendants, and Haulawng ruled in the South western part of the hill and chieftainship was with very rare exception considered to be the prerogative of the Sailos.

Sailova had a son Chungnunga who ruled over 7000 houses at a place called Selesih. It was his prowess and ability which paved the way for the supremacy of the Sailos. Internecine and fratricidal war among different kinsmen were quite common. The Palian and Zadeng had to give way of this. The Zadeng took the help of the Palian to defeat Hualngo of Burma. This success made them forget the role of the Palian. In a bid to eliminate the Palian, the Zadeng aligned themselves with the Sailo chief Haopuitualala, and in further collaboration with the Chakmas of the Chittagong Hills defeated the Palian at

\textsuperscript{91} B.B. Goswami, op.cit., p.314
\textsuperscript{92} J. Shakespeare, op.cit., p.9.
the Pukzing Hill in 1830. Then they consolidated their position at a concentration of 4000 houses near the Darlawng peak. They also established a cordial relationship with the King of Manipur, and so they were sure of his help, if and when attacked. Again a fratricidal fight took place when Mangpawrha Sailo attacked the Zadeng. No helped from Manipur was rush as expected. The Zadeng were completely vanquished and the Sailo now without any rival from the other kinsmen established their supremacy and became powerful Chiefs at the time of the advent of the British. At the end the Sailos to gain unchallenged paramountcy in the North Lushai Hills they ultimately had to vanquish in battle their remaining kinsmen.

During the Sailo Chiefship elementary principle of hierarchy was introduced. The concept of privileged and non-privileged were there. Yet the commoners had kinship links with the Chiefs. The line of social demarcation line between chief, Zalen and commoners, or privileged, however, was thin. The kinship relationship often filtered down to the commoners. Because of this and kin relationship between chiefs during British period mutual help between Chief and people were also observed. Yet a notion of purity of blood of a Chief by tracing descent from another prestigious Chief, was considered a strategy for establishing superiority. The privileged Zalens also used to emphasis the Chief is their kinsmen.

94 Ibid., p. 46.
95 A.G McCall, op.cit., p. 49.
96 B.B Goswami, op.cit., pp.130,131.
97 N.E Parry, op.cit., p249.
The Sailo privilege was so dominant that all the earlier British officers who came in contact with the Mizos suggested the policy of reconciliation with the Chiefs. His power for raids and warfare depended upon grain storage, kin relation, strong and brave following, who would abide by his orders even during his absence from his realm. The rise of Sailos as the most powerful ruling clan may also be attributed apart from political, to social and economic factors, because as Chiefs they enjoyed a number of privileges and freedom in the society, as well as developed action programme to crush the other ruling clans coupled with astute administration rose to be the most powerful ruling clan.

**2.5.1 Privilege of the Sailos:**

The Sailo Chiefs enjoyed certain privileges. Since the Chief was too busy in other activities, he could not afford to spare sufficient time for cultivation. Therefore, in return for his service, he was given a certain number of dues in kind. The Chiefs started receiving such dues from the time of Zahmuaka from whom the Lushai (Sailo) Chiefs traced their origin. The privileges enjoyed by the Chiefs were as follows –

*Fathang or Paddy tax* – The Chief was entitled to a share of produce cultivated in his land or *ram*. This due, known as *Fathang* was payable in kind and mounted to six or ten baskets of paddy per house per year. According to custom, the ramhual had to give ten baskets of paddy while the people six baskets of unhusked rice. Fathang should be paid from all types of cultivation within the Chief's land, namely Jhum for paddy cultivation and other subsidiary cultivation as well as cotton cultivation. The cotton cultivator had to pay three *Dawrawn* of cotton as Fathang to the Chief.

---

**Sachhiah or Meat tax** – The Chief received also one hind leg of every wild animal shot or trapped by any of his villagers within his land. If an elephant was killed, he took one of the tusks in lieu of the hind leg. No meat tax was taken by the Chief if the animal was killed by another wild animals or killed itself accidentally.

**Khuai chhiah or Honey tax** – The Chief was entitled to a little share of honey which was collected by any villagers from within his land. The villager had to carry the honey tax to the Chiefs who resided in a distant. Failure to pay honey tax resulted in a fine\(^{100}\).

**Chichhiah or Salt tax** – The Chief was also entitled to a due on salt collected from salt well on his land. However a salt well or Chikhur was found in a village, the Chief was entitled to a substantial share of all collection made therefrom. The party engaged in collection of salt used to offer salt to the village Chief at the rate of half of a seer for the collective group. Besides, the chief, if he so desired, could collect as much salt as he liked from any of his Chikhur. No villager was permitted to take salt from any chikhur without prior permission of the Chief\(^{101}\).

**Salam or Fine** – whenever a case was tried by the Chief, he had to receive a due known as Salam from the party who lost the case. The Chief and his upas would usually spend the salam on a feast. Sometimes in lieu of the cash payment of Salam, offering of a female pig was accepted\(^ {102}\)

---

* Dawrawn is a cane basket. *One Dawrawn is equivalent to the size of three tins of mustard oil. Then Three Dawrawn equal to nine tins of mustard oil.\

\(^{100}\) L.B Thanga, op.cit., p.12.\

\(^{101}\) N.E Parry, op.cit., p. 5.\

\(^{102}\) Ibid., p. 6.
Lai In sak or construction of a chief’s house – The Chief’s house was to be built by the villagers, free of cost and no remuneration could be claimed by the villagers. Every house was required to supply free labour to construct it. The villagers had also to repair the Chief’s house periodically free of cost.

As an administrator and supreme head of the village, the Chief enjoyed the right –

1. To order capital punishment to those committed murder or rape,
2. To seize food stores and property of the villagers who wished to transfer their allegiance to other Chief,
3. To levy tax from traders who were doing business within his jurisdiction,
4. To attach the property of his villagers when he wished or deemed fit, with or without fault on the part of the villagers,
5. To help bawi who were, by custom not open to redemption,
6. To freedom of action in relation to making his son Chief within his land,
7. To freedom of action in relation to all kinds of bawi who constituted the means whereby the Chief could cultivate and acquire the ability to sustain his village in peace and in war time, and
8. Proprietary rights over lands. It was a fact that the chief had the right over the life and death of his subjects.

The Mizo Chief also had a number of Bawi. These bawi were dependent upon the Chief. On the other hand, much of the position of the Chief depended

103 A.G Mc Call, op.cit., p.121.
on the bawi custom, which had been an institution of dependence of certain categories of bawi, namely Inpuichhung Bawi, Chemsen Bawi and Tukluh Bawi.

The first type Inpuichhung Bawi means, literally, a slave within the main house or Indwelling Bawi. ‘In’ being ‘house’, ‘pui’ means ‘main’, ‘chhung’ within and ‘bawi’ almost equivalent to ‘slave’. This type of bawi was applied to person(s) who, driven out by want of food and shelter or because of sickness, took refuge in the Chief’s house. Orphans and widows who were unable to support themselves and had no relatives willing to do so, formed the bulk of this class of bawi. These bawi would work for the chiefs. The bawi would remain under the control and protection of the Chief till their death or they could regain freedom by paying a freedom price of Sepui or she Mithun. These bawi were always treated well by the Chief and were to some extent regarded as one of the members of the Chief’s family.

The second category of bawi was called Chemsen bawi who were applied to criminals. The term ‘chem’ being a ‘dao’ and ‘sen’ means ‘red’ or short a ‘murderer’. Such a person would seek refuge in the Chief’s house. Once he entered the Chief’s house, he got immunity against punishment. Thereafter he became the property of the Chief and nobody could touch a Chief’s property. He had to work for the chief. Mc Call wrote –

This kind of chemsen bawi was under no obligation to work for the chief but the measure of submission was great in that the chief acquired the right to the marriage price of his chemsen bawi daughters, when they came of marriageable age.

---

104 Ibid., p.122
105 J. Shakespeare, op. cit., p.46.
*Tukluh bawi* was applied to person who, during war, had deserted the losing side and joined the victorious Chief by promising he and his descendant would be bawi. These bawi were comparatively free and were permitted to live in separate house. They could also regain their freedom by paying the required fee, that is, Sial or mithun.

In addition to bawi, there were also a number of *sal or captives*. Sal were applied to persons who were captured in war and raids. The position of Sal was quite different from that of any classes of bawi. Sal were the personal property of the Chief. Sometimes, a chief, who was defeated in war, was captured as Sal, but was usually let free and permitted to return to his village after war. The release of Sal taken in war depended entirely on the goodwill of the owner, that is - Chief.

Generally, children were taken as Sal or captives and were released when became mature. The following quotation reiterates:

*As a rule only children and marriageable women were taken captive and latter were disposed of in marriage, the lucky captor acting in Loco Parentis and taking the marriage price. The children grew up in the captor's house as his children, and as a rule were so well treated that they seldom wished to return to their former homes*\(^\text{107}\).

The Chief had always a very vital relationship with his people. The Chief looked after all the villagers as his own children. He had to help them in their achievements and punish them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or infringement of established customs. The villagers, in their turn, were to obey his orders implicitly, carry out errands assigned to them individually and

\(^{107}\text{J. Shakespeare, op. cit., p. 49.}\)
collectively and helped the Chief in all possible ways. It must however be mentioned that the Lushai chief was not an autocrat, and in fact, could not afford to be so if he desired to retain Chiefship as they would leave him and take shelter under a different Lushai Chief in another village if they found him tyrannical or indifferent to their needs and conveniences. The Chief was also fully conscious of his indirect but very potent control on him and to keep himself reproach transacted the business of his day to day administration of the village through his council of elders or Upas.

It may thus be said that this made it possible for the Mizo to bring about a balance in the power relation in the society which brought about peace in the society. It is also seen that the relationship between the Chief and people depended very much on the Chief’s role connecting the regulation of the activities of the people as well as the customs which could not be infringed even by the Chief.

Thus, in conclusion, the traditional administration of the village by the Sailo Chiefs was systematically arranged and closely related to absolute monarchy in character. The Chief was all in all in the traditional administrative system but in diplomacy and matters relating to external relations with other chiefs he was assisted by a set of high officials known as Upas. This process continued even after the coming of the British into the Lushai Hills. The Sailo dynasty ruled for 450 years till its abolition of chieftainship in 1955108.

The picture that emerges out of the discussion presented above is that state formation among the Mizos took place in the form of Chieftainship. It also shows that the pace of tribal state formation and maturation in different parts of

---

the world has been uneven spatially. However, since the beginning of the establishment of Chieftainship, a strong patriarchal gender relations appeared to have become established by the time major migration process was over and Mizo settled in the present homeland.

2.6 Women in Mizo Society

One of the best way to understand the spirit of a civilization, to appreciate its excellences and realize its limitation is to study the history of the position and status of women in it. The analysis of the status of women in Mizo society, therefore may be appropriately be prefaced by a brief historical study of the status of women in the society. From the earlier records and writings, it is very clear that historians have paid little importance on women’s life. This may be due to the patriarchal dominance of the society.

In a patriarchal societies all over the world, an elderly male member of the family is considered to be the head of the household. A male symbolises power and authority in the household structure, while a woman by and large is treated as subordinate to the male in her various roles as wife, sister, daughter and even mother. The male is expected to protect and look after the family. As a head of a family, he assumes responsibility for the social, physical and integrative needs of the household.

‘Nature assigned unequal roles to the two sexes in procreation. Although the mother-child bond is emphasized in the final analysis a woman is only receptable, an instrument for the perpetuation of the line of her child’s father. Thus, the mother’s role is explicated in a manner that excludes her from the line
of shares of blood and property. This quotations clearly explain the position of women in patrilineal society. Mizo society is a patriarchal/patrilineal society where hereditary and lineage pass through the males only. The family is what anthropologist term as patrilocal families. The father’s entire property was distributed among the sons. As a rule, neither wives nor daughters could inherit the father’s property. Even in the case of absence of male children, the nearest male relative would inherit the father’s property. However a daughter or a wife could rightfully inherit when there was no rightful male heir.

Like most other societies, in Mizo society women are by nature inferior to men. In the past the status and position of women in the society were not only lower but far more precarious than their male counterparts. Here, it can be said that the role of culture is very important in determining the position of women in the society. Previous research works shows that traditional Mizo society as a homogeneous society, where there was no social division. Every individual was said to enjoy certain prerogatives and had their own responsibilities to perform in different social functions and activities. But being a patriarchal society, the dominance of male and the inferior position of the womenfolk was conspicuous in the society.

During the traditional period, the dominance of patriarchy had its roots in the family. The father, being the head of the family exercised an autocratic dominance by enslaving his wife and other members of the family. Despite this, it was the duty and responsibility of a wife to look after the household affairs, but without being given any authority, as she had to submit herself to her

109 Leela Dube, Women and Kinship (Comparative perspective on Gender In South and South East Asia), United Nations University Press, Delhi, 1997, p. 77.

110 C.L Hminga, The life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram, Serkawn, Mizoram, 1988, p. 27.

111 N.E Parry, op.cit., pp. 85,88.
husband and endure, howsoever wretched her condition was. Thus, Woman’s life in the family was restricted and the demand by the family only enabled her to exert her place in the family.\footnote{Sangkima, Position and Status of Women in the Traditional Mizo Society in NEIHA, 9th Session, Guwahati, 1988, p. 294.}

This proved to be very true in the Mizo society. Although there was no class division in the society, Gender division was clearly seen in the family, social and economic aspect of the society. In the traditional Mizo society, there used to be a large sexual division of labour. The men concentrated themselves on defence and hunting due to the constant inter-village wars and only men were involved in wars. Most of the time, they engaged themselves outside the house. Whereas Women are responsible for all domestic works. From early childhood, a female child in a Mizo family engages herself in many household activities. She helps her mother in cooking, baby sitting and drawing of water etc. The female child continued to exist in the family constellation while the male child, by custom and convention, had to move very early in his life to the ‘Zawlbuk’ discipline.\footnote{Mizo Women Today, TRI, Aizawl, 1991, pp. 7,8} From this, we can say that since childhood, in their household the responsibility of the female child was much higher than the male child but without having any authority.

The following quotation clearly vindicated the position of the Mizo women in the family as they remarked:

‘Women rise at dawn, while the men sleep, on coaxing up the fire, they start to hand the rice, already dried overnight, even before dawn, as the women systematically pound the rice in the wooden, hand
fashioned mortars...after waking up their men folk...will make their way
down to the water supply"114.

Further:

'A Lushai woman has to rise early, fill her basket with empty bamboo
tubes and trudge off before daylight to the spring, which is generally
some way down the hill. Having conveyed her basketful to the house,
she has to work cleaning the rice for the day. The necessary amount of
unhusked rice has been dried on the previous day on the shelf over the
hearth, and this she now proceeds to pound in a mortar in the front
verandah, and window on an oval bamboo till it is clean enough for
use. The breakfast of rice has then to be cooked and by the time it is
ready, her husband is awake"115.

The lines quoted clearly explain the heavy responsibility of women in
their household when men hardly have anything to do. Men did not participate
in running the household and domestic work. What is considered as a woman’s
work will not be touched even in jest by a man"116. The main reason for them to
act like this was because they were afraid of being dubbed as hen-pecked which
was the most shameful title for a man and thus would never lift their fingers to
help their wives in any domestic work"117.

114 A.G McCall, op.cit., pp.172,173.
115 J.Shakespeare,op.cit., p. 16.
117 C.L Hminga , op.cit., p. 27.
Agriculture was the main occupation and Jhumming or swiddening was the method of cultivation which demanded strenuous labour. In some instances, men and women worked together but division of labour between sexes was firmly established. Men were also involved in the jhum work but they concentrated on clearing the jungle, harvesting and transferring the harvests the selection of cultivation site was done by male alone. Women did a lot of hard work to procure their daily necessities. They had to begin right from clearing the jungle, sowing seeds, regularly cleaning the weeds, harvesting and transferring harvest from jhum to home. Women were also the ones to grow the vegetables. They had to carry all the jhum work implements and on the way back they to carry firewood and food for the animals while the men and returned empty handed. Thus, the division of labour was such that the women could not claim leisure at all. Even during her pregnancy all the household activities rested solely on her and she had to perform all her ordinary household activities, the very day after her delivery. Therefore, in the economic sphere, it has been observed that most of the manual and non-technological work is done by women. In the reproduction process of the economy the role of women is not properly recognised. Only child bearing, rearing and domestic activities have been considered as natural jobs for women. But it is peculiar to note that this crucial reproduction and home caring function is considered by the society as non-productive, non-economic and feminine. The traditional socio-economic culture has legitimised this outlook by sustaining the gender relationship of

---


120 A.G McCall, op.cit., pp. 172,173.
dominance and subordination. Thus, since the women were busy from dusk to dawn, women often do not have all their time and energy and this gives dependency of women on men. Hence in case of death husband or desertion or divorce, they are often rendered destitute.

Domestication of animals was a very important economic activity of the Mizo society. Here also we see more of women’s responsibility than men. It was a necessity for every household to domesticate animals since they need it for religious, festivals, feast and even bride price. Poultry farming, animal husbandry was a common practice to support their needs and men never helped their women in this matters. And when these animals were killed it was the men to be invited for the feast. Among the domesticated animals, the most valued is mithun and wealth and prosperity of a man is considered by the number of mithun he keeps. Women were the one to work harder for the survival of their family, yet their hard labour was not recognised.

The art of making pottery and weaving was also the sole charge of womenfolk which required various craftsmanship and skills. Pottery was made by hand and the size varied according to the purpose for which they were intended. Women alone did this work. Besides this, every women was expected to know the art of weaving as it was their responsibility to provide clothing for their family and there was a competition among the girls as women who could weave beautifully was held in high esteem and considered to be industrious. Women who failed to do this work properly were considered to be

---


122 K.Zawla, op.cit., p.133.


lazy and irresponsible. Thus, every household was like a home based industry. The art of weaving also made the village society a self-sufficient unit. Practically, they were in charge of all the domestic duties.

Smoking of ‘tuibur’ (Nicotine water) was a common practice among the Mizos for the purpose of socializing. It was necessary for all the Mizo girls to provide sufficient ‘Tuibur’ to all her visitors. ‘Tuibur’ is a liquid form of tobacco which is produce in a special pipe in which smoke passes through water which was filled with nicotine and ashes. And this production required the capacity to smoke endlessly which proved to be very hazardous for health. Even if a woman might not like to smoke, she had to do it as women who failed to keep tuibur was liable to adverse criticism, and a good reputation is one of the most valuable assets for an unmarried girl. For married women, it could even result in their being divorce.

The low status of women in Mizo society could be seen in the family. Father was considered to be the head of the family and women had no say in family matters. There are sayings like, ‘Women and old fences can be replaced’, ‘Flesh of a crab is no meat; word of the women is no word’, ‘Wisdom of a woman do not cross beyond the village water point’ and ‘Unthreatened wife and unthreatened grass of the fields are both unbearable’. In a family, men hardly spoke to their wives and they infrequently conversed together. The wives were rarely consulted and knew little of their husbands affairs. On the contrary, in the Southern part of Mizoram among the Lai and Mara, it is recorded that the father was only

---

125 Ibid., p. 9.
theoretically the head of the family while the women often acted as supreme inside the house. And for the Mara women, it was normal to express her opinion and to involve herself in her husband’s affairs\(^\text{129}\). One unique feature we find is that among the Lai clan, Women who were unable to fight against their husbands were not regarded good wives and were called cowards\(^\text{130}\). Therefore, the status of women differed according to clan and in this regard, Mara and Lai women seemed to enjoy higher status in the family.

Patriarchy generally separate the women from natal homes after their marriages to which they have no claim. The ideal of patriarchal family is that it should comprise of conjugal (husband-wife) as well as filial (parent-child) dyads. The institution of endogamous marriage and the event of child bearing are considered absolutely essential for family life. Likewise, Mizo women joint the family of her husband at the time of her marriage. The state of being away home and a near stranger in one’s marital home, renders women easy objects of male control and authority\(^\text{131}\). A very unfortunate practice the Mizo women had to face is the system of divorce. A man could simply divorce his wife by saying, ‘I divorce you’ and the women had to leave the house with her personal belongings of\(^\text{132}\). However, the case of men who divorced their wives was more common than women who left their husbands. As such, they have old proverb which says, ‘*Hmeichhia leh palchhia chu thlak theih ani*’, Which means ‘worn out fencing and a women can be replaced’. This proverb became a popular saying and might have been coined out by men in order to justify their behaviour. Besides this discrimination, Women were also subjected to domestic

\(^{129}\) N.E Parry, op.cit.,pp.276,277.

\(^{130}\) Pawi Chanchin, TRI, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1988, pp. 50-51.

\(^{131}\) V.Geetha Theorizing Feminism, *Patriarchy*, Krishnaraj Maithreyi (ed), Stree, Kolkata, Reprint 2009,p. 82

violence and other hardships they had to face beatings and other abuse especially if the husband was a drunkard. Hardly people interfere since they did not want to get involved but if the women sought refuge in the neighbours house then it became the responsibility of the owner of that house to defend her from her husband. Thus, it can be assumed that married life was not a pleasant one for many women and the position of women in the family was very unstable and insecure and were also the one to be discriminated against. In many of the household where the husband is an alcoholic, or in houses where the head of the household is a widow, the woman maintains the house efficiently. In spite of all this, the status of women in the earlier Mizo society is economically, socially and politically very low.

The most important period in the life of a girl is that which precedes her marriage. Her most important task is to make no distinction whatsoever among her suitors. Courtship or ‘nula rim’ as it is called, is an institution which is necessary for marriage. Girls have to behave very politely with boys and would not show an unhappy look even if they do not like any one of them. This shows that the girl did not enjoy the freedom to express her feelings. If a man was not happy with the girl, he would go back to the zawlbuk, collect his friends and tear down the verandah of the girls house. Even the chief could not say anything in this matter. The girl’s father then had to give them a pot of beer to appease their anger. A man enjoyed the freedom to show his preference to any girl but a girl could not show any preference to a man. It was also believed that when they died, on their way to Pialral, a man called Pawla would try to shoot everyone with a catapult. He however would not shoot anyone who had had a physical


134 N.E Parry, op.cit., p. 57.
relationship with a women, and a woman who was still a virgin\textsuperscript{135}. Due to this belief, a boy would try to have sexual intercourse with a girl in order to escape Pawla's catapult while it was derogatory for a girl to have pre marital sex and could earn a bad name or disgrace could even effect her life after death\textsuperscript{136}. Therefore, they expect the woman to be pure and sexually clean and for a man having pre marital sex was some considered to be manly and something to be proud of. However difficult or unfair the expectation was, Women always had to follow the norms which the male values of the society expected of her.

One noticeable fact is that the girl had no right to inherit her father's property unless there is no male heir. It is clear that marriage practices express distinctive forms of patriarchal power, for all marriage forms affirm and reproduce male rights to property, heed the authority vested in male kin\textsuperscript{137}. Regarding Mizo women, Chapman wrote, 'A woman has no right at all. Body, mind and spirit she belonged from her birth to her death, to her father and her husband. Her menfolk could treat her liked and a man who did not beat his wife was scorned by his friends as a coward\textsuperscript{138}. Thus, Patrilineal and kin arrangements are varied and these too have important consequences for women status.

In their social life, group activities was a very common practice. The social activities were mostly in the form of ceremonies and festivals. Ceremonies were conducted in times of birth, illness, marriage death and when they conduct a successful raid. Mizo women also took active part in these ceremonies and they participated in the various festivals like mimkut, Chapchar

\textsuperscript{135} K. Zawla, op.cit., p. 137.

\textsuperscript{136} Tunhma Mizo Nunphung, TRI, Aizawl, 1992, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{137} V Geetha, op.cit., p. 82.

kut and Pawl Kut¹³⁹. On this kind of occasion, most of the work was done together and the girl could freely sing and dance with the boys. No restrictions were imposed upon the women even to the extent of indulging in drinking Zu¹⁴⁰. They had to take part on all the occasions whether they were interested or not. If they kept aloof from such activities, they would soon acquire a bad reputation and would have difficulty in finding a husband. Their reason for not attending the activities were not accounted for. Besides, it was considered shameful for a girl to be unhealthy or sick. Even if they had some illness, they would keep it secret and try to cover it up. A man would not marry a sick woman for fear of contacting other people’s diseases, nor would people share her domestic instruments like combs and baskets¹⁴¹. The main reason for this kind of attitude towards women was because such women who were sick could not work anymore and became a burden for others. Even though they were the vulnerable section, no help or treatment could be expected in their time of illness.

Gender discrimination was also clearly noticeable while welcoming the new born babies. When a child was conceived, they used to ask, ‘Fei nge Tuthlawh?’ which means spear or sickle instead of asking, boy or girl¹⁴². This practice was known since they were staying in the Kabaw valley. Spear referred to a boy and sickle referred to a girl. In those days, spear was used for raiding purpose and sickle for domestic work such as jhumming. Usually, a male child was blessed to be a good hunter or warrior while a female child was blessed to

¹³⁹ N.E Parry, op.cit., pp.90,91.
¹⁴⁰ Challiana, op.cit., p.36.
¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.15.
be a beautiful girl in order to win a huge marriage price. This wish indicated the division of labour and other responsibility since birth.

Hence, the absence of class division in the Mizo society may be because of the fact that the nature of society itself did not permit division based on caste or class. However, one could notice the division between men and women where the fate of women is linked to that of household, they identify themselves strongly with its welfare and yet the fear of losing its security generates special vulnerability. Episodes like widowhood, separation, abandonment are traumatic for women and bring drastic changes in their lives. Such women are accorded with lower prestige in a world of challenges. In the past, such women were not respected in the society and had to face difficult situations and hostility. The concept of womanhood as an independent person free to develop her personality was non-existent. The whole life of women was dovetailed on and around men and within domesticity and they were not identified as heads of the households. In no way was she allowed to interfere in the public sphere except on some occasion such as Chawngchen, Khuangchawi and Mitthirawplam. Women exclusively did the household activities such as cooking, drawing of water, pottery for household utensils, cotton works and feeding of domestic animals etc. Men were not supposed to interfere in these activities. Women were not allowed to enter but were kept for household work.

Thus, we can say that women contributed a lot and spent most of their time and energy in the smooth running of the society. Yet their hard labours remained invisible or unrecognized and they had no voice regarding the distribution of her family’s material good. It was only men who were regarded as decision makers and recognised as the productive in the family. This clearly shows the patriarchal dominance of the society. With a woman being deemed a single man’s property, her control over her children also loosened. Earlier
children inherited through their mother, rather than their father. But when women lost their exalted status in the household, the mother right too, gradually disappeared. Over a period of time, children learnt to identify their descent and inheritance through the father. By this time, the woman and her household had ceased to be central to the groups life. Now the man and his house and property assumed importance and men became valued group leaders. This is how patriarchy – the rule of the father- came into existence\(^{143}\).

In order to justify womens inferior position in society, Some scholars like Tiger and Fox (1972) Murdock (1949) Bowlby (1946, 1953) Parsons (1951) take shelter to biological explanation. They argue that it is biological characteristics that are at the root of women's subordination and basic sexual division of labour. Those justifying subordinate status of women in society on the natural basis, put forth their arguments on exclusive reproductive capacity of women, physiological weakness, and moral and intellectual inferiority. To them, it is the nature which places them at the second rank in the society\(^{144}\).

According to functionalist, the subordinate status of women emerges from the need of all societies of allocates different duties and responsibilities to their members. In their support, they assert that even in the primitive societies, the status of women is found to be inferior to men. Parsons (1955) vision of expressive female role as essential for family is simply a justification of the male dominance and device to relegate women to domestic roles. Murdock (1949) looks at the role of women in north western societies in terms of male dominated culture\(^{145}\).

\(^{143}\) V Geetha, op.cit., p. 58.

\(^{144}\) Cited in Dr.Ranjay Vardhan’s, Female Headed Households in Patriarchal Society, A sociological study,Indian publishers Distributors,Delhi, 1999, p. 5.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., p. 6.
Marxist believed that the main reason for the inferior position of women is the change in the system of mode of production or the mode of reproduction. Earlier the woman was the centre of communist household but things changed when human communities settled in one place for a long time. Gradually as groups accumulated wealth, the relationship between men and women changed, for all the wealth was a result of production of a male activity. Domestic work and the household, where women had wielded authority over and the group in general, lost its significance.

However, Uma Chakravarty’s suggestive essay and her re-working in The life and times of Pandita Ramabai, indicate that feminity in the Indian context may be understood as an ethic that women had to practice. If they do not, they failed to achieve transcendence, they remain locked in their low, given natures. She says that they are persuaded to view themselves as capable of greater virtue than what their nature allows them. This hold true in the Mizo context also where women always had to follow the norms which the male values of the society expected of her.

But when Christianity reached Mizoram, many of their beliefs and practice were slowly changing. Christianity does not emphasize marriage as a woman’s sole destiny and taught women to have an independent moral entity and responsibility too. For this reason we can say that Christianity brings more freedom to women than men. A Mizo woman is now legally entitled to hold property half of which is in any case, built up through her labours. The Christian missionaries and the introduction of education opened new opportunities for the Mizo people. They opened schools and encouraged the people to take up western education. The absence of education amongst the women in the earlier

---

146 V. Geetha, op.cit., pp. 56,57.
147 Ibid., p.93.
period was mainly responsible for their low status in the society. It is now realized that girls must also get education in order that the whole nation might march together. Mizo women are now coming up in almost every sphere of human activities\textsuperscript{148}.

In order to enforce their position and status in all works of life, a few voluntary organizations have been set up and formed, such as- Hmeichhe Tangrual Pawl (16\textsuperscript{th} July, 1946), Mizoram Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (6\textsuperscript{th} July, 1974), Puitu Hmeichhe Pawl (1976), and Young Women Christian Association (June, 1986) etc. All these associations contribute immensely for the welfare of the people. The principles and objectives of these associations are mostly to upgrade the position and status of women in every possible aspect\textsuperscript{149}.

Today, the privileges of women in the Mizo society is improving and increasing due to Christianity. A woman social outlook has become much wider. Valuable services have been rendered by them in the society. Even in political field, a Mizo women has risen to such a position now that she even contested for and become Member Of Legislative Assembly and rose to a position of Ministers\textsuperscript{150}. However, one could say that women have played indispensable roles in traditional Mizo society. But in spite of the activities, roles, responsibilities and position women held in Mizo society, the man in pre-colonial Mizo society was still the head of the family as well as the leader of the society as society was purely patriarchal in nature. The man still played the controlling agent in the family, women played supporting roles to the men, and the roles of women was complementary to men.

\textsuperscript{148} Mizo Women Today, op.cit., p. 20.

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., pp.5,6.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., p. 4.