

**HISTORY OF FUNERAL TRADITION IN PRE-COLONIAL  
MIZO SOCIETY**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**BY  
LALCHHANHIMA**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & ETHNOGRAPHY  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY : AIZAWL  
2015**

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### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “History of Funeral Tradition in Pre-Colonial Mizo Society,” submitted by Lalchhanhima in fulfillment of Master of Philosophy is an original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for other degree. It is recommended that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

Supervisor

Dated: 29.5.2015  
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## **Declaration**

I, Lalchhanhima, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “HISTORY OF FUNERAL TRADITION IN PRE-COLONIAL MIZO SOCIETY” is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in other Universities or Institutes.

This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the Degree of Master of Philosophy.

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Lalchhanhima

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## Introduction

Mizoram is situated on the eastern most Frontier of the North eastern region of India. It lies between 21.50' and 24.35' North and 92.15' and 93.29' East. The geographical area of Mizoram is 21,081 square kilometers.<sup>1</sup> According to Statistical Handbook of Mizoram the population is 10,91,094. It is bounded by two International boundaries- Bangladesh on the West and Burma on the east and south, and state boundaries on the north by Assam and Tripura and in the North East by Manipur state. The whole state is divided into eight districts, namely Aizawl District, Champhai District, Kolasib District, Lawngtlai District, Lunglei District, Mamit District, Saiha District and Serchhip District.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Historical Background

#### 1.1 Defining Mizos

Mizo is a generic term and to be more precise, it is an umbrella term under which the tribes were given various nomenclatures by their neighbors and colonial writers. They were mostly called Kuki, Chin, Lushai/Lushei, Pawi, Lakher, Hmar, Dzo etc. It is commonly believed that the Mizo belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group, based on the classification of South East Asian languages. These tribal groups have more or less the same tradition about their legendary homeland.<sup>3</sup> It is generally believed that the Mizos were among the offshoot of the Mogoloid stock, and in terms of language they were among the Tibeto-Burmanspeaking groups. The term Mizo is only a recent phenomenon and they had been split up into a number of tribes with distinct costumes and dialects.<sup>4</sup> Before the word Mizo was popular the term '*Lusei*' or '*Lushai*' was

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical Handbook, Mizoram, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Aizawl, 2012, p. xi x

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xv-xvi

<sup>3</sup> Lalzarzova, *Migration of the Mizo Tribe: A brief Overview* in *Mizo Narratives: Account from Mizoram*, (ed.s.), Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii p.17

<sup>4</sup> Sangkima, *Essay on the History of the Mizos*, p.19

mostly significant among any Mizos.<sup>5</sup>The major tribes/clan of the Mizos are Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Mara, Lai, Paite, Kuki etc.<sup>6</sup>Thus, the term Mizo referred to all the ethnic divisions of both Mizoram and outside the state. In general sense Mizo is used to include all the different divisions of the tribe settling in Burma, Manipur, Assam, Tripura etc. who are akin to Mizos in matter of languages, customs, culture and mode of living.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 Early Migration and settlement

F.S.V Donnison on the 'History of Burma' stated that, 'Of the indigenous peoples the great majority are of Mongoloid stock. All these people originated somewhere in the high table land of Central Asia and arrived in Burma as a result of population movements southward, driven by pressure from behind, or attracted by the prospect of milder climates and more fertile land'.<sup>8</sup>Mizos belong to the Mongoloid race of the Tibeto-Burman group. Historical perspective shows that their physical structure, culture and habitat had similarity with those of the tribes of Burma. There is a common belief that the Mizos originally came from 'Chhinglung', located in Falam sub division of the Chin Hills District of Burma. The literal meaning of 'Chhinglung' is 'Covering Rock' which perhaps may be a place now called Sinlung in China bordering Shan state in the east. Mizo mythology asserts that their original home was in the heart of China or Burma and other held it in Mongolia.<sup>9</sup>

It is believed that the Mizos were the offshoot of the "Ch'i-ang" as known by the Chinese, who had speak the Tibeto-Burman group of language. From Mekhong and Yangste this Tibeto- Burman speaking group moving along the boundary of Tibet and entered the Northern end of Burma.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to say when and how the

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<sup>5</sup>Orestes Rosanga, Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, *The Socio-Economic History of the Mizos in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, p.9

<sup>6</sup>Larzova, *op.cit*, pg.17

<sup>7</sup>Orestes Rosanga, *op.cit*, p.9

<sup>8</sup> F.S.V Donnison in M.phil unpublished dissertation, Prof. O. Rosanga, *The Socio-Economic History of the Mizos in the Second Half of the Nineteenth century*, p.13.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>10</sup>B.Lalthangliana, *MizoChanchin*, p.3

Mizos reached the plains of Burma. It is believed that during the initial period of migration, they might not have been divided into clans or groups. The first wave of movement included the various groups like Pyu, Arakanese, Kachin and many other smaller tribes. The second and third waves include Shans or Tais, Kare, Mon-Khmer and others. Mizo tribes were believed to be included in the first wave of movement and seemed to have entered Burma along one of the river valleys. They further turned towards the west into the upper reaches of the Chindwind River sometime in the early centuries of the Christian era.<sup>11</sup> From the Chindwind river valley they moved westward to the Kabaw valley which is called as 'Kawlphai' by the Mizos 800-ought 850 A.D. Due to the long period of unstable movement and migration along with the threat posed by recurring raid from enemies, their way of life and culture had greatly affected during this settlement.<sup>12</sup> During those days, the Mizos were said to have settled side by side with the Burmese, and had a close contact with them.

### 1.3 Migration to the Chin Hills

Soon after they left the Khampat area (Mynmar), the Mizos moved toward the north and northwest. At this stage of mass migration, they might be followed a clan-wise or group wise movements. Some of the groups moved directly and indirectly through the Chin Hills till they reached the present Manipur. They were Zous, Paites, Simtes and the Haokip of the Thadou clan. The large group moved into the extreme south Chin Hills of Mynmar where most of them set their settlement at Tiddim, Falam and Haka and still others moved further to Zotung, Matupui and the Mara areas up to the southernmost areas of the present Mizoram. The other group which consisted of Pautu, Hualngo, Khawlhing, Darlong, Hmar, Thadou, Gangte and other allied clans moved westward after crossing the Tiau river and finally entered Mizoram then Lushai hill.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Lalzarzova, *op.cit.*, p.21

<sup>12</sup>B.Lalthangliana, *Op.cit.*, p.p4-5

<sup>13</sup>Lalzarzova, *op.cit.*, p.21.



The other groups Lusei, Ralte, Chawngthu, Khiangte, Hauhnar, Chuaungo, Chuaungang, Ngente, Punte, Partete etc. also moved into the Chin Hills. They stayed in the areas of Thantlang and Run River at around 1250-1400 A.D. They left the Thantlang and Run area and moved toward Lentlang and Tiau area and reached there at around 1450-1700 A.D.<sup>14</sup> In the area of Chin Hills, they established a village settlement and most of them mainly lived in clans. The geographical topography of the Chin Hills made it inconvenient to build a big town or village, therefore living in groups and clans was made imperative. This led to lesser chances of intercommunication between the various clan based-villages. As they lived in separate villages each chief developed their own way of village administration and made their own laws. This further led them into independent societies and each started their own separate entity.<sup>15</sup>

It was during this period that the Mizos commenced their religious belief system. Their religious practice and sacrifices were also very simple and elementary. Moreover it was a remarkable period when the *Lusei* and other cognate clans came under the rule of chiefs. Earlier, they were without chief to organize proper administration and to settle their internal and external problems. At the request of the people, Zahmuaka accepted the invitation for the position of the *Lusei* Chief. His sons six of them, Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluah, Thangura, Rivunga and Rokhuma continued to rule over different villages. Amongst them, the descendants of Thangura, later known as Sailo chiefs/clan became the most powerful and most popular chief even after they settled in the present Mizoram.<sup>16</sup>

#### 1.4 Migration and Settlement in the Lushai hill present day Mizoram

According to Sangkima, one of the eminent author of Mizo history, the migration of the Mizos from Burma took place in three phases and as such they were

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<sup>14</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Culture*, p.6

<sup>15</sup> Lalzarzova, op.cit.p.23.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24

identified under three names as 'Old-Kuki,' 'New- Kuki,' and the 'Lushais'.The first batch included Hrangkhawl, Darlawng, Biate or Hmar clan with their offshoots who moved into the present Mizoram thenceforth into Cachar and Tripura. The Raja Chachang who was the the military commander of DhanyaManikya, said to have flourished about A.D 1512. During his reign quarrel arose between him and the *Kukis* over the possession of a white elephant. The kukis occupied the deep forest lying to the East of Tripura and the West of *Lushai* Hills. The Rajamal, the chronicle of the Tripura Rajas also mention the Kukis. Ther is also evidence to indicate that the Mizos under the name *Kukui*, had already arrived in Tripura late in the twelfth century A.D.<sup>17</sup>

The second batch being the new *Kukis* who following the same route of the Old-Kukis, Sangkima has asserted that they were not far behind the Old Kukis, said to arrived in the land between fourteenth and fifteenth century A.D.<sup>18</sup>

The last batch were the *Lusei* consisted of many sub-divisions and clans, who were believed to have migrated into Mizoram beginning from the second half of the seventeenth century which might have continued till the beginning of the nineteenth century A.D

The *Luseis* were the last group who moved across the *Tiau* River into the present Mizoram. Even after settling in the present hills their rival cognate groups, especially the *Pawi* of the Chin Hills of Burma continued to annihilate the *Lusei* clan. The *Pawi* chiefs often looted the *Lusei* villages and demanded tributes from the *Lusei* chiefs. To protect themselves from the attack of the *Pawis*, the *Sailo* Chiefs decided to live together in one place and founded a large town at *Selesih* in about 1740 A.D which comprised of seven villages located in the eastern part of the present Mizoram. This combined village was ruled by a senior chief named *Kawla*. Due to the

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<sup>17</sup> Sangkima, *op.cit.*, pp52-53

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.53

inadequacy of land for cultivation and for want of better livelihood, the heyday of *Selesih sangsarih* met its end around 1750 A.D.<sup>19</sup>

The *Luseis* who were settled in *Selesih* town scattered again into various parts of the present Mizoram and its neighboring areas under the dominance of the Sailo chieftainship. The Sailo chief became the undisputed rulers and successfully outnumbered most of their rivals from the present Mizoram and its nearby places until the arrival of the British in Mizoram in the Lushai Hills. By and large during this period the Lusei administrative system, agriculture, customs, livelihood, religious beliefs and practice progressed in a more systematic way.<sup>20</sup>

With the absence of written records, it is difficult to point out the definite timeline of their migration and settlement in different areas. According to Prof. O. Rosanga in his Mphil, unpublished dissertation “The socio Economic History of the Mizos in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century” he had asserted that, the Mizos migrated from Mongolia via China to Burma due to several pressure from behind, especially by the Chin, under such circumstances the Mizo had passed through the Chndwind Valley and the Chin Hills and entered the present hills by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while dealing with the phases of migration of the Mizo tribe into the present hills, what is important to be note here is that the tribe comprised of several clans and ethnic divisions under the term Mizo and considering the abovediscussions it is the fact that to note that some ‘Old Kuki’ tribe had reached the present Hills probably by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. As noted above it is clear that the various Mizo clans entered Mizoram in different stages, at different time and periods. The mainstream of the Mizo led by the Sailo chiefs entered the present Hills of Mizoram in the year around 1700 A.D along with some of the Hmar, Ralte Lai,

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<sup>19</sup> Lalzarzova, *op.cit.*, p25

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25

<sup>21</sup> Orestes Rosanga, *op.cit.*, p.15

Paite, Mara etc. They established villages on the top of various hills, and gradually spread out all over the present Hills of Mizoram.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Mizo Society in Pre-Colonial period

### 2.1 Social life of the Mizos

The practice of shifting cultivation forced the Mizos to shift from one place to another. The whole village had to move in search of more productive lands. But they were very particular in making a new village which was not an easy task. They chose the steepest and most inaccessible hills to build their villages; which were mostly opted because of its impregnable stronghold combined with a good water supply and water hole which would not dry up in hot season. Having found a suitable settlement the village was planned with a sense of orderly designs. As far as practicable the houses were arranged in two lines facing each other with a wide space or street in between with the Chief's house built in the village. *Thenzawlbuk* or a men's dormitory was built just near to the Chief's house. And then the house of the *Upas* or adviser clustered together nearby the Chief's house. Generally the Mizos were migratory tribe and they did not build strong houses. The houses were constructed in one uniform platform, raised some three or four feet from the ground, most of them used bamboo and ordinary saplings for the posts(pillars), and the floors were bamboo matting. For the roof they used leaves of local species like *di*, *thilthek*, *siallu*, *laisua*, etc.<sup>23</sup>

The system or form of marriage among the Mizos right from the inception was marriage by purchase. This means girls were purchased by paying the price. The price varied from clan to clan. They were very careful in selecting partners and it was normally an arranged affair. In selecting a partner, parents exercised great care and looked into the family history as far as they could trace. After marriage ceremony was over the girl was escorted to her husband's house in the evening. On her arrival the

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<sup>22</sup>B. Lalthangliana, *History & Culture of Mizo*, p.34

<sup>23</sup>Sangkima, *op.cit.*,pp.68-69

bride was welcomed by offering *zū* followed by rites performed by priest. They prepared a public feast by killing fowls.<sup>24</sup>

Among the most remarkable social institution in the Mizo society was the *Zawlbuk* institution. *Zawlbuk* is a large house where all unmarried young men of the community sleep.<sup>25</sup> The *Zawlbuk* functioned as a sleeping place or dormitory for the youths and recreational center for married and unmarried men, it also trained and disciplined young boys and also served as an inn for travellers. The *Zawlbuk* institution served as a means of education for the youth in the society, it had shaped the youth into a responsible adult member of the society. The *Zawlbuk* administration was placed under the charge of a leader called the *Valupa*; the *Zawlbuk* fostered and nurtures a pure and uncorrupted life. The inmates of the *Zawlbuk* consisted of two distinct strata: senior and junior groups. The latter supplied the *Zawlbuk* with firewood and water.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most important characteristic features found in the Mizo social life was that of *Tlawmngaihna*, a moral discipline. According to B. Lalthangliana:

*“Utter meekness, humbleness, and self-effacement and to live and have their being for others is the core and essence of the true Mizo way of life. In olden day it made social and communal life pleasant. It gave comfort to and peace of mind to the worthless”.*<sup>27</sup>

A man who was unselfish, zealous, courteous, considerate, courage, industrious, kind, generous, preserving etc. was considerate to have the spirit of *tlawmngiahna*. Such person were honored by offering rice beer in a special cup made for it known as *tlawmgai No* at a special function organized for the purpose. This was the highest award in those days.<sup>28</sup> To attain the title *tlawmgai* was an esteem of every

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.69-70

<sup>25</sup>K.Zawla, *Mizo Pipute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin*, p.160

<sup>26</sup>B.Lalthangliana, *op.cit.*, pp.171-180

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p.178

<sup>28</sup>Sangkima, *op.cit.*, p.70

person in the society, it was because of this reason, in every aspects of the social life of the Mizos we have seen the act of *tlawngaihna*, which every person esteemed to achieve to earn *tlawmngaihna* to each other in the society.<sup>29</sup>

*Kut* or festival was one of the common features of the social life of the Mizos people and also served as an instrument of amusement in the society.<sup>30</sup> The different clans performed it with slight alterations marking the difference of the performance from one village to another. There were three kinds of *Kut*: *MimKut*, *Pawl Kut*, and *ChapcharKut*. It maybe conjectured that these *Kuts* had been observed while they were in Burma, specifically when they were in the valley between the *Run* river and the *Tiau* rivers. *MimKut* is the oldest of the three *Kut*, it is also known as *thitin*, which means the departure of the dead. In the past *Mimkut* was held in memory of the deceased. Fresh vegetables, maize, bread etc. were offered on this occasion in memory of the dead, normally it lasted three days. *Pawl kut* was a *Kut* held soon after the harvest as over. It was a sort of harvest thanksgiving. *ChapcharKut* is a contemporary of the *Pawl Kut*. It was set apart for adults only. This *kut* was held immediately after the *lo* (Jhum) cutting was over. Dances were one of the most important features of the social life of the Mizos and one of the principle amusements in a village. Dances were performed only on certain festivals and on other important occasions. The most outstanding and colorful dance of the Mizos is *Khualam*. The origin is not known but it was connected with a series of ceremonies ( *Khuangchawi*, *Thangchhuah*, *Kut* etc.) performed by a man to attain a position of distinction in the society. On *Khuangchawi* ceremonies, the concerned person or family would invite his father in law, if the latter lived in a different village, to perform the dance on this occasion. Another colourful and distinctive dance is *Cheraw Kan*. In *Cheraw* men sit facing one another holding the ends of bamboo in each hand on the ground, forming of squares. *Solakia* was another dance associated with hunting, in *solakia* men and women dance in a big circle to the accompaniment of drum beats and gong.<sup>31</sup> Among

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<sup>29</sup> James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* pp.256-257

<sup>30</sup> V.L Siama, *Mizo History*, p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> Sangkima, *op.cit.*, p.73

the dances *Chawnglaizawn* was performed at the funeral of a person from a well-to-do family. This was usually performed by youths both boys and girls of around four in number, the dance being accompanied by a set of gongs.<sup>32</sup>

All these dances were accompanied by different kinds of traditional songs and musical instruments. Besides gongs and drums, there are six indigenous Mizo musical instruments; they are *Tingtang*, *Phenglawg*, *Rawchhem*, *Bengbung*, *Lemlawi* and *Tuim Dar*.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.2 Village Administration and Social Stratification

In pre-colonial Mizo Society, the village was administered by the '*Lal*' or Chiefs, most of these Mizo chiefs belonged to the *Sailo* clan from the descendants of Zahmuaka, the son of Thangura- Tangmanga, the son of Thangmanga-Sailova, the *Sailo* Chiefs reigned in the present Hills till the advent of the British. Though there were also Chiefs of other clan but they were small in numbers. In the Eastern part of the Hills beyond Tuipural, the Hualngo Chiefs extended their Chieftainship and some Fanai Chiefs also consolidated their ascendancy in a few hills.<sup>34</sup> As AG Mc Call stated that the majority of the people in the North Lushai Hills are Luseis, traditional subjects of the ruling clan of *Sailo* chief while further south are more varied clans, akin to the inhabitants of the Chin Hills, and these include Pawis, Lakhers and Fanais.<sup>35</sup> Chieftainship was hereditary usually the youngest son ascended to the chieftainship and inherited all the property of his father. In matters of governance, the chief was assisted in his discharging the administration of the village by the '*Upa*' or his council of elders, these *upa* were selected by the *Lal*. They were mostly relatives of the *Lal* or whom he thought to be wise or whom the *Lal* thought to be his well-wisher. Among the *Upa* or council of advisers, the *Upa Min* was the most influential. He acted

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<sup>32</sup> R. Chaldailova, *Mizo Pipute Khawvel*, pp.207-208.

<sup>33</sup> Sangkima, *op.cit.*, p.74

<sup>34</sup> James Dokhuma, *op.cit.*, pp.147-150

<sup>35</sup> A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p.26

as a legal adviser to the Chief and shared in the glory of his chief. The chief was the most instrumental in maintaining law and order in the village. Being the supreme authority he was vested with judicial and political powers. Although, all powers rested in his hands in practice however, practically however he would never try a case without consulting his *Upas*.<sup>36</sup> The chief was the symbol of the tribe, the protector and the guardian of the community and his share of the spoils of the war was the largest.<sup>37</sup> All land belongs to the chief and the position of the chief was held by the same clan or family relation and was hereditary.

The next important personnel in the Mizo society was *Ramhual*, who has a privilege to choose a paddy before the general villagers have choose. The *Ramhual* were normally from a big family who earned rice and vegetables in extensive scale compared with the commoners. *Thirdeng* or the village blacksmiths were an important person in the Mizo village, it is a distinct works which require several tools, art of smiting metals, where all these were inherited from their parents, common people did not have the capacity to do such work, so they occupies an important position in the Mizo society. One village usually has one *thirdeng*, they were appointed by the *Laland* they were also commonly known as *Lalthirdeng*. There were instances where there were more than one *thirdeng* in a big village. *Tlangau* or the village crier, was in charge of the dissemination of the proceedings of the *Lal* and his council of elders as well the proceedings from the *Zawlbuk* to be announced among the common masses. The works of *tlangau* is often comparable to as a village servant, and was often seen as subordinate position in the society but without him the village could not function.<sup>38</sup> *Sadawt* was the most important person in the society, without him the core of the Mizo religion cannot be performed. He was considered as a priest who supervises sacrifices on behalf of the person to perform *Sakhua*. Each clan had their own *Sadawt*, among the different Mizo clans there were cognate clans who could share

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<sup>36</sup> K. Zawla, *op.cit.*, pp.147-150

<sup>37</sup> O. Rosanga, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, The Economic History of Mizoram 1900-1940, Dept of History University of Delhi, p.38 1990.

<sup>38</sup> James Dokhuma, *op.cit.*, pp.156-157



the *Sadawt* to each other known as “*Dawisakilzathei*”. The chief had his own *sadawt* and he was regarded as a leader among them, he performed the worship of *sakhuaon* all community worship which the village has to undergo. *Sawdawt* was assisted by *Tlahpawi*, in some cases *Sadawt* was substituted by *Tlahpawi* in the absence of *Sadawt*. *Bawlpu* is a person who has specialized in curing illness or sickness. He was consulted on every illness; he often used domesticated animals as a sacrifice for curing illness.<sup>39</sup>

Generally in Mizo society people who do not belong to the Chief's clan are usually termed as “*hnamchawm*” or commoners among the *hnamchawm* they classified each other on the basis of wealth where higher social standings were called “*mitha*” where low social standings are called “*michhia*”.

Among the Thados and Chins real slavery existed, and men and women were sold like cattle. Among the Lushais this has never been the case, but there was a class known as *Bawi* who have been miscalled slaves by those ignorant of their real condition. Among the Luseis no one but the chief can have a *Bawi*, they are: i) *Inpuichhung Bawi*: They are those who have been driven by want of food to take refuge in the chief's house. Widows, orphans and others who are unable to support themselves and have no relatives willing to do so, form the bulk of this class. The next class of *Bawi* are: ii) *Chemsen Bawi*: These are criminals who, to escape from the consequences of their ill deeds; take refuge in the chief's house. Murderers closely pursued by the avengers of blood rushed into the chief's presence and saved their lives at the expense of their own or their children's freedom. Thieves and other vagabonds avoid punishment by becoming the chief's *bawi*. *Chemsen Bawi* does not live in the chief's house or work for him. The last class of *bawi* are iii) *Tuklut Bawi*: These are persons who during war have deserted the losing side and joined the victors by promising that they and their descendants will be *bawi*. As a rule the daughters of the

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<sup>39</sup>Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, pp.9-11

*tuklutbawi* are not considered *bawi*. A *tuklutbawid* does not live in the chief's house, and is in most respects.<sup>40</sup>

Other than these classes of *Bawi* there were *Sal* or slave, they were persons captured in raids and their position was quite different to other classes of *Bawi*. They were the personal property of their captors. As a rule only children and marriageable women are taken captive, and the latter were disposed of in marriage. The children grew up in the captor's house as his children, and as a rule so well treated that they seldom wished to return to their former homes.<sup>41</sup> Every household was entitled to keep as many as *sal* as it could collect. Like *bawi* he could buy his freedom by paying a big ransom.<sup>42</sup>

### 3. Review of literature

As stated earlier, there seems to be no adequate research on funeral tradition and methods of disposing of the dead bodies in the pre-colonial Mizo Society. This area has not yet been explored and no formal research has been yet undergone pertaining to this area of study. Though we have come across few journals, books and articles where we can see some elaboration of Mizo culture but even works pertaining to Mizo Culture hardly highlighted the funeral tradition and burial practices of the early Mizos.

*The LusheiKuki Clans* written by Lt. Colonel J. Shakespeare deals with the domestic life, laws, customs and religion, folklore and language of the *Lusei* and the non- *Lusei* clans. This book provided us a glimpse Mizo culture and practices in the

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<sup>40</sup>J.Shakespeare, *The LusheiKuki Clan*, pp.45-48

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*,p.48.

<sup>42</sup>Sangkima, "Socio and Cultural History of the Mizo: An outline of Pre-Colonial Period" in *Pialral A Historical Journal of Mizoram*, Vol.V, Dec, 1995, p.47.

pre-colonial times; in chapter four the author had elaborated in brief the funeral ceremonies and the disposal of dead.

*The tribes of Mizoram, A Dissertation* published by Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram contains a brief description of six tribal groups namely the *Lusei, Lai, Mara, Ranglong, Riang, Chakma*. This dissertation elaborated in brief the history and culture of each clan who have somewhat similar culture, customs, and tradition. Here we can find the brief description of Funerary practices, death rituals and disposal of the dead among the four clans which were closely linked.

*Lushai Customs: A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* by N.E Perry focusing on the customs and ceremonies of the Lushai, in chapter four titled 'Funeral Ceremony' he gave a thorough description of the Lushai funeral ceremonies and some methods of disposal of the dead.

*Five Years in Unknown Jungles* by Reginald A. Lorrain discussed in detail the religious beliefs of the *Lakher*s, their ideas on death, religious and secular ceremonies and sacrifices. In a separate chapter entitled From Cradle to Grave he clearly highlighted the funeral tradition of the *Lakher*s, their conception of death and burial practices. This book is part a broad elaboration of the culture of the *Lakher*s where all the cultural traditions were closely linked and almost the same with other Mizo clans especially the *Lusei*.

*Wild Races of The Eastern Frontier of India* written by T.H Lewin highlighted the customs of the hill tribes. Part II discussed the religion, festivals, dresses, social habits etc. along with funeral ceremonies of the *Khyoungtha* and the *Chukmas*. In part he describe the customs of the *Kookies* or *Lusei* and the Shendus, here we find a brief description of Funeral ceremonies among the *Kookies, Lusei* and *Shendus*. This book clearly highlighted the close connection between the tribe in the North East Frontier in Culture and society.

Malsawmliana in his article ‘*Traditional Burial System of the Mizo*’ in Historical Journal Mizoram, Volume-XIV, precisely elaborated the traditional beliefs of the Mizo, their conception of death and life after death. He also highlighted the different types of death depending upon the cause of the dead. We find a brief description of the *Lusei* process of funerals and traditional burials of the Mizos. In this article the author emphasized the impact of Christianity on Mizo religion which has totally substituted the traditional religion of the Mizo within a short period of time.

*ZofateChanchin*, published by Hualngo Literature and Cultural Association, deals with the different aspects of pre-colonial Mizo culture. It also discussed in length the war between different clans, social life and village administration, religion and their conception of death. One chapter deals with death and the method of disposal of the death, Mizo custom on death, life after death and the memorial stones.

*Mizo- TeKhawsakPhung* published by Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl Mizoram is a well-documented book which provided us a glimpse into the social lives and tradition of the Mizo in the pre-colonial times. In one separate chapter we find the elaboration of the methods of disposing of the bodies and funeral ceremonies. This chapter also deals with the Mizo conception of man’s soul, life after death, different burials and the tradition of building memorial stone among the Mizos.

*Mizo Pi PuteLehAnThlahteChanchin* by K.Zawla is one of the finest works on Mizo history, which describe different Mizo tradition, customs, and ceremonies. In a separate chapter we find the elaboration of the Mizo concept of God, evil spirit, death and soul. Next to this chapter he highlighted the different kinds of grave and its uses, he also describe in length the ceremony and methods of disposing a deceased enemy killed in war. Apart from this, his works contains a brief description of Mizo religion and its attributed sacrifices where we can have a glimpse of Mizo conception of death and its connection with funerary tradition.

Rev. Liangkhaia in his book *MizoAwmdanHlui&MizoMiLehThilHmingthangteLehMizoSakhua* briefly describes Mizo death ritual, grave and burial system, he also emphasized the practice of

*'Thlaichhiah'* ceremony. Apart from this he had a clear description of the *'Kuangur'* tradition and ceremony practiced by chiefs and high social standings. Other chapters clearly elaborated the Mizo religion, sacrifices, and taboos & inter war between clans which gives us a glimpse of Mizo culture and society in the pre-colonial period.

#### 4. Structure of the Study

Throughout history and in every human society the disposal of the dead and its accompanying ceremonies or funerary tradition has been given special significance. The practice was originally motivated not by hygienic considerations but by ideas entertained by 'primitive' peoples concerning human nature and destiny. This assertion is clearly evident from the fact that the disposal of the dead from the earliest times was of a ritual kind. Death in some form has profoundly influenced the thoughts, emotions and actions of mankind. Death rituals, which include treating and preparing the body, disposing of the body and the religious and social behavior of close family and friends in mourning, vary depending on culture of religion. All of the actions performed during funeral rite hold strong symbolic value, and all societies respond to death with their own traditions. Death rituals are the expression of cultural attitudes, values and ideas. In all societies when a person dies, family, friends and neighbors respond in structured, pattern ways to the death. Cultural guidelines determine the treatment and disposal of the body and prescribe a period of mourning for close relatives. Death ritual, like much of a human behavior, is an expression of a cultural blueprint, of attitudes, values and ideas passed down by parents, and their parents, which an individual learns as a member of society. In the context of the Mizos to a great extent this ritual performance was a clear indication of their traditional religious beliefs.

The study of death and its related rituals have been hardly dealt by scholars of Mizo history. The underlying factor for this may be partly, due to the absence of written records and the scarcity of ethnographical writings. During the colonial period, the Mizos did not attract much attention from professional anthropologist. Most of the information and writings regarding the subject were rewritten from the accounts of the British ethnographers. We have found some ethnographical works from the British as part of an attempt to sensitize the culture of the tribes whom they encountered, but the available source materials are few and scanty. Even later Mizo writings have lacked the study of death and its related rituals this may be due to the absence of academic inspiration, heavily stressing on the conception of the afterlife. The focus on death practices and cultural system are also seen in some Mizo research papers. It may be note that the study of death and its related rituals are also within the purview of other fields of subject such as anthropology, sociology and psychology etc. These disciplines also played their own part in broadening the scope of history and are closely related to each other.

Although several notes were made by few colonial ethnographers, the pre-colonial Mizo society has been a neglected field of research. As there is hardly any full- fledged work on the stated topic, the study focuses on a broader approach and interpreted with new dimension by using existing print materials which is further supplemented by oral sources.

The dissertation is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter One:

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the historical background of the Mizos; the second section deals with the Mizo Society in pre-colonial period, and the third section consists of a review of existing literatures on the present are of study; the last section highlights the structure of the study.

Chapter Two:

This chapter illustrates the pre-colonial Mizo belief system and concept concerning death and the afterlife.

Chapter Three:

This deals with the explanation and meaning of rituals, and analyzed traditional funeral ceremonies. The second part highlighted the symbolic meaning of death rituals existed in the traditional Mizo society and the process in which the society was indubitably transformed into effective symbolic rituals.

Chapter Four:

The fourth chapter deals with the different burial practices and the methods of disposal of the dead; In this context the burial practices of the traditional head is discussed, reflecting the hierarchical valued of the society.

Chapter Five:

The last chapter is devoted to the summary of the research.

**Traditional Religious Beliefs of the Mizos: Death and Life after Death.**

*“Humans weave intricate intellectual webs of faith and imagination that relate them to the universe and to each other, and that express basic premises linking event to event, past to present. Religious beliefs, cosmologies, myths, and rituals are basic to our perceptions of time and space...”<sup>43</sup>*

## **Introduction:**

Death has always been both celebrated and feared as far back as 600000 B.C; man buried their dead with ritual and ceremony.<sup>44</sup> In every culture birth and death were given special significance, all human cultures struggle to deal with the inevitability and mystery of death. Most cultures conceptualize death as a transition, or rite of passage. In many cultures, this transition is seen as a journey to an ultimate destination that may culminate in rebirth, ancestral abode, reunion with nature or Divinity, or indeed total oblivion.<sup>45</sup>

This chapter will study the Mizo traditional religious belief surrounding death, dying and the perception of life after death and will club the traditional belief on death and life after death into the realm of Mizo traditional religion. This chapter will not give detailed explanation of Mizo traditional religion but will try to highlight its relationship with the Mizo traditional beliefs on death and the afterlife.

## **2.1 Mizo Traditional Religion**

As far as we know, all societies have possessed beliefs that can be grouped under the term religion. These beliefs vary from one society to another society and from time to time. Despite their varieties attempt has been made here to define *religion* as any set of attitudes, beliefs and practices pertaining to supernatural power, whether that power be forces, gods, spirits, or demons.

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<sup>43</sup> . Danile G. Bates & Elliot M. Fratkin (eds)., *Cultural Athropology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p.387.

<sup>44</sup> . [http://genealogy.about.com/od/cemetery\\_records/a/burial\\_customs.htm](http://genealogy.about.com/od/cemetery_records/a/burial_customs.htm). Accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2014, 9:30 p.m.

<sup>45</sup> <http://henry-a.com/apage/115917.php> Henry Abramovitch, *Anthropology of death*. Accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2014, 5:p.m.



For Emile Durkheim, religion is “a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called church, all those who adhere to them.”<sup>46</sup> Max Muller affirmed, “Religion consists in the perception of the infinite under such manifestations are able to influence the moral character of man.”<sup>47</sup> E.B Taylor, religion is, “the belief in spiritual beings.”<sup>48</sup> There is numerous definition of religion among scholars and anthropologist with divergent views. The task of defining religion may be an uneasy task. Religion consists of beliefs and practices. Anthropologists have always agreed on the importance of the practices but their treatment on the beliefs has been very different at different times.<sup>49</sup> In almost every human culture we saw the believed in the existence of supernatural beings that are very much more superior to human, who ruled over them, an omnipotent being and the creator of man of the universe. Such was also the case, and the relevance was seen while dealing with primal religion of the Mizos in the pre-colonial period. Durkheim identified a concern for the sacred as the central feature of religion. The sacred is extra human and mysterious; it therefore inspires awe and respect. A religion, is thus, a set of beliefs connected with the sacred, the spiritual the holy as opposed to the profane.<sup>50</sup> What we have to focus here is that, what does the word ‘traditional’, ‘primal’ ‘tribal’, ‘primitive’ conveys? While dealing with primal religion we can simply relate to the religion of the ‘primitive people’. This does not mean that by using the term traditional or primal religion, the adherents are in primitive stage of life as the European ethnographers understood them. However the word primitive is used to mean basic rather than primitive. This suggests that Mizo primal religion would mean the basic of religious beliefs and practices notwithstanding the way of life and standard of living that adhered to it.

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<sup>46</sup> . Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary forms of the religious life*, translated and with an introduction by Karen E. Fields, p.34.

<sup>47</sup> .R.R Marett “*Religion*” in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.XXIII(11<sup>th</sup> ed) Cambridge University Press, p.61 1911.

<sup>48</sup> Vide Annemario De Waal Malefijit, *Religion and culture: An introduction to Anthropology of Religion*, London The Macmillan Company, p.20.

<sup>49</sup> Lucy Mair, *An introduction to Social Anthropology*, p.211.

<sup>50</sup> Lewis A. Coser, Buford Rhea (et.al), *Introduction to Sociology*, p.308.

*The unending search of man for explanation of natural processes beyond his observation convinced him to feel the need to establish friendly and beneficial relations with the living reality thus overruling the mysterious phenomenon around him. Yet his search for the reality has no end. Instead the means, method and forms which have multiplied from age to age. There lies the origin of religion which was motivated by fear of the unknown but whose presence is felt through divine providence.<sup>51</sup>*

In line with this, the Mizo primal religion exhibits the same features with the above statement; it was a search for an unknown God. The Mizo traditional religious beliefs is estimated to originate during their settlement between Lentlang and Tiau, circa 1450-1700 A.D, prior to this period, they might have embraced some beliefs in god and other supernatural beings but it lost into oblivion during their settlement in this place.<sup>52</sup> During the Mizo settlement between Run and Tiau river; where they had developed a belief, a belief in the existence of supernatural being who is superior to human beings, a creator, protector, who is invisible. Such spirit was believed to be worshipped by their ancestor and this is supported by a chant which goes, “*Pi Biakin lo chhang ang che*”,*Pu Biakin lo chhangang che*”,<sup>53</sup> which means “(One) who is worshipped by grandmother answer (Us), (One) who is worshipped by grandfather answer (Us).<sup>54</sup> Therefore it can be said that the root of traditional Mizo religious beliefs was the search for an unknown God.

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<sup>51</sup> Sangkima, *op.cit*, p.107.

<sup>52</sup> B.Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, p.332.

<sup>53</sup> *Mizo Sakhua: Kumpinu Rorel Hma* Tribal Research Institute, p.3

<sup>54</sup> T. Vanlaltlani, *Tribal Religion: Mizo and Bru*, p.51

There were close affinities among the Mizo clans pertaining to their perception of the world and its attributed life and spiritual world. They firmly believed in the existence of two worlds, the spiritual world and the physical world. The spiritual world was inhabited by those supernatural beings, who cannot be seen and touch. Firstly a supernatural being called *Pathian* who was synonymous with God was believed to be the creator being who created and tamed human beings with the accompaniment of numerous spirits in numbers, These spirits were supposed to bless and guide human beings in the physical world and were commonly known as good spirit. The Mizos also believed that there were numerous spirits who caused hardship to human known as the bad spirits. Thus, the inhabitants of the spiritual world were divided into that good and bad spirit. The physical world was inhabited by those which can be seen and touch, human beings etc. all other creations those lived in land and water, where all of them possessed a 'soul'.<sup>55</sup> Although several clans had their peculiar religion, beliefs, however the most common practices among the Mizos; the Lusei tradition will be more emphasized in the historical discourse.

According to Saiaithanga, the Mizo vocabulary was limited to a great extent while dealing with *Pathian* (God), *khuavang* (a guardian spirit) , *ramhuai*(demons) and *phung* ( a ghost generally regarded as female by the Luseis) and have no word which can include all these within its bounds. Spirits were classified into two, the good spirit and bad spirit.<sup>56</sup> Zairema listed out the detail lists of good and bad spirit. Good spirit include, *Pathian*, *Khua*, *Sa*, *Khaltu*, *Pu Vana*, *Khuanu*, *Khuapa*, *Tlang Lal*, *Lasi* and *Pheichham*. Bad spirits were- *Huai*( *huai* takes the name where it dwells), such as *Ramhuai* if it dwells in forest, and *Sihhuai* if it dwells in a small spring which were regarded as being possessed or haunted by evil-spirits, *Phung*, *Chawm* (evil spirit), *Khawhring* ( a malignant spirit which so closely approximates to what in English is known as the 'evil-eye), *khawimu* ( a malignant spirit, said to be in the habit

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<sup>55</sup> Zairema, *Pipute Biak Hi*, p 1.

<sup>56</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua* , p.2

of carrying off people), Tulum( an evil spirit said to be in the habit of entering into the bodies of those who fall from trees or over precipices, and animating them after death), *Maimi*( a spirit said to be responsible for a kind of temporary paralysis without loss of consciousness), *Hmuithla*( an apparition, a ghost, a wrath and a spirit), *Dengsur*( a spirit said to throw pebbles and stone on human)<sup>57</sup>

“The worshipped and sacrifice for ‘*Sa*’ and ‘*Khua*’ had been the core in Mizo society, as we have seen that ‘*sa*’ and ‘*khua*’ was deeply rooted in the world of the Mizos, such was the place of *sa* and *khua*, that it was often been translated as religion, and religion was also used as synonymous with *sakhua*”.<sup>58</sup> It seems that while dealing with the pre-colonial traditional Mizo religious beliefs, *sakhua* was used as synonymous with ‘religion’ just because of the limitation of Mizo vocabulary for religion. The English word ‘Religion’ is translated in Mizo as ‘*sakhua*’ and is used as an appropriate word for ‘Religion’. But while analyzing the pre-colonial Mizo beliefs system and tradition, what is to be considered as pre-colonial Mizo ‘Religion’ was much broader than that of ‘*sakhua*’. *Sakhua* is a combination of two words ‘*Sa*’ and ‘*Khua*’.<sup>59</sup> *Sa* was related to the clan- identity to which one is born, *khua* referred to the immanent protector of cosmic goddess *khuanu*.<sup>60</sup>

Mizo ‘*sakhua*’ in a briefly ordered manner included *Sakung phun*, *Chawng* (*chawngfang* or *chawngchen*, *dawino chhui* or *dawino kaitheh*, *sedawi* or *sechhun*, *sekhuan* or *mitthirawp lam* and *Khuangchawi*.<sup>61</sup> *Sakhaw* worship was a costly affair. It consisted of stages of worshipping acts, each involving a sumptuous public feast. The

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<sup>57</sup> Zairema, *opcit.*, pg.3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p3.

<sup>59</sup> *Mizo Sakhua* Tribal Research Institute, p.8.

<sup>60</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, “*Mizo Sakhua*” in *Transition: Change and Continuity from Primal Religion to Christianity* pg.46. In *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol XXXIV, no1, January, 2006, Downloaded from <http://mis.sagepub.com/> on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2014, 9:00 pm.

<sup>61</sup> *Op cit.*, *Mizo Sakhua* pp. 21-81

initial less expensive ones were considered to be almost obligatory and the remaining stages in the series of worshipping stages were optional. The higher the stage the costlier the act. The completion of all the stages placed one in the most coveted and respectable position in the society called *thangchhuah*, which also carries a promise to paradise or heaven (*pialral*) through the attainment of *thangchhuah*, the immediate aim which also serve as the means to achieve such a position namely public feasting, was to be a blessing to the entire community. Another *thangchhuah* called *ram lamathangchhuah* was set aside for those who achieved great hunting *success* and have feasted the community for several times.<sup>62</sup>

The belief in the supreme being(s) or (Spirit/s) , the belief in the existence of multitude of benevolent and malevolent spirits, and the accompanying propitiatory sacrifices, the practice of '*Sakhua*', the belief in life after death and the "religious" striving to *pialral* (heaven), constitute the Mizo traditional religion. The limitation of Mizo religion into the practice of *sakhua* fails to do justice to the idea of religion in the Mizo society.<sup>63</sup> Religious scholars, anthropologists and sociologists have included the worship of supernatural being such as high god, gods and goddesses, demons and spirits, nature into the realm of religion. So it can be noted that the Mizos worshipped *Pathian*, *Sakhua* as well *Huai* (evil spirit), they do not merged the worshipped of *Sakhua* with the worshipped of *Huai*, instead they performed the worshipped of *Huai* or evil spirit independently from '*Sakhua*'. Thus, it can be fairly noted that all these traditional set of believe system formed the Mizo traditional religion. Still, it is true to observe that the core of Mizo traditional religion was the worship of *sakhua*.

All divisions of the Lusei -Kuki family believed in a spirit called *Pathian*, who is supposed to be the creator or everything and is a beneficent being, but has, however

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<sup>62</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, *op.cit*, p.46.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p.42.

little concern with them.<sup>64</sup> *Pathian* or God was a spiritual being, omnipotent and the creator of the universe, who is kind and gracious to men and was also believed to be the source of all blessings. They therefore during lifetime regarded the worship of *sakhua* an obligation for every man, family and community for blessing and fortune during their lifetime. Also as a means for reaching the abode of the death, *pialral*. They performed *sakhua* with certain prescribed sacrifices and rituals, and following several steps to attain *thangchhuah*.<sup>65</sup> They also believed in the existence of other subordinate good and evil spirits. They therefore performed sacrifices by offering animals with intent to satisfy the evil spirit, who caused sickness and misfortunes to men. The people also believed in the existence of life after death. They believed that there were two places of abode know as *mithi khua* and *pialral*.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the perception, conceptualization of death and the belief in life after death can be clubbed under the umbrella of Mizo- Traditional religion. We can say that death and the belief in life after death in pre-colonial Mizo society was strongly linked with primal religion of the Mizo and formed part and parcel of the Mizo primal religion, all these beliefs and its attributed tradition, rituals, ceremonies and festival also constituted Mizo primal religion. The concept of human soul and life beyond the world are subscribed and formulated according to traditional world views which was embedded sparsely in primal religion and in the form of belief system. The philosophy of *Pialral* was strongly linked with Mizo *sakhua*, the core practice in Mizo traditional religion, where the climax in Mizo traditional religion can be reached or attained by completing all the steps in *sakhua*.<sup>67</sup>

Still the origin and concept of Mizo traditional religion is difficult to understand. Despite its obscure origin and concept, *sakhua* was seriously and ardently

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<sup>64</sup> J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, pg.61.

<sup>65</sup> Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin :Kum 1900 hma lam*, p..226

<sup>66</sup> Sangkima, *op.cit*, p.64

<sup>67</sup> C. Chhuanvawra, *Aw Pialral*, p.51.

worshipped along with several supernatural beings, it seems that *sakhua* was a process in search of unknown God or superior being who created human beings and the universe.<sup>68</sup>

From the above explanation it is true that the beliefs and practices that form the core of Mizo primal religion appear to be in a crude state in the development as they do not seem to be meaningfully connected with one another.<sup>69</sup> Or it can fairly be concluded that the Mizo traditional belief system surrounding death and life after death evolved out of the Mizo perception of the world and beyond, formed with the result of their interaction with the natural world. Although the hitherto Mizo primal religion appeared to be in a crude state or do not seem meaningfully connected, it reflected the culture and lives of the Mizos in pre-colonial society. These beliefs and practices were impelled by strong communal value system of the society, where society and religion inextricably linked with each other. The climax of Mizo traditional religion can be reached through achieving the status of the *thangchhuah*, means qualified for eternal bliss in *pialral*. This means that the pivot in Mizo religion lies in the worship of *sakhua*, where the climax was to achieve afterlife in *pialral* where the steps for achieving access to *pialral* obliged public feasting. While analyzing Mizo traditional religion what was clearly seen was that it involves the implication of moral ethics, public feasting, uplifting the downtrodden by the well to do families. Also, one alternative to reach *pialral*, i.e. *Ram lama thangchhuah*, which can be achieved by great hunting success regulate and sustain social life of the community, benefiting the societal needs.

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<sup>68</sup> Mizo sakhua: *Kumpinu Rorel hma*, Tribal Research Institute, p.1

<sup>69</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, *op.cit.*, p.43

## 2.2 Concept of Death:

In the traditional Mizo religious belief we notice that human beings were characterized by, *taksa* (flesh) and *thla* (soul/spirit). As long as the *thla* resides in the flesh it points to the vitality of man, but the temporary departure of the *thla* from the flesh signified, sickness, a state of unconsciousness or sometimes trance. The permanent departure of *thla* from the flesh or body signified the death of a person, fleshless spirit/soul are called *Thlarau* and are obliged to dwell in *thlarau ram* which were *Pialral* (Paradise) and *Mitthi Khua* (a dead man's village).<sup>70</sup>

According to K. Zawla, the Mizos generally believed that death was caused by 'Sanu' and 'Manghauva'. (In Pawi tradition Sanu was considered synonymous with Pawla in Lusei tradition). When a person died of prolonged sickness, it is believed to be the work of 'Manghauva'. According to oral sources, "Manghauva" was seen in dreams carrying a big basket made of bamboo with full of human heads, despite carrying a basket full of human heads he was seen walking in search of heads to hunt in the village street. He was probably feared with intense psychosis. A person named Lalthakhupa was also believed to cause the death of a person dying from Epilepsy. Apart from this the works of *dawi* was also believed to cause death. Victims usually suffered stomach ache and tuberculosis,<sup>71</sup> in pre-colonial Mizo society, *dawi*<sup>72</sup> (magic/witchcraft) was common among the Mizos and the victims usually suffered from stomach ache and tuberculosis believed to be caused by *dawi* or magic/witchcraft. This is also evidence from folktales and folklore with an elaboration of 'dawithiam' and his *dawi* which caused the death of many lives.

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<sup>70</sup> Zairema, *I thukhawchang mi pek te hi*, p.205.

<sup>71</sup> K.Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin*, p.p, 53-54.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp54.



It was also believed that, if anyone saw a black spot in the middle of the moon it was considered to be a bad omen may lead to certain death of the household of the village. They considered seeing a black spot on the moon as dangerous and fearful; therefore they often not dared to gaze at the moon even on a full moon night. <sup>73</sup>The Mizos also believed that hundred people were died everyday. When a person died suddenly without any disease or sickness it was called '*Zachhamlak*'.<sup>74</sup> According to James Herbert Lorrain *Zachham* is the name of an evil spirit said to be commissioned to seize the spirits of hundred everyday people everyday.<sup>75</sup> Occasionally, when not sufficient sick people have died to reach hundred during twenty-four hours, he is obliged to seize the spirit of a healthy person here and there in order to make up the required number.

In the pre-colonial Mizo society a dead person was mourned with an atmosphere of profound sorrow on the part of the dead family. When a person died it had affected and stirred the emotion of the dead family and the society at large. It had aroused a sorrow feeling to the dead family, and was mourned according to their customary law.<sup>76</sup> Among the Mizos death is likely to be seen as particularly disruptive, moreover when it strikes a person who are more relevant for the functional and moral activities of the social order. Normally the death of a husband or wife was regarded as most undesirable and often mourned with intense sorrow. To elaborate this there is a saying "*Kokki sah thlak ang a ni*" which means, the loss of a husband or wife is as painful as to cut off one's shoulder". When death took place, the Mizos often mourned with deep grief and sorrow, they were abstaining from meal, refuse to take bath, and hardly wash their hair and too neglected the oiling of hair. They even refused

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<sup>73</sup> C.Lalthianga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, pg.72

<sup>74</sup> *Mizo te Khawsak Phung*, TRI, p.30

<sup>75</sup> James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, p.554

<sup>76</sup> *Mizo te Khawsak Phung*, op.cit, p.24.

to wash their face, where the bereaved look dull and dirty, as it indicates his or her mourn for the loss. Women at the time of losing her children or husbands they usually cried every morning at least for three months. Thus, physically death implies the end in the physical world.<sup>77</sup>

*“The emotion aroused by death varies extremely in intensity according to the social status of the deceased, and may even in certain case be lacking. At the death of a chief, or a man of high social standing a true panic sweeps over the group. On the contrary, the death of a stranger, a slave or a child will go almost unnoticed; it will arouse no emotion, occasion no ritual.”*<sup>78</sup>

The impact of death was also directly related to the social status of the deceased and the nature of how a person died. There were several types of death among the Mizos, the most preferable was *Awmlai* or we can say that it is a natural death or sometime from disease but under the communion of a family or death in the premise of one's own house or due to old age, sickness, illness or infected by any chronic diseases. In contrary to this the most undesirable death was *Sarathi* or unnatural death caused by an accident or any unnatural death like drowning, falling from trees and edge of the hills. This type of death was again divided according to the nature of death, such as death from wild beast and from an enemy or foe in times of war were regarded undesirable and caused fear psychosis. In some cases the corpse must not be even brought into the village, it was often not allowed to bring into a house, but deposited in the forge. *Raicheh* is also another type of death, it is the death of woman at a child birth, this type of death is commonly very much scared by women. If a

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<sup>77</sup> C. Chhuanvawra, *op.cit.*, p.2

<sup>78</sup>Phyllis Palgi and Henry Abramovitch Death: A Cross-Cultural Perspective Author(s): Reviewed work(s):Source: Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 13 (1984), pp. 385-417Published by: Annual Reviews Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2155675>. Accessed: 27/04/2012 09:15).

women dies of raicheh, her spirit would find her path to *mitthi khua* with full of obstacles. It is said that an axe would be buried with her so that she might be able to clean her path to the *mitthi khua*, for this reason death over child birth was look upon with intimidation. When a child dies shortly after birth, it is called *hlamzuih*. The length of lifetime of the child to be called *hlamzuih* differs from area to area, but normally it was three months or 90 days. *Hlamzuih* were exempted from being shot by *Pu Pawla*.<sup>79</sup> Much heed were paid upon the corpse of the dead bodies, and the most undesirable death is *sarhi* or unnatural death such as drowned, accident from wild beast and enemy or lost in jungle. If such unfortunate event happened they would not leave the corpse and bodies to decay, and left to wild beast, therefore it was an obligation to search for the deceased body until it was found, the search maybe even upto seven days.<sup>80</sup> This suggests that human life was very much valued and was respected with much admiration.

### **2.3 Concept of the After Life:**

In the traditional Mizo conception of a human being, the soul (or spirit) continues

to live even after a person died. After death, the soul left the body through a crack

in the skull. According to K. Zawla the women's soul first visited the *Zawlbuk* (a young men's dormitory) and a men's soul visit a village water point. The hmars believed that the soul proceeded first to *Thlanpial* and then move toward Rih Dil.<sup>81</sup> It was also believed that when a person died the soul rather than proceeding to *mitthi khua*, still resided in their village. Sometimes transformed into *khawimu* (carpenters bee), the wondering *khawimu* (carpenters bee) was believed to be the soul of their departed parent who is wondering in search of food. Thus, they place food for their

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<sup>79</sup> Malsawmliana, *Traditional Burial System of the Mizos*, In Historical Journal Mizoram. Vol.XIV, Nov,2013, p.14

<sup>80</sup> B.Lalthangliana, *Mizo culture* , p.260

<sup>81</sup> K.Zawla *op.cit*, p.57

deceased parent known as “*chhiah*”.<sup>82</sup> After wondering around for about three months, the soul would then proceed toward the place of the dead. *Rih Dil*, a lake, which lies just beyond the eastern border of Mizoram, was believed to be the passage toward *mitthikhua* (literally, the village or abode of the dead). The origin of this belief can be traced from one Mizo folktale which goes like this:

*A hunting party stopped nearby Rih Dil and stayed for the night, one of the hunters couldn't sleep while the rest of them were sound asleep. The hunter who was awake heard voices and when the voice became clearer, he came to know that what it was none other than his wife talking about their household affairs. Seemingly talking with the others, she said, "Their father left before I left home, I forgot to tell our children that I kept the dried meat inside the pot on the fire shelf and put the eggs where I kept in the container of the rice husk". When the hunting party reached the village, they realized that his wife had died during their absence. The husband checked their house and found that everything was exactly what his wife said the previous night. So from then on, they believed that every departed soul passes through Rih Dil on their way to Mitthi Khua (village of the Dead) or Pialral (Paradise for the Thangchhuah).*<sup>83</sup>

And then the soul proceeded to *thanpial*, they soon reached *hringlang tlang*, from here they were gazing at the physical world, and would turn back weeping with sentimental and longing for their former life and their dear ones. At this place there grows a beautiful flower “*Hawilopar*” which blossom in numbers, the departed soul then plucked those flowers which was worn on the hair, which soothed their longing

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<sup>82</sup> *Mizote Khawsak Phung*, Tribal Research Institute, p.26

<sup>83</sup> Malsawmdawngliana, *Rethinking Sacred Geography of The Chin-Lushai* in The Historical Context, in K. Robin(ed.), *Chin, History, Culture & Identity*, pg.202.

for physical world, soon they reached a spring or a water place called ‘*Lunglohtui*’ where they drank and lose all their longing to return to earth. The departed soul then proceeded to the entrance of *pialral* and *mitthi khua*, known as *Zinvanzawl* where the route appears to have divided, one leading to the village of the dead (*mitthi khua*) and the other to paradise (*pialral*). This gorge or passage to both entrances was also called ‘*Pu Pawla kawt*’<sup>84</sup>

According to a tradition, other than those who attained the *thangchhuah* status, young men who had sexual relations with three or more virgin girls or seven women, virgin women, and infants escaped *Pawla*’s pellet. The origin of this tradition, according to Lalsawma, is rather weak and its genuineness doubtful. In the *mitthi khua*, the souls of the dead led a shadowy and depressing existence in a miniature form. According to one tradition, the soul later escaped from the village in the form of dew which would evaporate and vanish forever. *Pialral* (or the land beyond the “*Pial*” River) has been translated as Paradise. This is the place for the privileged few. The most popular expression is that those in *pialral* will be fed with husked rice inferring that there will be no more toil and hard labor.<sup>85</sup>

One of the most important aspects of Mizo primal religion is the belief in a place called *mitthi khua* (village of the dead) and *Pialral* (paradise). The different Mizo clans had a firm belief that human beings possessed a soul, and the concept of abode of the dead or *mitthi khua* and the *pialral*. Among the different clans the names and places are slightly different from each other but their conceptualization of the human soul and life after death is almost all the same. In fact most all the Mizo clans believed in life after death. J. Shakespeare stated that “The Lusheis believe in a spirit world beyond the grave, which is known as *mitthi khua* i.e., dead man’s village- but on

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<sup>84</sup> B.Lalthangliana.,*op.cit.*, p.116

<sup>85</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, *op.cit.*, p.47

the far side of *mitthi khua* runs the pial river beyond which lies Pialral, an abode of bliss”.<sup>86</sup> According to James Herbert Lorrain *pialral* “is the Lushei paradise- the further side of the Pial River”<sup>87</sup>. The concept of *Pialral* was very similar among the Lusei and Pawi, but the *Pawi* had a slight different concept on the human soul. The passage to pialral was different between Lusei and Pawi, the lusei have ‘*Rih*’ and ‘*Pawla*’ while the pawis having ‘*Buatural*’ and ‘*Sanu*’. Fanai have undergone the passage of ‘*Zingmun tlang*’, among the paites the soul proceeded to *Thlanpial* and then move to *Rih*. The Maras also have the concept of *pialral*, they called it ‘*Peira*’.<sup>88</sup> The Maras believed in three places of abode, the first was nearest to the dwelling place of *Pathian* or *Khazopa/Khozing*. The other was *mitthi khua*(*Athikhi*) an abode for ordinary people, and the third was *Savawkhi*, an abode for all unnatural and death at childbirth. Lusei, mara and lai have had the abode of *pialral* in common and all the obligations to be fulfilled to enter *pialral* were almost the same.<sup>89</sup>

It is not an easy task to trace the origin of *mitthi khua* and *pialral*; whether or not it was merely a metaphor representing the abode of the dead or a place on earth. Due to the absence of written records, we have to employ oral source, which was long back handed down from our forefathers, the story also different from clan to clan and person to person, diverse explanation arise, pertaining to what really was a *pialral* in Mizo primal religion and its origin is almost impossible to reconstruct, and is debatable.

In some of the Mizo poetry and songs we found that the word ‘*pial*’ was used as an ‘earth’, “*suihlunglenin piallung khar hawng ila,*” Here it stands for stone or a big rock used as a door of a tomb. In general usage *pial* is used as a flat rock or stone.

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<sup>86</sup> J. Shakespear, *opcit.*, p.62

<sup>87</sup> J.H Lorrain, *op.cit.*, p.365

<sup>88</sup> N.E Perry, *The Lakhers*, p.396.

<sup>89</sup> John Hamlet Hlychho, *The Maras: Head hunters to Soul Hunters*, pp.100-101

‘*Pialtlep*’ here it means a wide strip of rock, usually found on the bank of a river. In another usage, ‘*chhimpial*’ exhibits a broader meaning earth, ‘*pialleia ka nun tham hnu kha mi ngaihtir e*’ here it also conveys earth. We have found other usage “*Piallung*” here it was slightly different from the previous usage, it means a stone, or pebbles mostly smooth, used as a combination of two words *pial* and *lung*, here *pial* means a river, and *lung* means stone, thus *Piallung* means a stone on the bed or banks of a river. But there were different explanations of *pial* which differ from person to person.<sup>90</sup> Also the foremost migrating Mizo clan believed that the passage of the dead had to pass “*Thlanpial*” which points to a large flat rock at *Khawlek*.<sup>91</sup> In most of the Mizo traditional songs and poetry *Pailral* was represented as a land beyond the grave where the human soul resides for eternity, it can fairly be concluded that the word *pialral* was used to represent the land of the soul, or the abode of the dead.

It is believed that the concept of *mitthi khua* (village of the dead) and life after death developed among the Mizos as a result of some experience from after a person fell into trance, visiting the village of the dead, since then what was seen in *mitthi khua* was orally handed down and was conceptualized, which is probably believed as the origin of such belief. Also from the story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama* we saw a clearer picture of *mitthi khua*, and the position of ordinary human soul there. These beliefs were then orally handed down and formed the Mizo traditional beliefs on *mitthi khua* and the position of ordinary human soul. Thus, we can say that the Mizos developed the concept of *mitthikhua* and life after death from the story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama* and *Pawngazel* (*Pawnga*’s fallen into trance).

According to C. Lianthanga, *Pawnga* had fallen into trance visiting *mitthi khua* where he suddenly approached the green meadows, and then he entered the house

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 154-155.

<sup>91</sup> Zairema, *Pipute Biak Hi*, p.137

which was pointed out by his father and mother, where he saw a large pig which was laid in the front verandah and then her mother told him that the pig was meant for sacrifice for his *thla* (soul) to prevent the soul from following the spirit of the deceased or to prevent him from death or evil spirit, who was believed to cause trance. Soon, Pawnga had come back into his normal life where he suddenly fallen sick and died a broken heart.<sup>92</sup>

Most of the livelihood in *Mittihi Khua* was drawn from the story of Tlingi and Ngama. There was a clear elaboration of *mitthi khua* in the story of Tlingi and Ngama, we must try to bring out how this *mitthi khua* was known by the Mizos and the story goes like this:

*“Tlingi and Ngama were lovers and they often met as lovers did at some hidden places known only to them. One day they agreed to meet near a hillock which both knew. At that time their village was at war with another village and therefore no one should reveal his presence by making a noise when he or she was in the forest. As Tlingi reached the tryst she set quietly at a place where she could not be seen easily by anyone who passed by. Ngama came to the other side of the hillock and he too sat quietly and waited for the arrival of his lover. They sat and waited not knowing that they were so near to each other all the time. They put a few twigs in the ground and from these grew groves of bamboo that she or he had to wait only for a few moments though it lasted days and months. Tlingi died and he visited the grave quite often.*

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<sup>92</sup>C.Lianthanga, *op.cit.*, p.86



*One day Ngama found that the flower plants at Tlingi's grave were very much disturbed and so he himself went near the grave and watched. Early next morning a wild cat came to pick the flowers. He caught it and it revealed the fact that Tlingi who was then a spirit sent this cat to get some flowers from this place where the remains of its former existence were buried. He went with the cat to meet Tlingi in the spiritual world. It was not an easy journey and finally he was able to complete it and both Tlingi and Ngama were happy to meet again. Ngama found that the house where Tlingi lived needed repair and they went into the forest to collect building materials. Trees which Tlingi thought to be big and good were not so big or good in Ngama's eyes. They were too small that he could easily uproot them as it they were only grass. They went hunting and fishing together. Big bears of Tlingi were only worms to Ngama. Ngama reasoned that the difference in sight was due to the difference that one was a spiritual being while the other was a human being. Ngama returned to the abode of human beings and committed suicide. He became a spiritual being and went back to Tlingi and they found that there was no more difference in their evaluation of things they saw. They lived together happily ever after".<sup>93</sup>*

The origin of *mitthi thlaichhiah* and *mim kut* can be traced back from the above folk tale. The story was estimated to originate during the Mizo settlement in the vicinity of the Run river where all the Mizo clans were lived together as one uniting tribe. According to Hrangthiauva it was to the west of Run, at Lunglui about 1350-

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<sup>93</sup>B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and folklore of Mizoram* p.p. 362 -364

1400 A.D.,<sup>94</sup> since it was the earliest known story, which made them to develop an elaborated belief regarding physical death and the existence of the human soul with the afterlife finally of the two abode. The human soul is believed to exhibit the same physical appearance and character which he possessed during his lifetime. The soul of the deceased was believed to relish the ceremony during performing ritual such as *mitthi thlaichhiah* (a sacrifice for the dead in order that the spirit of the slain animal may accompany the departed to the other world), *mitthirawp lam* (the name of a festival held in honour of one's own ancestor and deceased near relatives) and at the time of *mitthi thluk* (the name of a kind of fit attributed by the Lushais to be the person so affected being possessed by the spirit of someone who is dead).<sup>95</sup>

The story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama* is a clear reflection of traditional Mizo perception of *mitthi khua* (village of the dead), the soul of the dead led a shadowy and depressing existence in a miniature form, where all the activities in their physical world was still continued. All what was possessed in the physical world was believed to be availed in life after death and followed the patterns of their lives on earth.

## **Conclusion**

Like many other tribal cultures of the world, and our neighboring tribes, the Mizos believed in life after death, traditional religious belief system had impinged on how they perceived and conceptualized death. This chapter highlighted that the Mizo belief system regarding death and the afterlife, where illness and death was often caused by supernatural being. Death implies loss in the family and the society as well and was mourned with intense sorrow. Death was also considered an adversity but the degree of which may depends on the nature of how a person died as well as the status

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<sup>94</sup> R.L Thanmawia, *Mizo Hla Hlui*, p.69.

<sup>95</sup> F. Lalremsiama, *op.cit*,

of the deceased. Pre-Colonial Mizo society was shrouded with the mystery of supernatural beings and the natural world. These played an important role in the formation of their belief system especially the beliefs surrounding death, dying and the human soul. The classification and the formation of typology of deaths was also to a great extent affected by their beliefs in the supernatural entity and the human soul.

The subscription of *Thangchhuah* status; the highest status which a Mizo could aspire to, which entitled a distinct person to reach *pialral*(heaven) in the practice of *sakhua* in traditional Mizo religion has merged the belief in after life death with traditional religion. It is to be noted that *ram lama thangchhuah*, a person who had earned great hunting success was also entitled to reach *pialral*. This suggests that those who had completely performed the prescribed obligation in worshipping *sakhua* were enjoying the same preference in *pialral* with those great wild hunters. This points to the fact that it was from time immemorial Mizo primal religion developed according to some set of beliefs, which was merged with different traditional cultural elements. Although we have not seen the direct linkage between *sakhua* and the Mizo philosophy of death and the afterlife, but the climax of Mizo *sakhua* points to *pialral* which can be attained in the afterlife.

Considering the similarities regarding their religious beliefs surrounding death and life after death, it is true to state that all the Mizo clans had shared a common beliefs especially the belief in soul after death and the abode of the dead. The proximity of the Mizo clans can be seen from the beliefs surrounding death and life after death which was vividly reflected in traditional religion of the Mizo. Although the different Mizo clans embraced their own *sakhua*, however were not much differ to one another. The Lusei, Pate, Hmar, Zahau, Fanai, Pawi, Mara, Matu, Kiang etc. had shared a common beliefs with regards to the concept of death and afterlife, and this

point to the fact that all these Mizos were at some point of time lived in very close proximity to each other. *Also*, from the discussion raised above particularly on traditional religious belief surrounding death and life after death, we can have a glimpse on the Mizo death rituals to placate these beliefs. These rituals and death ceremonies will be explained with detail analysis in the next chapter.

## **Traditional Mizo Funeral Ceremony and Death Rituals**

### 3.1 Introduction

The characteristic behavior and outlook regarding death in pre-colonial Mizo society was far more different from the present day Mizo tradition. The belief surrounding death was greatly impinged by their traditional belief system whether religious or secular. Their belief system had greatly shaped the funeral traditions and its attributed rituals. The magnitude of its impact depends, in large part, on the age and status of the deceased. In recent analysis, Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf have stated, “In all societies...the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences”.<sup>96</sup> It is

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<sup>96</sup>Fred T. Smith, *Death, Ritual, and Art in Africa In African Arts* Vol 21, No.1 Nov 1987, p.28.

noted that in traditional Mizo society, death brought physical, spiritual and social rupture. In order to heal these ruptures and ensure the renewal and continuity of life, transition must take place. Here rituals symbolized the transition which can be guided by the living, through the ritual preparation and interment of the body. By gathering existing literature and oral sources this chapter will try to analyze traditional funeral ceremonies and its accompanying death rituals.

### 3.2 Meaning of Ritual and the Rites of Passage

Victor Witten Turner defined ritual as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers.” The term ‘ritual’ refers to a conventionalized set of performances which are believed to “protect, purify or enrich the participants and their group” by mystical means beyond observation and control”.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, a symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior; it is a "storage unit" filled with a vast amount of information. Symbols can be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures, or spatial units. Ritual, religious beliefs and symbols are in Turner's perspective essentially related. He expressed this well in another definition:

*“Ritual is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests. Rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and*

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<sup>97</sup>RikshanaZaman, Chomangkan: *Death Ritual of the Karbi* in *Indian Anthropologist*, Vol.133, No.1, June 2003, pp.14-24.

*regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community. Not only do symbols reveal crucial social and religious values; they are also (precisely because of their reference to the supernatural) transformative for human attitudes and behavior. The handling of symbols in ritual exposes their powers to act upon and change the persons involved in ritual performance. In sum, Turner's definition of ritual refers to ritual performances involving manipulation of symbols that refer to religious beliefs.”*<sup>98</sup>

Present day analysis of ritual, especially, mortuary ritual, has been strongly influenced by the writings of Robert Herz, Arnold Van Gennep, and Victor Turner. In his schema for rites of passage, Van Gennep divided ritual into three stages, separation from one state or status, reincorporation into new one, and a transitional or liminal period in between. The liminal phase is critical and is often associated with special behavior, symbols, and objects.<sup>99</sup> According to Turner,

*“Liminality itself is a complex phase or condition. It is often the scene and time for the emergence of a society's deepest values in the form of sacred dramas and objects...”*<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Turner as cited in Mathew Deflem, *Ritual, Anti-Structure, And Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbol Analysis*, Prude University, Published in journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. 30(1):1-25, (1991).

<sup>99</sup>Hertz, Van Gennep&Turner cited in Fred T.Smith, *Death Ritual & Art in Africa*, in African Arts, Vol.21, (Nov.,1987) p.28

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.,

For Van Gennep, rituals performed at death resemble those played out during other critical periods in the life of the individual, e.g., at birth, social puberty, or marriage. Life is a journey, the individual a passenger. Along the way, the individual confronts periodic challenges which he must manage if he is to move to the next social station. To help the person cope with these crises, society has developed ceremonial responses which Van Gennep labeled the "rites of passage." He further stated the performance of the converging rites is in accordance with the general idea that the sacred, the divine, the magical and the pure are lost if they are not renewed in periodic rites.<sup>101</sup>

Traditional Mizo funeral ceremony is concerned, traditional funeral ceremony and death rituals in contrary with the ceremonies performed in the practice of *sakhua*, was not orderly performed with reference to god or Supreme Being.<sup>102</sup> It is noted that *sakhua* and funeral ceremony was not directly linked to each other, this is also clear from the fact that we have not seen the involvement of *sadawt* and *bawlpu*, also no reference to *tosa* and *khua* as well *Pathian* was seen in their funeral ceremony. This suggests that, according to the general perception of the Mizos, funeral ceremony and death rituals were observed and performed in separate entity, which was cut off from the practice of *sakhua* (the core in Mizo traditional religion). Despite the separation of *sakhua*, the core in Mizo traditional religion, they were orderly, religious, regarding their observation of funeral ceremonies and rituals.

Death rituals often have a ceremonial presence, that is to say, they require preparation and a display of various accompanying elements (special garments,

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<sup>101</sup> Solomon T. Kimball, Introduction in *The Rites of Passage* by Arnold Van Gennep.

<sup>102</sup> *Mizote Khawsak Phung*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram 1993, p.40.

colours, olfactory materials, etc.).InthamarGruenwald briefly explained rituals and stated:

*“Rituals, like ceremonies, are repeatable events; people can do them for the same purposes, in the same orderly manner, and with the expectation of the same results. Some rituals have a more localised character, which means that they represent a specific function or identity. In these cases, the specific place and time chosen for the doing of the rituals indicates functional specificity.”<sup>103</sup>*

So, while analyzing death rituals, we must at the same time tries to explain the detail funeral ceremonies as death rituals and ceremonies are inseparable.

### 3.4 Traditional Death Rituals of the Mizos

Van Gennep provides that he previously saw mourning as an aggregate of taboos and negative practices marking the keeping away from the community people affected by death who are hidden from the society because they are deemed to be in an

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<sup>103</sup>IththamarGruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual theory in ancient Israel*, p.7



impure state.<sup>104</sup> Later Van Gennep has completely changed his opinion or observation and considered death to be more than a phenomenon. According to him mourning is a threshold stage for relatives and friends and that when they go through the rites of separation, they come out of it reintegrated into the society.<sup>105</sup>

He also remarks that:

“During mourning, the living members and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and how soon living individuals leave that group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead person. During mourning, the social life is suspended for all those affected by it, and the length of the period increases with the closeness ties to the deceased and with a higher social standing of the dead person”.<sup>106</sup>

He further stated that that the element of separation would be more marked in funerals than other rites of passage, but his evidence demonstrated that it is the transitional or the liminal which dominates mortuary ritual and symbolism.<sup>107</sup>

A.G Mc Call the superintendent of the Hills during 1930-1940, cited:

*“At times of calamity, sudden death, death in the hunt or in war, there would be a day of rest, and death would fall upon any who broke this... The moral standard of society motivated by a terror of the unseen supernatural was certainly very high”.*<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p.157

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147

<sup>106</sup> Van Gennep cited in Phyllis Palgi & Henry Abromovich, *Death: A Cross Cultural Perspective*, p.390

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>108</sup> A.GMc. Call, *op.cit*, p.74

Notwithstanding the fact that the beliefs in spiritual beings and the duality of man and the philosophy of the afterlife had a practical effect on traditional Mizo death rituals, death rituals in pre-colonial Mizo society was also conceived from the idea of their beliefs in superstitions to a great extent.

Generally, when a Mizo died, men and women of senior members from the family or clan washed the dead body, and *temh*(a bamboo structure where the deceased would be put in a sitting posture) was then quickly prepared where they placed the deceased body in a sitting position, next to this a long thread of red cotton cloth was wrapped around the chin through the top of the head of the deceased and then the body was placed in a sitting position.<sup>109</sup>T.H Lewin has observed that:

*“The corpse is then dressed in its finest clothes, and seated in the center of the house in a sitting posture. At the right hand is laid the dead man’s gun and weapons; on the left side the wife weeping. All the friends assemble and there is a big feast. Food is placed before the dead man, who sits upright and silent among them; and they dress him saying, “You are going on a long journey, eat.”*<sup>110</sup>

It was compulsory for a wife to wrap the dead body of her husband with a *puandum/zawlpuan* which according to Mizo custom was obligatory to every girl. According to custom it is also mandatory to own *puandum* and is also compulsory to

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<sup>109</sup>Kauva, *Pi lehPuteSerhleh Sang*, p.33

<sup>110</sup>TH Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, p.152

take such clothes to her husband's house.<sup>111</sup> Kauva stated that an egg was quickly boiled and it was portrayed on the head of the deceased. This egg is believed to lead the deceased to the *mitthikhua*. The practice is on the believed that their ancestors or relatives would welcome the spirit of the deceased before entering the *mitthikhua*. This death ritual was known as *ArtuiZualko*, and it was a common practice especially among the Pawi.<sup>112</sup>

According to C. Lianthanga there was a difference in death rituals from *mithachhungkua* (the well to do families) and to *michhiachhungkua* (ordinary families of no influence, who enjoyed lower economic status and social standings). The dead body of *michhia* was simply laid on the bed while the dead body of a *mitha* was supposed to undergo *zalh*, according to this practice the dead body was laid on his back on a sitting position like a living person usually at the opposite side of the hearth or fireplace. The dead body was dressed up and placed on a bamboo or wooden structure placed leaning against a sort of cupboard attached to the wall near the water place. This was a general practice among the Luseis and its attributed clans. Among the *Raltes* and the *awzia* dead body was usually placed near the *khumpui* (the inner bed), facing outward.<sup>113</sup>

In the Gazetteer of Bengal it is noted that:

*“After death the corpse is dressed in its finest clothes and fastened to a bamboo frame in a sitting posture. A big feast is then given to the friends and neighbors and food and drinks are offered to the corpse. On the*

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<sup>111</sup> H.S Luaia, *Hmanlai Mizo Khawsak Dan & Mizoram Bualai Thu*, p.18

<sup>112</sup> Kauva, *op.cit.*, p.33

<sup>113</sup> C. Lianthanga, *op.cit.*, p.13

*evening following the death, the body is interred just opposite the house...*<sup>114</sup>

Like the other household members of the village, when the *mitha*(elite) or well to do family died, his body has to undergo *zalh*, but the deceased death body was wrapped properly with clothes in order to reflect his distinctive contribution in the society. The death body was usually wrapped with *thangchhuahpuan*( the name of a cloth worn as a mark of distinction by one who has a coveted life of *thangchhuah*). And then let him worn a *thangchhuahdiar*( a turban or a worn as a distinction by one who has coveted life of *thangchhuah* ). After completing this process clan members and neighbors gathered and seated on the floor of the deceased house. Crying and weeping started expressing their grief and sorrow.<sup>115</sup>

It was an obligation for the family members to arrange the dead body as mentioned above - washed and dressed up as deemed necessary. From time immemorial collective mourning becomes part of the Mizo process of mourning and wailing for the dead person. Characteristic of collective wailing of close relatives especially women shows gender role was apparent in death rituals among the Mizos. It is also apparent that kin based social relation was held important, this is clearly reflected on death ceremony and ritual performed, where all these functions were guided by the family members especially the eldest or their *makpa*. The magnitude of the mourners has greatly built the status of the deceased as well his family. To borrow Radcliff-Brown's assertion "death rituals are the collective expressions of feeling appropriate to the situation. In this common display of emotion, individuals signal their commitment to each other and to the society itself. Ritual functions to affirm the

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<sup>114</sup>B. C Allen, E.A Gait.,(et.al)., *Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India*, p.463

<sup>115</sup> R. Chaldailova, *Mizo Pi PuteKhawvel*, pp.204-205

social bond.”<sup>116</sup> This is also quite true in the context of death ritual among the Mizos of Mizoram.

The clothing, dresses, material buried along the corpse and rituals like the firing of guns and chiming gongs frequently expresses values of identity and incorporation. All these rituals symbolized the deceased status and indicate his or her role in the society. In case of the death of *pasaltha* (a notable warrior), the body was decorated with guns, *fungki* (a gun powder horn) to indicate his identity as a warrior.<sup>117</sup> Death rituals were also greatly affected by the nature of how a person died, generally the deceased were dressed according to his status in the society, if a warrior died he was dressed with all his appropriate amours and attire, this was also evident in the case of the death of *thethangchhuah pa* and the chief. But unusual death like *sarhi*(accidents) *raicheh*(died of a woman at child birth) and *hlamzuih*(when a child died after shortly after birth) have had a few different rituals which were very less expensive and sometimes often without a ceremony and rituals.<sup>118</sup>

These differences, in the process of treating the death, reflected social, political and economic hierarchical structure while performing death rituals in pre-colonial Mizo society. Generally *mitha* were privileged group of the society including the *Lal* (chief) and their families along with their *KhawnbawlUpa* (an elder to the chief or chief adviser), *zalen* (*free*) and *ramhual* (agricultural experts)

T.H Lewin has observed that:

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<sup>116</sup>AR Radcliffe Brown “Taboo”on *Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology*, (Ed.), John Middleton,, pp.175-195

<sup>117</sup>Tribal Research Institute, *op.cit.*, p.37

<sup>118</sup>Interview with Thanseia, Zarkawt, Secretary, INTACH, Mizoram Chapter

*“On the death of a father of a family, notice is sent to all his friends and relatives. The corpse is then dressed in its finest clothes, and seated in the centre of house in a sitting posture. At the right hand is laid the dead man’s guns and weapons; on the left is the wife weeping. All the friends assemble and there is a big feast. Food is placed before the dead man... and they dressed him saying, ‘You are going on a long journey, eat.’ These ceremonies occupy twenty four hours, and on the second day they bury the corpse”<sup>119</sup>*

Close relatives sat around the corpse and hid the deceased’s face with their hands, it was because of this reason that they choose close relatives to sit round nearby the corpse, and were called *“Thihniahmaihuptu”*.<sup>120</sup> Here the root of social ties and relationship was clearly portrayed; where the smallest unit of social web was seen, ie clan based or family. One approach to the study of ritual emphasizes the social and psychological functions of behavior. Social functions refer to the effects of a rite on the social structure, the network of social relations binding individuals together in an orderly life. The immediate or direct effects on the individuals involved in the ritual are psychological functions. Mourners gathered as soon as they heard the death of their clan members or maybe a member in the village. According to J.H Lorrain, *Mitthivui* is a combination of two words, *Mitthi* refers to a dead person, a corpse or the deceased, and *Vui* means to bury or dispose the dead in any manner.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> T.H Lewin, *Wild Races of South Eastern India*, p.143

<sup>120</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Awdan Hlui*, p.78

<sup>121</sup> James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, p.p-318&533

Death rituals subsume elements of separation, transition and incorporation. Symbolic of separation in death is the deposit of the corpse in the grave, coffin etc. The *ThadoKukis* buried outside the house.<sup>122</sup> Like the *Lusei* and other clans, among the *Chins* in the case of unnatural death and a man dies outside the village is buried outside the village. The *Hakkas* and southerners, Tashon and their tributaries bury their dead inside village; the *Chins*, *Suktes*, and *Thados* bury outside the village always.<sup>123</sup> Almost all the burial custom practiced in the Chin Hills were similar, even though we have seen some differences, the trends were almost similar throughout the area and among the different Mizo clans. The practice of the Mizo treatment of their burying their death is quite similar to the burial customs of the *Chins* of Mynmar. Although they may be some differences in the process of treating the dead body, the practice was almost the same throughout the Chin Hills and Mizoram. These burial customs will be discussed in more details in the next chapter.

Generally speaking, traditional Mizo death rituals were practice based on the belief that the dead have a continued existence both in the physical world and the world beyond. In pre-colonial Mizo society, the soul, like the body, is undergoing transition. The soul lives marginally in two worlds. It belongs neither to the afterworld, nor can it resume its existence on earth. Treated as an intruder in both worlds, destined to wander indefinitely, the living ensures a favorable outcome by meeting their responsibilities until the soul permanently leave. The bereaved are segregated, physically and socially, from the living. They are cut off from the dead and from their friends and neighbors. Normal social life is suspended for them for a prescribed period of mourning, their activities hemmed in by taboos.

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<sup>122</sup>William Shaw, *Notes on the ThadoKukis*, p.53

<sup>123</sup>H.N Tuck & Carey S Betram, *The Chin Hills*, p.192

Among the Mizos, if there were no time to hold *mitthivui* ceremony on the same day the person died, it was customary for the Mizo to wake the dead till the next evening. But sometimes in the case of the death of a *mitha*(elite) it was extended according to convenience as it requires more preparation than the ordinary family.<sup>124</sup>

*MitthiChawpek* is a practiced of placing food for the decease. A small amount of rice and some vegetables were placed on *faikhiat* at the time of every meal on one corner inside the house. It was believed that the soul of the deceased resided nearby house and village for about three months. A widow is obliged not to have any sexual intercourse with another man within this period, if such happened it was regarded *asuire*(adultery). After three months having gone through *inthian* a widow was incorporated back into her normal life.<sup>125</sup>

*Thihthiapven* is another ritual performed at the death a distinct person, it is the name of a ceremony and a ritual performed while the body of a man who killed a tiger during life, and duly performed the *ai* ceremony, is awaiting burial. The corpse is carefully protected from any flies and grasshoppers which may attempt to settle upon it, and every time such an insect comes near a cry is raised by the watchers and numbers of boys outside the house immediately begin to beat the walls and floors with sticks of firewood, making a tremendous dust and racket. This is because these insects are regarded as emissaries or transformation of *thihthiap*(The King of Tigers) seeking to avenge the death of the tiger which the dead man killed during life, and some such demonstration is necessary to impress upon them the fact that both the man and his spirit are immune from such vengeance because the *ai* ceremony was duly performed.<sup>126</sup> After performing such ritual, the body is taken for burial or for *kuangur*. As the deceased was a distinct person in the society, the way to burial was marked by

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<sup>124</sup>Interview with LalhmangaihaChawngthu, Serchhip on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2015

<sup>125</sup>Zatluanga, *Mizo Chan chin* p.p16

<sup>126</sup>J.H Lorrain, *op.cit.*,p.462



the sound of firing guns and the sound of gongs. This ritual usually elaborates the greatness of the deceased and was mourned with great reverence and respect.<sup>127</sup>

*MitthiVui* was the main ceremony observed on the day when death occurred in the society or when death took place in night it was observed the next day. Whenever death occurs, *Mitthivui* ceremony was held by adjusting day time where an ample time was given for the grave diggers to bury the corpse before sunset. This means that *mitthivui* ceremony generally took place in the evening. There was no chanting known or connected with this ceremony, but it was evident that crying and weeping by close families, friends and natives was common on this occasion. Among the Mizos crying and weeping was an indication of deepest sorrow so, when death took place the number of persons cried or wailed upon the deceased greatly marked the status of the deceased.<sup>128</sup>

Radcliffe Brown stated:

*“Ceremonial customs are the means by which the society acts upon its individual members and keeps alive in their minds a certain system of sentiments. Without the ceremonial those sentiments would not exist, and without them the social organization in its actual form could not exist.”*<sup>129</sup>

*Thlahualven* is another important ritual practiced by the Mizos. When a woman's husband dies, she would first perform the *thlaichhiah* ceremony in her husband's house. She will then perform *thlahual* in her husband's house and for this occasion she would kill and eat a fowl, which was given to her for the purpose by her

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<sup>127</sup> R. Chaldailova, *Mizo Pipute Khawvel*, p.181

<sup>128</sup> Tribal Research Institute, *op.cit.*, p.40

<sup>129</sup> Radcliffe Brown quoted in Richard Huntigton & Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p.27

*Pu*. If she did not have any *Pu* or her *Pu* failed to turn up or failed to perform *thlahual* she would use her own parents or folk for the said ritual. After three lunar months she would give a portion of rice from each meal to her husband's spirit. The practice of sharing the portion of cooked rice to the spirit of the deceased is called *mitthi chaw pek*. When the *mitthi chaw pek* was completed, the parent of the bereaved woman would take her to their house and immediately perform the *thlahual*. After the *thlahual* was over the deceased wife once again returned to her husband's house. The object of the *thlahual* ceremony was to console or show sympathy as the woman had lost a husband who had been her supporter and assistance in everyday life. The significant fact to be noted here is the presentation of a fowl by her *pu* was obviously an act showing sympathy and condolence. This daily offering of rice is called *mitthichawpek*. When the *mitthichawpek* has been completed her parents will take her back to the house and will there perform *thlahual* again. After this, woman will return to her husband's house. The object of the first *thlahual* ceremony is to console the woman her loss and the presentation of a fowl by her *pu* which obviously was an act of sympathy and condolence. The object of the ceremony performed in the widow's parent's house is to purify the woman and in a sense to separate her from her husband. Until the widow's parent or relations have performed the *thlahual* ceremony for her in their house the widow was still regarded or considered to be the wife of the deceased husband. One may suggest that the *thlahual* ceremony connotes a kind of divorce from the deceased or husband. The practical object of the ceremony is to save the woman from certain penalties which she would incur, if while living as a widow in her husband's house had sexual intercourse with a man. When a woman had not performed *thlahual* in her parent's house and committed promiscuity or even love affairs while living in her husband's house, she was liable to be dealt with in the same manner as if she had committed adultery (In her husband's lifetime) and would forfeit the whole of her marriage price and her dowry.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> N.E Perry, *A Monograph On Lushai Customs & Ceremonies*, p.77

*Arthlahual* is important ceremony almost similar with the thlahual which was performed when any of their relatives died. If a relative of married dies such as her mother or brother like in the thlahual the woman's Pu would give her a fowl for performing *arthlahual* and she would kill the fowl and eat it. The *Pu* has to do this in order to console the woman who had loss her relative as a token of sympathy. Similarly a man's *Pu* would do the same for him if any relatives die.<sup>131</sup> This ritual also connotes that the concern *Pu* would always be present at the time of their sorrow and would always tries to be there to comfort them and to make them rely on him according to circumstances.<sup>132</sup>

Another important ceremony was called *Lukhawng*. N.E Perry Stated:

*“Lukhawng is a due which is payable to a man's pu when he dies. Usually however it is paid by the man on whose account it is payable during his lifetime, in order to save his family from having pay it after his death when they may be in straightened circumstances. The ordinary lukhawng payable by a common person is Rs.2. If the man has performed the khuangchawi he has to pay Rs.10. A chief's lukhawng is Rs.40 and whether he has performed khuangchawi or not it remains the same. If a man's lukhawng has not been paid during his lifetime it can be claimed from his heirs and if a man refuses to pay his father's lukhawng after having been ordered to do so by the court, he is liable to pay Rs.40 pubanman Cases about lukhawng, however are of rare occurrence as it is considered very disgraceful for a man no to pay to his father's lukhawng promptly. When a man's dies*

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78

<sup>132</sup> Tribal Research Institute, *op.cit.*, p.33

*sarhi nolukhawng can be claimed for him. Also, A householder is entitled to claim a due of atlai of Rs.20 from the relations of any one, who is not a relation of his and who may happen to die in his house.*"<sup>133</sup>

There were instances where the family cried the whole night and day to show their passionate expression of grief or sorrow. Lamentation in the form of crying in an eloquent manner was regarded as a prestige for the deceased and the person who cried in such manner were usually praised by the household members. Due regard was given to the deceased depending on the number of people who had cried and wailed in mourning. Thus, the Mizo ceremonial weeping is a symbol not only of sorrow but of social ties or and also mark the degrees of prominence among the deceased and his family as well as in the society. Generally in the "*mitthivui*" the ceremony was guided by the deceased's family, especially by the grandest family member or oldest member of the household the family, or their *makpa* (a sister's or daughter's husband, son-in-law).<sup>134</sup>

R. Chaldailova who is a prominent author of on Mizo religion mentioned some of the rituals performed with music. He has noted that:

The use of music while performing death rituals was also seen in the funeral procession especially of the *mitha* (elites) family, where *Darkhuang* ( a large gong) and *darbu* ( a set of three different sized gongs) along with a group of people those played these instruments set their post as convenience, sometimes inside the house; *sumhmun* ( the verandah ) and *luhkapui* ( the platform in front of a Lushai house). While the above mentioned mourning ceremony took place inside the house, these

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<sup>133</sup> N.E Perry *op.cit.*, p.77

<sup>134</sup> Tribal Research Institute *op.cit.*, p.40

groups were playing gongs, probably the song sung while performing this ritual were “*Kanlal, lai*”, “*mitthirawpchawi*”, and “*nguntethi*”.<sup>135</sup>

The death of the *mitha/ miropui*(elite) was distinctly marked by the firing of guns, the households of the village who owned guns, carried loaded guns to the deceased house and when reaching the verandah of the house they had discharged their gun pointing towards the sky. The firing sound symbolized the death of a *mitha*. They soon entered the deceased house and started crying and weeping. The number of guns placed on the verandah and front platform of the deceased house reflected the status of the deceased and also marked his social standing in compared with the commoners or masses. The firing of guns glorified him and his family in the society. On this occasion mourners from nearby villages gathered and did the same like the above mentioned process.<sup>136</sup> At this time the sound made by mourners such as crying weeping, the drumming of gongs, firing of guns are all meant to glorify the death of an eminent person in the society.

In both the cases an ordinary family and the *mitha* family there was hardly any ceremony regarding death, no involvement of priest was known, but what was regarded as the main funeral ceremony of the *mitha* was marked by the incorporation of *Chawnglaizuan*. This type of dance is also sometimes known as *Chawnglaizawn*. In the olden days this dance was usually performed by young boys and girls of around four each in numbers. This dance was performed to signify that the deceased had undergone *Chawg*, which was a coveted status of the procession of *MizoSakhua*. Boys and girls are in line on both side of the dead body. And they started performing *Chawnglaizuan* where *darbu* (a set of gongs) was played in an appropriate rhythm sounding *Chawnglai, chawnglai, chawnglai...* In certain cases it was found more convenience and preferable by the bereaved family to perform such dance by themselves. (In case of inconvenience it was performed outside the house.) At the end of this dance the dead body was now placed to *ahlang* (a support made to keep a corpse

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<sup>135</sup> R. Chaldailova, *op.cit*, p.205

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.206-207

in a sitting posture) and was lifted up and marched from the front street of the deceased's house. During such procession the corpse was tossed up and down for three times and then they marched towards the grave. This march was usually accompanied by music by beating a set of small gongs called *darbu* and a large gong called *Darkhuang*. These sets of gongs were played by persons who know the art of beating such gongs. Along these music players goes the masses crying and weeping slowly towards the grave.<sup>137</sup>

C. Lianthanga cited:

*“When the corpse was finally buried in the grave, old men and women gathered in the deceased house, each carrying their zu (rice beer) and started lamenting in the form of songs, which would best suit to arouse the sentiments of the bereaves. Songs like Khiangi nu zai, Darpawngitahzai, Lianchhiarizai and Chawngvungi nu tahzai and others were sung which continued till before sleep.”<sup>138</sup>*

The earliest known songs which were the expression of sorrow and grief at the times of death were *ThuthmunZai*. It is also termed as a song for the bereaved family, which was believed to be originated during the Mizos settlement in the *KawlPhai (Kawbaw Valley)*.<sup>139</sup>

However according to B. Lalthangliana:

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<sup>137</sup> R. Chaldailova, *op.cit*, pp207-208

<sup>138</sup> C. Lianthanga, *op.cit*, p.19

<sup>139</sup> R.L Thanmawia, *MizoHlaHlui*, p.11

*“It was estimated around 1550-1560 during the Mizo settlement east of Tiau. It was the time when all the Mizo clans lived together as one uniting tribe. It was during this time that they were struck by a severe famine known as Tingpui Tam, which was of rare occurrence in the hills. The severeness of the famine was aggravated by epidemics. The famine caused starvation, resulting death in a row and took a number of lives. Every family was wiped by death, thus, the village was in chaos and turmoil, and this had resulted in the spontaneous expression of their grief in the form of songs.”*<sup>140</sup>

According to ZaTawnEng:

*“ThuthmunZai, is a song or poem which expresses sadness about someone’s death is usually performed in lamenting speech tone and also chanting style. In the society of Chin, the songs were transmitted by oral tradition, handed down, from generation to generation. The oldest known songs were short, simple and concerned about sadness...Melancholic refrains and song of love were also introduced employing the same tunes. “ThuthmunZai” was presented as an example of funeral songs in speech tone style. While the songs and funeral songs of both men and women would perform lamenting songs were almost always performed by women sitting directly next to the corpse*

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<sup>140</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Culture*, p.266

*or at the grave. Such songs were commonly subject to immediate composition.*”<sup>141</sup>

“*Ai maw Thanzau nu, chutimai a mual min liam san chuavapawi take m ve aw...*”<sup>142</sup>

The English Version: Oh...Thanzuali’s mother, what a pity! You just left us

The next day after burial was observed as “Inthutpuini” neighbors and relatives gathered at the deceased house with an objective to console and to mourn the deceased family. The next i.e the third day was observed as “*Thlanphoulhni*”. It was observed not only by close relatives but all the clanmates of deceased, where touching of soil with the body was forbidden and even combing of hair was regarded as taboo.<sup>143</sup> After one month *Rau hnek* was again observed by killing a fowl and drinking *zu* or rice beer then after having done all the required rituals they can go back to their normal life.<sup>144</sup>

Among the Luseis and their suzerain clans, the next day was observed as “*Thlanngah*”. On this day relatives from the nearby villages who could not attend the burial ceremony would gather at the deceased house to show sympathy to the family or bereaved known as *in ral*. As per convenience each of them contributed their

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<sup>141</sup>ZaTawn Eng, *Traditional Music of the Chin People* in E.d., K. Robin, *Chin History Culture and Identity*, p.70

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p70

<sup>143</sup> Kauva, *op.cit*, p.35

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p35



zu( traditional rice beer), and they spend the day drinking zu and singing *khawharzai* all day. By the evening a meal was prepared for those coming from nearby villages.<sup>145</sup>

According to Van Gennep:

*“The practice of sharing food and drinks is obviously a rite incorporation which is a physical union in nature and Van Gennep calls this as “sacrament of communion”. He considered rites of incorporation as “symbolic”...The Movement of objects among persons constituting a defined group create a continuous social bond between them in the same way that a “communion” does.”*<sup>146</sup>

Feasting was common among the Mizos whenever death took place; *Zu*( the traditional rice beer) in the context of death rituals among the Mizos exhibit the same feature as mentioned in the above explanation. It served as the main item which symbolizes a bond between the mourners who gathered at the deceased at the time of wake keeping and on the *mitthivui* ceremony through *thlaichhiah* they had organized a feast. Whenever a person died it was a tradition for the Mizos to perform *thlaichhiah*, generally four legged domesticated animals were killed as a sacrifice. Pigs and goats were killed, the well to do families even killed *mithun* and the ritual practice is known as *thlaichhiah*.

According to N.E Perry:

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<sup>145</sup> Tribal Research Institute, *op.cit.*, p.33

<sup>146</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *op.cit.*, p.31

*“It is the ceremony performed after a man’s burial to speed the soul of the departed on its way. It is to be performed by a man’s wife or if he is unmarried by his father or brother or any relation, failing relation it would be performed by the owner of the house a man died in. A pig is killed for the spirit to eat and a dog is killed to go ahead and show the dead man’s spirit the road to mitthikhua the place to which all spirits must go.”*<sup>147</sup>

But we have come across that poorer families hardly met the necessities to perform such ritual. Average family used a dog for performing the *thlaichhiah*.<sup>148</sup> However, as Mizos hardly eat dog meat it can be argued that such assertion was common to all Mizos. This ritual practice was ubiquitous among almost all the Mizo clans, and there is evidence that this ritual practice was also common among the Paites, *“Still, if the dead is a well to do person, they kill many domestic animals as offerings to the departed soul and set up on poles, on the grave the skull of the animals”*.<sup>149</sup> If the head of the family died it was regarded as a must to perform this ritual. In the initial stage, their intention was to feed those bachelors who were engaged in the digging of the grave, this feeding is called ‘*Thlanlai hraina*’. After many years of *thlanlai hraina* the process turned into the prerogatives of the deceased. Usually, the liver and lungs were *chhiah* for the deceased which was believed to be eaten by the dead man’s soul. The family who were abstaining from performing this ritual was looked down upon by the society. On the death of a *mitha* (elite) family it is an obligation to perform *thlaichhiah* in a larger scale than the ordinary family, which means they have to kill *ranpui* (all the four legged domesticated animals). It was believed that the animals killed were to be inherited by the deceased and would go

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<sup>147</sup>NE Perry, *op.cit.*, p.76

<sup>149</sup> CB.No.1, Mizoram State Achive

with these animals while proceeding towards the afterlife *in mithikhua*. Relatives from the neighboring villages would also bring domesticated animals, where a big feast was prepared by some 20 to 40 *fatu* (one who presides at a feast; one who prepare and cook a feast).<sup>150</sup>

One of the most important feast for the death is the *Mim Kut*. *Mimkut* festival was observed which was held at the end of August or the beginning of September. The village chief and his elders fixed the date for celebrating the festival. It was regarded as a festival in honor of the dead. Before the day of the festival, *zu* was fermented in every house. They also brought all kinds of vegetables from their *lo* (jhum) to their homes in advance. On the day of the festival all the village households stayed at home and regarded as a day for rest. The men and women folk drank *zu* for the whole day. They offered the first fruits of their vegetables to their demised relatives. They pounded glutinous rice, wrapped it in plantain leaves and made Mizo bread or dumpling. Some were offered to children and some to the dead. They believed that during the *Mim Kut*, the spirits of their departed came home to eat the vegetables and dumplings. Sentiments, tender feelings and longing for their dead relatives were arisen during the festival.<sup>151</sup> In sorrow, grief and longing, they would sing songs of lamentation to the dead, such as:

*The banyan lost its branch, its top is black and thin,*

*And I have lost my mate; the bed is not slept in.*

*Lurhpui is the highest mount on earth it is said,*

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<sup>150</sup> R. Chaldailova, *op.cit.*, p.206

<sup>151</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *A brief History and Culture of Mizo*, p.p.129-132

*From its peak will I see the abode of the dead?*<sup>152</sup>

*Mim Kut* festival was observed for three days. The following day was observed for resting, and on the third day, the vegetables which they had offered to the dead were collected, cook and eat it themselves. On this occasion *zu* was served and songs were also sung. They believed that the spirit of the dead now departed and returned to the land of the dead. Therefore it was no longer necessary to offer the food anymore. That is why the month of *mimkut* (August) was observed. Traditionally this is known as *Thi Tin thla*, the month in which the dead disperse.<sup>153</sup>

While analyzing Mizo death ritual, we have come across the practice known as *kuangur* and waseverntually connected with the death of *Lal* (village Chief) and the *mitha* family, this custom was expensive and requires wealth, it was common among the Mizo clan especially among the *Lusei*.<sup>154</sup> But it is evident that this custom was also practiced among the different Mizo clans. It is a practice of putting the corpse in a wooden coffin, with a plank cover, elevated over a fire with a bamboo tube fixed leading to a hole to the bamboo to the ground.<sup>155</sup> This continued for around six weeks till the destruction of the flesh, the opening of the ceremony was celebrated by killing of the pig and the usual drink *zu*. When every flesh excepting the bones were thought to be destroyed it was put in basket and kept in a special shelf at the opposite side of the hearth. The remainder of the bones were collected and buried generally in an earthen pot.<sup>156</sup> This ceremony and ritual is in line with the general theory of death

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<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, p.132

<sup>153</sup>Sangkima, *op.cit*, p.72

<sup>154</sup>J. Shakespeare, *op.cit*, p.87

<sup>155</sup>Interview with Mr. B. Sangkhuma, Museum Curator Rtd, Mizoram State Museum on 5<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014.

<sup>156</sup>J. Shakespeare, *op.cit*, p.85

ritual formulated by Hertz,<sup>157</sup> as death is not seen an event, but a process. When respiration stops, the body receives a temporary burial. A transitional period between the initial disposal and the final burial provides the time for the decomposition of the body, the purification of the bones, the journey of the soul, and the liberation of the mourners. During, the intermediary period, the link between the living and the dead continues. He remains a member of the group until the final ceremony. This tradition will be explained in more detail in the next chapter.

### 3.5 Rituals on *Thihchhia* or Bad Deaths

Pre-colonial Mizo society was shrouded with the mystery of superstition, this has greatly impinged on the classification of death, due to this reason death which are regarded as '*thihchhia*' or unusual death were given different burials from those of '*Awmlai*' or natural death.

When an infant died at or soon after birth, it was known as '*Hlamzuih*'. The Customs were not the same from village to village. In some villages, when a three month old baby died, it was regarded as '*Hlamzuih*'. Sometimes when a child from a poor family died which was older than three months, as the parents could not afford to sacrifice animals at the funeral, they made it as '*Hlamzuih*'.<sup>158</sup> In general *hlamzuih* were buried without any ceremony under the house.<sup>159</sup>

The treatment and process of burial for the *hlamzuih* was less pronounced and when an infant died their neighbor would assist the bereaved family digging. The corpse was wrapped with swaddling clothes and to assuage his or her thirst they would

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<sup>157</sup> Hertz cited in Richard Huntington & Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p.81

<sup>158</sup> Interview held with Chhuanliana, BVT on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2015.

<sup>159</sup> J Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, p.86

soak a piece of cotton wool with the mother's milk. This was done to quench thirst of the deceased that was believed to be on her way to *Pialral*. They also put some husked rice in one of the baby's hand (with closed palm) to sustain the infant hunger. Again a fowl's egg was placed on the other palm as it was believed that the egg would roll on her way towards the after world and lead her to *Pialral*. It may be suggested that in the pre-colonial Mizo society the treatment of the *hlamzuih* was apparently not taken seriously and considered not so important to community mourning without ceremonies and rituals. It often goes almost unnoticed to the household members of the village.<sup>160</sup> According to C. Sapchhunga "In the olden days if a still-born child (hlamzui) died it was put in a bamboo tube of about one foot and placed it near a tree usually near the house."<sup>161</sup>

The next unusual death among the Mizos was '*Raicheh*'. This is the death of a woman during child birth and sometimes the death of a woman soon after giving a birth was also regarded as '*raicheh*'.<sup>162</sup> This kind of death was regarded as the most horrible and feared and dreaded by women. Since such was the case of all Mizo women, trying to avoid death. A woman after delivering was usually sent to fetch water to the village water hole. It was the duty of the women to carry water with bamboo tubes. The women on pain of death would carry water on her back and returned home without any hindrance or complain to the household members. Unfortunately, if she died after doing such arduous work her death was not counted or regarded as '*raicheh*' it was rather '*awmlai*' or natural death.<sup>163</sup>

When a woman died of '*Raicheh*', nobody would fetch water or carry firewood from the jungle. No one would weave cloth and during the night no one would spin or wind cotton. It was a taboo to touch the loom of the deceased; no one would dare to touch her clothes. No women would sit in the same place where the deceased sat when weaving. It was believed that the spirit of the deceased would roam around in the

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<sup>160</sup> *Mizote Khawsak Phung*, Tribal research Institute, p.p.31-32

<sup>161</sup> As told by C. Sapchhunga (1911-2013) to his son Prof. Orestes Rosanga, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> December. 2011.

<sup>162</sup> C. Lianthanga, op.cit, p.78.

<sup>163</sup> Tribal Research Institute, op.cit, p.25

village on the day when a 'raicheh' took place. It was because of this reason, and the fear of the deceased spirit entering their house that every households would fix a branch of leaf or a broken fern outside the door, which signify that, "it was a taboo to enter" their house. By doing this, they sincerely believed that the spirit would not enter their house.<sup>164</sup>

The following is a report made by Mr. A.D Gordon Assistant Superintendent of Police, the local superintendent of census:

*"An adult who dies without having had his ears pierced has a porcupine gill buried with him. Whereas a still-born child or a child dying infancy is put in an earthen pot and buried in a grave with an egg and a small quantity of rice, mixed with some of its mothers milk. The egg is supposed to roll along in front of the child and show it the way and the rice is food for the way to the spirit world with adults a sacrifice is always performed, but this not done in the funeral of an infant."*<sup>165</sup>

A.D. Gordon further stated:

*"The husband the relatives of a woman dying in childbirth perform the usual sacrifice to the departed soul, but the rest of that village treat the day as a holiday and put a green branch on the wall of its house on the outside near the door post to keep out the spirit of the dead woman. The child is suckled by an aunt if possible. In former time if the child had no aunt to suckle it, the father used to smother the child with the bed clothes and bury the corpse with the mother"*<sup>166</sup>

If a person dies an unnatural death without any ailment; as such if he was mauled and killed by a wild beast, if he fell from a tree and died; fire and other kinds of accidents his death is known as 'Sarathi'.<sup>167</sup> It was regarded as the most unfortunate, terrible and horrible way of dying. It was believed that when this kind of death took

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<sup>165</sup> A.D. Gordon , in Census of India, Assam Vol. I 1901, p. 140

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *op.cit.*, p184

place a strong wind or gale was sure to blow, known as ‘*sarthli*’ (sar wind). When a part of rainbow or a short rainbow appears in the sky during a clear or good weather, it was said, “*sar a zam*” (a *sar* has formed or appeared) this was believed as a sign to indicate that somewhere, someone met an unnatural death. When a person died an unnatural death and was carried home, it was a taboo to carry the corpse through the front door of the house, so the corpse was carried through the back door of the house. The corpse was also not allowed to spend the night in the house, they dug the grave hurriedly and the corpse was again carried out through the back door and buried immediately. If the corpse was not buried immediately and allowed to the night in the house it was believed that another unnatural death would occur.<sup>168</sup>

Generally when a person died, the bereaved would deliberately and willfully refuse to eat any food. Two or three days after the funeral, they would eat just a little to sustain themselves, due to this they became drawn, haggard, pinched and thin. Nine weeks or about three months after the burial, they would perform the ‘*Inthian*’ or ‘*Inthen*’. It was a ritual by sacrificing a fowl, accompanied by drinking of *zu* or traditional rice beer. They regarded it as the worldly nature of the spirit of the dead. After performing this ritual, they were now purified and stopped their mourning. They washed and cleaned themselves, oiled and comb their uncombed disheveled hair. They now washed the clothes they had worn during the period of mourning, and dried, folded and put them away. They were free to do anything what their friends were doing. They endeavored to be as happy as they could, and now associated with their fellow neighbors.<sup>169</sup>

According to Shakespeare:

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<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, p184

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, p.184



*“Three months after the death a small chicken and placed with some rice on the shelf which runs along the wall. The family indulges in zu. This is apparently a sort of farewell to the soul.”<sup>170</sup>*

After performing this ritual the bereaved family was incorporated back to the society and followed normal life like other household members of the village.

### **3.6 Ceremony and Ritual performed on the death of Ral (foe or enemy)**

In pre-colonial Mizo period there were instant raid and war against the enemy villages and inter-tribal war as well between clans. As such was the case, admiration was given in the society to a man which they called “*mithasakap*” which meant slayer of both men and animals.<sup>171</sup> According to Joy Pachuau:

*“The earliest mention of death among the Mizo in colonial records is often in the context of its practices, especially the practice of ‘head hunting’.”<sup>172</sup>*

In such war and a raid against enemy or foe, the head of the enemy so hunted were taken back to their village as a trophy for their success, it was believed that the afterlife journey of the man who had slain such head were accompanied by the man which the deceased had hunted in during his lifetime. It was also believed that the person whom the head had been taken would serve to the one who took his head as a master in *mitthikhua*. Taking off enemy’s head was also a marker of an act of valor for a warrior, to attain this coveted position. Simply killing of foe was not enough but it was a must to carry home the heads of their enemy and is liable to perform *muallam*. In

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<sup>170</sup> J. Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, p.86

<sup>171</sup> Sangkima, *op.cit.*, p.,65

<sup>172</sup> Joy. K Pachuau, *Being Mizo.*, p.111

order to solemnize his victory he had to perform *bawhhla*(chanting or reciting) this was followed by firing his gun. After completing what a victorious man would perform he then entered his house. Then the next morning they had to perform *muallam* on the front open yard of the chief's house. The victor warriors who brought home the head of the enemy were dressed in appropriate attire with *arkeziak*(bracelet) *tuirual* and *zawngchal*. These warriors were accompanied by girls and started *muallam*(a dance) in a peculiar way around the heads which were placed at the front yard. This ceremony was accompanied by the display of music such as *Darbu* and *tumphit*, and the recurring firing of guns.<sup>173</sup> Soon those warriors are obliged to perform 'ai' or 'aih' (to sacrifice a domestic animal and perform a ceremony. This was done with a view of getting the spirit of the slain into the power of the slayer after death, and to protect him from evil consequences during this life.<sup>174</sup>

When a person died outside his village or in a jungle the corpse must be brought to his village, by following certain customs known as *Mitthizawn*. A stretcher is made of bamboo, and they wrapped the corpse with cotton cloth and then laid the corpse on a stretcher. Both ends of the cloth were stitched closed to protect the corpse from exposure. For instance, a person died in a nearby village; generally youth of the village were in charge of carrying the corpse to the deceased village. But each village would try to carry the corpse within their village boundary and try their best to proceed to the deceased village. In this situation we can see the display of *Mizotlawmngaihnaw* where each youth folk from the village wrestle against each other, where and the victor would claim over the corpse and would carry and proceed to the deceased village.

### 3.7 Conclusion

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<sup>173</sup> K. Zawla, *op.cit*, p.p. 90-99

<sup>174</sup> J.H Lorrain, *op.cit.*, p.4

From the analyses of traditional Mizo funeral ceremonies and its attributed death rituals it is evident that death rituals functions as a means to promote the solidarity of group, families; and clan members from the village gathered during such crisis or tragedy. It reminds them of their responsibilities to the dead and the bereaved and to others in the society. It was the duty of relatives to console the mourners. Also death rituals act as tool for the glorification of the deceased. The display of wealth, social and political status of the deceased in funeral ceremony and death rituals were fervently reflected the society and symbolized the relevance of social stratification in pre-colonial Mizo society. Death was not seen as an abrupt end for person, but a continuation, a process. This has also its own connection with traditional religious belief surrounding eschatology, traditional philosophy of afterlife. Among the Mizos death rituals often served as an establishment of social identity through rite of passage, display of resources, promotion of group cooperation and prosperity. From the above discussion death brought to the tribes, ruptures in the social community, as such funeral and death rituals act as a tool for the reconstruction of the social order and the identity of the tribes. From traditional ritual performances of death we have come across instances where group assembled in order to assert their identity. Generally speaking all the above mentioned rituals depicted signs, symbols and marked both the individual and collective identity.

#### 4. Traditional Burials of the Mizo

##### 4.1 Introduction:

Most of the Mizos bury their dead bodies but they do not seem to have any special place for burial, and in some cases the places of burials differ from clan to clan and person to person.<sup>175</sup> But generally, burial customs were ubiquitous throughout among the different Mizo clans. It is evident that there are different custom regarding

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<sup>175</sup>Malsawmliana, *Traditional Burial System of The Mizo* in Historical Journal Mizoram, Vol. XIV, 2013, p.15

the disposal of the dead body among the well to do families and the chiefs family. However burial was common among the general masses, the Mizo notion of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deaths played a significant role in prescribing the kind of burial.<sup>176</sup> Even the modes of preparation of the grave were different, in accordance with the status of the deceased; accordingly they prepared different types of graves for burying the dead bodies.<sup>177</sup>

#### 4.2 Traditional Burials of the Mizos

Generally speaking there are three different methods of disposing of dead bodies, which indicate that the Mizo classified the dead bodies into three categories, they are: the bodies of youth and warrior, body of a prominent persons and chiefs, the body of common people.<sup>178</sup> But while going through the Mizo classification of death, unusual death like *sarhi* and *hlamzuih* were given burials other than the above mentioned methods.

##### 4.2.1 *Tianhrangthlan*

K. Zawla has asserted that *TianhrangThlan* is a grave for the youths.<sup>179</sup> Malsawmliana also stated that, it is a tradition when a youth or warriors died that the grave were dug as deep as possible to show their respect and care to them. The bottom of the grave was made slope instead of leveling the ground so that the deceased appear to be standing in a slanting position as the grave known as *TianhrangThlan*.<sup>180</sup> This type of burial was also found among the Pawis of the Southern Hills.<sup>181</sup> When a great, prominent and highly favored person in the village died, after digging the grave to a depth of a man’s chest, on the uphill side of the grave they would excavate a cave long and wide enough for the corpse in an inclined

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<sup>176</sup> Joy Pachuau, *op.cit*, p.215

<sup>177</sup> Malsawmliana, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>179</sup> K. Zawla, *op.cit*, p.56

<sup>180</sup> Malsawmliana, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>181</sup> *PawiChanchin*, Tribal Research Institute, p.181

posture.<sup>182</sup> The body was laid according to the shape of the grave in a slanting position leaning against the wall of the grave.<sup>183</sup> The walls of the grave would be lined with stone slabs. They placed the corpse in the cavity at the top in a slanting manner. Lastly, they would cover the body with a huge slab of stone. This kind of grave was known as ‘Tian-hrangthlan’.<sup>184</sup>

According to ZofateChanchin by Hualngo literature the origin of this tradition goes like this:

*“There was once a chief named Tianhranga from Tuallawt clan. One day all of his villagers had gone for fishing at the river Run, (to the east of Mizoram) while all his villagers had gone for fishing, Tianhranga’s village was raided by Chhungchung; their intention was to hunt the head of men, while they only saw children and women in the village. Suddenly they saw their chief Tianhranga hiding on a Pang tree and killed him. When Tianhranga’s villagers knew that their chief was killed by their enemy while they go for fishing, they were surprised and felt sympathy for their dying chief. To show their sympathy and plight, they prepared an extraordinary grave which was not practiced ever before, known as TianhrangThlan.”*<sup>185</sup>

According to C. Lianthanga this type of burial was common among the Pawi which was accustomed to the well-to-do families and that of the brave hunters and warriors.<sup>186</sup> Considering the origin of this burial practice in the above story, it was especially specified to the dead chief as a token of their appreciation to the deceased.

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<sup>182</sup>B.Lalthangliana, A Brief History & Culture of the Mizo, p.186.

<sup>183</sup>Interview, Dated, 3rd March 2015 with K.L Chhuanvawra, 77 years, Serchhip, Mizoram.

<sup>184</sup>B.Lalthangliana, *op.cit*, p.186

<sup>185</sup>ZofateChanchin, Hualngo Literature & Cultural Association, p.227

<sup>186</sup>C.Lianthanga, *op.cit*, p.82

As time goes by, this type of burial was given to a well-to-do families and some prominent figure in the society. It also served as a symbol of priority to a prominent person especially youths in the Mizo society. Notwithstanding the fact that the social and economic status of a person was highly regarded, it also suggests that good conduct according to social norms was also highly important to earn such distinction in the society. It definitely highlighted the status of the deceased and also symbolized his status during his lifetime.

#### 4.2.2 *Khaukhurh*

It is a common form of burying dead bodies of ordinary peoples. The whole body was covered with a coarse bamboo matting (*dap*) around the body instead of clothes, in some places a piece of wood was also used.<sup>187</sup> A pit about 5 feet deep was burrowed out at one wall for putting the corpse. When the burial takes place, they pushed the head first into the hole and was (hole) closed with a coarse bamboo mat. Finally the grave was filled with earth. Stones and wood were used to lid the hole where the corpse was placed, generally a flat stones was used to close the hole, but there is evidence that a logs of wood were also used as per convenience.<sup>188</sup>

#### 4.2.3 *Lungkuang*

It is a grave prepared especially for the chiefs as well as for the prominent persons. The term *lungkuang* means a grave made of stone and when after digging about 4 feet deep, a hole was made at one side of the grave wall preferably to the eastern side for putting the corpse. It is interesting to note that the floor and each walls of the hole were made of flat stones. Thus after putting a corpse, the hole was closed with flat stone and then the grave was filled in with mud.<sup>189</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Burials among the Non-Lusei Clans

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<sup>187</sup>James Dokhuma, *op.cit*, p.254

<sup>188</sup> Interview, dated, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2015, with Chhuanliana BVT, Bethlehem Vengthlanga, Aizawl, Mizoram

<sup>189</sup> Interview, dated, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 with Thangthuama Sailo, 88 years, Ramthar Veng, Serchhip.

Among the Mizo clans, the Ngente do not attach any importance to burying the dead near their place of abode. They put up no memorials and offer no sacrifices, and make no offerings to the deceased's spirit. The dead are buried where ever it is most convenient. This is a most singular divergence from the general custom. A dead Fanai is buried in the usual Lushai way, but no rice is placed on the grave. An offering of maize, however, is suspended above it.<sup>190</sup>

The early Maras customarily buried their dead in the vault, which was constructed near the house or outside the village fence. There was no trace of either cremation or platform burial. They do not use coffin or rough plank. They wrapped the dead body with a piece of cloth and buried in the vault grave.

In early days the Mara had maintained three types of burials :

*“Thlapi or Lo-o meaning ‘stone house’ was customarily maintained only by the chief or important families. A grave about six feet deep, eight feet long and six feet wide was dug. Its floor, sides and roof were lined with flat stones; a small place was left as a doorway and was closed with large flat stone. In the vault, the chief or wealthy family usually placed a brass pot or a gong just below the head of the deceased, and the idea was that the skull of the deceased would automatically fall on to the brass pot or the gong after decaying of the dead body. Thlato was a grave of the commoner, who died pithi or a natural death. It was also known as the commoner's grave. It was usually dug near the deceased's house or outside the village fence. A pit of about five feet deep, six feet long and three feet wide was dug. When and after*

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<sup>190</sup>J.Shakespeare, *op.cit*,pp.130-136

*completing this, the vault hollowed at one end of the grave just enough to hold the dead body was excavated at the end of the grave. The vault was usually closed with a large flat stone. Thlaphei or Thlachhie was the grave of a person who died an unnatural death (sawvaw or thichhe). The grave thlaphei or thlachhie was also dug as thlato, but the vault was simply excavated at the lengthwise of the grave, and was closed with a log of wood or bamboo.”<sup>191</sup>*

While analyzing the burial practices among the different Mizo clans, one thing clear is that there were hardly any differences in respect of burying their death. And the types of burials along with the classification of graves are ubiquitous among all the Mizo clans. Still there are slight different practices among the different clans, but in general burial practices were almost all the same among the Mizos.

*“When a person dies, they dig a grave on the ground just in front or on back side of the house and bury the corpse therein”. ..“Each family has a common grave prepared for all the members of the common household. The shape of the grave is like that of the Lushai grave (or a European grave). The walls are built of stones. It has a big slab of stone for its cover...”<sup>192</sup>*

According to ZakhuHlychho, a common household grave known as *Thlanpui* burial was practiced among the chief and the well-to-do families, this type of burial was almost similar to that of *Tianghrangthlan*.<sup>193</sup> Although the process of preparation of this types of burials was almost identical to that of *Tianhrangthlan*, but among the

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<sup>191</sup> K.Zohra, *History of the Maras*, p.83-34

<sup>192</sup> CB-No1, G-6, Mizoram State Archive.

<sup>193</sup> ZakhuHlychho, *Mara teTobul*, p.p.77-78



Pawi it was often used as a common grave for all members of the common households which was made exclusively for the chief and the well-to-do families.<sup>194</sup>

*“The burial was, I was told, usually close to the home of the deceased, where a pit was dug; a good death required that the pit be slanted and covered flagstones; a bad death required that the body be placed in niche that was craved into the wall of the pit, which was covered by logs of wood”.*<sup>195</sup>

Thus, study has revealed that the notion of good and bad deaths played a significant role in prescribing the kinds of burials given to a person in the society at the time of death. Generally among the Lusei and some other clans bad deaths were classified into Hlamzuih, Raicheh and Sarthi. In the case of Hlamzuih they simply put the corpse in a big earthen pot and buried it.

#### 4.3 Kuang Ur

In the case of the *mitha*( elite) family *kuangur* was common. Literally *kuang* means a coffin, a trough, a groove and *ur* means to smoke, fumigate, to heat or bake. According to James Herbert Lorrain Kuangur means:

*“To dispose of a dead body by placing it in a sealed coffin made out of a hollowed out tree and keeping it in the house close to a constantly burning fire until the flesh has decayed and only the mains remain. This was a common practice among the ruling chiefs and the*

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<sup>194</sup> Pawi Chanchin Tribal Research Institute, p.180

<sup>195</sup> Joy K. Pachuau, op.cit., p.215.

*wealthier classes in the earlier days of the early British rule in the Lushai Hills.*"<sup>196</sup>

From the existing literature, the Mizo writers and other local informants, it is evident that *Kuangur* was practiced only by the *mitha* families due to the requirement of heavy expenses and to mark the status in the society. According to R.Chaldailova as the practice of *Kuangur* was very expensive In terms of economic resources as well requires extensive human resource, only the chiefs afford such tradition.<sup>197</sup>"Few Lusheis, except Chiefs, can afford the expense incurred in this method of disposing of their dead."<sup>198</sup>Slightly away from this assertion, Joy.KPachua in her book '*Being Mizo*' stated "in the practice of *kuangur*, the stature and wealth of the person so treated, which in reality was practiced mainly by the chiefs."<sup>199</sup>Thus, this tradition was exclusively practiced among the Chiefs and the fewer *mitha*(elite) family in the society.

It is almost impossible to figure out the exact time and place where this tradition originated, but it has been widely known that some Mizo clans in their way of migration towards the west crossing the Tiau river had brought along them a number of bones which were stored in a cave at different places, these bones were extensively found in Lamsialpuk, Vaparpuk, Biatekhampuk, a cave on the adjoining areas of Maite and Hnahlan etc., As we know that the migrating Mizo tribes from the Chin Hills moved on different phases on a clan based, this makes us uncertain to which clan these bones belonged.<sup>200</sup> What evident here is that the *kuangur* tradition had been practiced before the crossing of *Tiau* river.

J. Shakespeare has given detailed account of *Kuangur* and stated:

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<sup>196</sup> J.H Lorrain, *op.cit.*, p.p.274-275

<sup>197</sup> R.Chaldailova, *Kuangur*, In *Seminars and Important Papers*, Tribal Research Institute p.178

<sup>198</sup> J. Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, p.85

<sup>199</sup> Joy K. Pachua, *op.cit.*, p.216

<sup>200</sup> R. Chaldailova, *op.cit.*, p.178

*“The body is placed in a box made by hollowing out a log, a slab of wood is placed over the opening, and their joint plastered up with mud. This rough sort of coffin is placed in the deceased’s house near to the wall. A bamboo tube is passed up through the floor and through a hole in the bottom of the coffin and into the stomach of the corpse. The other end is buried in the ground. A special hearth is made close to the coffin and a fire is kept burning day and night on this for three months, and during the whole of this time the widow of the deceased, if he leaves one, must sit alongside the coffin. Over which are hung and valuables owned by the deceased. About six weeks after placing the corpse in the coffin, the latter is opened to see if the destruction of the corpse is proceeding properly and if necessary the coffin is turned round so as to present the other side to the fire. The opening of the coffin is celebrated by the killing of a pig and the usual drink, and is known either as enlawkor looking examining. When it is thought that the bones has been destroyed, the coffin is opened and the bones removed. The skull and the larger bones are removed and kept in a basket, which is placed on a special shelf opposite the hearth. The remainder of the bones are collected and buried generally in earthware pot.”<sup>201</sup>*

An eyewitness who had experienced the practice of Kuang Ur stated that “the *Sailo* chiefs mostly preferred *khiang* tree for *kuang*, this is because *khiang* tree has denser tree ring compared to other trees which gives more strength to the wood and are found best for erecting *kuang*. A number of log of woods was cut to fit the width hollow of the coffin, each was placed on top of the coffin till it covers the coffin then on top of the woods, a large number of ashes were collected mixed up with water to

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<sup>201</sup> J. Shakespeare, *op.cit.*, p.p-84-85

form loam like a mud then plastered on the lid in order to maintain air tight lid, so that the odor smell and vapor will not go out. A special hearth was made out of mud near *pathlang*, as ashes were collected with hands it requires the involvement of large number of people. The duration of was not uniform, they often maintain in an odd months like three months, five or six months respectively. Larger populated villages had observed a longer ritual. The village youths are responsible for the supervision of this practice; collecting log of woods for fire and wake keeping was the main task, sometimes they make routine for those who were to be on duty. On this occasion *zu* or rice beer was the main items, at daytime old man and married man gathered at the deceased house singing, lamenting the whole day. This continues till the destruction of the flesh, the commencement was marked by the opening of the *kuang* or coffin by the *upa* or village elders. The bones were separated, washed and oiled and dried in the sun, the skull, thigh bones and arms are most valued and preserved. This final opening of the *kuang* was celebrated with the final *thlaichhiah* ceremony accompanied by the killing of a *sial* (bison) or *vawk* (a pig). On this ceremony extensive consumption of *zu* was required and the deceased family feasted the whole village”.<sup>202</sup>

This tradition was common among all the different Mizo clans; it is evident that the Paite in Mizoram has also practice *kuangur* tradition:

*“In olden days the dead were not immediately disposed of or buried. Some people preserved the dead body by keeping over the fire and buried only after it had been shriveled up, the practice was known as kuanguk. It was expensive and rather impossible for ordinary families. While the rich people could retain the dead body for a month or two... The occasion of death, therefore, marked a clear distinction between the poor and the rich.”*<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> R. Chaldailova, *MizoPiputeKhawvel*, p.p147-152

<sup>203</sup> *Paite in Mizoram*, Tribal Research Institute, p.155

As stated above the dead Chief was mourned with distinct rituals as compared to the ordinary person in the village, *Kuangur* required large amount of workforce for a long period of time, at the same time it also incurred heavy expenditure as it requires continuous feasting of mourners until the final opening of the coffin. This was regarded as the glorification of the dead chief, as well a means to show his distinction in the society.

## Conclusion

The chapter highlighted the different kinds of burial system practiced by the Mizos in the pre- colonial period. The typologies of burials indicated the status of a person in the society. Firstly the Chief and prominent household members of the village known as *mitha*, were most favored and were given the best types of burial. Next was the *pasalthaor* brave warriors, youths, the common household members, lastly the *sarathi*, *raicheh*, and *hlamzuih* which is regarded as unusual death. Typologies and classification of burials among the Mizos clearly indicates that social stratification was highly embraced according to the social, economic and political status of the deceased in the pre-colonial Mizo society.

## Conclusion

The Migrating Mizo tribes had a long historical background, which is assumed to have been traced from the 4th century A.D. The absence of written records is a hindrance while tracing the origin of the Mizo culture and their tradition. But oral tradition which were handed down from generation to generation shows that, in pre-colonial Mizo society, the people were religious and adhered to numerous beliefs and practices connecting with supernatural beings. Their concepts and beliefs seems to developed while they were in the Chin Hills of Mynmar (around 1450 A.D to 1700 A.D) of Myanmar. The core practices '*sakhua*' is often termed by many writers as synonymous with 'religion'. But further study reveals that, what is often considered as pre-colonial Mizo 'religion' is much broader than that of '*sakhua*'. What was often considered as Mizo traditional religion i.e the worship of *sakhua* fails to do justice with the term religion. Thus, the study finds that in the pre-colonial period, religious practices had already existed with different form and nature. In fact the concept of death and the afterlife, the core practices '*sakhua*', the belief in the existence of multitude of benevolent and malevolent spirits, and the accompanying sacrifices and striving to go to *pialral* (heaven) by performing certain prescribed sacrifices and rituals, following several steps to attain *thangchhuah*, constituted the pre-colonial Mizo religion.

Pre-colonial Mizo society was shrouded with the mystery of supernatural beings and the natural world. These played a crucial role in the formation of their belief system surrounding death and the afterlife. It was believed that illness and death was caused by supernatural beings or sometimes by *dawi* (magic). The Mizo concept of death was also greatly affected by their belief in spirituality hemmed by several taboos; in the case of *hlamzuih*, *raicheh* and *sarhi*, which go almost unnoticed with no ritual at the same time with fear. They also believed in the afterlife where the soul of a dead person would reside either in *mithikhua* (a village of the dead) or a mizo coveted *pialra l*(heaven) depending on their performance of *sakhua* or by success in the chase with numerous prescribed wild animals. It may be stated that the philosophy of

eschatology in pre-colonial Mizo religion was formed under the influence of spirits, where death was conceptualized as a transition into the afterlife.

Mizo traditional religion cannot be analyzed in autonomy without the social process. All the aspects of *sakhua* in Mizo religion involves sumptuous sacrifice of domesticated animals, and hosting of public feast for the whole village which incurred heavy expenditure. The other alternative was to have an access *topiaral* (heaven) and that can be attained only if one was successful in the chase. This in fact suggests that one needs to killed several wild animals in order to accomplished religious processes. The climax of Mizo traditional religion lies in *pialral* (heaven), but the accession to this *pialral* can be achieved only by serving the society through the display of wealth and bravery. In examining traditional Mizo religion it appears to be in a crude state in its development as they do not seem to be meaningfully connected with each other. Nevertheless, the study shows that traditional Mizo religion from the perspective of death, religion functioned to reaffirm societal bonds and the social structure itself. Also, while studying the concept of death and the afterlife in the context of pre-colonial Mizo society, death channelized the accompanying emotional reactions into culturally elaborated frames and placing them under social control. Thus, traditional religion exhibits the display of several spiritual, religious, cultural elements and practices.

The traditional Mizo funeral ceremonies and its accompanying death rituals functioned as a means to promote the solidarity of groups, families and clan members of the village. It is also evident that the households of the village gathered during such occasions or tragedy, and observed such unfortunate day so as to share their sentiment to the bereaved family. This further suggests that each individual household had to cease their daily works or going to *tlang lo* (Jhum) to either console or share their sentiments to the bereaved family. Among the Mizos, crying and weeping was an indication of deepest sorrow, so the number of persons cried or wailed upon the

deceased greatly marked the status of the deceased. In this common display of emotion, individuals signal their commitment to each other and to the society itself.

The clothing, dresses, grave goods and rituals like the firing of guns and beating of gongs, dances etc. frequently expressed the value incorporating identity. All these rituals symbolized the deceased and his or her role in the society. Among the Mizos death rituals were also greatly affected by the social status of the deceased and also by the nature of how a person died. Unusual death like *sarhi* (accidents), *raicheh* (died of a woman at child birth) and *hlamzuih* (the death of an infant shortly after birth) have a few different rituals which were very less expensive and sometimes without a ceremony and rituals.

The study also finds that death rituals are also a tool for the glorification of the deceased. The display of wealth, social and political status of the deceased in death and funerals ceremonies reflected social cohesion and symbolized the hierarchical pattern of the pre-colonial Mizo society.

The nature of traditional death rituals among the Mizos further clearly reveals that, death was not seen as an abrupt end for a person, but a process of continuity. This has its connection with traditional religious belief surrounding eschatology, traditional philosophy of afterlife. Death rituals often served as an establishment of social identity through rites of passage, where death rituals exhibit a state of separation, transition and incorporation.

Ritual ceremony of *ralaih* also clearly portrays the fate of a person who had died at the hands of an enemy and also the victor. This ritual was performed with a view to getting the spirit of the slain into the power of the slayer after death, and to protect him from evil consequences during his life. It also reflected the fear of the spirit of an enemy so hunted by a warrior, which was believed to haunt him, if he failed to perform such ceremony even during his lifetime.



The study also reveals that ritualization of music was common among the Mizo tribes and lamentation in the form of songs were performed as a means to symbolize the transition of the deceased. In the case of a well-to-do family it was symbolic to beat gongs to manifest the status of the deceased in the society. This was followed by dances to mark the transition and incorporation of the deceased and the household members.

The study on funeral ceremonies and death rituals has shown that the death of a person brought certain changes in the structural norms of the society. Under such circumstances funeral and death rituals has become tools in reconstructing the social order and identity. This is evident from close examination of ritual performances where a group of people assembled in order to assert their identity. In fact all rituals depict signs and symbols and marked both the individual and collective identity of the society.

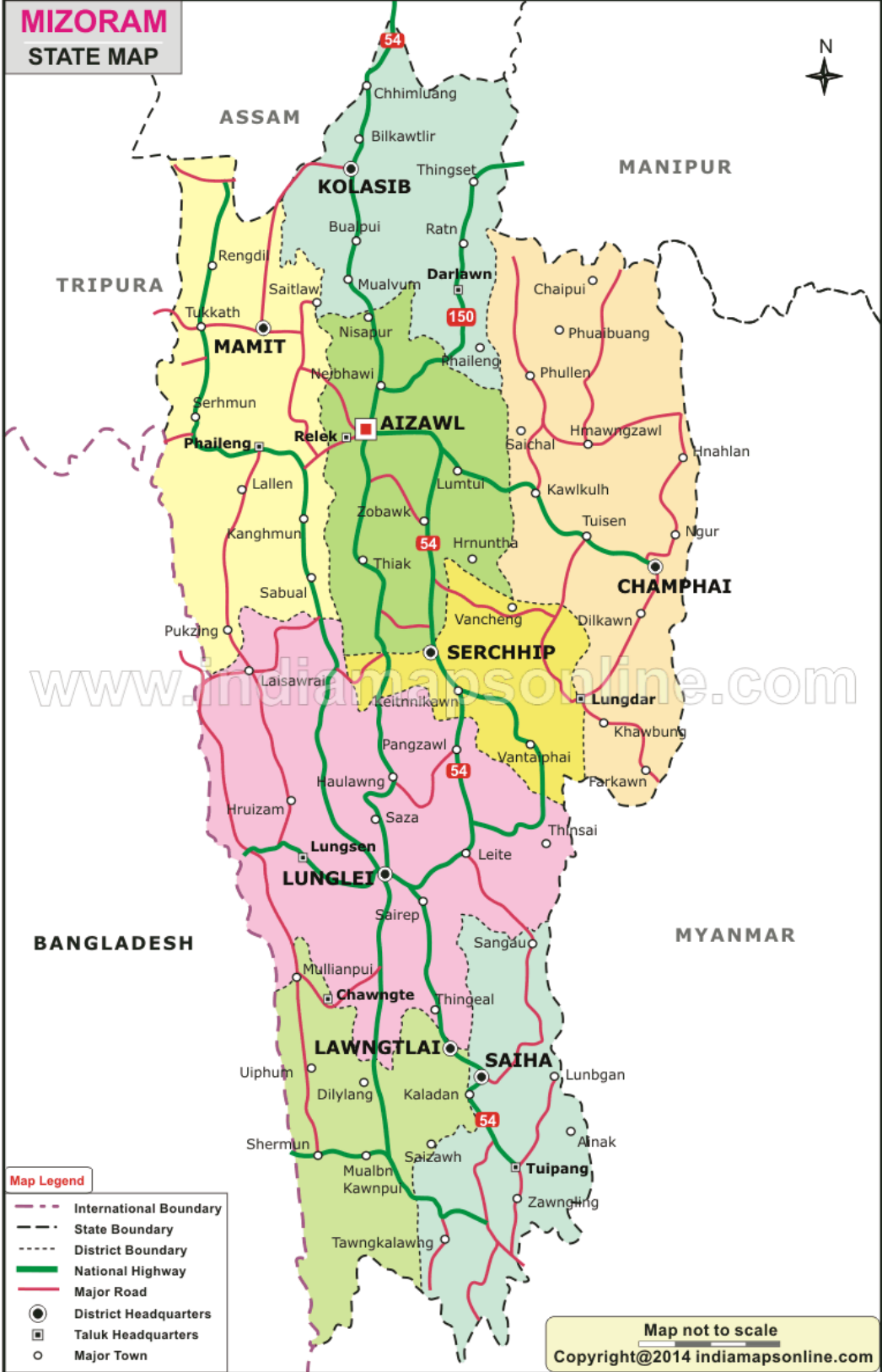
From Mizo death rituals, we have come across a very unique and significant practice known as *kuangur*. The nature and treatment towards this was entirely different from the common household members of the village. This is normally connected with the death of the traditional head and the *mitha* or a well-to-do family. This custom was in part the glorification of the concerned household member of the village and was usually very expensive accompanied by large number of work force. Although the practice was supposed to be common among the Lusei only, however, after a thorough investigations it is found that it was also common to other Mizo clans.

Among the Mizos, death is not seen as an event, but a process. When respiration stops, the body receives temporary burial. A transitional period between the initial disposal and final burial provides the time for the decomposition of the body, the purification of the bones, the journey of the soul, and the liberation of the mourners. During the intermediary period, even six months before the final burial, the link between the living and the dead continues, until the final incorporation of the deceased into the afterlife.

The study finds that there were five different major process of the interment of dead body in Mizoram-first, the process in which traditional heads and prominent household members of the society were treated or buried. These persons have different burial system and the ceremonies too were prolonged than ordinary households of the village; second, *Pasaltha* or warriors who were highly regarded and given special acknowledgement during the disposal of the bodies; third, priority was given to the well-to-do or prominent households in methods of preparing their graves; fourth, special care given to youths male or female unlike ordinary households members, last the common household members with ordinary burial system.

From the above mentioned hierarchical system the so called ‘egalitarian society’ as believed to be was not consistent and the so called ‘equal’ society was also not seen in the sphere of disposing of their dead bodies. The traditional burials and the interment of a dead body clearly <sup>204</sup>portrayed how death was perceived among the Mizos. The disposal of the body symbolized how a body was used to present moral and social values.

**MIZORAM**  
**STATE MAP**





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