

THE HMARS OF MIZORAM: SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORY
FROM PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD TO 1972

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CHAPTER-1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Conceptual meaning of Society and Culture:

The concept of Society and Culture has been a topic of interest for ages. Both the terms are complex enough singly to amass a wave of explorations by strings of Anthropologists and Social Scientists in their distinctive ways. Being dissimilar from natural science that can be studied by conducting an experiment in order to arrive at a general law or a distinct theory, the conceptual meaning of society and culture consequently is broad and complex, depending largely on the perspective of the explorer. According to *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*:

*“Society refers both to a general aspect of the human Condition-We are all necessarily Social creatures, and therefore depend on Society in order to live as human-and to specific groups of people living together in particular ways”.*¹

It further stated:

*“The idea of a society is applicable to a human group having some of the following properties: territoriality: recruitment primarily by sexual reproduction of its members; an Institutional organization that is relatively self-sufficient and capable of enduring beyond the life-span of an individual; and Cultural distinctiveness”.*²

So, society implies a group of people living together for a long period of time bounded by geography and shared a distinctive entity. It has been stated that the members

¹ Alan Bernard & Jonathan Spencer(eds), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, New York, Routledge, 2010, p.649.

² Bernard & Spencer, (eds), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, p.150.

of the specific human groups believe that they shared common identity which is inextricably linked with a territory, shared similar values, beliefs and habits.³ Society is that abstract entity that binds and constrain its members to adapt to it socially constructed rules for the suppose individual's survivor and well-being.

According to Kathy S Stolley:

*“A Society consist of people who interact and share a common culture”.*⁴

Collective consciousness of cultures binds together the Individual members of the Society. Culture, a constituent element of the society, may be used in the most versatile manner. Etymologically, the term ‘Culture’ is derived from the Latin word *Cultura* meaning ‘tending’ or ‘cultivation’.⁵ Edward Burnett Tylor, who is believed to have given the first anthropological sense to the word stated:

*“Taken in its wide ethnographic sense, culture implies that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society”.*⁶

From the 19th century, there was the expansion of the concept of culture. Raymond Williams stated that it is related with a general human mind-set as well as the progress of the Society that are manifested in concrete form, over and above encompassing the *whole way of life* including the *material, intellectual and spiritual* aspects.⁷ However, it is to be noted that the real roots of the modern anthropological concept, which is pluralistic and relativist, is found scattered in the writings of Franz Boas. According to him,

“Cultures may be defined as the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the

³ John Scott (ed), *Sociology the Key Concept*, New York, Routledge, 2006, p.168.

⁴ Kathy S Stolley, *The Basics of Sociology*, Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 2005, p.43.

⁵ A L Kroeber & Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture; A Critical review of Concepts & Definitions*, Massachusetts, Published by the Museum, 1952, p.33.

⁶ Edward Burnett Taylor, *Primitive Cultures; Researches into the development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art & Culture*, Sixth Edition, Vol-I, London, John Murray, 1920, p.1.

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society 1780-1950*, New York, Anchor Books Edition, 1960, p.(xiv).

*Individual behavior, that composed of a social group collectively and individually in relations to their natural environment, to other groups, to member of the group itself and each individual to himself.”*⁸

The use of language, reasoning power, ethical and aesthetic viewpoints and concept of causal relations distinguished human behavior from instinctive behavior of animals.⁹

In the 1950s, Kroeber and Kluckhohn after analyzing different concepts and definitions of Culture came up with six main understandings with regards to the concept of Culture:

(1) *Descriptive definitions* that see Culture as a comprehensive totality making up the sum of Social life.

(2) *Historical definitions* that tends to see Culture as a heritage which passed through generations.

(3) *Normative definitions* tend to see Culture as a way of life that shaped patterns of concrete behavior and action as well as values of a group of people.

(4) *Psychological definitions* which emphasized culture as a means of solving problem.

(5) *Structural definitions* pointed to the organized interrelations of the isolable aspects of culture and highlighted the fact that culture was an abstraction that was different from concrete behavior.

⁸Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Revised Edition, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1938, p.159.

⁹ Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, p.164.

(6) *Genetic definitions* that explain culture as a result of human interaction.¹⁰

Clifford Geertz argued that the definition of culture could go on without arriving at any concrete law or theory and under such circumstances it is best to search for an interpretation of its ‘*meaning*’.¹¹ According to Ralph Anderson, cultures can be inferred as a set of attributes and behavior learned and acquired socially by humans which are not biologically inherited and that are transmitted from generation to generation, and found only in the human species. Anderson further stated that it is a way of life followed by a *Society*, and the entity that binds a particular society together, including of its manners, morals, tools and techniques. It manifested itself in abstract and concrete forms such as the Society’s values, aspirations, belief system, ethos, arts, myths and folklores. However, changes can occur as a result of physical cataclysm and that its survival depended on the ability to adapt and accommodate. In cultures, *Society*, an entity that binds a group of people learn to live and work together, plays a pivotal role.¹²

Culture is the self-description of a society, a regulatory and controlling device within the society itself.¹³ At the same time, it also helps to fulfill the material and emotional needs of the individual of the society.

1.2 Society and Culture in the context of the Hmars:

In the light of the above discussion of the meaning of Culture, it would also be relevant in the context of the Hmars’ way of life in general and specifically their attitude towards life. In relating towards others these features are unique and served as the basis of their being as a group. Their culture mainly manifested in their way of doing things

¹⁰ Philip Smith, *Cultural Theory; An Introduction*, Malden, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2001, pp.2-3.

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays*, New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1973, p.5.

¹² E Ralph Anderson, *Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, New Jersey, Aldine Transaction, 2008, pp.44-47.

¹³ Dirk Baecker, The meaning of Culture, *Thesis Eleven*, November 1997, p.11, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication-240706335>. (accessed 12 May 2018). P.11.

such as food and eating habits, dresses, belief system, ethos and value system. To borrow the assertion of Denise Lawton who stated that it is “not a selection of the best or the most important aspects of a way of life, rather it envelopes everything that existed in the society, that is man-made; from technological artifacts to skills, attitudes and values that are socially acquired, and which are reflected in their ethos, folklores, religious beliefs, customs and traditions”.¹⁴

As cultures is a system for adjusting to the external environment as well as to other man,¹⁵ so was also in the context of the Hmar; their patterned life style, way of thinking and feeling adhered to their natural environment, which in turn promotes a livable society beneficial for all its members. For example, *Sesun Inchawng*¹⁶ an important personal religious ceremony involved organizing a grand feast which was a treat for the whole community. One significant point to be noted here is that in such event, every household of the village had the privilege to gorge upon meat lavishly.

The Hmar culture has withstood the test of time due to its ability to accommodate to the changing conditions. However, under colonial rule changes were noticeable in the social and cultural realm of the Hmars.

1.3 Mizoram:

Mizoram is located between 21°25'N to 24°39'N latitudes and 92°16'E to 93°39'E longitudes. It is sandwiched between Myanmar on the east and Bangladesh and Tripura on the west with its southern tip touching the Chittagong Hill tracts in Bangladesh. In the north, it shared a common boundary with the Cachar district of Assam and Churachandpur district of Manipur.¹⁷ It covers an area of 21081 sq./km with the north to south and east to west lengths measuring about 277 km and 121 km respectively. It consisted of eight districts such as Aizawl, Champhai, Kolasib, Lunglei, Lawngtlai, Mamit, Saiha and

¹⁴ Denis Lawton, *Class, Culture and The Curriculum*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, p.10.

¹⁵ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays*, p.5.

¹⁶ L Keivom, *Hmar Hla Suina (A Critical Study of the Hmar Songs)*, Churachandpur, L & R Printing Press, 1980, pp.32-33.

¹⁷ N.N Bhattacharyya, *North East India; A systematic Geography*, New Delhi, Rajesh Publication, 2005, p.193.

Serchip.¹⁸ In 2019 three more districts viz., Saitual, Khawzawl and Hnahthial were carved out of the State resulting in the divisions of the state into a total of eleven (11) districts.¹⁹

In the northern part of Mizoram, the Sinlung Hills Council was formed which consisted of twelve constituencies viz., *Khawlien* Constituency, *Phuaibuang* Constituency, *Suangpuilawn* Constituency, *Vanbawng* Constituency, *Ratu* Constituency, *New Vervek* Constituency, *Sakawrdai South* Constituency, *Sakawrdai North* Constituency, *Zohmun* Constituency, *Tingmun* Constituency, *Saipum* Constituency, and *Saiphai* Constituency.²⁰

According to the 2011 census, the total population in the state of Mizoram is 10,97,206 consisting of 5,55,339 males and 5,41,867 females respectively. The density Per Sq.km is 52 and that there are 976 females per every 1000 males.²¹

The topography of the eastern part of Mizoram consisted of a mountainous region with an altitude ranging from 400 to 2,157 meters, while the western part is characterized by ridges and valleys.²² Due to its fairly high elevation, it enjoyed a moderate climate throughout the year. The summer temperature falls usually between 25°C and 34°C whereas the winter temperature is usually between 11°C to 23°C. Moreover, since the region falls under the direct influence of the south-west monsoon, the state receives heavy rainfall from May to September with an annual average rainfall of 257 cm.²³ The topography and climatic condition largely contributed to the rich fauna and flora of the region. The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) identified nearly 1,468 species belonging

¹⁸ ___ *Statistical Handbook Mizoram, 2018*, Aizawl, Published by Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Mizoram, 2018, p. (xii).

¹⁹ No.A.46013/1/2019-GAD, Government of Mizoram, General Administration Department, dated Aizawl, the 3rd June, 2019.

²⁰ Directorate of Informatio & Public Relations, Government of Mizoram. www.dipr.mizoram.gov.in (accessed 20 February 2020).

²¹ ___ *Statistical Abstract of Mizoram: 2015*, Aizawl, Published by Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Planning & Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram, 2016, p.1.

²² ___ *Towards an Enlightened and Inclusive Mizo Society, Report of the Education Reforms Commission, Mizoram 2009-2010*, First Edition, Aizawl, Published by the Government of Mizoram, 2010, p.11.

²³ Rintluanga Pachuau, Mizoram; A Study in Comprehensive Geography, New Delhi, Northern Book Centre (Publishers of Scholarly Book), 2009, pp.41-42.

to 891 genera under 295 families, of which insects and birds constituted around 520 and 370 species respectively along with other subspecies distributed in the state. At the same time, the state can boast of four types of vegetation based on the nature of the forest. It included tropical, wet evergreen and semi evergreen, montane subtropical, temperate and bamboo forests.²⁴

Under the British administration, the present Mizoram was known as the Lushai Hills District of Assam. Colonel Frederick Lister, the Political Agent of the Khasi Hills who led the expedition to the Lushai Hills during 1849-50 was in fact, the first to recognize the *Lushai/Lusei* as a distinct, dominant and superior community inhabiting the said region.²⁵ The Lushai Hills got the attention of the British after obtaining suzerainty over the Assam valley by the treaty of Yandaboo.²⁶ The tea plantation around the southern part of Cachar bordering the Lushai Hills were viewed by the inhabitants of the Hills as an encroachment of their hunting grounds and a serious threat to their territorial integrity, leading to a frequent raid by the inhabitants of the Hills since 1842 and resulted in a series of expeditions by the British. One of the first of its kind was the punitive expedition led by Captain Blackwood on 10 April 1844 against Lalsuthlaha, who attacked Kachubari, a Manipuri village in Sylhet in which 20 men were killed.²⁷ Subsequently, raids were carried out in Cachar, Sylhet and Manipur by the Mizos that resulted in a series of punitive measures by the colonial government of India. In 1862, Suakpuilala raided a village in Tripura which ended with a peace negotiation with the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar and Suakpuilala and Vanpuilala. However, this agreement did not bring a lasting peace.²⁸ In 1871, Jhalnacherra and Manierkhal, both British territories were invaded by Lalburha who succeeded in seizing 13 guns. During the same period, Bengkhuaia, a southern chief raided Alexandrapore tea garden and

²⁴ _____ *Towards an Enlightened and Inclusive Mizo Society, Report of the Education Reforms Commission, Mizoram 2009-2010*, p.13.

²⁵ C Lalthlengliana, *The Lushai Hills: Annexation, Resistance and Pacification (1886-1898)*, New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2007, pp.5-6.

²⁶ Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India*, New Delhi, Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2002, p.145.

²⁷ S N Singh, *Mizoram; Historical, Geographical, Social, Economic, Political and Administrative*, First Edition, New Delhi, Published by K M Rai Mittal for Mittal Publications, 1994, p.34.

²⁸ H G Joshi, *Mizoram; Past and Present*, Reprint, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 2010, p.15.

carried off Mary Winchester besides killing and capturing many peoples.²⁹ The above incident resulted in Lushai Expedition of 1871-72.³⁰ Thus, a series of expeditions were raised against the Lushai chiefs, where their actions were coupled with an attempt to justify it on the grounds of safeguarding the integrity of their territories and protection of their subjects. The Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90 conducted by the British was the final straw for the inhabitants of the Lushai Hills that resulted in the annexation of their territory by the British Crown.³¹

In 1898, the administration of the then Lushai Hills came under the government of Assam. Prior to this, it was divided into Northern Lushai Hills and Southern Lushai Hills which were placed under the Governments of Assam and Bengal respectively. The Governor General-in-Council declared it as a *backward area* in 1921, re-termed it as an *Excluded area* or *Partially Excluded area* by the Government of India Act of 1935. The name was changed to the Mizo Hills district in 1954 by the Lushai Hills District (Change of Name) Act, 1954 (Act xviii of 1954) of the Indian Parliament.³² It was carved out of Assam as a Union Territory of Mizoram on 21st January 1972 and then became a full-fledged state of India on 20th February 1987.³³

In Mizoram, about 90% of the total population consists of the *Mizos*.³⁴ The term '*Mizo*' is a generic term referring to the different tribes or clans sharing a close affinity of cultures, traditions, dialects, etc. and inhabiting the entire perimeter of the present Mizoram. They may be broadly classified into two groups. The Hmars are classified within the first group along with the Lusei, the Ralte, the Paite, etc. along with their different sub-clans. On the other hand, the second group consisted of the Pawi and the Lakher. The former group mainly concentrated in the Northern and the Middle regions of

²⁹ C Nunthara, *Mizoram; Society and Polity*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing Company, 1996, pp.52-53.

³⁰ Thomas H Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel or How I helped to Govern India*, Reprint, Aizawl, Published by Tribal Research Institute, Art & Culture Dept., Mizoram, 2005, p.255.

³¹ Orestes Rosanga, 'British Policy Towards the Mizos till The Sovereignty of the Colonial Rulers In the Hills', in *Historical Journal Mizoram*, Vol. XV, 2014, pp.22 &31.

³² Jangkhongam Doungel, *Evolution of District Council Autonomy In Mizoram: A Case Study of the Lai Autonomous District Council*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, 2010, pp.1,2 & 7.

³³ Bhattacharyya, *North East India; A systematic Geography*, p.193.

³⁴ R. K Lalhluna, *Mizo History Kamkeuna (An introduction to Mizo History)*, Aizawl, J P Offset Printer, 1980, p.5.

the present Mizoram and are forming the majority of the population in that region, where as the Pawi and the Lakhers mainly inhabited the southern region and the south-eastern part bordering Myanmar.³⁵ Since the term *Mizo* is a blanket term covering Hmars, Lushai/Lusei and others, the terms *Mizo* and *Lusei* as well as *Hmar* and *Mizo* are often interchangeably used in this thesis.

1.4 Introduction of the Hmar:

The *Hmars* claimed to belong to the Kuki-Chin-Mizo group of the *Sino-Tibeto-Burman* family of the *Mongolian* race.³⁶ It is to be noted that the term *Kuki*, an Assamese or Bengali word was used to designate the hill tribes residing within India, whereas *Chin*, a Burmese word was used to designate all the various hill tribes inhabiting the region between Burma and the provinces of Assam and Bengal.³⁷ The Hmars' physical features consisted of broad and round face, broad and prominent high cheek bones with small eyes and flat and short nose. They shared resemblance to other hill tribes of north east India and Burma.³⁸ J Shakespeare the then Superintendent of the Lushai Hills from 1898-99 and 1904-1905 classified the *Hmars* under the Old Kuki clans.³⁹

The present study i.e. the Hmar tribe will cover from the pre-colonial period to 1972. The British colonization of the region has been taken up as a dividing line between the cultures of the Hmars since the said phenomena had heralded a comprehensive change that ushered in a far-reaching transformation of the Hmar culture.

Prior to the colonization of the present Mizoram there was no written record about the history of the Hmars. Even after the advent of the colonialist and the subsequent

³⁵ Sangkima, *MIZOS; Society and Social Change*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publication, 1992, pp.3-4.

³⁶ Hrilrokhum Thiek, *History of the Hmars in North East India (with special reference to Assam)*, Guwahati, Bhabani Offset Private Ltd., 2013, p.1.

³⁷ Sing Khaw Khai, *Zo People and Their Culture; A historical, cultural study and critical analysis of Zo and its ethnic tribes*, Churachandpur, Published by Khampu Hatzaw, 1995, p.1.

³⁸ _____ *Mizoram District Gazetteers*, Aizawl, Published by the Director of Art & Culture, Governemnt of Mizoram, Education and Human Resources Department, 1981, p.81.

³⁹ J Shakespeare, *The Lushai kuki Clans*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 2008, p.183.

opening of schools by the Christian missionaries, initially all scriptures and literary works were translated or written in the *Lusei* language. It was only from the 1920s that the documentation of the Hmar language made its first appearance with the publication of the Gospel of St. John in Hmar in the year 1921.⁴⁰ Oral traditions⁴¹ or sources have been constantly employed to construct the history of their origin.⁴² It was only from the 20th century that the Hmars became aware of the need to put down their cultures in writing. To this end their oral traditions became indispensable.

The colonial period ushered in structural changes in all spheres. The introduction of the so called *western* or *civilized culture* led to the decaying of many of the traditional age-old values, norms and practices that resulted in the comprehensive transformation in all aspects of life. Traditional administrative institutions gave way to bureaucraticism, which in turn resulted in the emergence of new elite class in the society.⁴³ New elements in the society such as Christianity and education that were no less the by-product of colonialism acted as a catalyst for a tremendous change in the society which were felt in every dimension- social, political, economy and even in the religious field. New religion was introduced which completely overshadowed and annihilated the traditional belief system. It also broadened the economic horizons and resulted in the emergence of Nationalism that directed against the alien rule and traditions and was primarily patronized by the educated section of the society.⁴⁴

According to the *Hmar* Traditions, *Sinlung* (believed to be in China) was considered as the ancestral home of the *Hmars*.⁴⁵ It was widely believed that from *Sinlung* they migrated southward in successive waves in search of a suitable settlement. Due to

⁴⁰ Lal Dena, *In Search of Identity; Hmars of North-East India*, New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2008, p. 81.

⁴¹ Since the 1950s, Oral Traditions which imply the narratives and descriptions of people and events in the past which have been handed down by word of mouth over several generations are increasingly regarded as evidence of how non-elite communities construct and modify cultural meaning over time 'John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history*, Reprint Third Edition, London, Pearson Education Ltd, p.295.

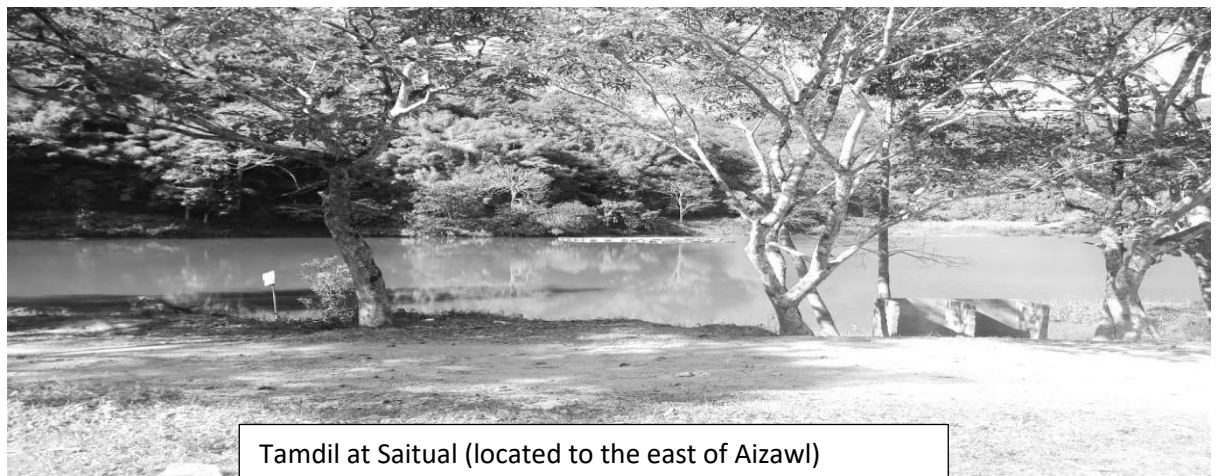
⁴² Thiek, *History of the Hmars in North East India (with special reference to Assam)*, p.1.

⁴³ O Rosanga, 'The Socio-Religious Impact of Colonial Rule: Mizoram', in *Laisuih (Ram leh Hnam Humhalhna)*, Aizawl, Mualchin publication & Paper Works, 2007, pp.233-235.

⁴⁴ O Rosanga, 'Colonial Legacies and Propagandas of Mizo Nationalism: A Critique on the Mizo National Front-Revolutionary Movement', in *Historical Journal Mizoram*, Vol.XIV, 2013, pp.199-200.

⁴⁵ _____ *Mizoram District Gazetteers*, p. 81.

the unavailability of written records, the exact period of the *Hmars'* migration and settlement into the present Mizoram was not known. The native writers put forth a divergent opinion. For instance, according to the Hmar historian Darliensung, the migration of the Hmars from Sinlung occurred around the 9th century A.D.⁴⁶ On the other hand, K Zawla suggested that it was around 1500-1600 (A.D)⁴⁷, while according to R.K Lalhluna, it was roughly between 1680-1699 A.D.⁴⁸ However, all seem to agreed that the *Hmars* were among the earliest settlers of the present Mizoram. For instance, villages like *Chawnchhim, Zote, Chhungte, Lawihmun, Ngur, Khawbung, Thiak, Darnawn* and *Biate* still bear the name of the Hmar clan.⁴⁹ *Fiengpuilal Biate*, a *Hmar* clan *Lal* (Chief) of *Saitual* was famous for his *Rulpui Khawi* (feeding of a big snake).⁵⁰ Rivers such as *Tuivai* and *Tuivawl* located in the eastern part of Mizoram were also believed to be the name given by the *Hmars* which are still in used even today.⁵¹ The earliest known farming at *Tamdil*,⁵² too was connected to the Hmar tribe.



Tamdil at Saitual (located to the east of Aizawl)

⁴⁶ Darliensung Hmar, *The Hmars*, New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2013, p.23.

⁴⁷ K Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh an thlahte chanchin*, 6th Edition, Aizawl, Printed at the Samuel Press, 1993, p. 151.

⁴⁸ Lalhluna, *Mizo History Kamkeuna (An introduction to Mizo History)*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ V L Siana, *Mizo History*, Aizawl, Lengchawn Press, 2009, p.5.

⁵⁰ *Rulpui* denoted a kind of big Snake or Python while *Khawi* refers to feeding. The Snake burrow could be seen even today. And the Village to this day is called *Rulchawn* which also means feeding a Snake; Lalremmawia Sailo, 'Saitual Khaw Chanchin' in *61st Y.M.A General conference 2006 Saitual Souvenir*, Aizawl, Blue Mountain Offset Printing, 2006, pp. 17-19.

⁵¹ H B Hrangchhuana, *Hmar Chanchin (Hmar History)*, Aizawl, Published by The Hmar Student Association, 1987, p.30.

⁵² B Lalhangliana, B, *India, Burma & Bangladesh-A Mizo Chanchin (Mizo History)*, First Edition, Aizawl, The RTM Press, 2001, p.203.

**Tamdil* is a lake located at 12 km. to the north of Saitual. Legend has it that it was formed from a mustard plant. When the mustard plant was uprooted, out gushed water from it and formed the lake. *Tam* means mustard in *hmar* language; Lalremmawia Sailo, 'Saitual Khaw Chanchin', *61st YMA General Conference 2006, Saitual Souvenir*, pp. 21-22.

In the pre-colonial times, the *Hmar* settlements in Mizoram were encompassed by a wave of migration and were scattered forcing some to push northward and southward, while others mingled with the *Luseis*, their cognate tribe.⁵³ With the coming of the British and their ultimate colonization of the present Mizoram in 1890-1891,⁵⁴ the *Hmars* then under the *Luseis* were not properly classified and this had continued till the 1950s. Accordingly, upon the independence of India, the inhabitants of the Lushai Hills as a whole were still not yet defined properly, the unique identity of the *Hmars* in particular was not even considered. Therefore, the areas of the *Hmars* settlement were being cut up and attached to the different states of the North East of India. This division of their habitation was to such an extent that the *Hmars* now found themselves scattered across the frontiers of Mizoram mostly in the extreme corner (border area) of Manipur, Mizoram, Cachar and North Cachar Hills of Assam, Tripura and the Chin hills resulting in their being reduced into an invisible and voiceless minority community in these respective states.⁵⁵ Consequently, the *Hmars*' habitation of the different state peripheries implied that no single state can be studied in isolation, and that the events or situation tended to have a bearing irrespective of regions and was not limited by state boundaries.

Historians have a divergent view with regards to the number of sub-tribes and sub-divisions of the *Hmar* tribe. For instance, according to Hranglien Songate and Hrangchhuana, there were 26 sub-tribes which were further divided into a number of clans.⁵⁶ However, Thangluaia and Laldotluanga had maintained that the number of the divisions to be roughly around 24 with numerous clans attached to it respectively.⁵⁷ This variation in numbers may be attributed to the clannish nature of the *Hmars* as well as their absorption by the dominant tribe-the *Lusei*. Anyway, there is no doubt that the *Hmar* encompassed a number of sub-tribes and sub-divisions with numerous clans branching out of the main tribe.

⁵³Liangkhaia (Rev.), *Mizo Chanchin (Mizo History)*, Fifth Reprint, Aizawl, LTL Publication, 2002, p. 22.

⁵⁴Zothanpuii, 'Colonial Health Services in Mizoram: Introduction of Western Medicine, Establishment of Dispensaries and Hospitals', *Historical Journal Mizoram*, vol XIV, 2013, p.132.

⁵⁵Lalsiamhnuna, *Political Problems of Mizoram; A study of Ethnic Politics with special reference to the Hmar People's Movement*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 2011, p. 82.

⁵⁶Hrangchhuana, *Hmar Chanchin (Hmar History)*, pp.4-10.

⁵⁷H Thangluaia, *Mizo Kan Ni (We are Mizo)*, Reprint, Aizawl, LoisBet, 2012, pp. 84-95; Laldotluanga, *The Quest for The Past*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 2011, pp. 31-35.

In the present Mizoram, the *Hmars* are mainly located in the Northern part of the hills. They either form a majority, and completely inhabited villages such as *Phuaibuang, Vanbawng, Suangpuilawn, Vervek, New Vervek, Khawpuar, Kani, Vaitin, Sakawrdai, Zohmun, Mauchar, Khawlian, Suhlusip, Daido, Khanthuam, Lungsum, Lamherh, Khawlek, Buallawn, Tinghmun, Saiphai, Saipum, Chiepuai, Dalakhal, Zawngin, Changkawlawng, Khawdungsei, Luakchhuah, Sesawng, Hruiteawl, Hmunnuam, Damdiai, Saihapui, Khawkawn, Thingsat, Vairengte, Bilkhawthlir, Ratu, Sailutar, Palsang, Bairabi, Phaisen, Nuchangphai, Meidum, Chhimluang, N. Hlimen, Dapchhuah, Pangbalkawn, Rengtekawn, and N. Vanlaiphai*. According to the official report, the Hmars concentrated areas were mostly in the northern part of Mizoram, yet, a good number of them were to be found in places other than northern part of Mizoram, including the capital city itself.⁵⁸

The later part of the 20th Century witnessed an aspiration for an administrative entity on ethnic lines to be carved out from the northern part of the present Mizoram, which gave rise to an armed rebellion based on ethnic line. It culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Settlement between the Government of Mizoram and the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) on 27 July 1994 with the main objective being “*giving adequate autonomy to the Sinlung Hills Development Council for social, economic, cultural and educational advancement of the people under the jurisdiction of the Council*”.⁵⁹ With the failure of the Settlement to fully implement its clauses, another Memorandum of Settlement between the Government of Mizoram and the Hmar People's Convention (Democratic) that superseded the earlier settlement was signed on 2 April 2018. The main objective was *to give enhanced autonomy in the manner of Administration ... in the sphere of socio-economic, political and cultural development of people under the Sinlung Hills Council. Sinlung Hills Development Council was re-christened as the Sinlung Hills Council*.⁶⁰ In pursuance of the later settlement, the Government of Mizoram appointed 12 persons as members of the Sinlung Hills Council.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Hmar, *The Hmars*, p.77.

⁵⁹ Memorandum of Settlement Between The Government of Mizoram and The Hmar People's Convention (HPC), 27th July, 1994.

⁶⁰ Memorandum of Settlement Between The Government of Mizoram and Hmar People's Convention (Democratic), 2nd April, 2018.

⁶¹ No. B. 12013/1/2018-HM (SHC), Home Department, Government of Mizoram, dated Aizawl the 9th July, 2018.

It also declared Sakawrdai Village as the Headquarter of the General Council of the Sinlung Hills Council.⁶² Lalthalien became the first Chief Executive Member (CEM).⁶³

Part XVII of the Indian Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 declared the *Hmars* as one of the Scheduled Tribes of the present Mizoram. The exact population of the *Hmars* was not known. In the first census of 1901, there were 10,411 Hmars in Mizoram which was then known as the Lushai Hills, where the total population of the Hills was 82434 only.⁶⁴ After 60 years, in 1961 in the then *Mizo Hills* (renamed from Lushai Hills), persons who speak the Hmar language as a mother tongue constituted only 2912 in numbers.⁶⁵ The problem with Mizoram was that even though *Hmar* was listed as a separate Scheduled Tribe, official documents did not provide a separate figure for this tribe.⁶⁶

1.5 REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The north east of India is a hub-bed of various tribes and sub-tribes. Ever since the annexation of the region by the British, the attentions of the administrators-cum ethnographers as well as the social scientist towards the issues of cultures, search for identity, the relationships between the colonial government and the region, etc., have increased tremendously which resulted in the publication of various literatures. Alexander Mackenzie's, *The North-East Frontier of India*, (Reproduced: 2007), was a store-house of information, especially for an ethno-historian. It discussed the political relations of the then British government of India with the hill tribes of Assam, Cachar and Chittagong. During this period Assam and the entire North East was a part of the Bengal presidency. The main disadvantage of this publication was that it was written on the colonial administrative perspective. For instance, it failed to make a distinction between the Kookies and the Lushais. Socio-cultural and the political

⁶² No. B. 12012/2/2018-HM (SHC), Government of Mizoram, Home Department, dated Aizawl, the 11th July, 2018.

⁶³ 'SHC Interim Sorkar Siamfel a ni, CEM hmasa ber tur Lalthalien', *Vanglaini*, 11 July 2018, p.1.

⁶⁴ Census of India, 1901, Volume IV-A, Assam, Part-II, published by BG Allen, of the Indian Civil Services, Superintendent of Census Operation, 1902, pp. 1 & 110.

⁶⁵ Census of India, 1961, Volume.III, Assam, Part. I-A-General Report, published by E H Pakyntein of the Indian Administrative Services, Superintendent of Census Operation, Assam Provinces, 1961, p.217.

⁶⁶ Lalsiamhnuna, *Political Problems of Mizoram; A study of Ethnic Politics with special reference to the Hmar People's Movement*, p. 89.

history of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai group of peoples was dealt with in *Zo Chronicles; A Documentary Study of History and Cultures of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai Tribe* (2008) by Khup Za Go. The book analyzed the culture, social or political environment on the emergence of trans-border identity, cultures and politics as well as the larger issue of safeguarding the minority rights.

Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality; Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India* (2002) maintained that the British rule was a catalyst for the upheaval of the socio-cultural life of different communities of the Northeast India. And that this crisis was the main factor for the formation of associations and organizations on ethnic lines that later served as a rallying point for the safeguarding of the identities and integrities, and in the extremes cases sometimes resulted in the confrontation between the government and the community leading to the growth of secessionist or insurgency movement. Along the same dimension yet in a different footing, S K Chaube in *Hills Politics in Northeast India* (Reprint: 2010), discussed in general, the socio-political history of the north east till the time of the reorganization of the region. Above all it pointed that the Sixth Schedule provision of the Constitution of 1950 proved insufficient to satisfy the aspirations of the educated elite. It also maintained that understanding the history of the region was the key to understanding the political issues. The politics of the north east was a clash of interest between the modernistic middle classes, the by-product of colonialism and the traditional elites who championed the primordial freedom of the tribes. Sometimes, this contradiction or competition resulted in the demand for regional autonomy.

The accounts of the courses of the colonization of the present Mizoram by the British and their subsequent system of government was to be found in the works of the colonial administrators cum ethnographers although their works were often tainted with biasness and prejudices, yet, nonetheless served as a storehouse of information. R G Woodthorpe's, *The Lushai Expedition 1871-72* (Reprint: 1980) discussed the expeditions to the then Lushai hills while at the same time, providing insight into the customs and traditions, usage and institution, etc. of the peoples. Woodthorpe

contended that the expedition against the Lushai was instigated by the Lushai themselves and that the British government had no choice but to subjugated their territory for the security and integrity of their peoples and territory. The same argument was visible in the book written by Thomas H Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel or How I helped to Govern India*, (Reprint: 2005). On the other hand, A G McCall's, *The Lushai Hills District Covers*, (Reprint: 2008) discussed the administration of the then Lushai Hills during the colonial period and served as a valuable store-house of information for researchers and writers alike.

Published works about Mizoram was often dominated by the history of the Lusei who constituted one of the groups under the wider umbrella of the generic term 'Mizo'. For instance, H G Joshi's, *Mizoram; Past and Present*, (2010) discussed the history, society, economy and political developments, social norms and values, art and crafts, and the MNF insurgency movement. N Chatterji's, *The Earlier Mizo Society*, (Reprint: 2008), dealt with cultures of the Mizo concerning the position and functions of the chiefs and the Zawlbuk and the status of Women. H L Malsawma's, *Sociology of the Mizo*, (2002), discussed the sociological aspects of the Mizos; giving us insight on their origin, social system, migration and settlement pattern. It also emphasized the impact of Christianity on the Mizos' cultures. C Lianthanga in *Hmanlai Mizo Nun* (2nd Edition: 2000) had examined the cultures of the Mizo from pre-colonial period to their settlement in present Mizoram.

Lalrinmawia in his *Mizoram; History and Cultural Identity* (1995) went a step further and equated *Lusei* with the term 'Mizo'. Moreover, he gave a very ambiguous defining for the term *Mizo* which to him implied the *Children of the hills*. Nevertheless, his so-called Mizo history was dominated by the *Luseis*. The book discussed the history of the Mizos from the pre-colonial period while covering in greater details the post-colonial period. It also emphasized on the role of the Church in the political development of the state. On the other, hand L B Thanga in his *The Mizos; A Study in Racial Personality*, (1978), defined 'Mizo' on the basis of a settlement/habitation. According to him, *Mizos* referred to peoples inhabiting Mizoram. This definition insinuated that groups of people settling outside of present

Mizoram who had shared a very close affinity with respects to cultures were excluded outside the ambit of the wider generic term *Mizo*. In the attempt to promote integration, it could unwittingly create division. Nonetheless, the book served as a storehouse of information for the history and cultures of the Mizos.

Sangkima's, *Mizos: Society and Social Change 1890-1947* (1992) presented a comprehensive study of the Mizos' cultures from pre-colonial to the end of colonialism. It maintained the British rule as the main harbinger of change for the Mizos. In spite of it being a comprehensive anthropological study about the Mizos, it missed out on major dances and festivals of the Hmars. B Lalthangliana's, *Mizo Culture (Studies in Mizo Culture and Tradition)* (2013) analysed the Mizo cultures in the perspective of change and continuity. The domination of the *Lusei* was prominent. The cultural domination of the *Lusei* proved noteworthy in almost all the existing literatures about the Mizos or Mizoram. This may be attributed to negligence or the lack of in-depth knowledge about the cognate tribes other than the *Lusei*. However, there are published literatures that presented an exclusive study on ethnic lines on some communities of Mizoram such as N E Parry's *The Lakhers*, (Reprint:1976), that discussed the cultures of the Lakhers, Jangkhongam Dounyel's, *Lai Chieftainship and Its impact in Politics* (2015), which was a comprehensive study of the Lai chieftainship including their settlement pattern as well as their migration to their present settlement. *Paite in Mizoram* (Second Impression:2011) and *A Brief Account of Riangs in Mizoram* (1986), both published by the Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Mizoram, etc. The former dealt with the pre-colonial cultures of the Paite, while the latter was about the cultures of the Riang. A comprehensive study about the Hmars might not be available as of now, nevertheless, there were instances where they were being referred to, and sometimes even formed a part of the discussion especially relating to the political development in the post-colonial period.

The inferences about the Hmars appeared for the first time in the writings of the colonial administrator cum ethnographers only after the colonization of present Mizoram by the British on account of the illiteracy of the Hmars resulting in their inability to record

their past. Even then, the Hmars as a nomenclature was hardly employed to describe them. Instead they were often wrongly clubbed together with their kindred tribes under the nomenclature *Kuki*, *Chin* and even sometimes *Lushai/Lusei*.

Carey and Tuck's, *The Chin Hills: A history of the People, our dealing with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country* (1896), the *chin* or *kyins* speaking a different *Tibeto-Burman* dialect was believed to have included the Hmars. The credit of categorizing the Hmars goes to J Shakespeare even though it appeared more like a passing reference without a thorough or an in-depth study. The failure of the other (colonial-administrator) writers from making even a passing reference may be attributed partly due to the domination of the *Lusei* over their kindred clans or tribes.

In Shakespeare's, *The Lushai Kuki Clans* (3rd Reprint:2008), the *Hmars* were referred to as a group of people living to the north of the Lushais, having a close cultural affinity to the latter.

Several published Literature such as the *Mizo Chanchin (Mizo History)* by Liangkhaia (5th Reprint: 2002), V.L Siama's *Mizo History* (2009) and Zatluanga's *Mizo Chanchin (Mizo History) Bu-I*(Reprinted: 1997), first published in 1966, had claimed that the Hmars were one of the earliest settlers of the present Mizoram. Liangkhai and H Thangluaia in *Mizo Kan Ni (We are Mizo)* (2012) had classified the Hmars under the wider umbrella of the generic term 'Mizo'. But, Liangkhaia, in spite of using Mizo as a generic term covering a range of tribes, was misleading in the manner he employed the term *Mizo*. The term *Mizo* basically connotes to the *Lusei* in the works of Liangkhaia. Likewise, V L Siama often interchanged the meaning of the term *Mizo* and *Lusei* and used *Mizo* as a synonym for *Lusei*, which both proved to be annoying and confusing at times.

Interestingly, Hrangthiauva, advocated an altogether different dimension, in *Mizo History (Mizo hnam hrang hrangte chanchin)* (2nd Reprint 20015), placed the Hmars

among the 21 tribes/clans of the Lusei. According to him, the *Hmars* were the first branch of *Duhliana's* progenies who tied their hair in a knot at the back. They were the descendent of a man named *Tochuanga*, the brother of *Luseia*, of which the latter was the descendent of the *Lusei*. An altogether different theory was that the Hmars were claimed to be one of the lost tribes of Israel. However, this has been given a death blow by Prof. Lal Dena in his work, *In Search of Identity: Hmars of North-East India* (2008) by employing an interdisciplinary approach on this issue. The book was a collection of essays that discusses the history of the Hmars from the earliest times to the post-Independence era. It emphasized on the identity issue of the Hmars and how it translated into political movements.

The early writers, not being on the same platform with regards to the nomenclature as well as the progenitor of the Hmar, have different views on the numbers of *Pahnam* (sub-clan/clan) of the Hmars. While Shakespeare mentioned 16 clans, Zathluanga regarded them as one of the largest tribes in Mizoram. At the same time, Hranglien Songate (*Hmar Chanchin* 1977)'s Hmar tribe was so inclusive and extensive and proved to be doubtful if one failed to acknowledge the concept of cultural assimilation that was believed to have a deep impact upon the Hmars, especially to those who lived among their different cognate tribes.

With regards to the ancestral home and migration towards their present settlement, Hranglien Songate's *Hmar Chanchin* (1977) served indispensable. Besides being the first one to write a book solely dedicated to the Hmars in the Hmar language, he had popularized the concept of *Sinlung*. His employment of oral mechanism as a tool for writing his book put his work at a high pedestal, yet, at the same time invoking criticism as his very method and tools left a wide room for subjectivity; biasness, supposition and wishful thinking. Louis L. Keivom's *Hmar Tolung (A Study of the Hmar History & Genealogy: 1990)*, diverging from Hranglien Songate, argued that the Hmars inhabited the Chin State prior to their settlement in the Shan State (both in Myanmar), which

according to him was supported by archeological evidences (monoliths) and oral traditions. However, his main contention was to open up challenges for further research.

In the socio-cultural arena, most of the works already available were pertaining to pre-colonial history and were primarily based on oral traditions. H.V. Vara's *the Hmar Nungphung (the Hmar Culture)* (2000), depicted the cultures of the Hmar prior to the advent of Christianity. Mention was made about the Village administration, marriage system, religion, economy, dress, rites and rituals, etc. *The Hmars* (2013), by Darliensung Hmar was mainly concerned with the history and folk stories of the *Hmars*. They all propounded that colonialism was the harbinger of changes towards socio-cultural realm. O Rosanga in his 'The Socio-Religious Impact of Colonial Rule: Mizoram', in *Laisuih (Ram leh Hnam Humhalhna)* (2007) opined that colonialism resulted in the *adulteration of tribal culture*. It led to the decaying of the age-old traditional social structures such as chieftainship, zawlbuk system, etc., while at the same time giving rise to the emergence of new elements such as the 'elite class' or the 'new middle class', the concept of *individualism*, etc. in the society. The professed structural transformation was not necessarily sanctioned by the then colonial officials even though the Christian missionaries played an enormous role to that end. *History of The Hmars in North East India (with special reference to Assam)* (2013) by Hrilrokhum Thiek, dealt with the *Hmars* from pre-colonial to post-colonial period. Post-colonial relates to the issue of identity, the advent of Christianity and the growth of Hmar literature, etc., and at the same time emphasis was also made to those who settled in Assam. V P Sharma's *The Hmars of Manipur; An anthropological Exploration*, (1992) was an extensive anthropological study of the *Hmars*. Yet, it basically concentrated on the *Hmars* of the Southern Manipur. The book emphasized on the arts and crafts. However, it failed to delve on the political developments in the post-colonial period.

With regards to political field, B B Goswami in his *The Mizo Unrest; a Study of Politicization of Culture* (1979) discussed political anthropology of the Mizos, i.e. from

the abolition of the power of the chiefs to the emergence of ethnic politics. It maintained that the British rule was the catalyst for this development.

S N Singh's *Mizoram; Historical, Geographical, Social, Economic, Political and Administration* (1994), discussed the role played by geography on the frequent ethnic problems and the resulting intermittent insurgent upheavals. It further content that north east region was composed of heterogeneous races possessing a diverse and unique cultures, and that the geographical isolation resulted in the retention of their traditional characteristics and therefore leading to the isolation and localization of tribal cultures and thus the urged to safeguard and preserve the same. In the case of the Hmars, the ethnic tension which could threaten the stability of the state was a sense of betrayal by the dominant cognate tribes towards the fruits of Independence from the colonial yoke and the subsequent creation of statehood from the Lushai Hills. It stated that the Hmars played a vital role in the political activities of the Lushai Hills District politics, but post-Independence the perks that came along with it was mostly utilized by the Lusei, the Lakhers and the Pawis. Consequently, this created schism in the well-knit Mizo society and further escalated into ethnic tension. On the other hand, A P K Singh's, *Political Scenario of Mizoram; Past and Present*, (2016) content that the origin of the Hmar issue in Mizoram originated during the Mizo National Front Movement (MNF). Upon the promised of 'Greater Mizoram' by the MNF, the Hmars became the active participant of the movement with the hope of integrating all the Hmars' Settlement, including settlement outside of the present Mizoram. The book maintained that the political development was inter-related to economic and social conditions and of geographical location. For instance, the ethnic unrest was mainly fueled by the economic deprivation of a particular region, which in turn led to battling for ethnic identity and a share in the economic resources.

O Rosanga's 'The rise of Self-Assertion and Self-Determination of the ethnic Tribe of the Mizo (1945-1965)', in *Laisuih (Ram leh Hnam Humhalhna)* (2007) stated that the policy of the British colonial power of cutting up of the habitats of the ethnic tribes of the Mizo leading to their absorption in the neighbouring states or countries was mainly

responsible for the *rise of regionalism* and a *separatist tendency* based on communal lines. The separatist tendency was mostly rooted on the feelings of exclusion against the resources to which the District Administration was also partly responsible for neglecting development works in the periphery of Mizoram. At the same time, it (separate tendency) was greatly motivated and influenced and pressurized from outside the present Mizoram. *The Political Problems of Mizoram: A Study of Ethnic Politics with special reference to the Hmar People's Movement* (2011), by Lalsiamhnuna, reflected the genesis of the political problems arising out of the autonomy movements along the ethnic lines of the major (recognized) tribes of Mizoram viz. the *Mizo (Lushai)*, the *Pawi (Lai)*, the *Lahker (Mara)*, the *Chakma (Takam)* and the *Hmar*, mainly dealing with the *Hmar* people's movement during the pre and post-Independence period till 2001. The book also emphasized on the causes and effects of the political discontentment of the various tribes of Mizoram. H.B Hrangchhuana in *Hmar Chanchin (Hmar History)* (1987) mentioned about the Hmars locating in the state of Manipur and their involvement in the 'Mizo Union Party'.

The Hmar's history and culture up till now was hardly represented in the history of Mizoram even after the subsequent emergence of the Sinlung Hills Council during the 1990s in the northern part of Mizoram. Moreover, there was no known published literature presenting a comprehensive socio-cultural history of the Hmars of Mizoram till today.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

A comprehensive study of the Hmars who constituted a sizeable population in the present Mizoram, so far was not available. Moreover, even the knowledge about the tribe was vague as per the existing anthropological and linguistic works. They are often misleadingly interpreted to be a big 'clan' either under the *Lushais (Mizo)* or the *Kukis*. For instance, J. Shakespeare had described their cultures under the 'Old Kuki Clan'.⁶⁷ It was likely that he must have borrowed the term 'Old Kuki' unwarrantedly

⁶⁷ J Shakespeare, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, p.183.

from Dr. Grierson's writing in the '*Linguistic Survey of India*' in which the languages of the Hmar and other neighboring tribes were placed under the '*Old Kuki*' group. In this way, some misleading statements were often found in the works of some writers like A.G. McCall, C A Soppitt and others who put the Hmars either under the *Lushai tribe* (in case of Mizoram) or under the *Kuki tribe* (in case of Manipur, Cachar and North Cachar Hills of Assam and Tripura).⁶⁸

The Hmars claimed that their culture, tradition, custom and language found no Government patronage for its development in Mizoram. Therefore, the rich cultures and language of the Hmars were on the verge of virtual extinction in their own homeland. Their socio-cultural history was dominated by the Lusei cultures. *Sikpui Ruoi* (Winter Festival), one of the oldest festivals of the Hmars and other festivals such as *Hrang Lam*, *Dar Lam* and *Buhtukhuonglawm* were not included among the various Festivals of the *Mizos*. They also claimed that the economic imbalance was so much that there had been rampant poverty in the Hmar concentrated areas. The educationally and economically advanced mainstream *Mizo* society dominated over administration and other fields which created a fear psychosis in the minds of the Hmars lest their identity would be wiped out. They also felt that they were neglected and treated as alien by their counterpart and the Government of Mizoram.⁶⁹

The Hmars claimed that they were the first settlers of the erstwhile Lushai Hills now Mizoram and nothing was traceable about human settlement before the coming of the Hmars in this area.⁷⁰ According to Thanglianchhunga's written report to the NE SUN correspondent, Jishnu Dutta, Towns and villages in which more than 85% of the inhabitants consisted of the Hmars occupying the villages like *Khawlian*, *Phuaibuang*, *Khawlek*, *Lamherh*, *Kani*, *Tinghmun*, *mauchar*, *Saiphai*, *Saipum*, *Palsang*, *Zohmun*, *Sakawrdai*, *Vaitin*, *Khawpuar*, *New Vervek*, *Lungsum*, *Chiahpui*, *Khawkawn*, *Phainuam* and *Damdiai*; where they are above 50% are *Suangpuilawn*, *Vanbawng*,

⁶⁸ Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam; From 1883-1941*, Shillong, Assam Government Press, 1942, pp.3-4.

⁶⁹ S N Singh, 'Hmar Autonomy Movement', in R. N Prasad (ed), *Autonomy Movements in Mizoram*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1994, p.126.

⁷⁰ Thanglianchhunga (HPC Vice-President), interviewed by Jishnu Dutta, 1989, The North-East Sun, 2 December, 1989, p.26 (vi).

Ratu, Sailutar, Bilkhawthlir, Vairengte, Kolasib, NE Khawdungsei and Bairabi with more than 30% Hmars in places such as *Thingsat, N.Khawdungsei, Darlawn, Kepran, Sawleng, Phaileng, Phaisen, Buhchang and Tengtawng*.⁷¹

As per the decision of the Council of Ministers (Mizoram) in its meeting held on 22 November 1994, the Two-men Commission visited several villages in the area demanded by the Hmar people Convention (HPC). Due to limited time given to them, many of the villages included in the demand area could not be covered. However, the villages which they considered to be more important had been included. As per the report submitted to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Mizoram, Aizawl, by the Two-men Commission on 13 December, 1994, the Hmars were constituting the majority of the population in the then Assembly Constituencies of *Ngopa, Suangpuilawn, Ratu, Kolasib and Bilkhawthlir*.⁷² Mention may rightly be made that besides these Constituencies and villages, the Hmars have scattered throughout the length and breadth of Mizoram.

Many prominent and successful businessmen, politicians, church workers and professionals came from this particular community. For examples, *Aloysius Thanglura* s/o Chhawnthanga Hmar Darngawn and Vanchhingpuii, became the first advocate in the Lushai Hills (1954) and the first Mizo politician to be the Cabinet Minister of Assam (1970 – 1972);⁷³ *Pachhunga*, a Church Elder and successful businessman was the first President of the Mizo Union (MU), which was the first Political Party of Mizoram. He was also a leading entrepreneur as well as the major benefactor of Pachhunga University College.⁷⁴ *Rokunga* s/o Thangluta Hmar and *Zaliani*, a renown Poet whose works included such as ‘*Ro min relsak ang che*’ and ‘*Lentupui kaivel leh romei chhumin*’ (Assam Rifles Band Paty’s Theme Song);⁷⁵ *H.K.Bawichhuaka* s/o Hmar Khawbung Dohnuna and *Roziki*, who was a renowned Mizo politician, and a General Secretary of the Mizo Union (1949-1958), and the Chief

⁷¹ Thanglianchnunga (HPC Vice-President), interviewed by Jishnu Dutta, 1989, *The North-East Sun*, 2 December, 1989, p.26 (vii).

⁷² Lalsiamhnuna, p.231.

⁷³ C Vanlallawma, *Tun Kum Za Chhunga Mizo Hnam Puipate, 1894-1994*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 1994, p.260.

⁷⁴ Vanlallawma, *Tun Kum Za Chhunga Mizo Hnam Puipate, 1894-1994*, p.191.

⁷⁵ Vanlallawma, p.208.

Executive Member (CEM) of the Mizo District Council (March, 1965 – April, 1970);⁷⁶ Hranglamthanga/ H.Lama (blind), a famous Mizo Poet who composed the first Mizo Christian Anthem, ‘*Lalberte Lalber*’;⁷⁷ J.Malsawma, M.A., B.L. s/o Lianhnawka, Chief of Lungsum and Darlianhhingi, who was well known for his articles such as ‘*Fur Khaw Hnawm*’, ‘*Vanapa College*’, ‘*Hawrawp Humtu*’, ‘*Harsatna*’, ‘*Awithangpa a nih kha*’.⁷⁸

Moreover, from the post-colonial period political consciousness had begun to develop among the Hmars predisposing towards the primordial cultures, thereby instigating as a distinct community to pursue their true political trajectory. In this regard, it was noteworthy to state that the present Mizoram was not a stranger to this kind of development within the various ethnic groups sharing a very close cultural affinity inhabiting the length and breadth of its territory. In the southern part, three Autonomous Regional Councils, viz., the Chakma Autonomous Region, the Lakher Autonomous Region and the Pawi Autonomous Region were carved out on the ethnic lines after Mizoram was elevated to the Union Territory (UT) status in 1972.⁷⁹ Except for the first mentioned Autonomous region, the last two Regional Councils were made for the communities under the wider umbrella of the generic term ‘*Mizo*’. The *Hmars* too, are also considered to have the same affinity in matter of customs, language, culture etc. with their cognate tribes, yet, the need to identify the *Hmars* as a separate entity was not made significantly important. Till date the *Hmar* traditional society and culture found only a small space and the history of the *Mizos* was dominated by the history of the *Luseis*, the majority of the *Mizo* tribe.

The Hmars too, had been awakened to what they claimed as their true political role, their actual identity that metamorphosed in the demand for a separate Council within the jurisdiction of the present Mizoram. As per the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Mizoram and the Hmar People’s convention (Democratic),

⁷⁶ Vanlallawma, p.55.

⁷⁷ Vanlallawma, p.169.

⁷⁸ Vanlallawma, p.184.

⁷⁹ C Lalkima, ‘Mizoram A District Council Te Zirbingna leh Chhuizauna’, in *LAISUIH (Ram leh Hnam Humhalhna)*, Aizawl, Mualchin publication & Paper Works, 2007, pp.99-100.

2018, the first election of the *Sinlung Hills Council* was held on 5 November 2019.⁸⁰ In this scenario, an in-depth scholarly study of the Hmars would enable a scope for a rational and fair treatment of the subject.

There was, no doubt that there were a handful of books available about the *Hmars*. But needless to say, that there was no published literature to date, which presented a comprehensive study of the *Hmars* of Mizoram that pertains to their socio-cultural history.

The Indian Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 declared the *Hmars* as a Scheduled Tribes in the states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram. According to the Table appended to the 6th schedule (para 20) of the Constitution of India (which was amended in 1992, 1984 & 1988), under Table III-1, the Chakma district, the Mara district and the Lai district had been declared as ‘Tribal Areas’ of Mizoram, and therefore administered as ‘autonomous district’.⁸¹ With the absence of such provision for the *Hmar* settlement areas, the language and culture of the *Hmars* was in danger in the near future or lost its unique features eventually.

1.7 OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of the study are:

1. To trace the origin of the Hmar tribe.
2. To study the routes of the Hmar’s migration to the present Mizoram.
3. To study the pre-colonial socio-culture of the Hmars.
4. To examine the impact of colonialism on the Hmars.
5. To examine the post-colonial changes and its effects on the Hmar community.

⁸⁰ ‘SHC-ah MNF leh HPC an Chak’, in *Vanglaini*, Vol-XXXIV No. 262, 7 November, 2019, p.1.

⁸¹ Durga Das Basu, *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, 19th Edition, Nagpur, Wadhwa and Company Law Publishers, 2006, p. 286.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The following research questions are placed before the research:

1. How the Hmars originated?
2. How did they migrate to the present hills?
3. What was the Hmar socio-cultural condition during the pre-colonial period?
4. What was the impact of the colonial rule?

1.9 AREA OF STUDY:

The study mainly focused on the whole region of Mizoram and its neighboring states as an extensive area. Extensive study was given in the north-eastern part of Mizoram. The study covered from the pre-colonial period to 1972.

1.10 METHODOLOGY:

The research was done based on ethno-historical study. Both primary and secondary sources were employed. Primary sources included archival sources and oral traditions. Archival sources were collected from the States Archives of Mizoram, Manipur and Guwahati. These sources were mainly supplemented by secondary sources such as published literatures, journals, articles, unpublished documents and local newspaper.

Qualitative method had been used for the collection of the relevant sources. A semi-structured interview (based on oral tradition) had been conducted for the collection of information or sources from the respondents. The respondents were carefully selected group of peoples who were believed to be well placed to cast light on the particular issue related with the research. Personal interview had been conducted by visiting respondents hailing from the Hmars inhabited areas of Mizoram, Manipur and Assam.

1.11 CHAPTERIZATION:

The study is divided into the following chapters:

The first chapter presents an overall summary of the whole work. It analyses the major theories on cultures and society and contextualizing the said concepts towards the Hmars. It also explores on the general introductions of Mizoram and the Hmars, statement of the problem, review of the existing literatures, the objectives, area and methodology of the study.

The second chapter deals with the origin and migration patterns of the Hmars. It opens with a brief introduction on the meaning of oral traditions and how far it was reliable as a source of the Hmar history per se, since no literary work was available on the issues of their origin and settlement prior to their present settlement. It also analyses on the origin and meaning of the term Hmar as well as the meaning of migration in the context of the Hmars. With regards to migration, taking colonialism as the partition point it was divided into the pre-colonial migration and the post-colonial migration respectively. The pre-colonial migration deals with the ancestral home, beyond *Sinlung* theory, settlement at *Shan*, settlement at *Kawlphai* and from *Kawlphai* to the present *Mizoram*. The post-colonial migration, on the other hand dealt with the migrations ‘in’ and ‘out’ of the present Mizoram.

The third chapter discusses the pre-colonial socio-cultural structures. It explores the social system such as the clan, *laibung*, family, marriage system, divorce, rites connected to birth and slavery, food habits and dresses and the economic system as well as the political system such as *lal* and *buonzawl*. It also highlights the folksongs, folklores, festivals, dances, musical instruments and the traditional belief system of the Hmars.

The fourth chapter is about the socio-cultural changes in the post-colonial period. It analysed the twin offshoots of colonialism, viz., introductions of Christianity

and education among the Hmars, and their impact on the Hmars such as the growth of the vernacular education, the emergence of devotional songs, patriotic songs, *hla lenglawng*, *keilet/sai hla*, adoption of Christianity at the expense of traditional belief system, abolition of *buonzawl*, emergence of a new social class, abolition of chieftainship, abolition of bawi/sal (slavery) system, introduction of modern health care system and decaying of traditional cultures and traditions. It also analyses the status of women through the ages, i.e., the pre-colonial status and status of women in the post-colonial period.

The fifth chapter discusses the political changes in the post-colonial period. It explores the major theories on ethnic/ethnicity, and how it translated among the Hmars in the pre-colonial period albeit in a subtle manner during *Takam Vai Lien* and conflict with the *Lusei*. And how in the post-colonial period it resulted in the Hmar-Kuki conflict finally leading to the reasserting of their identity in the form of Non-Political Organizations as well as directly involving in politics as a tribe. The latter could be described as the Hmar and the Mizo Union, the Hmar Mongolian Federation, the Hmar National Congress, the Hmar National Union, the Hmar Regional Movement and the Young Hmar Association. Then, it finally deals with the relationship between the Mizo National Front and the Hmars.

The sixth chapter summarizes the entire research findings and the final remarks of the study.

CHAPTER-2

ORIGIN AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN

2.1 Introduction:

It was only after the colonization of the present Mizoram by the British that the Hmars began to be acquainted with the art of writing, which therefore means that there were no written records about their past prior to colonization. However, to make up for the lack of written records, the Hmars had rich oral traditions in the form of folksongs, folklores, myths, poems, sayings, legends etc. which could be employed to conjure up their pre-colonial history, particularly the history of their origin, ancestral home, and their migrations and settlement patterns.

The colonial administrator cum ethnographer were the first to write about the *Hmars* and that too, upholding their best interest at heart. Here the term *Hmar* and *Mizo* was used synonymously as *Mizo* is a generic term which consisted of different tribes or clans sharing a close affinity such as the Lusei, the Ralte, the Pawi, the Chawte, etc.⁸² Their (colonial administrator cum ethnographer) works often reflected a painstaking attempt of justifying imperialism. For instance, the manner in which they describe the conquest of the Mizo speaks for itself, thus,

*“One long sickening story of open insults and defiance, bold outrages and cold-blooded murders on the one side and long-suffering forbearance, forgiveness, concession and unlooked favours on the other”*⁸³

In the face of such disposition, their writings cannot be relied as a comprehensive source without any reservation. Moreover, they were silent about their

⁸² Sangkima, *Mizos: Society and Social Change (1890-1947)*, p.3.

⁸³ Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality; Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India*, p.19.

ancestral home and settlement pattern prior to their immigration to the present Mizoram. From A S Reid to A G McCall and even to Shakespeare, they failed to show any interest in the Hmar's past history especially prior to their settlement in the present hills. It was only from the 20th century that the Hmars were aware of their past and that they felt the need to put down the same in writing. To this end, oral traditions became indispensable.

2.2 Meaning of Oral Tradition:

According to Jan Vansina,

“Oral Traditions as a source of history can be define as verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation. Where the message must be oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments only, and transmitted by word of mouth over at least a generation. Traditions need not be clichés or narratives, nor is the conscious intent to testify about the past necessary”.⁸⁴

It may also be defined as a body of knowledge that has been handed down by word of mouth over several generations and is collectively owned by the members of the society.⁸⁵ It is a collective action which informs as well as symbolize the permanent and changing precepts and values of the society, embodying wisdom and achievements.⁸⁶ In a way, Oral Tradition almost always tended to portray cultural reality. It covers a wide range of subject matter and can be found in a variety of forms such as folktales, folklores, chants, poems, folk songs, etc.⁸⁷ With the emergence of a strong school of documentary and scientific history in the 18th and 19th centuries supported by *Newtonian* science, oral traditions as a source of history was attacked as

⁸⁴ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition As History*, Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, pp.27-28.

⁸⁵ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history*, London, Pearson Education Limited, Revised Third Edition, 2002, p.311.

⁸⁶ Nwankwo Uchenna Martins, 'The Position of Oral Tradition (Myths, Mythology and Legends) in Historical Records', 2012 International Conference on Humanity, History and Society, IPEDR, Vol-34, p.160, <http://www.ipedr.com>, (accessed on 21 August 2017).

⁸⁷ Martins, 'The Position of Oral Tradition (Myths, Mythology and Legends) in Historical Records', p.160.

too fanciful, self-serving, and unreliable.⁸⁸ Popular critics included *Leopold Von Ranke* and *Charles Seignobos*, who insisted on relying to the relatively "hard" evidence found in documents and 'on analyzing critically of their form and content'.⁸⁹ In the light of such an ambiance, memory is greatly suspected and is seen 'as subject to both intentional and unintentional distortion'.⁹⁰ It was only in the 1950s that historians began to grasp the value of oral traditions and felt it indispensable to evaluate it carefully for its historical content and to lay down procedure for its interpretations and its collections.⁹¹ In the Post Second World War era, oral traditions had been widely employed by the third world countries whose colonizer failed to delve up their past beyond the written documents. For instance, A G McCall stated:

"History may be said to constitute an accurate and systematic record of events any authoritative and detailed history of early Lushai at this late stage can no longer be attempted".⁹²

The above statement amounted to the insinuation of the Hmars as having no past beyond their present settlement due to lack of written records. In this juncture, the greatest challenge to historian writing about them was to provide them an extended past, to which the 'oral tradition served as a ready panacea'.

2.3 How far Oral Tradition is reliable as a historical source?

According to Marc Bloch, the word 'history' that implied 'inquiry' still retained its term from the first time it appeared on the lips of man more than two millenniums ago, even though its content had changed a great deal.⁹³ In the word of John Tosh, sources for history '*encompass every kind of evidence that human beings*

⁸⁸ William W Moss and Peter C Mazikana, *Archives, Oral History and Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study*, General Information Programme & UNISIST, UNESCO, Paris, 1986, p.13. <https://www.pdfdrive.com>. (accessed on 26 January 2019).

⁸⁹ Moss and Mazikana, *Archives, Oral History and Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study*, General Information Programme & UNISIST, UNESCO, p.13

⁹⁰ Moss and Mazikana, p.13.

⁹¹ Tosh, p.311.

⁹² A G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, Reprint, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Mizoram, 2003, p.34.

⁹³ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, New York, Vintage Book, 1953, p.20.

have left of their past activities'.⁹⁴ To R G Collingwood, 'historical evidence to be a historical evidence depended on our perception, meaning they became one, i.e. a historical evidence if we consider them as one'.⁹⁵ If we were to agreed with the above statement, oral tradition, no doubt was to be regarded as part and parcel of historical sources. However, the question did remain, how far a researcher could rely on oral traditions or sources as historical facts.

Nevertheless, in spite of the importance and contributions of oral tradition, it is assaulted with criticism from various angle. Firstly, oral tradition is criticized for its method of spontaneous transmission that leave a wide room for distortion as they are handed down from generation to generation. It is also criticized on the ground of the feebleness of the human mind in recounting the past. It is also attacked for its subjective nature and its inclination to the political rights, privileges and position which it claims.⁹⁶ However, E H Carr stated:

*“The believe in a hard-core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one that is very hard to eradicate”.*⁹⁷

Furthermore, even with the case of written documents, the document speaks of only what the author of the document wishes to convey.⁹⁸ So, the bias attitude against oral tradition could be nothing more than eurocentrism.

⁹⁴ Tosh, p.54.

⁹⁵ R G Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Revised Edition (Indian Edition), New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.12.

⁹⁶ Alexander C Ugwukah, 'The Value of Oral Tradition to a Researcher of African Historiography', *Historical Research Letter*, Vol-17, 2015, p.57. <http://www.iiste.org>article>, (accessed on 21 August 2017).

⁹⁷ R W Davis (ed), *E H Carr, What is History? His Acclaimed Reflections On The Theory of History and The Role of The Historian*, Second Edition, London, Penguin Books, p.12.

⁹⁸ Davis (ed), *E H Carr, What is History?, His Acclaimed Reflections On The Theory of History and The Role of The Historian*, p.16.

Another critical remark against oral tradition is lack of chronology, while precise dates is argued for written sources.⁹⁹ This argument can also be analyzed in a whole new perspective. From the middle of the 20th century onward, Annales historian propagated an interdisciplinary approach involving structural changes in the study of history by applying comparative and regressive methods to the study of history. They argued that history could not be satisfactorily recreated from a patchwork of particular facts. They also advocated that the historian could enhance the knowledge of the past only by agreeing to draw freely from sociology, geography, psychology and economics without disregarding documents and of course scholarly concern.¹⁰⁰ If the same approach was applied to oral tradition, we would arrive at a better term with the chronological issues. For instance, in the context of the Hmar history, Hranglien Songate relied on folk songs and folklores to conjure up their previous settlement as well as the route of the migrations of the Hmars. While Darliensung Hmar, propounded his theory based on the route of migration of the 3rd century BCE. Lal Dena preferred scientific experiment (DNA testing) to analyzed the *racial identity* of the Hmars.¹⁰¹

Oral traditions were also criticized for not being static, and the mode of their handing down from generation to generation leaving a wide room for alteration. For instance, each time the story was retold chances of recreating or inventing a new story was possible from the respondent. Moreover, there was a continual regeneration of traditions as they were often adapted to express the existing collective conscience and *as the words of the past become congruent with the values and images of the present and take on contemporary meanings.*¹⁰² Therefore, attaching contemporary meaning to the past can proved to be bias, fanciful and self-serving.

⁹⁹ Monsuru Babatunde Muraine, 'Oral Tradition as a Reliable Source of Historical Writing: Arguments for and Against and Implications for Historical Writing in Education', *Historical Research letter*, Vol-22, 2015, p.19. <http://www.iiste.org>article>, (accessed on 22 August 2017).

¹⁰⁰ E Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography, 500 BC to AD 2000*, New Delhi, Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., 2009. Pp.259-260.

¹⁰¹ DNA test conducted in 2003 by Isaac L. Hmar and Isaac Thangjom proved the theory of Hmar-Israel racial affinity to be a myth.

¹⁰² Moss and Mazikana, p.11.

For an illiterate society like the pre-colonial Hmars, oral tradition served as a pre-requisite form of reconstructing the past, carving out identity and an indispensable means for promoting and stimulating their cultural heritage independent of colonial influence. However, the use of it as a historical material was no doubt, apparently difficult and challenging. But there was nothing that can be amended by careful application of critical evaluation and meticulous interdisciplinary approach. Oral tradition, if professionally processed, harnessed and harmonized, they could be as reliable as the so-called scientific sources. At any rate, a level of subjectivism enters every step irrespective of the raw materials. E H Carr stated that:

*“It is used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them”.*¹⁰³

It is to be noted that the dividing line between written and oral sources are slim. Just as many of the written sources were in fact oral in origin, oral tradition, once put into writing became a written source. Most of what had transformed into well-kept history of today were themselves processed from oral traditions. One important fact to be noted here is that no source material is used independently now a day.

2.4 Meaning of the term *Hmar*:

In the absence of a written records as mentioned above, Oral Traditions became indispensable as a historical source in analyzing the origin and meaning of the term *Hmar* as there was no consensus opinion with regards to the origin and meaning of the term ‘Hmar’. The failure of the colonial ethnographers/statesman who were the first to write about the history of the north east India in accurately classifying the various tribes of the areas they colonized, no doubt alleviated the problem connected with such issue. They often described them by a name other than the one they called

¹⁰³ Davis, p.11.

themselves which was evident from the letter from Dr R Brown, the Political Agent of Manipur to C.U. Aitchison which stated:

*“I have the honor to address you on the subject of the Loosai tribe of Kookies,”*¹⁰⁴

According to Shakespeare, the nomenclature Hmar implies ‘North’ which was the name given by the *Lusei* since they settled to their ‘north’.¹⁰⁵ To collaborate with the above viewpoint, Lalaudinga had asserted that the Hmars were commonly known by the term ‘*Fengngo*’. They came to be known by the nomenclature ‘Hmar’ only after their settlement in the present Mizoram. He further stated that they were one of the first settlers of the present Mizoram. After the migration of the *Palian* and the *Ralte* (both a sub-division of the Mizo) to the present hills, they moved towards the north and settled to the north of the *Palians* and the *Raltes* and thus they came to be denoted as the *Hmars*.¹⁰⁶ The word ‘*Hmar*’ happens to mean ‘north’ in both Lushai and Hmar languages. However, if this assertion were to be accepted, then the term ‘*Hmar*’ as a nomenclature, would be of a very recent origin.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the *Mirawng* (Nagas) and the *Meiteis* who had settled to the North of the Lushai hills would also be called ‘Hmars’, and not by any other name. Therefore, the above assertion could be over ruled or ignored.

Liendang Hla (Songs of Liendang), a collection of folk songs composed and popularized by Liendang, while the Hmars were believed to be settling in the so-called *Shan* (explain subsequently) before their migration to the present hills had included the following lines-

lairil tamin Hmar tlangpui an sawi luoi a,

¹⁰⁴ In the letter from Dr. R Brown, Political Agent of Munnipore (Manipur) to C. U. Aichison, Esq., Officiating Secretary to Govt. of India, Foreign Dept., the *lusei* are denoted as a tribe of *kookies (Kuki)*; N Chatterjee, *Looshais And Munnipoorees*, Calcutta, Published by Firma KLM (P) Ltd. On behalf of the Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1979, p.16.

¹⁰⁵ Shakespeare, p.183.

¹⁰⁶ C Lalaudinga, *Mizo History: Chin Hills leh Mizoram*, First Edition, Aizawl, Lois Bet, Print & Publication, 2019, p.25.

¹⁰⁷ Lalsiamhnuna, p.65.

*Rama Kaihra 'n Zapui pa damzo naw ning...*¹⁰⁸

The meaning of the above is, 'famine ravaged the Hmar's Settlement, wild *Kaihra* (a kind of wild Yam) is insufficient for the survival of *Zapui pa* (a man from Zapui)'. Moreover, Folk songs of their kindred tribe believed to be composed during their settlement around the Chin Hills also suggested the existence of the term Hmar-

A nau Kau hek huk e, gun titungah,

*Thanthlang leh Hmar pa lu*¹⁰⁹

(Along the course of the river Run, Men of Thantlang and Hmars had a very big ear).

Ka Khua a hla e,

Ka Kal nan Run tui a lian e,

*Hmar zawl a chhun e*¹¹⁰

{My home is far off, to get there I've to crossed flooding river Run (the colonialist called it the Manipur river), that had flooded the Hmar's settlement}. All the above folk songs suggested that the term 'Hmar' was already in used before they entered the present Mizoram.

Along the line of the above assertion, K Zawla stated that the term Hmar was the name given by the *Kawl* during the time of their settlement at *Kawlphai*.¹¹¹

After the advent of the British and their subsequent colonization of the present Mizoram, the 'Hmars' were classified by the then administrations of the hills within the wider umbrella called the '*Old Kuki*' or *Kuki*. For instance, J Shakespeare referred

¹⁰⁸ Louis L Keivom, *Hmar Tolung (A study of the Hmar History & Geneology)*, Imphal, The Eastern India Standard Offset & Letter Printing Press, 1990, p.41.

¹⁰⁹ Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, p.8

¹¹⁰ B Lalhangliana, *History of Mizo (In Burma)*, Aizawl, Nazareth Press, 1980, p-80.

¹¹¹ Zawla, p.6.

to the Hmars as the *Old Kuki* clans in spite of being aware that they were known by the name *Hmar* to their kindred tribes. Shakespeare stated:

*“The Hrangchal and Biate are two of many clans collectively known to the Lushais as Hmar-i.e., North-from the position of their villages with reference to those of the Lushais, and among themselves as Khawthlang and Khawchhak-i.e., Western and Eastern Villages I have found representatives of 16 clans in the Lushai Hills and adjoining portions of Manipur.”*¹¹²

Furthermore, it can be read from the extract from Carey and Tuck’s, *The Chin Hills: A History of the People, our dealing with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country* that stated:

“In the Burma Census Report of 1891 Chin ethnology is dismissed with the remark that the Chins or Kyins are a group of hill tribes, all taking various dialect of the same Tibeto-Burman speech and calling themselves by various names. Without pretending to speak with authority on the subject, we think we may reasonably accept the theory that the Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam, and the Chin originally lived in what we now know as Thibet and are of one and the same stock; their form of government, method of cultivation, manners and customs, belief and traditions all point to one origin”.¹¹³

Their aversion towards this particular term, i.e. *Kuki*, too suggest that they must already have an accepted name, where in this case, most probably must be the term ‘Hmar’.

¹¹² Shakespeare, p.183.

¹¹³ Bertram S Carey & HN Tuck, *The Chin Hills: A history of the people, our dealing with them, their customs and manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country*, Vol-I, Rangoon, Printed by the Superintendent, Govt. Printing, Burma, 1896, p.2.

There was another theory that content the meaning of the term Hmar as ‘*tying of the hair into a knot at the back of the head.*’ Thawnglinga stated that the term ‘Hmar’ referred to any male who ‘tie their hair into a knot at the back’.¹¹⁴ According to the Hmar tradition, there were once two brothers named *Hrumsawm* and *Tukbemsawm*. *Hrumsawm*, the older brother had a sore on his nape, and thus, against the conventional way of tying the hair in a knot at the back, he tied his hair in a knot at the front. His progenies continued the same hair style and came to be called the ‘*Pawis*’.¹¹⁵ The reference of the Pawi as Hrumsawm was reinforced by the following *Lusei* folk song which speaks about the superior ‘forces’ of the *Pawi* against the *Luseis*-

“*Hrum sawm lo lian pal ang ka do zo lo ve*”¹¹⁶

{the above song reflected the superior invincible forces of the *Hrumsawm (Pawi)*}

To the progenies of *Hrumsawm*, all the progenies of *Tukbemsawm* were known as ‘*Hmarh*’, which means tying one’s hair in a knot at the back of the head. In course of time enmity arose leading to the emergence and prominence of clans in the hills such as the *Lusei, Paite, Thado, Pawi, Lakher*, etc. The clan, who mostly settled to the north of the *Lusei* chief, leave out the letter ‘h’ linguistically and gradually they were later known as ‘*Hmar*’.¹¹⁷ The above view point is supported by the *Linguistic Survey of India*, Part-III, Volume-III which mentioned that the Chin people called their neighbouring tribes such as the *Lusei* and other kindred tribes as ‘*Marh*’.¹¹⁸ Moreover, *Lenbuongthuom*, the most popular skirt worn by a Hmar woman was popularly known to their kindred tribes as ‘*Hmar Am*’.¹¹⁹ Both *Mizo Tawng Dictionary* and *Zotawng Dictionary* defines *Hmar Am* as *Hmar Hmeichhiate pawnfen* (Hmar women’s skirt).¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Thawnglinga, *Chin-Mizo Chanchin*, First Edition, Ramhlun Venglai, Published by Orestes Rosanga, 2019, p.37.

¹¹⁵ Hranglien Songate, *Hmar Chanchin*, Churachandpur, L & R Printing Press, 1977, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁶ Lalthangliana, *History of Mizo (in Burma)*, p.85. Hereafter cited as Lalthangliana, *Mizo*.

¹¹⁷ Songate, *Hmar Chanchin*, pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁸ *Hmar*, p.1.

¹¹⁹ *Hmar*, p.2.

¹²⁰ ‘*Hmar Am*’, in Remkunga, *Mizo Tawng Dictionary*, Aizawl, The Synod Publication Board, 1992, p.226; In R K Ngurchhawna, Z T Sangkhuma, and Lalzuia Colney, *Zotawng Dictionary*, First Edition, Aizawl, Omniprint Offset, 1997, p.150.

To further support the above view point, Pu Buanga (James Herbert Lorrain), in his dictionary clearly stated/defined:

“Hmar as Lushai and other tribes the men of which wear their long hair done up in a knot at the back of the head, in contradiction to the pawis etc., who wear their hair in a knot on the forehead or on top of the head”.¹²¹

There were quite a few inferences that can be drawn from the above argument. One significant point to be noted here was that the term Hmar had been in used from time immemorial. Secondly, it would mean that all those tying the hair in a knot at the back were known as Hmar, meaning that all the *Mizos* excepting the *Pawi*, (who happened to tie their hair at the front) were once called Hmar. Thirdly, Hmar was the stump where the other kindred tribes subdivided. However, even if the first inference escape criticism, the latter two would no doubt be taken lightly especially in the face of a scanty reliable sources. The most probable acceptable theory was that the term Hmar had been in used even before they were in the present Mizoram. The fact that they were clannish and preferred to be identified by clans or lineages as suggested by the pattern and characteristic of their (the Hmars) settlement did not help much.¹²² Moreover, among the *Mizos*, Taichenga’s progenies plaited their hair which also proved that tying a hair in a knot was not the only hair-style of the *Mizos/Luseis* and their kindred tribes.¹²³

2.5 Origin of the Hmar:

The oldest known ancestor of the Hmar was believed to be *Manmasi*. It was through him that many clans and sub-clans emerged.¹²⁴ In support of the above view

¹²¹ ‘Hmar’, in James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga), *Dictionary of the Lushai language*, Reprint, Calcutta, The Asiatic Society, 1975, p.159.

¹²² Z T Sangkuma, *Kan Tuanna Tlang*, 1st Edition, Aizawl, Published by the Author, Finance by Mizoram Publication Board, 2001, p.7.

¹²³ Hrangthiauva, *Mizo History (Mizo Hnam hrang hrangte Chanchin)*, Chhut hnihna, Aizawl, J P Offset Printers, 2015, pp. 7, 11 & 267.

¹²⁴ Songate, p.10.

point, Songate had used the Chinese tradition wherein he stated that a peculiar people calling themselves *Manmasi* had migrated through Northern China and set up a settlement at *Aopatawng*, which they named *Sinlung* after their leader *Sunglung*. Even after migrating from *Sinlung* and establishing a new settlement they continued to call themselves as *Sinlung Suok* (originating from *Sinlung*).¹²⁵

There was a debatable theory which linked the *Hmars* with the people of *Israel*. The oldest known ancestor of the *Hmar* was *Manmasi*.¹²⁶ According to *Hmar-Israel traditions*, *Manmasi* was the corrupted form of *Manase* (one of the twelve tribes of *Israel*). In the course of their migration, they came across a river which they called *Tuizuongtum* (which means river with frequent rapids) and associated it with the river *Jordan* of *Israel*. They crossed this river and dispersed both eastward and westward. The branch that made their movement towards the east and made their settlement at a place called *Sinlung* were believed to be the ancestor of the *Hmars*.¹²⁷

There are some references in *Hmar* folk songs that tend to support the above-mentioned theory. *Sikpuilam hla*, one of the oldest folk songs of the *Hmar*, which was usually sung during the *Sikpui* festival with rapt attention contained words that can be interpreted to support such view. The *Sikpui* song can be related to the Biblical experiences of the Israelites on their path to Canaan (the promised land). Moreover, there were similarities in the religious sacrificial rites and practices of the pre-Christian *Hmars* and the Israelites. For example, the altar of the pre-Christian *Hmar* also had four corner, animal blood was sprinkled by the priest, etc. like the practice of their counterpart. But, preliminary result of DNA test conducted in 2003 by Isaac L. Hmar and Isaac Thangjom proved otherwise and as it stands now, the theory of the Israelites connection of the *Hmars* may be treated as a myth.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Songate, p.5., 11 & 12.

¹²⁶ Zairema, Pi Pute Biak Hi, Hebron Press, New Delhi, Published by Zorun Community, 2009, p.86.

¹²⁷ H V Vara, *Hmar Nunphung (The Hmar Culture)*, Lamka, L & R Printing Press, 2000, pp. 1-2. (review)

¹²⁸ Lal Dena, *In Search of Identity, Hmars of North-East India*, p. 11. Hereafter cited as Lal Dena, Identity.

The above contention was also supported by the silence of the *Hmar* oral tradition on the Israelites practiced of *circumcision* (Genesis 17:9-14) that has definitely distinguished them from the non-Israelites.¹²⁹ T Khuma asserted that if the Hmars were truly the lost tribes of Israel, their Oral Tradition would not be silent about the most distinguished rite of the Israelites. His main contention was that the *Hmars* were one of the *Chilak* which means the non-Israelite that lives with the Israelite or the descendent of the offspring of the Israelite's intermarriage with the non-Israelite.¹³⁰

The origin of the Hmars was one murky issue that needed wider interdisciplinary approach to arrive at a more acceptable theory. As of now, the present Hmars related largely to *Manmasi* tradition to construe their identity.

2.6 Migration and its meaning in the context of the Hmar:

Migration is defined as “the permanent or semi-permanent change of residence of an individual or group of people over a significant distance”.¹³¹

It is an age-old universal phenomenon depending upon a number of ‘*push*’ and ‘*pull*’ factors. People or an entire tribe in the olden days tended to shift their habitat in search of a better sustenance and a more congenial surrounding.¹³² It may be stated as a response of human society to the challenge posed by social, economic and demographic forces of the environment. For instance, people tended to settle in the same area in which they developed a sense of belongingness so long as they are satisfied with their needs and does not feel threatened.¹³³

¹²⁹ Genesis 17:9-14; *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1989, p.13.

¹³⁰ Interview with T Khuma Songate, on 12 August 2016 at Saikot, Manipur.

¹³¹ Hussain, Majid, *Human Geography*, Reprint, Jaipur, Rawat Publishing, 2010, p. 159.

¹³² L. P Swain, *Migration and Adjustment*, New Delhi, Northern Book Centre, 2006, pp.1-2.

¹³³ Ravender Kumar kaul, *Migration and Society; A Study of Displaced Kashmiri Pandits*, Jaipur, Rawat Publication, 2005, pp.1-2.

Migration is a complex phenomenon if taken into account the distance and time involved, or the nature of people's origins and destinations, or what instigated them to move. However, it may be classified simply as internal or international and as voluntary or forced. Voluntary migration is usually undertaken in search of a better life; forced migration includes expulsion during war and the transportation of slave or prisoners.¹³⁴

Migration mainly took place based on *push* and *pull* factors. The *push factors* may be described as the events and circumstances that compel people to shift to other locations. It included a variety of motives from idiosyncrasy to the dramatic.¹³⁵ For instance, people dissatisfied with their present situation due to compulsion by war, economic dislocation or environmental issues. The *pull factors*, on the other hand are those factors that attracted people to move and settle to a particular new area. Both the *push* and *pull* factors work hand-in-hand albeit in a varying degree in any shifting of habitat by an individual or any group of peoples.¹³⁶

For convenience the migration of the Hmars can be divided into pre-colonial and post-colonial migration. The pre-colonial migration may be understood as a combination of free-will as well as forced migration involving a group of people and their movement from their supposed ancestral home towards their present settlement in Mizoram and to other parts of North Eastern States of India. Whereas post-colonial migration was often individualistic and sporadic in nature, and did not necessarily involved a group of peoples to a large extend.

The leading *push factor* as suggested by the Hmar folk songs during their exodus from their ancestral home was political in nature. Therefore, it may be stated as 'forced migration', i.e. a migration that involves a perception of compulsion against

¹³⁴ 'Migration', *Britannica Ready Reference Encyclopedia*, Vol.6, New Delhi, Encyclopedia Britannica (India) Pvt. Limited and Impulse Marketing, 2005, p.253.

¹³⁵ Mohammad Izhar Hassan, *Population Geography*, Reprinted, Jaipur, Rawat Publications, 2009, pp.283-284.

¹³⁶ Hassan, *Population Geography*, pp.283-284.

their will or choice, and that they were being ‘compelled by political factors’.¹³⁷ Due to the lack of historical evidences, the routes that they had undertaken and the places that they had chosen to make settlement before they reached their present settlement leaves a wide room for pre-conceive notion. The condition that had attracted them to settle in their present area could be both economic and demographic in nature. The present settlement which was a vast empty land was appealing to a group of people who were believed to flee with strong pressure from other superior tribes. Moreover, the ecology must have sustained and satisfied their needs, helping them to suitably adjust thereby developing a sense of belongingness without any threat whatsoever.¹³⁸ However, later on, due to the inter-tribal feuds their dispersal was made imperative.

2.7 Pre-colonial migration:

Pre-colonial migration of the Hmars can be traced from their ancestral home to their present settlement.

(a) Ancestral Home:

According to oral traditions, the ancestral home of the Hmars was *Sinlung*.¹³⁹ Evidences of the existence of such settlement has been reflected in many of the Hmars’ folk songs and ballads. For example-

Khaw Sinlungah Kawt siel ang ka zuong suok a,

*Mi le nel lo tam e, Hriemi hrai a*¹⁴⁰

(“In the city of Sinlung I jumped out like a Siel (bison). I’ve come across numerous offspring of man.”)

¹³⁷ Hassan, p.284.

¹³⁸ Interview with T Khuma Songate.

¹³⁹ ___Mizoram District Gazetteers, p.81.

¹⁴⁰ Songate, p.11.

During the reign of Shih Huangti (ancient China), most probably around 220 - 210 BCE, the ancestors of the *Hmars* were forcibly engaged in the construction of the Great Wall of China. It is stated that the hardship they endured was so great that many failed to survive. As luck could have it, they found a hole, an opening in the walls, from whence they came out of it like a *Siel*.¹⁴¹ The metaphorizing of the exodus from the *kul* (fort) with a *Siel* jumping out of its enclosure was quite appropriate as it was the practices during this period to enclosed *Siel* in a large enclosure where there would be a gate called *Sekawtrawl* (gate). If the *Sekawtrawl* was left ajar by mistake, the *siel* would take that opportunity to be free in the wild.

To collaborate with the above viewpoint, there was an archeological evidence that suggest that the *Lai* (kindred tribe of the Hmar) once served as the guard of Shih Huangti.¹⁴² Taken this into an account, the possibility of the Hmars' presence during the reign of the former despot was quite reasonable as the *Lai* occupied an important place in the history of the Hmars, both shared a long history together.

However, even if the existence of *Sinlung* was to be accepted, the meaning and the location of the term were still debatable. There were diverse views with regards to the definition, location and its meaning. Hmar traditions described *Sinlung* as a *ram/khuo/khaw* (inhabited land/village). Such instances where *Sinlung* was described is found in the folk songs- "*khaw Sinlung ah, kawt siel ang ka zuong suok a*" (out of *Sinlung* I jumped out like a *Siel*),

Kan siengna Sinlung ram hmingthang,

Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai,

Chawngzil ang kokir thei changsien

¹⁴¹ Interview with Songrolal Songate, on 13 August 2015 at Sielmat, Manipur.

¹⁴² Margerat L Pachuau, 'The Lai', *MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies*, Vol-1, Issue-1, 1992, p.54.

*Ka nu ram ka pa ram ngai.*¹⁴³

My motherland, famous *Sinlung*,

Home of my own ancestors

Could it be called back like *Chawngzil*

Home of my own ancestors.

Moreover, there was a common saying among the Hmars, for instance, “*Sinlung in sieng sengseng nun inrawng bik ding a ni maw?*” (“would you, as one originated also from *Sinlung*, countenance cruelty”) to reprimanded an unduly authoritative and cruel chief towards his subjects.¹⁴⁴

Sinlung was also believed to denote the name of the Hmar leader, *Sunglung*.¹⁴⁵ Another theory opined that *Sinlung* was an impenetrable stone fortress. K Zawla stated: “After the death of Shih Huang Ti’s, many people who survived the construction of a fortress fled to escape an extreme oppression. Peoples dispersed into groups in different directions”. The ancestor of the *Hmar/Mizo* must have been among those that escaped from the fortress.¹⁴⁶ Still, another theory has it that *Sinlung* was a cave (Khur/Khul), from where many people emerged, and among them was the descendants of *Manmasi*.¹⁴⁷ *Sinlung* was also denoted as the name of a Chinese prince in China, the son of Huang Ti of the Ch’in dynasty who built the Great Wall. The said prince fled his father and kingdom to settle in the present Myanmar. The literal meaning of *Sinlung* (Sin=lid lung=stone) could be the name of the prince to whom the Great Wall was closed.¹⁴⁸ Further, it was denoted as a place from whence all people emerged. It is said that *Pathien* (god) was forced to close it when two *Ralte* became a

¹⁴³ Rochunga Pudaite, *The Education of the Hmar People; With historical sketch of the people*, Sielmat, Published by Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, 1963, p.21.

¹⁴⁴ Pudaite, *The Education of the Hmar People*, p.23.

¹⁴⁵ ___ *Mizoram District Gazetteers*, p.21.

¹⁴⁶ Zawla, p.6.

¹⁴⁷ Songate, pp.13,14 &16.

¹⁴⁸ L B Thanga, *The Mizos; A Study in Racial Personality*, Pan Bazar, Guwahati, United Publishers, 1978, p.3.

chattering box that misled the god into believing that too many people had already emerged.¹⁴⁹

Even after knowing the meaning of so the called *Sinlung*, the location of it still remain doubtful. Hranglien Songate was not specific about the location, on the contrary he made a generalize statement that *Sinlung* existed somewhere in modern China.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, Darliensung also agreed to this assertion and stated that the most acceptable location of *Sinlung* seems to be on the banks of the river *Yalung*, south west of China.¹⁵¹ Darliensung based his theory on the routes of migration from the north east to the south west during 3rd century BCE and map of 'Reader's Digest World Atlas'. The reason was that the name was spell as "S-I-N-L-U-N-G", which was similar to how it was known to the *Hmars*.¹⁵² However, if we are to associate *Sinlung* with Shi-Huangti, the location of the Great Wall of China was too far from the supposed location of *Sinlung* shown by Darliensung.

A crystal-clear meaning and location of *Sinlung* is beyond doubt and next to impossible. Due to lack of historical evidences the *Sinlung theories* is highly conjectural and subjective. Therefore, it was often dismissed as a myth that had evolved in the not so distant past to validate the distinct identity of the different sub-tribes of the Mizos. *Sinlung* as a recent construction would be more acceptable if the understanding of the term by the different sub-tribes of the *Mizos* concomitant. However, in the absence of any written document, there was not much choice other than dismissing *Sinlung* theory as a myth. The conclusion of B. Lalthangliana (Project Director of the *Study Tour* funded by the government of Mizoram in the early part of the 1990s), who was assigned to undertake a research work on the history of the Mizos, especially on the issue of the *Sinlung theory* did not help much. According to him, the location of the so called *Sinlung* was unknown to this day. In addition, the result

¹⁴⁹ Shakespear, p.93.

¹⁵⁰ Songate, p.16.

¹⁵¹ Hmar, pp.9-10.

¹⁵² Hmar, p.10.

of the enquiry made by B Lalthangliana to Mr Liao Jianbo who worked in the Yunan University regarding *Chhinlung* or *Xin lung* as written in a map, failed to bring out any positive inputs. It was stated that he failed to locate any places bearing that particular name in the map written in Chinese. Below is an extract from his work-

“*Chhinlung or Xin Lung tia Map-a inziak dan entir pahin kan zawt leh a. Chinese tawng inziak Map a en a, ngun takin a zawng a, a lo awm ve hauh lo mai a. tin, lo awm pawh ni se, hming lo inang palh mai a ni ang, awmzia nei hranin ka ring lo, a ti bawk*”.¹⁵³

(when I made queries about Chhinlung or Xin lung as it was written on the map. He looked it up at a map sketched in Chinese, even after searching intensely at the map, he failed to locate it, significantly even if it was on the map, it would be just a passing resemblance without any profound meaning attached to it).

Jan Vansina stated: “Oral traditions are argued as messages, which is an important features of a source from the point of view of the rules of evidence, although its symbolic significance and intended meaning must be enquire, yet never allowed to be interpreted without any concrete reference to the message itself.....there are hypothesis to be considered, although may not be accepted literally and uncritically, yet to give them a deserving attention, that is to make efforts to prove or disapprove them systematically in their own merits”.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, seeking an answer beyond oral tradition, *Sinlung* as a myth would amount to neglecting the available evidence known to us. In support of this assertion, recently the *theory of Sinlung* as *Khuo* (site of human habitation) was reinforced by Lalremliana, who claimed to set foot at *Sinlung* on 20th March 2012, located on the bank of *Yalong* river in Sichuan province of China.¹⁵⁵ His statement has been confirmed by the visibility of a place by the same name, although with a different spelling (Xinlong). This assertion was further supported by Van Driem’s assertion that the Tibeto-Burman language family’s proto-

¹⁵³ Lalthangliana, Mizo, pp.18 & 37.

¹⁵⁴ Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, pp.194-196.

¹⁵⁵ Lalremliana, *Chhinlung Chhuak Zofa*, Lois Bet Print & Publications, Aizawl, Published by the Author, 2018, p.85.

homeland lay in Yunnan and Sichuan, which was the geographical center of gravity of the language family as a whole.¹⁵⁶ Hence, it would imply that if oral tradition is taken into account, then the issue on *Sinlung* is more or less resolved. It is also to be noted that *Sinlung* was used as an instrument to construct the origin theory by a non-elite tribe like the Hmar. In either case, one can safely emphasize the instrumentality of *Sinlung* in the identification of the Hmars.

(b) Beyond *Sinlung* theory:

Sikpuilam hla, one of the oldest *Hmar* folk song containing words that can be inferred to their connection with the *Jews*. If this theory is to be accepted, then the *Hmar* migration can be traced back beyond *Sinlung*, right up to the Middle East. The *Sikpui hla* usually sings in the *Sikpui* Festival may be read as follows: -

Sikpui inthang kan ur lai a,

Chang tuipui aw, senma hrili kang intan

Ke ra lawn a, Ka leido aw,

Sunah sum ang, zannah mei lawn invak e

An tur a sa thua ruol aw,

In phawsiel le in ralfeite zuong thaw ro;

Sun razula ka leido aw,

Ke ralawna mei, sum ang lawn invak e

Sun razula ka leido aw

Laimi sa ang chang tuipuiin lem zova.

A va ruol aw la ta che,

¹⁵⁶ George Van Driem, 'Neolithic Correlates of Ancient Tibeto-Burman Migrations' in *Archaeology and Language*, Vol-2, edited by Roger Blench and Mathew Spriggs, London, Routledge, 1998, cited in Manjil Hazarika, *Prehistory and Archaeology of Northeast India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2017, p.56.

*Suonglung chungatui zuong suok saw la ta che.*¹⁵⁷

(The rough explanation of the above goes like this, “while anticipating the Sikpui festival, the red sea parted, we marched fighting our foes, my enemies approach on foot; the clouds led us by day; the fire by night; I fought mighty enemies; but the enemies’ warriors were swallowed by the sea; catch the flock of birds; take the water that gushed out from the rock...”)

The above ballad can be related to the Biblical experiences of the Israelites on their en route to Canaan. Moreover, there were similarities in the religious sacrificial rites and practices of the pre-Christian *Hmars* and the Israelites. For example, the pre-Christian *Hmar* altar had a four corner and animal blood were usually sprinkled by the Village priest.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, the Israelites more or less had the same practices.

B. Lalthangliana contended that the *Sikpui* songs are not as old as they are claimed to be. He stated that the names and places cited in the songs could have been composed while they were settling between the *Run* and *Tiau* rivers.¹⁵⁹ But B Lalthangliana had overlooked that *Sikpui* songs (explained in the next chapter) were not a single compact whole, rather they were a collections of a number of songs added together in course of many years connected with their experience which they once had encountered. Even to this day, the *Hmars* had a habit of mentioning names of places and events in their songs which have significant bearing to them. For instance, in some of their composition especially devotional songs places mentioned in the Bible found a place as they have spiritual relevance to them. Likewise, the places and events mentioned in the *Sikpui song* must have important relevance to the lives of their forefathers

¹⁵⁷ Vara, *Hmar Nunphung (The Hmar Culture)*, p.1. Hereafter cites as Vara, Nunphung.

¹⁵⁸ Vara, Nunphung, p.1.

¹⁵⁹ Lalthangliana, Mizo, p.31.

Fang Kona Hla, presumably composed after their Settlement at Champhai, to the east of Mizoram. The song is believed to have indicated the names of the places which the *Hmar* once inhabited. For examples: -

Fang Zuong rawh, fang zuong rawh,

Ni le Phaia fang zuong rawh,

Khaw Sinlunga fang zuong rawh,

Kachin leia fang zuong rawh,

Kawlphaia fang Zuong rawh,

Sanzawla fang zuong rawh,

*Luopui hrizawla fang zuong rawh.*¹⁶⁰

{(Fang= a staple food of the Hmar, presumably rice, Zuong=come ye) The rough explanation of the song is about beckoning a good harvest from places such a *Ni Le* plain, *Sinlung*, *Kachin*, *Kawlphaia*, *Shan* and *Luopui* Field}. Supporter of Hmar-Israelite connection contended that the *Ni le phai* to be the fertile river bank of the river *Nile*. This seems to be a farfetched theory because the name of the river *Nile* is the English term for the river Nile and therefore the Israelites in their ancient days may have a different name, and therefore not feasible for the best explanation to the origin of the Hmar. Moreover, since DNA test proved that the Hmars and the Israelites have no racial relations, the forefathers of the *Hmar* being a *Chilak* is more acceptable. Whatever may be the case, *Fang kona hla* is debatable in the context of the Nile river, but the *Sikpui hla* could be considered as one of the best evident to shows the Hmars origin.

What made the Hmars to migrate out of *Sinlung* is as murky as the meaning of the term itself. Taking into account the folk song “*khaw Sinlung ah kawt siel ang ka zuong suok a*”, here the term *zuong suok* literally means *jump out* which also indicated

¹⁶⁰ S N Ngurte & Rosiem Pudaite, *History of Hmar Literature*, First Edition, Churachandpur, Smart Tech Printers, 2015, p.127.

excitement or eagerness to move out somewhere else. The early writings on this subject was associated with the *Sinlung* believed to be during the reign of Shi Huang-Ti, although it was never specific in the folk songs. The Hmars were believed to be one of the groups of people who were engaged in the forced labour, suffering untold miseries. After Shih Huang Ti's death, many fled resulting into a great population movement in central China. This theory partly explains the excitement and eagerness of the exodus from *Sinlung* reflected in the above folk songs, besides placing the migration after 200 B.C.¹⁶¹ Another theory opines that the Ching dynasty absorbed many of the tribes inhabiting China, and those who refused to be absorbed were pushed out. Perhaps, the Hmars were among such tribes who were pushed out from the Ching dynasty.¹⁶² Their migration due to unfavourable political conditions is supported by the long distance covered from the starting point to the place that they finally decided to settle on.

(b) Settlement in Shan:

From the available folk songs, the *Hmars* next settlement after *Sinlung* was believed to be in *Shan*. In their folk songs, the term *Sinlung* always precedes *Shan* which led us to deduce that the *Hmars*' *Sinlung* preceded *Shan*. The above view was supported by the following folk songs:

Singlung lam tlak a tha'n dang

Ka pa lam tlak a tha'n dang

Shan khuo a tha po in vang,

*Tuoichongin hranlu a tlunna*¹⁶³

(this song is a comparison between the warrior of *Sinlung* and *Shan*, where the warriors of *Sinlung* surpass the warriors of *Shan*). According to V Lunghnema, the

¹⁶¹ Zawla, p.6.

¹⁶² Lal Dena, Identity, pp.12-13.

¹⁶³ Keivom, *Hmar Hla Suina (A Critical Study of Hmar Songs)*, p.4. hereafter cited as Keivom, Hmar.

above song was composed during their war with the *Shan Sen*, which he stated to be around 140 BCE to 100 CE.¹⁶⁴

Shan khuo fiertui tha var indang

*Naufan hnamcham ang an chawi;*¹⁶⁵

(it is about eulogizing the water-hole of Shan)

Shan khuo thlangfa pu tlingleng e,

I do thlunglu bak in sal;

Ka sawmfa thlaw, Ka laimi mi tha,

*Thal khatah lan ei de ning.*¹⁶⁶

(The rough explanation goes like this- “Great art thou, ye people of Shan, proud are ye of thou enemy’s head; I will celebrate my enemy’s head with the rich harvest.)

There were two opinions with regard to the location of the *Shan* State. One theory stated that the *Hmar* historical *Shan* is the modern *Shan* state that lies in the far South East of Burma.¹⁶⁷ Inferring from the folk songs mentioned above, Hranglien Songate asserted that *Shan* was already inhabited by the time the *Hmar* reached and that they could overcome that formidable opposition. The *Hmars* had a custom of casting a lot to decide if the land was suitable for habitation by releasing a cock. And if the cock crows, then the place was believed to be free of evil spirit and thus fit and suitable for settlement. Conversely, if the cock failed to crow, then the quest for habitation continues.¹⁶⁸ Rochunga Pudaite supported the above assertion arguing that after a long period on the move, the land was attractive and they were determined to settle even to the extent of employing force.¹⁶⁹ Situating *Shan* with that of the *Sanzawl* of the Chin Hills of Burma was also supported by K Zawla. He asserted that with the

¹⁶⁴ V Lunghnema, *Mizo Chanchin (BC 300-1929 AD)*, Aizawl, Published by H Lian Dawla, 1993, p.211.

¹⁶⁵ Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin (Kum 1900 Hma Lam)*, Aizawl, Published by Vanlalhmuaka & Vanlalhruaii, Financed by The Mizoram Publication Board, 2000, p.16.

¹⁶⁶ Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin (Kum 1900 Hma Lam)*, p.16.

¹⁶⁷ Songate, p.17

¹⁶⁸ Songate, pp.18-19.

¹⁶⁹ Pudaite, *The Education of the Hmar People; With the historical sketch of the people*, p.25.

outbreak of *Thingpui Tam* (Famine) the Mizos, who were mostly the Hmars migrated southward.¹⁷⁰

The above viewpoint was supported by B Lalthangliana who stated that the Shan had entered Burma only around the 13th century CE, whereas the Mizos were believed to have settled around the 6th Century CE. Thus, the *Shan* mentioned in the Hmar folksong probably must be the *San* of Burma, and the *Shan* must be just a mistake in the spelling.¹⁷¹ However, Lalthangliana failed to take into account that the *Shan* mentioned in the folk song was clearly stated as *khuo* (place of settlement) and not the name of a tribe. Besides, there are other places suffixed to the term *Shan* such as *Yin-Shan*, *Min-Shan*, etc., along the possible routes of the Hmars' migration from *Sinlung* to their present settlement.

Another theory which stated that the *Hmar* historical *Shan* was the *Shan* situating beneath the foot of the *Yunling Shan* range in modern Yunnan province.¹⁷² From the two opposing view point, the latter is more acceptable. If *Sinlung (Xinlong)* was accepted to be located at *Szechawn* Province (Longitude 100° E and longitude 31°N). If the former opinion is to be accepted, then the *Hmars* would have moved from *Sinlung* (longitude 100°E and latitude 31°N) to *Myanmar Shan* (longitude 98°E and Latitude 21°N) and then to *Kachin* which is located at around Longitude 98°E to latitude 25°N, this would mean that the *Hmar* moved southward to *Shan* and then again moved northward which is not feasible considering the World Population Movement of 1st and 2nd century CE.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Zawla, p.10.

¹⁷¹ Lalthangliana, Mizo, pp.48-49.

¹⁷² Hmar, pp.14-15.

¹⁷³ *Reader's Digest World Atlas*, London, The Reader Digest Association Limited, 2004, p.104.

The one thing that can be deduced from the folk songs was that the Hmars had experienced a successful battle while they were in *Shan*, but it was doubtful whether it was at the time of their arrival or during the course of their active settlement.

The *Hmars* life in *Shan* was advanced and was marked with prosperity. It was during this period of settlement that they learnt the art of agriculture, and the new components of their cultures began to take shape. It was also believed that many of their festivals or events/occasions related with their belief system such as *Lunglak* (stone to symbolize an occasion), *Sesun*, *Inchawng* and *Butukhuonglawm* originated during this period.¹⁷⁴ One example of their advanced civilization was in the art of weaving. A beautiful woman named *Zawltling* who was also called *Ngote* (fair) because of her exceptional beauty, a new pattern of making cloth “kerh” was invented in her honour which later on came to be known as *Ngotekerh*.¹⁷⁵

According to folk song the prosperity in *Shan* was interrupted by a severe famine, which forced the Hmar to move south-west and settled at the foot hills of the eastern Himalaya.

Shan khuoah lenpur a tla

Mi raza tlan thiera

Chung Pathienin Shan zuk siem a

*Shan khuo lung ang ngir na e*¹⁷⁶

(A famine broke out in *Shan*, people fled away, By God’s grace *Shan* will not to be desolated.)

¹⁷⁴ Songate, p.19.

¹⁷⁵ T Khuma Songate, *Ram Zunleng*, Aizawl, Zorin Compugraphics, 1988, p.19.

¹⁷⁶ Batlien, J, *Hmar Chronicles*, Churachandpur, Smart Tech Printers, 2007, p.13.

The exact period of settlement in the Shan area was obscure. One may suggest that if the desolation of Shan was taken as the *Thingpui Tam* and *Shan* as the *San/ Sanzawl* of Burma respectively, then the Hmars would have surely settled in the Shan areas before and during the occurrence of the *Thingpui Tam*, which was believed to be around 1520-1550 CE.¹⁷⁷ But this did not seem to be inconsistent with the viewpoint that the Hmars already had experienced their hay day in the present Mizoram around 15th century CE.¹⁷⁸ Another theory placed the Shan settlement covering the period from 500 CE to 700 CE.¹⁷⁹ From the folk songs, the only uncontested deduction was that the Shan settlement was aborted due to famine, and was silent about the period of habitation and its location. Therefore, it was impossible to derive an acceptable and reasonable conclusion without employing other sources.

(c) Settlement at Kawlphai:

The Hmars later on were believed to cross the *Mekong* river and the *Salween* river, and lived among the *Mishmi* for some time, and then they moved westward and settled at the *Kachin* state in Burma. From *Kachin* they followed the *Chinwind* river and entered *Dimphai* (Dimapur Valley), from there they moved further west, following the *Chinwind* river and finally settled at *Kawlphai* (kawl means Burmese; and phai means valley) for many centuries. Lal Dena argued that the Hmars folk songs; '*Kachin, my ancient land; and Himaloy (Himalaya), the land of my forefather*' purported this view point.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, their settlement with the *Mishmi* was supported by the tale of the legendary *Sura* who had married a *Mishmi* woman, *Thairanchawng*, who was a noted magician. V Lunghnema put forth that *Sura's* period covers between the period from BCE 201 to 131, encompassing the successful encounter and defeat of the Mon Khmer.¹⁸¹ It was said that *Luopui* of the *Thiek* clan

¹⁷⁷ Lalthangliana, Mizo, p.197.

¹⁷⁸ Ramdina Lalsim, History of the Biates (One of the earliest settlers of Mizoram) and Their Folktales, Lois Bet Print & Publication, Aizawl, Published by the Author & Finance by Mizoram Publication Board, Art & Culture, Govt. of Mizoram, p21012, p.17.

¹⁷⁹ Hmar, pp.17-18

¹⁸⁰ Lal Dena, Identity, p.13.

¹⁸¹ Lunghnema, Mizo Chanchin (BC 300-1929 AD), pp.28-29.

planted a banyan tree at *Khampat*, about 50 miles from *kalemyo*. One of the traditional songs referred to it as follows...

Simah Lersi, Hmarah Zingthlo,

Khawmalaiah Luopui;

Luopui in lenbung a phun,

*Khawthlang puolrangin tlan e.*¹⁸²

(On the south is Chief *Lersie*, on the north Chief *Zingthlo*. At the centre Chief *Luopui*, *Luopui* planted a banyan tree. The hornbills feed on its fruits.)

One may suggest that the Hmars made their movement from *kawlphai* (*the valley of Burma*) to *Thantlang* following the course of the river *Tieu* (Myanmar bordering Mizoram). It is also to be noted that the Hmars had been to the river *Run* and this is supported by the following folk song-

Run tui kawi e,

Raltenu leh Raltepa leh kan inkawi a,

*Run tui kawi e.*¹⁸³

(Meandering *Run*, we moved along with the *Raltes*, Meandering *Run*.)

Surprisingly, the meaning of the terms Hmar and their habitation other than *Sinlung* and *Shan* are no longer contested by historians. This may be attributed partly to time and space of their settlement. For instance, their settlement other than *Sinlung* and *Shan* were quite closer geographically to their present settlement.

¹⁸² Lunghnema, p.48.

¹⁸³ Keivom, Hmar, p.8.

(d) From Kawlphai to present Mizoram:

In the absence of a written record, at what period and under what circumstances the Hmars made their move from Kawlphai (Kabaw valley) and entered present Mizoram was not clear. But inference can be drawn from the available folk songs that the Hmars made their move from *Sinlung* towards southward and finally settled at the present Mizoram. The following folk song purported to this view point as follows-

Khaw Sinlungah kawt siel ang,

Ka zuong suok a;

Mi le nel lo tama e,

Hriemi hraia.

Thantlangpui lawi ang ka tan

Rundung ka zui

Lentlangpui kai ta rawng e

Simtieng ka ti, hmartieng ka ti,

Simtieng pan ta rawng e

Champhai zawlah hriem mipui,

Pal ang kan tlar,

Chuongkhuo 'n rel sien,

*Nunau chem ang dam raw se!*¹⁸⁴

(The rough translation goes like this- I jumped out of *Sinlung* like a Wild Bison, innumerable were the encounters, with children of man. I passed over *Thantlangpui*, cruised along river *Run*, Negotiate *Lentlangpui*, in dilemma, whether to tread along South or North, finally choose to entered Southward, in *Champhai* plain our population increased manifold, may god bestow good health to the womenfolk and children).

¹⁸⁴ ___ *Hlaro*, Second Edition, Churachandpur, Published by Hmar Literature Society, 2012, p.35.

Opinion differed as to the circumstances and the period of the Hmars migration to their present settlement. Either economic reason such as famine or political circumstances must have forced them to migrate to other areas. One theory was that they were forced to flee by a tribe superior to them. It was claimed that when the Hmars inhabited the *Kawlphai*, their *Reng Chonhmang* (Raja/King Chonhmang) fortified Khampat due to this the *Kawl Reng* felt threatened and sent an emissary stating that he would not tolerate another *Reng* in his kingdom. In other words, fortification of Khampat could imply the declaration of war with the *Kawl Reng*. As *Chonhmang* felt no match for the *Kawl Reng*, he had moved on and made a settlement at *Vanlaiphai* (to the south east of Mizoram).¹⁸⁵ Then *Rengpui Chonhmang* (Supreme King), was believed to have moved further to *Rapho*, modern Tripura and was believed to dig a pond called *Reng Dil*, which is still existing even to this day.¹⁸⁶

The unfavourable political condition as the *push* factor was plausible considering the clannish nature of the Hmars, and that even the migration was believed to have taken place in a wave based on clanship. If it was a natural calamity or a devastating war, there was a possibility that the larger number of them could have all move out at a one go and not in a wave. The movement to a large extent depended on the strength and power of the *Reng*; the mightier and the more powerful migrated at a later date.¹⁸⁷ The vast uninhabited land might probably have prompted them to settle there.

The Hmars were believed to be one of the earliest settlers of the present day Mizoram, even before the *Luseis* who were believed to arrive around 1703 CE.¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, the *Hrangchal/Hrangkhawl* and *Biate* of the Hmar clans were known to have appeared in the Cachar, Assam about 1780, that was about the same time as the *Luseis* occupation of the present Mizoram,¹⁸⁹ hence, undermining the assertion of

¹⁸⁵ Songate, p.25.

¹⁸⁶ Batlien, *Hmar Chronicles*, p.28.

¹⁸⁷ Sijama, *Mizo History*, p.17.

¹⁸⁸ Sijama, *Mizo*, pp.5 & 17.

¹⁸⁹ Shakespear, p.183.

Chhawnmanga that the present Mizoram was a vast uninhabited land till 1600 CE.¹⁹⁰ Zatluanga in *Mizo Chanchin* had claimed that the Hmars arrived in Mizoram around 1526 CE. According to him, the wet land cultivation of the Hmars at *Champhai*, *Tuisenphai* and *Phaichar* were later on permanently settled upon. Thereafter, their settlement extended to *Buanga*, *Lawitlang*, *Chawnchim*, *Ngur*, *Zote*, *Vamur*, *Khawzawl*, *Neihdawn*, *Darngawn*, *Thiak/Thiek*, *Lungchhuan*, *Biate*, *Khawbung*, and *Keivawmzo* (all the villages are located in the eastern part of Mizoram), settling in clan-wise where their settlement bearing the name of their clan itself.¹⁹¹ The Hmars were known to have reached their zenith prior to the incursion of the *Luseis*. They had mastered the art of paddy cultivation which they claimed to have learnt from the *Vai* (mainland Indian) at the time when their kindred tribes had to contend with millets, maize, yam, etc.¹⁹² The Hmar settlement after their arrival at their present settlement was also testified by the following folk songs:

Tiena raw khuo an sieng a, Khaw Sinlungah,

An tuk an tha um naw ro, kan khuo a nih;

Tiena raw khuo an sieng a, khuo Zielungah,

Hrangkhup le Thawnglaiin laitha lo siem;

Simbupa lai tha tir a awnthing lerah,

*Tlangchawi lo lam, va tin u bin gang lo khai.*¹⁹³

(In *Sinlung* it was agreed upon that no one should take another's life. Yet, after settling at *Zielung*, *Hrangkhup* and *Tawnglai* started and popularized taking the life of others, just as an owl celebrated his kill, people celebrated their kill as a war trophy.) As their settlement was based on clanship, thus began war based on clans.

¹⁹⁰ Chhawnmanga, *Mizorama Michengte*, Aizawl, Hnamte Press, Hnamte Allied Industries, Aizawl, 1985, p.1.

¹⁹¹ Zatluanga, *Mizo Chanchin Bu-I (Mizo History Book-I)*, Reprinted, Aizawl, Royal Press, pp.64-65.

¹⁹² Zatluanga, *Mizo Chanchin Bu-I (Mizo History Book-I)*, pp.64-65.

¹⁹³ Keivom, Hmar, p.11.

Material remains also confirmed the assertion that the Hmars precluded the Lusei inhabiting the present Mizoram. *Sikpui Lung*, a big stone weighing not less than thirty quintals at *Zote Village*, which was located at about 7 km from *Champhai* was believed to be the stone site for the *Hmar's Sikpui Festival* (will be discussed subsequently). Near to the big stone, a small stone was erected by *Zahula Sailo*, Chief of the Lusei clan with an inscription which read-

*“HE LUNG HI HMANLAI HMAR HO SIKPUI LUNG A
NI TIN KEINI KUM 28.2.1918 A HIAN KAN AWM TA
ZAHULA SAILO”*¹⁹⁴

*(this is the Sikpui Stone of the Hmars of the past and we
occupied this place from 28.2.1918 Zahula Sailo)*

Another theory opines that the Hmars had already inhabited the present Mizoram around the 10 century CE. According to Darliensung, the Hmar *Reng* named *Chonhmang* shifted his capital to Vanlaiphai from Kawlphai or Kabaw Valley. After a few years, he again shifted his capital to *Rapho*, situated along the Mizoram-Tripura border. From there, he again migrated to Tripura, hence the reference of Tripura as *Rengpuiram* by the Hmars has become common. It was stated that before leaving his people, he gifted a royal head gear to each lesser *Reng* along with a personal gift such as a big copper plate to *Tusing Saivate*, a gong and a horse to *Lawipa Hrangchal* (*Zamthatvung*), Silver pot to *Neilal*, a copper plate and a big gong to *Fiengpuilal*, a gong set and a striped horse to *Demlukim Hrangkhawl*, and a royal cloth and *Kelsai phi* (necklace) to *Tanhril Saivate*.¹⁹⁵ In support of this assertion, Darliensung Hmar further stated:

*“There were no actual rulers among the tribal communities
of Tripura during the 9th Century AD. The situation was
advantageous for Chonghmang to become a Supreme King*

¹⁹⁴ N Chatterji, *Monoliths & Landmarks of Mizoram*, Calcutta, Published by Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd. On behalf of Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Mizoram, 1979, p.26.

¹⁹⁵ Hmar, p.27.

(Rengpui). He became then Rengpui of Tripura, which was then became known to the Hmars as 'Rengpuiram'. 'Reng', in Hmar, means king or Raja, 'pui' means supreme and 'ram' means kingdom."¹⁹⁶

The *Khojawul*, probably *Khawzawl* (one of the Hmar clan) in its corrupted form mentioned in the report of the Magistrate of Sylhet in 1849 wherein a series of *kuki* outrages were mentioned who could have been the descended of the followers of *Rengpui Chonghmang*, as the Hmars were also classified by the name *Old Kuki* by the colonial ethnographers.¹⁹⁷

Furthermore, there was also another theory that the Hmars were pushed out from their settlement at Kawlphai by the more powerful *Shan*.¹⁹⁸ It may therefore, be suggested that their settlement to the present Mizoram be placed before the early part of the 13th century. This theory also correlated with the history of *Ahom* who were also a prominent *Tai* group in Burma, where *Ahom*, *Shan* and *Siam* were all cognate ethnologically. The chronicles written during the *Ahom* period maintained that the *Ahom* had crossed the *Patkai* range into the Brahmaputra valley under the leadership of man named, Sikukapha in around 1228 CE.¹⁹⁹ They were a *Kradai* group which came to the Northeast India from the kingdom of Pong in the upper Irrawaddy basin, an area that included a part of the upper Burma and the adjacent portion of Yunnan province of China.²⁰⁰ This suggested that the Hmars had left Kawlphai and moved westward before they were crushed by their foes or counterpart.

Even though, the exact period of the Hmars settlement of the present Mizoram is contestable, it was clear that they already inhabited the land prior to colonialism,

¹⁹⁶ Hmar, p.27.

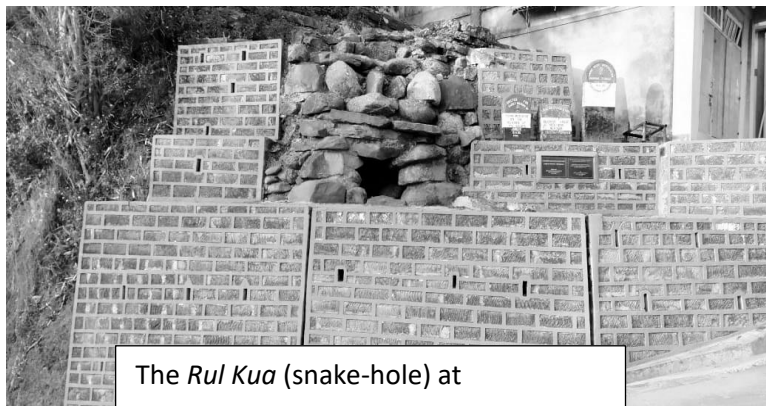
¹⁹⁷ Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Reprint, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2002, p.291.

¹⁹⁸ Lal Dena, *Identity*, p.14.

¹⁹⁹ Manjil Hazarika, *Prehistory and Archaeology of Northeast India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2017, p.46.

²⁰⁰ Hazarika, *Prehistory and Archaeology of Northeast India*, p.46.

and that they were one of the earliest settlers among all the ethnic divisions of the Mizos and this was also proved by the relics they had left behind. For example, the big hole where a Hmar *Chief Fiengpuilal* fed a big snake was still visible at Rulchawm village.²⁰¹ According to tradition, there was once a girl named *Chhawngchili* who was in love with a *Rulpui* (a big Snake). The girl's parents later on came to learn about the love affairs of *Chhawngchili* and *Rulpui* through *Chhawngchili's* sister. Later, the girl's father killed the *Rulpui* and *Chhawngchili* by tricking them. *Chhawngchili's* belly was cut up as by then she had been already pregnant. It was said that one baby snake managed to escape and hid under a dry patch of dung. The snake grew up and was used to be fed by the people. When it became really big, it wriggled into the *kuo* (hole) at *Rulchawm* and the villagers take turn to feed it until it was slain by a *Chin* (Burma *Pawi*) traveler.²⁰² The snake hole is preserved even to this day.

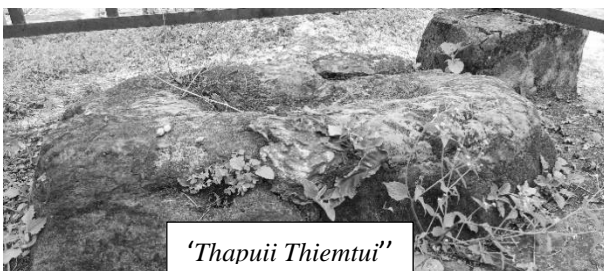


To collaborate with the above viewpoint, certain material remains which were believed to be the handiwork of the Hmars were available even to this day. According to traditions, around 1700 CE. *Ruallung*, a village in the present Saitual District of northern Mizoram was inhabited by the Hmars before the Luseis settled in this area. During this period, there was once a family known as *Paruola-te-sung* (family consisting of several men) consisting of seven brothers and a sister who led a very prosperous life. However, in course of time a misfortune befallen upon them leading to the death of all the seven brothers. Their only sister, *Thapuii* became so grief

²⁰¹ Hrangchhuana, *Hmar Chanchin (Hmar History)*, p.30.

²⁰² Shakespear, pp.106-107.

stricken that weaving only at a particular spot/hill could comforted her, as the spot enabled the nostalgic reminiscence to the places where her deceased brothers had once worked. The particular spot in course of time came to be known as *Thapui Chhip* (top) after the name of *Thapuii*, and the *Thiemtui* (type of bowl for keeping water to sprinkle on the cloth-woven) carved out of stone was still visible to day.²⁰³ Presently it was removed from the *Thapui chhip* (mountain top) and relocated it to *Ruallung Park*.²⁰⁴



The monolith *Sura/Chhura Lung* (Sura's Stone) located at *Ruallung* too, points towards this direction. It consisted of a stone slab with a 7 feet dimensions, encompassing a carving of the pictures of a man, probably of *Sura* (legendary figure of the Hmar) about 4 feet tall, *Phungpuinu's* (malevolent spirit) *fa rep* (smoked children), *Sekibusuok* (magical pot), *Chem* (doe), *Fei* (spear), *Darkhuong* (gong), etc.²⁰⁵ Traditions asserted that once *Sura* and his brother *Nahai* exchanged a *Lo* (Jhum) as the hollow of a tree located at *Nahai's Lo* was used as a dwelling place by

²⁰³ Tlangthanga, 'Ruallung Chanchin', in *Ruallung Presbyterian Kohhran, Centenary Souvenir, 1915-2015*, Aizawl, Published by Ruallung Presbyterian Kohhran Centenary Souvenir Sub-Committee, 2015, pp.88-90.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Sawithuami, on 21 October 2019, at Ruallung, Mizoram.

²⁰⁵ Tlangthanga, 'Ruallung Chanchin', p.93.

Phungpuinu and her children. Once while *Phungpuinu* was away, *Sura* intruded in her abode and killed and smoked all her children like a smoked meat. He later on captured *Phungpuinu* where the latter had to buy out her freedom by giving away her prized *Sakibusuok* (like the Greek cornucopia), a magical pot that can give out rice and meat with a mere verbal command. The stone was erected to commemorate this great feat of *Sura*. It is still visible today at *Ruallung* village in northern Mizoram.²⁰⁶ *Phungpuinu* was so devastated at the death of her children that her grief has been spelled out in the following manner-

“*Luichhuk tumbu ka zawn hlanin, ka cha rial ang lo dai e*”²⁰⁷(While I was foraging for banana plantain along the stream, my children’s bodies became as cold as an ice).



Sura fa rep at Ruallung

The Hmar settlement around the Saitual region was also attested by the *Biete* (one of the Hmar clan) folk lullaby-

Chiteraka rel ka pela,

²⁰⁶ Interview with Lalthlamuani, on 21 October 2019 at Ruallung, Mizoram.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Sawithuami.

In chon sum sua rel ka pel a;

Ei rual hei neh ei rual hei neh;

*Tui kang kin koia, hui I, kui I, Saitual ram.*²⁰⁸

(In my tender age, I carry a basket, a basket of my ancestors' heirloom; Along with my friends and all, like a twisted stream, marching on, oh! *Saitual* land). The song was about the reminiscence of *Saitual* region. Traditions upheld that when a superior force descended upon them, they were forced to abandon their settlement while some chose to stay behind at the cost of assimilation by the superior culture. The river *Tuivawl* and *Tuivai* were the name given by the *Hmars* which are in used even today.

²⁰⁹ K Zawla stated:

*“Lui hminga ‘Va’ awm: Vanva, Thlikva, Thliva leh a dangte hi Pawi hming vuah, tia sawi a ni thin a. Hmar tawngah ‘Va’ tih hi lui tihna a lo ni ve si a; Zoramah hian hming vuah nei khawpin Pawi an cheng lo. Chuvangin Hmar hming vuah niin a lang a ni”.*²¹⁰

(the suffix *Va* in the rivers must have been the name given by the *Hmars* although they were usually attributed to the *Pawi*, since *Va* happens to mean river in the *Hmar* language. Moreover, the *Pawi* settlement in *Zoram/Mizoram* was not that widespread to be elevated to such position). Therefore, these rivers were named by the *Hmars* since they were within the settlement of the *Hmars*, so the theory that they were named by them seems to be true.

2.8 Post-colonial Migration:

As mentioned earlier, the *Hmars* were one of the first settlers of the present *Mizoram*. They were already there when the *Luseis* entered the present *Mizoram*. *Chawnchhim, Zote, Chhungte, Lawihmun, Ngur, Khawbung, Thiak, Darngawn* and

²⁰⁸ Ramdina Lalsim, *History of the Biates (One of the earliest settlers of Mizoram) and Their Folktales*, pp.179-180.

²⁰⁹ Hrangchhuana, *Hmar Chanchin (Hmar History)*, p.30.

²¹⁰ Zawla, p.153.

Biats were all the name of the Hmar clans and the places they once settled are still known by the same names. After the arrival of the Luseis, the Hmars were being forced out from their settlement, thus forcing them to disperse and scattered.²¹¹ The British Colonialist as well as the Government of India failed to identify the Hmars. Subsequently, the areas of their settlement were being cut up and attached to different states of the North East of India, scattering them to such an extent that they now find themselves mostly in the extreme corner (border area) of Manipur, Mizoram, Assam and Tripura. Yet, this very incident of displacement and attaching it to different states may have contributed for their easy relocation within different states of North East India over a period of time.

There was a structural difference between Pre-colonial and Post-colonial migration of the Hmars. In the former, there was movement of the whole group or clan, resulting in the deterioration of their former settlement. For instance, upon the emergence of severe famine in *Shan*, the whole population migrated in order to find a new settlement. The post-colonial migration was due to the moving of one or more families seeking a better and more secure life. The motive behind such movement was usually socio-political in nature such as to escape the wrath of the dominant tribe or famine or the overall pursued of a more fertile land or peaceful life.

The Luseis were believed to enter the present Mizoram around the first part of the 18th century and due to clan enmity, some of the Hmars were forced to move northward.²¹² According to traditions, under the Lusei chief named *Vanpuia*, the Hmars of *Champhai* and the surrounding areas, were attacked, slaughter and many of them were captured as slaves. Since the *Luseis* were better armed and even possessed fire-arms, the Hmars were forced to scatter and dispersed into the adjoining areas.²¹³ Several households fled their settlement in the present Mizoram to escape the wrath

²¹¹ Siana, p.5.

²¹² Siana, p.17.

²¹³ Hrangchhuana, p.31.

of the Lusei chief.²¹⁴ It may be stated that, even during this time, politics was not the only reason for migration of the Hmars, also people migrated to escape famine.²¹⁵ The search for a better life too, often resulted in the relocation of settlement. Under this realm economic compulsion was the main driving force behind it. In the post-colonial period, many families from south Manipur relocated their settlement to present Mizoram with a hope for a better living condition.²¹⁶

Another sporadic wave of migration was during the Mizo National Front Movement that began on 1 March 1966.²¹⁷ Many households left the present Mizoram seeking security elsewhere. Not only the Hmars, but many households from cognate or allied tribes too, flee Mizoram at this critical juncture. Household who migrated during this period usually returned after the ‘peace accord’.²¹⁸

The oral tradition such as folksongs and folklores were the main source for constructing the pre-colonial history of the Hmars. The origin of the Hmars and the places where they once settled, and why or what prompted them to migrate was conjured up with the help of a selectively chosen folk songs. It is to be noted that their folksongs and folklores served as the much-needed source to put down the Hmar’s history in writing. The available oral traditions were complemented with other sources to arrive at an open-ended conclusion through reasoned inferences and careful correlations in constructing the history of the Hmars.

²¹⁴ Interview with Thankim (84 years) on 11 August 2016 at Rengkai, Churachandpur.

²¹⁵ Interview with Darsanglien Ruolngul (81 years) on 14 August 2016 at Sielmat, Churachandpur.

²¹⁶ Interview with Chalrohluna (56 years) on 29 December 2017 at Ratu, Mizoram.

²¹⁷ Zoramthanga, *Mizo Hnam Movement History; A History of Mizo Nationalism Movement*, Aizawl, Dingdi Press, 2016, p.31.

²¹⁸ Interview with Darphuta (80 years) on 29 Dec. 2017 at Ratu, Mizoram.

CHAPTER-3

PRE-COLONIAL SOCIO-CULTURAL SYSTEM

3.1 Social System:

Social system implies the systematic arrangement of parts or components of a society, in other word, a system that constituted human interactions, where in the process of interaction individual influences each other. It refers to definite pattern that emerged as a result of the interaction and interrelationship of the individuals in a society.²¹⁹ Although the general idea of the system had its roots in the natural sciences, as a concept it aimed at highlighting the individual's interdependency in a society irrespective of their distinctive identity. The social system of a group or community evolved out of the survival instinct of mankind, i.e., a principle necessitated by the environment if they are to survive.²²⁰ Kin groups are a common feature of a social grouping based on kinship ties where the consanguineal and the affinal kin groups constituted major types.²²¹ Among the Hmars, clan and *laibung* system exemplified the former type of kin group, i.e. consanguineal kin group. Kinship defined one's duties, responsibilities and privileges in relation to others. In fact, it was the idiom of social interaction, organizing economic, political, ceremonial and sexual activities.²²²

(a) Clan:

According to Ember & Ember, Clan is the basis of the social structures of the society and is a

²¹⁹ C.N. Shankar Rao, *Sociology; Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought*, 4th Revised Edition, New Delh, S Chand & Company Ltd, 2005, p.115.

²²⁰ John Scott (ed.), *Sociology; The Key Concepts*, New York, Routledge, 2006, pp.160 &163.

²²¹ George Peter Murdock, *Social Structure*, Tenth Printing, New York, The Machimillan Company, 1965, pp.41-42.

²²² Gayle Rubin, 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex' in John Wallach Scott (ed.), *Feminism & History*, Reprint, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p.114.

“Set of kin whose members trace descent from a common ancestor, but the links back to that ancestor are not specific. In fact, the common ancestor may not even be known”.²²³

According to Radcliffe-Brown, a society that is based on kinship irrespective of it being clan, joint-family or incorporated lineages must adopt a system of unilineal reckoning of succession.²²⁴ Consequently, the Hmar’s clan too, comprised of unilineal rule of descent based on patrilineal form. Sons inherited the clan of the father, while a daughter adopted the clan of her husband once she got married. Different clans of the Hmars have a distinct identity. For instance, *Buhril*, sub-clans of *Thiek* were *Thiempu* (priestly) clan,²²⁵ *Lungtau* clan enjoy a special price known as *Hringtha* when their daughter’s gave birth. According to this practice, the baby’s maternal grandparents were entitled to *tlaikhat* (equivalent half of a *siel*), in return, *lukawm* (traditional head-band) and *chem* (doe) would be presented to the baby.²²⁶ The eldest sons of clans such as *Leiri*, *Faihriem* and *Changsan* inherited all properties whereas for the rest of the Hmar clan property was inherited by the youngest son.²²⁷ Traditional Hmars were clannish and preferred to settle based on their clan and lineages. The places where they had once settled such as *Keivawm Zo*, *Khawzawl*, *Khawbung*, *Biete*, *Thiek*, *Zote*, etc, which were all located in the North Eastern part of the present Mizoram were still known by their clan or lineages name even to this day.²²⁸

When and where exactly division based on clan emerge was hardly known. However, all available literary sources professed that the Hmar clan formation emerged from their settlement at *Thantlang*, presently located in the Chin State of Myanmar. According to Hranglien Songate the Hmars came to be divided into different clans during their habitation at *Thantlang*, further sub-division later on emerged at *Lenthlang*.²²⁹ The

²²³ Ember, Carol R, & Ember, Melvin, *Anthropology*, Ninth Edition, New Jersey, Prentice Hall Inc., 1999, p.365.

²²⁴ A. R Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Adresses*, Illinois, The Free Press, 1952, p.46.

²²⁵ Songate, p.39.

²²⁶ Songate, p.43.

²²⁷ Hmar, p. 94.

²²⁸ Lal Dena, *Hmar Folk Tales*, New, 1995, p.(vii). Hereafter cited as Lal Dena, Folk Tales.

²²⁹ Songate, p.37.

above assertion seems to be rational because in Mizoram most of their settlement borne the name of the different clans of the tribe. Moreover, folk songs believed to be composed before the Hmars settlement in the present Mizoram did not mention any of the names of the different clans of the Hmar.

The origin of the division into clans was closely related to the conduct, behaviour and achievement of the forbearer during the time of clan formation. According to tradition, the Hmars greatly prospered while they were in *Thantlang*. Merry-making and feast to celebrate a good harvest and a successful hunt were a common occurrence. On one such occasion, a certain man was in a state of a happy mood and dance in a peculiar manner resembling a bird flying in the air. Henceforth, he came to be known as *Lamkangpa* (dancing on tip toes), and his progenies therefore, came to be known as *Lamkang*.

“A lamdandan Indang ta raw sen, A hmingah
LAMKANGPA aw ti ta rei e” (The way he dances was
different/unique from others, let him be called
Lamkangpa).²³⁰

In the same way, *Lungtau* came to be called so for worshipping *Lungvar* (Lung=stone, var=glowing/shining)²³¹ at *Singkaihman*'s *Lo* (Jhum).²³² Likewise, the different clans of the Hmar also developed their respective names from the nature, conduct and achievement of their respective forbearer. Clans also have a distinctive identity such as a dissimilar bride-prices, different law of inheritance, etc.

²³⁰ Louis L Keivom, *Hmar Tolung (A Study of Hmar History & Geneology)*, Hereafter cited as Keivom, Hmar Tolung, pp. 69-70.

²³¹ *Lung* implies Stone, whereas *var* could be associated with glow, white or wise. However, *Lung var* here implies a glowing stone; Interview with Songrolal Songate (62 years), interview by Self on 13 August 2015.

²³² Songate, p.40.

The following are the clans and sub-clans of the Hmars:

(1) **Thiek Pahnám (Clan)**-Athú, Amaw, Toulor
(a)Thilsong, Buhiril, Hekte (a)Ralsun (b)Chong-hekte,
Thluchung, Khungate, Selate, Tuolte, Taite, Hnamte,
Kangbur, Khawzawl (a)Lalum (b)Laldau (c)Saibung,
Vankal (a)Pangote (b)Pangulte (c)Khawbuol, Pakhumate
(a)Khumthur (b)Khumsen, Thlihran, Tamte, Hmante,
Chawnnel (Hnamte & Chawnnel belongs to **Darlawng
Thiek**).

(2) **Lungtau Pahnám (Clan)**-Mihriemate, Songate,
Infimate, Nungate, Intoate, Lungchuong (a)Inbuon,
Pasulate, Keivom, Tamhrang, Sielhnám, Theisiekate,
Thlawngate.

(3) **Zote Pahnám (Clan)**-Pusiete, Chuonkhup, Saiate
(Saihman), Hriler, Chawngchau, Chawngvawr,
Buonsuong, Chawngtuol, Darkhawlai, Tlangte, Parate,
Hrangsote, Ngaiate.

(4) **Hrangate Pahnám (Clan)**-Hrangate, Hrangsote,
Hrangdo, Hrangman.

(5) **Neitham Pahnám (Clan)**-Chawnhning, Singphun,
Khawthang, Thangnawk, Vaithang, Maubawk.

(6) **Lawitlang Pahnám (Clan)** Hrangchal (a)Laiasang
(b)Sielasung (c) Darasang (d)Tungte, Sungte, Varte,
Suomte, Tlawmte, Chawnsim.

(7) **Pautu Pahnám (Clan)**-Singate, Tluongate

(8) **Rawite Pahnám (Clan)**: Pieltu, Sawrte, Buite, Arro,
Zate, Aite, Hnungte, Seldo.

(9) Ngurte Pahnām (Clan): *Sanate (a) Pusingathla (b) Saidangathla, Parate, Saingur, Bangran, Taite, Chiluon.*

(10) Khawbung Pahnām (Clan): *Fente, Pangamte, Pazamte, Riengsete, Bunglung, Laising, Muolphei, Phunte (a) Sierthlang (b) Siersak.*

(11) Pakhuong Pahnām (Clan): *Khuongpui, Buongpui, Hranngul, Khelte.*

(12) Darngawn Pahnām (Clan): *Ruolngul, Faiheng, Banzang-Chawngmunte, Famhawite, Sanate, Lamchangte, Sinate, Fatlei.*

(13) Faihriem Pahnām (Clan): *Saivate, Bapui, Tuollai, Tuimuol, Khawlum, Khawkhieng, Khawhreng, Sekong, Thlangnung, Seiling, Saihmar, F.Tusing, Dulien.*

(14) Leiri Pahnām (Clan): *Neingaite, Puruolte, Pudaite, Pulamte, Puhnuongte, Thlandar.*

(15) Ngente Pahnām (Clan): *Chawnghawi, Dosak, Dothlang, Lailo, Laitui, Laihring, Tuolngun, Zawngte, Zawhte, Bawlte.*

(16) Khuolhring Pahnām (Clan): *Chunthang, Lung-en, Lozun, Leidir, Midang, Milai, Pieltel, Rawlsim, Thlaute, Suokling.*

(17) Vangsie Pahnām (Clan): *Invang, Vanghawi, Dosil, Tlukte, Theiduah, Zapte.*

(18) Khiengte Pahnām (Clan): *Khupthang, Khupsung, Kumsung, Khello, Muolvun, Singbel, Chawngte.*

(19) Clans from Darlong: (1) *Thiek-Chongkal, Vankal, Kangbur, Hnamte, Hmante.* (2) *Faihriem-Saihriem, Khawhreng, Saihmar.* (3) *Zote-Siete, Saite, Chawnnel.* (4)

Hrangchal-Khuoltu, Lawmte. (5) Ngurte-Rangte, (6) Biete-Fatlei.

(20) Biete Pahnām (Clan): *Nampui, Ngamlai, Thienglai, Da, Hmunhring, Puilo, Fatlei, Chungngol, Tlungurh, Tamlo, Betlu, Sawnlén, Khurbi-Lienante.*

(21) Sakechek Pahnām (Clans): *Neibawm, Bawmlien, Khawlum, Thingphun, Keiphun, Thirsu, Zeite, Sumtinkha, Telengsing, Vaichai.*

(22) Hrangkhawl Pahnām (Clan): *Penatu, Chawlkha, Phuoitawng, Dumker.*

(23) Chawrai Pahnām (Clan): *Langkai, Tuipai, Saithnoi, Nisatarai.*

(24) Chawnthei Pahnām (Clan): *Neichir, Hnechong, Luophul, Lamthik.*

(25) Chawthe Pahnām (Clan): *Changfieng, Chawngdang, Chawnthik, Chamte, Hawnzawng, Lienhna, Halte, Thamau, Tamva, Suonhawi.*

(26) Changsan Pahnām (Clan): *Zilchung, Zilhmang, Ngulthuom, Ngaithuom, Hrawte, Hranhnieng, Chaileng, Thangngen, Kellu, Armei.*²³³

Most of the early writings on the history of the Mizos suggested that the *Hmars* were one of the most numerous tribes inhabiting the present Mizoram. In fact, out of total 352 clans in Mizoram, 96 clans were from the Hmar clans, where the clan closes to it- the *Luseis* constituted 79 clans.²³⁴ Today, some of the clans and sub-clans mentioned above may not identify themselves as Hmars or were perhaps obliterated. The process of cultural

²³³ Songate, pp. 3-12.

²³⁴ Thanga, *The Mizos; A Study in Racial Personality*, p.6; Zatluanga, p.10.

assimilation might have a momentous impact on this realm. Tomlinson had stated: In the aboriginal family, the political and economic power plays an influential role in the application of cultural domination.²³⁵ As mentioned earlier, the Hmars were already inhabiting the present Mizoram when the *Luseis* (mostly the Sailo clan) arrived in the hills. But due to the inter-tribal conflicts between the two, the latter emerged victorious forcing many of the Hmar clans to flee northwards, while leaving many of them behind at the same time.²³⁶ Some of those left behind had been assimilated to the dominant cultures resulting in some of them losing their identity wholly or partially.²³⁷ It is also to be noted that the Hmars clan system was flexible, allowing a clan member to adopt another clan by means of *Saphun*, or adopting other's *Sa* (religion) as one's own and other liability for all practical purposes.²³⁸ The *saphun* of the Hmars was a form of 'ritual kinship' which shared some similarity with the 'ritual kinship' established through godparenthood types practiced at Tlaxcala in Mexico.²³⁹

(b) *Laibung* (the go between or intermediary):

Laibung was an important social system among the Hmars. It was a peculiar traditional institution within a clan based on patri-unilineal descent. It was composed of kin group exclusively derived from the patrilineal descent. Yet, all known blood relatives/kindred were not necessarily a *Laibung*. For example, son-in-law could not become a *Laibung* although he may be a close relative through his wife.²⁴⁰ It was a system through which certain families also considered themselves to have connection or relation on account of sharing a common clan although their actual genealogical tie was not known.²⁴¹ It implied a social liaison between a male member of a clan and also an alliance of different household sharing the same clan and lineage. *Laibung* usually worked for the welfare of the household and represented the household in both good or bad times. The

²³⁵ John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A critical Introduction*, Reprinted, London, Continuum, 2004, pp. 2-3.

²³⁶ Lalhluna, p.27.

²³⁷ Hrangchhuana, p.32.

²³⁸ *Mizo Hnam Dan Latest (Mizo Customary Law)*, 5th Impression, Aizawl, Mualchin Publication & Paper Works, 2009, p.46.

²³⁹ Christian Alvarado Leyton, 'Ritual and Fictive Kinship', *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* in Hillary Callan (ed.), published by John Wiley & sons Limited, 2018, p.1, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327430121>, (accessed 26 April 2020).

²⁴⁰ Interview with John Lalnunsang (56 years) on 11 August 2016 at Sielmat, Churchandpur.

²⁴¹ Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society; Essays and Addresses*, p.52.

decision of a *Laibung* was final once a householder sought its assistance. Any male adult member of a household could take part in the deliberation of the *Laibung*, however, each family was regarded as a single unit. As the Hmar followed a patrilineal system of the society, the daughter of the household could not inherit the clan of the father, this shows that only a male offspring could share a common *Laibung* with the father.²⁴²

The role of the *Laibung* included the representation of the household in social matters such as proposing and arranging marriages, acting as a third party in the case of dispute or conflict within its own clan members or others. For example, when a man decided to marry, the father or eldest member of the family usually sent their *Laibung* to the girl's family to propose a marriage²⁴³. The *Laibung* represented the groom's family in mediating between the two families on matter relating to whether the marriage was agreed upon, and if it was so, when and where it could take place. In all these arrangements, the son-in-law, although closely related through his wife was sidelined, but was expected to do all the manual work and should be careful not to voice his opinion. The son-in-law was expected to prepare and serve *Zu* (rice beer) accompanying the *Laibung* (the go between) as such while proposing the hand of the daughter to the girl's family. Along with the many responsibilities the *Laibung* enjoyed property rights if a family failed to produce a male heir. In such cases, the property of the household was usually passed to the *Laibung*, and not to the female offspring.²⁴⁴

(c) Family:

The traditional Hmar family was bound together by a kinship ties. Radcliffe-Brown had stated that a definite social group existed in a kinship system. The first group included the domestic family which may consist of a single elementary family or a group of persons sharing together a dwelling place along with some sort of economic arrangement. In almost every kinship system, lineage groups, clan and moieties based on unilineal descent

²⁴² Interview with John Lalnunsang.

²⁴³ Batlien, p.106.

²⁴⁴ Interview with John Lalnunsang.

played an important part.²⁴⁵ Family was the basic unit of the Hmar society. According to Murdock, the term ‘family’ is *ambiguous*. It comprises of adults of both sexes, where at least two of them are maintaining a socially approved sexual relationship, with one or more either biological offspring or adopted ones belonging to the cohabiting adults.²⁴⁶ The Hmars followed an extended family system where one or more nuclear families lived together under a single roof centering on patrilocal or patriarchal rules of descent.²⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in the Hmar’s society in certain ceremonies such as marriage, death or birth or in the occasions of traditional feast, relatives from the mother side were often a part of the beneficiaries in these events. For examples, certain portion of the bride-price was allotted to the kin from the mother side on the occasion of marriage, or even portion from the family pig slaughtered was given to the motherside of the family.²⁴⁸ Yet, kin linked through the mother and father were never considered as similar or equivalent. The eldest male member of the household became the head of the family and all-important decisions were taken up by him. Although married son moved out of the family to start a new one, the parental authority did not end there. There was usually mutual assistance if and when the situation demands it.²⁴⁹ The traditional Hmar families were bound together by *Kinship* ties. Bifurcate merging kinship terminology which bifurcated or split the mother’s side and the father’s side by a different terminology was a practice common with most society following unilineal rule of descent and unilocal post marital residence rules. Under this system, the mother and the mother’s side sister as well as the father and the father’s brother were assigned a common terminology while different terms were assigned for the mother’s brother and the father’s sister respectively.²⁵⁰ The Hmars made a distinction of the mother’s side (matrilateral) and the father’s side (patrilateral) by a terminology. All the male and female cousins from the mother’s side were known as *Pute* and *Nute* where as cousins from the father’s side were known by the prefix ‘U’ depending on the age. Moreover, there existed a distinction between the father’s male and female siblings respectively. The father’s male siblings were called *Pate* and *Papui* depending on the position of the father age wise. The wife of the *Pate* and the *Papui* were called *Nute* and

²⁴⁵ Radcliffe-Brown, pp. 53-54.

²⁴⁶ Murdock, *Social Structure*, p.1.

²⁴⁷ Murdock, p.2.

²⁴⁸ Interview with T Khuma Songate.

²⁴⁹ Lal Dena, *Identity*, p.22.

²⁵⁰ Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity*, Fourteenth Edition, New York, The McGraw Hill Companies, 2011, p.254.

Nupui/Nulien respectively. The prefix attached to the above terms *Pa* and *Nu* happens to mean both Father and Mother respectively which also indicated the male line. The father's female siblings were denoted as *Ni/Nipui* (Aunt) and their husbands as *Rang*. The terminology associated to the Kin reflected the Patriarchal nature of the Hmar Society.²⁵¹ It also reflected the categories to which the relatives belonged, the nature of the rights and duties or socially approved attitudes and behavior between a person and his relatives.²⁵²

Another kinship relationship beyond descent and affinity common among the Hmars was the *Zawl* System.²⁵³ *Zawl* could be understood as a kind of *Fictive Kin*. *Fictive kin* can be defined as 'those adopted unrelated relative where the rights and obligations of kinship are bestowed and socially recognized as members of the family'.²⁵⁴ It was usually a bond between friends cemented by certain ritual. Adoption of a *zawl* involved a gift of a portion of a pig known as *Zang* which was a slice of the pig's back from the neck down to the tail and was usually about three inches wide, to the adopted man. And if he accepted, then he would reciprocate the gift with the traditional tea/*zu* to the giver's residence. After some time, he would also have to give the same portion of the meat when he killed a pig. In other word, acceptance implies a willingness to return the gift as well as the confirmation of the relationship. It was customary albeit not obligatory for a male adult to adopt a *Zawl*, usually from outside his clan who could act as a blood related sibling for all practical purposes.²⁵⁵

(d) Marriage System:

Marriage can be defined as a system that,

²⁵¹ Interview with John Lalnunsang.

²⁵² Radcliffe-Brown, p.63.

²⁵³ Interview with C C Rema on 12 August 2016 at Sielmat, Churachandpur.

²⁵⁴ Daniel G Bates and Elliot K Fratkin, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd Edition, Massachusetts, Allyn and Bacon, 1999, p.251.

²⁵⁵ Interview with C C Rema on 12 August 2016 at Sielmat, Churachandpur.

“Provides a legal contractual basis for sharing of property, economic responsibility, sex, and obligations towards children born as a result of the union.”²⁵⁶

It was one of the primary factors for assimilating strangers into kin ties besides, creating and maintaining personal and political alliances and constructing an affinal relationship.²⁵⁷ A family created a bond between kin groups apart from promoting economic co-operation and provision for the children.²⁵⁸ As such, marriage for the Hmars was not taken lightly. Once a boy set his eye on a girl, his family would have traced the girl’s family line on matters such as whether any misfortune had befallen upon them, or any of her family member had genetically inheritable diseases. The boy’s family usually would pursue the matter only if they were satisfied with the girl’s lineage.²⁵⁹ The importance of the girl’s lineage in a marriage had been endorsed by the tragic love story of *Tuoni and Neilal*. *Neilal* who was the chief of *Sawrtui* (village in Champhai district) had fallen in love with *Tuoni* from *Khawkhum* (presently in Myanmar) who along with her family seek refuge at Neilal’s village. Neilal’s mother felt Tuoni to be unsuitable for her son as she was believed to be poor. However, according to the story, Tuoni being a refugee had refrained from indulging in her fineries.²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, marriage was not restricted to any particular clan, tribe or community, yet *Thlaram*, (September) which literally means the month of destruction was considered tabooed for marriage.²⁶¹ The consideration of a particular month as a taboo for marriage was not common only among the Hmars. Even the ancient Roman objected marriages in the month of May. Taylor suggested that this could be mere permanence of cultures without any concrete bearings.²⁶²

The Hmars marriage system was basically endogamous, yet incestuous relationship was forbidden and usually scorn at.²⁶³ The Hmars had a popular saying that

²⁵⁶ Bates, and Fratkin, *Cultural Anthropology*, p.265.

²⁵⁷ Kottak, *Cultural anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity*, p.263. Hereafter cited as Kottak, *Anthropology*.

²⁵⁸ Bates, and Fratkin, p.273.

²⁵⁹ Vara, Nunphung, p.25.

²⁶⁰ Batlien, p.189.

²⁶¹ Interview with Chawnglungnem (89 years) on 23 February 2017 at Sielmat, Churachandpur, Manipur.

²⁶² Taylor, *Primitive Cultures: Researches into the development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Culture*, p.70.

²⁶³ Hmar, p.94.

‘if a man committed incestuous relationships with one’s own daughter, then natural calamities like drought would befall upon the society’.²⁶⁴ The Incest prohibition was found in many cultures. The Kenyah and Kayan of Borneo discouraged the union with mother, sister, daughter, father’s sister or mother’s sister claiming that physical deformity was likely to occurred with such union.²⁶⁵ Levi-Straus suggested that incest prohibition was a social construction. A person had to conformed to the social norms with regards to relationship between the sexes. He cannot simply ‘do just what he pleases’.²⁶⁶ Marriages among the Hmars was more than just a union of a boy and a girl. The rites and rituals associated with a marriage indicated that it was more of an economic and social alliances to strengthen the kinship ties, thereby promoting the group solidarity. According to Kottak, Incest taboo promoted exogamy as marrying a close relative would be counter productive since one was already on peaceful terms. It promoted peaceful relations to a wider network of groups as marriages involved creating and maintaining alliances.²⁶⁷ According to tradition, the Hmar practiced three main types of marriage, viz., *Sawngpuia Innei*, *Arasi hnuoia innei* and *Tlun*.

Sawngpuia Innei: *Sawngpuia Innei* referred to a marriage with the blessings of both the parents. In this system, a young man would intimate his parents about his desire to get married. Soon the family had a gathering/meeting usually consisting of the brother(s), *laibung* and *makpa* (son-in-law) to act as *Palai* (go-betweens/intermediary). The *Palai* visited the girl’s parents with a pot of *Zu* to negotiate the marriage proposal. If the girl’s parents did not approve the proposal, they would politely refuse making flimsy excuses, at the same time, even if they approved of the suitor, they would still refrain from showing any enthusiasm. A hint for a second visit would be dropped on the pretext that they needed time for consulting the other members of the family in order to arrive at unanimous decision.²⁶⁸ The *Palai* when visiting the girl’s house took along the *Hmar-am* (traditional Hmar cloth) and *Thirdam* (hoe) along with a pot of *Zu*. In some instances, the

²⁶⁴ Interview with Chawnglungnem.

²⁶⁵ Claude Levi- Straus, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*, trans. James Harble Bell, John Richard von Sturmer and Rodney Needham, Revised Edition, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969, p.13.

²⁶⁶ Levi-Straus, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*, p.43.

²⁶⁷ Kottak, *Anthropology*, p.267.

²⁶⁸ Bapui, Vanal T, *Oral Traditions of the Hmars*, First Edition, Guwahati, Directorate, Assam Institute of Research for Tribal & Scheduled Caste, 2001, pp. 94-95.

Thirdam was left behind at the girl's residence as a symbol of their agreement to the marriage proposal. The *Thirdam* signified that the girl in question was taken and no longer available in the market, and that breaking the marriage agreement after this would result with a shameful scandal.²⁶⁹

The relationship between a family and a *makpa* (son-in-law) reflected an element of a 'joking relationship' between relations by marriage commonly found in Africa and other parts of the world. According to Radcliffe-Brown, the 'joking relationship' implied a permitted disrespect or a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism.²⁷⁰ The *makpa* was expected to be passive, talked only when called upon, yet expected to do the menial works such as serving tea/*zu* and cooking during ceremonial occasions such as marriage, ceremonial feast and funerals.²⁷¹

Arasi Hnuoia Innei: This type of marriage referred to the elopement of a boy and a girl without the consent and knowledge of their respective parents. Once the matter came to light, the boy's family then sent a messenger to alert and intimate the whereabouts of their daughter to the girl's family. They also would send a *Palai* to the girl's parent to offer an apology along with a proposal for a marriage.²⁷²

Tlun: It referred to a girl who voluntarily attempted to live with a boy she desired as a husband. If the girl could spend at least a night in the boy's house irrespective of whether they spent the night together or not, the girl was said to have accomplished her mission. However, if after spending a night, the boy changed his mind and decided not to marry her, then he must pay *Makman* (Sehkhat which was equivalent to a *Siel*// the same amount a man has to pay in divorcing a wife). Yet, if the boy decided to keep her, then he could send *Palai* to negotiate a marriage proposal.²⁷³ Similarly, a boy could also *tlun*

²⁶⁹ Interview with Chawnglungnem.

²⁷⁰ Radcliffe-Brown, p.91.

²⁷¹ Interview with Lalthazo.

²⁷² Interview with C C Rema (83 years) on 12 August 2016 at Sielmat, Churachandpur.

²⁷³ _____ *Hmar Hnam Dan (Seminar Thutlukna)* by *Hmar Youth Association (HYA)*, Gen. Hqrs., Churachandpur, Maipur, Published by Sinlung Society Publication No. 11, 1990, p.11.

the girl he desired to marry. If he could survive for two years in the girl's residence, then he would be exempted from paying the bride price. However, if he left before the expiry of two years, he could be forced to leave the house empty handed. On the contrary, if the girl expelled the boy, then she also had to pay a fine. In both the cases, any offspring resulting from the union of the above kind would take on the father's lineage.²⁷⁴

Bride Price: Levi-Straus stated that a system of exchange in different form; direct or indirect, explicit or implicit, general or special, immediate or deferred, closed or open, and concrete or symbolic emerges as the basic features of any modalities of the institution of marriage. In other words, a system of exchange is the basis of the marriage institution.²⁷⁵ One cannot agree more with the case of the Hmars. Tradition suggested that an element of exchange was occurring even from the earliest time irrespective of the nature of exchange which were mostly in the form of services or wealth. According to tradition, a girl's hand was earned by services. The mode of service rendered differed greatly. Sometimes it involved the slaying of wild animals or an enemy or rendering physical services for three whole years to the bride's family. The first known instance of a bride price was *Hrangchal* earning the daughter of *Faihriem's* Chief *Kungawri* by slaying a *ramsai* (wild elephant). This type of marriage was known as *Kawnghlaw*.²⁷⁶ Prior to the fixation of bride-price, the price of a bride rest upon the sweet will of the father of the girl. After *Rengpui* (supreme King) *Chonhmang* migration further westward to modern Tripura, bride-prices were left into the hands of the minor Rajas, thereby, it varies from clans to clans, and from regions to regions.²⁷⁷ The existence of the bride-price can be related to the matrimonial maxim of Russia where the groom and the bride were referred to as 'the merchant' and 'the merchandise' respectively.²⁷⁸ Among the Zulu-Kaffir tribes of South Africa, marriage required the payment of a *Ikazi* which constituted a number of cattles. The rights and obligations previously entitled to the father and her agnatic kindred was transferred to her husband and his agnatic kindred. The groom's family now in turn had a right over her children along with an obligation to protect and

²⁷⁴ _____ *Hmar Hnam Dan (Seminar Thutlukna)* by Hmar Youth Association (HYA), pp.11-12.

²⁷⁵ Levi-Straus. Pp.478-479.

²⁷⁶ Vara, Nunphung, p.27.

²⁷⁷ Vara, Nunphung, p.27.

²⁷⁸ Levi-Straus, p.36.

the right of being indemnified. To them, marriage was a procedure to acquire the undisputable rights over all children born to the woman.²⁷⁹ Gayle stated that women were a channel of relationship as they were being transacted. The link formed by marriage was between the man who possessed the right of bestowal and the man who accepted her as a wife. Yet, this did not necessarily implied that women are objectified in the modern sense, because objects in the primitive societies were imbued with highly personal qualities.²⁸⁰ Gayle further stated that nothing could surpassed the ‘gift of a woman’ that had a far-reaching consequences than any other gift transactions. It established kinship and not just a mere reciprocity or the obligations to give gifts. Marcel Mauss stated that the gifts givers had a hold over the beneficiary. To accept something from some body is to accept some part of his ‘spiritual essence’, of ‘his soul’ and that one is obliged to reciprocate or give something in return to the source of the origin of the gift.²⁸¹ Among the Andaman and Nicobar Islanders, present sealed the formation of a link through marriage between the bride and the groom parents.²⁸² The nature of the exchange of women with services or with bride-price practiced among the Hmars can be comprehended best by analyzing the beneficiaries and the mode of the distribution of the bride-wealth along with the reciprocal obligations involved. The father of the girl, who had the rights of bestowal was the main beneficiary, enjoying the lion’s share of the bride-price, apart from the groom who gained a wife for himself. The remaining pride-price was parceled out into various unequal shares which was distributed among the various kins.²⁸³ The bride prices that were reckoned in terms of *siel* (wild bison) was divided into various shares.

Manpui was the main price given to the father of the bride. *Mankang*, a subsidiary price that consisted of *Inhawn*, an opening fee for negotiation of a marriage proposal. *Panghak/Palal/Mankang* was a portion given to the maternal uncle, or to one of the clansmen. *Pusum* was a subsidiary price given to the bride’s maternal uncle. Another subsidiary marriage price such as *U Khel Man* would be paid to the elder sister if the

²⁷⁹ Radcliffe-Brown, p.41.

²⁸⁰ Gayle Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex’, pp.117-118.

²⁸¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in Archaic societies*, London, Taylor & Francis for e-library, 2002, pp.15-16.

²⁸² Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in Archaic societies*, p.25.

²⁸³ Interview with Lalthazo.

youngest girl married before the elder sister and *Nuthlum* if the girl was the youngest offspring.²⁸⁴ After marriage, when the bride was taken to the groom's house, the groom's family had to pay *Zuorman* to the female and male relatives who escorted the bride to the groom's resident.²⁸⁵ The *Zourman* depended on the exigency of the day and was therefore not consistent. In the olden times when money was very scarce, *zourman* was paid in kind, which was usually a *Sathlin* (raw or cooked portion of a meat). In course of time, money replaced *Sathlin*. Even then, the monetary value paid as *Zuorman* varied from time to time and from region to region. The amounts range from Re 1/- to Rs 40. The *Zour* were expected to assist the bride in good and bad times.²⁸⁶ The male kinsmen of the Melpa women of Papua New Guinea used the bride-price/bride-wealth for their personal needs.²⁸⁷ In the case of the Hmars the various beneficiaries had certain obligations to carry out towards the bride and her family. For instance, the maternal uncle would be expected to give a portion of his pigs when killed. Mutual ties and alliances were established where the recipients of the various portions of the bride-price would be there for the girl in good and bad times. Moreover, the kinsmen of the father would probably repeat the same procedure i.e., giving portions of the bride-price when they married off their own daughter.²⁸⁸

Murdoch argued that the bride-price guaranteed the well-being and security of the young bride rather than relating with a price paid for a chattel or a slave. The girl could always return to her parents if she was not happy.²⁸⁹ Likewise for the Hmars, bride price can be considered as a social status or an instrument for providing security to a married woman. For instance, *Zamthatvung's* (*Lawipa*) love for *Lerchawnkhawl*, from *Zote* clan induced him to increase the bride price for *Zote* clan relative to other clans. This particular incident reflected the bride price as a status symbol. Moreover, the high *Makman/Divorce* (*Sekhat* or a bison) was more or less a protection gear against appropriating the chastity

²⁸⁴ Bapui, *Oral Traditions of the Hmars*, pp.97-98. Hereafter cited as Bapui, Oral Tradition.

²⁸⁵ Thiek, p.280.

²⁸⁶ Interview with Lalthazo (84 years) on 12 August at Saikot, Churachandpur, Manipur.

²⁸⁷ Rubin, p.142.

²⁸⁸ Interview with John Lalnunsang.

²⁸⁹ Murdoch, p.21.

and preserving the values of women. *Siel* was a very high price indeed considering the economy of the Hmars during such period.²⁹⁰

After an agreement was reached between the *Palai* and the girl's family, the girl's father made a grand feast by killing a pig on the wedding day. Half of the meat called *Sawng* was given to the groom's family.²⁹¹ When the time comes for the bride to go to the groom's house, the groom's best man and his female relatives along with the *Zuor* accompany her to her new home. Before she set foot outside of her father's house, usually a priest would sweep her feet with wet broom chanting-

*“Khuonu Khuopa 'n mal sawm sien la che, bu sang
bu za va thlo la, nau le te inhringin mi kaldung
Kalkhang va zau rawh”.*²⁹²

(May *Khuonu Khuopa* bless you, may your harvest be abundant, may you be blessed with children and enlarge your family). Then the bride stepped her right foot first and the party proceeded to the groom's house. Marriages for the Hmars was an exchange of gifts to create economic, social and political alliances which was imperative for the survival of the groups. Monaghan and Just stated thus, ‘the most lasting fundamental bonds are formed on the basis of marriage and kinship.’²⁹³ Marriages for the Hmars apart from forming a bond between two families, it also solidified the kinship ties.

(e) Divorce:

Conrad Kottak asserted that divorce tended to get more complicated in a society where marriages was not merely a union of two persons but was complicated with political alliances, or where bride-price was involved or the society followed a patrilineal system.²⁹⁴ The Hmars society being more or less identifiable with the above asstetion,

²⁹⁰ Vara, Nunphung, p.27.

²⁹¹ Bapui, Oral Traditions, p.95.

²⁹² Vara, Nunphung, p.31.

²⁹³ John Monaghan and Peter Just, *Social and Cultural Anthropology; A very short Introduction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.75.

²⁹⁴ Kottak, Anthropology, p.153.

divorce often involved the return of the bride-price. Return of the bride-price, on the other hand often involved in the woman being stripped off all the property acquired by the two individuals as a couple, including taking away any children born from the union.²⁹⁵

Marriages of the Hmars was mainly dissolved by the following customs-

(i) *Mak*: In case a man refused to take his wife anymore, he could divorce her by paying *Sekhat* (equivalent to a *Siel*), along with the property of the wife brought at the time of marriage. However, property acquired together by the couple was usually in the hands of the husband.²⁹⁶ (ii) *Sum insuo*: Contrary to the above, if the wife refused to be married to her husband anymore, then she could divorce her husband by giving back the bride price. However, all her personal belonging was for her to keep.²⁹⁷ (iii) *Peksachang*: If a wife and a husband decided to divorce on grounds of incompatibility. The bride price remained as it is but, the wife could take back all her personal belongings. (iv) *Inthathe*: It refers to divorce with mutual agreement on grounds of ill-health or other misfortune. In this case, the division of the property depends on the two parties. (v) *Uire*: If a wife committed adultery and the husband refused to take her back, she could be divorced empty handed or would return and even her personal belonging would not be given to her.²⁹⁸

(f) Rites Connected to Birth and Death:

There were also certain rites performed for the well-being of a new born child. For instance, a torch would be lighted in front of a house after the birth of a child usually on the seventh day of the child birth. Some clan of the Hmars performed *Khawduop* every year for the babies born during the year. In this (*Khawduop*) ceremony, on a selected spot a long bamboo was planted along with a *thlek* (bamboo piece), where the long bamboo was surrounded by bamboos and plants planted temporarily. The young men play *Rawsem* (musical instrument made of bamboo), while mothers carried their children on

²⁹⁵ Interview with Chawnglungnem.

²⁹⁶ Zawla, p.98.

²⁹⁷ L.K Liana, *Zofate Thuhla*, Chhut Khatna, Zodin Printing Press, Tuikual South, Published by C Lalsanglura, 1994, p.185.

²⁹⁸ Liana, *Zofate Thuhla*, p.185.

their back, singing lullabies and dancing. A mock-sell ceremony that pretended to sell the next child into slavery was performed if a couple lost a child in succession. A man who had a number of children would pretend to buy the baby and let it sleep on their main bed. A hen would be killed in the house of the buyer which was usually eaten at the house of the real parents of the baby.²⁹⁹

The Hmars have different names for the death depending on the nature of the mode of passing away. *Hlamzui* referred to death of an infant. If an infant passed away before attaining three months, the death body would be buried under the house along with an egg. It was believed that the egg would roll leading the baby's spirit to *mithi khuo* (the abode of the death).³⁰⁰ *Umlai thi or awmlaia thi* for natural death, *Raicheh* implied death over childbirth and *Sarhi* for any unnatural or sudden death. All death involved the entire community. It was customary for every household to have supported the bereaved families in every respects.³⁰¹

Certain ceremonies and rites accompanied the demise of a family member. The day after a family member passed away, on a long intertwined thread *Hmaiphi* (a kind of plant) leaves were hung which was known as *Tuihlei*. Moreover, food was usually served for the death relatives., which the spirit of the deceased in the form of a rat was believed to have feasted upon it. The Hmars believed that till they performed *thitin*, the deceased spirit still hovered in their midst. During this period, killing a rat was a taboo, since they believed that the spirit dwelled on the rats and the *Khawimu* (carpenter bee).³⁰² The period prior to the performance of *thitin* was known as *Sehrawn*. After about a month they prepared *thlasiem*. *Thlasiem* was prepared by weaving a basket on which they placed three cups of Zu, rice and other eatables. Then the basket along with all the eatables was kept in the house for a night, after which they take it to their relative's graveyard. Several days later after *thlasiem*, they dug a canal to segregated the living and the death.

²⁹⁹ Bapui, Vanlal T, 'The Hmar People of Assam', *A Collection of Essays on Ethnic groups of Assam*, 70th Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha, February, 2009, p.254.

³⁰⁰ Zatuanga, pp.17-18.

³⁰¹ B lalthangliana, *Mizo Culture (Studies in Mizo Culture and Tradition)*, Aizawl, Published by F Vanlalringa, 2013, pp.110-111.

³⁰²

Finally, they performed *thitin-tinpui* to bid a final farewell to their departed relatives. All their relatives gathered at their house the night before. The next day, at the outskirts of the village, on a rope tied to a tree trunk planted temporarily, many things such as a piece of cloth, feather, squirrel's skin, etc. were hanged. After the completion of all the above, they believed that the spirit of the deceased was satisfied and also believed to have passed on to the next world.³⁰³

Thlantuibuok was another peculiar custom practiced by the Hmars. When some relatives who settled in another village and who could not be present on the day their relative passed away turned up, they would beat gongs or fire a gun, calling upon the names of their father and forefather, shouting and even hitting the door with a doe. All this would be followed by a visit to the grave where they would drink and cry their hearts out.³⁰⁴

(g) Slavery:

Suok (Slave) was a common occurrence among the Hmars. The existence of it was supported by folk songs. For example-

tui va chawi rawh,

tui va chawi rawh,

Saivaten tui ka chawi ngai nawh;

*Suoka te tuichawiin kan sil hlak.*³⁰⁵

(The translation goes like this-Go fetch the water, go fetch the water, *Saivate* never have to fetch the water; I bathe from the water fetch by the slaves). This particular folk song was believed to be composed by Tanhril (*Saivate*), a minor chief captured

³⁰³ Vara, Nunphung, pp.77-80.

³⁰⁴ Vara, Nunphung, pp.80-81.

³⁰⁵ Lunghnema, p.71.

by a chief stronger than him and was ordered to fetch water from the water hole in order to humiliate him.³⁰⁶

Slaves in the Hmar society could be classified into *Sal*, *Inpui Suok*, *Chemsen Suok* and *Tuklut Suok* depending on the mode of acquirement. Excepting those *Sal* who were the victim of inter-tribal wars, the rest enslaved themselves voluntarily to escape extreme poverty or were criminal that seek sanctuary or refuge or shelter. Giving up one's own freedom was the only road to survival for the slaves other than the war victims. Slaves were usually given food and clothing and protection by the slave owner.³⁰⁷

(h) Food Habits:

Rice constituted the staple food of the Hmars although it was supplemented with vegetables and meats. Their basic daily needs were supplied by the agricultural land and the domesticated animals such as chickens, *siel* (bison) or pigs. Yet it was not uncommon for the Hmars to foraged and hunted in the wild now and then to supplement to their needs.³⁰⁸ In the absence of modern amenities like refridgerator, they preserved foods by Sun-drying. For instance, different varieties of leafy vegetables were immersed in boiling water, and then were dried either by fire or left to dry in the Sun.³⁰⁹

The Hmars dishes were simple and required simple ingredients. It consisted of *Chartang* {meat curry mixed with locally available spices}, *Hmepawk* (a type of porridge mixed with rice and *Sizo* (local herb)}, *Chi-al hme* (simple boil with salt) and *Changal hme* {cooked with either *Sathu* (fermented pork), *Sithu* (fermented millets), *Bekanthu* (fermented soya bean) or *Ngathu* (fermented fish)}. *Changal*, a kind of vinegar made from ashes was a popular ingredient in almost all the dishes.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ Lunghnema, pp.70-71.

³⁰⁷ Hmar, pp.106-107.

³⁰⁸ Hmar, p.97.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Lalthazo.

³¹⁰ Interview with Lalthazo.



Sathu Um (dry and hollowed Gourd for fermenting pork/millet)



Changal Thlawrna (for making vinegar from ashes)

(i) Dresses:

The Hmar dresses consisted of a traditionally hand-woven garment mainly produced from cotton. After the cottons were plucked, dried and the seeds removed, it was made into yarn and finally woven into cloth. From the separation of the seeds from the cotton to the yarn, a traditionally hand-made implements such as *Herawt*, *Hmui*, *Pat Sai*, *Pat Ding*, *Pat Khui*, *Suthlam* were employed. The men folk wore *dier/dierkei* (loin cloth) while the women wore *puon* (*lungi*). The traditionally woven *puon* includes *ngotlawng*, *tharlai zawm*, *tawnlo puon*, *hmar-am*, *thangsuo puon*, *hmar puon*, *ngotekher*, *rulrak puon*, *pasaltha puon*, *puonchei* and *puonri*. The popular pattern in their *puon* were *lenbuongthuom*, *fawngte laivel*, *zawra bang*, *sakei zangze*, *par zie*, *bawta zie*, *puonlaisen*, *kikawi zie* etc.³¹¹

³¹¹ Bapui, Vanlal Tluonga, *Assam Rama Hmarhai (Hmars of Assam)*, First Edition, Guwahati, anupama Offset, 2007. Pp.104-105.



3.2 Economic System:

The main economic activity of the pre-colonial Hmars centered around the production of food or agriculture. When and where exactly the Hmars started the cultivation of food-crops was not known. However, a couple of folk songs suggested that the Hmars were acquainted with the art of cultivation even before settling in the present Mizoram. For instance, *Liendang Hla* (Songs of *Liendang*), a folk song believed to be composed during their settlement in *Shan* contained the term *Sawmfang*, and the term was used to denote rice or paddy.³¹²

The Hmars adopted *thlang lo nei* called *shifting cultivation* or *slash and burn* technique characterized by a non-continuous use of the same plot of land from three to

³¹² Hmar, L Chongtho (ed), *Hmar Hai Tobul Hla Bu, Pakhat Na (Hmar Traditional Songs Book, Book-1)*, First Publication, Guwahati, Sreeguru Press, 1987, p.103; Bapui, Vanlaltluonga, *Hmar-Hmar-English Dictionary (A Dictionary of the Hmar Language)*, First Edition, Aizawl, Lois bet Print & Publication, 2016, p.220.

four years in succession. Crops were shown and harvested after the trees were cut and burned down, and the land used was left fallow for about 3 to 4 years to regain its fertility.³¹³ In every village, the selection of the *Lo* (site for cultivation) known as *Pam Rorel* was formed by the *Lal* (Village Chief) and his *Siehmang* (Village Elders). After the *muol* (hill site) was selected, the chief had the prerogative of choosing a *lo* first and was followed by his *Siehmang*, the commoners were the last to take their pick. To mark the selected site, they erected a bamboo stump called *per*. The society's morale was such that once a *Per* was erected, they could rest assure that no one would encroach upon it.³¹⁴ Selection of the site was followed by *Lovat* (clearing the vegetation or slashing) that was left to dry for about a month. This period was called *Chapchar*. Finally, the *lo* was burned and was ready for sowing several seeds and vegetables.³¹⁵

The Hmars economic system was a replica of what was known as *Adaptive Strategy* in Cultural Anthropology.³¹⁶ The methodology of shifting cultivation was such that a new cultivating site was selected every year. Rather than shifting the whole village to make a settlement nearby the cultivating site, they constructed *Tu* (temporary stilted hut) equipping with the bare essentials, where the open space underneath was sometimes utilized for setting up a rodent trap that served as a nutritious supplementary diet.³¹⁷ Their ingenuity was such that even to this day this age old method of farming is still in vogue.

The mode of the selection of the agricultural land reflected towards the existence of social hierarchy, high moral values and the communal life of the people. For instance, the chief and his kinsmen were the first to select the land followed by the privileged sections of the society. The commoners were the last to pick the site for cultivation.³¹⁸

³¹³ Conrad Phillip Kottak, *Mirror for Humanity; A concise Introduction to Cultural anthropology*, Ninth Edition, New York, McGraw Hill Education, 2014, p.88.

³¹⁴ D Tinkhup Thiek, *Hmar Hai Tlanglo Nei Dan (Jhumming Cultivation of the Hmars)*, First Edition, Churachandpur, ICI Press, 1985, p.6.

³¹⁵ Thiek, *Hmar Hai Tlanglo Nei Dan (Jhumming Cultivation of the Hmars)*, pp.6-9. Hereafter cites as Thiek, Hmar.

³¹⁶ Kottak, *Mirror for Humanity*; p.84.

³¹⁷ Thiek, Hmar, p.10.

³¹⁸ Sangkhuma, *Kan Tuama Tlang*, p.11.

The pre-colonial economy of the Hmars can be interpreted as that of ‘*mixed Subsistence Strategy*’ typology’, where several crops were grown and produced side by side with hunting, fishing and domestication of some animals.³¹⁹ Every household took pride in producing their bare essentials. The main production included foodstuff such as rice, staple yarns, cereals and vegetables and livestock like chicken, cow, pig and *siet* or bison and household wares.³²⁰ The Hmars too, can be associated with what Malinowski termed it as the principle of ‘closed household economy’ where every household consumed the results of their labour by themselves. Yet, interestingly like the Trobriand Islanders, reciprocal obligations and dues that resulted in a constant flow of gifts and counter gifts imposed by rules of kinship led to a state of affairs where everybody is working for somebody.³²¹ For example, when the Hmar’s household slaughtered the domesticated pig, the portions of the meat such as the neck, shoulder and the thigh were distributed among the *Pu hai* (mother’s family) and married sisters, while the remaining was cooked by *makpa* (son-in-law). The neighbours and kindred would be invited to consumed the meat. The same method will be practiced when the kinsmen or neighbours killed their pig.³²² In the same spirit of reciprocal obligations, during the sowing season, *Butukhounglawm*, a kind of community labour connected with the sowing of rice where each of the participant’s land was collectively sown, was usually organized. On this particular day, all the household of the village gathered together at the outskirts of the village to proceed together at the selected site. They sang while sowing and the ladies usually served rice beer the whole day. They even have songs to last for the whole day which were segregated into songs to be sung in the morning, afternoon and so on and so forth.³²³

The economic considerations permeated even to their social life. An element of the reciprocal obligations or gifts countering gifts was exemplified in the Hmars *lawmzui/lawmruoi* practices. In this system, in the course of their cultivation, the

³¹⁹ Nanda, Serena & Warmas, Richard L, *Culture Counts: A Concise Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Stanford, Cengage Learning, 205, p.117.

³²⁰ Lal Dena, *Identity*, p.31.

³²¹ Branislaw Malinowski, ‘The Primitive /economics of the Trobriand Islanders’, *Economic Journal*, Vol-31, 1921, pp.5-6, <https://pdfs.semanticscholars.org> (accessed on 26 April 2020).

³²² Interview with John Lalnunsang.

³²³ Hrangchhuana, pp.44-46.

unmarried males and females organized themselves into group to help each other in de-weeding the *Lo*.³²⁴ Services were rendered out by an individual which was reciprocated by other individuals. This particular practice enabled them to endure the hardship of their manual work by transforming it into a remarkable and enjoyable event. In all activities of cultivations, they used implements made of iron. It was believed that they traded with whom they called *Misim* trader way back at the time they settled at *Shan*, and bought such implements for their requirements.³²⁵

The household did not have any surplus products as every produce were for self-consumption only. In the absence of surplus appropriation, inequality was barely perceptible. Except in the case of household devoid of adult male or a family without a son, which would ‘amount to being devoid of crucial laboring class, and resulting in less productive household as all the household members constituted the labouring force’.³²⁶ In this case, they could hardly produce sufficient commodities, or in other words, they might not be self-sufficient. During this period, not being self-sufficient would be considered as shameful and degrading. In the Hmar society, no existence of marked differences between the *Lal*, *Siehmang* and *Vanthlang* (commoners) was attested. However, one instance can be noted in one of the folk songs which talked about their *Lal*, *Lalpa Ropuithang* greediness in choosing the best land for himself:

*“An Lal hmangpa Ropuithang Shan Khawzawlah,
tha dumdur vanglai lienlo siehmangin chang na
e.”*³²⁷

(The above can be translated as-The Chief named Ropuithang from Shan, when selecting land for cultivation has display his greediness by attempting to lay hold of all the available good land for himself). Nevertheless, the possession of objects or token of wealth such as *darkhuong*, *darbu*, necklaces and *siel* (bison) were highly valued.³²⁸ The ownership of such objects served as a symbol of wealth and status. The ownership of this objects from

³²⁴ Sangkhuma, *Kan Tuanna Tlang*, Aizawl, pp.73-74.

³²⁵ Thiek, Hmar, p.7.

³²⁶ Interview with Lalthazo.

³²⁷ Vara, Nunphung, p.81.

³²⁸ Interview with C C Rema.

time to time changed hands as a ceremonial gift. The exchanged of these tokens of wealth or objects according to Malinowski, acted as the foundation of ‘certain kinds of trade’.³²⁹

Arts and Crafts:

Arts and crafts occupied an important place among the Hmars. All the tools and implements required for their daily used were produced by them. Except for the production of cloth from cotton which was within the domain of the women folks, all tools and implements for domestic and field used were made by the men. They were skillful in the bamboo and cane crafts and produced different kinds of baskets for their daily used such as *paikawng* (big basket for carrying rice), *khawngvar* (basket with holes for carrying fire wood), *leikhawr* (brushel), *leidar* (sieves), *dawrawn* (big elongated basket), *buhak* (a type of mat), *paiper* (oblong basket), *rel* (basket for storing cloth), *chempai* (pouch for carrying doe), *bemkhuong* (storage basket with lid), *ringkawl* (curved wood for carrying load upon the shoulder) etc.³³⁰



Paikawng, Kawngvar, Hnam and Ringkawl



Hmui

³²⁹ Malinowski, ‘The Primitive /economics of the Trobriand Islanders’, p.7.

³³⁰ Interview with C C Rema.

3.3 Political system:

Politics implies the process by which decisions and rules for group behavior are established with an aim to minimize disputes. Whereas Political System refers to the larger context in which political processes occur, or in other words related to the process of *who gets what, when, and how*. Political system is closely connected with the economic activity such as mode of production, surplus appropriation, etc.³³¹ The pre-colonial Hmar economy followed subsistence economy; therefore, their political system was simple and also uncomplicated. According to tradition, prior to the formation of clan, the Hmars were under *Reng/Rengpui* (supreme king). Chief among them were *Thlawnrakpa*, *Zamadie*, *Lersi*, *Zingthlo*, *Luopui* and *Chawngmang*. The different Hmar clans emerged while they were in and around the Chin hills. As such, the different clans began to disperse and lived together based on clan and resulted in the emergence of a village *Lal* (chief) for each and every village.³³²

(a) **Lal**: The village Chief was endowed with certain prerogatives alongside responsibilities and duties. The Chief was entitled to *Busung* (paddy tax given to the chief by every household of the village after every harvest, the amount varies from village to village), *Sadar* (portion of wild animal comprising of the upper joint of the foreleg and the surrounding muscle given to the chief whenever wild animal was killed in his areas),³³³ *Rampawnman* (If a cow/*siel*, etc was sold from a chief's village to another village, part of the proceeds was enjoyed by the chief), *Sukeiman* (If a girl marry a boy from another village, the Chief was entitled to *thifang*, a traditional necklace), etc. Along with such perks, the chiefship was attached with several prerogatives and obligations. The security and safety of the village, property of the household, settling of disputes, selection of cultivable land, etc. were in the hands of the Chief.³³⁴

³³¹ Bates, & Fratkin, *Cultural Anthropology*, p.353.

³³²Vara, Nunphung, pp.5-6.

³³³ John H Pulamte, 'Traditional Institutions of the Hmars', in *Ruonglevaisuo, annual Magazine 2006-07-Cum-Souvenir of 51st General Assembly, Hmar Students' Association, Vairengte, Mizoram*, published by Souvenir Committee, HAS 51st General Assembly, 2007, p.74.

³³⁴Vara, Nunphung, p.9.

The chief was assisted by *Khawnbawl/Siehmang/Pachawng* and the *Val Upa* (leader of the young people), the *Tlangau/Tlangsam* (village crier) and other elderly persons of the Village whose council were often invited and solicited.³³⁵ Another prominent character indispensable in the village were the *Thirsu* (blacksmith) and the *Thiempu* (Priest). The former maintained and repaired tools of all the villagers, and the blacksmith in return for his service received an annual share usually in the form of paddy. The priest on the other hand, assisted the king in addition to other duties and responsibilities. For instance, in *Thingkuongdeng*, a ceremony related to investigating the wrongdoer or litigation in a case of a dispute, the *Thiempu* usually organized a ritual to find out the culprit. In this ceremony, the Priest would take two earthen pots filled with water up to the brim and chanted-

*“Chunga Pathien, hnuoia Pathien, thilsuol thawtu
chu a thla hung tir la, hi zobel hmaia hin a thla hung
suklang la: amah titna pe la, thla khat chau dam raw
se”*

(the rough translation of the above- God from above, god from below, sent the spirit of the wrongdoer, let it be revealed on the water of the earthen pot; let him be petrified, let him live for only a month). It was more of a psychological tool to intimidate the culprit to confess to his crime rather than having any scientific basis. It was believed that the culprit often confessed out of sheer intimidation.³³⁶

(b) *Buonzawl/Zawlbuk:* *Buonzawl* also known as *Zawlbuk* referred to a dormitory for adult unmarried and married young men of the village. In the Hmar language, it literally means *Buon*=wrestling and *Zawl*=place. It was usually constructed in the heart of the village, usually near the Chief’s house. The structure consisted of a big hall, where a platform was raised at the corner for sleeping. The rest of the room was left as an open space. The vacant space was utilized for wrestling, lighting a bonfire and sometimes as a dancing ground. Guests were not only welcomed, but were wrestled by the village young

³³⁵ Bapui, Vanlal Tluonga, ‘A Brief Account of the Hmar People of Assam’, *Bornil Borai: The souvenir of the 9th Special Session*, Guwahati, Printed at BNit Book Builders, 2012, p.245.

³³⁶ Pulamte, ‘Traditional Institutions of the Hmars’, pp.77-78; Vara, Nunphung, p.12.

men. It was said that the wrestling was done in order to make everyone feel at home. Every male above the age of 15 had to sleep there. Although the upper age limit was not fixed, it was a common understanding that even after getting married with two or more offspring, a man was supposed to spend the night in the *Buonzawl* along with other young men.³³⁷

There was one opinion that asserted that the Hmars did not maintain the *Zawlbuk*.³³⁸ This is quite doubtful considering that most writers had mentioned the *Buonzawl* and that they hardly missed it. It is to be noted that during the inter clan feuds, a valiant warrior *Saizahawla* (a Hmar), along with two friends from *Pawibawia*'s village, were said to have penetrated as far as *Pherzawl*, a Hmar village in southern Manipur. It was alleged that he spent the night at their *Buonzawl* undetected, took three guns from the *Buonzawl* and on the rest (which he could not carry), he poured water in the barrel of the guns. This supported the viewpoint that the Hmars did maintain *Buonzawl*.³³⁹

Buonzawl served as an institution for imparting morals and social values, discipline and direct social behavior towards solidarity, which was an indispensable basis of a society. It was the basis for instilling the concept of *Tlawmngaina* (a self-sacrifice in order to serve others), *taimakna* (assiduousness), *huoisenna* (to be brave) and *thuawina* (obedience); These are the four pillars of the pre-colonial Hmar's culture.³⁴⁰

Tlawmngaina was reflected in the young men's forfeiting the comforts of their home in order to safeguard their village against any raiders, wild animals and certain unprecedented events. As the young men spent the night together at one place, it became easy for them to respond together if the need arises. The elders also used to visit the *Buonzawl*, teaching the youngmen the art of bamboo craft and its trade. They also entertained them with tales from the bygone days about the notable achievements, heroism

³³⁷ Bapui, *Assam Rama Hmarhai (Hmars of Assam)*, pp.38-39.

³³⁸ Shakespear, p.184.

³³⁹ Zawla, pp.263, 266 &267.

³⁴⁰ Vanlalnghak, 'Zawl Buk', *NUNROBU*, Revised & Enlarged, Churachandpur, Published by Hmar Literature Society, 2013, p.2.

and laudable actions of their forefathers, and instilling them with the values and etiquette of life. The young boys, young enough to wean from their mothers, yet not old enough to be spending the night at *Buonzawl* were instructed to collect firewood, which they were bound to oblige, failing would result in a punishment. Thus, implanting at a very tender age the virtue of the society; respect towards the elders, social responsibility, heroism and mostly the prestige attached to those who fulfilled the social norms thereby motivating the youngster towards such goal.³⁴¹

3.4 Folksongs:

Folksongs were deeply embedded in the Hmar culture. The Hmars had some appropriate folk songs for every occasions and incidents. Various folksongs can be broadly grouped into *Hlado*, *Dawi hla*, *Khawthlang/Vanthlang hla* and *Mimal hla*. *Hlado* were songs chanted to commemorate a heroic deed in the events of a successful hunting of wild animals or slaying of an enemy. The Hmars social norms place a courageous, heroic, daring and fearless spirit upon a high pedestal. Apart from serving as the gate way to achieve social status and position in the society, killing of a wild animal(s) and slaying an enemy was believed to ensure ultimate abode in the afterlife. Moreover, the wild animals were often a threat to their lives, livestock and food crops. Therefore, the ability to kill them was no small feat. When such events occurred, the hunter or the man who slayed an enemy or wild animal chanted *hlado* at the village *kawtsuo* (entrance) in order to announce his feat.³⁴² They have a separate *Hlado* depending on the types of the trophy, i.e. songs for an enemy and the wild animals. The following is an example of a *Hlado*-

*Sai liene, nang hmasa la, Hnunga kawlfung a zuitu e;
Pielrale kal khamtu e, vawmphuoi e, hnung a dal ngai
e.*³⁴³

³⁴¹ Vanlalnghak, 'Zawl Buk', pp.1-6.

³⁴² R L thanmawia, *Mizo Hla Hlui (Mizo Folk songs)*, Gilzom Offset, Aizawl, Published with the financial assistance of the Mizoram Publication Board by Din Din Heaven, 2012, pp. 72-73.

³⁴³ Vara, H. V, *Hmar Hla Hlui (The Hmar Folk Songs, Lyrics and Chants)*, 2nd Edition, Revised & Enlarged, Churachandpur, ICI Press, 1985, pp.69 & 140.

(The explanation of the above is- Gigantic Elephant, lead the way, behind it wild Bison will follow leading towards the *Pielral*, Black Bear, usually at the rear)

Dawi Hla can be referred to the Hmar *Thiempu* (Priest) sacred chants and utters for worship, sacrifices and other functions that were related to their belief system. There was a couple of *Dawi hla*, which were greatly different in their context. While some were a simple reference to names, others were reminiscence of the places they once inhabited or came across, and still some were for invoking the spirits of the water, mountains, forests, village and precipices.³⁴⁴ For examples, the traditional incantation used during worship and sacrifices denotes the places they had encountered and their settlement during the course of their migration. For example,

Tiena Ka Chin lei, ka Pu leilung Himalawi.

*(My Ancient land o chin, my grandpa's land of Himalawi).*³⁴⁵

Yet, some songs invoked a divine being for material blessings-

Hei chibai Pathien (3),

Inchawn raza ka hnina,

kuong sen kuong ngo ka hnina,

Chang chung hning in mi hung siem rawh,

Chang hnuoi hningin mi hung siem rawh,

Bu sawm bu z aka hnina, Fanu fapa ka hnina,

Ka pi biek ngai,

³⁴⁴ Lunghnema, *Mizo Chanchin (B.C. 300-1929 A.D)*, Zothlang Press, Published by H Lian Dawla, pp.218-219.

³⁴⁵ Bapui, Vanlal Tluanga, 'Folks Songs of the Hmar People of Assam-an appraisal', *Assamar Janagosthiya Lokageet: A collection of essays on ethnic folk-songs of Assam*, pp.104-121.

Ka pu biek ngai Changtuia mi,
Muol khat kal khat,
muol khat kal khatin hung nei unla,
Bu thar a tlung tah thali thar a tlung tah,
*Nangni a fa hmasa a dawn hmasa hung ni ro.*³⁴⁶

The above song was about giving reverent to the divine being (*Pathien*) and a prayer to grant abundant harvest. In this occasion, a stalk of the first ripe paddy was taken as a sacrifice to *Pathien*.

Khawthlang/Vanthlang hla (public songs) and *Mimal hla* (individual songs): This type of Folksong was the most varied and common form covering diverse matters from songs to be sung during festivals. There were songs that reflected their past experiences, showing intimate personal feelings or about love, losses of life or loss of dear ones, and for amusement and entertainment. For every festival and social gathering, the Hmars had an array of folk songs. For instance, in *Butuokhuonglawm*, as mentioned earlier, there was a collections of folk songs to last for the whole day. For instance, while going towards their *lo* they proceeded with the *Ma Inranna Hla* (song) and the drummer usually started with-

“A eza.....eza....ezai.....ie..”, to which the crowd
 responded with, “A
 awza.....awza....awza...awzai...ie..”.

(not explainable/ did not have any meaning)

The drummer and the crowd sung responsively all through the day. Besides *Ma Inranna Hla*, the other folk songs consisted of *Tunlawi hla*, *Pakhat Pa Hla*, *Thaimak Nu*

³⁴⁶ Keivom, Hmar, pp.89-90.

*Hla, Chongi Hla, Tuoichong 'Hla, Sawn len Dona Hla, Nunghak Tlangval Hla, Mothar Thabo Hla, Nunghak le Tlangval Indi Hla, Fe Pha Tieng Hla, Ruo Surna Hla, Khawhrite hai, Tinna Hla, etc.*³⁴⁷

There were many folk songs that had reflected their past history. Many folk songs were associated with their settlement at *Shan*, mostly reflecting their love and the cherished life spent during those days. Below is an example of such eulogy of *Shan*-

*Shan Khuo fiertui tha var indang, Naufa'n
hnamchem ang an chawi; Thangfa nghaknu lien
inthang.*³⁴⁸

(not only the water-hole in *Shan* is pure and unpolluted, even the ladies are pleasing to behold...). Personal experiences too, find a way into popular folk songs. For instance, the songs of *Chawngchiri*, also known as *Bapuinu*, tells the story of the capture of her daughter by the *Zampui* Chief, *Tusing Faihriem*, on account of her defiance of the authority of the said chief. Her songs speak of her quest to bring her daughter back from *Faihriem's* village. She tried to win over *Tusing Faihriem's* sympathy through eulogy-

*"Lalsaktuthlu, Lamthlangtuthlu, Sumreia
Kharinsawne, An mithlum Keltemenga e, sumraza
hawl inkawi e"*³⁴⁹

(*Lalsaktuthlu, Lamthlangtuthlu, Sumreia Kharinsawne* (names of the sons of Chief *Faihriem*) and the youngest *Keltemenga*, they possess huge wealth and riches). Impressed, the Chief attempted to reward her with *siel* to which she replied-

³⁴⁷ Hmar, *Hmar Hai Tobul Hla Bu Pakhat Na (Hmar Traditional songs Book-1)*, pp.2-19.

³⁴⁸ Thangluaia, *Mizo Kan Ni (We are Mizo)*, p.189.

³⁴⁹ Bapui, 'Folks Songs of the Hmar People of Assam-an appraisal', pp.104-121. Hereafter cited as Bapui, Folk Songs.

“A *siela in mi peka e, a khal ding kan um a naw;*
Suoka hringte nip e unla, Ama’n kalchawi rel de
nih”³⁵⁰

(If *siel*/wild bison is gifted to me, there is no one to herd it home; give me your young slave, and it will walk by itself).

Some folk songs were the manifestation of the deepest personal feelings about love, loses and life in general. *Liendang hla*, one of the oldest folk songs of the Hmar that reflected the Hmars settlement at *Shan* too, could be cited as an example of this type. *Liendang*, an exceptionally good looking young man of *Shan* fell in love with a girl from another village. Sadly, the girl happened to be a coquette who led a licentious lifestyle. Nevertheless, his longing for her resulted in the composition of a number of songs showing his deepest, most intimate personal feelings, thereby in the process leaving behind the undying love ballad between a boy and a girl which came to be cherished to such an extent that it later on formed a part of folk song sung in *Darlam* Festival.³⁵¹ One such example is-

“*Tiena pi pu’n thlafamin hranglung an phun,*
Suillengah Chaltuoiin hranglung ka phun:
Si-arin bawm khatah anlawi sieu a;
*Zawnsieinu le keini’ndi kan kar a hla*³⁵².”

(Our ancestor who were no more has erected a memorial stone to commemorate the death, I, on the other hand erected a memorial stone out of sheer loneliness: The star cluster and huddle together in groups; even though *Zawnsieinu* and me are in love, but we are far apart).

³⁵⁰ ----*Hlaro*, 2nd Edition, Churachandpur, Published Hmar Literature Society, 2012, p.23.

³⁵¹ Bapui, ‘Folks Songs, pp.104-121.

³⁵² Vara, *Hmar Hla Hlui (The Hmar Folk Songs, Lyrics and Chants)*, p2. Hereafter cited as Vara, Hla Hlui.

Further, the tragic story of *Sawrtui* Chief *Neilal* and *Khawkhum* Chief's daughter, *Tuoni*, who had fallen in love while *Tuoni*'s family seek refuge at *Neilal*'s village. But as fate would have it, *Neilal*'s parents being unaware about *Tuoni*'s family background felt she was not good enough for their handsome son. In the end the two had to part ways. Such tragedy can be seen in a song known as *Tuoni*'s song. The following was an extract from such song-

*“Neilal a nu thufiek maw,
Neilal a pa;
A ngaina`n kawmbang kan ngai.
Ka simthi ka thawna hi,
Ka bun nghosai;
Tuoni hi an phar lo ti.
Tawk ang pharna lo ti naw,
keima Tuoni,
Pumhriel ka hlina a nih.”*³⁵³

(Neilal's parents suspected me of being a leper, because of a blotchy skin like a toad; but this is not a rash and I'm not a leper, it is a mark left by my earrings, bangles and necklaces).

Some folk songs are primarily for amusement and entertainment purposes. For example-

*“Pi pe sai nawkah, sai nawka te changpan a,
Piring parang aikum de,
khaw hi nge ka sie hre thei rawh!*

³⁵³ ---Hlaro, pp.32-34.

Dik dek dawka, aikum rawk”,³⁵⁴

In the song mentioned above, children sat around circling one of the participant with their hands in their back, while singing one of the kid would run around the circle pretending to place a stone/pebble in their hands. The kid in the center had to guess on whose hand the stone was being placed.

Children’s play songs sometimes unconsciously reflected their surroundings. This particular song,

“A ra a Kur ie,

Invong a ra a kur ie;

Fak a loa tuoi a ta,

Simleiah a vanduai ie!”³⁵⁵

(the above song is about *Invawng* tree bearing fruits. In spite of its alluring and tempting nature, the fruits are not edible for human. Only wild deer feast upon it.) Therefore, the songs spoke about the misfortune of the *Invawng* tree, although it had such an appealing fruit, they will over ripen and fell, wasted on the ground uneaten.

3.5 Folklores/Folktales:

The Hmars folk tales were typically plain and simple, yet they often epitomize their attitude towards life, family, state of mind such as happiness, sorrow and love, the pain of unreturned love, the fear of the unknown, the dreams and aspirations, belief system and practices and the traditional values. Lal Dena stated that “they are usually inter-woven with conflict between the good and the bad, the virtuous and the wicked, and the benevolent and the malevolent”.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ Interview with Chawnglungnem.

³⁵⁵ Keivom, Hmar, p.119.

³⁵⁶ Lal Dena, Folk Tales, p.(ix).

Some folk tales instilled and nurtured moral instructions; such as the triumph of the good over the bad. The tale of *Mauruong* which was popular among the Hmars till today as a bed time story was one such example. The story was about an orphaned girl named *Mauruong*, who was treated badly and unjustly by her step-sister and step-mother in a manner which was incomprehensible. In the story, *Mauruong* was not only refused food, but was also forbidden to be fed by her dead mother various incarnations such as fish and nectar bearing tree. But, in the end *Mauruong* overcame all her hurdles with perseverance and without any complain. She later on married *Vai Lal* (non-mizo chief, belived to be from Tripura) and lived happily ever after. The Hmar folk tales often unwittingly reflected the social condition of the time. For instance, in the above tale, the perception of the society towards orphan was subtly indicated. Her step-mother was illustrated as uncaring, deceitful and vile while the father was either indifferent or unaware or uninvolved to the day to day affairs of the household.³⁵⁷

On the other hand, many folk tales defying all natural mode of human existence, were entwined with super power. For example, “In the *Paruol Sarihai* tale, a super natural being from heaven was born through the sister of the Seven Brothers to avenged the death of the Seven Brothers and their Father at the hand of *keimi* (tiger that can take the form of man)”. In the story, god visited the Sister of the Seven Brothers in the form of wild goose berry leading to the birth of *Tekabereisuon*. In the quest for avenging his uncles and grandfather, *Tekabereisuon* came across certain hurdles and tasks which he could accomplished with his super power. For instance, his first task was to cut a mortar into half and to glued it back together. Secondly, he was asked to pick a basket of *Si* (a kind of tiny oilseeds in the millets family) that was poured on the ground without missing a single seed. And finally, the last task was to slay a very big pig with his gun. All the extraordinary tasks were successfully completed by him, thus enabling him to finally avenged his relative’s death. In the course of the story, one encountered some extraordinary things like mice talking in human language, cocks predicting future, etc.”³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Lalhmachhuana Zofa, Mizo Thawnthu, Vol-I, Tenth Reprint, Aizawl, Published & Edited by Author, 2015, pp. 51-66.

³⁵⁸ Ngurte & Pudaite, *History of Hmar Literature*, pp.78-84.

Furthermore, in another tale- “*Thuitling le Ngambawng*, a star-crossed lover who were torn apart by their parents, yet still found a way to unite in the afterlife. *Thuitling’s* (the girl) mother could not accept her daughter’s relationship with *Ngambawng* since he was an orphan. *Thuitling* tragically passed away, and in order to be with her at least on death, *Ngambawng* made a trip to *Mithi khuo* (the abode of the death). However, life was very different in the spirit world. Fishes of the spirit world were just bamboo leaves for the living and just as a black caterpillar for the living was a bear for the spirit. In such a scenario, staying together became a struggle for them. In the end, *Ngambawng* returned to the human world to die. Subsequently, they were united in death after all.”³⁵⁹ This particular tale reflected the Hmar’s belief system, the existence of the spirit world as well as the social stigma attached to poverty.

Many of the Hmar folk tales talked about *Vailal* (Vai=non-Mizo/non-tribal/plain dwellers and *lal*=Raja). For instance, as stated above Mauruong was married to a *Vailal*. One inference that could be deduced was that the Hmars, it seems were well acquainted with the *Vai*. Another example of citing of *Vailal* was found in *Sakhilawngdar*. A man named *Riangte*, who was unable to get a wife due to his repulsive look went hunting. In the forest he caught a fairy and took her as his wife and named her *Sakhilawngdar*. *Sakhilawngdar* was a witch and in no time, *Riangte* became very popular and prosperous and even get elected as the Chief of his village. However, in the near future his fortune turned against him for he began to indulge in all sorts of evil such as drinking and was hardly ever available for his wife and daughter. As his wife and daughter could no longer borne his behavior they left him. After this *Riangte’s* life became miserable and he became poorer and poorer, ultimately, he had nothing left. His wife and daughter out of compassion drop him a magic pot. However, *Vailal* became envious of such a valuable possession and made a treacherous attempt to snatch the magic pot. Luckily for *Riangte*, *Vailal’s* plan was not successful.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Ngurte & Pudaite, pp.92-98.

³⁶⁰ Lal Dena, *Selected Mizo Folktales Rereading in the context of Modernization and globalization*, pp.140-144.

The Hmar folk tales often accorded human attributes to animals, or in other words, *anthropomorphism* was displayed in many of the folk tales. For example, in *Arpui leh Sanghar*, all the animals involved acted and talked like human. *Artuite* (an Egg) was on a quest to avenge the death of his mother who was eaten by *Sanghar* (a wild cat). On the way he encountered Red ants, *Tlaihnat* (Blade made of Bamboo) and *Mankhawng* (a kind of trap), who all decided to follow him. Together they successfully avenged the death of *Artuite*'s mother.³⁶¹

3.6 Festivals, Dances and Musical Instruments:

The festivals of the Hmar can be categorized into two main divisions- the first category consisted of a community feast concerning the whole village; the second category was a private affair serving a private goal even though the whole households of the village participated in the feast. An important example of the first kind was the *Sikpui Ruoi* Festival.

There was a conflicting view as to the meaning of the term *Sikpui*. One contention was that it means 'everyone to his or her own' or 'to shoulder responsibility'. All the participants contributed to celebrate the good harvest and therefore *Sikpui Ruoi* implies *harvest festival*.³⁶² Another theory was that the word *Sikpui* signifies winter or cold season, while *Ruoi* stands for a *feast*.³⁶³ The first contention was more acceptable because there was no fixed date and month for the celebration of this festival, nor it was celebrated every year. But it was usually celebrated after every good harvest and when all work concerning the cultivation was done for the year, mostly in the winter season.³⁶⁴ Another altogether divergent view unconnected with the literal meaning of the term *Sikpui* was '*Inremna Ruoi (a feast of peace)*'. To participate in the feast, every individual had to be on good terms with everybody for it was considered *thianglo/taboo* to participate if one

³⁶¹ Lalhmachhuana Zofa, Mizo Thawnthu, Vol-II, 8th Reprint, Aizawl, Published & Edited by Author, 2017, pp. 183-186.

³⁶² Interview with Valthluonga Bapui on 24 June 2017 at Halflong, Assam.

³⁶³ Hmars, P.115.

³⁶⁴ Thangluaia, p.192.

had any grudges against anyone.³⁶⁵ During such festival almost every house of the village brewed *Zu*, and started celebrating in their home. On the day of the feast the whole villagers, young and old, would gather singing and dancing the whole night. It was to be noted that the festival had no religious bearing.

When and where exactly the Hmars began to celebrate the *Sikpui Ruoi* was not clear. One theory propounded that it was already celebrated even before the Hmars settled in the *Sinlung* areas. One of the folk songs associated with *Sikpui Ruoi*'s similarity with the experiences of the *Israelites* route to *Canaan* supported this contention.³⁶⁶ Yet, another opined that it started from their settlement at *Shan*.³⁶⁷ This was supported by the Hmar folk songs which stated that they had the knowledge of cultivation during their settlement at *Shan*. It was possible that the *Sikpui Ruoi* had been celebrated by the Hmars long before they migrated or came to the present hills.

The decision to celebrate the *Sikpui Ruoi* was in the hand of the village Chief and his *Siehmang*. It was usually celebrated when there was a good harvest. The village *Thiempu* (Priest) perform *aisan* (divination) and hung a gong in the courtyard of the Chief one whole night. If no sound was made from the gong the whole night, then it was considered as a green signal to go forward with the celebration. Then a big stone known as *Zawllung* was carried from the forest, to be placed on the venue for the celebration, on it was erected a *Chawrsawng* (Platform) where on its post were hung *Zu* and other eatables for the Drummer.³⁶⁸

On this ceremonial occasion, every household of the village was in a festive mood, the young and old participated in the dance singing the *Sikpui-Ruoi hla* (song). In the first line the old men and women alternately hold hands together, followed by the young men

³⁶⁵ Lal Dena & Zothanchhingi Kھیangte, 'Sikpui Ruoi (Sikpui Festival): A Festival with a difference', in *Sikpui Ruoi 2017, Mizoram*, Published by Hmar Inpui, Mizoram, 2017, pp.51-58.

³⁶⁶ Hmar, p.115.

³⁶⁷ John Pulamte, 'Sikpui Ruoi', *Sikpui Ruoi 2017, Mizoram*, Published by Hmar Inpui, Mizoram, 2017, pp.28-36.

³⁶⁸ Ramthianghlim Varte, 'Sikpui Ruoi', in *Sikpui Ruoi 2017, Mizoram*, Published by Hmar Inpui, Mizoram, 2017, pp.22-27.

and women in the second row. Lastly, much younger boys and girls followed while the singles formed the tails. They sang and danced the night away. A number of folk songs were involved with this particular festival. Before the sacred solemn *Sikpui* song began, *Buonthlaw hla* (song) that talked about their past settlements and adventures and events was sung to open the festival.³⁶⁹ L Keivom had discussed the *Sikpui ruoi* in the following manner: “*Buonthlaw hla* was followed by *Hla Pui*. Surprisingly, this song was a triumphant war song that had no connection with the harvest in spite of it being used as an opening song for *Sikpui* (harvest) festival. On closer examination, it seemed to depict a historical event which brought out a debatable identity issue even to this day. After the main *Sikpui* song was sung with a rapt attention, it was followed by *Hla Ser* (song that reflected tragedy), *Hranthli Hla* (songs of *Thlihran*), *Lamthluong Hla* (that reflected courtship between a boy and a girl), *Saia ke Tet hla* (songs reflecting pride), *Sim Sak hla* (love song), *Tangkawng vailak*, *Inran hla* (reflected the animals they domesticated), and finally the celebration ends with *Trinna Hla* (parting song). Certain dance moves were associated with each and every song. New additions were made to the existing songs if or when the situation demands.”³⁷⁰

Another type of festival common among the Hmars were *In-Ei* and *Sesun/Inchawng*, which were of private affairs in spite of possessing a communal overtone. *In-Ei* refers to the celebration connected with the killing of an enemy or wild animal(s). When a *Hmar* successfully hunted down a wild animal, the whole households of the village celebrated with *umnikham*³⁷¹, making merry with *Zu* and dances, accompanied by particular songs composed for this purpose known as *Hranglam hla* (Hranglam songs).³⁷² Lal Dena termed these particular songs as “*songs of the Valiant feast*”. There were about forty-four verses in this song. Below is one example of the verse-

³⁶⁹ Keivom, L, ‘Bung Hnina; Sikpui Lam Hla’ in *Sikpui Ruoi 2017, Mizoram*, Published by Hmar Inpui, Mizoram, 2017, pp.10-21.

³⁷⁰ Keivom, ‘Bung Hnina; Sikpui Lam Hla’, pp.10-21.

³⁷¹ *Umnikham* was when all the villagers would relinquish their personal affairs for a day in order to attend to the social event; C Saizawna, *Pi Pute Tawng Kauchheh*, Second Edition, Aizawl, Published by Lalrinliana, 1989, p.11.

³⁷² ___ *Mizo Lam Thenkhatte*, First Edition, Aizawl, Published by Tribal Research Institute, Directorate of Education, Govt. of Mizoram, 1985, p.76.

*Shan Khuo thlangfa put thlingthleng e; I do thlunglu
bak in salh;*

*Ka sawmfa thlaw, ka laimi tha; Thal khatin lan ei
de ning.*³⁷³

(Ye children of Shan look lovable, Proud are ye of the heads hanging with ropes
But celebrate I must one season, My abundant harvest and heads of my enemies).

When and where exactly the *Hmar* started practicing *hranglam* festival was not known. According to one contention, this practiced dated back to *Sinlung* (the oldest known *Hmar* settlement).³⁷⁴ While another opined that it originated when the *Hmar* made their settlement at *Shan*.³⁷⁵ The latter was more credible as the *Hmar* experienced prosperity in *Shan* and this had been reflected in their folk song too.

Sesun/Inchawng was also known as *Khuongchawi*. It was believed that *Sesun Inchawng* make its appearance among the affluent *Hmar* household after the *Hmar* cultures became more advanced and prosperous. The term *inchawng* signifies 'wealth'.³⁷⁶ It referred to killing of a *siel* in a peculiar manner and feeding the whole villagers with *zu* and *sa* (meat). During *Sesun Inchawng*, all the villagers were expected to participate even though it was a private family affair. Every one whether young or old, all were lavishly treated with a grand feast complemented with *Zu*. The occasion was more of a religious affair to gain a social status in this life and the coveted title *Thangsuopa/Thangsuonu*, that guaranteed a place at the *Pielral* (the abode of the death) to be served upon in the afterlife.³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Lal Dena, *Identity*, p.79.

³⁷⁴ Thangluaia, p.192.

³⁷⁵ Keivom, *Hmar*, p.25.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Lal Dena on 12 August 2016 at Saidan, Churachandpur, Manipur.

³⁷⁷ Lalthanglian, *Mizo Culture (Studies in Mizo Cultures and Tradition)*, pp.145-148.

The whole households of the village were in a festive mood, making merry and dancing the whole night. The *Hmar* also had a particular song for this festival called *Darlam hla* (Darlam song). This song reflected pride, exaggeration, and panegyrist, and sometimes even tell a tale. One example of *Darlam hla* may be read as follows-

*Zing inzawn, zing inzawn e, Kan tuolhmai zing inzawna e,*³⁷⁸

(The translation goes like this, ‘the smoke from the fire that cooks our meat goes up day after day’.)

The participation of the whole villagers reflected the solidarity and corporate lifestyle of the community. It also shows that there existed a centralized authority whereby the village chief became the symbol of the village activity. This also reflected that the customs or traditions had strongly governed the villagers and that there was the authority which insisted them to participate on such occasion, and if not oblige there would be a great price to pay.

The celebration like *Hranglam* and *Darlam* were connected with the achievement of few individuals. The fact that individual achievement that was celebrated by the whole villagers could signify that the households depended much on subsistence economy and the accumulation of surplus products was not in their dreams. It also reflected the social division albeit in a very subtle manner; take for an instance that *Sesun/Inchawng* signify status and wealth and was within the means of the very affluent member in the society only.

Dances: The many folk songs accompanying the festivals usually have a peculiar form of dances. The different form of the Hmar dances includes *Fahrel-Tawk-Lam* (dancing to the tune of a rhythmic clanking of pestles where the dancers had to jump in and out of the shaking pestles), *Hranglam* (victory dance), *Pheiphit Lam* (dancing to the

³⁷⁸ Keivom, Hmar, pp.32-33

tune of bamboo pipettes performed to commemorate a successful hunts or victory against the enemy), *Khuol Lam* (dances performed to welcome a guest), *Vaituksi/ Vai Lam/Lal Lam* (dance to honour the Chief), *Feitung Tawl Lam* (warrior dance) and *Dar Lam* (dancing to the tune of different musical instruments such as gong, flutes, etc.). Except for *Hranglam*, which was performed solo, the rest of the above mentioned dances were a group dance. Dances were performed in honour of a distinguished guest, or to commemorate dsuccessful hunting and warriors or just for the sake of entertainment.³⁷⁹

Musical Instruments: The musical instruments of the Hmar consisted of *Darkhuong* (gong), *Darbu* (gong that vibrates in multiple mode and usually consisted of three smaller gongs), *Khuong* (Drum made from animal skin and wood), *Tuitheikhuong* (water held inside the hollow of the bamboo that produces a sound when beaten with a stick), *Rawsem/Rawchhem* (a small bamboo was fitted to a hollow gourd to serve as a pipe, small holes were drilled into it and when it was blown, it could produce a sweet music), *Pheiphit/Tumpit* (a small bamboo cutted into three different length to produce three different sounds when blown upon), *Hna* (leaves were blown to produce music), etc.³⁸⁰ The musical instruments reflected their dexterity, skill and above all their love for music.

3.7 Traditional Belief System of the Hmars:

The early writings on the Hmars traditional belief systems was mostly based on the colonial accounts. Yet, they were nonetheless biased and Eurocentric in nature. Moreover, Christianity completely annihilated the Hmar traditional social life leaving a wide room for speculation, supposition and wishful thinking. The traditional belief system of the Hmars could be understood only after explaining their practices before they were converted to Christianity.

³⁷⁹ Bapui, 'A Brief Account of the Hmar People of Assam', pp.340-346. Hereafter cited as Bapui, Hmar People.

³⁸⁰ C Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, Revised and second edition, Lunglei, Mizoram, Published by Mizoram Publication Board, 2000, pp.212-214.

Religion is a blanket term that cannot be compressed into a single meaning. Ember and Ember, both an American Anthropologists defined -

*“Religion as any set of attitudes, beliefs, and practices pertaining to Supernatural power, whether that power be forces, gods, spirits, ghosts or demons.”*³⁸¹

The term religion generally comes from the Christian perspective, where the concept of God, heaven, sin, soul, worship and even belief and religion itself were applied and understood.³⁸² This assertion was quite relevant in the context of the Hmar’s belief system.

Belief in a Supernatural and Superior Being: Like any other cognate tribes, the Hmars also believed in the existence of the Supreme being, the creator and sustainer of all living beings, who dwells in the heaven above. Yet, besides the Supreme being, they had many other gods, a pantheon of traditional gods such as *Vanhril/Vanhrik* (a god of fertility), *Hnuoihmangpa* (god of the underworld), *Simbak* (god of nature) and *Khuonu/Khuopa* (god of nature),³⁸³ They also believed in *Khawzing*, their guardian and protector against misfortunes. They propitiated for his benevolence and mercy.³⁸⁴ The supposed superior, creator and benevolent being was called *Pathien*. One of their incantation ...*Hei Chibai, Chunga Pathien, Hnuoia Pathien*³⁸⁵ (equivalent to saluting or paying tribute to god from the heaven and the earth) had strongly suggested the belief in the transcendental nature of *Pathien*. The colonial ethnographer like Shakespeare had described *Pathien* as a ‘detached and a remote being’.³⁸⁶ But, this concept is contestable because in some of the Hmar folk tales there were instances where the super natural being was approached to render help, and even in some instances the benevolent super being

³⁸¹ Ember & Ember, *Anthropology*, p-421.

³⁸² Jack David Eller, *Introducing Anthropology of Religion, Culture to the Ultimate*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p-XIV.

³⁸³ Bapui, *Oral Traditions*, p-11.

³⁸⁴ V Lunghnema, p.179.

³⁸⁵ Zairema, *Pi Pute Biak Hi*, p.87.

³⁸⁶ Shakespear, p-61.

himself was stated as partaking in the human affairs without being invoked upon. For example, in the case of *Rengte* who had seven barren wives offered a prayer to *Vanhrut* for an issue. Other instances where the benevolent being came to the rescue of human was also depicted in the tale of *Sawrlai*. *Sawrlai*, a young beautiful girl was captured by *Vawmpahrang*, believed to be a demon. In the course of her emancipation by her brother, the god from above rendered help by directing and guiding them to safety.³⁸⁷ Their ultimate hope was expressed to *Pathien* with the believe that he was watching them to render his urgent aid and helping hand. Therefore, it is impractical and irrational to invoke a being to be detached and isolated from human being.

The Hmars seldom invoked *Pathien* except for an important community event such as *Khawthar Sat* (to settle a new village site), *Tuikhur Siem* (to fashion a village water source usually from a nearby Spring) and *Khawser* (purification ceremony). *Dawihla*³⁸⁸ associated with the above usually begins with *Hei Chibai (Chunga)Pathien...*³⁸⁹ The absence of the invocations of the other Super Natural beings were conspicuous. This suggested that they were either insignificant or were a mere attribute of the Supreme being. There was an instance when the pioneer missionaries began their translation of the Bible in the *Duhlian* dialect, there was confusion among their local helpers as to whether *Pathien* or *Khuovang* should be used to translate the word “God”.³⁹⁰ In the same way, a popular Hmar Gospel Hymnologist, named Rev. Thangngur³⁹¹ in one of his song used the term *Khawzing* synonymously with the Christian *Pathien*-

Van Khawpui thar tuola leng lai khin,

*Khawzing hnuoia in rieng an um ngai naw;*³⁹²

³⁸⁷ Lal Dena, Folk Tales, pp.47 & 203.

³⁸⁸ *Dawihla* could be defines as a kind of chant with a magical property.

³⁸⁹ Vara, Nunphung, pp-47-53.

³⁹⁰ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, Jorhat, Mizo Theological Conference, 1996, p-118.

³⁹¹ Rev. Thangngur, born in 1891 at Lailen Village, the then Lushai Hills, along with Thangneirum and Kaithang, the first to embrace Christianity in Southern Manipur.

³⁹² *Independent Kohran Hlabu (Independent Church Hymnal)*, 8th Edition, Sielmat, Churachandpur, Printed at ICI Press, 1986, p-89.

(the translation of the above- Among those that roam the New Jerusalem/Heaven, nobody lived a destitute live under *Khawzing*.)

The Belief in Spirits: The Hmars believed in a cluster of spirits believed to be either benevolent or malicious. The benevolent spirits were *Khuovang*, *Lasi* and *Pheisam*. The *Khuovang* was believed to be a spirit of the forest which often appeared to the aid of human beings. The *Lasi* was believed to be a very beautiful female fairy who usually helped the hunter.³⁹³ While the *Pheisam* was a visible spirit bestowing material blessing to whoever caught it.³⁹⁴ The prominent malicious spirits consisted of *Khawhri*, *Khawchawm* (a spirit which often follows a person secretly, steals chicken and also twisted the neck of the fowl), *Phung* (an invisible spirit, believed to be ugly and fearful in form), *Khawmu* (spirit of the forest which often lifts up a person and makes them disappear), *Zasam* (fearful spirit), and *Tulum* (that often possessed human being). There were also *Nelhau a rawi hai*, believed to be a group of playful spirits who often played pranks on the man, and *Kau or Khawhring*, a malignant spirit. A person possessed by *Khawhring* often cause harm to the object/subject of their envy.³⁹⁵

There was another popular spirit called *Ramhuoi* (evil spirit), believed to cause harm or diseases or sufferings. They were believed to inhabit anything extraordinary, hideous and unusual objects and places found in their environment. The Hmars believed that they dwelled in places such as *Hmawng Kung* (Bunyan Tree), *Rawlpuk* (a cave in a precipice), *Thing zik bul* (a branchless tree), *Si* (a salty water-hole), *Leiruongtuom* (a mound that looks like a grave) and *Thingsairawkher* (a hollow tree trunk). They took pains to avoid these places by any means, as upsetting them could lead to sickness and ill-health.³⁹⁶ The *Ramhuoi* had no consistency in their form.³⁹⁷ Since they were believed to

³⁹³ Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, Second Edition, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, Published by R Lalsawmliana, 1994, p.4.

³⁹⁴ Zairema, p.75.

³⁹⁵ Bapui, Oral Traditions, pp-12-13.

³⁹⁶ Batlien, pp-14-125.

³⁹⁷ C L Hminga, *The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram*, Lunglei, The Literature Committee, Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1987, p-33.

be the source of their sickness and ill-health and if disturbed or displeased, hence, it was customary to propitiate these evil spirits with animal sacrifices.³⁹⁸

The invocation of the supposed supreme being and the attempt to propitiate the evil spirits were two very different issues that were often misread as having the same meaning. Earlier works on the subject propounded that traditional belief system involved the worship of malevolent spirits. However, the sacrifices were nothing more than an appeasement purposes to get rid of a sickness, just like consuming modern allopathic medicine to cure sickness.³⁹⁹ Moreover, the malevolent spirits were not revered was evident from their share in the sacrifices, which comprises of the grotesque portion, unpalatable and distasteful for humans.⁴⁰⁰ And once the *inthawina* (sacrifice) was over, the *Ramhuoi* as well as the *Thiempu* (priest) were not revered at all. On the contrary, they were often the butt of jokes.⁴⁰¹

Mathew Kneale stated that, “religion gave human-being an assurance, and that the beliefs in the superior and supernatural being had made their existence less obscure and less intimidating.” This assertion must have been relevant to the Hmars. Because, they believed in a superior and a benevolent being with a little concern for human, and also refrained from turning to him for protection against the wrath of the supposed evil spirits. Yet, they believed in offering sacrifices to that scores of supposed evil spirits whom they fear, yet did not revered. The logical explanation could be that the supposed knowledge of the causes of sickness and ways and means of curing it must have made life less frightening and less uncertain, and made them more in command of their life.⁴⁰² To borrow the assertion of Hubert Seiwert, the Hmar’s belief perhaps was ‘*the binding force*’ which was a crucial element for survival.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, pp-1-2.

³⁹⁹ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Awmdan Hlui & Mizo Mil eh Thil Hmingthangte Leh Mizo Sakhua*, Mission Veng, Aizawl, LTL Publication, 2008, P-12.

⁴⁰⁰ Shakespears, p.69.

⁴⁰¹ Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, p.110.

⁴⁰² Mathew Kneale, *An Atheist's History of Belief*, London, Published by Vintage, Random House, 2014, pp-7-9.

⁴⁰³ Hubert Seiwert, “Theory of religion as Myth; On Loyal Rue (2005), Religion is not about God”, in Michael Strausberg (ed), *Contemporary Theories of Religion; A Critical Companion*, New York, Routledge, 2009, p-233. Available from: Researchgate.net/Publication, (accessed 30 June 2018).

The belief in the existence of *Thlarau* (soul): *Thlarau* can be defined as a soul or spirit of a human being. The Hmars believed in the existence of *Thlarau* or spirits. When a person died, his/her *Thlarau* was believed to leave the body for the *Pielral* or *Mithikhuo* (abode of the death), depending on the person's conduct during his/her lifetime. The departed *Thlarau* had to pass through *Pawla*⁴⁰⁴ *Kawtsuo* (gate of Pawla) before reaching the *Rih Dil* (*Rih Lake*) which at present was located in Myanmar to the eastern border of Mizoram. The departed *Thlarau* was believed to wash and clean up before proceeding to *Pielral*. On the way it had to pass through *Hringlang Tlang*, a hill from which one could see their dear and near ones whom they had left behind, resulting in the encompassing of the *Thlarau* with extreme loneliness. Then the spirit was believed to proceed further and arrived at *Lunglotui* (water capable of eliminating all feelings), a water that refreshed and consoled the *Thlarau* from loneliness. Around the *Lunglotui*, there was a beautiful flower called *Hawilo Par* (a flower that make the soul forget all his earthly days) wherein the deceased adorned themselves with and after this the soul moved on to the *Pielral*.⁴⁰⁵ Another contention stated that the Hmars believed that the deceased soul had to pass through *Thlanpiel*, a hill-lock located in the confluence of rivers *Tuivawl* and *Tuivai* in Manipur bordering Mizoram before proceeding to *Rih Dil*.⁴⁰⁶ The following folk song corroborated to the above view point:

“*A fam po muol an liem thlanpiel kawtah;*

Rih li tui an dawn, hmasa Pathien an chang”⁴⁰⁷

(the above can be roughly explained as-All the deceased had to pass through *thlanpiel*, drink water from *Rih Lake*, in order to become an everlasting soul).

Only the *Thlarau* of the *Thangsuo*⁴⁰⁸ were believed to earn a place in the *Pielral*. *Kulsamnu* (a feminine spirit) has no power over them. *Kulsamnu* was believed to be the

⁴⁰⁴ *Pawla*, the first man to die shoots at all those who died after him with a very big pellet bow. Only *Hlamzuih* (a child dying shortly after birth), *Thangchhuah/Thangsuo* and a young man who has enjoyed three virgins or had enjoyed seven different women irrespective of whether they are a virgin or not escape *Pawla*'s pellet. Those not fortunate enough to escape *Pawla*'s wrath cannot cross the *Pial river* and are doomed in *Mithikhua*. Shakespear, pp-62-63 & 86.

⁴⁰⁵ Thiek, pp-295-296.

⁴⁰⁶ Lalhmuaka, *Zoram Thim Ata Enga*, Synod Press, Aizawl, Published by The Synod Publication Board, Aizawl, 1998, p.72.

⁴⁰⁷ Zairema, p.196.

⁴⁰⁸ *Thangsuo/Thangchhuah* is the title given to man who has distinguish himself by killing a certain number of different animals such as elephant, bear, sambhur, barking deer, wild boar and wild mithun, or by giving a certain number of public feast or

keeper of the *mithikhuo*.⁴⁰⁹ They also strongly believed that the *thlarau* of their *Pi le Pu* (ancestor) were capable of granting abundant blessing and thus were invoked and propitiated upon.⁴¹⁰

The belief of the Hmars especially the after-life was quite relevant with the Abrahamic religion. The deciding factor of the Hmar afterlife was plagued by social division and gender inequality. For instance, *Pielral* was accessible only to the *Thangsuo*, where only the affluent and the *braves* could have provided the required feast, and hunted the required animals, both wild and domesticated animals. For a female, the only way of accessing the *Pielral* was to marry a *Thansuopa* (*Thansuo* man). In a way, the Hmar belief system relating to the concept of life after-death reflected the status of women in the society. The Hmar woman per se had no identity of their own, i.e., the conduct of the man in her life dictated her position in the society. Her access to the supposed ultimate abode for the after-life was even believed to depend not on her personal conduct, but was in the hands of another being, i.e., her husband.

Sakhuo: *Sakhuo* was a combination of two words, *Sa* and *Khuo*, where both *Sa* and *Khuo* were probably the name of gods or deities. *Sa* was worshiped with a boar where as *Khuo* was with a Siel.⁴¹¹ The validity of defining *Sa* and *Khuo* as a being/entity and not a religious institution was supported by the popular saying in Mizo that if a person/family were constantly afflicted with sickness or misfortune, people would have commented that, “*In Sa biak hi a dik lo a niang*” (the *Sa* you invoke must not be appropriate for you).⁴¹²

killing their enemy, R Lalruatkima, “A Mizo Religious Account of the World beyond the Grave, in S Haukhanlian Mate & Vanrammawii (ed) *Customs and Traditions of the Hill Peoples of North East India*, New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2016, pp-81-85.

⁴⁰⁹Interview with Chawnglungnem.

⁴¹⁰Vara, Nunphung, p-45.

⁴¹¹ Liangkhaia, Mizo Awmdan Hlui & Mizo Mi Leh Thil Hmingthangte leh Mizo Sakhua, p.12.

⁴¹² Zathluanga, p.105.

The Hmars worshiped *Sa* first and then *Khuo*. According to tradition, *Sa* implied *biek/biak* (worship), where as *Khuo* referred to ‘*engkim siamte*’ (almighty creator). Thawnglinga stated that in the quest for *Khua* they offered a sacrifice to *Sa*, hitherto unknown. In course of time, they began to believe and accepted that the ‘almighty creator’ was none other than the *Khua*.⁴¹³ When they invoke *Sa* they killed a boar, while a *Siel* (wild Bison) was used to invoke *Khuo*.⁴¹⁴ Worshipping *Sa* was Known as *Sakhawhmang*, which was conducted by *Hnambing Thiempu* (priest of a clan/community).⁴¹⁵ It was a clan or family affairs to which only the nearest relations were admitted. It was also known as *Sakung Phun* (erecting a post), which was a religious rite marking the admission of the family into the clan to which the head of the family belonged. *Sa* was exclusively for the family and clan, while *Khuo* was a public affair for the whole village. A *Siel* was slayed and the entire community took part in the ceremony.⁴¹⁶

The Hmar system of worship and sacrifice can be divided into three main parts, viz., *Sungbing Inthawina* (family worship and sacrifices), *Khawtlang Inthawina* (community or village worship and sacrifices) and *Mimal Inthawina* (Individual worship and sacrifices).⁴¹⁷ The invocation of *Sa* and *Khuo* came under *Sungbing Inthawina*. In the invocation of *Sa* (*Sakhawhmang*), a *Vawkpa* (boar) *Sutnghak*⁴¹⁸ was killed in a particular manner where *Sungbing Thiempu* and the whole family feasted upon it. The main purpose of this ceremony was to invoke and propitiate the *Sa* for material well-being. At the same time, it could also be a gesture of gratitude for their well-being.⁴¹⁹ In the case of the invocation of *Khuo*, a *Siel* was killed and it was called *Sesun/Inchawng* (already explain above). Since it involved the entire community, only the well-to-do could afford it. There were a couple of *Dawihla* (chants which were the monopoly of the *Thiempu*)

⁴¹³ Thawnglinga, *Chin-Mizo Chanchin*, pp.252-253.

⁴¹⁴Thiek, p-283.

⁴¹⁵ *Hnambing Thiempu* implies the *Priest* of the clan or lineages. The Hmars happens to be divided themselves into different clans such as Thiek, Zote, Khawzawl, Lkobung, etc, Lal Dena, *Hmars Folk Tales*, p-vii.

⁴¹⁶Kipgen, p-113.

⁴¹⁷ Bapui, *Oral Traditions*, pp-15-18.

⁴¹⁸ *Sut* here is used to mean the main middle post supporting the roof, opcit, Bapui, *Hmar-Hmar English Dictionary*, p-238; Just as *Sutnghak* implies guarding the most important part of the building structure of a house, *Vawkpa Sutnghak* means the most-prized male pig of the family.

⁴¹⁹ Keivom, Hmar, p-91.

and folk songs associated with the ceremonies. Below is one of the chant associated with *Sesun/Inchawng*-

Tiena Kachin lei ka pu leilung

Himalawia thla hung tum rawh

Ka khuonglaiin ka ko che, ka darlaiin ka ko che

*Thla hung tum rawh....*⁴²⁰

(The priest is invoking the spirit of the ancestor of the places they once had inhabited such as Kachin, Himalawi, to arise thee; I invoke thee with my drum, I invoke thee with my gong, and then the priest goes on to call forth the spirit of the ancestors of the performer of *Sesun/Inchawng*.)

Khawtlang Inthawina: It referred to the invocation of the supreme being by the whole villagers. The prominent *Khawtlang Inthawina* were *Daibawl*, *khawser*, *Khawthar sat*, and *Tuikhur siem*. The *Daibawl* ceremony was conducted to receive a blessing and atonement for all the sins that were committed in a year,⁴²¹ which the Hmars believed provoked all their sicknesses and misfortune. To appease such spirits, the *Thiempulal* (chief priest) took a chicken which was then released in the wild to face its own fate. The helpless outcast chicken in the wild symbolizes the sins of the households of the village that was believed to be lifted and banished away to doom.⁴²² *Khawser* was another ceremony to ward off the evil spirit or to ensure sound health and abundance all year round. In this case, every household made a clay model of *siel*. The day was observed in silence and even the domestic fowl were forbidden to crow. All the fires in the village were also extinguished. After sweeping their houses with green leaves. A new fire was then started and the entire village lit a fire from the chief's fire.⁴²³ In the case of *Khawthar sat*, the *thiempu* performed the divination with a cock. If the cock crows only then the site

⁴²⁰Vara, Nunphung, pp-60-61.

⁴²¹ A year here implies a time period between *Va Sam Lak/Lo Vat* (clearing the land for Jhuming purposes) and *Pawl Tlak* (the season after harvest), Interview with Lalhmangaihzuala on 14 August 2017 at Saitual, Mizoram.

⁴²²Vara, Nunphung, pp-45-46. This particular *Daibawl* ceremony should not be confused with the *Daibawl* ceremony associated with sickness.

⁴²³Bapui, Oral Traditions, p-17.

was considered fit for a new village and suitable for habitation, and was selected for a new site for a Village.⁴²⁴ In the case of *Tuikhur Siem*, a ceremonial cleansing of the village *tuikhur* (water-hole) was usually done by the *Thiempu*. In this ceremony, the priest chanted and sprinkled a concoction made from rice and herbs. After the rites and rituals were completed, the priest would declare the water to be fit for consumption.⁴²⁵

Mimal Inthawina: It was an individual household sacrifice. If a person happened to fall ill, it was believed to be the handy-work of the evil spirits, and hence an attempt was made to propitiate the evil spirit by offering sacrifices. The *Thiempu* examined and decided on the mode of sacrifices to be performed. He either prescribed a cock, pig, goat, dog or even larger animal depending on the intensity of the ailment. Some of the important sacrifices made included *Arthiem*, *Runat*, *Dawisie*, *Ram/Rampuinat*, *Nauhri*, etc. They were mainly conducted by the *Thiempu* with his assistant called *Berva*.⁴²⁶

The Hmars different rituals and ceremonies could be interpreted as an attempt to understand the unknown and to make their life at ease. For instance, the believed that the *Thiempu's* were capable of identifying the cause of a disease and had the skill to ward off the same might have surely made the households of the village to lead a contented and less uncertain life.

Aisan (Divination): The Hmars were known to be an exceptional *Aienthiem/Dawithiem* (diviner/sorcerer). Their kindred tribes greatly favoured them for the *Dawisut* (to emancipate one from a magic spell).⁴²⁷ The first known Hmar *Aisanthiem* was *Thairanchawng*, the wife of *Sura*. Her *dawi* (magic spell) was called *Thairan Dawi*, which was usually performed to ascertain the success of a hunter in a game.⁴²⁸ Other prominent ones were *Lalruong* (*Ralngam*) and *Hrangsaipui* (*Dawikungpui*). Divination

⁴²⁴Vara, Nunphung, p-47.

⁴²⁵ Interview with T Khuma Songate on 12 August 2016 at Saikot, Churachandpur, Manipur.

⁴²⁶Bapui, Oral Traditions, p-18.

⁴²⁷Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, p-49.

⁴²⁸Keivom, Hmar, P-98.

was also performed in *Khawthar sat*, *tharlak*, *Fang ko dawi*, *Thuite ko*, etc. The above ceremonies have different rites and rituals.⁴²⁹

The Hmar's *Thiempu* (priest) may be classified into *Thiempulal* (Chief Priest), *Khawtlang Thiempu* (Village Priest) and *Hnambing Thiempu* (priest of the clan). *Khawtlang Thiempu* and *Hnambing Thiempu* received obligatory council and education from The *Thiempulal*.⁴³⁰ A *Thiempu* was more or less a go-between of both the spiritual beings and human beings respectively. The *Thiempu*'s success was counted not on a mere memorization of charm nor luck, rather it was on skill and knowledge of the eco-system, the poisonous and healing herbs, and the behavior of the animals. In dealing with the Malignant Spirits who were supposed to inflict sickness and caused misfortune upon human beings, a skillful and wise priest was considered to have the power of successfully intervening on such occasions.⁴³¹

The supposition and assumption of the work of the *Thiempu* confining to a mere memorization of *hla* or charm, rather than constituting and mastering an elaborate rite and rituals was unjust and misleading. Rituals is defined as a behavior that has become highly formalized and stereotyped.⁴³² The Hmar *Thiempu* was quite similar with other practices of Asian countries. For instance, in an *Aisan* for *Mankhawng*,⁴³³ to ensure the success of the trap, the *Thiempu* made a concoction in such a way that the ingredients, which he sprinkled on the *Mankhawng* (trap) was irresistible for the wild animals and hence resulted in increasing the success rate. To dramatized it, the whole procedure was accompanied by a chant, *Tuktin-Samtawk-Manphit-Mantal*, which merely denoted the ingredients he used in the concoction.⁴³⁴ Other examples that reflected their talent and ingenuity was in the method they adopted in healing snake and wolf spider's bite. They cut the skin around the wound, to which a fowl cloaca was made to suck the poison out of the system.⁴³⁵ And

⁴²⁹ Bapui, Oral Traditions, pp.18-21.

⁴³⁰ Vara, Nunphung, p-47.

⁴³¹ McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p-69.

⁴³² Bates, & Fratkin, *Cultural Anthropology*, p-389.

⁴³³ *Aisan* for *Mankhawng* (a trap) means casting a spell on the trap to ensure its success.

⁴³⁴ Interview with Vanlalthuonga Bapui.

⁴³⁵ Vara, Nunphung, p-67.

to heal Angular Cheilitis, they used the bubble that oozes out of semi-dry firewood when it was burnt in the hearth as a medicine.⁴³⁶

Moreover, the Hmar *Thiempu* shared some similarities with the African traditional healers. “They both are trusted with identifying the causes of the illness or in discovering the violated established order, to which attempt was made to remove the hostile source by neutralization or seeking forgiveness of the evil spirits (sorcerer or hostile ancestor in the case of the African) with sacrifices and rituals to appease their anger or by prescription of certain medication”.⁴³⁷ Further, “they possess an extensive knowledge of curative herbs, natural treatment and medicinal mixtures of animal origin”.⁴³⁸ The healing besides focusing on the physical condition, it also influenced the psychological, spiritual and social aspects of individuals, families and communities.⁴³⁹

The Hmar traditional society was plagued by superstitious beliefs and *Thienglo* (Taboos) which were deep-rooted in their everyday life such as production patterns, diseases, unexpected and unexplainable phenomenon and the fear of the unknown, where the joined forces of this various elements resulted in the invention of the belief system. Yet, interestingly, there was neither a permanent place of worship nor the various gods were represented in an image. The colonial ethnographers referred to the Hmar traditional religion as ‘animistic’.⁴⁴⁰ E B Taylor, 19th century anthropologist defined *animism* as a doctrine of Spiritual Beings, that characterizes tribes very low in the scale of humanity, a *primitive people*.⁴⁴¹

The pre-colonial Hmar followed patriarchal system of society where clanship formed an integral part. Clanship dictated their social interactions, settlements and even

⁴³⁶ Interview with Lalmangaihzuala.

⁴³⁷ Ilse Truter, ‘African Traditional Healers; Cultural and religious beliefs intertwined in a holistic way’, pp-57-58. <http://www.manualzz.com>, (accessed 30 June 2108).

⁴³⁸ Truter, ‘African Traditional Healers; Cultural and religious beliefs intertwined in a holistic way’, pp-57-58.

⁴³⁹ Truter, pp-57-58.

⁴⁴⁰ O Rosanga, ‘Aspects of Mizo Traditional beliefs of some Ethnic Groups (A Familiarization of Mizo Religion), in *Historical Journal Mizoram*, Vol.VI, Issue.I, 2005. P.63.

⁴⁴¹ Tylor, *Primitive Culture, Researches into the development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, p.417.

had a bearing on the rites and rituals of their belief system. The political, economic and social systems were closely inter-related and the activities concerning it were dictated by the social norm.

CHAPTER-4

Socio-Cultural Changes in the Colonial Period

4.1 Introduction:

Cultural changes occurred primarily due to the mechanism of changes such as *diffusion* or borrowing of traits between cultures, *acculturation* or *independent invention*.⁴⁴² Exchange of information and even products between cultures had been going on throughout history even for an isolated group like the Hmars. The diffusion of cultures happened when two culture trade, intermarry or wage war against each other or in a more apparent manner or when one cultures imposed the dominant culture through subjugation or colonization.⁴⁴³ Acculturation imply cultural exchange that occurred when two groups of cultures experienced firsthand contact continuously for an extended period.⁴⁴⁴ The third mechanism of change, *Independent invention* that is independent of the first two refers to human creative innovations to meet challenges to their existence.⁴⁴⁵ The first two mechanisms played a dominant role among the Hmars in regards to socio-cultural changes. The joint forces of the British colonization and the missionaries' proselytizing zeal acted as the main catalyst for cultural changes.

4.2 Advent of Christianity among the Hmars:

The coming of Christianity among the Hmars par se was not an isolated event. It may be understood within a wider perspective of missionary movements in the north eastern states which was deeply entwined with the political situations.

The invasion and subsequent colonization of the present Mizoram was instigated by the attempt made by the British ruler of India to secure their frontier in

⁴⁴² Conrad P Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology; Appreciating Cultural Diversity*, 14th Edition, New York, Mc Graw Hill, 2011, p.42.

⁴⁴³ Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology; Appreciating Cultural Diversity*, p.42.

⁴⁴⁴ Guido Bolaffi et al (ed), *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity & Culture*, First Published, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2003, p.1.

⁴⁴⁵ Kottak, p.43.

the face of the Mizos repeated attempt of safeguarding their territories that resulted in frequent raids on the tea garden by the latter.⁴⁴⁶ On one such raids in 1871, the Mizos made one daring raids at Alexandrapur where Robert Winchester was murdered and several persons were carried off as captives including his child Mary Winchester.⁴⁴⁷ The incident and the subsequent punitive measure resulted in the subjugation of the so called ‘wild tribe’ and the coming of Rev. William Williams, the then Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Missionary of the Khasi Hills, to Mizoram. Eventually, he landed at Aizawl on 20 March 1891 and immediately made an appeal to the Mission Board who formally adopted Mizoram as a mission fields in 1892 and appointed him (Rev. William Williams) as a missionary to serve there. But, his untimely demise on 21 April 1892 extinguished his dreams of serving among the Mizos.⁴⁴⁸ However, his contribution could not be treated lightly as he was the pioneer who paved the way for the subsequent arrival of other missionaries in Mizoram.

The Arthington Aborigines Mission:

J H Lorrain and F W Savidge, both from Arthington Aborigines Mission with the permission of Mr. A W Davies, the then Political Officer of North Lushai Hills arrived at Fort Aijal on 11 January 1894. The date had been observed as the beginning of the arrival of the Gospel in Mizoram.⁴⁴⁹ However, Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod, one of the leading Christian denomination in Mizoram declared the 15th March as *Chanchin Tha Thlen Ni* (the beginning of Gospel Witness). Denouncing the former contention, this proclamation was made only in 2014 after a careful consideration to commemorate the day Rev. William Williams along with Benjamin Aitken, Kasinath and M Khania landed at *Mualvum Kai-Kutbul Lui* on 15 March 1891 to preach.⁴⁵⁰ Savidge and Arthington soon learnt the common *Duhlian*⁴⁵¹ language

⁴⁴⁶ Lalthlengliana, *The Lushai Hills: Annexation, Resistance and Pacification (1886-1898)*, p-13.

⁴⁴⁷ H K Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes: North-East Frontier*, First Edition, Gauhati, Spectrum Publications, 1981, pp.29-30.

⁴⁴⁸ Lalramthanga, ‘Rev. D E Jones (Zosaphluia) Chanchin’, in *Welsh Presbyterian Mission In Mizoram Centenary (1897-1997) Souvenir*, Aizawl, Published by Synod Literature & Publishing Board, 1997, p-5.

⁴⁴⁹ Ruolngul, *The Advance of the Gospel, Part One*, First Edition, Churachandpur, Smart Tech Offset Printers, 2009, p-3.

⁴⁵⁰ Thangzauva, *Presbyterian Church of India; Mizoram Synod, 2018 Nilai Leh Beihrual Thupui*, Aizawl, The Synod Literature & Publication Board, 2017, p.(xiv).

⁴⁵¹ ‘Duh-lian’, In James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga), *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, Reprint, Calcutta, The Asiatic Society, 1975, p.118; It is equivalent to the term *Lushai/lusei*, Shakespear, See Introduction.

(Lushai language) and within four years devised the art of writing in the Lushai language based on the Roman Scripts.⁴⁵² In 1899, Khuma and Khara became the first native to convert to Christianity.⁴⁵³

It is to be noted that Lorrain and Savidge knew that their days in the Lushai Hills was numbered as the stated aim of Arthington Mission was to send missionaries only to places still un-reached by the gospel. As soon as some members of the tribe embraced Christianity, they would be left to fend for themselves and the Missionaries, would yet again move on to other unreached regions. Moreover, they came to learnt that the Welsh Presbyterian Mission had already adopted the Lushai Hills as part of their Mission field. And that their application to the Welsh Presbyterian Mission to formally retain them as missionaries to the Lushai Hills was rejected because of their being from a Baptist Church.⁴⁵⁴ Church Denomination plays a significant role in spreading the Gospel. This was due to the principles of the comity of Protestant foreign missions operating in both Bengal and Assam that no new Missionary of another organization should undertake any work where one mission society had already started working without first coming to a mutual understanding with the mission already working in that particular field.⁴⁵⁵ Therefore, there was a reserve mission of the mission field for both the Welsh Presbyterian Mission and the Baptist Church of England respectively. Therefore, due to certain inevitable circumstances the Arthington mission was withdrawn from the hills, and left the field to the Presbyterian mission who had refused to give sanction to their application.

The Welsh Presbyterian Mission:

In 1897 the Welsh Presbyterian sent in the Lushai hills Rev. David Evan Jones to continue the work began by Lorrain and Savidge accompanied by Dr T J Jones and

⁴⁵² H Remthanga & Lalbiaktluanga, *Kohhran Chanchin (AD 1500-1990)*, Chhut Khatna, Aizawl, The Synod Publication Board, 1990, p.240.

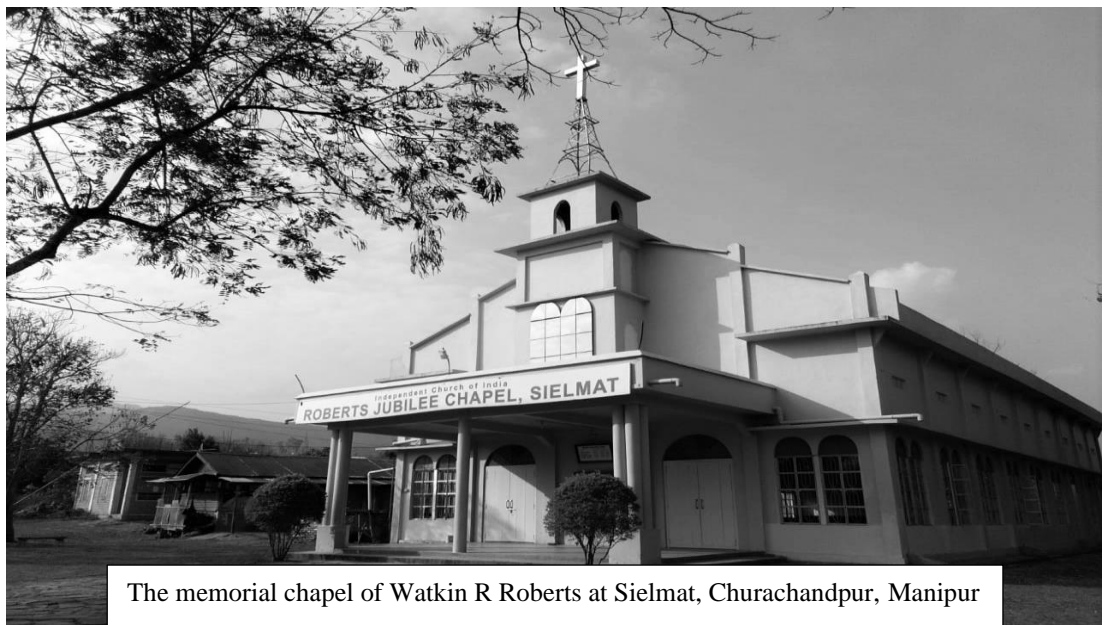
⁴⁵³ Vanlalchhunga, *Marvelous Mission; The role of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission in the Transformation of Socio-Cultural life in North East India and Sylhet Province, Bangladesh*, Revised & Enlarged, Aizawl, Shalom Publication, 2008, p-198.

⁴⁵⁴ D Ruolngul, *The Advance of the Gospel, Part One*, p-3.

⁴⁵⁵ Lal Dena, *Identity*, p-52.

the Khasi evangelist, Rai Bhajur and his wife, where the whole party arrived at Aizawl on 30 August 1897.⁴⁵⁶ The following year in December, Rev. D E Jones was joined by Edwin Rowlands, and since then, the then Lushai Hills came under the Welsh Presbyterian mission.

The coming of Christianity in a Hmar speaking area especially in the north of the Lushai hills around the *Tuivai* river was noteworthy. Although several dialects were used in most villages, the *Duhlian* language was commonly used in imparting Christianity and Education in the hills.⁴⁵⁷ However, the penetration of the gospel in *Senvon* (a village in southwest Manipur) and the subsequent spreading of the faith in other parts of the Hmar inhabited areas attributed to the growth and preservation of the Hmar language and its literatures. It was said that the man responsible for the aforesaid spread of Christianity was a lay missionary named Watkin Robert Roberts, from Caernarvo, Wales, who left his home in 1908 and came to work under Dr. Peter Fraser in Aizawl, Mizoram as a medical dispenser.⁴⁵⁸



The memorial chapel of Watkin R Roberts at Sielmat, Churachandpur, Manipur

⁴⁵⁶ J V Hluna, *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram*, First Edition, Guwahati, Spectrum Publication, 1992, pp-44-45.

⁴⁵⁷ Zairema, 'God's Miracle in Mizoram', in *Welsh Presbyterian Mission In Mizoram Centenary (1897-1997) Souvenir*, Aizawl, Published by Synod Literature & Publishing Board, 1997, p-54.

⁴⁵⁸ Jonathan Pudaite, *The legacy of Watkin R Roberts; The pioneer Missionary who Advocated & Empowered Indigenous Christian Leader*, Shillong, Partnership Publication, 2009, p-1.

Roberts arrived at Aizawl at a young age with a great zeal for evangelism. Soon he started to distribute pamphlets containing some of the Gospel to all the village Chiefs of the Lushai Hills.⁴⁵⁹ The response was very positive, as such *Khamkholun Singson*, the Chief of *Senvon*, requested him to come in person to explain what has been written in the pamphlets. Within a few days, Roberts started to take a long, hazardous journey to the rugged hills towards *Senvon* village.⁴⁶⁰

The exact date of the arrival of Watkin R Roberts to *Senvon* is debatable although every source seems to agree that it was on the month of February 1910. One source claimed that it was on the 5 February that Roberts and his party set foot on the soil of *Senvon*. The above view point content that Roberts and his party left for *Senvon* on January 31, 1910, and the time they took to such journey and considering the villages where they spent the night, as such the above cited date was the most probable one.⁴⁶¹ Moreover, the official statement of the *Thado-Kookie* Pioneer Mission accepted it as the date of the planting of the Gospel in South Manipur.⁴⁶² Another contention advocated the 9 February as the date of the arrival of Roberts and his party to *Senvon*. This view point contended that Robert's party departed from Aizawl on 1 February 1910, and as such the claim had been based on the information secured from Roberts himself by *Rochunga Pudaite*.⁴⁶³ Still another claim stated that Robert's party departed from Aizawl on 31 January and reached *Senvon* on 13 February.⁴⁶⁴ The controversial date however, did not diminish the importance of the visits of Watkin R Roberts. Among other things, it also resulted in the establishment of a new church purely based on ethnic dimension.

After Roberts and his party returned to Aizawl, he and Dr. Fraser sought out a means to preach the gospel to the Hmar speaking area of southern Manipur, to which

⁴⁵⁹ Pudaite, *The legacy of Watkin R Roberts; The pioneer Missionary who Advocated & Empowered Indigenous Christian Leader*, pp-49 & 50. Hereafter cited as Pudaite, Legacy.

⁴⁶⁰ Pudaite, Legacy, p-52.

⁴⁶¹ Ruolngul, p.19.

⁴⁶² Ruolngul, pp.19 & 220.

⁴⁶³ Pudaite, Legacy, p.54.

⁴⁶⁴ *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran; Kohhrana Mi hmasa biru Leh Tangkaite*, Aizawl, Synod Literature & Publication Board, 2016, p.57.

three of Dr. Fraser's pupil namely, *Savawma, Vanzika and Thangchhingpuia (Taitea)*, who later on came to be called the First Three Native Missionaries volunteered to go to Manipur. The native missionaries reached *Senvon* on 7 May 1910. The chief of *Senvon*, named *Khamkholun* and his subjects welcomed them with open arms and even assisted them in constructing their houses. The first batch to embrace Christianity were *Thangneirum, Kaithang and Thangngur*. From 1911, *Senvon* functioned as a base for the Mission in South Manipur.⁴⁶⁵ In 1913, the Mission, which was expanding was given the name *Thado-Kuki Pioneer Mission*. *Upa* (Church elder) *R Dala* was sent from Mizoram to *Senvon* in 1913. He was ordained as a Pastor by the Church conference delegates on 26 December 1914.⁴⁶⁶ Within a short period, Christianity engulfed the whole of the Hmar population thereby contributing to a structural transformation of their cultures.



The Tombstone of Vanzika (one of the three native missionaries) at Saitual

The *Thado-Kuki Pioneer Mission* adopted the Presbyterian Church of India's system of administration, and the first Presbytery Conference was held at *Senvon* in

⁴⁶⁵ *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran; Kohhrana Mi hmasa biru Leh Tangkaite*, pp.58-60.

⁴⁶⁶ *Zatanga, North East India General Mission (NEIGM) Manipur Chanchin Tawi* (Unpublished), p.5.

1914. *R Dala* was assisted by *Thuomlun* and *Thuoma*, both migrant from the then Lushai Hills to be the mission workers. The ministry expanded encompassing different ethnic communities of Manipur. The *Thado-Kuki Pioneer Mission* was no longer suitable to cover the whole region, therefore, the nomenclature was changed to *The North East India General Mission* (NEIGM) in 1924. The western Missionaries worked under the common understanding of the *Principle of Mission Comity* especially in the North East India. Under this agreement, the Northern Lushai Hills was put under the Welsh Presbyterian Church whereas Manipur was under the American Baptist Church. Based on this ground, Roberts in course of time was forced to abandon the NEIG Mission. In spite of this the Hmars refused to accept the dismissal of Roberts and rallied around under a new banner viz., the Independent Church of India (ICI) in 1930.⁴⁶⁷ Later, another branch called the Evangelical Free Church of India was established in 1972.⁴⁶⁸ The three branches, namely the PCI, ICI and EFCI became the main denomination among the Hmars of Mizoram. At present, ICI has three Presbyteries in Mizoram, Viz., (i) *Aizawl Presbytery* which includes the local Churches in *Ramhlun Sport Complex, Sesawng, Zemabawk, Dapchhuah, Kolasib, Thingdawl, New Builum, Gosen, Bairabi Vairengte Field Veng, Vairengte South, State Veng, Hermon, IOC Veng, Phainuam, Saiphai and Saipum*. (ii) *Tuivai Presbytery* which covers *Khawlian, Phuaibuang and Saitual* and (iii) *Hmarphei Presbytery* that covers *Sakawrdai Sub-headquarters, Sakawrdai South, Tinghmun, Mauchar, New Vervek, Ratu, Sunhluchhip, Palsang and Hmunsang*.⁴⁶⁹ Whereas the EFCI sub-divided their church into five administrative districts such as Lunglei, Aizawl, Kolasib, Khawlien and Sakawrdai districts respectively.⁴⁷⁰

The unparalleled success of the Missionary may be attributed to their ability to contextualize Christianity with the Hmar culture. For example, in the case of a truce between Chiefs over tribal enmity or wars, it was solemnized by *Sa-ui-tan* (a covenant). In this ceremony, either a pig or a cow was slaughtered at the boundary of

⁴⁶⁷ Ruolngul, pp.33 &39, 119-120.

⁴⁶⁸ J Huoplien Neitham, 'Evangelical Free Church of India', in *Chanchin Tha Thilthawtheina*, Shillong, The Evangelical Free Church of India, General Head Quarters, 2010, p.6.

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with V Ramchuoilo Varte on 27 August 2018 at Aizawl, Mizoram.

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with John Lalnunmawi on 3 September 2018, churachandpur, Manipur.

each chief's realm, and before the blood cloth and was still warm and oozes out, the two parties negotiated the peace term by placing both the hands of the chiefs on the slayed animal. Roberts adopted this particular ceremony to illustrate the enmity between God and man because of sin, and that Christ sacrificed himself so that man would be at peace with God, which of course was quite easy to understand and comprehended by the tribal.⁴⁷¹

The manner in which the missionaries translated the *Christian Hymns* into the native language too, reflected the above assertion. In the second stanza of *Jesus beloved of my heart* composed by G. D Mackay⁴⁷², Rev. E Rowlands translated the word *Paradise* as *Pialral/Pielral*.⁴⁷³ At the same time, the role of the personality of the missionaries were also a force to reckon with. For instance, it was said that Mr. Roberts was respectful towards the people and treated their cultures with dignity. Moreover, the colonial and political approach can be given a credit in this dimension. The European missionaries and the first natives' missionaries often operated and propagated Christianity under the influence of the colonial power. Roberts himself and the three native missionaries seeking permission to cross the border from the political Agent of Manipur testified to the above assertion. It was stated that Watkin Roberts had forwarded a telegraph to the then political Agent of Manipur seeking permission for the 'three native missionaries' to enter Manipur.⁴⁷⁴

As mentioned earlier, Mr. Savidge and Mr. Lorrain got permission to enter the present Mizoram only after promising that they would work in conformity with the government, in other words, not to instigate anything that could be interpreted as anti-government propaganda. Even after they reached Aizawl, they had to take care of the basic amenities like housing by themselves which was a rare sight considering the *babu* nature and attitude of the colonial officials. Their situation was so wretched to

⁴⁷¹ Pudaite, *Legacy*, pp.55-56.

⁴⁷² G D Mackay, *Jesus beloved of my heart*, <https://hymnary.org>, accessed 27 October 2019.

⁴⁷³ _____ Kristian Hla Bu (Tonic Solfa), 14th Reprint, Aizawl, Published by Synod Literature & Publication Board, 2015, p.69,

⁴⁷⁴ *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran; Kohhrana Mi hmasa biru Leh Tangkaite*, pp.58-59.

behold that the people nicknamed them *Sap Vakvai* (the white vagabond).⁴⁷⁵ The two pioneer missionaries were granted the right to issue a permit for procuring salt which was curtailed due to certain unrest by Captain G.H Loch, the then Political Officer of the North Lushai Hills.⁴⁷⁶ It is to be noted that during this time, the present Mizoram which was only recently subjugated was in a state of turmoil as the peoples were still coping with the alien rule. For instance, in 1890 Captain Browne was assassinated.⁴⁷⁷ Moreover, the production of salt which occupied an important place in the society was insufficient to meet the requirement. Salt mainly acquired from limited *chi khur* (salt spring) was supplemented with trading from the plain traders. Such privileged of possessing the permit to procure salt elevated the status of the missionaries' vis-a-vis the people.⁴⁷⁸ The colonial government and the missionaries work hand in hand, even though the former did not directly involve themselves in imparting Christianity in the Lushai Hills.

The Hmar culture itself was no less responsible for the exceptional success of Christianity. As mentioned earlier, the pre-Christian culture was greatly influenced by the fear of the malevolent spirits, with an endless sacrifice to appease the evil spirits, which proved strenuous to their meager resources. On the other hand, the Christian God was superior than the *Ramhuai* (evil spirit), and was easily accessible and did not require costly sacrifices. On top of it, the intertwining of Christianity with western system of education made it all the more alluring to the Hmars. Also, the early converts played a great role in spreading the gospel among their own people. Even some chiefs namely Suaka, chief of Durtlang, Thanphunga, chief of Chaltlang and Khamliana, chief of Lungleng were said to have lent their assistance when Savidge and Lorrain were preparing a hymn book written in Mizo language.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁵ P L Lianzuala, *Zofate Chanchin Tha Rawn Hlantute*, Guwahati, Bhabani Offset Pvt. Ltd., 2012, p.99.

⁴⁷⁶ Lalhrualtuanga Ralte, *Zoram Vartian; Chanchin Tha leh Thuziak Khaw Var Tan Dan*, Revised, Aizawl, Synod Press, 2009, p.205.

⁴⁷⁷ McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p.59.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Nunthara Sailo (92 years) on 25 February 2020 at Saitual, Mizoram.

⁴⁷⁹ Remthanga & Lalbiaktluanga, *Kohhran Chanchin (AD 1500-1990)*, p.240.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that the early Hmar converts were free of any form of discrimination. In fact, there were examples of instances where they face persecution in the hands of some chiefs and even from among their own family. For instance, *V T Kappu* ridiculed, teased and scorned at the newly convert before he himself was converted and later became a celebrated Christian song writer. After his conversion by the end of 1910, he too suffered several abuses in the hand of his own father. At one time, his father insisted him that he should go to the forest on Sunday, a sacred day for Christians, in search of wild yam. But, the latter, although forced by his father refused to oblige. In retaliation, his father inflicted a severe physical punishment that almost caused his life. Moreover, *Lianrum's* house was forcibly seized and he was expelled from *Suangsang Village* by *Mangkhawluna*, chief of the village for embracing Christianity and for being a Christian convert.⁴⁸⁰

4.3 Introduction of Education:

Under the Colonial rule, Christianity and Western Education became the prime factor for imparting Christian teaching and ethos among the Hmars. They were the twin pillars responsible for the radical transformation of the Hmar cultures and religious belief.

Mizoram, then the Lushai Hills came to be exposed to Western education only after the coming of the Christian missionaries who started to learn the language and introduced western system of education. On 2 April 1894, they first started a primary school.⁴⁸¹ The first known written words in Hmar was about the biblical prodigal son written in 1904.⁴⁸²

⁴⁸⁰ K C Vanlalruata, *Mizo Hla Kungpui Hmar Mi Rilte*, Aizawl, Laisuih Zirbing Run (Laisuih) Research Centre, 2009, p.148.

⁴⁸¹ Hluna, *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram*, pp.51 &53. Hereafter cited as Hluna, Education.

⁴⁸² G A Grierson (ed), *Linguistic Survey of India voll-III; Tibeto-Burman Family, part-III*, Reprint, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1967, p.259.

The first informal school begun in 1910 in Senvon when *Savawma*, *Vanzika* and *Thangchhingpuia* operated their houses as a makeshift school during the day time. They became full time workers under the Mizoram Presbyterian Church, with a remuneration of Rs.3/- per month which was later raised to Rs.6/- in 1912.⁴⁸³ Later on, the *Senvon* villagers in collaboration with the missionaries opened a school without any formal preparation. A man named *Thangngur*, who was a native from Parbung village (southern Manipur) became the first Teacher. As the number of Christian converts increased, more Schools were opened in the area. In 1920, there were over 30 schools.⁴⁸⁴ It was said that the education imparted was of a decent standard and this was reflected in the enrollment of students from outside. For instance, Pherzawl High School, which was a village in southern Manipur, was said to have attracted pupil even from Mizoram.⁴⁸⁵

4.4 Impact of Christianity and Education:

(a) Growth of Vernacular Literature:

It may not be wrong to say that the early Christian converts were the first to comprehend the essentiality of education in all spheres of life. As the Bible and Hymns book were the sources of inspiration for their new faith and to be able to read and understand them was vital for the growth of the said faith. Therefore, the first households to grasp the advantage of the introduction of education was the Christian converts.⁴⁸⁶

The introduction of education and the reduction of the Hmars language into writing open a new epoch in the history of the Hmar literature hitherto exclusively on oral tradition. As mentioned earlier, the first known written words in the Hmar language was in 1904, the translation of the *Prodigal Son*, extracted from the English

⁴⁸³ -----*Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran; Kohhrana Mi hmasa biru Leh Tangkaite*, p.60.

⁴⁸⁴ Pudaite, pp.68 & 69.

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with Lalmakthanga on 12 December 2016 at Republic, Aizawl.

⁴⁸⁶ Lalthankhum Sinate, 'Chanchintha le Changkangna', in *Robawm*, Second Edition, Churachandpur, Published by Hmar Literature Society, 2010, p.5.

version of the Bible. This was before the penetration of Christianity among the Hmar concentrated area. According to *S N Ngurte* and *Rosiem Pudaite*, there was a possibility that the missionaries got assistance from one of the first convert named *Khuma*, who happened to be from a *Hmar Khawzawl* clan. He was known to have visited some villages located in southern Manipur such as *Senvon*, *Leisen* and *Parbung* to preach Christianity in 1914.⁴⁸⁷ It is to be noted that the prominence of *Zote* clan's (one of the Hmar clan) diction such as *bak-ding* instead of *Fak-ding* (a situation in want of food) made to conclude that *Kuma*, a *Zote* from *Rengkai* who had passed out Lower Primary in 1902 from Aizawl could have assisted the missionaries.⁴⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the recognition of the distinctiveness of the Hmar dialect by the missionaries is noteworthy.

What was known today as the Hmar language was what the Hmar themselves called the *Khawsak tawng* (eastern dialect). Different clans of the Hmars such as *Zote*, *Leiri*, *Khawbung*, *Faihriem*, etc., had their own different dialect. However, the *Khawsak tawng* was unanimously accepted as the literary language of the Hmar. It was a semi-tonal language, where the meaning of a word was influenced by the tone and its accent.⁴⁸⁹

The Mission Schools in the initial stage adopted text books written in the Lusei language and commonly used Lusei as the medium of instruction. The schools were so popular that more schools were opened in almost every village in order to boost Christian converts. Education became their ticket to the salaried services, in other words synonymous with *Kamdingna* (employment), to be more or less free from the age-old system of shifting cultivation. Though, the education system lacked a clear definition and aims, the instruction however was examination oriented, as stated by

⁴⁸⁷ Thangsawihmang, *Ka Hriet Nuom Zawng*, Unpublished, p.152.

⁴⁸⁸ Ngurte & Pudaite, pp.159-160.

⁴⁸⁹ Vanlal Tluonga Bapui, Assam Rama Hmarhai, Guwahati, pp.126-127. Hereafter cited as Bapui, Assam.

Rochunga Pudaite,⁴⁹⁰ and was also instrumental in the growth of Christianity and vernacular literature.

In the beginning, local missionaries and leaders of the mission raised their concern over the use of a language other than the *Lusei* language in all matters related to the missions. For instance, all assembly or presbytery resolutions were recorded in the *Lusei* language, new converts had to say their prayers only in the *Lusei* language, and there was even a circular that no hymns should be composed in a dialect other than the *Lusei* language.⁴⁹¹ The imposition of *Lusei* over the non-*Lusei* may be associated with the concept of ‘Cultural Imperialism’ and an attempt to assimilate other by dominant cultures. In this context, to borrow the assertion of Theresa Weynand Tobin, “Cultural Imperialism can be defined as the imposition of the cultures of the politically or economically dominant community towards another non-dominant community, where the customs, traditions, religion, language, social and norms, and other aspects of the dominant community are distinct from, though often closely related to the marginal community.”⁴⁹² However, the attempt to assimilate somehow failed as Hmar language was put to writing since the 1920s.

The arrival of Rev. F J Sandy and his wife in March 1914 in Mizoram, the then Lushai Hills can be said to have laid the foundation of the Hmar vernacular literature. Although they may not be able to tell the different ethnic divisions of the hills like the Hmars, Ralte or Lusei, etc., both were the one who took a keen interest in translating the gospel into tribal languages. With the assistance of *Thanga* and *Thangkhup*, F J Sandy translated the Gospel of St. Mark in the Hmar language and later was Published in 1920 by the Bible Society of India.⁴⁹³ Henceforth, after translation of more extract from the Bible in Hmar, the complete Holy Bible was translated and published in

⁴⁹⁰ Pudaite, pp.72 & 74.

⁴⁹¹ Lal Dena, Identity, p.80.

⁴⁹² Theresa Weynand Tobin, ‘Cultural Imperialism’, in Britannica.com, <https://www.britannica.com>, (accessed 29 August 2018).

⁴⁹³ Ngurte & Pudaite, pp.163 & 164.

1968.⁴⁹⁴ In spite of some elements of opposition to their translation and other subsequent development in this regard led to the unprecedented development of the Hmar vernacular literature. Within a span of three years, *Hmar Kristian Hla Bu* (A devotional hymn in Hmar) was published in 1923, which was reprinted over and over again. Over 500 copies were reprinted and enlarged in 1928, and in 1937, 20000 copies were reprinted again and contained about 200 hymns. In 1945, after the world war II it was enlarged with the hymns totaling to 4000 copies. The translated New Testament in Hmar was published by the Bible Society of India in 1945.⁴⁹⁵ After a series of re-edition, *Hmar Kristian Hlabu* was renamed as *Kristian Hla Bu (Tonic Solfa)*, and was published by the Hmar Christian Musical Society. This has been used as a devotional hymn book by the Hmar Christians irrespective of their denomination. The latest edition was published in 1999, 2003 and 2011 with 5000, 3000 and 5000 copies respectively and contained about 455 hymns.⁴⁹⁶

In fact, the new form of education was welcomed by the Hmars like a barren land that welcomes the coming rain. It engulfed the Hmars rapidly like a wild-fire. Some of them even ventured outside their region to get education, which directly promoted the growth of their literature. In 1945, the Hmar Literature Society was founded under the leadership of Dr. Thanglung and from that time onward there was a steady growth of the Hmar vernacular literature. Some of the remarkable published literature includes *Buhmasa* by Dr. Thanlung and *H L Sela* published in 1946, Dr. *Thanglung's Sierkawp Bu, Geography. Geometry* and *Hriselna Kawng*, Dr. *Thanglung's English-Hmar Dictionary*, Dr. *Thangler's Pherzawl Readers* published in 1960, *H C Hrangate's Hrietna Var* published in 1965, etc.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁴ Lalhmuoklien, 'Hmar Holy Bible Nei Tan Dan le Vawisun Chen Ngirhmun', in *Hmar Holy Bible Golden Jubilee souvenir (1968-2018)*, Churachandpur, Published by Hmar Holy Bible Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, 2018, pp.1 & 5.

⁴⁹⁵ Ngurte & Pudaite, pp. 187-188.

⁴⁹⁶ *Kristian Hla Bu (Tonic Solfa)*, Centenary Edition, Churachandpur, The Hmar Christian Musical Society, 2011.

⁴⁹⁷ D Ruolngul, 'Chanchintha Leia Manipur Simthlang Biela Inthlakdanglamna', in *Manipur Simthlang Gospel Centenary 1910-2010 Souvenir*, Churachandpur, Independent Church of India, 2010, p.31.

The unprecedented growth of the Hmar literature compelled the Government of Manipur to recognize it as one of the major tribal language in 1968 and permitted its usage in school as a medium of instruction up to standard six. With the initiative taken by the Hmar Literature Society, from 1997, the Hmar language could be opted as a full paper in the High School Leaving Certificate Examination under the Manipur Education Board. It reached another milestone in 2000 after it was introduced as one of the subjects in lieu of Major Indian Languages (MIL) in the XI and XII standards. Finally, in 2003 the Hmar language was introduced as MIL in the degree level courses under the Manipur University.⁴⁹⁸ Likewise, the Assam University had also introduced Hmar as a language paper up to the Higher Secondary (XII) level and the subsequent introduction to the first degree level is still under way.⁴⁹⁹

Even before the advent of Christianity, the Hmars love for *hla* (Songs/Poems) was evident in the numerous folk songs, which some of it were put to writing. That trait which was engrained deeply into them cannot be surpassed by any amount of changes instigated by outsiders. On the contrary, it was streamlined to suit the changing need of the time. For instance, the traditional folk songs gave way to the Christian devotional songs, just as contact with the outside civilization/cultures gave rise to awareness of preserving their identity which in one form manifested into the composing of many patriotic songs. However, *Keilet Hla/Sai Hla* (Romantic Songs), the constituent elements of the traditional folk songs still formed an important part of vernacular literatures.

(b) Emergence of devotional songs:

One of the forerunners of the Hmar devotional songs was *Rev. Thangur*, also known as the “Father of Hmar Christian Music”. It was claimed that he received an offer from both the Aizawl Bawrsap (Superintendent) and Churachandpur Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), Manipur to work under them respectively. Yet, he had

⁴⁹⁸ Ruolngul, ‘Chanchintha Leia Manipur Simthlang Biela Inthlakdanglamna’ p. 31-32.

⁴⁹⁹ Bapui, Oral Traditions, p.138.

chosen to work under the mission over a governmental job that could have pay higher wages. Initially, the songs he composed were all in the Lushai language. The first three songs he composed included ‘*Nunna Thianglim Siamtu An Duhlo Zionah*’, ‘*Ka Thovanga Ka Pa Hnenah Ka Kal Te Ang*’ and ‘*Ka Thinlung Sual Bawhlawh Hnu Kha*’.⁵⁰⁰ There is a controversy with regards to the composer/authorship to the second and the third hymns mentioned above. The *Kristian Hla Bu*, jointly owned by the Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran and Mizoram Baptist Kohhran attributed the second song to *RL Kamlala*. Whereas the third was written as a translated hymn.⁵⁰¹ However, the son of *Rev. Thangngur* argued that the above songs and *Khawvelah Hian Lal Tamtak An lo Piang ta a* were the handiwork of his father which was wrongly attributed to others.⁵⁰²

Within a span of two years, *Rev. Thangngur* composed about 13 devotional hymns in the Lusei language which served as a great inspiration even to this day. Around the year 1920, an idea began to develop in him that it would be more pleasing to praise and worship in one’s own language rather than other language which was difficult to comprehend sometimes. *Rev Thangngur*, hence nurturing his thought composed his first song in the Hmar language:

Sandamtu hi Ka Hriet Hmar Chun,

Mi dang Pathien ka lo sawn a;

A Chanchin tha ka hang tiem a,

*Ka pa ka’n hmangsan kha a nih.*⁵⁰³

[Before I heard about the Saviour, I though He belonged to other; but when I go through the gospel, it dawned on me that he was the Father I had stray away from.]

⁵⁰⁰ Lalhmingthang, *Pastor Thangngur; A Chanchin le A Hla Phuokhai*, Shillong, Published by Partnership Publishing House, 2008, pp.(i) & 6.

⁵⁰¹ *Kristian Hla Bu*, 14th Reprint, Aizawl, Synod Literature and Publication Board, 2015, pp.77, 396 & 409.

⁵⁰² Lalhmingthang, *Pastor Thangngur; A Chanchin le A Hla Phuokhai*, p. (ii).

⁵⁰³ Ngurte & Pudaite, p.164.

There was no turning back after his first composition in the Hmar language. He had to his credit such as *Lungngaina kan Tlangpui*, *Ka Lawmna par ang an thliek ta ie*, *Hlimna Zing Arasi Lalpa*, *Kannan ram thar hung pan dingin*, *A min ruoi ropui an the a*, *keia Lalpa chun*, etc. which are still very popular even to this day.⁵⁰⁴ He was truly one of the founding father towards the development of the Hmar vernacular literatures.

Some of the other prominent composers of the devotional songs were *Pastor Thangler*, whose first song *Rinna thla zar ila, Kalvari mual lam va fang ila..*, (Kristian Hla Bu no. 214) was in the Lusei language. He was believed to have composed about 60 songs of which 32 were incorporated in the *Independent Kohran Hla Bu* (Some examples of his songs were *a lalna ram Khelin, aw ka unau dittakhai, sualna ral thlatu a hrang, kei ka suol lein Van lalnau inthieng hnuoia a hung a, aw kan lalpa iengkim siemtu, bethlehem tlang chungga, zan a bo ding an ta*, etc.).⁵⁰⁵ His songs mostly reflected the selfless sacrifice of Jesus and the yearning of the heaven. Apart from Pastor Thangler's composition, *VT Kappu's* songs were immortalized into devotional hymn book of the Hmars and were translated into other language, and some of the popular ones included *Pielral ka ngai ka lal lengna, Ka ngai ngei de aw ram ropui chu (ka ngai e chatuon ram ropui khi), Kan thlaihai mal I sawm a, Hang thlir in la Van Khawpui khi*, etc.⁵⁰⁶ Rev. Lienrum, too was well known for his inspiring songs such as *Ni tla ngai naw, Zion khawpui, Ami'n an hril Zion ram mawi khi, Kum sang rorel ni hung hnai rawh*, etc. Thanher, like the other Hmar converts his early songs were composed in the Lusei language such as *Chhandamtu hmangaihna Kalvari lam chu pan in, I Hmangaihna zara lawma inkhawm hnute* (Mizo Kristian Hla Thar Bu, No.432), etc. Some of the songs he composed in Hmar were *Eini mi zawngin maw, A thla hnuoi deihlum inhawiah*, etc.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Lalhmingthang, pp.18-118.

⁵⁰⁵ Vanlalruata, *Mizo Hla Kungpui, Hmar Mi Rilte*, pp.191-194.

⁵⁰⁶ Vanlalruata, pp.93-102.

⁵⁰⁷ Ngurte & Pudaite, pp. 173-19.

(c) **Patriotic Songs:**

With the introduction of Christianity and education, the Hmars were gradually exposed to the outside civilization resulting in the perceiving of the new innovations in a positive manner. In this way many educated Hmars had developed the idea that all the Hmars were to be under one political territorial unit. The Mizo Union, founded by R Vanlawma in 1946 vouched for integration under a Mizo government, their propaganda against the *Lal* attracted public support especially from the Hmar community. Such examples could be seen in songs which reflected their sentiment and one such composition was-

State thuneina bo a ta,

Mizo Sorkar la ngir a tih;

Lenruol dit le ei chi hnam hal eh,

*Sappui nun ngai loin leng tang ei tih.*⁵⁰⁸

{The state referred here was the Manipur govt. and the translation goes like this; The power of the state would cease, and in its place, there would be a Mizo Govt. Under it, all would be together, where no one would miss *Sappui nun* (the colonial government)}

After the Mizo Union had accepted the Autonomous District Council of the Mizo hills under the Sixth Schedule, the MU, however, failed to fulfill the main aspirations, i.e., the integration of all the Mizos living inside and outside of Mizoram. The Hmars especially felt betrayed to such extent that even the term 'Mizo' and the Lusei language began to lost their popularity.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Keivom, Hmar, pp.231-232.

⁵⁰⁹ R Vanlawma, Ka Ram Leh Kei (My Country and I), 3rd Edition (revised & enlarged), Aizawl, Published by M C Lalrinthanga in association with Zalen Publishing House, 1989, p.284.

Henceforth, the patriotic songs composed also emphasized for the integration of the Hmars living at different places. For example, in *T Khuma's Hmar Puonzar*, the term 'Mizo' has been completely ignored. The third stanza was as follow:

Sak le thlang, sim le hmar, ramtinah,

Phung le chang, chi le kuong chu tam sienkhawn,

Eich-em-aa-ar Hmar hi a lo nih,

*Pi le pu chen khawma an lo sak hlak.*⁵¹⁰

(The above can be roughly explain as, 'In the east and the west, the south and north everywhere, kin and kindred, class and clan may be large in number. The only integrating or uniting factor for us is the term *Hmar* and nothing else, which the forefather had sung about'.) The exclusion of the term *Mizo* is noteworthy here.

The above song was composed in September 1950. The author had claimed that the independence of India had inspired him to urge the Hmars living in different regions of the north east of India to acknowledge that the land inhabited by them from the time of their forefathers was their land irrespective of official recognition. He further stated that the term 'Hmar' was the name that they were known by from time immemorial.⁵¹¹

Another patriotic song by *Lalkhum Keivom's, Aw kan Hmar Ram*, urged the politically separated Hmars of *Cachar, Haflong, Aizawl and Manipur* to be emotionally united and move forward for the betterment of the Hmars. Such motivation could be read from the second stanza of his song-

Cachar, Halflong, Aizawl, Manipur

Inpumkhata ngirin

⁵¹⁰ R Tawna Khawbung (ed.), *Lenruolhla Bu* (Revised and Enlarged), Churachandpur, Published by Rosiem Pudaite & R Tawna Khawbung, 2005, p. 10.

⁵¹¹ Interview with T khuma songate on 12 August 2016 at Saikot, Manipur.

Ei ram lungmawl indar hi

Kei khawm tum varna tha zawngin

*Hmatieng ke pen ei tiu*⁵¹²

(Cachar, Halflong, Aizawl, Manipur

Let us stand united;

Striving to seek good wisdom,

To bring together our scattered tribe;

Onward marching we go).

Similar song composed by *H L Sela*, entitled *En tu'm! mihrang pasalthahai*, also lauded the Hmars seeking education outside their region to strive hard, for their brethren eagerly anticipated to uplift them.⁵¹³

(d) Hla Lenglawng:

Hla Lenglawng may be defined as a song that depicted natural phenomena or the adulation of nature. It evolved out of the socio-cultural changes instigated by the advent of Christianity. The early converts disapproved of any songs other than the devotional ones, therefore any song that does not conformed to Christianity were regarded as impure and therefore, was to be cast off. *Lenglawng* implies any song that does not reflected the gospel or a love between humans, but mostly concern with nature and its phenomenon. The songs were a fusion of traditional and foreign, pure and innocent lyrics that evolved from the 1950s. T Khuma Songate, Thattinlien Sungte, H Suokhum, L Thuomluoi, Lalthlamuong Keivom were some of the composers of this type of songs.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹² Khawbung (ed.), *Lenruolhla Bu* (Revised and Enlarged), p.9.

⁵¹³ Keivom, Hmar, pp.239-241.

⁵¹⁴ Keivom, Hmar, p.244.

T Khuma, the son of Hranglien Songate a notable Hmar historian was believed to be a pioneer in this realm. Altogether, 18 of his songs could be found in *Lenruol Hlabu* (*Lenruol Song Book*). His poem entitled *Kan Sawmfang* depicted the natural beauty of the agricultural land during *Favang* (September-October). The paddies that were about to bear fruits sways happily to the gentle breeze, while the wild monkeys who were waiting for a chance to share the bounty chattered and mingled with the parrots, dove and birds. Such melodious, pleasing and satisfying sight and sounds had been described in the following verses-

*“Kiva lengruol thlakawi an leng vel a,
Murva leng thiem, huiva an leng a;
Virthlifim leng vel awiin sawmfang lawmin an lam a,
Zai rem thiem, zai tin thiemin an awi a.”⁵¹⁵*

T Khuma had a profound talent. An ordinary and natural occurrence that many even failed to notice like the Moon shining up in the Sky was able to evoke his poetic instinct stimulating him to come up with a beautiful eulogy about the Moon. Instead of using the term *Thla* which means moon in the Hmar language, the author used *Sawrthlapui* (a poetic term for the moon in Hmar).

*“En rawh khi, lawmim a fe zankal-mawite,
Biethu hril thiem, Chawl lovin thangvan zawlah;
Thlir ka tih zaia awiin, aw chung Sawrthlapui,
Hnam ze tinreng singmit an lengkhawmna,”⁵¹⁶*

(Behold, jubilantly the lovely Night-Queen walk steadily by evoking romantic passion; I will gaze and serenate with a song, oh! heavenly Moon, every race of the earth’s sight falls on you).

⁵¹⁵ Thangsawihmang, *Hmar Hla, Hla Lenglawng le Lengzem Hla Suina*, Churachandpur, Blessing Offset, 2016, p.19.

⁵¹⁶ Thangsawihmang, *Hmar Hla, Hla Lenglawng le Lengzem Hla Suina*, p.20. Hereafter cited as Thangsawihmang, Hmar Hla.

The Hmar's literature was incomplete without mentioning L Keivom, who had written more than twenty books including a number of poems. More than forty of his *Lenglawng Hla* were found in *Lenruol Hlabu*, and some examples are *Thing tin sawl ang vulna*, *Chung Sawrthlapui khi*, *Kan Hmar ram I mawi*, *Sinlung Parmawi Kung*, *Lenlai Chenin*, *Hlimlai nun kha*, *Khawvel mawina*, *Vanglai ni*, etc. In “*Kan tlangram mawi hring dum dur hi..*” he spoke about the satisfaction received from observing the hillocks covered with a lush green, wherein different varieties of trees flourished and the gentle mountain breeze serenades. Such expression could be read from the following verses of his poem-

*“Kan tlangram mawi hring dum dur hi,
Lentu sawl thing tin an vul chiei;
Thlirin a mawi, Salung a awi,
Zo thlifimin damte 'n min thawi”.*⁵¹⁷

Thatinlien Sungte songs about *Singtur Dumbel* (tobacco pipe usually smoked by men) and *Pi Burtui* (tobacco pipe designed for women) both immortalized the traditional way of smoking pipes by both men and women. In *Singtur Dumbel-*

*Tiena pi le pu remhre thiemhai 'n,
A sakhming 'Singtur Bumbel' an tih a mawi ngei;
Thlang sappui siemsa sikret nekin,
Ka thlang lem ie ka Singtur Dumbel.*⁵¹⁸

{Long ago our ingenious forefather, had named it *Singtur Dumbel* (smoking tobacco in a pipe) which is a lovely name, I'll will always choose my *Singtur Dumbel* over the Western *Sap* product *Sikret* (cigarette)}.

⁵¹⁷ Khawbung (ed.), pp.40 & 45.

⁵¹⁸ Thangsawihmang, Hmar Hla, p.42.

(e) **Keilet hla and Sai hla:**

Keilet hla and *sai hla* were love songs about the love of a man and a woman. The main difference was that in *keilet hla*, a new lyric consisting of a love between a man and a woman was composed using the tune of an already existing devotional song. Some of the important composers of this type of songs were *L Keivom*, *Darkamlo*, *Lalruotthang*, *Sawnglienthuom*, *Paulsiemlien*, *Lienkhawkam Sungte*, etc. These songs often reflected the passionate and sometimes obsessive feelings of two lovers, loss of love or anything related with human emotions. One example of this type of song was *Thangvansang khi* by *Lienkhawkam Sungte*....

“Thangvan sang khi ka hang thlira,

Siar indi an leng hmun;

Pielleia leng dang indihai’n

Hlimten hmangai par an tlan.”

“Kei ruok chun ka thlir vel a,

I sakhmel hrim ka tawng nawh;

Lunglem hrim ka nei theih nawh ie,

*Lungrunpui I thang naw chun.”*⁵¹⁹

(The author stared up the sky only to see all the stars having their own partners. The same thing happened when he looked down below. He saw that all the lovers seemed to be happily enjoying each other’s company. He felt so out of place. In the chorus, he claimed to look around futilely for his love. He felt lost and forlorn without his lady love).

⁵¹⁹ Thangawihmang, Hmar Hla, pp.48-51.

4.5 Adoption of Christianity and declining or deterioration of the traditional beliefs:

The traditional beliefs in the existence of a host of supernatural beings apathetic and at times harmful to human beings gives way to Christianity, where God is associated with compassion and caring, the exact opposite of indifferences associated with the traditional *Pathien* (god).⁵²⁰ The enormous success of Christianity among the Hmars was often attributed with the entwining of the eschatology of the traditional belief system with that of Christianity. For instance, the emphasis of the similarity of the Christian concept of heaven and hell with that of traditional concept of *Pielral* that are both dictated by the present world. The traditional *Pathien*, the creator and benevolent god was equivalent to the Christian God and were even addressed by the same name, *Pathien*. The missionaries explained that the traditional *Pathien* was the father of Jesus Christ. There was a paradigm shift in the understanding of traditional *Pathien*, who was perceived as both the creator, sustainer as well as destroyer possessing a transcendental nature and was detached with human affairs.⁵²¹

In the absence of any supportive argument, however, it was difficult to ascertain the above assertion for the success of Christianity over the traditional beliefs on grounds of the theory of interweaving of concepts such as *pielral* and heaven, Christian God and traditional *pathien*, etc. It may be noted that the concept of a happy after-life even itself was neither the exclusive invention of the traditional Hmar society nor Christianity. For instance, Mathew Kneale asserted that “the ancient Aristocrats Egyptians filling of their tombs with *Ushabtis*, a model of this life which they believed will come to life in the afterlife to serve their personal ends”.⁵²² It was also proved that they, too believed in the concept of a happy after-life. Therefore, the roots of the popularity of Christianity and its subsequent annihilation of the traditional belief system should be sought elsewhere.

⁵²⁰ V S Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 2005, pp. 355-357.

⁵²¹ Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, pp. 356-360.

⁵²² Kneale, *An Atheist's History of Belief*, p.34.

The Christian theology was within the grasp of the common people as it was devoid of expensive sacrifices and that even the notion of heaven (*Pielral*) was open and accessible for everyone. Moreover, the traditional belief system had no set of systematic structural and pattern in the absence of any religious books like the Bible for the Christian, the Gita for the Hindus or the Quran for the Muslims. The forms and modes of traditional *Sakhuo* varied from clan to clan and from region to region.⁵²³ In addition, the Christian missionaries had the backing of the government to support their cause which intensified the pathetic plight of the traditional religion and was done away with never to recover again.

In Christianity, the traditional sacrificial system had lost its meaning. The basis of it which was based on the twin concept of appeasing the hoard of malevolent spirits and the worshiping of the *Sakhuo* for a curative and material well-beings. However, both had lost their significances since the same could be achieved by offering prayers and allegiance to *Pathien/Jesus Christ*.⁵²⁴ Nevertheless, the spirit of giving lingers on and *Titles* (1/10 of the produce) and other contributions were gladly given even today.⁵²⁵ Rev. Merfyn Jones had reported that in 1946 in spite of floods that ravages their Village, the Hmars Christians living on the banks of the river Barak still enthusiastically raised money through offering to the Church. He further mentioned that three evangelists were entirely supported by the Hmar Church without any help from the mission.⁵²⁶ At the same time the doing away of traditional sacrifices was directly related to the relegation of the priestly class that had previously occupied an important place in the society.

Christianity was responsible for a paradigm shift in the traditional eschatology of the Hmars. In the traditional belief system, it was a common belief that when a man dies, his soul would either go to *Pielral* (ultimate abode for afterlife) or *Mithi khuo*

⁵²³ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Awmdan Hlui & Mizo Mi Leh Thil Hmingthangte Leh Mizo Sakhua*, p.152.

⁵²⁴ Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, pp.358-259. Hereafter cited as Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*.

⁵²⁵ Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, pp.358-259.

⁵²⁶ Vanlalchhunga, *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Sylhet-Bangladesh and Cachar-India, 1886-1955*, Silchar, Assam, Shalom Publications, 2003, pp.451-452.

(abode of the death) depending on his conduct in this world. The access to Pielral was limited to only *Thangsuo*, i.e., fulfilling certain feat and the required feasts for such deeds.⁵²⁷ The access to either *Pielral* or *Mithi Khuo* was more or less dictated by the society and the value of judgement was based on social practices. In every level, in the traditional belief systems god nor faith had nothing to do with it. On the contrary, in the Christian concept the fate of the human rest with God, therefore adherence to the Christian faith was believed to be the golden key to an access to *pielral* which was no longer limited to a few privileged groups. As such, it was possible for the Hmars to be easily converted to the new religion.⁵²⁸

4.6 Abolition of *Buonzawl/Zawlbuk*:

Buonzawl came under direct attack under the influence of the Christian missionaries as the hub bed of social evils where men under the influence of alcohol gathered together. However, there was more to it than a mere gathering place for the young men of the village. It was the nerve center, the integral part of the society and a means to dictate, direct, discipline and perpetuate and enliven the Hmar culture. *Buonzawl* was the guiding force of the society, symbolizing the village just as the Chief was to a tribe.⁵²⁹ An attack to it amounted to an undermining and a direct challenge to the traditional set up of the society.

The spread of Christianity among the people led to the gradual deterioration of the *Buonzawl* institution. Ironically, it was the native converts who were more vocal in raising their voices against *Buonzawl* than the missionaries. Most Christian converts saw *Buonzawl* as the place for drinking of *Zu* and its prohibition of women too was the concern of the households and the new converts. Moreover, the missionaries felt that *Buonzawl* had no direct bearing to the traditional belief system and thus did not

⁵²⁷ Lalnghawrlie, 'Mithi Khuo', in *Nunrobu*, Revised & Enlarged, Churachandpur, Hmar Literature society, 2013, pp.7-10.

⁵²⁸ Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, pp.360-363.

⁵²⁹ Rosanga, 'The Socio-Religious Impact of Colonial Rule: Mizoram', in *Laisuih (Ram leh Hnam Humhalhna)*, p. 237. Hereafter cited as Rosanga, *Colonial Rule*.

bring any suspicion of apostasy.⁵³⁰ On the other hand, the Christian converts perceived the *Buonzawl* institutions as contributing to the moral degeneration of the society. As married and unmarried men flocked together in the *Buonzawl*, it could act as a breeding ground for unhealthy gossips, rumours and scandals. The solidarity of the young men often prevented the disciplinary action by the Chiefs and elders and often the victims of this gossips who were mostly women were denied justice.⁵³¹

However, the immediate abolition of the age-old traditional practice was not an easy task. The first significant challenge came after the introduction of educational institution. Henceforth, parents refused to send their children to *Buonzawl* on the pretext that they could not study properly. Such challenge became more vocal in expression and this was noticeable when some young men who joined the British army during the World War I returned home with new ideas and opinion about the traditional culture of the Hmars. They began to question their age-old tradition. On the other hand, there were others who thought that the *Buonzawl* has greater positive influence in the society. For instance, N. E Perry stated that “the *Zawlbuk (Buonzawl)* was misconceptualized as a drinking bout where *Thlawmngaina* (selfless sacrifice to help others) was neglected due to lack of adequate knowledge which would have greatly strengthened the Church”.⁵³² He further lamented, “the mission influence was therefore, destructive, destroying good customs without a proper replacement.”⁵³³

As Christianity and education spreads, the traditional power of the chief over the people deteriorated as the colonial bureaucracy and the missionaries gradually replaced the traditional role of the chief of protecting the interest of the people. It had been stated that the policies of the British colonial power and the missionaries brought

⁵³⁰ Kipgen, p.176.

⁵³¹ Kipgen, pp.176-177.

⁵³² N E Parry, *The Lakhers*, Reprint, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram, 2009, p.22.

⁵³³ Parry, *The Lakhers*, p.22.

forth to some extent peace and stability in the society and the institution of Zawlbuk deteriorated further and finally was abolished in 1937.⁵³⁴

4.7 Emergence of a New Social Class:

Education among the Hmars initially was solely on the promotion of the mission and was strictly confined to religious teaching. In course of time more subjects were introduced without proper research for the practical needs of the students, thereby reducing education to examination oriented system, that is, “to make the pupil know the subject, to get through in the examination, and most importantly to be able to communicate and be able to read and understand English.⁵³⁵ English language gained prominence to such an extent that education became almost synonymous with being conversant in English and ignorant about the traditional cultures of the society. The aim of education now shifted from promotion of the mission to a new and easier economic prospect. Education became a gateway to salaried jobs and a ticket to get away from the often uncertain and labour intensive agriculture.⁵³⁶ It came to be associated with wealth and a more comfortable life-style. Education provided an alternative profession against the traditional mode of production, a salaried class and therefore the cash income beneficial came to constituted a new class in the society. This new class thus came to monopolize the social order resulting in social imbalances which eventually leads to the destabilization of the traditional society and became one of the instruments for the structural transformation of the traditional society.⁵³⁷

4.8 Abolition of Chieftainship:

Like the other ethnic divisions of the Mizos, the traditional head of the Hmars was the chief who was the absolute administrative head of the village and was supported and sustained by the collective needs of the households of the village.

⁵³⁴ Rosanga, Colonial Rule, p.238.

⁵³⁵ Pudaite, pp. 73-74.

⁵³⁶ Pudaite, p. 74.

⁵³⁷ Rosanga, Colonial Rule, pp.242-243.

Traditionally, chieftainship was hereditary and the youngest son inherited chieftainship and the property of his father. Under normal circumstances, the sons of the chief other than the youngest son were usually provided by their father an opportunity to build themselves up a new site or village and became a chief after attaining maturity along with a few households. The chief was, for all practical purposes the fountainhead of all power in the village.⁵³⁸ He was empowered to deal with all types of cases in the villages. Their prerogatives included the right to punish the guilty party even to the extent of expulsion from the village, *Fathang* (Paddy tax) or *Salam* (payment made by the guilty party in a case of dispute which may be paid in cash or kind). However, the chief was duty bound to protect the lives and property of his subjects. Moreover, his arbitrary power and authority was constrained by his fatherly attitude towards his subjects as well as the council of the *Upas* (elders) and the welfare of his subjects. At the same time, in the case of an extreme oppression the villagers could always migrate to another village.⁵³⁹

After the annexation of the present Mizoram, the Colonial authority made certain changes on the privileged and power of the traditional heads. This in fact adversely affected the previous status of the chief. For instance, the lands claimed and occupied by the chief was reverted to the Government, which the government then apportioned out to the chief, leaving the chief vanquished and bereft of their erstwhile authority.⁵⁴⁰ Furthermore, many of the traditional rights of the chief such as right to order capital punishment, right to seize property of the villagers, proprietary rights over lands, right to appoint heir, etc. were arbitrarily extinguished on grounds of the exigencies of the day.⁵⁴¹ Further, the households exposure to the outside civilization made them more aware of the political ideologies of the world and were now becoming less supportive of the traditional head. Political Party like the Mizo Union was formed by the educated elite which vehemently vouch for the abolition of chieftainship in the

⁵³⁸ Siama, p.19.

⁵³⁹ N Chatterji, *The Earlier Mizo Society*, 2nd Reprint, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, Dept. of Art & Culture, Govt. of Mizoram, 2008, pp.33-36.

⁵⁴⁰ Orestes Rosanga, 'Land Tenure System Under Colonial Rule: Mizoram, in *Proceedings of North East India History Association, Twenty Seventh Session*, Aizawl, Edited & Published by Manohar Sharma on behalf of North East India History Association, 2006, p.308.

⁵⁴¹ McCall, pp.201-202.

hills.⁵⁴² With pressure amounting from the Mizos, in 1954, an Act known as the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act was passed which came into force on 1 April, 1954, through which the land under the administration of the Chiefs were passed over to the District Council.⁵⁴³

4.9 The issue of the *Bawi* (Slavery) System:

There was no single matter on the issue of the *Bawi* system that had bred a tussle between the Missions on one hand and the colonial administration on the other. The roots of the controversy appeared on the interpretation and meaning of the term *bawi*. The term *bawi* had been referred to as 'slave' or 'retainer' in the *First Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, without any thorough investigation or knowledge on the subject. Dr. Fraser was the first missionary to raise the issue of *bawi* among the Mizos and he equated the treatment of the *bawi* with that of a slave. He alleged that the system was against the 1833 declaration of the British Parliament where slavery was banned all over the British Empire. Moreover, he asserted that it was against the Christian teachings. However, Major H W G Cole, the then Superintendent of the Lushai Hills felt that Fraser had misunderstood the services rendered by the *bawi* and therefore Dr. Fraser's allegation was null and void. Both endeavored to mobilize supporters to their respective stands and thus, escalating the issue to a major tussle between the mission worker and the administration which eventually led to the expulsion of Dr. Fraser from the Lushai Hills.⁵⁴⁴

According to McCall, *bawi* was a far cry from slavery as the former shared the various advantages common to the Chief's establishment such as lavish foods, drinks and meat without any physical restrictions and the possibility of buying one's own freedom by paying a *siel* or wild bison or its equivalent. One significant point to be noted here was its hereditary nature. In all matter including a family debt- a *bawi*

⁵⁴² Kipgen, pp.171-174.

⁵⁴³ Thanga, p.171.

⁵⁴⁴ P L Lianzuala, *Bawi Chhuah Duh Vanga Hnawl Tak, Rev. Dr. P Fraser-a (1908-1914)*, 2nd Edition, Aizawl, Mualchin Publication & Paper Works, 2012, pp.42-43.

children became a *bawi*. McCall argued that “interfering impetuously with the age-long, indigenous system of hereditary social obligation is dangerous and is bound to evoke controversy”.⁵⁴⁵

The situation was aggravated when in 1909, *Khawvelthanga*, a Christian convert freed all of his *bawi* by stating that he set them free in the name of the *Lord Jesus Christ* and *King Edward* (of England) and that no one would be able to enslave them again. The then Superintendent refused to officially acknowledge *Khawvelthanga's* public announcement.⁵⁴⁶ In order to cool down the issue, the Superintendent made an order in a local monthly magazine *Chanchin Bu*, stating that in the Lushai Hills any *bawi* could buy their freedom by paying ransom money and therefore would no longer be a slave. Thus, the term “Payment for board of household members” (*chhungte chawmman*) should be used in place of ‘*slave price*’ (*bawi man*).⁵⁴⁷ However, the problem became intensified and was more like an altercation between the British administration and the Welsh Mission Board. The latter for fear of negative impact thought that the wisest recourse to it was to persuade the authority for the abolition of the *bawi* system. Nevertheless, rather than adopting conciliatory approach, Fraser was forced out of the Lushai Hills.⁵⁴⁸ Although the *bawi* system was not solved in the hills the matter eventually deteriorated.

The real cause of the tussle between the colonial administration and the missionaries was power politics, a compulsion to control the destiny of the subjugated population with a perspective difference. The colonialist on the other hand felt that they had the imperial power to control the people as their colonization was the outcome of a long warfare. While the missionaries felt that they were on a civilizing mission they were more obligated to free the people from the ceremonial holds of traditions.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁵ McCall, pp. 121-126.

⁵⁴⁶ Lianzuala, *Bawi Chhuah Duh Vanga Hnawl Tak*, Rev. Dr. P Fraser-a (1908-1914), p.83.

⁵⁴⁷ Kipgen, p.156.

⁵⁴⁸ Kipgen, pp.153-160.

⁵⁴⁹ Nag, *The Uprising; Colonial State, Christian Missionaries, and Anti-Slavery Movement in North-East India 1908-1945*, p.163.

In the end both became the winner. The colonial administration was successful in demonstrating its legitimate power in bringing about the expulsion of Dr Fraser when the latter refused to come to terms with the authority. At the same time, the missionaries' quest for the abolition of the *bawi* system was eventually realized by the administration and a more pathetic dealings were done on the *bawi* holders.

4.10 Introduction of Modern Health Care system:

After the occupation of the then Lushai Hills by the British, the traditional perceptions and approaches towards sickness and diseases gradually give way to western medicines and modern doctors. To this end the work of the missionaries were indispensable. The Hmars traditionally upheld that all sickness and diseases were the outcome of the wrath of the evil spirits and the only solution was appeasement with several sacrifices of animals. In the initial stage of colonization and the mission in its infancy stage, the natives were anxious and hesitant towards the western medicines. Moreover, the fabrication of rumour such as the medicines contained a mixture of various human organs doing the rounds made them uneasy and hesitant towards the western medicines.⁵⁵⁰ The *Thiempu* whose profession and status were undermined by the new emerging wave tried their best to dissuade the people to avoid western medicine. Nevertheless, the western medicines steadily gained precedence over the traditional methods of curing sickness by means of sacrifices.

The Missionary who had made a deep impact with regards to western medicines was Dr. Fraser who came to the Lushai Hills during 1908 to 1912. Initially, his house located at Mission veng (area), Aizawl served as his clinic where his porch was used to be filled with patients. From 1910, the then Assistant Superintendent Mr. Dixon gifted him a makeshift tent for his clinic. It was said that in 1909 alone, he had

⁵⁵⁰ Zothanpuii, 'Colonial Health Services in Mizoram: Introduction of Western Medicines, Establishment of Dispensaries and Hospitals', p. 139.

tended 24,000 patients.⁵⁵¹ This was quite large considering the total population of the Lushai Hill at that time which was believed to constitute about 82434 people only.⁵⁵²

The colonial administration established a *Treatment Camp* in 1894 at Aizawl to cater to the labourers which was upgraded to a dispensary with twenty beds in 1896. In around 1904-1905, Aizawl Civil Hospital was constructed although initially aiming the labourers and the non-Mizos. Rapidly, the authority felt the growing necessity for a hospital to cater to the needs of the growing population.⁵⁵³ Even in 1942, the Civil Hospital at Aizawl had only 42 beds, where this was divided into 20 beds for males and 22 beds for females.⁵⁵⁴ From 1944 to 1950, there were 13 Hospitals and Dispensaries all over Mizoram.⁵⁵⁵ However, the hospitals were ill-equipped especially with regards to infrastructure. For instance, at the Aizawl Civil Hospital, an operating theatre was available but without an X-ray plant. Moreover, the hospital had no nursing facilities.⁵⁵⁶ Nonetheless, there were records to prove that the Government had taken drastic necessary action in times of an outbreak of epidemic. In 1939, the government issued an order to immunized all unprotected persons and children from a small-pox infested area.⁵⁵⁷ Again in 1948, there was a record that Dr. Rohawka SAS i/c epidemic unit had visited diarrhoea affected village to dispense treatments.⁵⁵⁸

The traditional practice of healing which was a combination of sacrifices and incantations as advised by the village *thiempu* (Priest) and modern pharmacology as was reflected by the use of jungle plants and herbs to heal on wounds and sores,⁵⁵⁹ did not stand a chance against the western system of healing using a modern medicine which was much more affordable for the common people.

⁵⁵¹ J V Hluna, *Mizoram Hmar Biel Missionary-te Chanchin*, Chhut hnihna, Aizawl, Synod Literature & Publication Board, 2003, p.80.

⁵⁵² Census of India, 1901, Vol IV-A, Assam, Part-II, by B G Allen (of the Indian Civil Service), superintendent of Census Operation, Shillong, Printed at the Assam, Secretariat Printing Office, 1902, p.2.

⁵⁵³ Zothanpuui, pp. 133 & 135.

⁵⁵⁴ CB-1/SL-12(HD), Mizoram State Archives.

⁵⁵⁵ CB-1/SL-17 (HD), Mizoram State Archives.

⁵⁵⁶ CB-1/SL-12 (HD), Mizoram State Archives.

⁵⁵⁷ CB-1/SL-8 (HD-8), Mizoram State Archives.

⁵⁵⁸ CB-2/SL-16 (HD), Mizoram State Archives.

⁵⁵⁹ McCall, p.178.

Complementing with the introduction of Christianity was a change in perception towards personal hygiene, which came to be associated with Christian theology, and physical cleanliness was emphasized. A notion came to imbibe upon the converts that, “*To be a worthy Christian, one’s body, mind and soul should be clean and pure*”, which made them more aware of a clean surrounding.⁵⁶⁰

4.11 Decline of Traditional Customs and Traditions:

The introduction of Christianity and education destabilized the traditional customs and traditions of the Hmars to such an extent that some practices declined permanently. The missionaries and the early converts joined forces in denouncing the traditional norms which they thought were not in conformity with the new faith. In this regard, the early converts strived hard exaggeratingly degrading the traditional culture in the most despicable and loathsome manner to the extent of characterizing it as *devil-worshiper* and *head-hunters*.⁵⁶¹ For instance, the saying that Christianity had transformed the Hmars from ‘head-hunting’ to ‘soul-hunting’ speaks for itself. But the point that needed to be stressed here was that as the inter-tribal/inter-clan warfare was a common sight among the Hmars, to slay the enemy and brought home the head was a symbol of victory.⁵⁶² Moreover, the slaying of the enemy was entwined deeply with the belief system as it was reckoned as part of a feature of *Pasaltha* (Valor/bravery), a necessity asset to gain access to *Pielral*, an ultimate abode for the after-life.⁵⁶³ It was argued that Christianity and the acts of the Government unveiled the fallacy of such action and the practice of head-hunting soon disappeared without any coercion or even condemnation in the society.⁵⁶⁴

In the context of head-hunting, even the colonial ethnographer like Shakespeare had written that among the Luseis and their kindred clans head-hunting was a mere

⁵⁶⁰ Lalthankhum Sinate, ‘Chanchin tha le Changkangna’, p.7.

⁵⁶¹ Pudaite, p.68.

⁵⁶² O Rosanga, ‘Theorizing the Concept of Mizo Hero: An Indigenous Perspective’, in Historical Journal Mizoram. Vol.XVIII, September 2017, Aizawl, Mizo History Association, p.21.

⁵⁶³ Ruolngul, ‘Chanchintha Leia Manipur Simthlang Biela Inthlakdanglamna’, hereafter will be cited as Ruolngul, Chanchintha, p.26.

⁵⁶⁴ Sangkima, *Mizos: Society and Social Change (1890-1947)*, p. 155.

incident during raids for plunders. But it was believed that on the demise of a chief, 'a party at once set out to kill people to served and adorned the chief in the after-life too, was a pure invention with nothing to lend support to it'.⁵⁶⁵ It may be noted that the basic cause of these raids were for loots and plunder, but bringing of the enemy's head became a symbol to prove that they truly killed the enemy. To stereotyped the whole community based on a particular act in times of particular situation (warfare between enemies) committed by an individual would seem unjust and biased. Likewise, the inhuman and heinous acts committed during the French Revolution of 1789-1795 did not make the French 'blood thirsty or beheader'. This misconception was a result of the devastating impact of colonization of ever spheres of life including the attitude and outlook of the people.⁵⁶⁶

Christianity insisted on '*sanctification of Sunday*' and devoted it for church fellowships and to abstain on that day from manual work. This bred provocation and hostility towards Christianity from some section of the population which was understandable from the stand point of their subsistence economy. For even if they had worked hard all throughout the week, there was no guarantee that they would produce enough to survive. They were apprehensive about the younger population's refusal to work on Sunday due to their conversion to Christianity. However, if they had known that Christianity and its complementary education system would open up a new horizon in the economic realm, we might have encountered a whole new perspective.⁵⁶⁷ Still, there was no denying that the early converts exhibited a negative biasness to anything that was remotely connected with traditions. For instance, the display of courtship between the unmarried man and woman was discouraged. For example, *Chawikungi*, a lady from *Sumsuih* village was denied admission to active member of the Church on account that some young man had courted her in her house.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁵ Shakespear, pp.59-60.

⁵⁶⁶ Lal Dena, 'Keynote Adress', in S Haukhanlian Mate & Vanrammawii (ed) *Customs and Traditions of the Hill Peoples of North East India*, New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2015, pp.6-7.

⁵⁶⁷ Sinate, p.2.

⁵⁶⁸ Lala Khobubg, 'Ei Ni Lai a Kristian Hmasahai', in *Chanchin Tha Thilthwtheina (The Power of The Gospel)*, Shillong, The Evangelical Free Church of India, 2011, p.87.

Christianity undermined the traditional marriage system resulting in the emergence of the 'Christian Marriage'. A Christian marriage was usually solemnized in the Church in the hands of a Pastor after the blessings of both the Parents of the couple. It was a fusion of traditional and Christian elements, other than the Church ceremony, the whole process was more or less similar with *Sawngpuia innei*, the Hmar traditional system of marriage.⁵⁶⁹ Both the systems composed of courting before marriage, engaging intermediary to mediate and the practices of bride-price was still in vogue. The traditional marriage was more of a civil contract comprising of a series of rites, ceremonies and rituals associated with both the benevolent and malevolent spirits. To which Christian ways was fused discarding the rites, ceremonies and rituals unacceptable to the purview of Christianity. For instance, the traditional *Zu* has been replaced by snack and tea. The one domain that Christianity did not have much impact was with regards to customs relating to divorce except in the realm of the Christian ethos. Christianity, not surprisingly discouraged divorce of any kind.⁵⁷⁰

Regarding customs relating to death and burial, social distinction and the treatment meted out to the dead bodies of a chief, commoner, *sarhi* (unexpected or sudden death), etc., ceases after the advent of Christianity. Every dead body was buried in a particular area reserved for the death body called *Thlanmual* (Cemetery), a common ground.⁵⁷¹

It had been stated that Christianity eradicated the irrational fear of the *Khawhri* (evil spirit) and the *Dawi* (sacrifices) connected with the attempt to propitiate it.⁵⁷² The household of a village gradually came to be enlightened about the causes of certain diseases, thereby gradually abandoning the age-old belief in the evil spirits. The traditional *Thiempu* (Priest) also gradually lost their importance in the society. The

⁵⁶⁹ S Haukhanlian Mate & Vanrammawii, 'Aspects of Social & Cultural Changes-Mizo Society and Colonial Rule', in N William Singh, Malsawmdawnglian & Saichampuii (ed) *Becoming Something Else: Society & Change in India's North East*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, p. 56.

⁵⁷⁰ S Haukhanlian Mate & Vanrammawii, 'Aspects of Social & Cultural Changes-Mizo Society and Colonial Rule', pp.55-57.

⁵⁷¹ Sangkima, p.141.

⁵⁷² Siama, p.60.

futility and expenses involved in the exhaustive sacrifices as well as the acquaintance with the modern method of health care system proved the last straw for the decaying of the old mode of dealing with various types of treatments. Education enlightened and provided insight into certain occurrence such as diseases hitherto within the unknown domain and thereby contributed to the freeing of the society under the clutches of taboos associated with ignorance.⁵⁷³

Christianity condemned the drinking of *Zu* (rice beer) which occupied an important place in the traditional society. *Zu* was commonly used by the households on the occasion of feasts, successful hunt, to past the time after hard labour and to entertain guests. There was absolutely no inhibition against the consumption of it in the society and one can truly equate it with water and what is tea to the present generation.⁵⁷⁴

Under Christianity the consumption of *Zu* was attacked severely by the Christian new converts, resulting in the 'diminishing of it under the influence of mission teaching'.⁵⁷⁵ The missionaries emphasized that drinking *Zu* was a sin. The acceptance of such proclamation implies a total break away from traditional cultures including the belief system as *Zu* was also a part of the religious act. The diminishing of *Zu* drinking indirectly reflected the complete assimilation under the stronger mission enterprise backed up by the colonial authority.⁵⁷⁶

Moreover, Christianity substituted the traditional festivals with Christian system of festivals. Gradually important festivals such as Mim Kut, Pawl Kut, etc waned and declined.⁵⁷⁷ Attempt had been made to revive traditional festivals in the modern times and care had been taken to modify in order to conform with Christian

⁵⁷³ Ruolngul, Chanchintha, p.29.

⁵⁷⁴ Sinate, p.1.

⁵⁷⁵ McCall, p.194.

⁵⁷⁶ Rosanga, Colonial Rule, p.239.

⁵⁷⁷ Sangkima, p.144.

precepts and teaching. For instance, care had been taken in avoiding the traditional use of *Zu* in the celebration of *Sikpui Ruoi*.



Fahrel Tawk Lam at Chapchar Kut celebration 2020; Saitual, Mizoram

4.12 Status of Women:

In the context of men and women, *Status refers to the value attached to men and women by society* along with the degree of the authority, rights and privileges enjoyed by them for being either a man or a woman.⁵⁷⁸ Radcliffe-Brown stated that at any given period, the status of a person was related to the totality of rights and duties recognized by the social usages of the society to which the person was affiliated.⁵⁷⁹ The relative status of the Hmar woman to that of the man could be seen reflected in the different forms of the Hmar folk songs, folklores, and through oral sources. Folklores, art and rituals, according to Gerda Lerner were the product of both man and woman, they both shared in preserving the collective memory that shaped the past into cultural traditions. It therefore, provided a link between generations, and connected the past and future.⁵⁸⁰ It therefore, no doubt served as an indispensable means for

⁵⁷⁸ Carol R Ember & Melvin Ember (ed), *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender; Men and Women in the World's Cultures*, New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003, p. (xiv).

⁵⁷⁹ Radcliffe-Brown, p.37.

⁵⁸⁰ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.4.

understanding the past. The status of woman would also involve the evaluation of the women's role in the society, how far they partake in the production and distribution of important resources. Their relative status was also effected by the "state of the society such as the presence or absence of a warfare".⁵⁸¹ The status of the Hmar women can be divided into two periods, viz., pre-colonial and post-colonial period respectively.

(a) Pre-colonial Status of Women:

Investigating the pre-colonial status of Hmar women was very complex and their representation could be gained from the folksongs, folklores, various sayings and the traditional role played by the women in the society. Gerda Lerner asserted that the value and implications by virtue of biological differences between man and woman were construed by cultures.⁵⁸² Traditionally, women were assigned all the domestic chores, while the menfolk were associated with work considered outside the household domain.⁵⁸³ However, the menfolk understandably also contributed in meeting the household needs in both the domestic and the outside realm. The woman had to work from dawn till late at night. C Lianthanga stated that "the woman days begun with carrying water from the village water-hole, separating the husk from the rice, cooking for the family and then accompanying the men to the agricultural site or *Lo*. Besides this, she was burdened with all the works related to caring for the households including weaving for the family, taking care of the kids and the domesticated animals".⁵⁸⁴ In fact, the only time out she had was the time she could finally go to bed.⁵⁸⁵ In spite of this, the contribution of the menfolk in the society was given precedence as it involved working outside the domestic purview which enable the family to sustain a living. Moreover, the society which was intricately linked with the *Pasaltha* (hero/brave/successful hunter), who were put on a high pedestal by dint of being directly related to the society's safety and security in times when inter-tribal enmity was a common phenomenon.⁵⁸⁶ To Simone de Beauvoir, 'the worst curse for women

⁵⁸¹ Maxine L Margolis, 'The Relative Status of Men and Women', in Carol R Ember & Melvin Ember (ed), *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender; Men and Women in the World's Cultures*, New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003, p. 137.

⁵⁸² Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p.6.

⁵⁸³ James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, Aizawl, Gilzom Offset, 1992, pp.264-265.

⁵⁸⁴ C Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, Revised & Second Edition, Lunglei, Published by Mizoram Publication Board, 2000, p.14.

⁵⁸⁵ C Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, p.14.

⁵⁸⁶ Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, pp.314-315.

was her exclusion from the warrior expeditions'. This was her ground for subordination as society exalted a person that risked his life to kill and protect over the person that gave birth.⁵⁸⁷

One of the chief features of patrilineal system was reflected in the popular anecdote that content that 'women and crab had no *Sakhuo* (religion)'. *Sakhuo* can be interpreted as an identity which was performed by every household. A woman had to share the *Sakhuo* of her father by birth or husband after marriage. Being with no identity, she not only had no property rights, even the child that she gave birth and brought up belonged to the husband and his family.⁵⁸⁸ However, Simon de Beauvoir contended that social system such as patrilineal, matrilineal, bilateral or undifferentiated did not have a bearing on the women's actual condition as she was always under men's guardianship. The only question was under whose authority did she belonged; her father, brother or husband. Beauvoir further stated that, the basis of marriage, i.e. the relationship of reciprocity was not established between the man and woman, on the contrary, it was between men, only using woman as the means.⁵⁸⁹

The women were excluded from *Buonzawl*, one of the most important social institution in a Hmar village. *Buonzawl* was highly regarded as it was an institution which shaped the society based on the traditional customs and practices. It was both a social and educational institution where the male members of the society formed a part of it from a very tender age learnt to be an acknowledged person in the society. Women hardly ever visited the *Buonzawl* although there was no restriction associated with their visit. Yet, woman who ventured into it were perceived as a woman with a questionable morality as it was regarded to be strictly a male domain.⁵⁹⁰ The traditional exclusion of women to such important social aspects reveals the subversive nature and the reduction of women to their male counterpart. But this was still

⁵⁸⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, New York, Vintage Books, 2011, p.99.

⁵⁸⁸ Dokhuma, pp.313-314.

⁵⁸⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp.105-105.

⁵⁹⁰ C Lalbiaknema, *Zawlbuk Titi*, Aizawl, Published by Mizoram Publication Board, 2000, p.6.

debatable since, even though *bounzawl* was considered to be the male domain, there was no prohibition against a woman visiting it.

Even though the tasks performed by both men and women in the Hmar society were indispensable to the survival of the group. One was given precedence over the other. Ron O'Brian stated that the inter gender and economic activity such as work related to the supply of food and shelter were interrelated and that every society genderized these activities.⁵⁹¹ Gender implies culturally based norms, values or behavior that a particular society assigned to the male or female of the species by virtue of their sex.⁵⁹² Society indoctrinated both man and woman with the male defined value system and to conduct their lives according to that value system. Respectability and deviance were defined by restraints, coercion and discrimination and at the same time awarding the conforming woman.⁵⁹³ For instance, the society imposed double standard moral values. The virtue of a woman was exemplified by chastity and self-restraint. A virgin woman was considered as a pure being, endowed with certain privileges like escaping the wrath of Paula's sling on her way to the abode of the death. It was stated that "a special resting place was allocated for them even if they happened to pass away".⁵⁹⁴ On the contrary, the concept of the ideal man involves the deflowering of as many virgins as possible in his life time to escape *Paula's* wrath.⁵⁹⁵

In the pretext of the welfare of a woman, many taboos were associated with her natural phenomenon such as menstruation and pregnancy, restraining their freedom and mobility in the society. Many prohibitions were associated with a pregnant woman such as avoiding certain types of foods, restricting her movement and

⁵⁹¹ Robin O'Brian, 'Economic Activities and Gender Roles', in Carol R Ember & Melvin Ember (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender; Men and Women in the World's Cultures*, New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003, p.91.

⁵⁹² Edwin S Segal, 'Cultural Construction of Gender', in Carol R Ember & Melvin Ember (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender; Men and Women in the World's Cultures*, New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2003, p.3.

⁵⁹³ Gerda Lerner, 'Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges', *Feminist Studies*, Vol-3, No.1/2 (Autum), 1975, p.5, <http://links.jstor.org>. (accessed 21 November 2014).

⁵⁹⁴ C Lalbiaknema, *Mizote Khawsak* Dan, Aizawl, Mizo Publication Board, 2000, p.108

⁵⁹⁵ Lalbiaknema, *Mizote Khawsak* Dan, p.108.

prohibition of certain types of work which were in other words, regarded as abnormal events and employed it as a tool to incapacitate them.⁵⁹⁶

Folklores often reflected the presence of women as the leading character in the society. However, they were often depicted as frail, helpless, and a pathetic being whose worth rested on the mercies of the men. In *Pawthir and Hrangchal*, the leading character *Kungawri*'s was tricked into marriage by *Sairampa* (Elephant who can take the form of a man). Once the parents came to learn of it, they desperately seek ways to rescue her. Luckily two friends, *Pawthira* and *Hrangchala* decided to take the quest and subsequently succeeded. However, the quest was rather a bumpy one. In one instance they had to spend the night on a road infested by malevolent spirits, resulting in the capture of *Kungawri* and *Hrangchala* (the timid one among the two friends). Later on, by deception and cunningness, *Hrangchala* and *Kungawri* reached home and left behind the real hero *Pawthira*. *Kungawri* was married to *Hrangchala*, passing her from one man to another. This represented *Kungawri* as a helpless being who needed the protection of a man, but at the same time, ignoring the quality of the so called man. "Insinuating that being 'man' was a quality more than enough for a suitor of a damsel in distress".⁵⁹⁷ Such instances were also seen in the story of *Mauruong*. Although *Mauruong* was an honest and hard-working lass, untold miseries had befallen her. She lost her mother at a very tender age, and thus she had a very harsh childhood. Later on in life, fortune began to smile upon her. She became the bride of *Vailal* (a non-Hmar chief).⁵⁹⁸ If the marriage of *Mauruong* to *Vailal* was considered as a fortune, it would imply that status of women was related to security and marriage. The contention put forth by Gerda Lerner to portrayed the subordination of women that she always 'shared the class privileges of men of their class as long as they are under the protection of a man' could not be more relevant for the Hmars.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Vara, Nunphung, pp.131-132.

⁵⁹⁷ Lal Dena, Folk Tales, pp. 151-158.

⁵⁹⁸ Laltluangliana Khiangte, *Mizo Folklore-I; Folktales of Mizoram*, Aizawl, LTL Publications, & Art & Culture Department, Mizoram, 1997, pp.141-149.

⁵⁹⁹ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p.218. hereafter known as Gerda Lerner, Patriarchy.

One sided social expectation towards women was also depicted in the story of *Liendohai Unau*. *Liendo* and his younger brother were orphaned by their father at a very tender age. Their mother remarried a man from another village leaving behind her two offspring to fend for themselves.⁶⁰⁰ In narrating the story, one sided double standard treatment towards a woman was prominent. The woman was written off as incompetent and an unfit mother for leaving her young children behind.⁶⁰¹ On the other hand, the story focused on the miserable lives of the two brothers all the while blaming the heartless and insensitive mother on how she could have subjected her own children to such wretched conditions. Later on, fortune began to smile upon *Liendo* and his brother and they became very rich. The Chief's daughter who had somehow learnt about the hidden secret wealth of the brothers had chosen *Liendo* as a husband. Yet, the chief being unaware of the secret wealth of *Liendo*, hastily chopped off her poor daughter's limb just for choosing a poor man as a husband.⁶⁰² Its distressing to lose a limb for exercising a personal choice in one's own marriage in an era where marriage by choice was almost akin with basic human rights. The above story strongly suggested the evidence of the existence of subjugation and helplessness of the pre-colonial Hmar women.

In the story of *Renghawngghawi* who was reflected as a beautiful woman, and had earned the undying love of her husband in spite of being foolish enough to let herself be captured by *Vailal's* (non-Hmar chief) men due to her naivety in not heeding to her husband's words. The story of *Renghawngghawi* suggested that 'the virtues of women were constructed by the society in such a manner that passivity and physical appearance were given preeminence. A virtuous woman was epitomize as being fair, beautiful, graceful and pleasing to the eyes, while ugliness was associated with vile nature'.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Lal Rinawma, *Thawnthu Un (Mizo Thawnthu)*, Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl, K L Offset Printers, 2013, pp.126-141.

⁶⁰¹ Rinawma, *Thawnthu Un (Mizo Thawnthu)*, p.126.

⁶⁰² Rinawma, p.139.

⁶⁰³ Lalhmachhuana Zofa, *Mizo Thawnthu*, vol-I, pp.75- 80.

The traditional Hmars as a whole were courteous and well-mannered. On the contrary their treatment towards woman were altogether different. For instance, a husband never used a polite tone in speaking to his wife and one who did so was often loathe at, jokingly referred to as a henpeck.⁶⁰⁴ Traditional anecdotes often manifested the status of women. For example-

Nuhmei var in tuikhur ral a kai nawh

(A women's wisdom does not go beyond the village water-hole)

Nuhmei sie le pal sie chu thlak thei an ni

(A wife and an old picked fences can be replaced).⁶⁰⁵

However, certain customs integral to the Hmar culture vouch for the protections of the woman in the case of any physical violation of the intimate private parts. As such, in case of violation the guilty man had to pay a *Siel* (a wild bison) and a *Salam* depending on the intensity of the case. A *siel* was to be given to the victim whereas *Salam* which usually involved the slaughtering of a pig and a fine had to be paid for tainting the reputation of the village, and was usually shared by the *Chief* and his *elders*.⁶⁰⁶ Traditionally, the Hmars society did respect women, but in reality the women were considered to be weaker and needed to be protected and safeguarded against their male counterparts. But in some cases, the women were subordinated by the men and the latter became dominant in the village activities. Masculinity was an accepted fact where the society depended much on the expenses of the men.

Traditional belief system, an integral part of the Hmars prejudiced against the woman in various dimension. Those belief system frequently involved the propitiations of the super natural beings. In the ceremonies, the *Thiempu* was always the key player and was also mostly dominated by the male section of the society.

⁶⁰⁴ Saizawna, *Pi Pute Tawngkauchheh*, p.16.

⁶⁰⁵ Lalmalsawmi, 'Impact of Christianity Among the Hmar Women of Manipur', in S Haukhanlian Mate & Vanrammawii (ed), *Customs and Traditions of the Hill Peoples of North East India*, New Delhi, Akansha Publishing House, 2016, p.161.

⁶⁰⁶ Vara, Nunphung, pp.41-43.

Pielral, the ultimate abode of an after-life was accessible for the women only with the assistance of their male-counterparts, i.e., by virtue of marrying a *Thangsuopa*.⁶⁰⁷

The picture of the pre-colonial Hmar women was not all about melancholy and unpleasantness. There were some capable women who raised against the odds and carved out an unforgettable name in the history of the Hmars. In this connection, mention may be made of poetess named *Chongtling* (commonly known as *Bapuinu*) and *Pi Hmuoki*, also called *Chawngmuok*. *Bapuinu*'s daughter was captured and enslaved by *Tusing Faihriem*, Chief from *Zampui*. As the said chief was very well-off, *Bapuinu* could not think of any gift for *Tusing Faihriem* to trade with her daughter's freedom.⁶⁰⁸ *Pi Hmuoki* was another notable poetess. She became inconsolable and so grief stricken after the demise of her husband that she put her heart and soul into composing songs, composing one melancholic songs after another. But, every household of the village became apprehensive that if *Pi Hmuoki* continued to compose more songs there would be none left for others. They, therefore buried her alive.⁶⁰⁹ The latter was even considered as the first *Mizo* to compose a song.⁶¹⁰ Moreover, the status of the Hmar woman was also reflected in the many design and pattern of their traditional *Puon* (cloth), which was basically the domain of the women folk. Tradition stated that *Zawlhling*, a beautiful maiden from *Shan* had inspired the women of her generation with her style and taste. She was also attributed with the introduction of a new type of 'pattern' in *Puon* commonly known as *Hmaram* or *Lenbuonthuom*.⁶¹² Yet, the presence of a notable or exceptional woman in history did not represented the experiences of the mass of women, as it failed to instruct us with regards to the activities of the common women in the society.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁷ S Haukhanlian Mate & Vanrammawii, 'Colonialism and Status of Mizo Women: In the Perspective of Change and Continuity', *Historical Journal Mizoram*, Vol-XVI, 2016, p.133.

⁶⁰⁸ Songate, pp.88-93.

⁶⁰⁹ Zawla, pp.309-310.

⁶¹⁰ Lalthangfala Sailo, 'Mizo Hla Hluia Hnam Ziarang', in *Zo Kal Siam*, Aizawl, Mizo Academy of Letters, p.3.

⁶¹² T Khuma Songate, *Ram Zunleng*, p.32.

⁶¹³ Lerner, 'Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges', p.5.

Traditional folklores projected the essence of women with a negative representation such as frail, helpless and sometimes even cruel to others. But the Hmar women did not altogether lack the positive aspect in assisting others. For instance, in the folklore *Liendo hai Unau*, an old and frail woman named *Fapite* who possessed a magical spell was associated with *Liendo* and his brother's sudden turn of fortune.⁶¹⁴

In the religious field, among the host of Super Natural beings associated with the Hmar's belief system included beings possessing feminine essence, viz., *Khuonu* and *Lasi*. *Khuonu*, believed to be the god of nature was more prevalent and even superseded its male counterpart *Khuopa*. Whereas *Lasis* were a beautiful fairy living in cliffs and precipices, often endowing blessing to the traditional hunters. The *Lasis* were also believed to be the guardian of the forest.⁶¹⁵ Yet, supernatural being possessing either a male or female essence was not imperative as it was the men who decided whether supreme divinities would be males or females. It was always the men who assigned the place of the women in the society.⁶¹⁶ There were women known to be *Dawithiem* (magician) who were also known as traditional healer. In fact, the first *Dawithiem* among the Hmar was a woman, *Thairanchawng* the wife of *Sura*. The renowned magician in the Hmar mythology. *Lalruong's* girlfriend who later on defeated him too, was a great magician. According to tradition, *Zangkak* who was also known as *Supheikak* was furious at *Lalruong* for revealing the physical relationship they shared together thereby breaching 'the pact of silence' till the birth of their child. By tricking him, she trapped *Lalruong* inside a huge rock till his death. In the story, *Zangkaki* sent an intermediary to *Lalruong* to visit her on the pretext that she was carrying his child. It was alleged that *Lalruong* on his way to see her lost one of the strongest *dawibur* (a kind of a magical equipment). On reaching *Zangkaki's* resident, she sweet talked *Lalruong* to sleep on her lap and once he felt asleep she started casting her spell on him till her house was turned into a stone trapping *Lalruong* inside it.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁴ Vanlal Tluonga Bapui, *Assam Rama Hmarhai*, pp.189-190.

⁶¹⁵ Thiek, pp. 284 & 288.

⁶¹⁶ Simone de Beavior, p.111.

⁶¹⁷ Bapui, Assam, p. 202.

Although the profession of *Thiempu* (Priest) was within the male domain traditionally, there are few examples where this domain was penetrated, and one encountered a female priestess. In this regard, a priestess named *Thangtinkim* from the Cachar hills was worth mentioning. It was said that she possessed a super natural healing power such as the ability to heal magically a knife wound and was also claimed to possess a prophetic vision that enabled her to foretell the future. It was further claimed that she converted to Christianity during the 1960s.⁶¹⁸

N Chatterji had stated that the Hmar (Mizo) society had not only endowed equal treatment of man and women, it had taken the extreme steps of ensuring her safety and security even to the extent of imposing a heavy fine. Her main contention was based on the mutual inter-dependency of both man and women for the survival of their community-based culture in spite of their differences in responsibility. And the comparison between the Mizo women with that of the more advanced plain societies.⁶¹⁹ It may be argued that on a glance, the society of the Hmars endowed an opportunity for capable women to rise above and carved out an undying name for themselves. Yet, it has been stated that it was the same society that excluded the women in the *Buonzawl*, the *nerve centre* of the society, the same society that decreed a double standard custom, on one hand framing an elaborate law against adultery committed by woman while at the same time silent on man and adultery.⁶²⁰

The pre-colonial Hmar women although enjoyed certain amount of freedom and opportunity, they were excluded in certain areas considered to be the male dominion.

⁶¹⁸ Hrilrokhum Thiek (80 years), Interview by Self On 24 January 2017 at Halflong, Assam.

⁶¹⁹ Chatterji, *The Earlier Mizo Society*, pp.2 & 29-30.

⁶²⁰ Mate & Vanrammawii, *Historical Journal Mizoram*, p.132.

(b) Status of Women in the colonial period

Colonialism introduced new innovations and completely transformed the traditional Hmar Society. The household including women adopted Christianity and the western education, which were the twin offshoots of colonialism.

The Christian missionaries were the pioneer of female education. Initially, parents were reluctant to send their daughters to school. They were indispensable to the household in lending a helping hand to almost all the daily household chores. Moreover, fear psychology engulfed the traditional society that educated female would become a liability rather than an asset for the household.⁶²¹ They fear that educated women would care more for their looks over their chores and that it would be difficult for educated women to find a husband. Nevertheless, there were some examples of girls privileged enough to enjoy western education from the very initial period of its introduction. For instance, in 1901, three *bawi* girls, viz., Pawngi, Hnunuziki (Ziki) and Challiankuki from the household of a Zote Chief, could learn to read and write due to the benevolent attitude of their kind mistress who was inclined towards Christianity. Later on, the girls were freed from their enslavement and became an indispensable in promoting female education.⁶²²

The gender classification of the society was taken to a new level during the colonial period. For instance, the first school for girls opened in Aizawl in 1904 introduced vocational courses such as *sewing, knitting, simple medication, sanitation and child care*. In the initial stage, medical and teaching were the only professions that the girls were encouraged to enrolled.⁶²³

However, Darliensung stated: “in spite of stimulating certain changes in the society, Christianity failed to make any impact on certain customs of the Hmar that

⁶²¹ Interview with C C Rema (83 years).

⁶²² Hluna, Education, pp.150 & 152.

⁶²³ Hluna, Education, pp. 154 &159.

relegated the women to a secondary position. The symbolization of a marriage by the bride-price, signifying woman as equivalent to commodity that can be purchased, to be borne by the groom's family was still in practice. The verbal proclamation of divorce still acts as adequate ground for divorce".⁶²⁴ Further, it had been remarked that "in the name of providing anchorage to perpetuate tribal identity and cultures, very often individual and gender choices were foreclosed, in the end, it was always the women folk that were relegated to a lower status".⁶²⁵

It was to be noted that the pre-colonial Hmars solely depended upon shifting cultivation for their livelihood. The division of labour was in such a manner that all the domestic chores were taken care off by the women folk, besides lending help on cultivation, while for the menfolk, gendering of labour which was the product of the societal construction cultivated an aversion to the domestic chores to such an extent that they deemed unmanly even to be a part of it.⁶²⁶ As mentioned above during the colonial period there was great transformation in the daily activities of the women. Women have started venturing out of their home to take up government jobs in different sectors, or started a business or took part in different service sectors. Economic compulsions combining with the desire for a better life was the main motivating force here.⁶²⁷ This had become a far cry from the traditional disgraceful sayings connected with women such as *Nuhmei var in tuikhur ral a Kai naw* (A women wisdom does not cross over the village water-hole), etc. Women now possessed a much higher status in the society, and even their involvement in the society increased tremendously. Now, a woman working outside of the domestic purview was often regarded as an extension of the household chores. In such scenario, they were often less efficient professionally as they had to balance between their work and the culturally constructed roles assigned by the society. To borrow the word of Kamala Basin in the context of the Hmar women that "the professional gap rises in favour of

⁶²⁴ Hmar, p.94.

⁶²⁵ Ruth Lalsiemsang Buongpui, 'Gender Relations and the Web of Traditions in Northeast India', *The NEHU Journal*, vol-XI, No.2, July 2013, p.79, <https://www.nehu.ac.in/files/journals>, (accessed 23 August 2018).

⁶²⁶ Chitta Ranjan Nag, *The Mizo Society in Transition*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1993, p.10.

⁶²⁷ Lalhmasai Chuaungo, 'Women's Contribution to Socio-Economic Development with Particular reference to Mizoram' in Lalneihzovi (ed), *Changing Status of women in North Eastern States*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2009, p.76.

the man as they can and are capable of exhibiting their undivided attention to their job”.⁶²⁸



Hmar girls in their traditional attire

Lawmsanga stated: “Contrary to the marginalization of women in the traditional *Sakhuo Biekna* (explained in the previous chapter), in the formative stage of the Christian Church institution, women took active parts. Many of them worked as teachers, evangelist and even deacons. This could be partly attributed to the lack of human resources and the non-availability of complementing male leaders. However, in course of time, churches became more and more unopen to the full and free participation of women within it”.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁸ Kamla Bashin, *Understanding Gender*, New Delhi, Women Unlimited (an associate of Kali for Women), 2003, p.36. <https://archive.org>, (accessed on 24 August 2018).

⁶²⁹ Lawmsanga, ‘A Critical Study on Christian Mission with Special Reference to Presbyterian Church of Mizoram’, Ph D Thesis, University of Birmingham, Dept. of Theology and Religion, 2010, pp.274 & 276.

During the colonial period, a separate woman wing of the Church was established under the aegis of *Pi Zosaphluid* (*Katherine Ellen Williams*), wife of *Rev. D E Jones (Zosaphluia)* around the year 1903 to 1904.⁶³⁰ *Pi Zosaphluid* and the Bible Women ardently worked for the upliftment of the women and organized *Kohhran Hmeichhiah* (women's fellowship) and also organized a separate Church Service for women called *Kohhran Hmeichhe Inkhawm/Nuhmei Inkhawm* on every Friday afternoon. One form of the manifestation of their mission work was *Buhfai Tham/Bufai Tham*, which implied keeping aside a handful of rice in every meal for the Church mission purposes. In the beginning, the income received from it was utilized to support Bible Women founded in the year 1913.⁶³¹

In the case of the Presbyterian Church around the 1910s, the *Bible Women (Hmeichhe Tirhkoh)* constituted an important wing of the said Church. But, in the Synod Assembly Resolution, the open wing of the Presbyterian Church stated that the *Hmeichhe Tirhkoh (Bible Women)* aspirant will have to relinquish their service if and when they got married. However, the resolutions could be more of a practical reasoning synchronizing with the construed culture. For instance, there was a general assumption that married woman will be tied down with the traditional wifely and motherly roles.⁶³²

In another Resolution of the Synod Assembly of 1949, General 18, on the agenda relating to ordination of a woman Pastor, the Assembly for the time being did not felt the need to have one such. Implying that till date, there was no compulsion for woman Minister as aspiring male candidates were sufficient enough to fill up the post. Yet, this differential treatment based on sexes had repercussion elsewhere. It would mean lesser opportunity for woman theologian in comparison with their male counterpart, which might result in lesser aspirants on this line. The outcome would be

⁶³⁰ *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Department Chanchin*, First Edition, The Synod Press, Aizawl, The Synod Publication Board, 1987, p.201.

⁶³¹ *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Department Chanchin*, pp.210 & 213.

⁶³² H Remthanga, *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Synod Thurel Lak Khawm*, Vol-I, Aizawl, Synod Literature & Publication Board, 1996, pp.116 & 120.

lesser woman holding degree on theology in comparison to man resulting in a lesser qualified woman for a minister.⁶³³ The final consequence would be a never-ending maze of marginalization based on gender.

The church denominations other than the Presbyterian Church based on ethnic groups popular among the Hmars like the Independent Church of India, Evangelical Free Church of India, etc., followed their parent Church in the treatment meted out to their women folk. Under the aegis of Rev Thangngur and Rev. Taisen, *Buh Faitham* was initiated in 1937.⁶³⁴ But it was only in 1948 that they could have a separate Church Service for the woman wing. The first *ICI Nuhmei Pawl Conference* was held at *Rawvakawt*, a village in southern Manipur, in the year 1948. The women pioneering *Nuhmei Pawl*, the woman wing of ICI were *Pi Thanglienzo* and *Pi Lalthieng*.⁶³⁵ Yet, very often it was argued that Churches in Mizoram relegated woman to a secondary position although they contributed a lion's share for the church's betterment, they were marginalized and debarred in ecclesiastical employment and were expected to play an assisting role only.⁶³⁶

It has been noted that "the active involvement of the female European Missionaries and the Native Bible Women in the early part of the introduction of Christianity may be understood as a short breach from the traditional patriarchal system to a new form of patriarchy."⁶³⁷ In course of time, the participation of women became more restricted in the church activity as such, the Bible Woman was abolished in the year 1958, and their income directly passed it over to the Church evangelism.⁶³⁸

⁶³³ Remthanga, *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Synod Thurel Lak Khawm*, p.123.

⁶³⁴ Darthangmawi, 'The Women Ministry Today' in *Gospel Centenary Compendium (1910-2110)*, Churachandpur, Gospel Centenary Celebration Committee, Independent Church of India, 2010, p.41.

⁶³⁵ Darthangmawi, 'The Women Ministry Today' in *Gospel Centenary Compendium (1910-2110)*, p.41.

⁶³⁶ R L Hnuni, *women in the context of the Bible and North East India*, Faculty-Student Seminar, Unpublished Paper, ETC Jorhat, 1987, cited in Frederick S Downs, *The Christian Impact on the Status of Women In North East India*, Shillong, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, 1996, p.22.

⁶³⁷ Frederick S Downs, *The Christian Impact on the Status of Women In North East India*, Shillong, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, 1996, p.90.

⁶³⁸ *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Department Chanchin*, p.214.

This had reflected the male domination over the female even in the institution of the Church.

The advent of Christianity coincided with the heyday of the Sailo Chiefs, the last ruler of the hills, then known as the Lushai hills. During their period, an utmost care was taken to maintain and perpetuate the traditional patriarchy and the socially perceived and assigned roles. For instance, according to tradition, during the time of legendary figure named, *Vanapa*, the married women of his village had the habit of venturing out of their homes to enjoyed the Chief's *Zu* (rice beer). *Vanapa* devised a plan along with the menfolk of the village to constrain them within the four walls of the home, to where they belonged in the society so as not to tread into what was considered as the male domain. He, therefore lifted the skirt of his wife in full view of others when she as usual ventured out to have a drink in the Chief's house. The other men followed suit. In this way, degradingly women were taught to conform to the socially construed roles.⁶³⁹ When Christianity was firmly established, 'it became the guardian of the *ethno-cultural identity*, thus transforming itself from a counter-cultural movement into the champion of the new cultural synthesis and became a champion of patriarchal practiced of the society. The Church tended to move away from the notion of egalitarianism'.⁶⁴⁰

However, the Presbyterian Church of India, one of the denomination of Mizoram having the highest percentage of followers stated that the Mizos meted equal treatment to both man and woman on this issue.⁶⁴¹ But, weighing the condition of the Hmar (Mizo) women with the Muslim and Hindu women of the plain would hardly be a useful scale to arrived at the status of the Hmar women. The Hmar women were free from the constraint faced by the women of the more advance societies of the mainland India in the form of child marriage, purdah system, sati system, etc.

⁶³⁹ Dokhuma, pp. 317 & 318.

⁶⁴⁰ Downs, *The Christian Impact on the Status of Women In North East India*, pp.90-91.

⁶⁴¹ *Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod Nupa Chungchang Dan Leh Kohhran Pawl Dang Nena Kan Inkungkaihna Dan*, Aizawl, Synod Literature & Publication Board, 2012, p. 23.

In conclusion it can be noted that Christianity and education could be attributed to the structural transformation of the Hmar Society leading to progress and changes in all aspects.

CHAPTER-5

Political Changes in the Post-Colonial Period

5.1 Introduction:

The second half of the 20th century heralded political consciousness among the Hmars. The awakening as an ethnic group occupied a dominant theme, percolating in the assertion for political identity in the regions that they inhabited, and later developed into the politics of self-determinations. Ethnic consciousness germinated a renewed interest of the past, the primordial cultures thus construed was employed to define and consolidate their identity. Conrad stated: “The principal factors for political translation of ethnic consciousness are the sense of injustice towards resource distribution, competition in the economic or political fields and reaction against the feelings of discrimination, partiality or the overall sense of devalued identity”.⁶⁴² In this context the colonial rule over the Hmars was quite significant in the changing trend of the region.

5.2 Ethnic/Ethnicity in the context of the Hmars:

The first usage of the term ‘ethnicity’ was attributed to David Riesman, an American Sociologist in 1953. Etymologically, the word ‘ethnic’ is derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means *heathen* or *pagan*.⁶⁴³ In course of time it gradually began to refer to *racial* characteristics. For instance, from the Second World War, ‘ethnics’ came to be used as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group consisting of largely British descent in the United States.⁶⁴⁴ In social anthropology, ethnicity refers to aspects of relationships between groups that considered themselves as culturally distinctive and are regarded as such by others, against the common implications of ethnicity with that

⁶⁴² Kottak, p.145.

⁶⁴³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords; A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised Edition, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983, p.119.

⁶⁴⁴ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism; Anthropological Perspectives*, Third Edition, London, Pluto Press, 2010, pp.4-5.

of ‘minority issues’.⁶⁴⁵ The majorities and dominant groups are no less ‘ethnic’ than minorities, however, “*the discourse concerning ethnicity tends to concern itself with subnational units, or minorities of some kind or another*”⁶⁴⁶

Ethnicity came to mean a lot more today than its derivatives from the Greek word *ethno* although there are different approaches to it. Some came to associate it as that sense of “peoplehood” or the “we” feelings shared by members belonging to a group.⁶⁴⁷ Some scholars consider race relations as the basis of ethnicity while for some it is culture that served as the main basis.⁶⁴⁸ Still other approached it from the broader context of polyethnic groups constituting a social system. Ethnicity is argued essentially as a form of interaction between culture groups operating within common social context, members or groups collectively conforming to shared norms in their course of social interaction.⁶⁴⁹

Hutchinson and Smith stated that a group of people is said to develop an ethnic identity if they exhibit the following features:

1. *a common proper name, to identify and express the ‘essence of the community’;*
2. *a myth of common ancestry, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnics a sense of fictive kinship.*
3. *Shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;*

⁶⁴⁵ Malcolm Chapman et al (ed), *History and Ethnicity*, London, Routledge, 1989, cited in Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism; Anthropological Perspectives*, Third Edition, London, Pluto Press, 2010, p.5.

⁶⁴⁶ Chapman et al (ed), cited in Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism; Anthropological Perspectives*, p.5.

⁶⁴⁷ Chandrashekhar Bhat, *Ethnicity and Mobility; Emerging Ethnic Identity and Social Mobility among the Waddars of South India*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1984, p.21.

⁶⁴⁸ Bhat, *Ethnicity and Mobility; Emerging Ethnic Identity and Social Mobility among the Waddars of South India*, p.21.

⁶⁴⁹ Bhat, p.21.

4. *One or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;*
5. *A link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnies, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples;*
6. *A sense of solidarity on the part of at least some sections of the ethnies's population.*⁶⁵⁰

However, the characteristic as well as the phenomena of 'ethnicity' are inconsistent and varied to a great extent. For instance, while there are highly durable *ethnies* tracing their origins over several centuries, there are new *ethnies* or the dissolution of the older ones. Not to mention the many fissures and shifts in ethnic identification that includes not only the many different affiliations of individuals with other kinds of grouping such as gender, class, region, etc., but also the shifting identification between different *ethnies* or ethnic categories.⁶⁵¹ For example, in ancient Greek, identification could be based with one's polis (city-state), with one's ethno-linguistic group (Ionian, Boeotian, Dorian, Aeolian), or with one's ethnies (all Hellas).⁶⁵² In modern Nigeria, identification could be based with one's clan, one's ethnies (Ibo, Yoruba, Tiv, Hausa, etc), one's religious community (Christianity, Islam), and with the national state of Nigeria, as well as the wider African cultures.⁶⁵³

Approaches to ethnicity can be categorized into *Primordialist*, *Instrumentalist/Constructivist*, *transactionalist*, *social psychological* and *ethno-symbolic* approaches. Edward Shills first used the term "primordial" to denote the tie that effectively binds some *primary groups* (particularly) together. Primordialist contends that ethnicity is a *constitutive* and *permanent* feature of human nature and

⁶⁵⁰ John Hutchinson & Anthony D Smith (ed), *Ethnicity*, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁵¹ Hutchinson & Smith (ed), *Ethnicity*, p.7.

⁶⁵² James S Coleman, *Nigeria, Background of Nationalism, Appendix*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1958, cited in John Hutchinson & Anthony D Smith (ed), *Ethnicity*, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 7.

⁶⁵³ Coleman, cited in John Hutchinson & Anthony D Smith (ed), *Ethnicity*, pp. 7-8.

once constructed it is belief to be fixed.⁶⁵⁴ Ethnicity is to be understood as a phrase for extended kinship or an extended and attenuated form of kin selection. Ethnic groups are ascriptive in nature and are defined by common descent, generally hereditary and often endogamous.⁶⁵⁵ This kind of approach came under fire for presenting a static and naturalistic view of ethnicity considering its malleability and over-lapping nature since various identities can be assumed in different situations, besides reducing the cultural and social behavior to biological drives and also failed to explain the bonding of large *ethnies* and nations and migration, colonization or inter-marriage have undermined the argument for the permanency of ethnic identity.⁶⁵⁶

According to instrumentalist, ethnicity is a social phenomenon and therefore, is a product of human interaction or in other words, “socially constructed”, and should be understood as the contingent result of specific historical circumstances. It is socially constructed with a political or material interest in mind. It has been noted that ethnic groups are for all practical purposes an “interest groups” distinguished from other groups of people by cultural characteristics such as language, custom or religion, and that same distinctive features created cohesiveness and a self-consciousness as a community, an *ethnic identity* or a consciousness of membership to such a group.⁶⁵⁷

According to Hutchinson and Smith, there are three alternatives approach to ethnicity such as *transactionalist* propounded by Barth, *social psychological* by Horowitz and *ethno-symbolic* by Armstrong and Smith. Barth’s transactionalist put emphasis on ethnic groups as units of ascription where social boundaries such as language, dress, food, etc. ensure the persistence of the group. Social Psychological of Horowitz, on the other hand focuses on group psychology and the notion of belongingness to an ethnic group is based on kinship myths and on a sense of group

⁶⁵⁴ Stephan J Larin, ‘Conceptual Debates in Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Migration’, Robert Denemark (ed.), *The International Studies Encyclopedia*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, pp. 440 & 442, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1934606>, (accessed 13 Nov 2018).

⁶⁵⁵ Larin, ‘Conceptual Debates in Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Migration’, p. 440.

⁶⁵⁶ Hutchinson & Smith (ed), p. 8.

⁶⁵⁷ Larin, p. 441.

honour in relation to other groups.⁶⁵⁸ The main concern of Armstrong's and Smith's 'ethno-symbolists' is with the persistence, change, and resurgence of ethnies, and with the role of the ethnic pasts in shaping the present cultural communities.⁶⁵⁹ They put emphasis on myths, memories and symbol in unifying and preserving identity and in treating shifting ethnic identities. However, ethno-symbolism had been criticized for failing to identify sufficiently the mass bases of ethnic phenomena by placing too much emphasis on the nostalgia of the intelligentsias towards their ethnic roots as the main factor for resurgence of ethnicity in the modern world.⁶⁶⁰

In the light of the above discussions the Hmar as a community exhibit a 'distinct cultural attributes in the form of a common descent, language, region and belief system for identification as an ethnic group', distinctive from other people of the region. Ethnic identity relates both to that which members of a group share in common, yet, that very 'commonality marked a distinctiveness from others.'⁶⁶¹

Ethnicity, in the context of the Hmars was relatable to *primordialist*, *instrumentalist*, and the three alternatives approaches such as *transactionalist*, *social-psychological* and *ethno-symbolist* perspectives. A common ancestry, common experience, cultures and common region to some extent were the major premises that gives shape to a distinct identity of the Hmars. To borrow the assertion made by John Nagel, ethnicity was constructed out of premises of language, religion, culture, customs, physical appearances, myth of origin or regionality.⁶⁶² The Hmars assertion of their origin that revolved around the myth of *manmasi* (the Hmars claimed that they are the progenies of *manmasi*)⁶⁶³ reflected a myth of origin or common ancestor as a pivotal factor for a sense of kinship in promoting cohesion and solidarity as a group of

⁶⁵⁸ Hutchinson & Smith (ed), p. 9.

⁶⁵⁹ Hutchinson & Smith (ed), p. 9-10.

⁶⁶⁰ Hutchinson & Smith (ed), pp. 9-10.

⁶⁶¹ Bhat, p.22.

⁶⁶² Joane Nagel, 'Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture', *Social Problems, /special Issue on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1994, p. 153. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096847>, (accessed 22 July 2016).

⁶⁶³ Ngurte & Pudaite, p. 5.

people. Further, in the words of Nagel, the Hmar's society was 'woven around the myth of a common ancestor, a common belief system, common dialect and a common tribal social system that symbolizes their distinctiveness to others'.⁶⁶⁴ The inherent primordial elements reinforce and boosted by social and political phenomena such as the colonization by the British stimulated the emergence of ethnic identity among the Hmars.

Erikson maintained that a 'colonial situation' or a 'nation state' often gave rise to the emergence of ethnic movement.⁶⁶⁵ In the case of the Hmars, the British colonization of the North East India resulted in the divisions of the Hmar's settlements to different states of north east India and nations across India. In this back-drop they manipulated their primordial history along with their cultural symbols in an attempt to maintain and assert their uniqueness. In this dimension, the missionaries' contribution was noteworthy. The missionaries played a pivotal role in introducing education along with the creation of a written Hmar language (discussed in the previous chapter). The same forces that had separated them (i.e. colonization) contributed as a primary factor for the awakening of political consciousness among the Hmars. Christianity and education which were the offshoots of colonialism served as an important pillar in preserving the identity and solidarity of the Hmars.

Moreover, in the post-colonial period, the settlement of the Hmars being attached to different regions has compelled them 'to compete for resources in a *plural society* reinforcing ethnic boundaries as well as providing incentives for formation and mobilization as a group'.⁶⁶⁶ Yet, Nonetheless, the Hmars assertions as a distinct community was not a recent development, in fact it was visible albeit in a subtle manner even before the advent of the colonialism in Mizoram. It is also to be noted that, the Hmars from their sojourn from *Sinlung* which was believed to be their original homeland to their present settlement Mizoram, they had run into their fair share of

⁶⁶⁴ Joane Nagel, 'Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture', p.161.

⁶⁶⁵ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism; Anthropological Perspectives*, p.96.

⁶⁶⁶ Joane Nagel, p. 157.

conflict with other tribes. However, it was doubtful whether these wars were the outcome of asserting the modern concept of ethnic identity or an inter-tribal feud for territorial protections.

5.3 *Takam Vai Lien:*

The first known conflict that the Hmar faced after entering the present Mizoram was with the *Takam Vai*⁶⁶⁷. It is to be noted that *Takam Vai* was the term used by the Hmars to referred to the Chakmas. It was a result of a misunderstanding between the Hmars and some Chakmas they encountered. According to tradition, some of the Hmars' hunting party encountered the Chakmas along the river bank making a bamboo raft. When they enquired about them and asked who they were, they replied that they were employed by *Tarakam*. Henceforth, the Hmars referred them as the *Takam*.⁶⁶⁸ The Hmar *Rengpui* (the Hmar supreme chief) *Chawnhmang* several years after his migration to *Dapram* (Tripura) from present Mizoram, it was stated that the chief who hitherto recognized his suzerainty refused to pay tax to the representative sent by *Rengpui Chonghmang's* progeny as the latter sent *Takam Vai* whose language the Hmars could not comprehend. The following folk song supported the above contention:

Vai an hung, Vai an hung

An Tawng fangang hawi lova,

*Tapuon ang la khawng rei aw.*⁶⁶⁹

(The rough translation goes like this-The *Vai* came whose language is incomprehensible to us. Let us weave them like a cloth, so saying they hit them with a flattened wood they used for weaving.)

⁶⁶⁷ *Vai* implies a non-tribal as opposed to the Hill people, plain dwellers. 'Vai', in Vanlal Tluonga Bapui, Hmar-Hmar-English Dictionary (A Dictionary of the Hmar Language), Aizawl, Lois bet Print & Publication, 2016, p.307.

⁶⁶⁸ H V Sunga, *Manmasi-Hmar Tobul Thusim*, New Delhi, HP Dzine & prints Pvt. Ltd, 2014, pp.43-44.

⁶⁶⁹ Batlien, pp.28-29.

This instigated *Chonhmang*'s progeny to invade their own kinfolds. They set out along with the *Takam Vai* resulting in the capturing of some of the Hmar's Chief namely *Thanhрил Saivate*, *Lungtau Chief Haudar* and *Lawipa Zamthatvung*.⁶⁷⁰

The exact date of the invasion of the *Takam Vai* was controversial. According to *J Batlien*, the invasion of the *Takam Vai* was in 1627.⁶⁷¹ *Hranglien Songate* placed the capture of *Thanhрил Saivate* by the *Takam Vai* during the year 1229 CE.⁶⁷² The same issue was placed around 1239 by *V Lunghnema*.⁶⁷³ The occurring of *Takam Vailien* during the 13 Century CE was the most probable one if *Rengpui Chawnhmang* was believed to have migrated to Tripura during or before the early part of the 13 century. At the same time, the internecine war amongst themselves led to the destruction of the prominent Hmar chiefs resulting in the dispersal of the people and paved the way for the subsequent over-powering of the Hmars by the *Luseis* under the *Sailo* chiefs.

5.4 Conflict with the Sailo Chiefs:

According to tradition, the *Luseis* were the progenies of *Luseia*, chief of *Khampat* (Myanmar). Among the offspring of *Luseia* only the *Chhakchhuak* clan called themselves by the name *Lusei*. However, later on *Hrahsela*'s and *Zahmuaka*'s progenies respectively merged with the *Lusei* or *Sailo* and thus enlarged their number to a great extent.⁶⁷⁴ As already mentioned, the Hmars had already established themselves in the present Mizoram by the early part of the 17th Century. *Chawnchim* (*Chawnchhim*), *Sungte* (*Chhungte*), *Lawihmun*, *Ngur*, *Thiek*, *Khawzawl*, *Darngawn*, *Vankal*, *Kangbur*, *Theiva*, *Lurhva*, *Vanva*, etc were the name given by the Hmar which were still in use today. The *Luseis* or *Sailo* made their incursion into the area already inhabited by the Hmars to escape the constant raids of the *Thlanrawn Pawi* (sub-tribe

⁶⁷⁰ Batlien, pp.28-29.

⁶⁷¹ Batlien, p.29.

⁶⁷² Songate, p. 117.

⁶⁷³ Lunghnema, pp.66 & 70-71.

⁶⁷⁴ Hrangthiauva, pp.13-14.

of the *Mizo*). The Hmars failed to defend their habitats against the Sailos, consequently they were dispersed in every direction. The *Hrangchals* initially moved southward seeking the protection of the *Sailo Chiefs Vandula and Lalhluta*, later on moved back to *Hnahthial* to finally make their settlement at *Halflong* (Assam). Some of the Hmars decided to stay behind and sought protection under the Sailo Chiefs while others migrated to Manipur and the Cahchar Hills.⁶⁷⁵

The second major encounter with the Luseis under the Sailos was believed to have occurred in the year 1882. This war was believed to be a retaliating action against the murder of a man named *Thangsum*, when he visited his grandfather *Darpuiha* of *Buolpui* (eastern Mizoram) village. In order to avenge him, *Thangsum's* Village rallied around *Chala Ngurte Pasaltha* (Valiant Warrior) which resulted in an inter-village enmity.⁶⁷⁶

Around 200 villagers from *Buolpui* set out to invade *Lailawng* village (southern Manipur). From the Hmar side, men from *Lailawng* and *Suongsang* (southern Manipur) villages joined hands to confront their adversary. The two-party met at *Sabung* (southern Manipur bordering Mizoram) which later came to be known as *Ralkapkawt*. During this event, the Hmar ambushed them and shot death three men instantly forcing the Luseis to flee along with their friend's body. The Hmars stealthily followed from a distance unaware of the *Lusei*. While the *Luseis* were relaxingly bathing on the river *Tuivai* unaware of the danger, the Hmars shot death many of them. This incident was attested by the following folk song composed by the *Luseis*-

*Hmar thlang doral I la e, Lalhrangchhuan pa Milai tha an fam zo ve.*⁶⁷⁷

(The rough translation of the song is- You have invaded the north-west, taking away the lives of many youth).

⁶⁷⁵ Lalhluna, p.24.

⁶⁷⁶ Songate, pp.152-153.

⁶⁷⁷ Songate, pp.154 & 155.

It would be inappropriate to style wars fought during this period as nothing more than inter-tribal warfare over territories and material gain without any ulterior motive unlike the modern concept of asserting one's own identity or contesting ideology. Attributing modern concept for the past events was wrong and dishonorable. Even the so-called war with the Sailos failed to witness the mobilization of the so-called Hmars under the Hmar banner. The first instance seemed more like a war for territorial or hegemony which was the main reason of feud during such time.⁶⁷⁸ The fact that the Hmars had already established in the present Mizoram when the *Luseis* spread westward could have prompted a serious war between the Hmars and the *Luseis*. But it was just a war over a territory and nothing more. In fact, most wars were fought for the position of the *Rengpui* (supreme chief), sometimes between the *Luseis* and *Luseis*, the Hmars and Hmar, the Pawis and Pawi, the Suktes and Sukte, the Thados and Thado, etc. thus, weakening each other during this period.⁶⁷⁹

In the words of R Brian Ferguson, "The culturally constructed war depicted the warrior as a valor, and those who symbolize those characteristics are rewarded by the Society".⁶⁸⁰ This assertion is also quite relevant in the context of the Hmars. For instance, among the Hmars the society was constructed in such a manner that bravery was accompanied by a reward not only during their life time, but also in the afterlife. Man displaying a gallant and courageous act in times of clan feud or wars were venerated upon. For example, as mentioned earlier, such *concept of honour* have instigated the Buolpui villagers to treat *Thangsum* (a Hmar from south Manipur) as an enemy, and the householders who organized under *Chala Ngurte* also instigated to avenge the death of *Thangsum*.

Another worth mentioning was the rivalry with the *Luseis* which took place between 1887-1890 during the hay day of *Saizahawla Hmar*, a *Pasaltha* from

⁶⁷⁸ K L Kama Chhakchhuak, *Zofate Nunphung Lamdang Zell eh An Hun Tawnnte*, Churachandpur, Published by Kawlkhuma, 1993, p. 36.

⁶⁷⁹ Lungnema, p.65.

⁶⁸⁰ R Brian Ferguson, 'Tribal Warfare', Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2012, p.7, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273375660>, (accessed 17 September 2018).

Pawibawia's Village.⁶⁸¹ During this time some Hmars of Southern Manipur bordering Mizoram attacked Saizahawla's village, *Khawruhlian* (to the east of Aizawl) killing one person named *Ngurdailova*. Subsequently, *Saizahawla* set off on a quest to avenged the death of the latter. Near *Leisenzo* village, he encountered a lone man clearing a *Lo* or agricultural site for cultivation. He shot him down and chopped off his head as a war trophy. His presence of mind and ability to speak the Hmar language enabled him a safe journey back home.⁶⁸²

In another instances, Saizahawla and his two friends set off to *Pherzawl* village where he secretly sneaked in to the *Zawlbuk* to spend the night while his two friends hid in the outskirts of the village. He stole the best three guns while cunningly pouring water to the rest of the other guns.⁶⁸³

The connotations of the above incidents as a war between the Hmars and the Luseis seemed fallacious. It was more like a feud between a Hmar and a Hmar as Saizahawla himself was a Hmar. Moreover, Saizahawla had to pass through a number of Hmar settlement from his home town *Khawruhlian* to *Leisen* to *Pherzawl*. If it was a war between the Hmar and the Luseis, it would be logical to slay a Hmar from a nearby area rather than having to trek to a far off region.⁶⁸⁴

The conflicts were mostly dictated by vengeance, territory or slaves which were sometimes traded with *Siel* as in the case of the Hmars' war with *Mirawng* (Nagas) from *Mukpui*, a village in Manipur. In the event of the affairs, the Hmars from *Hmuntha* village had captured several slaves which were later on freed with the payment of a *Lawi* (buffalo) by the *Mirawng*. Further it was stated that the *Hmuntha*

⁶⁸¹ Liankhaia, *Mizo Awmdan Hlui & Mizo Mi Leh Thil Hmingthangte Leh Mizo Sakhua*, Aizawl, L T L Publication, 2008, pp.126-127.

⁶⁸² Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin (Kum 1900 Hma Lam)*, Aizawl, Published by Vanlalhmuaiki & Vanlalhruii (financed by the Mizoram Publication Board), 2000, pp.553-554.

⁶⁸³ Lalthanliana, *Mizo Chanchin (Kum 1900 Hma Lam)*, p.555.

⁶⁸⁴ Timothy Z Zote, 'Khawvelah Hmar ka la Hmu Nawh', in *Sinlung: Hmar Students' Association, 55th General Assembly Souvenir*, Aizawl, Hmar Student Association, 2016, p.62.

villagers used the Lawi for celebrating *Sikpui Ruoi*.⁶⁸⁵ According to Erikson, ethnicity or the ‘we’ or ‘them’ feeling was the product of contact with others. However, cultural differences could be associated with ethnicity if and only if such differences are made pertinent in the social interactions.⁶⁸⁶ The one thing lacking in clan feuds prior to colonization was motivation by identity awareness. The war was fought sometime even amongst themselves such as the case of the villagers from *Sawnlen* (south Manipur) with the Thieks from a village called *Tinsuong* (Manipur), both from the Hmar clans. It was stated that inter-village conflict broke out between *Sawnlen* and *Tinsuong* villages after the former killed the latter’s *Siel* in the *Sikpui Ruoi* celebration.⁶⁸⁷ With the advent of the British, the inter-tribal conflicts which manifested in the inter-village wars came to an end.⁶⁸⁸

5.6 Hmar-Kuki Conflict (1959-1960):

The Hmar-Kuki conflict may be described as the first manifestation of the assertion of a distinct ethnic and cultural identity. According to Erikson, ‘*ethnic identity becomes crucially important the moment it is perceived as being under threat*’.⁶⁸⁹ The Hmars felt that their identity was threatened by an attempt of integration into or encapsulation within an identity supposedly alien to them. Although sporadic in its occurrence, the Hmar-Kuki conflict generated psychological cohesiveness crossing all state boundaries, promoting, popularizing, developing and elevating the concept of *Hmarization*.⁶⁹⁰ In order to understand the root cause of the Hmar-Kuki conflict, it is imperative to explain the meaning of the term ‘*Kuki*’.

⁶⁸⁵ Interview with T Khuma Songate (86 years).

⁶⁸⁶ Eriksen, p.42.

⁶⁸⁷ Interview with T Khuma Songate (86 years).

⁶⁸⁸ Zawla, p.119.

⁶⁸⁹ Eriksen, p.92.

⁶⁹⁰ A term coined by Lal Dena that implies the popularity and wider acceptance of the term *hmar* by the hmars living in different parts of North East India; Lal Dena, *Hmar Folk Tales*, New Delhi, Scholar Publishing House, 1995, p. (vii).

According to C.A Soppitt, “The origin of the term *Kuki* was ambiguous”, yet, “*Kou* in both the Lusei and the Kuki languages refers to a village”.⁶⁹¹ He further stated: “the community known as *Kuki* seldom visited the plains, the name they styled themselves by must be given to a few traders from the plain who transliterate it as *Kuki*”.⁶⁹² A.S Reid stated: “The term *Kuki* is a Bengali word implying the *hill-men* or *highlanders*”, and “it applied to the tribe or tribes occupying the west of the Koladyne river”.⁶⁹³ According to J Shakespeare, “the term *Kuki* was loosely applied to the closely allied clans that belonged to the Tibeto-Burman family such as the inhabitants of the hills beyond the Chittagong Hill tracts, family known as *Thado* or *Khawtlang* clan in the Cachar hills, *Chins* inhabiting the Chin hills and Burma, and where in the Lushai hills the term *Kuki* was superseded by the term *Lushai*”.⁶⁹⁴ He further stated that “initially the term *Kuki* was not recognized by the above mentioned tribes and their various division of people to whom it was applied to”.⁶⁹⁵ Whatever be the connotation of the term *Kuki*, by the middle of the 20th century it had been crystalized into a nomenclature, to identify the different ethnic divisions sharing unique culture, common practices, traditions, customs.

The colonial ethnographer classified the Hmar tribe under the so called *Old Kuki Clans* along with *Aimol*, *Anal*, *Chawte*, *Chiru*, *Kolhen*, *Kom*, *Lamzang*, *Purum*, *Tikhup* and *Vaiphei*, etc. based on the period of their settlement. While the new *Kuki* came to be synonymous with the *Thado* or *Thadou*.⁶⁹⁶

The Thados were well-known for their combative spirit and gallantry which was reflected naturally in their hegemonic attitude towards their kindred tribes. The Hmar villages such as *Parvachawm*, *Lungthulien*, *Senvon*, *Parbung*, *Taithu*, *Tuolbung*

⁶⁹¹ C A Soppitt, *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier (Districts Cachar, Sylhet, Naga Hills, etc, and the North Cachar Hills) with An Outline Grammar of the Rankhol-Lushai Language and A Comparision of Lushai woth other Dialects*, Reprinted, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Mizoram, 1976, p.1.

⁶⁹² Soppitt, *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier (Districts Cachar, Sylhet, Naga Hills, etc, and the North Cachar Hills) with An Outline Grammar of the Rankhol-Lushai Language and A Comparision of Lushai woth other Dialects*, p.2.

⁶⁹³ A S Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land*, Reprinted, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, Govt. of Mizoram, 2008, p.5.

⁶⁹⁴ Shakespeare, p.(i)(introduction).

⁶⁹⁵ Shakespeare, p.(i)(introduction).

⁶⁹⁶ Shakespeare, pp.147,183 & 189.

in *Tipamukh* even came under the hegemony of the *Thado* Chiefs. But, this did not mean that all the Hmar villages in *Tipaimukh* and *Vangai* ranges and the Hmar villages in eastern Mizoram were under the suzerainty of the *Thado* Chiefs. On the other hand, they could successfully check the expansionist policy of the Sailo and the Sakte Chiefs who were trying to dominate over the Hmar villages of the Manipur and Vangai ranges. Incidentally, they can be attributed as a factor in preserving the Hmar identity as they did not indulge in imposing their culture which could lead to assimilation under their banner.⁶⁹⁷ The Hmars of the above-mentioned regions well-preserved their distinctive identity in terms of dialect, customs and traditions in the face of a striking similarities yet distinctive identity with their kindred tribes.

The Thado elite content their supremacy over their kindred tribes which culminated in the straining of their relationship and germinated inherent seeds of fragmentation. The phrase that the Thado elite used to describe the other tribes who were branded Kukis other than themselves as *Kuki seki/Kuki makhai* (a degrading term implying a half Kuki) attested the supposedly conceived superiority.⁶⁹⁸ This very idea of superiority developed into a centrifugal force that drove homogenous ethnic group away from the banner *Kuki*. Moreover, the matter was intensified after William Shaw, Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) of Tamenlong brought out his note on *Under the Wings of Thadou* with the help of *Jamkhothang Siltlou*. This period coincided with the dawn of political consciousness among the various community that further reinforced and fastened the process of the fragmentation of the *Kuki* ethnicity.⁶⁹⁹

Moreover, it is to be noted that in *The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950*, all the tribes designated under Kuki by the colonial ethnographer received recognition in the Scheduled Lists after India's Independence, thereby also elevating the Hmar as a recognized Scheduled tribe.⁷⁰⁰ The already volatile situation was

⁶⁹⁷ Lal Dena, Identity, p.102.

⁶⁹⁸ Interview Darnghilthang (80 years) on 19 June 2019 at Tuolbung, Manipur.

⁶⁹⁹ Lal Dena, Identity, p.103.

⁷⁰⁰ *The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950*, [https://www.legislative.gov.in>states>files\(pdf\)](https://www.legislative.gov.in>states>files(pdf)), (accessed 12 July 2019).

aggravated when again in 1956, the constitution of India introduced Scheduled Caste and Scheduled lists (Amendment) Act that re-affirmed the recognition of the Hmar as an official nomenclature under the constitution of India.⁷⁰¹ During this time, S L Lunneh an experience politician from the *Kuki National Assembly* (KNA) was spearheading the movement for the creation of a separate Kuki state. Meanwhile, the Thadou political leadership still nurtured the idea of a common nomenclature under the banner *Kuki* and adopted a policy of *re-Kukization* of the erstwhile Kuki tribes. This was the fundamental issue on which the conflict between the Hmar and the Kuki revolved around during this period. Consequently, the Kuki National Volunteers (KNV) was formed which enforced a fee of rupees ten per household to be paid by all the non-Nagas and the non-Meiteis residing in their so-called suzerainty.⁷⁰²

The spark was ignited when the Hmar villagers at *Rovazawl*, Tamenglong district in Manipur refused to pay Kuki fees to the armed Kuki volunteers. The whole village was completely burned down on February 8 1960 at about 2 a.m.⁷⁰³

It is to be noted that the Hmar and the Kuki had shared a very close relationship prior to this conflict, the Hmar National Union (HNU) formed in 1958 and the Kuki National Army (KNA) were on good terms sharing the security surveillance of their respective villages against the Naga incursion. All this harmony came to an end when in the early part of February 1960, an ultimatum was forwarded to the Hmars stating that there were no other tribes besides the Meiteis, Nagas or Kukis in that region, and failure to identified with neither of the above tribes could lead to dire consequences. The Hmars however, claimed that they were neither *Meitei*, *Naga nor Kuki*, but that they were simply a *Hmar*. The assertion of the term *Hmar* as a 'distinct identity by the Hmars amounted to the willingness to face any consequences that might have

⁷⁰¹ *The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1956*, <https://tribal.nic.in>, (accessed 12 July 2019).

⁷⁰² James a Songate, 'The Hmar Tribe of Cachar (Their History and Politics)', *Sinlung: Hmar Students' Association 55th General Assembly Souvenir*, Aizawl, Published by the Hmar Student Association, Aizawl, 2016, p.112.

⁷⁰³ Songate, 'The Hmar Tribe of Cachar (Their History and Politics)', p.112. Hereafter cited as Songate, Hmar Tribe.

emerged from it'.⁷⁰⁴ Following the above incident, violence along communal lines became imminent.

After the communal incident at *Rovazawl*, the Kuki Volunteers extended their activities to other parts of the Hmars inhabited areas in Mizoram, Manipur, Cachar and North Cachar hills district of Assam. For instance, some of the villages they managed to ravage included *Muolthung* in Cachar, *Lungtau* in North Cachar Hills district, *Tingmun* in Mizoram. And they managed to terrorize and instill psychological fear even to the areas physically not affected by the Kuki Movement. Fear psychology was instilled in almost all the Hmar villages during this period. Everyone was living in terror, ready to flee their villages at any time.⁷⁰⁵

To counter the KNA, the Hmars too, organized a volunteer cell to act as a check and balance against the actions of the Kuki volunteers.⁷⁰⁶ In addition to the volunteers, every abled man from a village volunteered to stand guard at their respective villages against the KNA attack.⁷⁰⁷

The Hmar-Kuki conflict was nothing like the one that the Hmars had experienced before. The mode of warfare in the olden times involved raiding of an unaware villagers, now the war developed to an all-out open war. The root of the conflict as alleged by some critics was no doubt due to the action of the government of Manipur in Particular. It completely failed to identify, protect and was indifferent towards the sentiments of people living within its suzerainty. It had been stated that the Hmars were recognized by the Assam and Central Government as one of the Scheduled Tribes of India under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Amendment Ordinance Act of 1956. However, deliberately some officials included the Hmars under the nomenclature Kuki. This had really hurt the sentiment of the

⁷⁰⁴ Batlien, pp.316-317.

⁷⁰⁵ Interview with Chawnglungnem.

⁷⁰⁶ Interview with Damghilthang.

⁷⁰⁷ Interview with Fimtanglien (80 years) on 21 August 2016 at Peace Land, Lamka, Churachandpur, Manipur.

Hmars who were also recognized as a separate tribe. The main issue to be noted here was that the government of Manipur remained silent to such matter and showed no concern to the plight of the Hmar people. In fact, the Hmars from time immemorial had never called themselves *Kuki*.⁷⁰⁸

The communal clash flared up like wildfires crossing over the state boundaries and gradually spread all over the habitats of the two communities to Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Mizoram. The two communities soon began to realize the futility of upsetting the age-old cordial relationship between them and resorted to have series of talks under the leadership of each community. The first peace talk was held on 30 April 1960 by the representatives of the Hmar National Union (HNU) and the Haokip Allied Council (HAC) at Saikot, a Hmar Village in Churachandpur. This was followed by a Peace Negotiation at Sielmat, a village in Churachandpur on 3 May 1960 where Peace Agreement was signed by 20 leaders each from both the communities, which was endorsed by 64 delegates from the Kuki side who met under the initiative of Paolien of Saitu, a Haokip village in south Manipur on 6 May 1960.⁷⁰⁹ Finally, a Peace Agreement was signed on 25 June 1960 at the residence of the Chief Commissioner of Manipur by the representatives of the HNU and KNA. The summary of the Peace Agreement included the peaceful revocation of all Volunteers from both the communities and their rehabilitations to their respective villages within a specific period.⁷¹⁰

However, the incident that would haunt both the Kukis and Hmars was averted due to the timely intervention of the government and the conflict between the two groups deteriorated.⁷¹¹ The two communities co-existed peacefully to this day since the signing of the Peace Accord. Till today, there was no record of any untoward happening or incidents which could be interpreted as a communal discord.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁸ Lal Dena, *Identity*, pp.105-108.

⁷⁰⁹ Thiek, pp.247-248.

⁷¹⁰ Thiek, pp.248-249.

⁷¹¹ Lal Dena, *Identity*, p.106.

⁷¹² Interview with Lalthazo.

Nevertheless, the *Hmar-Kuki* conflicts had a profound impact on both the parties especially with regards to settlement pattern. For instance, *Tuolbung*, a village in southern Manipur inhabited by both the Hmars and Kukis together where the majority of the households belonged to the latter prior to the conflict, came to be solely inhabited by the Hmars after the conflict.⁷¹³

5.6 Search for Identity:

The Colonization of the then Lushai Hills ushered in physical contact with the outside world along with a modern political consciousness giving rise to awareness for the need of self-assertion of identity to the dispersed Hmars. The *divide and rule* policy that first affected them was the Indian Council Act of 1935 that cut up their habitation resulting in some of them even to be separated from Indian mainland administration and attached them to Burma forcing them to be separated by an international border.⁷¹⁴ According to Erikson, ethnicity is a social identity. It was based on uniqueness or differences in relations with others.⁷¹⁵ Therefore, cultures became a crucial element in constructing identity. According to Nagel, cultures was constructed by groups through reconstruction of historical culture such as revivals and restorations of traditional practices and institutions and the construction of new cultures involving revision of current cultures and innovations.⁷¹⁶ The Hmars revival of the traditional practices such as the *Sikpui Ruoi*, the unanimous acceptance of the *khawsak tawng* (eastern dialect) as the literary language of the Hmars over various dialect of the Hmars (discussed in the previous chapter) and various efforts to preserve and revitalize it could be relatable to the above assertion. Various associations were formed with a view to maintaining solidarity.

⁷¹³ Interview with Darnghilthang.

⁷¹⁴ Orestes Rosanga, 'The Rise of Self-Assertion and Movement for Autonomy of the Hmars Beyond The Frontiers of Mizoram Till 1960s', *Contemporary Social Scientist (A National Refereed Journal)*, Vol.VI, No. 2, 2014, p.33.

⁷¹⁵ Erikson, p.17.

⁷¹⁶ Nagel, p.162.

5.7 Non-Political Organization:

In 1936, the Hmar Association (HA), the first organization on ethnic lines was formed with the objectives of preserving the Hmar culture and identity, to give financial aids to the deserving and needy students by collecting donations from the general public and to promote and spread awareness for development of education. Lal Dena rightly pointed out that “It did not have any political objectives, yet it paved the way for the formation of political organization in the years to come”.⁷¹⁷

Other associations that were formed for the promotion of education and preservation of culture and identity and overall welfare of the Hmar Peoples included the Hmar Student Association (HSA), Hmar Youth Association (HYA), Hmar Christian Leaders’ Forum (HCLF), Hmar Literature Society (HLS), Hmar Cultural Society (HCL), Hmar Company (HC) and Hmar Inpui (HI).

The Hmar Student Association was formed in 1939 to promote education among the Hmar community. The initiative was taken up by DM colleges Students of Imphal such as H L Daka, Thanglienkham, H S Saithang, John Vanlalput, M Seikang, H Thanglor, Kaithuom, L Lana, Thana, S Ngurte, H T Sandam and Lama.⁷¹⁸ According to Chapter 1, Article 5 and Article 6 of the *Hmar Students’ Association, Inawpdan Bu (Constitution)*, “The main objectives of the Hmar Students’ Association was to strive hard towards helping the weak; to enlighten and free others from ignorance in order to lead them to serve the nation”. It was a voluntary student organization where the membership was not restricted to student alone, it was open to any body with a passion for the aims and objectives of the HSA. Any interested person could become its member by paying the membership fee and enrolling themselves in the unit or branch of the HSA.⁷¹⁹ The General Headquarters of the Hmar Student

⁷¹⁷ Lal Dena, Identity, p. 128.

⁷¹⁸ L Rothanglien Khawbung, ‘Hmar Students’ Association, General Headquarters Secretarial Reports’, *Sinlung Hmar Students’ Association 55th General Assembly Souvenir*, Aizawl, Published by Hmar Student Association, 2016, p. (xxii).

⁷¹⁹ *The Hmar Students’ Association, Inawpdan Bu (Constitution)*, Churachandpur, Manipur, Published by Hmar Students’ Association, General Headquarters, 2007, p.2.

Association was stationed at Churachandpur in Manipur. At present, under the general headquarters there were thirteen joint headquarters and five branches spreading across the north east of India and some major cities around the country, where every joint headquarters have a number of units attached to it. For instance, the state of Mizoram and Assam had three joint headquarters each, Manipur had five joined headquarters and Meghalaya and Delhi city had one joint headquarters each. The HSA too had opened a branch at different cities such as Silchar, Ahmednagar, Pune, Bangalore and Kolkata. The joint headquarters in Mizoram were located at Aizawl, Kolasib and Sinlung.⁷²⁰

The Hmar Literature Society was formed on 25 September 1945. The main initiative was taken up by Dr Thanglung. Its main objective was to promote and enrich the Hmar literatures and the Hmar language. The initiative, preservation, and promotion of the Hmar culture was taken up by the Hmar Cultural Society which was formed in 1951. Other associations such as Hmar Trading Company and Hmar Youth Association (HYA) were formed in 1961 and 1985 respectively.⁷²¹

The Hmar Trading Company was formed for the welfare of the Hmar Community. It functioned democratically with an elected Board Members from the share-holders. During its heyday, the above company set up a sort of guest house for the Hmar community at the heart of Imphal city in Manipur. It was said that the guest house was an advantage to the Hmar community as well as other ethnic division from the surrounding regions.⁷²² On the other hand, the Hmar Youth Association (HYA) was formed for the preservation and promotion of the culture of the Hmars. To that end it endeavored for stimulating the concept of *tlawmngaina* (selfless act) in the society, lending a helping hand to the needy and preserving the traditional customs and

⁷²⁰ Interview with Rothanglien Khawbung on 15 June 2019 at Aizawl, Mizoram.

⁷²¹ Batlien, pp.354-360.

⁷²² Interview with Fimthanglien.

practices. One such practice was to promote the Hmar traditional *Puon* (cloth) during social functions and gatherings.⁷²³

The Hmar Inpui was formed on 31 October 2000 and acted as an apex body for the welfare of the Hmars living in different parts of the North-East of India.⁷²⁴ Chapter-1 of the Article 1 of the Hmar Inpui Inawpdan (Constitution) stated that Hmar Inpui was the top decision making body possessing the authority to represent the Hmar people in various aspects such as in the social, economic and political realms. Its functions included deliberation, intervention and mediation over the different associations within the Hmar people if and when necessary. Its Leaders were elected by the General Assembly.⁷²⁵ Further, Article 2 stated that “Hmar Inpui strived towards the unity and integrity of the Hmar people and aimed at guiding them towards these goals”. It also aimed at safeguarding the customs and traditions of the Hmars, preserving and protecting the natural resources available in their habitats and at the same time promoting peaceful co-existence with their various cognate tribes.⁷²⁶

5.8 The Hmar in Politics:

Erikson stated that ‘in a pluralistic society, i.e., *culturally heterogeneous population*, ethnicity was expressed through group competition. And that plural societies tended to developed some aspects of politics such as competition for power and recognition along with a social identity or belongingness to a particular group.⁷²⁷ The political awakening for the Hmars came only in the early part of the twentieth Century. Colonization resulted in the creation and the encompassing of the somewhat hitherto isolated Hmar group into a pluralistic society as a result of their settlement being cut up and attached to different states of Northeast India. Colonization, the introduction of western education, the World War I and World War II also served as an important

⁷²³ Lalhmuok Famhoite on 12 August 2016 at Rengkai, Churachandpur, Manipur.

⁷²⁴ Preamble to the Hmar Inpui Inawpdan (Constitution), Churachandpuri, Manipur, Published by Hmar Inpui, General Headquarters, Churachandpur, 2016.

⁷²⁵ Hmar Inpui Inawpdan (Constitution), Churachandpuri, Manipur, Published by Hmar Inpui, General Headquarters, Churachandpur, 2016. P.1.

⁷²⁶ Hmar Inpui Inawpdan (Constitution), pp.1-2.

⁷²⁷ Erikson, pp.19-20.

factor in exposing the Hmars towards the outside world. Through exposure to the outside civilization they began to learn the liberal ideas of other countries. It was even stated that Subhas Chandra Bose, the leader of the Indian National Army came to Saikot, a Hmar village in Churachandpur and met the village Chief, *Khawvel Hmar* which really fascinated the Hmar Youths with his dreams and political aspirations.⁷²⁸ Nagel had suggested that resource competition was one of the main driving force for the emergence of ethnicity and ethnic conflict.⁷²⁹ The above assertion could not be more relatable for the Hmars. The feelings of discrimination, neglect, deprivation and a petition for recognitions were reflected in the memorandum submitted to the then prime minister of India during the 1960s which will be subsequently discussed.

(a) The Hmars and the Mizo Union:

The formation of Mizo Union in Mizoram, the then Lushai Hills served as the antecedent as well as a factor for the subsequent development of political parties among the Hmars based on ethnic lines. It was the first political association and was formed after the constitution of a District Council under A R H McDonald, the then Superintendent of the Lushai Hills. From the outset, a conflict arose over the position of the M.U, over its claimant as the sole representative of the people in making decisions on future politics of the Lushai Hills.⁷³⁰

The Mizo Union was formed on 9 April 1946 with the initiatives of R Vanlawma, Labuaia, V Rosiema, Hrangaia and P S Dahrawka, with Pachhunga as its first President. The membership was open to all adult Mizos including both men and women with the payment of an annual membership fees. The aims and objectives of the Party were

- a) the integrations of all the Mizos, within and outside the purview of the Lushai Hills;

⁷²⁸ Rosiem Pudaite, *Indian National Struggle for Freedom and Its Impact on the Mizo Movement (1935-1953 A.D)*, Unpublished, p.73.

⁷²⁹ Nagel, p.157.

⁷³⁰ R Rualthansanga, *Union Territory of Mizoram; Rules*, Guwahati, EBH Publishers, 2015, pp.38-39.

- b) to serve as a linkage with a view to betterment of relationships between the government and the common people;
- c) To educate and spread awareness to the public matters relating to their rights and positions and the accomplishment of the said rights;
- d) To strive for the holistic development of the Mizos including the upliftment of the status of the women;
- e) To serve as a voice and mouth piece with regards to the aspirations of the Mizos; and
- f) To preserve and amends the customary laws as and when necessary.⁷³¹

It is to be noted that only after more than a decade that the Hmars were ready to take up arms and make sacrifices rather than to be categorized under certain nomenclature other than the term 'Hmar'. Shortly after supporting the *Mizo Union for Mizos*, a conflict arose between the Hmars and the Kuki on the issue of classification under the nomenclature 'Kuki' where as it may be noted that the Hmars were the first to be classified as Kuki (Old Kuki). The question that provoke the Hmar sentiment was on the question of a nomenclature. In order to understand such issues, one has to explain the common terminology 'Mizo'.

There were certain theories with regards to the origin and meaning of the term 'Mizo' in the absence of a proper authentic documentation. Literally, the term *Mizo* is generally translated into *Hillman*, where *Mi* implies people while *Zo* is translated to mean hill or mountain.⁷³² Yet, even if the term *Mizo* was accepted to mean *Hillman*, the questions may be posed as to how or when did the term came into existence. One theory often asserted was that while they were in *Thantlang*, they began to call themselves *Zomi*, the poetical term for which was *Mizo*, henceforth the poetical term superseded *Zomi* and therefore, they came to be known as *Mizos*.⁷³³ Lunghnema stated that the term *Mizo* was a generic term that covers the people inhabiting the

⁷³¹ K L Chhuanvawra, *Mizo Union Kha (1947-1974)*, Aizawl, Published by The Author, 2008, pp.33-35.

⁷³² Thanga, p. (xii).

⁷³³ Zawla, p.9.

geographical area between 14°N to 29°N Latitude and 80°N to 100°N Longitude, mongoloid race sharing close cultural affinity such as a common myths of origin, folklores, etc.⁷³⁴ According to Sangkima, they may be broadly classified into two groups-the Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Chawngthu, Pawi, Khawlhing, Khiangte, Chawhte, Ngente, Renthlei, Tlau, Pautu, Rawite, Zongte, Vangchhia, Punte, Paite, Fanai Pawi, Thahdo, Lakher, Pangkhua and Mawk constituted the first category. Whereas the Pawi and the Lakhers formed the second group.⁷³⁵ Nevertheless, in spite of its comprehensiveness, it was often used at a great length as a synonym for Lushai by the early Mizo writers.

Mizo as a nomenclature seems to be a recent development since in the writings of the colonial ethnographers they had recorded under a different connotation or term such as *Chin, Kuki* and *Lushai*. For instance, the expedition of 1871-72 was designated as Kukis (hill men or highlanders) raids⁷³⁶ and later the term has been used commonly. Nowhere was they referred to as Mizos. Even in the 1901 census of India, no one was recorded as a Mizo. Yet, in the 1961 census, more than two Lakhs were registered under the same nomenclature. In the first General Assembly of the Mizo Union held on September 1946 at Aizawl, the term 'Mizo' was passed as a nomenclature representing more than 50 tribes sharing close affinity of cultures. In the same year in the month of November, representatives from Lushai Hills, Manipur, Cachar, Tripura and Chittagong Hills Tract, etc. endorsed the same at *Hmarkhawlien (Lakhipur)*.⁷³⁷ Subsequently, as mentioned earlier, in 1954 the Lushai Hills District was renamed as Mizo Hills District by an Act of Parliament.⁷³⁸

Before the Mizo Union Party was formed there was a movement in the then Lushai hills against forced labour. For instance, in 1926 *Telela* from *Kulikawn*

⁷³⁴ Lungnema, p. 21.

⁷³⁵ Sangkima, p.3.

⁷³⁶ Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land including A Description of the Various Expeditions into the Chin-Lushai Hills and The Final Annexation of The Country*, p.5.

⁷³⁷ Lalsiemhnuna, 'Ram leh Hnam Humhalh leh Hnam Inpumkhatna', *Sinlung: Hmar Students' Association 55th General Assembly Souvenir, 2016*, Aizawl, Published by Hmar Students' Association, General Headquarters, 2016, p. 145.

⁷³⁸ -----*Mizoram District Gazetteers*, p.2.

(presently within Aizawl city) along with some friends with the intention of the welfare of the common people in mind had appealed to the then Superintendent, N E Perry to do away with forced labour and other taxes usually paid to the chief. This was taken as a political tone and resulted in the banning of any activities undertaken by the Mizos against the administration.⁷³⁹

However, after 1946 the Mizo Union took an active part in politics not only in the then Lushai Hills, but also in Manipur and Assam. The Hmars from Manipur and North Cachar Hills of Assam were now very vocal of their status which they believed that their main hindrance was the division of boundaries by the government and believed that they were the victims of circumstances and were being exploited by others. They, therefore welcome with an open arms the Mizo Union's objective of merging the Hmars inhabited areas of the south-western part of Manipur along the North Cachar Hills of Assam to form a *Mizo Hill District*. In Manipur, in order to mobilize public support, the MU party hoisted a special Assembly at *Senvon*, the biggest Hmar Village in Manipur, which was attended by more than 1000 delegates.⁷⁴⁰ The top leaders who made their presence included R Thanhlira, and Lalbuaia from the Lushai Hills, H K Bawichhuaka from Cachar Hills, etc.⁷⁴¹ The general meeting unanimously resolved to forge concerted actions for the common welfare of the people and agreed that the Hmar inhabited areas would be included in the proposed *Mizo District*. Under the banner of the Mizo Union Party, the Hmars launched a boycott movement which was mainly against the administration of Manipur government and that of the Chiefs and their prerogatives. The movement gained momentum and soon spread to the remotest corner of the Hmar inhabitant areas. It had been stated that "the boycott movement turned violent in many places, where the houses of the Chiefs and Village Authorities were attacked and partly dismantled".⁷⁴² Several songs against the tyranny of the rulers were composed in the Lusei and the Hmar languages. The

⁷³⁹ J Zorema, *Indirect Rule in Mizoram 1890-1954 (The Bureaucracy and the Chiefs)*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2007, p.95.

⁷⁴⁰ Interview with C C Rema.

⁷⁴¹ Thiek, pp. 192-193.

⁷⁴² Interview with C C Rema.

government's response was non-committal and resorted to repressive measures resulting in the imprisonment of their leaders.⁷⁴³

In the North Cachar Hills of Assam, the MU party was spearheaded by the Hmars' local leaders namely HK Bawichhuaka, Dr. Rosiama and Rev. Thianga. When the second MU conference was held at *Hmarkhawlien* in *Lakhipur, Cachar* between 21-23 November 1946 and the leadership of the Hmar approved the resolution passed by MU at Aizawl in September 1946. The Hmars in the Cachar followed the advice of the MU leadership to start a civil disobedience movement against the government. One significant point to be noted here was the volunteer corps, an important wing of the M.U consisted of men and women under the command of one Ex-Havildar named Khuma. To distinguish the male and the female volunteers the former used a red tie. Both male and female above the age of 15 could enrolled as a volunteer. In almost every village, a *Union Hall* was maintained for a meeting place of the said volunteers whenever called upon. Besides the volunteer corps, another important wing was the Morse Code Corps consisting of a selected few to sent an important message by flashing torch lights to another village at night by using codes.⁷⁴⁴

One unfortunate incident during this event was the volunteering of some chiefs and village authority members as an informant to the government. This seriously had severe repercussion when the government imposed the Maintenance of Public Order Act 47 and arrested several of MU Leaders. H K Bawichhuaka and other leading leaders were arrested at Lakhipur and were sent to Silchar District Jail.⁷⁴⁵

Due to internal party conflict, the Mizo Union Party split into two-the right wing and the left wing respectively. Both the factions submitted a memorandum to the Bordoloi Committee that visited Aizawl on 17 April 1947. The left wing

⁷⁴³ Interview with C C Rema.

⁷⁴⁴ Songate, Hmar Tribe, p.111.

⁷⁴⁵ Songate, Hmar Tribe, p.111.

demanded a self-government through a district council while one member of the right wing demanded independence, but the two coopted members of the Committee from the then Lushai Hills decided to be a part of India.⁷⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Mizo Union had demanded the creation of a Mizo Hills District by integrating all the Mizo inhabiting areas such as the Lushai Hills, Manipur and North Cachar Hills, the substitution of the term *Lushai* to *Mizo* and *the internal administration of the Area should be left to the people within the framework of the Province of Assam* including a liberal financial assistance from the government, along with the reviewing of the political set-up after a period of 10 years.⁷⁴⁷ Subsequently, in 1952, the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India provided for the establishment of Lushai Hills District within the Autonomous Hills Districts in Assam along with five others Autonomous District Councils viz., United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Naga Hills, North Cachar and Mikir Hills.⁷⁴⁸

In the unprecedented turns of event the Hmars outside the then *Mizo Hills* felt betrayed by their brethren. The establishment of the Autonomous Hills District that covers only the then Lushai Hills was like a stab at the back. They felt that this was against the agenda of integrating the whole areas inhabited by the Mizos including the Hmars inhabitant areas of Manipur and North Cachar Hills. Naturally the Hmars sentiment was seriously hurt as many of them also endured several hardships. This sense of disloyalty was no less aggravated by the fact that men like *Vanhnuoikai* from *Sartuinek*, *H V Tawnga*, *Kunga* and *Luna* from *Tuolbung*, *Pasung*, *Chala*, *Hmunthang*, and *Zathang* from *Lungthulien*, *Bula* from *Parbung*, *Hrangchawi* and *Luma* from *Senvon*, *Sieka* from *Taithu* and *Hmanga* from *Rawvakawt*, etc. served term at Imphal Jail.⁷⁴⁹ J Batlien stated: “The opting of the words of the Union Leaders from Aizawl against the offering of the proposed *Regional Council* by P B Singh, the then Chief Minister of Manipur to the Union Leaders of Manipur added insult to the injury. When

⁷⁴⁶ V Venkata Rao, H Thansanga and Niru Hazarika, *A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India*, Vol.III-Mizoram, First Published, New Delhi, S Chand & Company (Pvt.) Ltd., 1987, pp.137-138.

⁷⁴⁷ R Rualthansanga, *Mizo District Council (Powers Exercised Under Sixth Schedule)*, Guwahati, EBH Publishers (India), 2015, p.7.

⁷⁴⁸ Rualthansanga, *Mizo District Council (Powers Exercised Under Sixth Schedule)*, hereafter cited as *Rualthansang, Mizo District*. p.10.

⁷⁴⁹ Batlien, pp.297-298.

P B Singh visited the Hmars inhabited areas of Manipur in February 1946, MU Leaders from Aizawl such as *Bawichhuaka*, *Thanhera* and *Sakawra* hurried to the MU Leaders of Manipur anticipating the offering of the Regional Council by the former, urging them to stand steadfast on their original cause, i.e. the integration of all Mizos from the Lushai Hills, Manipur and North Cachar Hills thereby creating a Mizo District, and that to be strong and unfazed as their goal is almost within their reach”.⁷⁵⁰

The precedence of the words of the MU leaders of Aizawl over PB Singh’s offering proved disappointing for the Hmars especially inhabiting the southern part of Manipur. When Prof. Lal Dena visited him (PB Singh) to enquire about the MU and this offering of a Regional Council, “*as soon as the subject was breached, P B Singh instantly recited a song composed in Mizo Language at that time against him,*

State lalber P.B Singh-an,
Union kawng a dal thei lo;
Authority bawm khaia chuan
*Artui Khawn I phu tawk e.*⁷⁵¹

(PB Singh, the State’s supreme leader;
Cannot block the Union’s way;
You, authority with basket in hand,
Are indeed fit only to beg for eggs.)

When questioned whether he had made such an offer, P B Singh just smiled. Moreover, in his public address at Senvon, he stated that he was sympathetic towards the cause of the Hmars, yet he was not prepared to take any steps to disrupt the territorial integrity of Manipur.⁷⁵² Either way, it was not certain whether it reflected that the Hmars would be considered as a separate tribe or community.

⁷⁵⁰ Batlien, p.298.

⁷⁵¹ Lal Dena, identity, p.98.

⁷⁵² Lal Dena, identity, p.99.

Another realm where the Hmars of Manipur and Cachar felt betrayed was in the alteration of the definition of the term *Mizo* after the achievement of the Mizo District. Under the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953, Chapter-I under Preliminary, the term *Mizo* was defined as a member of ‘any Lushai tribe’.⁷⁵³ Lushai, the corrupted form of Lusei was taken to mean only the Lusei clan.⁷⁵⁴ Traditionally, the Sailo chiefs and their large families used to call themselves the *Lusei*.⁷⁵⁵ In such a predicament, it was no wonder that the Hmars considered it as ‘double-crossing’ and an attempt to assimilate the smaller groups of people (minority group).

The above allegation was understandable considering the fact that even the first Chief Executive Member (C.E.M) of the Mizo District Council, Lalsawia had confessed that he absolved the detachment of the Hmars from the Mizo Union, and that he felt guilty in neglecting the political aspirations of their brethren who were outside the Mizo district and who also stood by them through thick and thin for the cause of the Mizo Union.⁷⁵⁶ One thing was certain that from that point of time the Hmars were more conscious of their political status and began to assert their identity in a more specific manner.

(b) The Hmar Mongolian Federation:

Although the Mizo Union failed to politically integrate all the ethnic divisions of the Mizos dispersed in the different states of the Northeast of India especially the Hmars outside the Mizo hills. The concept of the distinct ethnic group under the banner Hmar began to take shape in Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. In their respective inhabitant states, associations were organized with a view to materialize the unfulfilled dreams that they cherished under the Mizo Union Party. In the North Cachar Hills District of Assam, the first political Party of the

⁷⁵³ Rualthansanga, Mizo District, pp.26-27.

⁷⁵⁴ Lalsiamhnuna, ‘Ram leh Hnam Humhalh leh Hnam Inpumkhatna’, *Sinlung; Hmar Students’ Association 55th General Assembly Souvenir, 2016*, p.144.

⁷⁵⁵ Lunghnema, p.79.

⁷⁵⁶ Lalsawia, *Zoram Hming-Hmel*, Aizawl, Published by the Author, 1996, p.170.

Hmars called MAR (HMAR) MONGOLIAN FEDERATION (MMF) was formed on 1 June 1948, which aimed at unifying all those Hmars who were dispersed far and wide to different districts and states. It also aimed at accommodating all smaller ethnic groups of the Mongolian stock with whom they shared a very close affinity.⁷⁵⁷ The first President and Secretary were Thangteh Kuki and Harish Roy (Laltudai Roy) who belonged to the Amo clan of the Thiek sub-tribe of the Hmar respectively. However, its members were forbidden to participate in any political movement without the prior permission of the Party, and any member found acting against the Indian Union was to be suspended forthwith pending consultation of the general meeting that was held once a year.⁷⁵⁸

The aims and objectives of the Federation were as follows:

- *To Unite all Tribals in one Common Platform as Indians and to wipe out all sorts of sectionalism.*
- *To work for economic, educational and social uplift of all tribals.*
- *To serve the motherland in conformity with her culture and values.*
- *To watch over reactionaries who create divisions among the people with ill-motives.*
- *To help the National Government in all possible ways.*⁷⁵⁹

In the name of MMF, an appeal was immediately circulated to the Hmars as well as to all sections of the tribal population of the North East India. The circulated letter reads as follow:

1. *The Party (also) urges fellow brothers and sisters to consider the gravity of time and to form district committee*

⁷⁵⁷ Rosiem Pudaite, Indian National Struggle for Freedom and Its Impact on the Mizo Movement (1935-1953 A.D), p.138.

⁷⁵⁸ Lal Dena, identity, pp.128-129.

⁷⁵⁹ Thiek, p.199.

to decide the fate of tribals in Assam. Illiterate masses must be saved from the clutches of power-politics and bad elements in the name of nationality.

2. *Nationality means loyalty to motherland-INDIA. We are born Indians and shall live as Indians. But the reactionaries are teaching us Assam for Assamese, Lushai Hills for Mizos, Naga Hills for Nagas and so on. Are we Indians? Just think over and decide your line of action. We may be living in Naga Hills, Lushai Hills, Khasi Hills or in the plains of Surma Valley or Assam Valley, but after all, we are Indians and we have equal partnership right over the entire resource of India-our motherland. We cannot give up this right.*
3. *Sectional feeling will only weaken our Government and we shall be ever vigilant against such feelings of sectionalism and separatism. Though India is independent, it is unfortunately divided on communal lines. One part is turned to Pakistan where Muslims can find honour and safety there. So, other communities were compelled to opt for Indian Union or Hindustan.*
4. *Indian Union or Hindustan is a secular state. Here all communities get equal status irrespective of caste, creed or religion. And this is the only way to peace and Harmony. We have to think over our history of 200 years past and to revive the relationship of tribals and plainsmen. We need not put importance to the history of seventeenth or eighteenth century which was the blackest period for the country. There were clashes among different classes. Our actual history can be traced back to 2000 years back. we, the tribals, are still carrying on the glimpse of that nerve centre in our social affairs...*

If we are united, we shall lead the province and our district affairs will automatically come under control.

Brothers and sisters, if you are pleased to consider the above facts and principles, kindly drop a line to us. Our intention is to hold a political conference with representatives of all parts of the tribal zone in Assam, to draw lines for submission to the Indian Constituent Assembly.

With thanks and kindest regards for you all

Date:

Taranathpur,

P.O. Dwarbund

The 1st June, 1948

Forwarded by

The General Secretary, (HARISH ROY)

(Laltudai Roy)⁷⁶⁰

Yours Sincerely

Sd. THANGTEH KUKI (Hm)

MANTRI Dist. Cachar (Assam)

President

The MMF could not make much headway in spite of their heartrending appeal. This may be partly attributed to the wave of political awakening within the various tribal of North East India resulting in the emergence of various associations on ethnic lines. For instance, the Vaiphei National Organization was formed on 15 March 1940

⁷⁶⁰ Thiek, PP.199-201.

that aimed at socio-cultural, educational, economic and unity of all the Vaipheis, and the Kuki National Assembly on 1936, etc.⁷⁶¹

(c) Fenngo Association/Federation:

The Fenngo Association was formed in 1952 in the present Mizoram, under the leadership of Pachhunga, who also happens to be the first President of the Mizo Union. The association main aim was to develop a better relationship with anyone who adopted *Fenngo* as part of their traditional culture. *Fenngo* also implies a white Hmar shawl striped horizontally in six-small navy blue lines, and traditionally served as an important part of the Hmar culture.⁷⁶²

The move of some of the prominent citizens of Aizawl such as *Lalbuai Khawlhing* (Ex. MP), *H. Raltawna* IAS (Retd.), etc was not encouraged by some politicians on ground of accusing them of a separatist tendency. A request was put forth to annul the Federation and the Hmar leaders obliged for the cause of Mizo integrity and stopped instantly all their political activities.⁷⁶³ But the achievement of the association was more in term of asserting one's identity although its establishment coincided with the heyday of the Mizo Union which failed to endorsed the integrity of all the Mizos especially the Hmars living in different parts of North East India.

(d) The Hmar National Congress:

The Hmars living in the contiguous areas of the Lushai Hills had learnt their lesson from their experience and truly accepted that the Mizo Union failed to cross even the rivers *Tuiruong* and *Tuivai*, the boundaries of the then Lushai Hills with Manipur, with the contiguous areas mostly inhabited by the Hmars. As this was the case some sections of the Hmars especially the educated class desired to form a

⁷⁶¹ Rosiem Pudaite, pp.94 & 102.

⁷⁶² Paul B Chonzik, 'The Hmar Struggle for Self-Determination; A Brief Historical Investigation', in Timothy Z Zote (ed), *Manmasi Year Book*, Vol-III, 2006, p.177.

⁷⁶³ Lalsiamhnuna, p.127.

political party based on ethnic lines. Subsequently, a political conference of prominent Hmars was held on 3 July 1954 at Parbung, a village in southern Manipur that led to the emergence of the Hmar National Congress (HNC).⁷⁶⁴ The Office bearers includes *Rochunga Pudaite* as the first president, *Thienga Nampui* as the Secretary and *Saia of Pherzawl* as the treasurer. The formation of the HNC coincided with the formation of the State Reorganization Commission (SRC) by the government of India. In December 1953, the then Prime Minister Nehru appointed the States Reorganization Commission, hence the State Reorganization Act was enacted on 31 August 1956.⁷⁶⁵ Consequently, under the leadership of Rochunga Pudaite the Hmar National Congress in 1954 submitted a memorandum to the Chairman of the State Reorganization Commission of India.⁷⁶⁶ The memorandum stated the plight of the Hmar that had been neglected in respect of their economy, transport and communication, education, medical aids by the government. The memorandum also made a plea for the formation of the *Hmar District* encompassing all the inhabited areas of the Hmars in Manipur, Mizoram, Assam and Tripura.⁷⁶⁷

The movement for the Constitutional recognition of the *Hmar* as a *tribe* and a demand for the *Hmar District* for the contiguous Hmar inhabitant areas of North East India was spearheaded by *Rochunga Pudaite* who was then studying at Allahabad University. On 19 October 1953, he submitted a memorandum to Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India. The memorandum stated that the Hmars were completely wiped out in the constitution of India scheduled tribes lists, whereas every other tribe were identified and have their own share in the government, thereby breeding resentment as well as the feelings of being excluded towards the constitution. The letter, therefore moved a petition for the creation of a new district called “Hmar Hills District” by slicing off part of Manipur (south-west) and northern part of Lushai Hills and a little portion at the southern part of Cachar district with a very convenient natural borders on each sides. According to Rochunga, it will naturally arouse the

⁷⁶⁴ B B Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest-A Study of Politicisation of Culture*, Jaipur, Aalekh Publishers, 1979, p.58.

⁷⁶⁵ The States Reorganization Act, 1956. www.legislative.gov.in (accessed on 25 February 2020).

⁷⁶⁶ Hmingchungnung, *Aw Kan Hmar Ram*, Churachandpur, Published by Hranglienkhum Sinate, 1999, pp.37-39.

⁷⁶⁷ A Memorandum Submitted To The Chairman, States Re-organization Commission, Government of India, New Delhi by The Hmar National Congress, Pherzawl, Manipur on August 1954.

Hmars' enthusiasm as the rightful citizen of India and will helped solve all their internal and external problems, and therefore, proving themselves as the most progressive, honest and loyal citizen of India in the eastern border.⁷⁶⁸

Even though the initiative was taken by *Rochunga Pudaite*, the solidarity of the Hmar community on the above realm was suggested by the households of *Pherzawl* village, who collected and contributed the half day wage of an adult men from each household to borne the cost of his (*Rochunga Pudaite*) travelling to the capital to submit the memorandum.⁷⁶⁹

(e) The Hmar National Union:

The Hmar National Union (HNU) was formed in the *Hmar Inkhawmpui* (Conference) held at *Senvon* on 5 December 1958. It was an amalgamation of the Mizo Union and the Hmar National Congress. The two parties were amalgamated as some of the Hmar leaders apprehended the existence of two party with different ideology could weaken the unification movement of the Hmars. The Party claimed to represent all the Hmars of Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.⁷⁷⁰

A memorandum was submitted to the then Prime Minister of India in 1960. The memorandum asserted that the present areas of the Hmars habitation such as “the Northern part of Lushai Hills, South Western part of Manipur, South Eastern side of Cachar and Southern part of North Cachar Hills, all then were un-inhabited, compact and homogenous” prior to their settlement from the early part of the fourteen century”.⁷⁷¹ The memorandum appealed to the government of India for the immediate creation of an autonomous district to be called the ‘Hmar Hills District’ by carving out and uniting the Hmars majority areas of the Mizo District, Manipur, Cachar district

⁷⁶⁸ Rochunga Pudaite's letter to the Prime Minister of India, 19th October 1953.

⁷⁶⁹ Lal Dena, Identity, p.132.

⁷⁷⁰ Keivom, Hmar Tolung, pp138-139.

⁷⁷¹ A memorandum submitted To The Prime Minister, Indian Union, New Dehli by The Hmar National Union, September 1960. P.3.

and North Cachar district of Assam. In support of the above claim, the memorandum stated the areas and populations of the Hmars in the proposed district and how they had been misunderstood resulting in their division to different states of the North East of India. Furthermore, the cutting up of the settlement of the Hmars reduced them into a minority in their respective regions leading to their identifications with the basic obstacles/grievances faced by the minorities relative to development. To sum up, the memorandum asserted that the Hmar people sought a constitutional safeguards and remedies which was “in consonance with the rights of the people provided by the constitution of India”.⁷⁷²

A memorandum was again submitted on September 1968 to The Prime Minister of India appealing for the *Creation of Hmar Autonomous Hills District* comprising of all the contiguous areas inhabited by the Hmars in the north eastern region, along with a map indicating the proposed region, full description of resources available in the said areas and budget estimate for the first year of its creation. The Memorandum earnestly requested the then Prime Minister to make an enquiry and appointed a commission to see to the demands made by them.⁷⁷³

Soon, the Hmar National Union (HNU) spread and opened branches and units outside Manipur. For instance, in Mizoram in 1962 branches and units were already opened in the Hmar dominated areas such as *Vaitin, Khawpuor, Tinghmun, Mauchar* and *Sakawrdai*, (villages located to the northeast of Mizoram). In February 1966, the HNU gained recognition as a political party in the Mizo Hills District and decided to contest in the village council election.⁷⁷⁴ However, the emerging Mizo National Front (MNF) party and its movement became increasingly influential in the Mizo Hills. The MNF and its armed revolution for the independence of Mizoram including all the inhabitant areas of the Mizos had resulted in the paradigm shift of the attitude of most of the Mizos who had been trying to have a separate administrative unit and resulted

⁷⁷² A memorandum submitted To The Prime Minister, Indian Union, New Dehli by The Hmar National Union, September 1960.

⁷⁷³ A memorandum submitted To The Prime Minister, Indian Union, New Dehli by The Hmar National Union, September 1968.

⁷⁷⁴ Chonzik, ‘The Hmar Struggle for Self-Determination; A Brief Historical Investigation’, pp177-178.

in the subsiding of the movement for a separate District temporarily.⁷⁷⁵ It was also stated that the MNF became apprehensive about the existence of such organization on separate ethnic lines among the ‘*Mizo*’ tribes. It was stated that the MNF forced the HNU offices to shut down while confiscating their files and documents, resulting in the eclipsing of the party into oblivion in Mizoram.⁷⁷⁶ As for the case of its birth place, Manipur, the attainment of Manipur statehood in 1972 and the subsequent winning of election of the state Assembly seat by the Party’s President, *Ngurdinglien Sanate*⁷⁷⁷ was largely responsible for the declining of the Party.⁷⁷⁸

(f) Hmar Regional Movement:

The Hmar Regional Movement was formed in 1963 with the objective of creating a *Regional Council* based on ethnic lines, with H Sapbela of *Tinghmun* (a village in northern Mizoram), *Sunga Pulamte* of *Vaitin* (a village in northern Mizoram), and *J Challien* of *Sakawrdai* (a village in northern Mizoram) as the President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively. The Movement called for the creation of the Hmar Regional Council in line with the Pawi and Lakher Regional Councils in Mizoram for the *Hmar Thimpui Area* (dark part of Mizoram) consisting of the neglected area dominated by the Hmar tribe. The movement attempted to adopt a constitutional means in realizing its goal. A memorandum of grievances was planned to be submitted to the Governor, even talk was held with Lal Denga (the then president of the MNF). However, the movement being a peaceful one was nipped in the bud under the threat of the MNF that professed the formation of *Greater Mizoram* even encompassing the Hmars inhabited areas of the North Eastern India.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁵ O Rosanga, ‘The Rise of Self-Assertion and Self-Determination of the Ethnic Tribe of The Mizos (1945-1965)’, in *Laisuih (Ram Leh Hnam Humhalhna)*, Aizawl, Mizoram, Published by MC Lalrinthanga, 2007, p.302.

⁷⁷⁶ Chonzik, ‘The Hmar Struggle for Self-Determination; A Brief Historical Investigation’, pp177-178.

⁷⁷⁷ Interview with John Lalnunsang.

⁷⁷⁸ Goswami, *The Mizo Unrest; A Study of Politicisation of Culture*, p.59.

⁷⁷⁹ Interview with Thangliensung (65 years) on 7 May 2019 at Sakawrdai, Mizoram.

(g) Young Hmar Association:

The Young Hmar Association (YHA) was formed in 1967 at Sakawrdai, a village in northern Mizoram and its first President was *Ngurliana*.⁷⁸⁰ The YHA was formed along the line of *Young Mizo Association* (YMA) and had branches and units in almost all villages dominated by the Hmars.⁷⁸¹ It was formed at *Sakawrdai* in 1967 with *Ngurliana* as its president. It was asserted that following the MNF movement for the sake of convenience the government of India formulated a policy of grouping of villages of the Mizo Hills into four type of grouping centres.⁷⁸² It was argued that during the re-grouping of villages against the MNF Movement, *Sakawrdai* village too, was re-group within *Zohmun* Village in 1968. However, after the re-location of villages to their respective site, the YHA passed into oblivion, thus in its place, the YMA was revived.⁷⁸³

1.9 Mizo National Front Movement (MNF) and the Hmars:

The emergence of Mizo National Front (MNF) in the 1960s had a great impact on the Hmars as an ethnic group. It was stated that the MNF was transformed from the Mizo National Famine Front that was formed as a relief measures from a natural phenomenon called *Mautam* that occurred every fifty years and would last for a year or two. During the *Mautam*, the bamboos which were the natural vegetation of the region spread abundantly, flowered and bear seeds. The seeds being nutritious for the rodent resulted in the unprecedented outburst of their population and their consumption of every single grains of the region thereby resulting in a severe famine for the people. It was argued that the apathetic attitude of the government instigated some sections of the population to formed the said organization with *Laldenga* as its President and *R Denthuama* as its Secretary. Subsequently, the Mizo Famine Front

⁷⁸⁰ Thangliensung (65 years), Interview by Self on 7 May 2019, Sakawrdai, Mizoram.

⁷⁸¹ Chonzik, p.178.

⁷⁸² O Rosanga, 'Economic Problems Caused by Insurgency in Mizoram-A Study', in Malsawmkima (ed.) *Socio Economic Impact of Mizoram Insurgency*, Aizawl, Mizoram, Published by Aizawl North College, 2015, pp.124-125.

⁷⁸³ Interview with Thangliensung.

was changed into a political party and rechristened as the Mizo National Front on 22 October 1961.⁷⁸⁴

The concept of self-determination in the political sphere became the main catchword to the contiguous areas of the Mizo Hills. In a series of their public meetings from 1961 to 1962 in almost all parts of Mizoram, it aimed at the establishment of *Greater Mizoram* that would encompass all the ethnic divisions of the *Mizos* of Mizoram, Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Bangladesh and Burma across international boundaries where the term *Mizo* was pre-supposed as all the sub-ethnic groups under the *Kuki-Chin* group. The proposed *Greater Mizoram* once realized will eventually seceded from the Indian Union.⁷⁸⁵ The policy of MNF which was framed in the Assembly of 1963 were-

1. *“Complete freedom for the whole Mizoram and re-organization of all the ethnic groups forming the Mizo nation.*
2. *Complete safeguard of Christianity.*
3. *Progress and uplift of the Mizo nation”.*⁷⁸⁶

The Mizo National Front declared the Independence of Mizoram from the Indian Union on 28 February 1966.⁷⁸⁷ Henceforth, the Government of Assam declared the Mizo district as a *disturbed area* on 2 March 1966 under the *Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1958* and the *Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958*. To dealt with the disturbances, the government therefore dispatched troops by air and road to Aizawl and placed the armed police forces under the operational control of the army. Later, on 6 March 1966, under the Defense of India Rule, the Mizo National Front was declared as an unlawful association implying that managing, promoting or attending

⁷⁸⁴ Lalrawnliana, Ex-MNA, *Freedom Struggle in Mizoram*, Vol.I, Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl, Published by the Author, 2014, pp.1-3.

⁷⁸⁵ C Nunthara, *Mizoram; Society and Polity*, p.196.

⁷⁸⁶ Lalrawnliana, Ex-MNA, *Freedom Struggle in Mizoram*, p.22.

⁷⁸⁷ Zoramthanga, *Mizo Hnam Movement History; A History of Mizo Nationalism Movement*, Aizawl, Published by the Author, 2016, p.35.

the meetings of the MNF, as well as publishing any notice or advertisement relating to such meetings, inviting anyone to support the MNF or in any form assisting its operation, becomes liable to punishment and prosecution.⁷⁸⁸

Indeed, the political involvement of the Hmars on ethnic lines was given a setback during the Mizo National Front Movement. As mentioned above, the demand for the formation of the Hmar District subsided due to the MNF movement and the subsequent transformation into an underground outfit. During this period, the leadership of the Hmar National Union (HNU) urged their brethren from Northern Mizoram to set up the party units to encourage the demand for the formation of a separate Hmar District. Yet, due to the MNF Movement and its adamant stance against formation of a separate district on ethnic lines, the MNF would and also likely used brute force to such development, hence the demand for a district met a setback for the time being. Moreover, it was alleged that the MNF vowed to stand for *the integration of all Mizo ethnic groups under one Government*, but the outcome of their promise seemed to be the reverse. It was said that *H Thanga Keivawm* of *Palsang* village, an activist of the HNU was killed by the Mizo National Army (MNA), the arm wings of the MNF.⁷⁸⁹ It was also reported that *Rohringa Pulamte* and his friends from *Vaitin* village were captured and imprisoned for fifteen days and they were released only after giving assurance that any activities under the banner of the Hmar National Union would cease unconditionally.⁷⁹⁰

The above activities, no doubt deeply hurts the sentiment of the Hmars living inside and outside the Mizo District. But, the open opposition to the MNF movement was averted by the timely actions of the MNA wherein in 1969, under the leadership of *L Malsawma Colney* hundreds of MNA personal visited *Senvawn* village, then one

⁷⁸⁸ Rao, Thansanga and Hazarika, *A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India*, Vol.III-Mizoram, pp.243-244.

⁷⁸⁹ Hmingchunghnung, *Aw Kan Hmar Ram*, p.53.

⁷⁹⁰ Lalsiamhnuna, pp.127-129.

of the biggest Hmar village in the south-west of Manipur. *L Malsawma Colney* made a touching speech to which he stated:

*“Since the MNF is the sole political party in which the rights and solidarity of all the Mizos and territorial integration of all the Mizo inhabited areas into one administrative unit could be achieved, there would be no question of the establishment of other political parties.”*⁷⁹¹

The MNF urged the Hmars not to organize any political party other than the MNF. One significant point to be noted here was that Malsawma was a good orator and his speech too was very touching, as such many Hmar youths without any hesitation enrolled themselves as the MNF volunteers. Their grievances against the MNA was apparently overshadowed.⁷⁹²

The aspirations of the Hmars for the political integrations of all the Hmars was once again shattered indirectly by the Memorandum of Settlement between the Mizo National Front and the Government of India signed on 30th June 1986.⁷⁹³ Among other things, on the issue of integration of the Mizo inhabited areas the settlement stated:

*“The question of the unification of Mizo inhabited areas of other States to form one administrative unit was raised by the MNF delegation. It was pointed out to them, on behalf of the Government of India, that Article 3 of the Constitution of India prescribes the procedure in this regard but that the Government cannot make commitment in this respect.”*⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹¹ Lalsiamhnuna, p.128.

⁷⁹² Interview with Lalroman (69 years) on 12 August 2016 at Sielmat, Churachandpur, Manipur.

⁷⁹³ Rao, Thansanga & Hazarika, *A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Vol-III-Mizoram*, New Delhi, S Chand & Company (Pvt.) Ltd., p.253.

⁷⁹⁴ Lal Hmingthanga, ‘Problem of Peace-Making in Mizoram’, in J V Hluna (ed), New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., 2013, pp.143 & 147.

Ironically, the Memorandum of Settlement turned out to be a stimulus for the development of a new era relating to involvement in politics by the Hmars. As the settlement could not fulfill the contention of the Hmars, on 19 October 1986, *Mizoram Hmar Conference* was held at *Vaitin*, with a theme “Hmar Political Future”, and also set up the *Mizoram Hmar Association*. The conference decision to set up a Hmar Convention took a concrete form at the convention held on 9 December 1986 at *Sakawrdai* Village. In this convention, the *Mizoram Hmar Association* was transformed into a political party and came to be known as the *Hmar People’s Convention* (HPC). The party contested the Mizoram MLA election in 1987 which was a milestone for the Hmar community of Mizoram and on 5 October 1987, they also submitted a Memorandum for the first time to the then Mizoram Governor for the Hmar Autonomous District. It had been lamented that the supposed to be peaceful organization was soon transformed into an armed movement from 28 March 1989 due to the severe retaliation of the armed forces of the state government.⁷⁹⁵ However, after as many as twelfth round of talks which lasted for months between the representatives of the Mizoram Government and the HPC respectively, a peace settlement was negotiated on 27 July 1994 at Aizawl known as “*Memorandum of Settlement Between The Government of Mizoram and The Hmar Peoples Convention (HPC)*”.⁷⁹⁶ The 1994 MoS was supplanted by the Peace Accord signed on 2 April 2018 between the Hmar Peoples Convention (Democratic) and the State Government of Mizoram that resulted in the creation of Sinlung Hills Council which will have 12 elected and two nominated members.⁷⁹⁷ Accordingly, the first election of the Sinlung Hills Council (SCH) was held on 5 November 2019.⁷⁹⁸

The Hmar’s re-assertion of their identity manifesting into inter-tribal feuds, and the formations of various associations even though failed, as of now to realize the

⁷⁹⁵ Hmingchunghnung, pp.56-57-60.

⁷⁹⁶ Chitta Ranjan Nag, *Post-Colonial Mizo Politics (1947-1998)*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1999, p.118.

⁷⁹⁷ John H Pulamte, ‘Mizoram Hmar Politics: Today and Tomorrow’, *Vartien, Hmar Students’ Association, 57th General Assembly Souvenir, 28th November-1st December, 2019*, printed at Lois Bet, Aizawl, 2019, p.77.

⁷⁹⁸ *Vanglaini*, Vol-XXXIV No.262, 7 November, 2019, K Sapdanga, Aizawl Venglai, Aizawl.

ultimate goal, i.e. bringing together all the Hmars inhabiting different part of North East India under one banner, it was not a complete failure.

CHAPTER-6

CONCLUSION:

The origin of the Hmars construed through oral traditions was significant in spite of its fair share of criticism. It provided the much-needed historical sources for reconstructing the past, carving out identity and proved to be an indispensable means for promoting and stimulating the cultural heritage independent of colonial influence for the non-elite tribes like the Hmars. *Manese, Sinlung, Shan*, etc. traditions might elude historicity, yet they served as an instrument of identification as well as the focal point of integrating element for the Hmars of different parts of the Northeast India. On the other hand, there were ample evidences mainly in the form of literatures and material remains to prove their previous settlement and their present settlement prior to colonialism, lending support to the theory that they were one of the original inhabitants of the present Mizoram.

The Hmars as the original inhabitants of the present Mizoram concentrating particularly in the northern region was established from the writings of colonial administrators and ethnographers supplemented by the early Mizo writers. For instance, an extract from Carey and Tuck's *The Chin Hills: A history of the People, our dealing with them, their Customs and Manners, and a Gazetteer of their Country*, indicated that the Hmars had been in their present settlement prior to the advent of the British in Mizoram, although it did not precisely address them as the 'Hmar' but tactlessly clubbed under different names such as *Kukis, Lushais* or *Chins*, and this too, depending on the regions they inhabited.

Furthermore, apart from the existing literatures, there were also evidences either in the form of material remains or names of a places, rivers, etc. closely associated with the Hmars and these were still in used even to this day. In this regards, mention may be made of places like *Khawzawl, Tamdil, Thapui Chhip*, etc., rivers like

Tuivai and *Tuivawl* and material remains such as *Sikpui Lung* at *Zothlang*, *Rulkuo* at *Rulchawm*, *Sura Lung* at *Ruallung*, etc.

According to oral traditions, the *Hmar* as a nomenclature had been commonly used even before the *Hmars* inhabited their present settlement. Yet, the colonial administrator-cum ethnographers failed to identify them as a separate tribe and they were often clubbed under a different nomenclature such as *Chin*, *Kuki* and even *Lushai*. This could be indisputably attributed to their lack of in-depth studies about them. J Shakespeare who was supposed to be well versed in ethnographical study of Mizoram did not hold back from referring to them as the *Old Kukis* in spite of being aware that they were known as the *Hmars*.

It appears that they (colonial ethnographers) opted the easy way out in classifying all the hill tribes under the nomenclature *Kuki* and *Chin* that generally denoted the various hill tribes inhabiting the region between Burma and the provinces of Assam and Bengal. The *Hmars* as a nomenclature was documented only by the early native writers. Adding to their woes, the Scheduled Tribe list of India declared in 1950 defined *Mizo* as ‘*Any Lushai Tribe*’ implying that the *Hmar* had to be classified as a *Lushai* in order to enlist for a governmental job. The *Hmar* as a tribe became recognized only after the 1950s, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists (Modification) Order. Consequently, many of the so-called *Hmar clan* assimilated to their kindred tribes which was evident from the Statistic of Tribe Wise Population of Major Tribe of Mizoram. From constituting about 13% of the total population of the present Mizoram in 1901, the total number of people who used *Hmar* as a mother-tongue came down to only 1.09% of the total population in 1961 without any evidences of any major tribal movement or migration during this period. The process of the assimilation was accelerated by the clannish nature of the *Hmars*, i.e., identifying foremost with their clan which was evident from their settlement pattern that was bases on clan system.

The Hmar's migration in the post-colonial period was not as intriguing as the pre-colonial migration. Even though crossing the inter-state boundaries was imperative, their new settlement was already inhabited by their own brothers. One important point to be noted here was the failure of the colonial power to specifically identify the Hmars, and the policy of divide and rule inherited by the Government of India which resulted in the Hmars' inhabiting the different States of the North East of India.

Primary sources relating to the origin and migratory movements of the Hmars is no doubt desirable to complement with the available existing oral traditions to construe the pre-colonial Hmar history. However, from their present settlement the major constraint relating to historical sources dwindle to some extent due to the availability of sources in the form of literatures and material remains. In this realm, the colonization of the settlement of the Hmars by the British was noteworthy. No doubt, the colonial authority failed to acknowledge the unique identity of the Hmars and imposed upon them their draconian *divide and rule* policy which cut up their habitations resulting in their settlements being bounded by states and international boundaries. And that the Hmars cannot be studied in isolation defined by regionalism based particularly on polity as their settlement areas were inter-dependent and influence each other pushing political boundary to oblivion for all practical purposes. Yet, ironically, it was the same colonial power that contributed to their enlightenment that awakened a consciousness about their past, exposing them to their surroundings and providing them a means to combat the challenges of their very survival and existence.

The pre-colonial Hmars' society, polity, economy and belief system was symbiotic and bound together intricately like a web making it hard to tell the beginning or the ending part. It was a close interaction between socio-cultural, economic, political and the belief system. For instance, in the event of *Sesun Inchawng*, where an affluent individual treats the whole villagers with a feast was believed to be a

gateway to *Pielral*. While the affluent individual was rewarded with the ultimate abode of the afterlife, the whole community was rewarded with a hearty meal (meat), which was a great privilege in an age when meat was seldom available for consumption. It suggested that the belief system was interdependent with the social system, where the service to human kind was wisely promoted and recognized and with it came a covetable prize. Likewise, the concept of *Pasaltha*, which was also linked with the *Pielral* served the exigencies of the day. During the pre-colonial period, inter-tribal feud ruled the day. In an age of survival of the fittest, it was expedient and reasonable for the village chief and his elders to encourage the concept of *Pasaltha*, a position that carries a respectful position during the present life coupled with a belief for a place at *Pielral* in the afterlife. The households not only acquired a warrior capable of protecting the lives and property of the villagers, they were also benefited with an additional economic resource in the form of the game that the *Pasaltha* brought home. Moreover, in the subsistence tribal economy like the Hmars where bare necessities were produced through *Lo*, the *Pasaltha's* contribution in hunting indirectly led to the protection of both the lives of the households as well as the food-crops from wild animals.

Kinship relationships characterized by a set of obligations and counter-obligations, or in other words, reciprocal obligation was an important feature of the social structures of the Hmars. It was manifested in all spheres of their social interactions such as ceremonies connected with marriages, birth or death, etc.

The Hmars experienced subsistence economy where their basic necessities were derived from their environment. All the members of the family lend a hand in their own capacity and constituted the work force in the daily production. What the households of a family feared most was inability to meet the basic requirements of the household or in other words having to live off the charity of their fellow villagers. As the Hmars were self-dependent each family motivated themselves to work hard from dawn to dusk to that end. The inability to make ends meet was often perceived as

idleness, sluggishness, laziness or not putting enough efforts to work. In the tribal labour intensive economy, it was very hard especially for the widow, orphans and a family with few or no male adult to keep the wolf from the door. As such, it was a great boon to have a male child that also bring more joy to the parents. The above inferences could be drawn from the oral traditions that reflected the cultures; ethos, values, dreams, aspirations and fears of the Hmars. For instance, in the folk tales *Liendohai Unau (Liendo and his brother Tuoisel)*, who were left to destitution due to their father's untimely demise and the subsequent abandonment by their mother, leading them to face alone the mockery of their fellow villagers. In the story, after fortune smile upon them the same people who sneered and jeered at them were the same to display awe and respect in the end.

The subsistence village economy based on the exploitation of nature with a simple tool gave rise to the production of bare necessities without any surplus for appropriation, which in turn resulted in a more or less egalitarian society with only a subtle inference to the existence of hierarchy, which altogether leading to the emergence of a simple and uncomplicated tribal polity based on chieftainship.

The belief system was based on the trepidation of the unknown. Their everyday existence was influenced by fear based on their wild imagination. The religious rites and rituals and the mode of curing the sickness were all an attempt to understand and attuned with the unknown. It was practically a practice favouring the affluent section of the society since the rites and rituals involves and even the ultimate goal, i.e., comforts in the afterlife was mainly within the reach of the well-to-do only. The biasness of the traditional religion was also reflected in the discrimination shown towards women; the only way they can access *Pielral* was by marrying a *Thangsuopa*, implying that women *per se* had no access to *Pielral*.

The pre-colonial Hmar women although enjoyed certain amount of freedom and opportunity, they were excluded in certain areas where the male considered it as their dominion. Taking to their stride the biological differences between man and woman, turning the differences into positive outputs and using it to their advantage such as being stronger and harder in an age where physical strength was the key to survival, and at the same time taking advantage of nature's exemption from nursing duties, they help shaped and constructed, zealously guarded the construed cultures and strive hard to perpetuate it.

Moreover, the age-old socially constructed Patriarchal system that has stood the test of time cannot be tossed aside and replaced with a thoroughly liberal and egalitarian society in a matter of just one to two decades on the pretext of enlightenment. Aside from the religious institution, society's attitude towards the Hmar women was liberal and they enjoyed as much freedom as their male counterpart.

The colonial administration and the missionaries mainly focused on the Eurocentric, pre-determined Christian point of view, and hence very few positive elements were acknowledged in the traditional belief system of the Hmars. The early native writers who themselves were a Christian convert followed suit and characterized the traditional belief system as 'animistic', the characteristic of a tribes very low in the scale of humanity, or in other word, a '*primitive people*'. An element of *animism*, no doubt, was visible in the traditional belief system of the Hmars. Nevertheless, animism was a part of the definition of every religion. For instance, even Christianity sees *God as Spirit* (John 4:24).

The Hmar traditional belief system was completely extinguished by Christianity today, thus analyzing it posed a great challenge. The colonial ethnographers, administrator and the Christian missionaries were biased in their treatment and understanding of the tribal norms. The Native writers that follows suit were themselves also a Christian convert. And as such, one should approach the subject with caution and

be alert of imposing foreign terminology and concept. Moreover, as the study reveals that the indigenous religion of the Hmars had no founder, therefore, it made the research more intricate and challenging. The fact that the practitioner did not possess a missionary zeal to propagate or proselytize it for the spread of such religion or to inculcate into others to gain such knowledge and therefore make matter worse.

Colonialism and its offshoots Christianity and education ushered in changes among the Hmars. The transformation was so great that one does not cringe at the idea of categorizing or dividing the socio-cultures of the Hmars as pre-colonialism and post-colonialism. Proselytizing Christianity and education by the missionaries served as an important factor in molding the modern identity of the Hmars. The immense popularity and acquiescence to Christianity resulted in the structural changes in the Hmar culture and also a radical transformation occurred into their belief system.

The colonial rule subsequently brought forth certain changes in the social and intellectual norms of the Hmars. In this dimension, Christianity and its offshoot education accelerated the transformation of the various aspects of the Hmar's culture. The unprecedented success of Christianity even to the extent of annihilating the traditional belief system may be attributed to certain factors. Firstly, the basis of the Hmars' belief system was *fear psychology*, especially of the fear of the unknown. At the same time, the Christian missionaries' successful employment of modern medicines based on scientific experiment to cure sickness might have corresponded to a proficient *Dawithiem* (Magician) to the Hmars capable of taming the unknown and therefore, no doubt venerated upon and extremely attractive. Secondly, the fact that the Hmar's habitation was colonized and that the Missionaries had joined forces with the colonial power was a force to reckon with. For example, when Savidge and Lorrain set foot in present Mizoram as Christian Missionaries, the initial reaction of the people towards them may be understood as far from cordial was evident from the nickname, *Sap Vakvai* (Vagabond). The situation reversed when the then official Leut. Col. Lock issued an order stating that salt could be purchased only after obtaining a letter from the former. Since colonization of a territory

was bound to be accompanied by colonization of the mindset, or we might also implied that the colonial cultures was imposed upon although in a subtle manner where in this case the natives were lured with modern medicine, education (the gate way to salaried job) and other amenities. Thirdly, in the proselytization of Christianity, an element of what might be equated as *Contextual Theology* and *Indigenization* was visible. The likening of *Pielral*, a place of perfection, a place where all their ideal fantasies fabricated in this life will be realized at the Christian *heaven*, and the relating of the sacrifice of Christ for the sinner to the animal sacrifice as peace covenant in *Sa-ui-tan* (explain in the preceding chapter) to illustrate the sacrifice of Christ for the sinner to make peace with the holy God seems very appealing and easily identifiable with their cultures.

However, what induced the over-all upstaging of the traditional belief system that was deeply entwined with the socio-cultural aspects by that of Christianity may be more than the existence of a subtle element of what may be understood as *Contextual Ideology*. Post-Christianity, socio-cultural ethos, virtue, moral and values came to be identified more and more with Christian values centering around Christianity, resulting in the structural transformation of the Hmars' culture. *Zu* (intoxicating drink brewed from rice), occupying an important place in the society was scorned at incessantly resulting in the association of it with a great vice or evil deeds, and therefore the consumption of it amounted to a sinful act. The declining of *Buonzawl* as the nerve-centre of the society, etc., were a few examples in this dimension. On the other hand, new elements such as western clothes, education and many social reforms were introduced.

All the above points, no doubt might have joined forces in spreading Christianity. However, one must look for the reason for its immense success in upstaging and the total annihilation of the traditional belief system within the inherent nature of the traditional belief system itself. The Hmar's traditional belief system like all tribal religions was based on oral traditions, i.e., devoid of any scriptures. It was a set of corporate *memory* passed on from generations, without a worship place for the *Supreme Being* or the *Super Natural Beings*. Non-appearance of neither a zeal nor

fanaticism involving the traditional belief system was suggested by the appearance of some elements of *indigenization* of Christianity with the traditional belief system. Many gospel songs composed especially by the early converts often employed Christian terms or concepts side by side with the traditional one. A fine example of the above was *Pa thununa* (Father's discipline) by Rev. Thangngur which was about the *Pielral* sun shining on his soul, "*Pielral nisa ka lungrilah a hung var ta*". However, in the same song he claimed to have spiritually originated from the blood of Jesus Christ. As such, in the absence of religious canon and systematic organization, the Hmars' traditional belief system did not stand a chance of an invasion by Christianity that comprised of a set of organized structure along with written scriptures, and additionally coupled with the assistance of the colonial power.

The influence of the British administration resulted in the supposition of western culture to a dominant position in relation to the tribal cultures leading to the destabilization of the later. The fact that the Hmar society was in state of flux due to unprecedented inter-village feud and conflict due to the movement of tribes in the pre-colonial period contributed to its destabilization. Yet, although the social, economic and political factors formed an important element in the context of conversion from traditional belief system to Christianity among the Hmars, it could be a simple religious pragmatism and logic on their part. For instance, the conclusion that the Christian God was greater than their traditional deities or that the Christian medicines based on Scientific experiment was far more effective than the traditional mode of curing sickness. When even one aspect of the close interaction between socio-cultural, economic, political and belief system was disrupted, the balance toppled resulting in a major over-haul or transformation to adjust to the changes.

If Colonialism was the harbinger of change, it was Christianity that reinforced the changes. Subsequently, the Hmar identity came to be identified as the Christian Hmar identity. The Christian missionaries themselves were strongly influenced by the patriarchal western society of their day, and they continued to support the

patriarchalism that was already visible in the Hmar's society prior to colonialism. Thus, the result was that on the one hand the society became increasingly secular, while at the same time the church continued the traditional patriarchal establishment within its realm. The secular enlightened cultures of the west percolated through modern western system of education to which the Christian missionaries had played an important role, yet, ironically it was Christianity that provided sanctioned to patriarchal institution in the ecclesiastical set up. This was apparent in the attitude of the Hmars towards women even today. In the event such as *lengkhawm*, which was a party or gathering for singing fellowship, the unwritten rule was that the male member from the gathering party always beat the traditional drum(s) in order to lead the singing party. Which in itself was nothing out of the ordinary except that the gathering tended to wait sometimes to a ridiculous length for a male drummer who possessed the skill to do the honour. During this gathering, it was deemed unethical for women to lead the singing party although there was no canon against it even though there were many who could beat the drum since some of them are well-accustomed to it in the church services for womenfolk. The only rational explanation was the subservient attitude of women vis-à-vis men in the religious organization.

The socio-cultures of the post-colonial period reflected an element of synthesis between the ethno-cultures with that of Christianity, against the popular notions of complete breakaway with the past. There existed an element of Change and Continuity in the *hybrid cultures* which was a result of a synthesis of ethno-cultures with Christianity with the dominant theme being Christian ethos, concept and principles. In other words, any elements that did not conform within the purview of the Christian doctrines were either dismissed or altered. Take for instance marriages among the Hmars, after adoption of Christianity the *marriage system* became a hybrid custom, a blending of both traditions and Christianity, the marriage negotiation, the bride-price, serving the guests, etc. retained their places. The marriages became more than a civil contract, a religious ceremony with a vow solemnizing at the altar of the church with western outfit dominating the traditional ones for the bride and groom. Certain practices such as throwing filthy water at the bride, eavesdropping at the newlywed

couple, serving of *Zu* during the marriage party, etc. were done away with, while at the same time, new traditions such as giving gifts to the newly wed were introduced.

Introduction of Christianity and education, the twin offshoots of colonialism that beget modern enlightenment principles such as reduction of Hmar language into writing heralded the growth of vernacular literature, the instinct of preserving their distinct socio-cultural identity that escalated into a movement for autonomy. The imparting of Christianity and education in the *duhlian* dialect did not seem to evoke any reaction in the initial period. But, when it was further carried to Senvon, i.e. outside the ambit of the *Sailo* hegemony, it was perceived as a form of cultural imposition and an attempt of domination threatening the Hmars distinctiveness. In the application of cultural domination, the political and economic power plays an influential role. Nevertheless, the translation of the gospel according to *St. Mark* under the initiative of *F J Sandy* (a missionary from *Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales*) by *Thangkhup* and *Thanga*, and its subsequent printing of the same by British & Foreign Bible Society, Calcutta Auxiliary in 1920 proved crucial for the preservation of the language of the Hmar. Henceforth, more extract from the Bible were translated and the complete Holy Bible was translated and published in 1968. The Hmar Holy Bible Golden Jubilee was celebrated on 24 & 25 November 2018, under the auspices of Hmar Bible Translation Committee comprising of the Church leaders of different dominations among the Hmars.

A remarkable post-colonial phenomenon among the Hmars was the emergence of political awakening that reflected the frustration, alienation and the feeling of deprivation. The political awakening runs parallel with identity revivalism focusing on the definition and consolidation of their boundaries based on their primordial cultures. The government of India inherited the colonial legacy of unforgivable negligence on the issues of ethnic habitations of the various Northeastern region. Even the Northeastern Area (Reorganization) Act of 1971 did not prove to be different. The Act cuts up the habitations of various communities including the Hmars and attached

up the slices of their habitations into different legal states, which was deeply hurtful and insulting to them. Adding to their woes, the *Hmars* in particular were reduced to a minority position in the various states of Northeast India. The feeling of alienation, deprivation, neglect and frustration over the allocation of resources was the main driving force to define and consolidate their territory-based identity. Education acts as the catalyst for such reaction. At the same time, political awakening resulted in the growth and nurturing of identity based on primordial cultures which act as a cohesive measure, ideal for preserving the identity and integrity of the Hmar peoples irrespective of their regions or settlements. In the present Mizoram, it materialized in the eventual emergence of the *Sinlung Hills Council*.

Appendix-I

A MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE PRIME MINISTER INDIAN UNION
NEW DELHI

By

The Hmar National Union

Which is

The Only living and All-Embracing Political Organization Of the Freedom-Loving
Hmar People of Manipur, Assam and Tripura (1960)

To,

The Prime Minister

Indian Union

New Delhi.

Hon'ble Sir,

Before the advent of the British in the Hmar area to take over the administration, the Hmar had got their own set up of government independent of outside influence and control. They, young and old, were contented with their political status and territories over which their sway had extended, and perfect peace and tranquility had ruled the day. In those days there was no segregation of the tribe nor discrimination of any kind as the tribe has been badly suffering from nowadays. Being a distinct tribe and equally strong in matters of tribal, cultural and economic development, the Hmars had been as strong and powerful as their neighbouring tribes like Lushais, Khasis, Garos, Mikirs etc., who are now enjoying to the full, the fruits of India's Independence. In this connection mention may also be made about the fact that the Hmars were the original settlers of the present Mizo District, south western part of Manipur, south eastern parts of Cachar and North Cachar Hills. These areas however, had constituted one compact whole in the past and a sort of democracy was

the form of government. But ever since the British had finally conquered the Hmar area the whole tribe was mercilessly segregated and given to the great pressure of social and political discrimination and as such the Hmars now considered the achievement of independence a prerogative devoutly to be wished or welcomed for the quick restoration of the long-cherished reconstruction and consolidation of the tribe under one administrative unit. This memorandum, therefore, represents the wish of the Hmar people of Manipur, Assam and Tripura and fervently appeals for the creation of a new district to be called "Hmar Hills District" by uniting the contiguous Hmar majority areas of Lushai hills, Manipur, north Cachar Hills and Cachar, Assam.

Past History (Their coming into India)

The long past history of the Hmar, though may be interesting, was not fully known to their modern young learners and anthropologists due mainly to their lack of script till the coming of the white missionaries in their regions. However, some traditions were kept in their memories which were handed down from generation to generation; and these traditions backed by some monumentary traces, are being worked out into history by their writers as well as by some anthropologists. But as no authentic information regarding their chronological accounts is available, the present writers of their history are time and often in confusions as to the strict chronology throughout their nomad life. Thus, Lt, Colonel J. Shakespeare surmised that they came into India in 1368 A.D. which was long before the coming of the Lushais. This is also an agreement with the writings of the noted Lushai historians. Thus, the most popular believed is that the Hmars came from their original homeland "Sinlung" a place somewhere in China, and made somehow their settlements, in the early part of the fourteenth century A.D. in the neighbouring areas they are spread over now, after fairly long time halt in "Shan" now called Shan State in Northern Burma. It may not be out of place to mention here that "Shan" where they lived for a number of years was "to the Hmars what Canaan was to the Israelites". But, quite unfortunately, natural calamity whatever might be its nature, drove the helpless people to track for fresh vacant land on a hunt for food where the nature would be bounteous. Thus, from Shan

their nomadism continued till at last they reached and settled down in the present northern part of Lushai Hills, South Western part of Manipur, South eastern side of Cachar Hills, all then un-inhabited, compact and homogeneous.

Areas and Population

At present almost the entire population of the Hmar tribe is distributed into the following contiguous districts, namely, Manipur, Lushai Hills, Cachar and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam. The hill districts occupied by the Hmar in Manipur were never apart of Manipur state before, that will be evidence from political documents and history. Before the Britishers put them completely under control, the Hmars had got their own administration strong enough to knit together in one big unit devoid of all social, economic, political and educational facility as desired by the people concerned.

The entire population of the Hmars on taking from the aforesaid four districts alone will be 1,22,300 with an occupied area of about 4,800 sq. miles. There are also about 3,000 Hmars in Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Assam and about 10,000 in Tripura too. Historically and culturally the Hmars are different and distinct from the rest of hill tribes and speak one language different from the other tribes. They also comprise of one compact whole and can be treated as homogeneous unit for administrative and political purpose.

Who Are They?

The Hmars may warrant a careful anthropological investigation as this tribe is vaguely known to the general public in India, and in some current newspapers and anthropological or linguistic works some misleading statements or interpretations have been made about them to be a big 'clan' either under the Lushai tribe or under the Kuki tribe. Lt. Col. J. Shakespeare had described some of their social customs under the head "Old Kuki Clans". But evidently, Shakespeare misunderstood who the

Hmars really are, and it is likely that he borrowed the term “Old Kuki” unwarrantedly from Dr. Grierson’s writing in the “Linguistic Survey of India” in which was placed the Hmar language along with other languages of neighbouring tribes under “Old Kuki” group. Similarly, some English writers who wrote about the Lushais also took the Hmars to be a big ‘clan’ under the Lushai tribe. In this way some misleading statements are often found in the works of some writers like A.G. Mc-Call, J.H. Hutton, and others who put these Hmars under the Lushai tribe (in the case of the Lushai Hills) or under the Kuki tribe (in the case of Manipur, North Cachar Hills and Tripura). The truth however, is that the Hmars are the original or first settlers of these districts and are as big as the other tribes like the Lushais, Garos, Mikirs etc.

But, these unfortunate tribe was mercilessly divided and placed in the far ends of the adjoining districts by the Britishers when the boundary lines were, for the first time demarcated, thus making the Hmars minority and voiceless in those districts.

The Various Sub-Tribes

The Hmar tribe is broadly divided into two big groups or phratries-Khawsak and Khawthlang-and these two phratries embrace as many as 36 “pahnam” or clans. Under the Khawsak phratry there are 19 clans viz., 1. Faihriem 2. Lungtau 3. Ngurte 4. Lawitlang 5. Zote. 6. Leiri 7. Hrawte 8. Khawbung. 9. Pakhuong 10. Darngawn 11. Hrangchal 12. Sakum 13. Kholhring 14. Kom 15. Ngente 16. Lutung (Hmarlusei) 17. Aimol 18. Anal 19. Chiru.

Under the Khothlang group the clans are 19 in number viz. 1. Biete 2. Thiek 3. Langrawng 4. Changsan 5. Mahau 6. Sutpawng 7. Kolhren 8. Chawrai 9. Puram 10. Kaihpen 11. Hrangkhol 12. Darlawng 13. Sakechep 14. Mongtung 15. Chawhthe 16. Ruonte 17. Khelte 18. Muolthuom 19. Suonate.

The various clans are sub-divided into sub-clans or families, and some clans consist of as many as fourteen families, each family being composed of hundreds of numbers who, for the sake of convenience, divide themselves into household families generally of 8 to 10 members each. These clans or sub-clans speak or understand a common language called Hmar which is different in accent, composition and tune from the Lushai, Kuki etc. The fluidity of the language and the copious senses of some words render their grammatical rules somewhat complex and even reduce the number of their vocabularies. And now-a-days, due to the such hated “artificial” boundaries, some clans have become slightly deviated not only in language but also in some sociological features from the main stock being isolated or subjected to the absorption by the neighbouring custom like those of Lushais, Mikirs, Kacharis, Khasis, Manipuris, et., with whom they have been mixed up for years together. It is, therefore, feared that unless the government takes necessary steps as early as possible, so as to safeguard and promote the interest of the Hmars as per articles 29 and 46 of our Indian Constitution, the Hmar tribe will soon be exterminated.

Age-Old Grievances

The Hmars have a number of grievances-political, social and economic. These grievances are all due to the long neglect of the tribe by the Central Government inspite of their repeated legitimate demands for upliftment. In the spheres of education and economic welfare also, the Hmars could not fully share, like their brethren tribes, the privilege of our long awaited independence. The compact whole of Hmar area is still divided up and mercilessly placed in the far end of each of the adjoining districts. For this reason, the Hmars are lagging behind in the fields of education, culture and economy since no uniform policy could be evolved to achieved the desire development. Being so divided and placed in the far end of every district mentioned above, the Hmars are left out in all social and economic plan of the country and have no political freedom to determine and work out their future destiny, which is privileged to all other hill tribes in free India.

The constitution of India also enjoins upon the president of India and the union government to protect and uplift the minorities in different States. But to their surprise, the Hmars are still placed, despite their protest-prayers, in different contiguous districts as to make them minority always in each of those districts.

The Hmars are having and will always have complaints and grievances unless and until some sort of administrative unit for their own is given by the government. In the districts where the Hmars have been rendered minority there is an odd mixture of tribes in different stages of culture and economic development and naturally, the minority always suffers and feels mental unrest.

Such mentality among the people belonging to the artificial minority group in those small units is bound to shake the very foundation of our freedom, and therefore, these kind of morbid mentality should immediately be eradicated root and branch. The Hmars, therefore, pray that the government should no more play the passive role of a mere spectator while the minority is oppressed or is being put in inconvenience by the majority community or communities but, instead, should come to their immediate help. The Hmars being rendered minority in each of the districts where they have been living from times immemorial have been the political victims up to this day and, therefore, the freedom loving Hmar people shall ever cry for their earliest rescue. This long-drawn deliberate negligence on the part of the government has created a great commotion which still remains to be resipiscence. It has fully awakened the political consciousness of the people and has caused a great political unrest.

Economic Grievances

The Hmars are, like their brethren tribes, mostly agriculturists of the primitive type, and cultivate rice, their staple food, mainly by shifting methods of cultivation known as “Jhumming”. They also thrive, in large quantity, oranges, pineapples, bananas, etc., meant mainly for transport. But after the achievement of independence

of India, the partition badly affected their economy, since most of their trade was with East Pakistan. Now their produce in huge quantity of the absence of the communication, their cash crops does not give them adequate return. Besides the difficulty created by the partition, there is another serious setback, namely, lack of communication in their occupied regions. Because of the absence of the communication their crops could not fetch them any profit and, therefore many of them are now inclined to give up this kind of non- profitable enterprise.

Kuki-Hmar Trouble

Till recently there was serious trouble between the Hmars and the Kukis of Manipur. Many dear friends and relatives lost their lives and many more were rendered homeless. This trouble, on careful examination, was the sole creation of the Kukis who try to compel, by force, the innocent Hmars to be kukis. For this purposes the Kukis attempted to levy the Kuki fee of Rs. 10/- per house among the Hmars, which however, was strongly protested by the Hmars. This strange attempt on the part of the Kukis was not a wonder in one sense because the Kukis thought that the Hmar tribe, which has been rendered minority by the Britishers, is a very small and negligible tribe that can be easily suppressed and made into a mere clan under Kuki tribe. This fact is now clear to many people including the officials of the Manipur administration. The Hmars were already declared as a separate recognized tribe of India as per Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists Modification Order No 126-A Ministry of Home Affairs on 29th October, 1956. They thus pray fervently that the central government should immediately undertake a special census of the Hmars in various districts and territories to ascertain the actual strength of Hmar tribe.

Wrong Nomenclature

In the former censuses of India, the Hmars were wrongly classified as Kukis in the case of Manipur, North Cachar, Cachar and Tripura, as Lushais in the case of Lushai hills. However, this wrong nomenclature has been generously removed by the

central government in the year 1956 as a result of the modification of the Lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes of India. But, it is here by earnestly requested that the government should kindly see that the Hmars are classified correct in whichever districts they are living, in the coming all-India Census of 1961, under a separate column of the census register of India. In this connection the Hmars further pray that the government should put the various sub-tribes of the Hmar tribe (which are mentioned in the earlier paragraph of this memorandum) under the separate Hmar column in the forthcoming census.

Post And Services

While expressing our grateful thanks for the blessed provisions laid down in Article 16 of the constitution of India, the Hmars still feel that they are captive of the opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office (as gazette Officers) in the various districts wherein they are living, particularly in Manipur. In Manipur, most of the other tribes such as Tangkhul Nagas, Kukis, Kabuis etc. are represented by gazette officers, whereas, the Hmars are not having even a single gazette officer. Why this is so? To mention only one point here, the Hmars have a dozen graduates and post graduates in Manipur alone, but there is no gazette officer, whereas the Kukis have only about six graduates but five of them were gazette officers. The Hmars, therefore, strongly feel the necessity of having a separate administrative unit so that their graduates may also serve the country with their top capacities.

All-India Radio

While appreciating the schemes of the government of India for the development of the radio communication particularly the free distribution of community receiving sets in tribal areas, the Hmar have to say to the central government that due to the non-compliance with their repeated demands for a separate radio programme and all the privileges which are being enjoyed by their brethren tribes like Lushais, Khasis, Garos, Mikirs and Dimasas are not available for the Hmars

yet, and that they have already far lagged behind in the field of cultural development and progress. In respect of population and cultural (tribal) civilization the Hmars have no hesitation to say that they are equally strong if not more as the above mentioned tribes, upto this day. But due to the discriminating treatment of the government, the Hmars are now not in a position to keep equal pace with them and therefore, their songs and culture will seriously suffer and soon meet their natural extinction. Therefore, the Hmars are now in a very difficult position to understand why they should suffer doubly-politically due to the merciless division of their area, culturally on account of the non-compliance with their repeated demands for a separate radio programme.

Hmar Areas Not Visited

Coming again to the point of the merciless division of the compact Hmar area into so many negligible fragments and the much hated maintenance of the 'status quo', the Hmars feel strongly the necessity of immediate nullification or removal of the shameful 'traces' of the 'divide and rule policy' of the British due to which the freedom-loving Hmar people have suffered a number of untold miseries and difficulties. Since the compact area was thus sub-divided and placed in the corner most part of the present adjoining districts, the present Hmar occupation areas are now secluded and are outside the reach of the responsible government officials, except the local sub-divisional officers. In Manipur, for instance, the Hmar area was never visited in the past by any government officials above the rank of S.D.O. Thus the whole area and population of the Hmars were subjected to merciless sub-division and segregation and the people are now seriously neglected by the local government concerned. The Hmars, therefore, find their future gloomy and hopeless since in each of the adjoining districts they are the most neglected tribe and least cared for.

Serious Famine In Hmar Area

A very severe famine known as “Mautam” has been visiting the Hmar area, especially of Manipur and Lushai Hills, since 1858 and the poor helpless Hmar people are now suffering to the greatest extent possible. Although this Mautam affected the whole of Lushai Hills, southern Manipur Hills, etc., the politically unfortunate Hmar people became the worst victims only because they are the corner people in each of these districts. The Hmar-occupied areas, as stated before, are the most neglected areas because of their situational inconveniences and bad communications. Except footpaths through the steep mountains, there are no proper roads. Because of the absence of communications, the Hmar areas cannot or will not invite the administrative officers to visit the areas and see ‘things’ for their own. Due to this lack of communications adequate supply of rice cannot be rushed to this far end areas, and therefore, the people are compelled to live on roots and leaves of plants. Besides the inadequate supply of rice, many people now could not buy rice-supply since they have already exhausted their meagre incomes. Therefore, the scene of the Hmar areas is not simply staggering. The Hmar people, therefore, earnestly pray that the government should take immediate steps to relieve the Hmar people of their present miseries and find out ways and means for their political and economic development. In this connection the Hmars also pray that the government should freely distribute rice among the famine-stricken people to be realized back in rice of same quantity after the famine.

Previous Memorandum Renewed

In order to conserve the best of their interest in their culture, traditions, customs, usages and language and to develop themselves politically and economically, the Hmars under different party-names have submitted a number of representations to the government since the achievement of our independence. They also submitted two memoranda of the States Re-Organization Commission and Backward Classes Commission respectively in the year 1954-55. But, it seemed the government did not attend to their just and legitimate demands and as such the Hmars are still allowed to

be outnumbered and oppressed by their fellow tribes. however, it is believed that the government also knew very well that the present Hmar occupying areas can be easily be treated as a single homogeneous unit for a better administration of the areas and that the meaning of their just demand will not be detrimental to the interest of the other people. Therefore, now, the Hmars find it difficult to understand why the government has been turning deaf ears to their earnest legitimate cries. This memorandum, therefore, re-affirms, renews and supplements all the previous memoranda and strongly urges anew the quick reconstitution and consolidation of the tribe under the administrative unit.

Hmars' Gesture

Since the declaration of India as a sovereign democratic republic, the Hmars have been experiencing denial of fair treatment in almost all sphere of life at the hands of the government as also at the hands of some of our brethren tribes. however, the Hmar people of the different districts sought for constitutional safeguards and remedies and relied upon constitutional means, and always attempted for creating closer bonds of affection and friendship even at considerable sacrifice to themselves in the hope that these gestures would be appropriately reciprocated by central as well as by the local governments. But most unfortunately, all gestures and sacrifice have been unnoticed and as such the Hmars feel they should acquaint your honour and government of India once again with all these facts and circumstances leading to their political, cultural and economic backwardness of the people which is still going on unabated in their occupied areas.

This memorandum therefore in consonance with the rights of the people provided by the constitution of India, represents the long cherished wish of the Hmars of Manipur, Assam and Tripura, and makes a very appeal to your honour and the government of India for the immediate creation of a new autonomous district to be called Hmar Hills District by uniting all the adjoining areas of Hmar majority in Mizoram, Manipur, Cachar and North Cachar Hills District, Assam.

We hope the just demand of the people will be conceded before the coming general election, 1961-62. A referendum may be called to ascertain the wishes of the people to this effect if you deem it necessary.

Yours faithfully,

S K Hrangchal

President

Yours faithfully,

Ruolneikhum

General Secretary

The Hmar National Union
(Manipur, Assam and Tripura)

Appendix-II

A Memorandum

Submitted To The Chairman

States Re-organization Commission,

Government of India,

New Delhi

By

The Hmar National Congress

Which is

The Only Living and All-Embracing

Political Organization

Of the

Freedom Loving Hmar People of

Manipur, Lushai Hills, Cachar and

North Cachar Hills, Assam.

(August 1954)

The Hmar national Congress, Pherzawl

Manipur.

Printed at the Cachar Press, Silchar.

To,

The Chairman,
States Re-Organization Commission,
Government of India
New Delhi.

Hon'ble Sir,

Ever since the British had finally conquered the Hmar area, the whole tribe was segregated and given to the great pressure of social and political discrimination and as such the Hmars considered the formation of the States Re-Organization Commission a prerogative devoutly to be wished for the restoration of the long-cherished reconstitution and consolidation of the tribe under one administrative unit. This memorandum, therefore, represents the wish of the whole of the Hmar people and fervently appeals for the creation of a new district by uniting the Hmar majority areas of Lushai Hills, Cachar, North Cachar Hills, Assam, to be called, "Hmar Hills Districts."

At present the entire population of the Hmar tribe is distributed into the following districts, namely, Manipur, Lushai Hills, Cachar and North Cachar Hills District, Assam. The hill areas occupied by the Hmars in Manipur were added to Manipur state by the British Government, but were never a part of Manipur state, as will be evidenced from political documents and history. Before the British Government had taken over the administration of hills areas, the Hmars had got their own set up of government independent of outside influence and control. Being thus so divided they are deprived of all social, economic, political and education facility as desired by the people concerned.

The entire population of the Hmars on taking from the aforesaid four districts will be about 1,00,000 with an occupied area of about 3,000 sq. miles. Historically and culturally the Hmars are different and distinct from the rest of hill tribes and speak

one language different from the other tribes. They also comprise of compact whole and can be treated as homogeneous unit for administrative and political purposes.

Being so divided and placed in the far end of every district mentioned above, the Hmars are left out in all social and economic plan of the country and have no political freedom to determine and work out their future destiny, which is privileged to all other hill tribes in free India. The Hmar population was shaken to a surprised turn when they discovered that the tribe was deliberately omitted in the list of the Scheduled tribes in the Constitution of India and consequently in the Census table of the year 1951. This omission has created a great commotion which still remains to be resipiscenced. It has fully awakened the political consciousness of the people and has caused a great political unrest.

This memorandum, therefore, in consonance with the rights of the people provided by the Constitution of India and to conserve to the best of their interest their culture, traditions, customs and usages in the Constitution of India, make fervent appeal to you and your Commission for the creation of a new autonomous district called Hmar Hills District by uniting the adjoining areas of Hmar majority areas in Lushai Hills, Manipur, Cachar District and North Cachar Hills, Assam.

We hope the just demand of the people would be met with favourably.

A referendum may be called to ascertain the wishes of the people to this effect if deemed necessary.

Yours Faithfully,

Sd/

(J Lungawi, B.A)

President, Hmar National Congress)

Pherzawl Village

B.P.O. Thanlon, Manipur.

Appendix-III

A MEMORANDUM

Submitted

To

The Prime Minister of India,

New Delhi,

By

The Hmar National Union of

Manipur, Assam & Tripura,

Hq. Hmarkhawlien, Cachar, Assam,

Which is

The Only Living And All Embracing

Political Organization Of The

Freedom Loving Hmar-People

Who Re-affirmed

Their demand

For

The Creation Of Hmar Autonomous Hills District

By Uniting The contiguous areas inhabited

By them as shown in a map provided;

With full description of resources

Available in such area

September 1968

To,

The Prime Minister of India
New Delhi.

Madam,

Much have been told and written to our excellency about the origin and distinctive feature of the Hmar tribe in our previous memoranda. It is however, needles to reiterate or elaborate them every now and then.

Long before the coming of the British in the Hmar areas, the Hmar had got their own set up of Government Independent of outside domination and control. They were contented with their political status strong enough to knit them together in one big unit devoid of political discrimination and economic exploitation. Perfect peace and tranquility had ruled the day and a sort of Democracy was the form of Government.

The British did never subjugate the Hmar tribe nor did they visit the Hmar areas to take over the administration till the First World war broke out in 1914. There are also ample evidences from historical records to prove that the Hmars in turn did never surrender to the British.

We reaffirmed belief in the urgent need to established conditions in which we might be able to live in peace and prosperity and be free from outside pressures and exploitation in order to be able to work out our own destiny within the broad framework of the constitution of India.

Property and economic exploitation were at the root of the present tribal unrest everywhere in the country. The poor tribals and their sentiments were being exploited by the more advance communities. Planning had, how-ever, failed to ameliorate the conditions of the poor, particularly the tribal people. Unless the poor people were emancipated from exploitation, instability in society was bound to continue.

It had long been our aspiration to find out means of developing our personalities as member of free India. But we became aware of the fact that this can be achieved only when we are brought together under one administrative set up and allowed to decide our own future.

We find it difficult to understand why the Government of India have deliberately denied autonomy to the Hmars while allowing our brethren tribes to enjoy maximum autonomy and attempts are being made to bring them up to the level of advance communities. We pray, therefore, that the Government of India should immediately refrain from such discriminatory policy and recognize the fact that unity can be real only when it is based on the principal of equality in all respects.

The faulty policy of the present Government had made the rich richer and the poor poorer and as a result the poor people naturally found it difficult to make both ends meet. Both state and central Government had been negligent towards the Hmars community. They had utterly failed to chalk out and implement any programme for self-expression, cultural and educational progress and economic prosperity of this backward tribes.

The indifferent and apathetic attitude of the Government toward the Hmar for the last twenty years had compelled us to think about our own interest for the very existence and survival of our tribe. We pray, therefore that the Government should come forward to solve our problem with sympathetic outlook.

The Hmar people once again declared their firm resolve to strive for the ideals of peace national unity, progress and prosperity to which the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, remained dedicated.

It had also long been our constant endeavor to serve our people and give them as such relief as possible in every sphere of life. But we strongly believe that such objective can be achieved or attained only in an atmosphere of peace and integrated society.

The Government of India have consistently followed linguistic principle in forming all states. We strongly argue and pray, therefore, that the Government of India should also attend to the Hmar demand for a separate District in keeping with this accepted principal of state formation or re-organization on linguistic and cultural basis.

We had so long been sincere and honest in our determination to have our political aspiration settled within the frame work of the Indian constitution and to this end we had been working untiringly and devotedly by adopting peaceful, democratic and constitutional means. We are now fully convinced that the need has arisen for the Hmars to live together under an integrated administration in the face of difficulties and insecurity.

Uncertainty and disturbances have created undesirable situation in society and have, no doubt, deterred the economic development of our country. Emergence of a new middle class in tribal societies in this region had made the situation all the more difficult and complicated. However, we have no hesitation to point out here that had maximum autonomy been provided to the hill tribes earlier, there would have been stability in this region and the situations in Nagaland, Mizo District and its neighboring areas would not have become, so serious as it is today.

Though enjoined upon by the constitution of India to ameliorate the condition of the backward tribes, we are neglected and exploited and this is responsible for the growth of a separatist tendency in this region. We pray, therefore that the Government of India should evolve an acceptable formula for solving the Hmar problems that might match up to the legitimate aspiration of the people concerned.

The creation of separate District for the Hmar is considered as the first step towards economic development, prosperity, security and well- being of our tribe. The consolidation of our tribe under one administrative unit will be the only appropriate approach to save the Hmars from exploitation and oppression by the more advanced communities. It is believed that the meeting of our just demand will not be detrimental to the interest of other people.

Now that the situation in the Hmar majority areas has returned to normalcy and peace been restored, we once again reiterate and affirm our demand for immediate integration of our areas for better and efficient administration of the areas.

The delay in accepting our demand for a separate Hmar District might lead to serious consequences in view of the fact that the Hmar people are very much agitated over the issue. The people's patience for the last fifteen years over this vital demand had reached its climax and any further delay might set off widespread unrest.

The memorandum therefore, represents the wishes and high hopes of the Hmar people and makes a very fervent appeal to your excellency and the Government of India for the formation of Hmar Hills District comprising the Hmar-Majority areas of Manipur and Assam as shown in map provided.

Please accept, your excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Yours faithfully,

sd/

sd/

(Dinglien Sanate)

(T.K. Buongpui)

President,

General Secretary,

The Hmar National Union (M.A. &T.)

Sub-H.Q. Churachandpur, Manipur.

Resources of Proposed Hmar Hill District

Nature has been quite generous to the Hmar people as it has endowed us with lavish gifts such as numerous mountain ranges, rivers and soil which are full of immense potentialities. There is no reason why a District with such vast resources should not be very advanced and prosperous. It is hope, therefore, that the propose District can be easily maintained by its own resources without much dependence on central or state government for funds. The resources of the proposed district are described in the following page which, we hope, may warrant your kind attention and consideration. Your honour will easily understand and see how sound is the economic position of the proposed district.

Size and Boundaries

The propose Hmar hills District shall comprise an area of about 4400 sq. miles which is equal to half that of Manipur territory. The propose district shall cover and include all contiguous Hmar majority areas of Manipur and Assam state. The proposed

district shall be bounded by Manipur on the east, North Cachar Hills on the North; Mizo district on the South and Cachar district on the West as shown in a map provided.

Population

Almost the entire population of the Hmar tribes is distributed over the following contiguous districts, namely Manipur, Mizo district, Cachar District and North Cachar Hill district, Assam.

According to the census of 1961, the population of the Hmars over these areas was 108500. Now the entire population inhabiting the proposed district will be about 1,20,000 people.

Physical Environment

Physical features and natural resources play a very important role in shaping the economic life of the people. Physical environment forms the basis of all economic activities. The gifts of nature, when used effectively by the people, will lead to the development of industries, raising of their income and improving of their living standards. In order to understand the economic position of the proposed district, we, first of all, must study the physical environments and natural resources of the areas under covered of the proposed Hmar District.

There are different mountain ranges stretching from North to South. These ranges are thickly covered with valuable forests. These forest render the climate more equable and help in causing rainfall. The rivers get abundant supply of rain water throughout the year. The soils are fertile and good for cultivation. There is no waste land which may render cultivation practically unsuitable and unfit. The entire District is covered with evergreen and deciduous forests. Jhuming is the only method of cultivation there.

Climate and Rainfall

The proposed district lies in the tropical region as the tropic of cancer passes over the south western sides of the district. The winter is mild and the summer is not extremely hot. There is plenty of rainfall on the mountains. The area get rainfall during summer month and the amount of rain varies from place to place. The average rainfall is 60” in a year. The climate and rainfall are conducive to the cultivation of rice, millet, maize, sesamum, ginger, potatoes, chillies, pineapple, etc. The soil and rainfall are also favorable to the growth of orange, tea and other vegetables. The mountainous forests help in causing rains and endow its soils with in-exhaustible fertility.

Soils

The alluvial soil is mostly found in the north-western part of the District where rich clay deposits are made by the Barak river. The soil there is endowed with a sufficiency of chemical properties and it produces rich crops like rice, pulses, etc. The fertile top soil which is dark in colour and suitable for the growth of cotton, chilly, ginger, millet, etc. is also found all over the district. The brown and yellow loamy soil are found throughout the District. They are suitable for the growth of orange, pineapple, mango, Bananas, vegetables, etc. On the western part of the district there is the laterite soil which is suited to the growth of tea plant.

Forests

The proposed district has a variety forests. Forests constitute important natural resources. They are mainly deciduous and evergreen forests. There are large areas of forests in these hills. So the district is rich in forests and forests product. But due to the lack of communication and other transport facilities, these forests cannot serve the purpose and remain unutilized and unpreserved at present. All kinds of forests products like timber, teak, fir, pine, sal, oak, thangnolias, etc. are available in plenty. Bamboos also grow in large quantity and extend over large areas. The contribution of mountains to the economic life of the people is immense.

The forests are not properly preserved by the Government. Deforestation reduces rainfall. Most of the people are agriculturalists. Jhuming is there only method of cultivation. They used to cut down trees and cleared the jungles for purposes of agriculture. Hence it is necessary to conserve the forests. These forests, when properly preserved and utilized, will provide employment to large number of people. The district government will derive a large revenue from forests. Royalty on timber, firewood, bamboos other forests products, etc. will add to the resources of the district. Grazing fees will also be imposed.

Fisheries

Fishing is the occupation of a section of the Hmars. The Barak, the Tuivai, the Tuivol, the Jiri, the Tuijang, the Tuibum rivers are the natural and fairly good fishing grounds of the people within the proposed district. Different types of fishes are caught in a large quantity from these rivers every year by means of net and fish poisoning. This fish poisoning unnecessarily took heavy toll of fishes. If fishing nets and materials are provided to the fisherman, they are expected to increase the annual out-put of fish to a great extent. Fishing has a bright future as fish serves as food the people to this district. Fish are also exported to the neighbouring areas. Rent on these fisheries will, no doubt, contribute towards the district fund to be a source of income of the district in the near future.

Hydro- Electric Works

A vast amount of hydro- electric energy can be produced in the proposed district. Almost all the river can be used to produce electric energy. There are vast water power resources of the district that rainfall over the areas could provide potential energy equivalent to several thousand kilowatts. Fortunately, this district has great potentialities of this water power. Rainfall is heavy over the areas. When the rivers are properly utilized for generating hydro-electricity, way would be open for large scale development of industries. The Barak and other rivers got abundant supply of

water from their numerous tributaries throughout the year. The Barak hydro-electric works can be established on the Barak river. There are many favorable sites for construction of dam across the river. Large supply of labor can be cheaply available. If started, it is expected to generate, at least, 100000 kilowatts of energy and can be serving Manipur and Assam apart from the district itself. These power projects, when properly undertaken and executed, will be quite profitable. It will provide employment opportunities to the unemployed masses and offer suitable job to the jobless. Income or royalty received from this project will add to the district funds. The proposed Hmar Hill District has a lot of such unexploited natural resources.

Coal Deposits

The proposed District is endowed with the basic power resources needed for industrialization. She possesses good reserves of coal in the Hriengmol mountain range, the Taithu range and on the bank of the Tuivai river near Phuoibuong village on the south of the district. It is a sources of heat for domestic and industrial purposes. But due to the lack of communication this coal deposits or reserves cannot serve the purpose and remain unexploited till today. If this coal reserves are duly exploited, it will not only meet the local requirements for the people but also enable the neighboring areas. Thermal plants which are worked with coal can be easily established. We, therefore, need to develop quick and cheap means of transport to supply coal to deficient areas. The coal is located in one part of the district and it will be quite costly to move it to the other part of the district in the present circumstances.

Mineral Oil Deposit

The supply of petroleum is insignificant in our country. The Khawlien mountain range is full of such mineral oil deposits. The expert can, therefore, locate new sources of oil at Daido village where crude oil is found. A new refinery can be set up to refine crude oil available in this field if the Government of India is very anxious to increase the production of oil in our country. The Government may form a scheme

to set up a state plant to produce several hundred tons of synthetic petrol. Due attention has to be paid to the development of this mineral oil by the government.

Wild Elephants

Several wild beasts are still found in areas under cover of the proposed Hmar District. Wild Elephants particularly are found wandering in abundance in the Khobon hill range in the very heart of the proposed district. Many of such wild Elephants from this wild forest had been tamed and some parts of the forest still remain unexplored by human beings because of its wild nature.

Cattle Rearing

Rearing of cattle consisting of cow, buffalo, pig, sheep, goat, etc. is an important subsidiary occupation of the Hmar people. As meat serve as a part of food to them, they rear these domestic animals in large number. Therefore, every household usually keeps all the different kinds of cattle. Cow provides them with milk and pigs provide them with fat which forms nutritious food to the Hmar people. Imposition of taxes on these animals will add to the district funds and income from cattle pounds will also contribute towards the expenses of the district. Forests are of great help to the people who used the forests as Grazing ground for their cattle.

Paper Mills

The proposed district includes bamboo-ever-growing areas of this region. Bamboos will always be available in plenty. So paper mills on small scale basis can be started at several places. If forests are properly preserved and electricity is available, there is no reason why paper industry can not be started on a large scale basis. The present state government paid no attention to the industrialization of our areas in spite of our repeated request to start paper mills, fruit industry, etc. This will also prove to be a sources of income of the district.

Fruit Preservation

Several thousand acres of land are under cultivation of orange, pineapple and banana. They are grown mainly in areas along the Barak, the Tuivai and the Tuivol rivers. The total output of fruits is estimated to be, at least ten thousand tons annually. Any village located on the banks of these rivers will turn an important fruit preservation centre in future. The government never took necessary steps to start a fruit industry despite our repeated prayer to do so. This industry will also give employment opportunities to the poor agriculturalists who have no proper occupation after harvest every year.

Sugar Factory

There is enough scope for the establishment of sugar Factory in the Hmar areas. The climate and rainfall are quite favorable for the cultivation of sugar cane and sugar beet. The average annual rainfall is 60' which is conducive to the growth of plant. At present the cultivation of sugar attracts little attention of the people as there is no transport facility. Hence this crop is mainly cultivated to meet local consumption. The crop has a bright future when road communications are constructed and completed. This subsidiary industry will provide proper occupation to the agriculturalists to supplement their income.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the main occupation of the hmar people as it absorbs 80% of the working population. So the importance of agriculture is fully realized by the people. Apart from rice they cultivated ginger, maize, cotton, millet, pineapple, chilly, sesamum etc., in large quantity meant for export. They also grow Banana, orange, tea, etc.

Several thousand tons of this agricultural produce were transported through the Barak river from the Hmar areas of Manipur alone in 1967-68. The soils are fertile and the climate and rainfall are favorable to agriculture. Jhuming is the only method of cultivation. It is defective in several respects. The people clear the jungles for the purposes of agriculture but they were unable to give up this method since there is no other alternative. Taxes on these exported agricultural produce will undoubtedly increase the district funds to a great extent. The indiscriminate cutting down of forests is responsible to some extent for the recurrence of flood.

Crops

Rice is the most important crop for the district because it is the main staple food for the people. They grow maize, millets, pulses because these serve as parts of food to the people. They also grow pineapple, banana, orange, mangoes, sugar cane, etc. in large quantity. Fruit industry has not been started in spite of the availability of raw materials required for the industry. They grow large variety of vegetables such as potatoes, onion, brinjals, cabbage, tomatoes, cauliflowers etc.

Cotton, ginger and sesamum are the most important commercial crops of the people. They are chiefly produced in the Vangai ranges, the hmar area in large amount. Several thousand tons of crops were produced annually and most of them were exported to Cachar through the Barak river.

Rainfall is heavy and is conducive to the cultivation of tea. There are large areas of land under tea plantation on the north-western part of the proposed district. The proposed Hmar district includes two large tea estates in areas bordering Cachar district, Assam.

Communication

Road is an important means of transport. The construction of roads is necessary for commercial and military purposes. Much attention had never been paid to the making of roads in our areas. Most of the villages in the proposed Hmar district are not linked with motorable roads. The Barak river serves as the only waterway communication and is the only serviceable means of transport in the proposed district. It is the lack of roads and the consequent high cost of primary transport that is robbing the poor agriculturalists of the incentive to produce more or to put more areas under cultivation of cash crops.

In a big country like India where villages lie scattered, there is a great need of roads. No programme of rural reconstruction and agriculture development can be carried out in their absence. If our villages are connected with a good system of roads, it will increase the cultivable land and will give a great encouragement to the production of commercial and cash crops. It will also provide great stimulus to the village industries.

In a view of the great important roads, the Churachandpur-Tipaimukh road has been construct by the Manipur PWD since 1962. As the department is weak, they are unable to make much progress in course of six years. There is no other road passing through the proposed district. The area is totally neglected by the government, now the Barak, the Tuivai, the Tuivol, etc. serve as highways of commerce and trade. The problem of road has landed the Hmar people into serious economic distress and as such we need to develop quick means of transport.

Land Revenue

Land revenue shall form the sheet anchor of district budgets and shall stand first in point of yield. Every cultivator has to pay it to the government, weather he earns profit or not. The revenue from this course shall be more or less stable in amount.

An area of land not less than 50 thousands of acres is under wet cultivation and there are many more such lands suitable for the extension of wet cultivation in the north-western part of the proposed district. About 70 thousand acres of land are under the cultivation of cash crops like orange, ginger, pineapple, banana, maize, tea, etc. These lands are permanently held and owned by the cultivators. Jhuming tax will also be imposed upon those who adopt jhuming method of cultivation. The district government shall require sufficient revenue to defray her expenses. The revenue collected from this sources will be quite substantial to defray, to some extent, the expenses of the proposed district.

Tea Plantation

The proposed Hmar Hills District includes two big tea estates in that part of the district bordering the Cachar district, Assam. The annual output of tea from these estates is estimated to be of the order of 10 thousand mounds each. Taxes will be imposed on tea produced in the district and the amount of taxes collected will be quite helpful to meet the expenses of the district.

As rainfall favor the growth of tea plant, the proposed district has a lot of suitable places for tea plantation. The literate soils suitable for the cultivation of tea are found on the north- western part of the district where teas are planted.

Literacy

The Hmars have a distinct language and culture of their own. But unfortunately they have not fully enjoyed the right to conserve the same in the various district wherein there are living. Their language is not recognized by the governments of Manipur and Assam.

However, the Hmar are able to impart education in their own language up to the middle school stage and to maintain a number of educational institutions up to that stage without receiving aids from government. Over hundred books written in Roman scripts have so far been published in the Hmar language. However backward they may be, the Hmars who do not know the R's are few and far between.

The Hmar students reading in all stages number about 10,000 in 1967-1968. The literacy percentage is about 70. Of more than 150 students appearing at their school final examination, some 50 to 70 have usually come out successful every year. We have so far produced over 200 graduates and post-graduates up to 1967-68 results. But most of them have got no suitable employment in government service nor have they been offered or provided suitable employment or appointment by the government. The Hmars, therefore, strongly feel the necessity of having a separate district administration under the deputy commissioner so that their graduates may also serve the country with their top capacities.

Health and Sanitation

The Hmars are now having six qualified Doctor and will be having much more in the near future. The Hmars also have over 80 pharmacists and 50 nurses serving at different places. Some of them have no suitable and proper government employments and have remained out of employment.

Within the proposed district there are 5 hospitals and 20 dispensaries which can be managed and run by local hands available. If our just demand of a separate district is met, we shall be able to run the administrative machinery efficiently.

Boat Tax

Some three thousand boats have usually passed through the Barak, the Tuivai, the Tuivol and the Jiri rivers every year. These rivers serve as highways of commerce and trade. The boats carried agriculture produce like cotton, chilly, orange, sesamum, ginger, pineapple, etc. from the hills to Silchar and manufacture goods from Silchar to the hills. If boat tax is collected, it will amount to several thousand rupees. Therefore, it shall be a perennial source of income of the proposed district. The yield from this source will be quite considerable.

Hill House Tax

The proposed Hmar district includes 300 villages which may consists of 28,000 houses. Hill house tax at the rate of Rs.5/- per house will be collected. Revenue from this sources will, therefore, amount to Rs. 1,40,000 annually. This amount will prove to be a great contribution towards the district funds. With a very least possible state assistance, the proposed district can be maintained by its resources.

From the above description of different natural resources available in the proposed district, it is evident that nature has been quite generous to the inhabitants of the proposed district. It has endowed us with lavish gifts such as the rivers, the mountain ranges, the soils, etc. which are full of immense potentialities. The vast natural resources, however, had not been exploited fully. An area with such vast resources should be very advanced and prosperous. The varied resources such as large arable lands, rich forests, big fisheries, huge water resources were not properly used at all. We possess large natural resources. But unfortunately, they are not exploited to our advantage. So the vast majority of the people have remained steeped in poverty in the midst of plentiful natural resources.

The local government are not trying to make the best use of these natural resources. It is proposed that the government should make comprehensive schemes to

exploit these natural resources in the best possible way, so that the standard of the people will be gradually improving.

It is also evident that the resources of the proposed Hmar district are numerous and the revenues to be received from all sources will be quite sufficient to defray the expenses of the district. Hence it is hoped that the proposed district can be easily maintained by its own resources.

PROPOSAL AND EARLY IMPLEMENTATION

District Headquarters

The proposal district will have its district headquarters at Tipaimukh favourably located at the very heart of the district. As it is the meeting place of all the contiguous areas, it is expected to become the most important trade centre of the proposed district because of its favorable location.

Sub-Divisions

For the convenience of administration, the proposed district shall be divided into two main sub-divisions, namely, Tipaimukh and Jiribam sub-divisions, each to be placed under the charge of sub-divisional officer with their sub-divisional headquarters at Tipaimukh and Jiribam respectively.

Administrative centres

For the purpose of carrying out development programme, the proposed district shall also be sub-divided into four administrative units, namely, Tipaimukh, Phuoiboung, Jiribam and Hmarkhawlien. Each administrative unit will be placed under the charge of a block development officer or a project officer or a sub-deputy collector, as the case may be.

Education

The district shall have its education head office at Tipaimukh, the capital of the proposed Hmar Hills district, with an assistant inspector of schools at the head of the deputy inspector of schools under him to inspect and supervise educational institutions. There shall be six or seven sub-inspectors of schools to aid and assist in their works of supervision and inspection. The following are the existing number of educational institutions from high schools down to the primary schools within the proposed district.

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|----|
| 1) High Schools | : | 5 |
| 2) Junior High Schools | : | 12 |
| 3) Middle English Schools | : | 20 |
| 4) Primary Schools | : | 65 |

More than half of these institutions are wholly established and maintained out of missionary funds based on Christian religion. These institutions have not been receiving aids out of state funds. Since most of the schools are run by private managements, it will substantially reduce the expenditure of the proposed district on education which absorbs the major portion of the district revenues in other districts.

Constitution of District Council

There shall be a district council for the proposed Hmar Hills District consisting of not less than 20 members dully elected on the basis of adult suffrage. For the purposed of election to the district council, the proposed district shall be divided into 20 territorial constituencies in such manner that the ratio between the population of each constituency and the number of seats allotted to it is, so far as practicable, the same throughout the district as given below.

| Number of constituencies | Name of constituencies | Number of seats. |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Parbung | 1 |
| 2. | Pherzawl | 1 |
| 3. | Senvon | 1 |
| 4. | Patpuihmun | 1 |
| 5. | Ngampabung | 1 |
| 6. | Ankhasuo | 1 |
| 7. | Jairawn | 1 |
| 8. | Jiribum | 1 |
| 9. | Vanbawng | 1 |
| 10. | Ratu | 1 |
| 11. | Vaitin | 1 |
| 12. | Mauchar | 1 |

| | | |
|-----|--------------|---|
| 13. | Phuoibuong | 1 |
| 14. | Hmarkhawlien | 1 |
| 15. | Tuolpui | 1 |
| 16. | Kapakhal | 1 |
| 17. | Sonai | 1 |
| 18. | Kumba | 1 |
| 19. | Muoltluong | 1 |
| 20. | Modura | 1 |

Constitution of Village Council

The district council may constitute village council or court for each village for the trial of suits and cases between the parties. The district council or any court constituted in that behalf by the district council shall exercise the power of a court of appeal in respect of all suits and cases triable by a village council or court so constituted.

District Police

The proposed district shall keep a band of district police under the command of a district police officer not below the rank of deputy superintendent of police to keep law and order and see that laws are obeyed. For the purposed of maintaining law and order effectively the district shall be divided into two circles, namely Tipaimukh and Jiribam each under the charge and command of a circle police officer not below the rank of an inspector of police (gazetted).

For the shake of convenience, the two circles again shall be sub-divided into four thanas each, namely, Tipaimukh, Senvon, Phuoibuong, and Saipum in Tipaimukh circle and Jiribam circle, each thana being placed under the command of a police officer to be designated as an officer commanding not below the rank of a sub-Inspector of police.

Appendix-IV

Rochunga Pudaite's letter to the Prime Minister of India, 19th October 1953.

To,

The Prime Minister,
Government of India.

Sir,

First of all, may I have the pleasure of extending the love, greetings and good wishes from the Hmar people for I promised to do something during my last vacation in June, 1953, who sing and talk about your undying fame in their simple daily life. It is really a pleasure and a special privilege for me to meet you and have these few minutes of heart to heart talk on their pressing problems which are being made known to you. May your honour be pleased to read the following few points which I have jotted them down for your information.

Occupied area and Population

The Hmars spread over the south and western part of Manipur, North Lushai Hills and south eastern part of Cachar and Halflong, Assam and few in Tripura. They have been segregated into those districts under the divide and rule policy of the British. The entire population on the said districts would be well over one lakh (1,00,000), but as they are scattered over many districts they are always outnumbered by other tribes which reduce them to negligent minority. The whole area under the Hmars will roughly be over 5,000 square miles in Manipur hills alone.

Occupation

Their main occupation is rice cultivation. Gardening ranks next in importance which is the only source of their income. They practice shifting methods of cultivation.

They produce plenty of oranges and pineapples which they grow on the bank of Barak river. Most of their buyers being from the East Bengal (Pakistan), partition has adversely affected and prices of their commodities have been sharply brought down from Rs. 25/- to Rs. 30/- per 100 to Rs.8-16/- in the case of oranges and Rs. 20/- to Rs.30/- per 100 to Rs. 6-Rs.15/- in the case of pineapples. The tragedy is that even in such exceptionally low prices, the whole product cannot be sold out in the market and for the past few years the major portion of their fruits are left open to river monkeys or to be rotten to the soil. They produce chilly, ginger, raw cotton and many other cash crops. They produce enough essential commodities for their personal consumption except salt and kerosene oil. There are charkhas and local handloom in every home and a girl reaching the age of fifteen years is expected to be able to supply the whole requirement of the family over and above their works in the fields.

Unrecognized Tribe

One thing that surprised me is that they (Hmar) are completely wiped out in the constitution of India scheduled tribes lists, whereas every other tribe identified themselves and take their share in and from the government. This has recently caused a lot of resentment when the constitution was interpreted for them and when they heard about their being excluded. I wonder if your honor be pleased to reconsider and include them which I believe will create a very healthy atmosphere.

Roads and Postal Communication

In Manipur and Lushai Hills one has to walk miles and miles before one could reach the nearest post office and motorable road. For instance, my home in Manipur is as far as 120 miles from the nearest post office and motorable road and 80 miles from Silchar, Cachar and over 100 miles from Lushai Hills. this lack of contact with outside world discourages intercourse with any other people and as a result the people are confined to their own circle.

Educational Problem

Educationally they are far behind the other tribes. There are only very few, not even half a dozen government primary schools in the whole of the Hmar areas in Manipur, but even in these few schools the Government of Manipur had introduced Manipuri (meiteilon) as the medium of instruction, a language which is so foreign, new and unpopular to the people that these few existing schools are left unattended. There are few English medium middle schools and three mission schools under the management of the local churches. These school have nothing to do with the education department in Manipur and have complete freedom till very recently, to control the whole affairs of the school administration and they have already started Hmar as the medium of instruction. A private high school was recently opened through the initiative of the village people and the whole building was constructed by the people free of remuneration which is nothing but a true community service. But being educationally and financially poor, they could neither employ persons from outside nor employ persons from their own community. Hindi is more readily accepted in those schools rather than any other Indian language and we have introduced in every school to learn Hindi at least how to read and write. But in the absence of expert teacher from the Hindi Self-Instruction books. It is my own conviction that Hindi should be made popular as soon as possible in all the hill districts of Assam rather than any other language in the state.

Many anxious parents of this community could not afford to send their children to high school not because of pecuniary difficulty only but also because of lack of communication. Any parent who desires to send his son to high school must also prepare to waste 8-12 days' labour every month to be used for going to the nearest post office to send letter and money to their children as they cannot afford to send them all at once. On many occasions my letter reached home in two to three months as they are sent through casual travelers and never get information for several months which is the bitter experience of those other students who face the same problem.

Medical Care

Medical care is completely absent in the whole area. So far neither the Christian missionaries nor the government have opened any hospital or dispensary where the people can get their medical care. Many children die in infancy and it always happens that a sick who is carried over a hundred miles died before reaching the nearest hospital. In case of epidemic and other disease, the people are just left at the mercy of nature.

Lack of Government Contact

Politically they are not at all conscious like other tribes. their political consciousness was therefore aroused only very lately. They joined hands for sometime with the Lushais in the Mizo Union movement whose leaders promised them a creation of a new district after their own district council was formed. But being contented with the district council, they seem to have no interest in them and the Hmars who have no proper leader amongst themselves are left helpless and their cause is completely ignored now. As far as my knowledge goes this movement is mainly responsible for their obscurity now.

There are no government offices of any kind in their area and hence no contact with government. Their connection with the government is limited to only collection of hill house tax.

Need of Creating a New District

Last of all, I want to impress your honour upon the need of creating a new district which will be included in sixth schedule government of India constitution. For the creation of this new district we will have to slice off part of Manipur (south-west) and northern part of Lushai Hills and a little portion at the southern part of Cachar district. Geographically this is very convenient having natural border on each side,

with the river Barak in the middle. This will naturally arouse their enthusiasm as the rightful citizen of India and will solve all their internal and external problems. Up till now they are not given any chance to develop and work for themselves. I am sure if the government of India gives them a chance to express and work freely for the country, within a separate district called, "Hmar Hills District", they will in their last minutes' race prove themselves the most progressive, honest and loyal citizen of India in the eastern border. But should the government neglect them longer, after their discontentment cropped up, things will happen just the opposite. There is a common saying among the Hmars, "be aware of waking up a sleeping leopard". So long, since they have no leader/have been waiting patiently and silently but the time will come when they will also rise up and voice their multi-grievances and claim their rights as a rightful citizen of India.

There is a rapid growing of discontent among the educated class and I fear the long expected help from the government will give sufficient ground for them to develop themselves against the government; should the Nagas know this, they may make use of it too.

Sir, this is just an information about my tribe and some of the understanding problems which I want to make known, as one of the first would-be graduates among the whole of my tribe, to the Government of India in general and to you in particular. I am anxiously waiting for the time when a separate district would be created for my people and the time when they will be recognized fully as the rightful citizen of India by being included in the Sixth scheduled list of the Indian Constitution in order to be both a loyal and dutiful citizen.

Thanking you for your kind consideration

Rochunga Pudaite
20 Holland Hall
Allahabad, UP

Sir,
Yours Faithfully,
Sd/-
Rochunga Pudaite

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|-------------------------------------|
| EFCI | Evangelical Free Church of India |
| FA | Fengngo Association/Federation |
| HA | Hmar Association |
| HAC | Haokip Allied Council |
| HC | Hmar Company |
| HCA | Hmar Cultural Society |
| HI | Hmar Inpui |
| HLA | Hmar Literature Society |
| HNC | Hmar National Congress |
| HNU | Hmar National Union |
| HSA | Hmar Student Association |
| HTC | Hmar Trading Company |
| HPC | Hmar Peoples Convention |
| MHA | Mizoram Hmar Association |
| MMF | Mar(Hmar) Mongolian Federation |
| MNF | Mizo National Front |
| MU | Mizo Union |
| NEIGM | North Eastern India General Mission |
| HYA | Hmar Youth Association |
| ICI | Independent Church of India |
| KNA | Kuki National Assembly |

| | |
|-----|------------------------------|
| KNV | Kuki National Volunteers |
| PCI | Presbyterian Church of India |
| UT | Union Territory |
| YHA | Young Hmar Association |
| ZSI | Zoological Survey of India |

GLOSSARY:

| | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Aisan:</i> | Divination |
| <i>Berva:</i> | Assistant of the Priest. |
| <i>Bung:</i> | banyan tree. |
| <i>Buonzawl:</i> | a communally owned large house of a village where adult unmarried and married young men of the village slept together at night. |
| <i>Busung:</i> | a portion of the paddy harvest entitle to the chief. |
| <i>Chilak:</i> | a non-Israelite that lives with the Israelite or the descendent of the offspring of the Israelite's intermarriage with the non-Israelite. |
| <i>Dil:</i> | Lake. |
| <i>Duhlian:</i> | a dialect spoken by the upper classes or clans in the Lushai Hills. |
| <i>Fang:</i> | Paddy, food grain, rice. |
| <i>Fathang:</i> | a portion of the paddy harvest given to the Chief as a kind of tax. |
| <i>Himaloy:</i> | Himalaya |
| <i>Hla:</i> | Song/poem. |
| <i>Hmar Am:</i> | the popular skirt worn by a hmar woman. The pattern/design is also known as <i>Lenbuongthuom</i> . |
| <i>In Ei:</i> | celebrating a good harvest or a successful hunt with a communal feast. |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| <i>Inchawng:</i> | the treating of the whole villagers with a sumptuous meal by killing a siel (wild bison). |
| <i>Kaihra:</i> | a kind of wild yam. |
| <i>Kawlphai:</i> | Kabaw Valley |
| <i>Keimi:</i> | A tiger that can take the form of a man. |
| <i>Khuo:</i> | a village/ a settlement. |
| <i>Kuki:</i> | Hill-man or highlanders. |
| <i>Lal:</i> | a tribal chief. |
| <i>Run:</i> | Manipur River. |

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “The Hmars of Mizoram: Socio-cultural History from pre-colonial period to 1972” submitted to Mizoram University for the award of the Degree of Philosophy is a research work carried out by Ms. VanrammawiInbuon, Research Scholar, in the Department of History & Ethnography, Mizoram University, under my supervision and it has not been previously submitted for the award of any research degree to any other University/Institute.

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DECLARATION

I VanrammawiInbuon, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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Statement on Anti-Plagiarism

It is hereby certified that the Ph.D thesis entitled “The Hmars of Mizoram: Socio-Cultural History from Pre-colonial period to 1972” is the result of the Doctor of Philosophy programme and have not taken recourse to any form of Plagiarism in any of the chapters of the thesis, except for quotations, from published and unpublished sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such.

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MAP OF MIZORAM



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