

**EVOLUTION OF MIZO DRESS: A HISTORICAL STUDY**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY**

**BY**

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## CONTENTS

Certificate	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgement	iii-iv
Maps	v-vi
Abbreviations	vii
Chapter 1 : Introduction	1-34
Chapter 2 : Lusei Dress-From Pre-colonial to Colonial Times	35-81
Chapter 3 : Lai Dress-From Pre-colonial to Colonial Times	82-106
Chapter 4 : Mara Dress-From Pre-colonial to Colonial Times	107-124
Chapter 5 : Traditional Jewelleries and Accessories of the Mizo	125-174
Chapter 6 : Dress production-The Loom, The Tools, The Rules	175-198
Chapter 7 : Evolution of Mizo Dress during Colonial Times	199-242
Chapter 8 : Conclusion	243-254
Appendices	255-260
Glossary	261-286
Bibliography	287-311



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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **“Evolution of Mizo Dress: A Historical Study”** submitted by Rosaline Varsangzuali in fulfillment of Doctor of Philosophy in history is an original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for other degree. It is recommended that this thesis be placed before examiners for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Supervisor

Dated: 23 July, 2018  
Place: Aizawl

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## DECLARATION

I, Rosaline Varsangzuali, hereby declare that the subject matter of the thesis entitled **“Evolution of Mizo Dress: A Historical Study”** is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis for the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in other universities or institutions.

This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in history.

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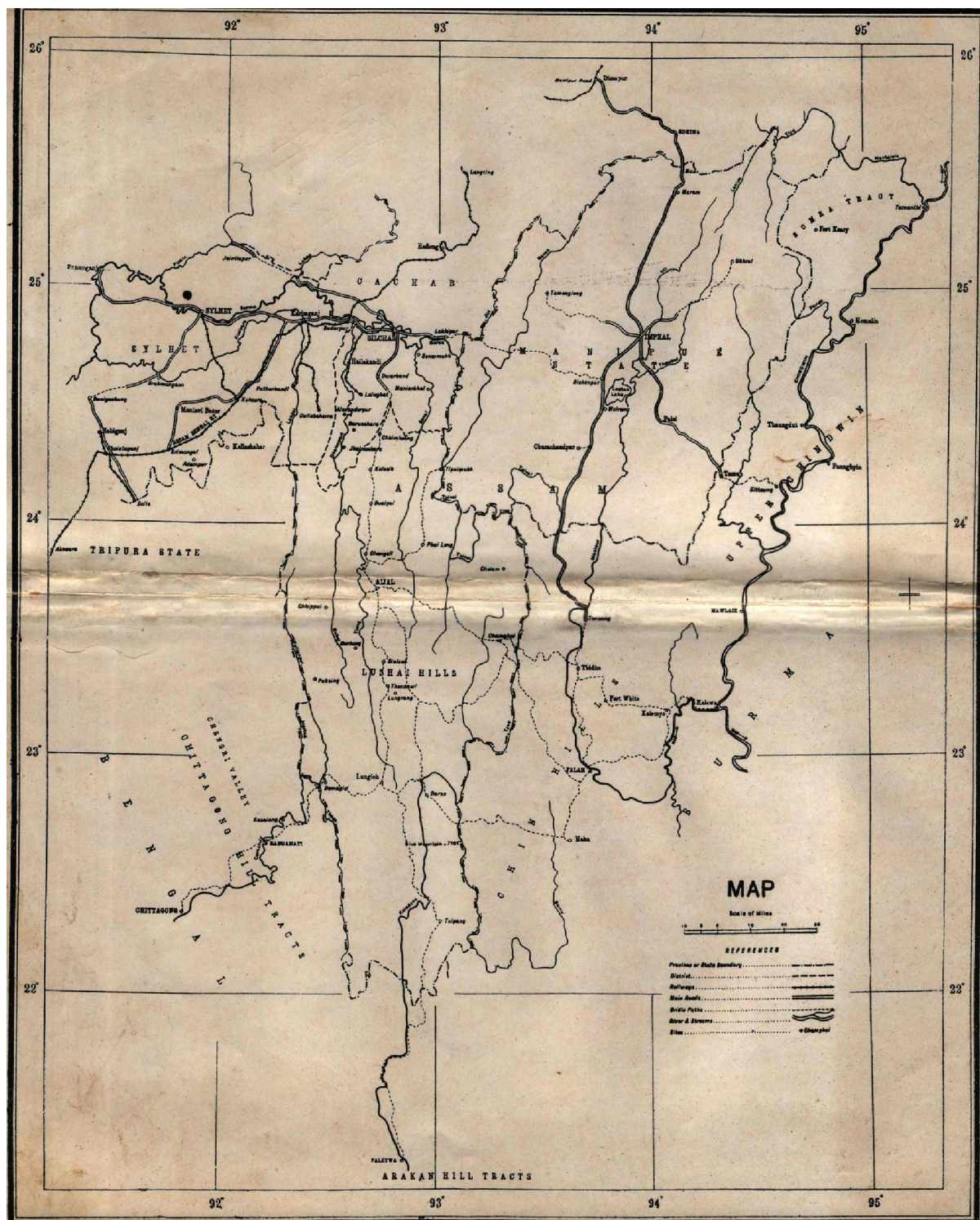
And not at all the least, to GRACE that saw me through.

Dated: 23 July, 2018

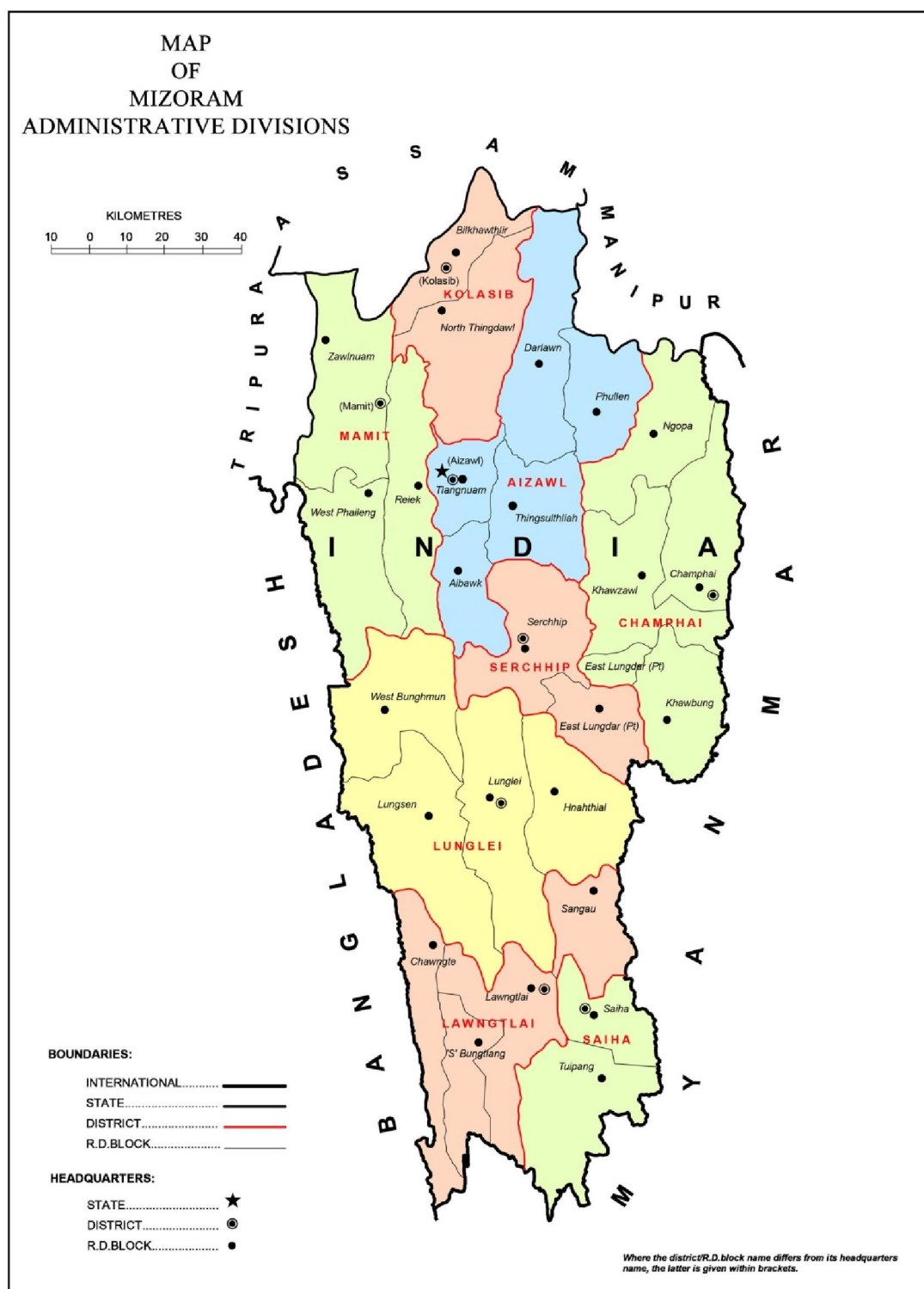
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# THE LUSHAI HILLS



Source: A.G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysallis*



**Source:** I & PR Department, Govt. of Mizoram.

## ABBREVIATIONS

IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ISPCK	Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
GOM	Government of Mizoram
Kms	Kilometers
MMR	Mother Mortality Rate
MNF	Mizo National Front
MSA	Mizoram State Archive
STS	Science, Technology and Society Studies
YMA	Young Mizo Association

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.0 Mizoram:

This research is carried out within the state of Mizoram specifically working on the three biggest tribes of the Mizo living in the state namely Lusei, Lai and Mara. Hence this thesis commences with a brief account of the state. The state of Mizoram located in the north eastern corner of India is strategically significance both geographically and politically, due to the fact that it has a long international boundary of 318 kilometres with Bangladesh on the west and about 404 kilometres with Myanmar on the east and south; it also shares an inter-state boundary of 123 kilometres with Assam on the north, 66 kilometres with Tripura on the west and 95 kilometres with Manipur on the north.<sup>1</sup> Owing to its mild tropical location, Mizoram enjoys a very moderate climate all through the year. The maximum average temperature is 20°–30°C in summer while in winter it is 11°–21°C.<sup>2</sup>

‘*Mizo*’ is a generic term that includes different tribes who inhabit the entire land of Mizoram, whose culture, traditions, dialect etc. are similar and commonly designated by the term ‘*Mizo*’.<sup>3</sup> While this term has often been used to refer the people living in the present state of Mizoram, India, it is also used to include all the ‘Kuki -Chin-Lushai’ groups living in Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Despite the existence of many other expressions such as Zo, Zofa, Zomi, etc. to denote them, this research uses the term Mizo to refer to the people living in Mizoram and the adjoining areas and across borders with who they share similar history and culture.

The Mizo were nomadic in nature, migrating from China to Kabaw Valley in Burma from where they moved on to the Chin Hills due to the Shan invasion. The Chin Groups (including the Mizo) are said to have arrived in the Chin Hills of Burma during the first half of the 13th century AD.<sup>4</sup> It is believed that from the Chin Hills, they migrated to the present habitation, in three major movements approximately between the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17th centuries,

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<sup>1</sup>Malsawmliana, *Megalithic Culture of Mizoram*, New Delhi, Research India Press, 2017, p. 1

<sup>2</sup>‘*Mizoram-Land of peace And Progress*’, Directorate of Information & Public Relations (DIPR), Mizoram, Govt. of Mizoram, 2004, p. 19

<sup>3</sup>Sangkima, *Mizos-Society and Social Change*, Guwahati, United Publishers, 1992, p. 3

<sup>4</sup>Malsawmliana, *Megalithic Culture*, p. 4



gradually settling and spreading all over the present Mizoram while some even settled in the neighbouring states. They belonged to the Tibeto Burman language group with physical and facial features of the Mongoloid race.

During the pre-colonial and colonial period, outsiders knew them under various nomenclatures such as Kukis, Chins or Lushais and the area inhabited by them were called the Lushai Hills District under the British. After independence, in 1952, it was declared the Mizo District under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, having executive, legislative and judicial powers on certain matters. When Mizoram attained statehood after two decades of insurgency in 1986, the state thrived economically and politically while continuing to follow Christianity as the major religion which was passed on to them by the missionaries.

The majority of Mizoram's population is comprised of the ethnic Mizos which is inclusive of different tribes. Of these Lusei, Hmar, Paite, Lai (Pawi) and Mara (Lakher) are the biggest groups. While the Lai and Mara are concentrated in the southern part of the state, the biggest groups Hmar, Paite and Lusei mostly populate the northern side of the Mizoram. In accordance with their population sizes, maintenance and preservation of exclusivity of their particular culture especially in dress and language and also depending on convenience this research selected the following three tribes for intensive study: Lusei, Lai and Mara.

### **1.1. Historical Background of the Lusei:**

Some Mizo historians<sup>5</sup> are of the opinion that while the Mizo including the Lusei were in the Kabaw Valley, Burma was invaded by the Chinese in 1283 AD and the Mizos had to flee to Chin Hills. Though there is difference in opinion about the time frame given by some of these historians on the Lusei settlement in the Chin Hills, B. Lalthangliana and C. Chhuanvawra agreed that the Lusei settled in the Chin Hills around 1250–1400 AD, and at the most till the 1500 AD. Another historian also corroborated this time frame by claiming that the Lusei settled in the Chin Hills between 1100 –1400 AD.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Sangkima argued that Lusei settlement in the

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<sup>5</sup>Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* (1938), Aizawl, L.T.L Publication, 2002 (Reprint); V. L. Siana, *Mizo History*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 1991 (Reprint); K. Zawla, *Mizo Pipute leh An Thlahte Chanchin*, Aizawl, 1964; B. Lalthangliana, *Hmasang Zonun*, Aizawl, Remkungi, 1992; B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin (Mizo history in Burma, India and Bangladesh)* Aizawl, Remkungi, 2001; Chhuanvawra, *Mizo Chanchin*, Aizawl, 1978.

<sup>6</sup>H. Lalrinawma, *Hmasang Zofate Chanchin*, Aizawl, Lalremtluangi, 2000, p. 111

Than Hill range and Run River in the Chin Hills was between the years 1300-1400 AD.<sup>7</sup> However Liangkhaia believed that the Luseis were already in Lentlang during 900 AD.<sup>8</sup> On the basis of these assumptions it may be inferred that there was an on going process of migration even before the Chinese invasion of Burma due to the itinerant character of the Lusei, who comprises of the largest numbers amongst all Mizo tribes.

In the Than Hill range, their life was rather difficult and they could neither grow crops nor cotton due to the topography, environment and climatic conditions. It was too cold to grow cotton and the soil was not suitable for crops. Even their diet went through drastic change during this period as it was difficult to grow rice, which was the staple food of most of the Mizos including the Lusei. They lived on maize and sweet potato and whatever could be grown and harvested. So when the clothes that they brought from their previous settlement wore out, they had to start wearing crude form of clothing such as *Hnawkhal* and *Siapsuap* which was made from the bark of a tree. Depending on the economic condition of a family, which was mainly based on the number of able members to work in the cultivation and also the number and skill of women in the family capable of weaving, *Hnawkhal* and *Siapsuap* may not have been resorted to by all during this period. This is probably the most neutral and tangible response which can be applied to explain why the Lusei after living in the Kabaw Valley, roughly from 800 – 1250/1300 AD, living in close quarters with a civilised society of the Burmese, who by then were properly clothed, would go back to wearing dresses made from the bark of a tree in the later years.

In the course of their migration, the Lusei went further west and reached Lentlang where the climate became better and more productive for growing cotton and rice again. Liangkhaia writing in the 1930s on the basis of oral sources said that their settlement in Lentlang is approximately as early as 900 AD while B. Lalthangliana argues that the Mizos started living in Lentlang mountain range near the Tiau River (current Indo-Myanmar border) between the years 1400 and 1750. Even though the time span given by these historians was a few hundred years back and forth, they acknowledge that this region received heavier rainfall and the land was fertile and cultivable. In this location the Lusei had grown rice and cotton and made tools for

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<sup>7</sup>Sangkima, *Mizos*, pp.15-19

<sup>8</sup>Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 43



weaving again which enabled them to gradually improve their attire. However, the products of such weaving during the initial period were enjoyed only by a few privileged families who had enough time away from the agricultural works on dressmaking.<sup>9</sup> Boichhingpuii also consented that by around 1700 when they crossed the Tiau River, they made a lot of progress towards dress making and there was a vast difference between the haves and the have-nots.<sup>10</sup> Hence dress became a tool to measure social status very early on.

### 1.1.2 Historical Background of the Lai/Pawi:

The Lais are known to be the second largest group of the Mizo tribe in Mizoram. The date of their migration to Burma from China according to C. Kamlova is approximately around 1200 AD,<sup>11</sup> but it is certain that it was not a single influx movement. According to DOUNGEL they were believed to have settled down in Chindwin valley around 750 A.D and they finally settled down in the Chin state of Myanmar.<sup>12</sup> It is generally believed that in the flow of these migrations from China to Burma and to the present habitat, smaller groups were the first to migrate, making way for the larger groups to follow. The Lais have always been the last to move in the course of migrations perhaps because they were large in numbers. It is also widely accepted that the Lais reached the present Mizoram about 1750-1850 AD and settled in the southern region of Mizoram. Salai R. Lahnim broadly assumes that they migrated from the Chin Hills in Burma between 1800 and 1900 AD.<sup>13</sup> Though they are scattered in different parts of the world they are mainly concentrated in the Lai District of Mizoram and Chin Hills of Burma where a larger segment of the Lai community resides. They are also in the Churachanpur district of Manipur, Cachar district of Assam bordering Meghalaya and they are also identified as Bawm, in the South of Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup> Z. Hengmanga traces the route of the Lai migration originating in China, coming to Tibet and then charting the source of the Brahmaputra. They entered Kachin following the mouth of the Chindwin River and then came to Burma around 750

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<sup>9</sup>B. Lalthangliana, *Hmasang Zonun*, p. 32

<sup>10</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh leh La Thlan*, Aizawl, Lois Bet, 2016, p. 23

<sup>11</sup>C. Kamlova, *Lai Chanchin*, Lawngtlai, Lai Autonomous District Council, 2013, p. 6

<sup>12</sup>Jangkhongam DOUNGEL, *Lai Chieftainship and Its Impact in Politics*, Delhi, Balaji Publication, 2015, p. 1

<sup>13</sup>Salai R. Lahnim, 'Origin and Development of Lai Language,' in Salai R. Lahnim (ed.), *A Defense of Lai Linguistic Identity*, Lawngtlai, Association for Lai Language, 2015, p. 3

<sup>14</sup>DOUNGEL, *Lai Chieftainship*, p.22 Also see Margaret L. Pachau, 'The Lai', *MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Department of English, Mizoram University, p.50 Available from: <http://www.mzu.edu.in/index.php/downloads/forms/finish/480-journal-of-literature-and-cultural-studies/7842-mzujles> (accessed 14 March 2016).

AD. During the colonial period when the British started occupying India and Burma, many of the Lai people started to spread out in different parts of Burma, Bangladesh and India.<sup>15</sup>

Lai is an ethnic identity to determine all the tribes of Chin, the *Pawi* and *Bawm*. Amongst the various clans of the Lai tribe are *Anu*, *Bawm*, *Chuntei*, *Thangnge*, *Sialling*, *Hranglung*, *Mualchin*, *Khuangsai*, *Lautu*, *Pang*, *Miram*, *Senthang*, *Sim*, *Tlangloui*, *Zahau*, *Zangiat*, *Zathang*, *Zophei*, *Lithing*, *Chinzah*, *Sanai*, *Sathing*.<sup>16</sup> Cherrie L. Chhangte specified the Lai language to the Tibeto-Burman language family<sup>17</sup> while Margaret L. Pachuau writes their language is related to Tibeto-Chinese.<sup>18</sup> The Tibeto-Burman languages are spoken in the Indian subcontinent in Baltistan, Ladakh Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and in the northeastern states of India namely Sikkim, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>19</sup>

There are several theories pertaining to the etymology of the name Lai and Pawi, which is what they are also called. While the people prefer to call themselves Lai, Pawi was a common usage, especially with the Lusei. The origin of the name Lai can be traced through a number of oral and written sources. The word *lai* in Lusei dialect means centre or middle. This is corroborated by Grierson who stated that *lai* means middle and F.K. Lehman also expressed that *lai* means centre or intermediate.<sup>20</sup> There are many lore and tales on why they are called Lai and Pawi. Such theories of origins are attributed in the following narratives.

One popular myth explains that once the God *Khawzing* dropped a *lungthu* (trivet) from heaven and it is believed that he dropped it right from the centre of heaven and the place where it fell was believed to be the centre of the earth. The place coincided with where the Lai were

<sup>15</sup>Z. Hengmanga, *Lai HnamTobul (Genealogical Roots of the Lais)*, Lawngtlai, Pawi District Council, 1988, p. 18

<sup>16</sup>Pachuau, 'The Lai', p. 50

<sup>17</sup>Cherrie Lalnunziri Chhangte, 'The Pawi/Lai: A brief Introduction', *MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 1, Department of English, Mizoram University, p. 69. Available from: <http://www.mzu.edu.in/index.php/downloads/forms/finish/480-journal-of-literature-and-cultural-studies/7842-mzujlcs> (accessed 14 March 2016)

<sup>18</sup>Pachuau, 'The Lai', p. 51

<sup>19</sup>Alejandro Gutman and Beatriz Avanzati, *Tibeto-Burman Languages*, [languagesgulper.com], 2013 Available from: <http://www.languagesgulper.com/eng/Tibeto.html> (accessed 14 March 2016)

<sup>20</sup>F.K. Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society-A Tribal People of Burma adopted to a Non-western Civilization* (1863), Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1980(Reprint), p. 30 Also see C.Kamlova, *Lai Chanchin*, Lawngtlai, pp. 2-5

settled. So, the place where the Lai settled is hence, declared as the centre and the people living in the area are pronounced the.<sup>21</sup>

Another theory explains that in the course of the migration of the Mizo, the Lai people often requested the groups that went ahead to leave and arrange spaces for them right in the hub or centre of their settlement. This was usually agreed upon. This was due to the reason that as they were in constant state of war, the large population of women and children could be well protected and cared for. Consequently, they became known as *Laimi* or those in the centre.<sup>22</sup> Some maintains that the name Lai is given to them due to their geographical placement. After the mass migration when they came to settle at their present location in Mizoram, they were sandwiched by the Lusei who settled in the north and the Mara or Lakher who settled in the south. The people who settled in the centre in between the Lusei and Mara or Lakher were called Lai as the literal meaning of the expression is centre or middle in Lusei dialect.<sup>23</sup>

There is also the *Lai-lungpuk* theory of origin which, in short claims that they have come out of a cave called *Lailung* which is located near the town of Falam in Chin Hills, Burma.<sup>24</sup> This is similar to the popular Lusei theory of origin in which the Lusei claims to have come out of a cave called *Chhinlung*. Vumson stated that from the plains of the Shan country, the Pawi settled initially at Hmunli and then moved to Lailun where they dwelled first in a cave. Lailun is located between Falam and Haka. There is a story of a Lai ancestor, Hlwa Sha<sup>25</sup> or Hluasang<sup>26</sup> who is a grandson of a Lai chief. He killed his elder brother Seohle and became the progenitor of the Lai clan. He founded the village of Pailian on which Haka now stands and he allowed the people to build hamlets in and around it.<sup>27</sup> His descendants eventually scattered in the neighbouring areas like Thlantlang, Haka, Zokhua, Sakta and other places. Ultimately people who hailed from these

<sup>21</sup> Chhangte, 'The Pawi/Lai', p. 69. Available from: <http://www.mzu.edu.in/index.php/downloads/forms/finish/480-journal-of-literature-and-cultural-studies/7842-mzujlcs> (accessed 14 March 2016)

<sup>22</sup> K. Hrekunga, Associate Professor in the Department of History at Lawngtlai College, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 4 August 2017 at Lawngtlai

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Vanlalringa Bawihlung, Associate Professor at Govt. Lawngtlai College and a Lai historian, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 4 August 2016 at Lawngtlai

<sup>24</sup> R. Lahnim, 'Origin and Development,' p. 3; Also see C. Kamlova, *Lai Chanchin*, pp. 7-8

<sup>25</sup> Bertram S. Carey, & H.N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills: A history of people and our dealings with them, their customs and manners and a gazetteer of their country (1932)*, Volume-1, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 2008 (reprint), pp. 152-153

<sup>26</sup> Vumson, *Zo History: With an Introduction to Zo Culture, Economy, Religion and Their Status as an Ethnic Minority in India, Burma, and Bangladesh*, Aizawl, Vumson, 1993, pp. 48-51

<sup>27</sup> Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 152

villages and areas all considered to have originated from the *Lailungpuk* and came to call themselves Lai.

However, many insists that they have always been called Lai from time immemorial and the place which they have inhabited in the east of Burma is still known as Lai *Ram* or *Land of the Lai* and the hills as *Lilting* or *Lai Hills*. So those who migrated from this place preserved the name Lai.

These narratives are hazy and evidently inaccurate and it is only obvious that they have been modified many times from generation to generations as with most cultures whose accounts of their past are based on oral tradition. In spite of all that, most Lai historians are of the opinion that the Lai are the oldest among the Mizo tribes and the only one to have a history of settlement in China.<sup>28</sup> They are the ancestors of the Mara<sup>29</sup> and the Lose are also their offshoot.<sup>30</sup> The Lai are the only tribe among the Mizo tribes who insisted that their origin is from a deluge.<sup>31</sup>

Apparently, as far as their origins in China are concerned, what is accepted by historians and anthropologists alike is the fact they share a common pedigree with the other mongoloid races in the north eastern part of India. They migrated through the Tibetan mountains moving through the Chin Hills where the political and diplomatic influence of the political scene was under the overwhelming Lai chiefs.<sup>32</sup> The increasing population and their ambition for territorial expansion led them to migrate towards the Lucia Hills and Bangladesh changing the course of history and in turn strengthening the hegemonic influence of the Lai chiefs.<sup>33</sup>

The Lusei calls them *Pawi* or *Pawihte* but they prefer to call themselves Lai as they regarded '*Pawi*' a derogatory term.<sup>34</sup> For this name given to them by the Lusei, again, there are numerous accounts and tales around. One such tale narrated by K. Hrekunga<sup>35</sup> describes that at the time when the Lai troops from Khuafu, in Burma with their chief Tialcheu Chinzah, came to

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<sup>28</sup> Chhuanawma Lahnim, 'Pawi/Lai Tobul leh Awmzia', in *1<sup>st</sup> Annual Magazine of Lai Students Association*, Lawngtlai, 1997, pp. 72-74; C. Kamlova, *Lai Chanchin*, pp. 1-10; also see Thatchem Chinzah, 'Brief History of The Lais,' in *1<sup>st</sup> Annual Magazine of Lai Students Association*, Lawngtlai, 1997, pp. 4-8; Z.Hengmanga, *Lai Hnam Tobul (Genealogical Roots of the Lais)*, pp. 18-24

<sup>29</sup> Kamlova, *Lai Chanchin*, p. 7

<sup>30</sup> Thatchem Chinzah, 'Brief History of the Lais,' p. 5

<sup>31</sup> Lahnim, 'Pawi/Lai,' p. 72

<sup>32</sup> Doungel, *Lai Chieftainship*, p. 24

<sup>33</sup> Doungel, p. 25

<sup>34</sup> Doungel, p. 2

<sup>35</sup> K. Hrekunga, interview, 2017

help the northern *Sailo* groups in their war against the southern *Sailo*, a brave Lai warrior met a group of Lusei in the jungle at Samthang. Since they were in a constant state of war, the Lai hero with his *kawlnham* apprehensively went towards the Lusei group clamouring ‘*khawnge keimah pawte*’ which roughly translate into ‘*here I come, the leopard.*’ *Pawte* in Lai means a leopard, implying his bravery and courage. However the Lusei mistook the expression *pawte* as *pawihite* which literally mean nothing in the Lusei dialect, yet still the name *Pawi* or *Pawite* got stuck with the Lai. Similar story is narrated by Dr. Vanlalringa Bawitlung<sup>36</sup> confirming this particular tale. Another version of the origin of the word *paw* is narrated by Lalnunziri Chhangte:

*‘Members of this community used a weapon called tek lung (flint stone), in times of altercations, which they would carry on their bodies, into the folds of their puan at the waist. This act of inserting an object into the fold of the puan was called Pangpawi in their language. The Lusei tribes, not knowing the meaning of this word, separated the two syllables to refer to certain groups, and hence the tribes Pang and Pawi came to be referred to as such.’<sup>37</sup>*

One other version states that a Chinzah chief named Saikhama during his *Khuangchawi* feast had suspected his wife of infidelity with his guest Kepchara. Saikhama therefore sent her in exile by banishing her from the village without any clothing. She thence went to Kepchara’s village where they got married. They subsequently had three sons named Hnialuma, Famchuna and Mualchina. So when she died all her children from both her marriages came to her funeral and lamented repeatedly saying, “*A va pawi em, a va pawi tak em?*” again and again. They then stated, “we are children of *Pawi*”. *Pawi* in Mizo language actually mean sad or tragic or regrettable. Because of this incident, their progenies came to be known as *Pawi*.<sup>38</sup>

Some Lai scholars advocated that the name *Pawi* was an insult meted out to the Lai by the Lusei in the event of their fear of them. The Lusei were always in constant trepidation of the Lai attack who were mightier than them. *Pawi* in Tlaisun language means dirty or filthy. Tlaisun is clan of Lai who are very daring and fearless. The Tlaisun and all the other Lai clans have always been living in close parameters with the Lusei and this is perhaps one of the reasons that there is close linguistic affinity and similar cultural traits between these two tribes. On the other

<sup>36</sup>Dr. Vanlalringa Bawitlung, interview, 2016.

<sup>37</sup>Chhangte, ‘The Pawi/Lai,’ pp. 70-71

<sup>38</sup>Dr. Vanlalringa Bawitlung, interview, 2016

hand, there has always been a high level of rivalry between the two tribes. Hence it was to slur and abuse that the Lusei called them *Pawi*.<sup>39</sup>

In an interview Renhchin Chinzah mentioned that as a child her mother told them that they were *Laimi* and belonged to the chiefly lineages and hence to act like one. She recounted that when the Baptist Mission started school at Serkawn in southern Mizoram, there were separate boarding for boys and girls and children of chiefs who were converted to Christianity were given priority. As a hosteller, studying in Serkawn Baptist School in the year 1946-47, Renhchin being naive did not really understand that the slur leveled out against Lai school children as *Pawih* was a popular tease word used by the Lusei girls against the Lai and it was often pointed their way. One day as she was playing with some Lusei girls, her cousins called her inside and asked why she was still playing with girls who were mocking her by calling her *Pawite* and she told them that she was not a *Pawite* and that she was a *Laimi* and so she did not feel offended. Nevertheless apprehensions grew amongst the Lai girls who informed the teacher Miss Chapman, the headmistress, also fondly called Pi Zirtiri, a Lusei name for Mrs Teacher. The next day Pi Zirtiri called a special assembly and announced that the administration will not tolerate such acts of mockery directed at any other tribe and that it is against Christian teachings. Also, she added that amongst all the Mizo tribes the Lai were by far the most civilized and that they were already wearing silk and other fine clothes way before the Lusei in Burma. According to Mrs. Chinzah, Pi Zirtiri also mentioned that they had done a great deal of studies about the tribes living in these parts of the country before they came to the Lushai Hills and found that the Lai were highly cultured and advanced as compared to any other tribe living in the Lushai Hills.<sup>40</sup>

However, in the present situation of homogeneity and harmony, this narrative might not be endorsed by everyone. Conversely, Liangkhaia explained that *Pawi*, with their buns at the top of their forehead incessantly looked at those with buns at the nape of their neck, condescendingly.<sup>41</sup> In spite of the striking similarities in their dresses with the Maras, the Lai proudly claims originality of the traditional dresses, its design and pattern, taking pride in their

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<sup>39</sup>Lahnim, 'Pawi/Lai,' pp. 77-80

<sup>40</sup>Pi Renhchin Chinzah, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 11 August 2016 at her residence at Lawngtlai. Besides being a member of one of the Lai chiefly lineages, she is also the wife of L. Chinzah, the ex-Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Lai Autonomous District.

<sup>41</sup>Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 55

belief that they were the most advanced and refined tribe amongst all the Mizos. However, the Lais who have migrated to the Lushai Hills have always maintained a close relationship with the Lusei, living in close quarters with them and other Mizo tribes and hence are merged within the culture here and assimilated themselves with the other groups through marriages and by borrowing each other's customs and traditions, accepting one another's ethos. Therefore, taking into consideration of the current trend and the preferential endorsement of the nomenclature *Lai* by the people themselves as their self identification, this research insisted on using it to denote the said tribes unless otherwise necessitated by colonial ethnography and in synthesizing the works of others.

### 1.1.3 Historical Background of the Mara / Lakher

People belonging to the Mara tribe amongst various nomenclatures, are identified as *Shendus* by the colonial ethnographers<sup>42</sup>. In fact it was how the Arakanese referred to them, the exact word being *Shentoos*. The mention of *Shentoos* in 1846 by Lieutenant T. Latter of the Arakan Battalion suggests that the *Shentoos* were highly widespread and well settled in the Lushai Hills, Chittagong Hill Tracks and Arakan areas even in the early nineteenth century. Latter mentioned that amongst the tribes he found on the banks of the Kuladyne (Kolodyne), the *Shentoos* were the most powerful.<sup>43</sup> In the Arakan Hills, they were known by their close neighbour *Khumi* as *Shendus*. The earlier practice of the Mara in war was to cut the head off of a person and take them home to show their bravery. In the Khumi dialect, *shen* means hair and *du* means to carry. Thus Shendu according to the Khumi means those who carry the dead by the hair or head.<sup>44</sup> In spite of such atrocious nomenclature, according to Lewin, they were a higher race than the ordinary hill people.<sup>45</sup> Quoting J.H. Hutton, Zakhu Hlychha also writes, "*The Lakher should not be confused with the Lusei and Chin people.*" He continues that they seem to be closely related to the Mon Khmer and Melanesian of Indonesia. Looking at the way they

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<sup>42</sup>T.H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South East India*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1978 (reprint), pp. 148-177. Also see T.H. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped To Govern India* (1912), Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1977(Reprint), p. 146-182.; N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers* (1932), Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1976 (reprint), pp. 1-28

<sup>43</sup>T. Latter, 'A Note on some Hill Tribes on the Kuladyne river-Arakan,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol XV, 1846, Available from [http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/61365/7/07\\_chapter%201.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/61365/7/07_chapter%201.pdf) (accessed 2 August 2017)

<sup>44</sup>Zakhu Hlychha, *Mara-te Tobul*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 2009, p. 11

<sup>45</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 163

preserve their old habitats and ancestry they are very similar with the Naga. However, their culture in terms of living and tools renders them close to the *Kuki*.<sup>46</sup>

Closer home, they were widely known as Lakher by their neighbouring tribes and they inhabit the south-eastern part of Mizoram and a huge number of this ethnic group still lives in the bordering country, specifically in the South-west corner of the Chin Hills of western Myanmar and the Arakan Hill tracts in the south of Myanmar.<sup>47</sup> R.A. Lorrain, the first missionary into the Lakher country and founder of the Lakher Pioneer Mission corroborated that they were known by the surrounding tribes as the 'Lakhers'.<sup>48</sup> He pointed out how the Lusei Christians were consistently referring to the Lakher in their prayers.<sup>49</sup> The term Lakher appears variantly as *Lakheyr*, *Lankhe*, *Lekheyr*, *Lengkhe* and *Lungkhe* in numerous references and few historical publications of Indo-Myanmar people.<sup>50</sup> Some of the early ethnographers such as A.P. Phayre, A. Mackenzie, N.E Parry, Lewin and R.A. Lorrain used two terminologies namely *Shendu* and Lakher in variant forms to identify the Mara. R.A. Lorrain even called the present Maraland as Lakherland.

The issue of the Mara being called Lakher particularly in Mizoram seems to be a Lusei vocabulary. There is a narrative which tells of an incident when someone asked a man from Lusei tribe who these people were to which he replied that they were Lakher. *La* in Lusei language means cotton and *kher* means to dig or pick out. They were known by the Lusei as a tribe who pick cotton or people who were good in weaving.<sup>51</sup> This tale narrated with more accuracy divulged that on his visit to a Mara area, a Lusei saw a Mara woman plucking cotton and thus he named the Maras as Lakher.<sup>52</sup> The cotton plucking technique of the Mara was different than the other tribes, in particular the Lusei. While the Lusei would pick the cotton with

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<sup>46</sup>Hychha, *Mara-te Tobul*, p. 6

<sup>47</sup>K. Robin, 'Migration, Belief System and the Worldview of the Maras', in Amrendra Kumar Thakur (ed.), *Proceedings of the Thirty-sixth Session of North East India History Association (NEIHA)*, Shillong, NEHU, 2015, pp. 466-467

<sup>48</sup>Reginald A. Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungle for God and Empire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, Lakher Pioneer Mission, 1912, p.88 [Archive.org], Available from: <http://www.archive.org/details/fiveyearsunknoOOlorrial> (accessed 13 June, 2017)

<sup>49</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 54

<sup>50</sup>K. Zohra, *The Mara: Indigenous Tradition and Folk Culture*, Guwahati, Scientific Book Centre, 2013, p. 8

<sup>51</sup>Dr. K Robin, Associate Professor, Coordinator, Academic Staff College, Mizoram University, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 24 November, 2013 at Aizawl; K. Pari, Joint Secretary, Legislative (Rtd.) and Director (Rtd.), Art& Culture Department, Mara District Council, Siaha, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 13 July 2016 at Aizawl.

<sup>52</sup>Zohra, *The Mara*, p.9



the flower when plucking and separate the cotton later, the Mara would dig out the cotton from within the cob. A slightly different account tells us that the Lusei were highly amazed and influenced by the Mara skill for cotton plucking and the technique of weft rib structure weaving. Weft rib structure weaving is considered to be a difficult technique where the weft threads are plucked using a pointed tool which is generally a porcupine quill and this needs skilful hands. All the explanations thus add up in the Lusei expression of Lakher meaning the ‘cotton-plucker’.<sup>53</sup> Although the people prefer to be called Mara, the early Mara people were helplessly stuck with the name Lakher. This term was also picked up by the then British government and applied to the Mara living in the south Lushai Hills. Hence they were known by this name till the formation of the Mara Autonomous District Council in 1989 after which they commonly came to be called Mara.

The term Mara is an archaic word commonly found in folksongs, folktales, traditions, etc; but the etymology of the name Mara cannot be specified to a particular theory. Though there are a few anecdotes which are often narrated by the Mara themselves, only three of the most popular conjectures will be highlighted. The Mara likes to believe that as the word Mara is comprised of two words *ma* and *ra*, it also has two meanings. *Ma* means a dream and *ra* is land, therefore, Mara means a dreamland. According to this explanation, the early settlers of the Maraland believed that this land will provide them with enough food and other necessities which is why they came to settle here and called it their dream land or Maraland. The people living in Maraland were then called Mara.<sup>54</sup>

Another plausible derivation is the term *Mawra* which is a reproduction of the Haka word *Mauram* meaning bamboo land. (*Maw/mau* = bamboo, *Ram* = land). This term was applied to the Mara due to their nomadic nature and because they settled in the more suitable tropical jungle covered with the bamboo forest.<sup>55</sup>

Contradicting the previous premise there is another derivative of the origin of the term ‘mara’ which says that the word *Ma* means to leave or to let go. This meaning is also true in the Lusei language, where *Ma* specifically denotes divorcing one's wife. Hence, Mara implies a land

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<sup>53</sup>Elizabeth Darsiempuii, *Visual dictionary of Mizo Textiles: Building Identity Through Language and Traditional Textile Symbols*, Master of Design Dissertation, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai, 2016, p.65; Also see Hlychha, *Mara-te Tobul*, p. 7

<sup>54</sup> Hlychha, p. 16

<sup>55</sup>Zohra, *The Mara*, p. 8

which has been left behind by early inhabitants. Whatever the tale behind the name Mara may be, it suffices as long as the people are contented with the name.

The dialect of the Mara is also different from and unique among the Mizo dialects. Also among the tribes in Mizoram, they are perhaps the only group who has yet finely preserved their language till date. They only speak in Mizo or *Duhlian* to people who use this language and consistently use the Mara language as far as possible within their own tribe. This claim is reiterated by A. Zakia<sup>56</sup> who said that the Mara dialect has evolved over the years and though the main script is taken from the *Tloh-sai* dialect, it also incorporated the dialect of the other Mara clans such as *Chapi*, *Zeuh-nang*, *Haw-thai*, *Sabeu*, *Heima*, *Hlaipao*, *Vytu*, *Lochei* and *Sizo*.<sup>57</sup> In an interview, Mrs. Ngotlai<sup>58</sup> and Mr. K. Chatlu<sup>59</sup> also opined that the youth too support the need for the conservation of their language and dialect. Especially since the Gospel Centenary in 1994, educated Mara youths have become highly aware of the need to preserve their language. At the same time, the likeness of many features in the Lai and Mara culture cannot be mistaken. Parry also stated that ‘The Maras are a branch of the Lai Tribe of Chins, and speak a language closely akin to Lai’.<sup>60</sup> Linguistically they are also classified as one of the major central Chin sub-groups.<sup>61</sup> This linguistic affinity mentioned in ethnographic records and the similarity of the Mara and Lai ethos and way of life, which is clearly displayed especially in dress and language confirms their close kinship. In the process of defining the different dresses of the Mara, the similarities of the Lai and Mara traditional attires cannot be denied. Therefore, it is important to highlight the relation of the Lai and Mara to clarify the perplexities that may arise due to the resemblance in look and description of their dress.

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<sup>56</sup>Azyun Zakia, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9<sup>th</sup> August, 2016 at Siaha. He was born on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1930 at Serkawr. His parents were commoners but his father, born in 1911 became the first missionary of the Lakher Pioneer Mission in 1923 after learning to read and write under the Mission. Because of this connection, A. Zakia also grew up getting education under the mission. He was recruited as an officiating teacher in 1952 and was regularized in 1957 till his retirement in 1996 as a primary school head teacher in Saiha. His wife Thleiso was born in 1936 and they met when A. Zakia came to work in her village as a teacher.

<sup>57</sup>Michael C. Howard, *Textiles of the highland peoples of Burma Volume I: The Naga, Chin, Jingpho, and Other Baric-speaking Groups*, Bangkok, White Lotus Press, 2005, p.105; also see Zohra, p.8; Parry, *The Lakher*, p.4

<sup>58</sup>Ngotlai Chozah, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016 at Siaha. At the time of interviewing, she was the President, Mara Women’s Association, with great knowledge of dress owning a huge number of traditional *Mara* garments.

<sup>59</sup>K. Chatlu, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016, at Saiha. At the time of interview he was President, Mara Thalai Pawl (Mathipi).

<sup>60</sup>Parry, *The Lakher*, p. 1

<sup>61</sup>Zohra, *The Mara*, p. 12

John Hamlet Hlychha writes that Rev. Albert Bruce Foxall and Bhattacharya are of the opinion that the Maras original home was in Malaysia.<sup>62</sup> From their original home in Malaysia they first migrated to China and then to Tibet after which they settled in the plains of Bhutan from 400 to 750 A.D. From here they finally migrated to northern Myanmar somewhere between the tenth to eleventh centuries AD.<sup>63</sup> Lehman claimed that the Lusei and the Mara are branch of the northern Chin groups who migrated to Myanmar. In fact, there are Burman inscriptions dating from the thirteenth century onward referring to the Chin in Chindwin Valley and also persistent reference in the legends of almost all Northern Chin and Luei to a former home in the Chindwin Valley.<sup>64</sup> From here they all migrated to their present settlement in Mizoram, one group after another. The Lai and the Mara lived together at close quarters for a fairly long time in the Chin Hills. By giving an outline of how they intermingled in the border villages of Chin Hills and Lushai Hills, Parry traced the progress of their migration accurately. While they all lived closely to each other in their previous homeland; their differences were sharpened in the course of their migration. Hence, these tribes, especially the Lai and Mara, who were very close in the Chin Hills started to drift off and the Mara began to form themselves into a separate tribe.<sup>65</sup>

On the eve of their encounter, the colonial officials found them inhabiting the land south of the sub division of Lushai Hills district and the extreme north of the Arakan Hill tracks as was later charted out by the British. In the flow of Mizo migration from Burma, the Mara made a historical migration from the Haka sub-division of the Chin Hills of Myanmar and arrived at their present settlements in Mizoram.<sup>66</sup> They seemed to have driven the Lusei towards the north and west.<sup>67</sup> Their viciousness in war, and their self discipline was also often a point of remark made by the British. As Mackenzie pointed out the whole history of this frontier as gathered by the British was the story of the outrages of the Lakher or Mara.<sup>68</sup> However, they are also known to be highly skilled in cloth making and other skills as compared to the other tribes around them. In the late 1860's Lewin also remarked that they bind their hair in a high and lofty knot over the

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<sup>62</sup>John Hamlet Hlychho, *The Maras: Head Hunters to Soul Hunters*, New Delhi, Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), 2009, p. 28

<sup>63</sup>Pawi Chanchin, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1988, pp. 8-11

<sup>64</sup>Lehman, *Structure of the Chin Society*, p. 18

<sup>65</sup>Hlychho, *The Maras*, p. 28. Also see K. Robin, 'Pattern of Migration: The Maras and the Chindwin Valley Connection,' p.7

<sup>66</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 4

<sup>67</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 148

<sup>68</sup>Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p.331

fore head and both the male and females are distinguished by decorum in a matter of dress that, from our knowledge of the other tribes, would hardly be expected.<sup>69</sup>

## 1.2 Terminology and Analytical Frameworks:

The historical study of dress and fashion encompasses the analysis and interpretation of human dress and appearance from prehistory until the immediate past. Recent period witnessed growing interests on history of dress. The past two decades have seen dress history moving from the margins of academic debate to the centre of interdisciplinary analysis in the arts and humanities. Dress and all its connotations are matters of significance for social and cultural historians. Once denigrated by design reformers, fashionable dress is now integrated into histories of design and western clothing is considered alongside traditional textiles within studies of material culture.<sup>70</sup>

Dress and fashion are vast areas of study encompassing the analysis and interpretation of human dress and appearance. They are also referred to as ‘hybrid subjects’ as they incorporate different conceptual frameworks and disciplinary approaches, as varied as those from anthropology, art history, cultural studies, design studies, economics, history, literature, semiotics, sociology, visual culture and business studies. Since the late 19th century, there has been a number of scholarly endeavors which however have been intermittent and usually remained within the confines of their respective disciplines. “It was only in the last decades of the 20th century that various approaches were integrated across disciplines and institutions so that it became possible to talk about something like ‘fashion studies’, reflected by the emergence of research centers, academic journals and graduate programmes with such heading.”<sup>71</sup>

In the study of dress history, terminology is a perpetual obstacle. The most recurring problem is in the definition and distinction of terms such as dress, fashion, clothing or clothes and costume from each other. In current scholarship, how do ‘dress history’, ‘fashion history’,

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<sup>69</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 149

<sup>70</sup>*Design History and Material Culture Research Group*, Developments in Dress History, 2011. Available from: <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/research/research-events/research-conferences/developments-in-dress-history> (Accessed on 25 November 2017)

<sup>71</sup>Lise Skov and Marie Riegels Melchior, ‘Research Approaches to the Study of Dress and Fashion’, in Joanne B. Eicher (ed.), *The Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Oxford, Berg, 2010, p. 3. Available from <http://openarchive.cbs.dk/bitstream/handle/10398/7766/Creative%20Encounters%20Working%20Papers%2019.pdf> sequence=1 (Accessed on 9 November 2017)

and ‘fashion studies’ differ? According to Charlotte Niklas and Annbella Pollen, “The meaning of these words and phrases overlap and interconnect, their definitions continuing to challenge researchers.”<sup>72</sup> Joanne Eicher and Susan Kaiser both emphasize that ‘dress’ is an inclusive term, encompassing all adornment and modification of the body. While ‘Clothing’ is specifically what is worn by people, ‘Costume’ exclusively refers to dress that is worn for particular events. It could also refer to clothing relating to a group of people or historical period.<sup>73</sup> ‘Fashion’ implies change in dress over time, as well as the ‘dynamic social process’ by which this change occurs.<sup>74</sup> So, to be in fashion, people wear certain clothes, but not all clothing or dress is fashion.

By the 1980’s based on the studies conducted, three widely encompassing questions for dress and fashion research were concluded which became the generally consented foundation. The first inquiry constitutes how dress is used as a tool to display class privilege and for creating a competition between social classes. The second issue deals with the way in which dress indicates gender distinctions and the third issue investigates the way in which basic principles could be used to analyze the meaning of dress and fashion which is infused in a system. This became the broad basis of most dress and fashion studies from then onwards including the present research as far as possible.

### 1.3 Theories in Dress and Fashion Studies:

Traditionally, most works on dress were descriptive and documentaries in character. Early European traveller in different parts of the world wrote their encounter with native society including their dresses. Illustrated books of “regional costumes” have continued to appear till date to promote national identity. One of the earliest of this kind is Auguste Racinet’s *Le Costume Historique* (1888) published in six volumes with 477 lithographs of costumes, which was the first serious attempt at a history of Western dress; it covered attire from the ancients through the nineteenth century, and it established the West European emphasis of all subsequent

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<sup>72</sup>Charlotte Nicklas & Annebella Pollen, ‘Introduction: Dress History Now: Terms, Themes and Tools’, in Charlotte Nicklas & Annebella Pollen (eds.), *Dress History: New Directions in Theory and Practice*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, p. 1

<sup>73</sup>Joanne B. Eicher (ed.), *Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion*, Volume 1, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. xiii. Susan B. Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, New York, Fairchild Publication, 1998, pp. 4-5

<sup>74</sup>Kaiser, *The Social Psychology of Clothing*, p. 4

costume histories until today.<sup>75</sup> In the European ethnographic tradition, native societies were often portrayed as ‘naked’ and ‘uncivilized’ as contrast to the European society. Edward Said also holds the opinion that western ideal created a thought process to deal with the “otherness” of eastern society, customs and beliefs including notion of dress.<sup>76</sup>

While dress and fashion as a proper field of study was struggling within traditional historical methodology, classical sociologists at the turn of the twentieth century theorized and conceptualized the notion of fashion and the first fully articulated sociological theory of fashion is the “trickle-down theory” or the “class distinction approach.”<sup>77</sup> The idea that fashion spread from upper to lower classes, or the ‘trickle-down theory’ became highly influential in the study of dress and fashion. Its roots can be traced back to the work of Mandeville (1670-1773), the Anglo-Dutch philosopher,<sup>78</sup> who held a positive view of fashion and luxury in which he saw key drivers of prosperity. The English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) identified two central processes of fashion: “reverential imitation,” i.e., to follow the fashion of the upper class because of its status; and the more challenging “competitive imitation,” i.e., to show that there is nothing special about the upper class.<sup>79</sup> In Spencer’s view, fashion is a symbol of manifestation of relationships between superiors and inferiors that functions as a social control. Various forms of obeisance through mutilations, presents and visits, forms of address, titles, badges, and costumes express domination and submission, and thus, fashion is a symbol of social rank and status. Although Spencer does not make an explicit distinction between clothing and fashion, he implies that what is important is not the actual clothes that are worn, but the wearer’s position in society, which has the power to transform clothing into fashion.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, *The history of Dress and Fashion*, Berg Fashion Library Available from: <https://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/products/berg-fashion-library/article/bibliographical-guides/the-history-of-dress-and-fashion> (accessed 13 October 2017).

<sup>76</sup>For further details, please read Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon, 1978 and Edward Said “Islam Through Western Eyes”, *The Nation*, 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1980. Available from <https://www.thenation.com/article/islam-through-western-eyes/> (accessed 6 June 2013).

<sup>77</sup>F. Davis, “Herbert Blumer and the Study of Fashion: A Reminiscence and a Critique,” 1991. *Symb. Interact.* 14:1–21 (accessed 26 November 2017)

<sup>78</sup>B. Mandeville, 1714 (1924). *The Fable of the Bees: Or Private Vices, Public Benefits*. New York: Penguin Class. Available from: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/mandeville-the-fable-of-the-bees-or-private-vices-public-benefits-vol-1/simple> (accessed 26 November 2017).

<sup>79</sup>Patrick Aspers and Frederic Godart, “Sociology of Fashion: Order and Change,” *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 2013. 39:171–92. Available from: <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-soc-071811-145526> (accessed 26 November 2017).

<sup>80</sup>Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Oxford and New York, Berg, 2005, p. 22

Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) and Georg Simmel (1858-1918), seen as the two modern fathers of the trickle-down theory, further developed the idea of fashion as imitation and distinction. They were interested in the role dress and fashion played for the upper classes around 1900 instead of analyzing the relationship between classes. Veblen argued that fashion was one aspect of the conspicuous leisure, conspicuous wealth and conspicuous waste he held to be characteristic of an acquisitive society in which the ownership of wealth did more to confer prestige on its owner than either family lineage or individual talent. He explained fashion changes as a kind of restless attempt to get away from the ugliness of the imposed, irrational styles, which everyone instinctively did recognize to be ugly. For Veblen, then, the motor force of fashion was a wish, forever frustrated, finally to escape the tyranny of irrational change and perpetual ugliness.<sup>81</sup> For Simmel, fashion is a form of both imitation and social equalization, but paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another. It unites those of a social class and segregates them from others. The elite initiates a fashion and, when the mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, abandon it for a newer mode; this is a process that speeds up with the increase of wealth.<sup>82</sup>

Ferdinand Toennies (1855-1936), the German sociologist and philosopher, argues that we follow fashion 'slavishly' to indicate our acceptance of the leadership of those who dominate the groups in which we desire membership, just as we follow the customs and traditions of such groups as an indication of our desire to remain among or join them. Toennies discusses custom in clothing, which fixes and orders what would otherwise be arbitrary. It establishes certain dress as feminine and masculine, as well as other differences in social role such as unmarried and widowed, youth and adult, or master and servant. Clothing is used to legitimize the wearer's position in symbolic identifications with traditions already powerful in their society. Desire for distinction is expressed in frequent change of dress, and in frequent discard of what has already been worn. The drive for distinction weakens the power of tradition and this is the beginning of fashion as well as *Gesellschaft*.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London: IB Tauris, 2003, pp. 51-52

<sup>82</sup>Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, p. 22

<sup>83</sup>Kawamura, pp. 22-24

Throughout the twentieth century there were scholars who provided critiques of the trickle-down theory and presented alternative analytical models. Herbert Blumer (1900-1987), the American sociologist, who defined the concept of fashion movement, argues that fashion is based on collective selection in a kind of ‘trickle-across’ movement. In his view, designers and other tastemakers play a key role by translating tastes into designs. This perspective opened the way to multiple challenges to the trickle-down approach, and empirical studies such as the theory of Diana Crane<sup>84</sup> which demonstrated other movements such as trickle-across or trickle-up that saw the evolution of fashions as being across social classes or from the bottom up.<sup>85</sup>

The French sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky in *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (1996) places the individual and individualism at the centre of his interpretive history of the past 600 years of fashion in the West, and he criticizes all preceding studies of fashion from Veblen to Bourdieu and Baudrillard for their preoccupation with dress as class display. Lipovetsky’s main argument is that the central concern should be with comfort and individualism.

Bourdieu,<sup>86</sup> a French sociologist, shares many of his views with classical contemporary discourse of fashion as imitation. He includes fashion within his theory of distinction-making. He uses the notion of taste as a marker that produces and maintains social boundaries, both between the dominant and dominated classes and within these groups. Thus taste is one of the key signifiers and elements of social identity. Bourdieu’s interpretation of clothing and fashion lies within the framework of cultural taste and of class struggle. The bourgeoisie emphasizes the aesthetic value and the importance of the distinction between inside and outside, domestic and public while the working classes make a realistic and functional use of clothing, and they want ‘value for money’ and what will last. Fashion has a distinctive function and also opposes the dominant and the dominated fractions, or the established and the challengers, given the equivalence between economic powers. This reinforcement of the line between classes is best seen in a society where there is no one absolute authoritative power such as the aristocrats in the

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<sup>84</sup>Crane D. “Diffusion models and fashion: a reassessment”, *Ann. Am. Acad. Polit. Soc. Sci.* 1999, 566:13–24. (Accessed 27 November 2017)

<sup>85</sup>Patrick Aspers, and Frederic Godart, “Sociology of Fashion,” pp. 171–192

<sup>86</sup>Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Haute couture et haute culture,’ in *Questions de sociologies*, Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980.



feudal age. Fashion reflects the advent of democracy in which the boundaries between classes have become less rigid.<sup>87</sup>

#### 1.4 Review of Literature:

For the current research a selected number of works that included both books and journals have been reviewed in order to understand the concepts and methodological implications of studying dress history as well as to identify the directions and area of current research in this field.

*Fashion Theory* is a quarterly journal which aims to provide an international and interdisciplinary forum for the rigorous analysis of cultural phenomena ranging from foot-binding to fashion advertising. *Fashion Theory* takes as its starting point a definition of ‘fashion’ as the cultural construction of the embodied identity. It gives importance to the study of the body as a site for the deployment of discourses. The journal also provides a vital contribution to the following disciplines: cultural studies, art history, literary criticism, anthropology, fashion history, media studies, gender studies, folklore studies and sociology.

Roland Barthes’ *The Language of Fashion* (Translated by Andy Stafford, Berg / Power Publications, 2006) consists of a series of essays, interviews and articles written by him before and immediately after publication of his influential *Système de la mode* (*The Fashion System*) in 1968. While the pieces in this volume were initially published between 1956 and 1969, this is the first time that they have been published in English. It was in the arena of fashion and clothing studies that he developed a complex analytical framework for clarifying the signifying structures behind the representation, consumption and circulation of meanings in the quotidian experience of contemporary society. In admitting that fashion has its own internal logic such as ‘something is fashionable because fashion says it is’, irrelevant to outside concerns such as history or utility or even aesthetics, Barthes structured his analysis on the literariness of fashion, decoding the links between image and text. This forms a crucial element of Barthes’ broader writings on semiotics, attempting to give a semiotic clarity to the slipperiness of the fashion ‘form’ throughout history. He constantly criticizes the formulaic determinations between the historical

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<sup>87</sup>Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, p. 29

zeitgeist and fashion 'styles,' providing one of the most engaging aspects of the collection for contemporary readers.

In *Fashion as Communication* (Routledge, 2002), Malcolm Barnard considers the meaning of fashion in society from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Malcolm Barnard introduces fashion and clothing as ways of communicating and challenging class, gender, and sexual and social identities. Drawing on a range of theoretical approaches from Barthes and Baudrillard to Marxist, psychoanalytic and feminist theory, Barnard addresses the ambivalent status of fashion in contemporary culture. He looks at the producers, consumers and critics of fashion, exploring the tensions between haute couture and high culture, and asking who generates meanings and how.

*Fashionology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Berg, 2005) by Yuniya Kawamura is an introduction to sociological and social science approaches to fashion. The book provides a concise and much-needed introduction to the sociology of fashion. The book gives an overview of classical accounts by scholars such as Simmel, Veblen, and Toennies, as well as modern more empirically based studies including those by Blumer, Davis, and Bourdieu. Most studies do not make a clear distinction between clothing and fashion. Kawamura argues that clothing is a tangible product whereas fashion is a symbolic cultural product. She explains that fashion is not about clothes but is a belief. There is an institutional structure, ignored by many fashion theorists that has shaped and produced the fashion phenomenon. Kawamura further shows how the structural nature of the fashion system works to legitimize designers' creativity and can make them successful. Newer fashion cities, such as Milan and New York, are the product of the fashion system that originated in Paris. Without that systemic structure, fashion culture would not exist.

Margaret Maynardin *Dress and Globalization-Studies in Design & Material Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2004) surveys dress and identity of cultures around the world. It draws on issues of consumption, ethnicity, gender and the body, as well as anthropological accounts and studies of representation. In this book, Maynard is able to build another major step in our understanding of current developments in world dress, global dress and its manufacture and consumption.

In *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), Fred Davis sets out to answer what we do with our clothes and what they can do to us. Drawing on interviews with designers and fashion editors, Davis examines the workings of the fashion industry. In fashion's cycle of invention to obsolescence, fashion succeeds or fails by its ability to respond to a complex and usually unpredictable cultural marketplace. Much of what we assume to be individual preferences, Davis shows, really reflect deeper social and cultural forces. Ours is an ambivalent social world, characterized by tensions over gender roles, social status, and the expression of sexuality. Predicting what people will wear becomes a risky gamble when the link between private self and public persona can be so unstable. Filled with sharply detailed portraits of the business and culture of fashion, this book will enlighten anyone interested in the important and complex role clothing plays in our lives.

Bonnie English in *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20th Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk* (Berg Publishers, 2007) covers the subject of twentieth-century fashion by stressing the importance of popular culture and media on fashion design, merchandising, and style—an accomplishment that distinguishes itself from the many books written about the topic. She elaborates upon how popular culture and clothing design were mutually reliant upon each other during the twentieth century and how this interdependency continues as future fashion and textiles develop.

*The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives* (edited by Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, Routledge, 2010) is one of the latest publications in the field. Fashion, generally thought of as an 'up-to-the-minute' cultural phenomenon, has, as Riello and McNeil suggest, a troubled relation with history. Yet the contributions they assemble from nearly 60 scholars provide a compelling case to consider fashion as a major question for almost every social, cultural, and economic pursuit in multiple cultural and temporal contexts. Riello and McNeil characterize fashion as having an inherent yet complex relation to time, which makes it a key material and conceptual formation for reflecting on the very construction of cultural history. The editors do not claim to have discovered a new field, or to have solved all of its problems. On the contrary, *The Fashion History Reader* opens debates that are yet to take place in fashion studies, but that will be necessary if it's to develop as a field of research.

In *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Rutgers University Press, 2003), Elizabeth Wilson traces the social and cultural history of fashion and its complex relationship to modernity. Wilson delights in the power of fashion to mark out identity or to subvert it and this brand new edition of her book follows recent developments to bring the story of fashionable dress up to date, exploring the different looks and trends inspired by popular culture of the mid 90's, retro-dressing and the meanings of dress from the veil to make up for both the sexes.

In *Dress and Identity in India* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), Emma Tarlo examines sartorial style from the late nineteenth century to the present, showing how trends in clothing are related not only to caste, religion, wealth, urbanization and levels of education, but also to a larger cultural debate about the nature of Indian identity. She explores how Indians have chosen their clothes to express various social and political positions from the late 19th century to the 1990s. Among the topics are the influence of Gandhi's concepts of nationalism and simplicity, the blurring and deliberate violation of traditional caste markers, village dress, peasants, pastoralists, and modern fashions. Tarlo documents the changing attitudes towards clothes in India from the early colonial period to the present day. She set out to study the significance of women's embroidery in a Gujarati village in 1988. A large part of the book is devoted to Gandhi, who skillfully deployed the politics of dressing, which literally became the material evidence of his evolution as a political and spiritual actor. He shifted the emphasis from style to actual material and the cloth itself was politicized. She also analyses the different stitches, and patterns which the villagers traditionally use. Far from being a purely 'academic' exercise, this highlights their changing attitudes towards 'home and the world'.

*The Study of Dress History* by Lou Taylor published in 2002 by Manchester University Press is another innovative work which asserts the importance of using good research technique in the study of dress history. Taylor stresses on the importance of interdisciplinary sources using material culture, art history, ethnography and cultural studies. The book explains the issues surrounding dress history and explores new techniques and methods which could be applied to the study of dress history so as to bring to light a new understanding that study of clothing is more than just studying the object. Taylor emphasizes on the critical analysis of academic gender rendering it to be comprehensive, engaging and bringing respectability to the study of dress history.

Using photographs and illustrations from the famous James Henry Green collection at Brighton Museum along with other collections, private and public, *Textiles from Burma* is an assortment of articles written by ten textile and art researchers from all over the world edited by Elizabeth Dell and Sandra Dudley. Published by Phillip Wilson Publishers in 2003 in London, the book has been published by other agencies to be distributed all over Asia and the United States. The book contains themes on history, production, meaning and collection of textiles from Burma while the vivid collections display the richness of the textile traditions in Burma. Chapter 4 of the first part of the book contains articles on Chin and related group and their textiles which offer an array of facts and pictures valuable to this particular research. It also provides glimpses into textiles that are extinct and helps in the revival of those textiles. This book is a popular source of information for fashion and textile study of Burma.

*Textiles of The Highland Peoples of Burma* by Michael C. Howard is one of the most detailed work on the culture, specifically dresses of the Naga, Chin, Jingpho, and other Baric-speaking groups of Burma. This book was published by White Lotus, Bangkok in 2005. As an anthropologist, Michael's work provides background on these peoples and their textiles which includes a great deal of new information provided through dozens of black and white photographs, maps, 264 colour photographs and 96 plates. The book contains seven chapters with lots of details based on interpretations of ethnographic works and his field work. The last chapter of the 354 paged book dedicated to the Northern and Southern Chin groups is especially consequential to this research.

Another publication from Bangkok is the *Mantles of Merit* by David W. & Barbara G. Fraser. Published by River Books in 2005, this book compiles photographs and texts showing and explaining the beauty of Chin textiles from Burma, India and Bangladesh. Besides independent researchers and private collectors, the pictures have been gathered from the Victoria & Albert Museum, American Baptist Historical Society, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Denison University, The Textile Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, American Museum of Natural History, British Library and University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Such wide ranging collection is very rare and valuable, especially for the study of Chin textiles enhancing the work and elevating its status as one of the most important work on Chin textile in recent times. However, the maps illustrated in the book lack authenticity

especially figure 88 on pages 57. This lack of cartographic validity sets back the value of the work. Also many of the clans mentioned as owner of certain blanket and dress could easily confused readers leading to false interpretation and ownership.

*Clothing as Material Culture* is published in 2005 by Berg Publishers. Edited by Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller, the book contains an assortment of nine articles with ranging from aesthetics of the self to recycling and second hand clothing, Turkish headscarf to Polynesian quilts, thrift fashion to chiefly dress and threads to fabrics. The wide range of information collected from field works, photographs, museum and various other sources raises the quality of this book. While traditional studies of dress have focused mainly on textiles often neglecting the cultural context of dress and who wears them, this book combines material and social aspects of dress by using the material culture approach to the study of clothing. The book addressed the material qualities of clothing and argues that cloth and clothing are living, vibrant parts of culture and the body.

A recent publication of Bloomsbury Publishing edited by Charlotte Nicklas and Annabella Pollen titled *Dress History: New Directions in Theory and Practice* is one of the most important book of recent times on dress. The 215 pages of the book contain a collection of twelve articles written by fashion writers, theorists and dress historian from all over the world. Their themes and contents explore the exponential growth in dress history in the past two decades with in depth investigations, pushing boundaries of disciplines. Focussing on the etymology and methodology of dress and fashion history, the book offers deep insights into the contribution and application of object studies with simplicity and brilliant clarity. By including different items of dress such as gloves to shoes, spanning time frames from the nineteenth century to modern era, employing new terms, themes and tools, this book is a must read to find new meanings in dress history and new methods in its scholarship.

*Puan the pride of Mizoram* by N. Chaterji is a book on the traditional cloth of the Mizo, made from loom by the women and worn by wrapping it around the waist. The book is specifically dedicated to this piece of clothing. It introduces the Mizo culture and retrospect on the *puan* to enable readers to have an understanding of the importance of certain *puan*, the varied designs and their particular usages and how some particular *puan* signifies the social status of the wearer. The book also describes in details 27 different varieties and designs of *puans* which are

indigenous to the Mizo, their intricacies and how a certain design belongs to a particular tribe or clan. All these are accompanied by pictures, shown with plates. To critique the work one can say that in spite of the fact that the author filled the gap for the much needed book on dress, she lacked an in depth understanding of the Mizo culture and language. Due to this, a number of the motifs and patterns are described as the name of an actual *puan* in the book. Also, spelling or typing mistakes referring to ‘loin loom’ as ‘lion loom’ also discredit the book. Authentic chronology and date for the origin of the *puans* are and the social situation in which they were invented is also lacking. It is highly descriptive, lacking proper validations.

Mizo *Incheina* (Tribal research Institute) is a light read with only 28 pages to its credit. It was apparently published to fill up the need felt with the dearth of proper documentation and a reliable source for information on Mizo clothing and accessories. Published in 1991 and reprinted in 1993, the book is quite true to its title, which literally means dress of the Mizo. It has five chapters which are dedicated to Lusei, Pawi, Paite, Riang, Chakma and Marare respectively. These chapters explain how each of the tribe dresses, their jewellery and other forms of ornamentations. The book also describes clothes which are worn on particular occasions, what a priest wears during rituals and sacrifices and so on. Though it only briefly describes each piece of clothing, it supplies enough information on each of the pieces to curb one’s interest, thus basically sufficient to serve as a handbook to Mizo clothing.

Another publication from the Tribal Research Institute is *Material Culture of The Mizo* by Lianhmingthanga. This book published in 1998 narrates with illustrations the various aspects of Mizo cultures in compact chapters. Chapter nine and ten of this book contains descriptions about clothes and ornaments and dyes and paints respectively. It is a source for description with sketchy illustrations and pictures which is quite useful in providing basic information about the different types of tools used for making dresses, the numerous types of dresses, accessories and jewellery of the Mizo, mainly the Lusei. It also tells in a gist a few of the basic colours employed by the Mizo. Even though it is not based on historical research, it offers the ground for a fundamental knowledge of Mizo dress and its peripherals.

Another important book is titled Mizo *Chanchin* by Rev. Liangkhaia. This is one of the first books on Mizo history first published in 1938 in Mizoram, reprinted five times with the last edition published in 2002. The preface of book is written by John Shakespear written in 1938

from Chelsea, London, encouraging and congratulating the author for bringing out the first book on Mizo history. The book traces the origin of the Mizo, the different clans, their migration and the account of British entry and their eventual annexation along with the establishment of the church. However, very little is written about the dress and clothing matter of the Mizo in details. But the book shed light on the time and space, culture and tradition of the Mizo in the pre colonial and colonial period, thus helping in the better understanding of the Mizo, their surroundings and clothing system and the evolution of Mizo dress in general.

*Mara-te Tobul* written by Zakhu Hlychho published by Mizoram Publication board in 2009 is a useful book informing readers about the origin and cultural life of the *Maras* in Mizoram. The book outlines the migratory route of the *Mara* from Burma to their present habitation in Mizoram till the formation of the Mara Autonomous District in 1972. In between it highlights the topography of the Mara land and their culture till the coming of the British and their relationship with the British in which the whole of chapter eleven is dedicated to the dress and lifestyle of the *Mara* along with pictures of *Mara* traditional dresses and accessories. Therefore, the book can be said to be a practical source of information about *Mara* dress and culture.

One of the most comprehensive book on Mizo dress is the recently published ‘*Mizo La Deh leh Zethlan*’ by Boichhingpuii. Published in 2016 by the author’s husband C. Hmingthanzuala who is a retired Indian Civil Service (IAS) officer, this book is the latest work relating to Mizo traditional dresses, their designs and motifs and their evolution over the years. The title essentially means the process of Mizo loom and patterns and the 201 pages of the book is divided into 16 chapters with 359 pictures from the author and from private collection. The author in the introduction and in an interview<sup>88</sup> mentioned that she does not have a proper academic knowledge to write an academic work nor a degree in fashion or dress study. Yet, the influence of her mother who was a seasoned and expert weaver, who also knitted and made their dresses had deeply impacted the author in her interest of Mizo *puan* and its creation and also inspired her to learn and weaved a number of *puan* on her own. This knowledge and her tenure as an officer and eventually as the director in the department of Art and Culture under the

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<sup>88</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. vii; Boichhingpuii, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 4 May 2017 at her residence in Chaltlang, Aizawl



government of Mizoram has also pushed her further into researching, conserving, creating and developing Mizo *puan* and designs. It also put her at an advantageous position in collecting and exploring Mizo loom and its productions in different parts of the state. The book in its chapterization deals with a wide range of time frame and social custom, from the pre colonial Mizo dress, the different dresses of the Mizo clans, production of Mizo dress, the gender differentiation, the traditional motifs and their eventual progression under the colonial rule, independence and the influence of the political movements in the 1960s leading to the evolution of Mizo dress and its production. The book, based on its visual contents and information is highly informative, comprehensive and worthy for students, historians, scholars of social sciences or anyone interested in the Mizo art of dress making and fashion.

This research also reviewed the unpublished dissertations submitted to National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi and Mumbai for master degrees by Susan R. Ralte and Elizabeth Darsiempui and they are titled, *A study on The Textile Motifs of the Lusei Tribe of Mizoram and The Awareness Amongst the Present Generation* and *Visual dictionary of Mizo Textiles: Building Identity Through Language and Traditional Textile Symbols* respectively. While Susan concentrates only on the Lusei dresses, she also tries to provide the historical background for the clothing she describes as well as the technical explanation for the various motifs used by the Lusei in their clothes. The motifs are explained with the help of pictures and clothing with the help of material remains she has photographed from the owners who has kept them. Thus this study while being authentic in its approach, lacks the academic approach and objective which is demanded in scholastic researches. The work of Elizabeth on the other hand comprises of the various dresses of different Mizo tribes including that of the *Hmar* to which she herself belongs. Exclusive study of the material culture of the Hmars is not common which makes this research unique. Nonetheless, like that of Susan's work, it lacks theoretical and speculative methodology which is stipulated in academia. However, both these provides useful information about the dresses of the Mizo. Another master degree dissertation which provides information on the Mizo *puan* is from Stella Maris College, Chennai by Stefenie Lalthansangi Halliday, titled '*Puan-The tradition of The Mizos*' submitted in 2011. Though the title seems to be highly inspired by the work of Chaterji, this research work is unique because while tracing the evolution of the dresses of the Mizo, it also provides original illustrations on the different styles of wearing Mizo dress and a detailed graph on the different organic dyes and their sources.

Therefore, though it lacks the comprehension of academic methodology, it certainly brought innovations to the various types of works submitted into fashion study institute at the same time bringing novelty and originality to such works. This deemed the work to be reliable to a certain extent as a source for this research as well.

In 2015 one of the most comprehensive research works on the socio-culture history of the Mizo was published by Cambridge University Press co authored by Joy L.K. Pachuau and Willem Van Schendel. This book created a paradigm shift into how Mizo history is perceived with the use of photographs sourced from wide ranging private collections, archives, universities and libraries across the United Kingdom and Mizoram. Through these photographs, the history of the Mizo people are studied in relation to the events happening around the world and it traces how the indigenous people of Mizoram have in such a situation evolved a new identity.

*Wild races of South-Eastern India* first published in 1870 by Wm. H. Allen & Co. London and later reprinted by Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl Mizoram and *A Fly on the Wheel, or: How I Helped to Govern India*, first published in 1912 and later reprinted by Tribal Research Institute in 1977 are both written by Thomas Herbert Lewin. Written while serving as a Deputy Commissioner of the Hill tracts, these books are basically a memoir of Lewin as a British colonial officer, who lived and explored the hill areas of Bengal and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. As written by him in the preface of the latter title, the books contained details from his life in these hills recorded in his diaries, kept carefully for his home-folks. However, the private diary and records of Lewin in the form of these books have become the most read, referred source and sought after works for scholars and everyone interested and trying to understand the people living of this area, before and under the colonial reign. However, the names of tribes, clans and persons given in the books are based on the understanding of the author, in the absence of any anthropological or linguistics knowledge. This makes it very problematic for readers to understand or locate them in the right category or place. The superiority complex of the colonizer is quite vivid in the narratives. Also, the perspective of the writer could not fully comprehend the context of the people he wrote about thus creating a gap in the information it provides. Notwithstanding these biases, these books supply one of the earliest reports on the dresses of the Mizo, when they first encountered the British thus giving us a glimpse into the life of the Mizo and their dresses prior to the coming of the British.

In 1896 a very important work titled *The Chin Hills: A history of people and our dealings with them, their customs and manners and a gazetteer of their country* Volume-1 and 2 were first published by two political officers named Bertram S. Carey, & H.N. Tuck, stationed in the Chin Hills. This book was reprinted by Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl in 1976 and 2008 respectively. While the second volume contains political reports of villages, list of roads and stockades in the Chin Hills, the first volume contains detailed accounts of the country, people, their manners and customs, cultures, law and economy in Chin Hills. A number of pictures produced with photo etchings are provided in the book giving readers a visual glimpse into the life of the people during that period which adds a lot of value to the book. Again, names of people, clans and places are spelled as per the discernment of the writers which makes it difficult for readers to grasp the actual names and meanings. This also creates confusion in interpretation and translation especially for academicians and scholars. However, there is no doubt that the information imparted is genuine therefore it remains one of the most relied sources of study among the ethnographic works of the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial history of the Chin and related people.

The first Superintendent of Lushai Hills J.Shakespear's monograph titled *The Lushei Kuki Clans* first published in 1912 by Richard Clay and Sons, Suffolk is another ethnographic work which has been reprinted three more times by the Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl in 1975, 1988 and 2008 respectively. In the introduction, the author stated how his realization of the many clans living in the hills could be included in the Kuki race. He went on to explain how the name of certain clans such as the Kuki, Naga, Chin and *Shendu* are not recognized by the tribes themselves thus relieving many of the confusions created by earlier ethnographic works. He used the term Lushai as a generic term encompassing all the Mizo clans within it. This therefore becomes a trail blazer in many works which later followed, laying the foundation for the rise of elements of ethnic identity and politics based ethnic assertion. Besides details on the general habits, domestic lifestyle, laws and customs, religion and folklores, the different branches of the Lushei and non Lushei clans like Thado and Mara are indicated. The first chapter has a theme on dress and ornaments which provided valuable information for this research. The chapter on *Mara* clan has also provided authentic data which are useful. This book continues to be one of the major ethnographic sources of Mizo history under the colonial rule.

'*Five Years In Unknown Jungle, For God And The Country*' is an account of the life of a missionary named Reginald A. Lorrain in the Lakher country published by Lakher Pioneer Mission, London in 1912. Although this book is written from the perspective of a missionary with zeal to make converts of the local people, it delivers along the process a number of data about the people that they have encountered from the beginning of their journey into the hills, including the Lusei, Lai and Mara. A number of essential information about their day to day life, food habit, social interaction and mode of clothing are discussed in passé which gives readers insights into the culture and dress of not only the Lakher but also other clans that they have come across. Though it is not a historical work, it throws light into the life of the Mizo in colonial period and as such it has become an important piece of ethnographic source for the study of cultural history.

While serving the British government in India as an Indian Civil Service officer, N.E. Parry was appointed the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills district between February 1924 to April 1928 and later as the Deputy Commissioner of the Lushai Hills district from 1953 to 1958. During his tenure he observed and studied the Lakher and the Lusei, often visiting the Lakher country where he collected information on their life and culture. Based on his observation and the information he gathered during this period, his monograph on the Lakher was first published in 1932 reprinted twice in 1976 and in 2009. In the introduction of this book J.H. Hutton remarked that this book has yet greater details in many respects than that yet recorded of any other Assam tribe.<sup>89</sup> This statement of Hutton cannot be argued with as the 614 pages of monograph clearly have details about the Lakher habitat and language to their physical characteristics, domestic life, laws and customs and religion to folklores. The chapterization is very similar to that of Shakespear's *Lushei Kuki Clan*. The texts come with illustrative sketches and etched photos, making it easier to understand the descriptions. Specific description of dress and accessories, dress making technology and tools along with their significance in the social structure of the Lakher and the Mizo as a whole has given a lot of impetus to this book. Although it comes with its share of mis-spellings of names of places and persons, which has become a norms in all ethnographic works, it has become the most cherished source for the study of Mizo cultural history in general and that of the Lakher in particular.

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<sup>89</sup>Parry, *The Lakher*, p. xvi

Anthropological work on the Chin society titled '*The Structure of Chin Society: A Tribal people of Burma*' is another important book authored by the famous anthropologist F.K. Lehman. The book is based on upon the field research carried out by the author in the Chin Hills of Burma from February 1957 to August 1958.<sup>90</sup> This book was first published in 1963 by the University of Illinois and later reprinted by Tribal Research Institute in 1980 under the arrangement of the University of Illinois. This book is one of the first to be authored by a trained professional anthropologist and an academician. Earlier, most monographs were prepared by government servants without no or very little knowledge of history writing or anthropology. This can be called the first academic work on the Chins and their kin hence any cultural study of the Mizo in general cannot be complete without looking into the information provided by F.K. Lehman. The book contains detailed analytical description on the land, the people, their economy, politics and religion while outlining the recent socio- cultural changes brought about by the said elements. The book also comes with a number of photographs to help readers to easily understand the nature and context of the contents of the book and also detailed summary chart of agriculture, ceremonial and secular calendar. It gives us a peek into the everyday life of the people and their culture, how they have evolved from a pre colonial culture into a modernized society by adapting to new economic systems, trade and politics. The significance of this monograph continues, especially as interdisciplinary approaches to cultural studies have become the trend in academic fields.

One of the most influential books of the nineteenth century on colonialism was *Orientalism* by Edward Said. Said critically asserted that the world's perception of the orient, including Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East are deeply rooted in the imperialist ideas and attitude. In this book of 368, published by Pantheon Books in 1978, Said questioned the dispute over the understanding of what is East which was a confusion created by the west. He answered this by denouncing the lifestyles of the Arabs who have internalized this notion of the Orient as was depicted by the westerners whose main purpose was the false imagery of the east to justify their colonial rule. The author tries to establish a culture, values, rich heritage and traditions which was original to the East. The book provided a fresh insight about colonialism from the perspective of the colonised which elevated the credibility of the work and being purely

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<sup>90</sup>Lehman, *The Structure*, p. xi

academic in its content, it continues to become one of the most sought after work in the academic arena and beyond.

The recent progress in the study of dress and fashion brings a lot of focus on dress and its related issues and it has increasingly become a central topic in caucuses, both academic and non-academic. A number of discussions in the electronic and print media focus on the question of the Mizo traditional dress and its replacement by modern clothing styles. These discourses bring to the fore, issues related to gender and body as well as religion, social, political, economic and cultural matters. Such developments have made it all the more pertinent to have an academic research on the meanings of dress within the Mizo society.

As far as dress history in Mizoram is concerned, the available literature contains very little information. Books specifically devoted to dress have hardly been published or any historical research done in this topic. Publication of few available books on dress or themes related to dress were mainly shouldered by the Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram which are mentioned in this synopsis. Therefore, this proposed research will try to address the existing gap in the academic exercise on dress history of Mizoram as far as possible.

## **1.5 Objectives**

The objectives of the current study are as follows:

- (i) To provide a descriptive analysis of the traditional dresses of the three major tribes of Mizoram namely Lusei, Lai and Mara.
- (ii) To analyze traditional dress production techniques of the Mizo.
- (iii) To evaluate the impact of colonialism on the evolution of Mizo dress.

### **1.5.1 Scope of the Study**

The study covers the present state of Mizoram, India focusing on three selected tribes, namely, Lusei, Lai, and Mara. However, the limits of the research sometimes extends beyond the present boundaries of Mizoram understandably because the people of the state share cultural, social, religious, and ethnic affinities with those across the national and international boundaries. The time frame of the study stretches from the pre-colonial to the colonial period.

### **1.5.2 Methodology:**

The study tries to combine historical and material culture approach to understand the evolution of dress by using private and public photographs. Objects related to the topic were examined by the object-based analytical technique to elicit their meanings, origin, functions, and spatially ordering them in chronological order. Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted in order to place the objects in their proper socio-cultural contexts. Thereafter, surveys of textual sources provided the theoretical bases and directions upon which the research would be grounded and conclusions arrived at.

### **1.5.3 Structure of the Study**

**Chapter 1** contextualizes the research by providing a discussion of the key ideas, theories and concepts in the study of dress history and fashion studies.

**Chapters 2, 3, and 4** offer a descriptive analysis of the dresses of the Lusei, Lai, and Mara tribes of Mizoram, from pre-colonial to colonial times respectively.

**Chapter 5** describes and analyses the traditional jewellerys and accessories of the selected tribes.

**Chapter 6** provides a discussion of the raw materials, process, and technology involved in dress production.

**Chapter 7** analyzes the evolution of Mizo dresses since pre-colonial times and the impact of colonialism and situates this in the context of current multidisciplinary approaches to the study of dress history and fashion studies.

**Chapter 8** presents the conclusion and findings of the research.

## **Chapter 2: Lusei Dress - From the Earliest to Colonial Times.**

### **2.0 Introduction:**

The primary function of dress is to cover and protect the body. We can go back as far as the Garden of Eden and find that Adam and Eve after realising their nakedness, sewed fig leaves together for dress.<sup>91</sup> And dress must have been really important for humans because after that, ‘The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.’<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the first dresses of any tribal society almost always comprised of something, which is made from leaves, bark of a tree, hide or something close to nature. Likewise, the earliest known dress and clothing of the Mizos like any other tribal group was scanty and raw.

When it comes to pre-colonial Lusei dresses, they may be classified, into ordinary/everyday dress, festive/occasional dress and statutory dress like that of the chiefs’ and other deserving persons. This chapter tries to understand the Lusei dresses from the pre-colonial to the colonial period in terms of designs, motifs and contextualise them within the cultural and social milieu of the Lusei.

### **2.1 Everyday Dress of the Lusei:**

The pre-colonial Mizo society including the Lusei tribe hardly had time to pursue leisure and hence everyday clothing consisting of a single white homespun sheet, worn by everyone wears. However, once they had settled down in a particular place with stable agricultural system, improved economic structure leading to better management of time for weaving and easier access to dyes, they started developing variety of colours, design and pattern of clothing to choose from.

These dresses are commonly worn by all men and women and have no special connotation which were worn everyday to work in the jhum fields and also at home. They are essentially the earliest representation of Lusei dress, which was created out of the sheer need to have a proper dress made from fabrics other than the bark of a tree. They are mainly work dress but it also showed their progress in the field of dress-making.

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<sup>91</sup>Genesis 3:7, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+3%3A5...NIV> (accessed 7 July 2015)

<sup>92</sup>Genesis 3:21, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+3%3A5...NIV> (accessed 7th July 2015)



The everyday or casual dress of the Lusei broadly includes *Hrenpereng* and *Hnawkhal*, *Siapsuap*, *DawlremKawr*, *Hnathawh Kawr*, *Tualtakawr*, *Kawrmawl*, *Fenphel/Fenngo*, *Hmaram*, *Tual puan*, *La ung puan*, *Puantial*, *Puanhlap*, *Puanngo*, *Puanrin*, *Fenthuah* and *Ngotekherh*. Despite the fact that the names of these dresses may differ from place to place, this research tries to provide the most common names and descriptions and club together the same dresses, which are given different nomenclature.

### 2.1.1 *Hrenpereng* and *Hnawkhal*:

Presumably the earliest dress of Lusei men was *Hnawkhal*, a straw dress and a loin cover of the men called *Hrenpereng*. These earliest dresses were made from the bark of a flowering tree called *Vaiza*<sup>93</sup> (*Hibiscus Maerophyllus*), which is peeled and shredded into fibre. The shredded tree barks were tied together in a thick bunch and worn with a piece of rope tied to the hip, the thick bunch falling right at the middle to cover their private part.<sup>94</sup> It was left to hang mainly from the shoulder and for as long as the wearer wanted. It was like a long dress worn by the men, long enough to cover the bottom part of a male body and sometimes secured at the waist with a belt made from the same material. The hard fibrous material of the *Vaiza* had to be treated. After it was shredded it was sometimes pounded in the pestle or pounded on a stone with another hard object to make it softer for wear. This seemed to be the *Hrenpereng* made of straw. And there is no specific indication whether this lower garment of men was also referred to as *Hnawkhal*. *Hnawkhal* is the attire which was called a Chin (Lai) raincoat by Lorrain in his 'Dictionary of the Lushai Language', which was also worn by the Lusei men. This again was made from the same material. These are considered to be the earliest known clothing of the Luseis as well as Lai (Chin). However, it cannot be verified whether both the Lusei and Lai used the exact type at the same time. But both the straw and cloth were used to cover their loins at certain periods of time. Later, cotton cloths came to be used for *Hrenpereng* and the use of tree barks, such as *Vaiza* was slowly and permanently discarded. In an interview, Lalbiakliana<sup>95</sup> recollected that loincloth or *Hrenpereng* was what his father wore to work daily in the jhum. It was made from a piece of cotton cloth woven by his mother. In fact, he says, whatever his mother made was what they wore and they had no choices or options regarding

<sup>93</sup>J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (1940), Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1990 (Reprint), p.542

<sup>94</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p.26

<sup>95</sup>Lalbiakliana (103 years) interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 11 April 2017 at Muallungthu

their clothing. For a long time, even through the colonial period, Lusei men never wore any undergarment. They simply used a broad piece of cloth to cover their body. But when they went to work or to fish and hunt in the rivers and the jungle, *Hrenpereng* was what they wore as it was more convenient and practical. Some wrap another cloth or *puan* over their body, upon the loin cloth. On such occasion they discard the *puan* and even if their private parts were showing, they did not really care at all.<sup>96</sup> That they were pretty much naked above the waist is also corroborated by Lalremsiama. Quoting the Raja of Chittagong's complain about Ronu Khan in 1777, he says the Raja complained to Warren Hastings that Ronu Khan had sent for a number of *Kukis* from the hills to help him against the Company and these people did not wear any tops or shirt and they did not have guns.<sup>97</sup> About *Hnawkhhal*, its pervasiveness was supposedly confirmed by R.L. Thianga, who claimed that in 1958 his grandmother Darbuki (born in 1877) narrated that *Hnawkhhal* did cover their loins from the front but not really from the sides.<sup>98</sup> He also claimed that the same claim was made by his middle school teacher, V.L Siama. Rev. Liangkhaia (1938) in his book *Mizo Chanchin*, wrote '...and they didn't have any other proper clothing other than this'.<sup>99</sup>



Fig. 2.1 Haka warrior, 1908-20.



Fig. 2.2 Darpong wearing *Hrenpereng* in a drawing.

<sup>96</sup>Boichhingpuui, *Mizo La Deh*, p.28; Lalbiakliana Interview, 2017

<sup>97</sup>F. Lalremsiama, *Mi Lu Lak leh Vai Run Chanchin*, Aizawl, MCL Publications, 1997, p.63

<sup>98</sup>R.L. Thianga, Associate Professor (Rtd.) interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 5 October 2012 at Aizawl

<sup>99</sup>Liangkhaia, *MizoChanchin*, p. 43

Again, the fact that this does not cover the head makes it doubtful and leads one to think that *Hnawkhal* might not have been just a raincoat but more of a primitive dress of the Mizoas a whole.



Fig 2.3 (a) Chin grass rain cape (*Hnusep*) 1908-20.



(b) Lusei Hnawkhal.

It is very likely because the use of *Siksil* was also prevalent among the Lusei against the rain and shine. *Siksil* is a Lusei handle-less umbrella, made from a *Siksil* tree (*pterospermumacerifolium*) whose leaves are used for lining *siksil* umbrella.<sup>100</sup> The product here carries the name of the raw material. Again, similar type of straw dress is very popular in other Southeast Asian countries such as Japan and there is variety of pictures to prove it and they are all captioned as raincoats which render it rather interesting for further study.



Fig 2.4 Japanese straw rain cape 1885

<sup>100</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 418

Though there are no clear cut evidences, a speculative question that arises is that while the women folks were wearing *Siapsuap* and whereas the men had no inhibition to go topless, why would they be covering their whole upper torso even as the ‘*women were topless*’ at the very beginning? In the light of this argument, it may be concluded that both the loin cover whether it was a tree fibre or cloth, was called *hrenpereng* and the rain cape was *Hnawkhal* and both were used simultaneously by the Lusei and other Mizo tribes.

This type of scanty clothing was also worn by the Mara/*Lakher*s but it is difficult to comprehend whether it was made and worn in the same way as the Lusei. Also in 1894, J.H. Lorrain mentioned that after giving a good bath and a hair cut to their first boarder Saikunga, they ‘*bought him white coat and a loin cloth.*’<sup>101</sup> What kind of loin cloth did Lorrain mentioned is hard to identify but his location, which was in the northern part of Mizoram would suggest it to be a plain white one which was common amongst the Lusei. This apparently confirms that cotton loin cloth had already become a common part of men’s attire in Mizoram and still formed the dress of the ordinary men at the dawn of the twentieth century unvaryingly, even after they had encountered a number of outsiders. It also seems that the Lusei loincloth is not as elaborated as that of its southern counterpart. Meanwhile some says that it was not really a loin cloth but rather a piece of cloth, which is made to cover just enough and let to hang and tightened with a string at the waist or hip. It was worn on the waist, to cover the loin, hence served as a loincloth. Whether they used a shredded bark of a tree or a piece of cotton materials, this gives the impression that both *Hrenpereng* and *Hnawkhal* were used by all Mizo men, concurrently in the earliest times till the colonial era, as dress and not as an under garment. However, it is true that upon the loin cloth, Mizo men, especially the Lusei, sometimes wore a blanket wrapped around the lower body and rolled under at the waist.<sup>102</sup> They also wore it over the shoulder covering the body as a shawl. This is also indicated in many of the ethnographic photographs.

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<sup>101</sup>J. H. Lorrain, *Log Book, 1890-1936*, Aizawl Theological College Archives, entry for 23 May 1894, p.14

<sup>102</sup>David W. & Barbara G, *Mantles of Merit: Chin Textiles from Myanmar India and Bangladesh*, Bangkok, River Books, 2005, p.107

### 2.1.2 *Siapsuap*:

The earliest known dress of Lusei women is called *Siapsuap*. This is also made from the bark of the same tree, *Vaiza*, sewn together at the waist, to cover the middle part of their body. This could well be the opposite of the men's *Hrenpereng*. N.E. Parry observes that though the skirt of the *Sabeu* woman by this period was voluminous in shape, bark skirts were worn by women of other tribes.<sup>103</sup> This bark skirt may obviously be *Siapsuap*. Longtha in 1901 reported that they were practically stark naked. The women wear a small bit of covering of a bark tree, suspended by a waist string just in front to hide their private parts, and nothing behind. This constitutes all the clothing worn by both the sexes.<sup>104</sup> This may have been a rudimentary form of *Siapsuap* as it is different from the ones identified by everyone, which is a fuller type of a straw skirt. Liangkhaia also reportedly cited that before reaching Lentlang, they could not produce cotton and clothes, so they were quite naked.<sup>105</sup> Through these observations it is possible to infer that their bosoms were exposed. Lewin confirmed this when he observes that '*the women wear a strip of thick blue cloth round the loins, about eighteen inches in breadth; their bosoms being left bare.*'<sup>106</sup> Woodthorpe too, when discussing about the dress of women, mentioned only the small strip of cloth passed around the waist and nothing about a blouse.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, even after they have used cotton cloths, they were still naked above the waist. It is rather vague but this also lead us to a realization that the smaller version of the bark skirt to cover the upper part of their body, cinched together above their breasts, like a modern two-piece garment is a modern day addition to *Siapsuap*, for cultural festival and other cultural shows and event to cover the bosom. There are also indications that later when they started weaving again, *Siapsuap* was made from cotton instead of the coarse tree bark and it remained an integral part of their wardrobe even during the colonial period. This kind of skirt was made with home spun cotton threads. Cotton strands are plaited flatly on the ridge of two parallel cords from which cotton yarns are hung suspended by lark's head knot.<sup>108</sup> This was mainly worn by children and young adults.

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<sup>103</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p.32

<sup>104</sup>Note recorded by Mr. C. B Drake-Brockman, dated Lungleh, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1901-NEP, cited in N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, p.32

<sup>105</sup>Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 43

<sup>106</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p.135.

<sup>107</sup>R.G. Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition 1871-72* (1873), Gauhati, Spectrum Publications, 1980(Reprint), p.6

<sup>108</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p135



Fig 2.5 Siapsuap



Fig 2.6 Cotton Siapsuap/ String skirt 1880-1930

### 2.1.3 *Fenngo / Fenphel:*

It is a plain unbleached skirt wrapped around the waist, which is in the natural white colour of the cotton.<sup>109</sup> This is believed to be one of the first items of dress made by the Mizo women after reaching Lentlang. *Fen* means to wear like a skirt, on the waist or as Lorrain put it ‘to put on or wear (as apron, girdle, petticoat, kilt, skirt, etc)’<sup>110</sup> and *ngo* means white, fair, of a light colour.<sup>111</sup> *Phel* on the other hand means to split, to cut in halves.<sup>112</sup> It is a short skirt, the hemline of which falls right above or till the knee. Because it is short in length and width, it cannot overlap deeply and a slit is created where the two ends meet which is usually on the outer side of the left thigh, thus its name. According to Thankhumi they would stitch the sides of the cloth and made it into a short skirt to wear under a puan.<sup>113</sup> It was held in place at the hip, using belts which could range from *Chumchi* to *Darzai* to a small piece of cotton woven by little girls in their miniature looms for practice.<sup>114</sup> It is like a shorter version of the *Puanngo* for younger girls who wore them singularly. This is what Woodthorpe referred to as ‘a small strip of cloth, eighteen inches deep, passed around the waist’.<sup>115</sup> For the older women, it served as a petticoat and an under garment. It was mainly worn at home and at work under another piece of cloth. It is an everyday dress. Unfortunately authentic sample of this early skirt is not to be found anymore.

<sup>109</sup>Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1998, p.70

<sup>110</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p.136

<sup>111</sup>Lorrain, p.340

<sup>112</sup>Lorrain, p.360

<sup>113</sup>Thankhumi interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 3 August 2014 in Chhinga Veng, Aizawl. She is the owner of one of the first mechanical looms and the first trained weaver in Mizoram.

<sup>114</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p.15

<sup>115</sup>Woodthorpe. *The Lushai*, p.76

### 2.1.4 Puangngo, Puanmawl and Puanhlap:

These dresses are considered to be the earliest type of *puan*. As Daydreambeliever rightly noted in her blog, ‘*In the beginning, the Mizos did not use colored yarn, and so the cloth produced was a simple, coarse white piece for both men and women. These were called Puangngo.*’<sup>116</sup> This is probably the first type of *puan* produced at Lentlang when they could only produce a crude and pure form of coarse cotton cloth. They could not make elaborated dresses using colour. So the cloth that they produced was a simple thick white cloth called *Puangngo*. It is plain and simple and made for everyday use or any use for that matter but mainly worn to work<sup>117</sup>. They could hardly afford to differentiate between formal or otherwise. No dye or motifs are used in this *puan*. The meaning of *ngo* as already explained means pale, fair or white, referring to the white colour of the *puan*. The whiteness of this *puan* is often a bit creamy in colour for some because this *puan* brings out the natural colour of the cotton with which it is woven. This however became the most common *puan* worn mainly by the commoners. This is commonly worn over *Fenggo*<sup>118</sup> in the *hnuh* or *thin* style which is to clutch the *puan* just above the breast baring the shoulder and freeing the hands which was the trend during the pre-colonial period.<sup>119</sup>

*Puanmawl* refers to the plain cloth with no motif or design but it can be of other colours as well. *Mawl* means simple hence the name. A plain coloured *puan* with no motif and design incorporated in its weave is what can be called a *Puanmawl*. Even in the loom, the easiest mode of weft and warp is employed which the most ordinary type of weaving known as *Malkalh*. Therefore, while a *Puangngo* can also be called a *Puanmawl*, all *Puanmawl* are not *Puangngo*.<sup>120</sup> And today many *Puanmawl* of different colours are brought by the bride to the groom’s house to be distributed among her new relatives. Also, a *Puanmawl* is the most common type brought along when someone dies or to funerals. It is used symbolically as shrouds, and parting gifts for

<sup>116</sup> Cherrie L. Chhangte, ‘*Textiles of Mizoram*’, Aizawl, Daydreambeliever, 30 August 2009, <http://mizdaydreambeliever.blogspot.in/2009/08/textiles-of-mizoram-puan.html> (accessed 27th May 2017)

<sup>117</sup> *Mizo Incheina*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>118</sup> Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p.16

<sup>119</sup> Boichhingpuii, p. 17

<sup>120</sup> Boichhingpuii interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 4 May 2017 at her residence in Chaltlang, Aizawl.



the dead. Once the funeral rites are over, the dead person's family usually distributes a number of these *puans* as keepsakes to the dead person's near and dear ones.<sup>121</sup>

*Puanhlap* is a term used for any piece of clothing. Some are of the opinion that it is a male version of *Puanngo* but bigger. Boichhingpuii is of the view that *Puanngo* is also called *Puanhlap*.<sup>122</sup> This *puan* serves more than one purpose as it could be worn casually and to warm them in the chilly climes. It is a common *puan*. It is somewhat like a bed sheet of today which could also be used as a light blanket at night or a shawl during the day.



Fig 2.7 (a) *Puanngo tlang dum*



(b) Men and women with *Puanngo*

### 2.1.5 *Hmaram*:

The use of both colour and motif first appeared in *Hmaram*. *Hmar* literally means the hair bun at the nape of the neck while 'am' is a skirt<sup>123</sup>. It is a small piece of cloth about 17 to 18 inches or more in breadth worn by young girls. When worn at the waist it hardly covers the knee of the wearer. It is somewhat like a traditional mini skirt of the Lusei. The base of this skirt is black and the motif use in this skirt is called *Kawkpuzikzial*. As they became more affluent with weaving, new motifs were developed by the Lusei ladies and *Kawkpuzikzial* is one of those designs which they have developed early on. *Kawk* is a common leafy vegetable the tip of whose leaf curls in a rounded loop. *Zik* means the tip and *zial* means to roll or to make round referring to the rounded loop of the tip of the leaf. Thus the shape of the leaf was imitated in the design in

<sup>121</sup>Chhangte, 'Textiles of Mizoram'

<sup>122</sup>C. Laitanga, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 24 August 2014 at Hunthar Veng, Aizawl. He is a Research Investigator (Rtd.) at Tribal Research Institute, Art & Culture Dept., government of Mizoram. Thankhumi interview, 2014; Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 88

<sup>123</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p.90



such a beautiful way that it remained a recurring motif in many other designs which were later developed. Also, *Hruih* design was incorporated in this skirt. The skirt is woven with the natural white yarn as warp and indigo dyed thread as weft. These natural white yarns were again used to insert the *Kawkpuzikzial* motif where the blue areas are weft-faced black weave and the other blue and white areas are balanced plain weave<sup>124</sup> plaited into the skirt with bigger and smaller bands alternating perpendicularly and then vertically when worn. Besides *Kawkpuzikzial*, *Disul* and *Lenbuangthuam* motifs are also used to pattern *Hmaram*. These designs have become one of the most recurring motifs in Lusei dresstill today. Sometimes especially after long use as the dyes were not fast enough, the indigo colour of the motif takes a greyish turn.



Fig 2.8 *Hmar Am* from Chittagong Hills. 1882 at Berlin Ethnologisches Museum

*Hmaram* seems to be the dark blue skirt mentioned by Lewin in his book.<sup>125</sup> There was no particular occasion for wearing *Hmaram* as it could be worn every day. But it was preferred over *Fenngo* by young girls at festivities. It is somewhat an enhancement and improvement of *Fenngo* in colour and design.



Fig 2.9 *Hmaram* made by Laltani, 1948

<sup>124</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 137

<sup>125</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 135

### 2.1.6 *Puantlangdum / Puantlangtial*

The use of colour first appeared in *Puantlangdum* or *Puantlangtial*. This is a developed version of *Puanngo*. As they started to discover the use of dye, new designs were developed by the Lusei women. But first it was only the colour black which made its appearance in the dress of the Lusei. It is certain that they have harnessed the knowledge of dying using indigo called *ting* which was grown in the cultivation along with cotton. Girls who could afford to have the time and colour to dye added a hint of black at the helm of the *Puanngo* or *Puanmawl* while weaving, to give variation. *Puantlangdum* literally means a cloth with a black hem, which was precisely what it was. The hem of a *puan* is also called a *tuipal*, which basically means the part that gets wet or touches the water. Later, when they had access to different colours other than black, the *tuipal* or border of the *puan* was coloured, and it was also known as *Chhimpuantlangtial* or *Puantlangtial*.<sup>126</sup> Hrangkili remarked that this was a decoration afforded by most section as it needed only a handful of coloured threads which was expensive to buy and luxurious to make often.<sup>127</sup>

At present, a variant of this *puan* is still an important part of the Lusei dress and is worn on both formal and non-formal occasions. This *puan* is presentable yet not too official, lighter in weight as compared to the other heavily embroidered ones, thus easy to wear all the while giving out a semi formal vibe. Hence it is quite popular among the fashion conscious relaxed generation of today as it can be easily mixed and matched with the blouses they may be wearing or the colour of the shoes that they wear, defining an innovative trend in fashion.



Fig 2.10 Different styles of *Puantlangdum/ Puantlangtial*

<sup>126</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Wild Races*, p. 16

<sup>127</sup>Hrangkili interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9 May 2018 at Aizawl. She was born a commoner in 1920 at Khawbung.

### 2.1.7 *Kawrmawl / Tualtah Kawr / Hnathawh Kawr:*

Once the Lusei developed a relatively stable lifestyle, they also made progress in dressmaking and other clothing items. *Kawrmawl* seems to be the first blouse made by them. As the name suggests, *Kawr* implies blouse, shirt, top or any other bit of clothing worn on the upper body with sleeves or arm holes notwithstanding its length and *mawl* means simple. Lorrain proposed that it is ‘a coat or jacket’.<sup>128</sup> Apparently, they made a blouse of crude variety using *Puangngo* or the plain white cotton cloth, stitched together in the middle forming a tunic. Though the back is plain, the front is left open stitched together using small cotton strings rolled and attached to the opened lines of the front. Long sleeves were attached to it. Though naked above the waist at the early period, once they started wearing *Kawrmawl*, it was worn with everything from the short kirtle to the bigger cloths. It was also called *TualtahKawr*.



Fig 2.11 *Haka* woman wearing *Kawrmawl* 1908-1920

Both men and women wore mostly on a daily basis to work. This again construes the other name for the blouse that is *Hnathawhkawr*, which stands for work cloth. *Hnathawh* means to work. Though blouses or this kind of top were already available, the men folk did not take up wearing it for a long time. They hardly covered themselves or only covered themselves with *puan* leaving one of the shoulders bare till the colonial period, especially in the distant villages. Nonetheless, wearing this tunic became quite common during the colonial period. The ‘white coat’<sup>129</sup> that Lorrain mentioned in his log book is supposedly the same as the one being explained

<sup>128</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 240

<sup>129</sup>Lorrain, *1890-1936*: entry for 23 May 1894, p.14.

here and this yet again confirms the fact that Lusei men and Mizo men in general had already taken to wearing shirts or tunic during the colonial period.

### 2.1.8 *Dawlrem Kawr*:

Liangkhaia contends that the earliest Lusei blouse was *Dawlrem Kawr* which was worn around 900 AD.<sup>130</sup> This was made using the plain *puan* which was coloured with a brownish dye made from the bark of *Keifang* tree. Worn by men, the blouse was given a belt like design on the waist with a woven band panel in a rib structure. The blouse was then sewn together in the middle like a tunic. So it is said that when they wear this blouse, they looked similar to a beetle like insect that tweet called *Dawlrem*.<sup>131</sup> This was one of the first decorated top worn by men. Sangkima affirms this and wrote that the blouse was named after a little chirping insect called *Dawlrem*.<sup>132</sup> However, with due respect to Liangkhaia, his statement that *Dawlrem Kawr* was the earliest blouse seems a bit suspicious considering the technology involved in the creation of this blouse. It is rather difficult to accept that this blouse would have been created earlier than the plainer blouse such as *Kawrmawl* or *Hnathawh Kawr* which had no design and colour. It is easier to assume simpler blouses were produced first leading to the eventual crafting of *Dawlrem Kawr* perhaps as non-formal and formal dresses respectively or as general wear and that they may have been around at the same time.

B. Lalthangliana is of the opinion that this blouse was made from *Puanrin*, the possibility of which cannot be disregarded. The *Dawlrem Kawr* that is produced today is rather colourful. In her thesis<sup>133</sup>, Susan R. Ralte remarked that a sample of *Dawlrem Kawr* displayed in the Mizoram State Museum does not fit the descriptions given by elderly scholars and historians that she interviewed.<sup>134</sup> Hence, in the absence of an accurate sample of the blouse, it is very difficult to give a definite and authentic description to this early shirt of the Lusei but what is agreed by all is that, it existed. However, *Hnawkhal* and *Siapsuap* still formed a part of their basic clothing

<sup>130</sup>Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 44

<sup>131</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 127

<sup>132</sup>Sangkima, *Essays on the History of the Mizos*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, 2004, p. 71

<sup>133</sup>Susan R. Ralte, *A study on The Textile Motifs of the Lusei Tribe of Mizoram and The Awareness Amongst the Present Generation*, M.A. Dissertation, National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi, 2016, p. 19

<sup>134</sup>Susan R. Ralte, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 7 October 2016 at Chanmari, Aizawl.

for a very long time, especially for those families who did not have enough time to weave or were not rich.<sup>135</sup>



Fig 2.12 Dawlrem Kawr

### 2.1.9 Ngotekherh:

Originally, this *puan* was referred to as *Puan Hruih*. It was a plain white *puan* with two thick weft-faced lines of black, which divides the *puan* into three equal parts. The technique of producing a transverse stripes on cloth using a particular pull when making the design, thus making the patch where the design fall thicker or dense is called *Thaihruih*. The effect is known as *Hruih*,<sup>136</sup> so the first name of the *puan*. The hem of the *Thaihruih* was evenly stitched with black and white (ngo) thread in small lines and this is called *kherh*, thus forming the other name of the *puan* as *Ngotekherh*.<sup>137</sup> However, both *puan* are collectively called *Ngotekherh* as well. This first photograph is the earlier version of *Ngotekherh* before the grid background was introduced and it perfectly fits the description of Woodthorpe when he said the Lushai cloth is

<sup>135</sup>C. Chhuanvawra, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 14 May 2013 at his residence in Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl. He is a retired teacher, noted *Mizo* author and a Padmashree Awardee (2014). He mentioned that as a kid, he had seen a woman still wearing *Siapsuap* in the year 1939 or 40 in his village. He was 73 years old when he was interviewed. He also mentioned that, she belonged to a downtrodden family, who could hardly harvest their need for a year. Hence, it would be viable to assume that economic condition also played a big role in the way people dressed even during those days. Another incident was narrated by Thankhumi. She talked about an old song often sung by her grandmother which was a song sung by a poor blind girl in her grandmother's village. Because she was blind, the girl could not make clothes for herself, so she did not have proper clothes to wear and hence was feeling embarrassed to mingle with others. The lyrics of the song says, "Ka sil vawng chhia, ka fen vawng chhia e. Va chhuak ila dawhsang chungah, thiam tial bihin kan mawilo e. Ae ka nu, ae ka nue!" This literally translates to saying that it would not be nice if I mingle with others because my clothes are old and torn. She further reiterated that she used to cry hearing this story of a poor blind girl from her grandmother. Thankhumi, interview, 2014.

<sup>136</sup>Ralte, *A study on The Textile*, p. 25

<sup>137</sup>Thankhumi interview, 2014; Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, pp. 92-130

generally greyish white, with dark blue stripe running through it.<sup>138</sup> This version was popular and common till the 1950's.

This *puan* is categorised as an everyday dress because, though it was a much-coveted dress, it was also worn at any occasion, daily or otherwise. There was no specification on the occasion and also on who wore it. It could be worn by anybody and lately it has become a very common piece owned by all.



Fig 2.13 (a) Khawvelthanga in Ngotekherh

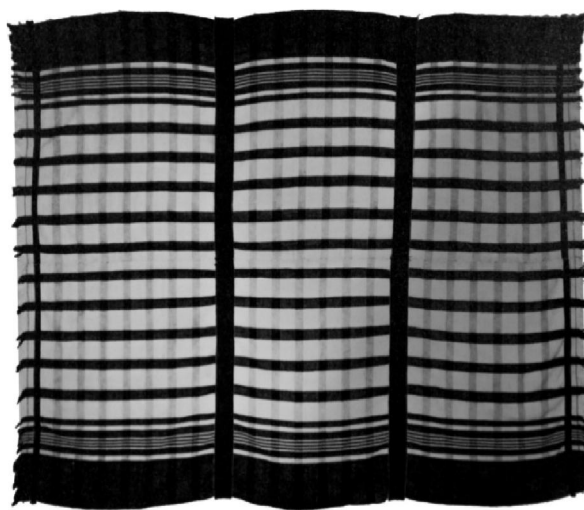


Fig 2.13 (b) Ngotekherh from Digna and Neil Ryan collection

The base of the *puan* itself is white. Two black warp stripes 8-9 centimetres run down the outer edges of this *puan* with several narrower black warp stripes in the rest of the *puan*.<sup>139</sup> The dense black weft-faced stripes crossing the central part of the *puan* with the subtle stripes of black wefts creates a perpetual grid. The thick weft-faced on both end of the *puan* divides the *puan* into three equal parts.<sup>140</sup> Also, black colour was used as the warp at the edge of the *puan*, creating a black border, of about six to seven inches. Sometimes, lines are also created at the hem with black that runs parallel to the black border creating a stripe and evolving a new design in Mizo *puan*. It is believe that the stripes in the border must be of odd number which is considered lucky.<sup>141</sup> This regular grid pattern use as a base of the cloth today on this piece is called *Mangpuantial* which was missing in the original version. It was worn only by men at the in olden

<sup>138</sup>Woodthorpe, *The Lushai*, p.75

<sup>139</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 95

<sup>140</sup>Ralte, *A study on The Textile*, p. 24

<sup>141</sup>Darsiempuii, 'Visual dictionary of Mizo Textiles', p. 40



times but later on shared by the women. David and Barbara remarks that both men and women wear this as a shawl and as a wrap.<sup>142</sup> The grid pattern of *Mangpuantial* has also become a regular background for *Ngotekherh* and along with the band of *Ngotekherh*, a recurring background in a number of *Puanchei* in the early twentieth century, which surfaced during the colonial period and after independence.

This is supposedly very difficult to make as it requires an expert hand. Also, there were instances when this *puan* was also worn by members of other tribes, such as the Lai and Mara, which may be construed as a validation for its wider distribution beyond the Lusei tribe.



Fig 2.14 Mara man wearing *Ngotekherh* 1961

This *puan* is believed to have been originated by the rich families since they had the means to make the black dye for the design and had more leisure time to invest on creativity. Today, this *puan* is still very popular and every Lusei woman is expected to own one. But regardless of how it was commonly worn, today it is worn mostly on formal occasion, cultural programmes and festivals without any changes or alteration in the design. Older women do wear it to church on Sundays and other formal events as well. However, green and red coloured *Ngotekherh* has also begun to make rounds recently. Although it is not as fancied as the original colour it does create a variation in the Lusei dress.

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<sup>142</sup>Fraser&Fraser,*Mantles of Merit*, p. 95

### 2.1.10 *Zopuantial*:

For everyday wear, they made a simple *puan* with no design. Though the base of the colour was still plain white in colour, it was somewhat like an upgraded version of *Puantlangdum* (cloth with black edge). The weaves were finer and later on, instead of using just black, they started to incorporate other colours in to the *puan*. Once they could produce enough cotton and their lives were more settled, they could give more attention to details in the form of infusing colours into cloth. It could be any *puan* locally produced, infused with colour of any kind but without motifs. Sometimes they would incorporate the *Mangpuantial* framework in the background using different colours and apply motifs like *disul* and *lenbuangthuam* on the side of the fringe. This was one of the first colourful *puan* produced in Mizoram during the colonial era. This added another variant and enriched the Lusei dress. Until they created motifs and more designs, *Zopuantial* highly enhanced the Lusei dress culture especially for women.

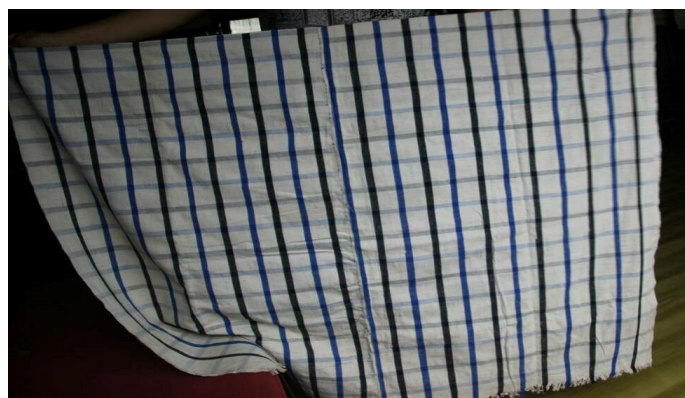


Figure 2.15 *Zopuantial* from Khawbung 1930

### 2.1.11 *Tualtah Kawr / Tualtah Puan*:

These terminologies often come up when working on Mizo *puan* or dress as a whole. Though they are words that convey a common implication for most blouse or cloth, it can be a little confusing when trying to describe the different terms and names used to represent the various dresses. Therefore, the need to explain such terms is necessary. *Tualtah* refers to the place of manufacture. *Tual* meaning local, *tah* is to weave and *kawr* is blouse, hence *Tualtah Kawr* denotes any locally woven blouse. Like the name suggests, any *puan*, which was locally produced, was a *Tualtah Puan*. These types of terminologies were used for any of the *puan*



made by themselves. Perhaps it came into use once they were infiltrated with cloth produced elsewhere and therefore came up with the term *Tualtah* to differentiate the clothes and fabrics which were manufactured by them from the yarn to its colour and designs till it is completed and turned into something wearable. The yarns and clothes imported from outside be it Burma or other Indian states were referred to as *Vai La* and *Vai puan* respectively as *Vai* denotes any foreigner other than a Mizo. This type of dress was very much a part of the Lusei life even after the British infiltration.

### 2.1.12 *La Ung Puan*:

This is also another label that needs to be clarified. While most *puan* are described based on the motifs utilized, this *puan* differs. *Ung* in Lusei means brownish or the colour of white after it is smoked or made dirty by other means, hence the name. There were two types of cotton, grown by the Lusei which were white and brown (flax).<sup>143</sup> Lusei preferred to use indigo or other colour on the brown cotton if they needed to choose. The white cotton in its natural colour was favoured more than the brown colour of flax. When they make cloth out of the yarn produced with flax, it did not really fascinate them. The colour did not appeal to them as it looked old and dirty but they did utilize it just the same.



Fig 2.16 *La Ung Puan*

So unlike the other *puan*, this type of *puan* is identified based on its natural colour, which is brownish. In other words, any piece of clothing made with naturally brownish colour thread, was a *La Ung puan* regardless of its design. It is primarily used for casual cloth and mainly for

<sup>143</sup>Padma Shri Kawlkingi, 'Mizote Inchei dan leh Nun dan' in *Mizoram Kum 100: Kum 100 Chhunga Mizote Awm Dan*, Aizawl, Synod Literature & Publication Board, 1996, p.232.

rough usage. But there are instances where the yarn made from flax or *La Ung* is used as a background for *Puanlaisen* and other designs. Though it was used alongside the white cotton, its use has deteriorated over the years.

### 2.1.13 Children's Dress:

As for the children, they were hardly clothed. Way into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, clothing for children was not a priority. They would be left naked and let to play with the house hold animals, such as the dogs, who would sometime even share their food, which was usually a chunk of boiled rice that were given to them. T.H. Lewin noted that most children he saw in the hill tracks were not clothed. At a social gathering he noticed naked children who squatted, playing with live lizards while the elders smoked and drank.<sup>144</sup> Even when the missionaries came to the Lushai Hills, they reported that adults were clothed better in comparison to children.



Fig 2.17 Children photographed by R. A. Lorrain, 1914

It appeared that children were mostly deprived of clothing. Shakespeare remarks:

*‘No one, however takes any care of children, and they are allowed to run about the village as they like in all weathers, which no doubt accounts largely for the heavy mortality among them, as their clothing is of the scantiest.’*<sup>145</sup>

<sup>144</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 151

<sup>145</sup>J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clan* (1975), Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 2008(reprint), p. 18

This sentiment for children not being attended to is echoed by the pioneer missionary to Mizoram J.H. Lorrain when he reports: '*pigs and children all wallow in the mud with great delight*'.<sup>146</sup> Lewin also remarks that, '*all children under ten were, without exception, naked*'.<sup>147</sup>

Even by 1892, after a quarter of a century since Lewin's remark about their nakedness, the condition of children's clothing and dress scarcely improved as Lorrain affirms in his log book: '*Little boys, very little clothing...If raining they tuck their small loin cloth under their arm and come to Sunday school naked*'.<sup>148</sup> Change in the style and fullness of children's dress was rather slow. Young boys would be naked except for the loin cloth. Older girls would wear a *fenphel*. After the establishment of churches in the northern and southern parts of Mizoram and the introduction of western education, children, particularly those who were privileged enough to attend schools started wearing proper clothing. However, the dresses of children were merely an adaptation of what the older people are wearing. It was essentially *Hrenpereng* or the homespun cloth for the boys and *Fenphel* or *Fenngo*, *Hmaram* and *puan* for the girls.

Later, when missionary families were stationed in both Aizawl and Serkawn, they would give away the second hand clothes of their children to students and local children nearby. E.M. Chapman, fondly called Pi Zirtiri was a teacher who joined the Baptist pioneer mission at Serkawn in 1919. She would order or send for second hand bales from England for the children and students of Serkawn and distribute them. These actions on the part of the missionaries, knowingly or unknowingly was what triggered an era of drastic evolution in the westernisation of Mizo dress.<sup>149</sup> These interventions also led to the increasing valuation of foreign goods in the minds of the Mizos and particularly heightened the significance of the word 'foreign' having positive connotation. In the light of these developments, anything that comes from a foreign country was thought to be better and special. Any article that comes with an affixation of the word 'foreign' more or less still attracts the attention of a Mizo in general.

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<sup>146</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for June 20, 1894

<sup>147</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 198

<sup>148</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for July 27, 1892

<sup>149</sup>Lalthlamuana interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 11 August 2016 at his residence in Serkawn, Lunglei. He is a retired Principal of Govt. Serchhip College. His grandfather was George Miller and his father John Miller was adopted and employed by the missionaries at Serkawn. John rechristened as Nanga, later married Saichhingpuii, daughter of Saizema who was one of the first converts in the south.

## 2.2 Dress of Specific Persons / Statutory Dress:

In a broader meaning ceremonial and statutory dress will point to formal settings. Therefore, this category would include those dresses, which are worn mostly by certain privileged people only. Some of the Lusei dresses were not as elaborated as compared to other tribal groups. Nonetheless, their dresses are different in colours and in the way they were made. The pattern and intricacies of the designs are also given a lot of attention. Hence when a person wears them; it either elevated the status of the wearer or defined the wearer's societal standing. Thus these clothing naturally created a psychological effect on the wearer, boosting his/her confidence and reminding his/her place in the society.

The following dresses are worn only by specified groups of people, who were either in a position to wear it, through ascription or achievement of prescribed criteria of the Mizo society. These dresses signify the importance of the wearer, through the dress. It also identifies the significant feature of the culture. Statutory dress consisted mainly of *Thangchhuah Puan*, *Mangpuan*, *Puantial*, and *Tawlhloh Puan*.

### 2.2.1 *Thangchhuah Puan*:

This is a ceremonial dress, conferring a high status to its wearer or a cloth, which could be worn only by people with certain. It is a black or dark blue<sup>150</sup> cloth which has horizontal stripe pattern with red, yellow and white threads woven in the centre on which some very difficult motifs such as *Selutan*, *Mitmurual*, *Semit*, *Halkha* and others are imbedded. These thin stripes were made to run lengthwise covering the whole surface with the same width in the same colour threads. This *puan* is unique for the fine weave work on the thin white stripes. The embroidery work on these *puan* was so fine that *Thangchhuah Puan* could be made only by highly experienced and talented weavers.<sup>151</sup>

There is a discrepancy in its design. While some *Thangchhuah Puan* is made only with horizontal lines with motifs in the centre of these lines, some are made with the grid pattern in the backdrop. It is usually bigger in size than other cloths commonly worn as it had to cover the

<sup>150</sup> C.G. Verghese and R.L.Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, 2 vols. New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1997, p. 326

<sup>151</sup> N. Chatterji, *Puan the Pride of Mizoram*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1978, p. 43

whole body and height of the wearer, both ends overlapping and also as a sign of respect to its stature. It has high social significance as it could be worn only by a man and wife who have hosted the most important feast of merit, *Thangchhuah*.<sup>152</sup> To have performed it automatically endowed the feast giver a highly coveted and exceedingly desirable position in a Mizo society. This is an expensive procedure, the recipe for which is provided by the traditional Mizo religion to attain better life in the after death. It involved a large number of religious rites to be performed including the sacrifice of Mithun along with other animals.<sup>153</sup> Also, it is an act of bravery which needed to be shown by killing the stipulated number of animals, which are of different kind and giving a series of feasts to the whole village.<sup>154</sup> Thus those who have achieved this distinctive act are called *Thangchhuahpa* (male) and his wife, *Thangchhuahnu* (female). *Thangchhuahpa* is the only person who could wear the coveted *Thangchhuah Puantial* along with a headband exclusively made for the male called *Thangchhuah Diar*, whose design was the same as the *puan*. It was to be worn on the occasion of them proving their significant status and they had to host a feast for the whole village that was known as '*Khuangchawi*'. They would be highly respected and looked upon as inspiration.



Fig 2.18 *Thangchhuah Puan* of Chief Vanpuilala Sailo, 1800?



Fig 2.19 Painting of Chief Chhawn Thiaua, Falam, 1945.

<sup>152</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 92

<sup>153</sup>J.D. Baveja, *The Land Where The Bamboo Flowers*, Gauhati, Assam Publication Board, 1970, pp. 30-32

<sup>154</sup>Shakespeare, *The Lusei-Kuki*, p. 63

It was also used to wrap the body of a deceased *Thangchhuah* host because they believed that it would protect his spirit from evil spirit who guards and stalk the underworld and ensuring a somewhat easier entry into *Pialral*.<sup>155</sup> All other persons are subject to an afterlife in a less luxurious environment.<sup>156</sup> Today, this *puan* is used to bestow respect to guests and as a token of cognizance for achievements. Also, the design has evolved into a simpler and smaller version to fit women who have started wearing it.

### 2.2.2 *Mangpuan*:

This is an exclusive dress worn by *Thangchhuahpa*. It is said that it was also worn by the chief. But most chiefs often attained the *Thangchhuah* status anyways. This could be true as *Mang* normally implies a person who is above the ordinary folks. As the Lusei language is a tonal language, *mang* when pronounced rapidly in a lower tone denotes black or blackened. Also a dirty blackened dress does not suit the wearers of this *puan* who were an exclusive lot. This was commonly worn by the brave hearts and warriors as well. Whoever it was, this *puan* positively illustrated the status of the wearer and vice versa. The deserving were undoubtedly allowed to wear it.

The design of this *puan* is simpler than *Thangchhuah Puan*.<sup>157</sup> The turban of *Thangchhuahpa* has the same design as *Mangpuan*. It was woven on the base of black or white yarn with horizontal and vertical lines running across each other in the whole *puan* at regular intervals and intersections creating a grid like design. This grid design of the *puan* created a base for newer designs which were developed later and has become a recurring background for the evolved version of other prominent Mizo *puan* such as *Puanchei* and *Ngotekherh*. The popular *Thangchhuah Kawr* with the red, yellow and white grid pattern for the male nowadays is the result of this design.

This *puan* is regarded as a cloth of great implication as it could be worn only by the Chiefs, their wives, the braves and those who have achieved the coveted status of *Thangchhuah*.<sup>158</sup> However, picture of *Pasaltha* Hranghleia wearing a *Mangpuan* shows a

<sup>155</sup> *Pialral* is the pre-Christian Mizo equivalent of heaven. It is believed to be the abode of bliss in the afterlife.

<sup>156</sup> Verghese and Thanawna, *A History*, p. 326

<sup>157</sup> *Mizo Incheina*, p. 1

<sup>158</sup> Ralte, *A study on The Textile*, p. 24 See also Darsiempuii, 'Visual dictionary of Mizo Textiles', p. 42

variation in design where the grid was discarded and the cloth was wholly lined with small stripes of black horizontally laid on a plain white warp. *Mangpuan* was worn only on very rare and important occasions such as on the day a memorial stone of some eminent person was to be erected or on their death. On death, this cloth is hung up as a flag to show that somebody of distinguished stature had died.<sup>159</sup>



Fig 2.20 *Mangpuan* from Ratu 1930



Fig 2.21 Pasaltha Hranghleia wearing *Mangpuan*.

### 2.2.3. *Puan tial*:

*Tial* in Mizo means colourful or chequered. Depending on the way *tial* is pronounced, the connotation becomes utterly different. If it is pronounced in a higher tone it denotes a readily coloured or plaited cloth. Eg: 1. *Ka puan a tial.* (My cloth is chequered.) But when *tial* is pronounced in a lower tone, it refers to the colour or design of tartan. Eg: 2. *Engtin nge i tial dawn?* (How will you make/design the plaid?) This *puan* should be pronounced in a higher tone like the first example. This *puan* was fairly common among the Chins. It is a chequered *puan* similar with the Lai *puan* called *Maimaw nak* and the *Thakao/Tlatho/ Phiphia Poh* of the Mara. It is also known to some as *Vaipuantial* probably because the design was borrowed from the *Vai*. Though it was not very popular amongst the Lusei, it was also used by them. In the Chin Hills this was very popular and worn during the same time frame as the other dresses. The fact that it could be an import is thoroughly explained in the next chapter. But it is enough here to allude to

<sup>159</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 101



Woodthorpe that a few tartans have found their way among the Lushais, but these have been procured through Manipur or Cachar.<sup>160</sup>

An interesting fact was mentioned by Pu Laitanga<sup>161</sup> that back in the 1970s as a representative of the Art and Culture Department, Government of Mizoram, he collected information and samples of artefacts and material cultures, all over Mizoram as per the instruction of his superior. In this regard he visited Liamsial Puk, a famous cave in Champhai district, within the village area of Farkawn, which was very difficult to reach due to its location. He stated that he was the first to enter from their group and saw a tartan which was folded among



Fig 2.22 (a) *Puantial*



(b) *Puantial*

the bones and other items and it looked exactly like the *Puantial*, worn by the Lai and Mara This is also mentioned by Boichhingpuii.<sup>162</sup> He revealed that when touched, the plaid crumbled as it had already decayed. He said that the cloth was chequered with red, black and white. They had even taken pictures of the material remains at this cave, which were still in a pretty good condition and brought back a few items. However, these pictorial evidences and items were not recovered from the hands of the superiors who left Mizoram after retirement. Khamliana, Sailo chief of Lungleng had reportedly woven this type of *puan*.<sup>163</sup>

#### 2.2.4 *Tawlhlohpuan*:

The design of this cloth is like that of a chain intertwined, running across over the whole length of the *puan* in vertical. It is said that this design evolved during the time when the Mizo lived between the river Run in Myanmar and the river Tiau. The colour is mainly black as the

<sup>160</sup>Woodthorpe, *The Lushai*, p. 75

<sup>161</sup>Laitanga, interview, 2014

<sup>162</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 3

<sup>163</sup>Laldingliana Sailo, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9 November 2017 at Aizawl



base, with deep red, white and yellow forming the design. *Tawlhlohpuan* signifies bravery and valour. *Tawlhlo* in Mizo basically means to stand still or to not budge, to not move backwards. This is indicative of a warrior who would put it on. According to Boichhingpuii, way back while they were in Lentlang, villages would challenge each other and the braves of each village compete with each other in a solo wrestling match while standing upon a plank of wood placed like a bridge. While doing so, they would be made to wear a *Tawlhloh Puan*. Those who deserve to wear this dress wear it in the event of war and also at festivities to signify their status. Hence it can be both statutory and occasional.

It is said that the custom of making the braves wear this *puan* stems from the expression of Lalngurvungi, wife of chief Nikuala who decided that it was not enough to just give the first mug of *Zu* to the braves on festivities as was customary. So she took out her best *puan* and draped it around the bravest of her village and this happened to be the *Tawlhloh Puan*.<sup>164</sup>

It was worn in such a way that all four corners of the *puan* are brought to the front, two corner over the shoulder and the other two from under the arms and they are tightened together like a shield covering the back. This way of wearing a *puan* is known as *Kawrtawnghak*.<sup>165</sup> This is the same as the Lai way of wearing cloth as a shirt or top called *Hnoisawt*. As Chatterji says 'It was indeed a cloth which could not be put on except by very courageous warrior who had established himself a reputation for such bravery.'<sup>166</sup> Warriors put this cloth on as a token of their steadfastness and courage in the face of danger. Even during colonial times, this *puan* was put on by warriors when facing the British soldiers as a symbol of their resistance and to show their dignity. If a warrior retreated or turned back after he had been given *Tawlhlohpuan* to wear, it degraded his social status, bringing him shame as his social status deteriorated. He was expected to not retreat and face death if needed be. Also, warriors of such status hardly retreat and they would try their best to fend for their village and fight against the enemies with all that they have. Again, since its design is very difficult to master, those who could make it were also looked up and respected by other ladies in the community.

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<sup>164</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 101

<sup>165</sup>Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 5; *Mizo incheina*, p. 2

<sup>166</sup>Chatterji, *Puan*, p. 34

Fig 2.23 *Tawlhloh Puan* by Tuahngaii 1930Fig 2.24 *Tawlhloh Puan* 1950-1970

Since it was very difficult to make a *Tawlhloh Puan*, it took a lot of time to make one. They could hardly move on or make progress in a day. On this note, there are some who alleged that it is called *Tawlhloh* or to not move.

The original design of this *puan* is a cloth about two yards or 60-80 inches in length and 42 or more inches in breadth. There is vertical line of black, red, white and sometimes yellow stripes made of entangled threads which gives a chain like appearance to the stripes. The stripes are woven in a rib structure to give an embossed effect. These small chainlike stripes run breath wise and are clubbed together in about four to five inches, dividing the whole clothes to three or five equal parts. The colour designs could be altered and in course of time they have lost their original significance along with their design specifics. Nonetheless, today this *Puan* is altered for the women to wear. Though it is still revered as a significant dress of the Lusei, there are hardly any occasion for wearing this *Puan*. So, they are used as a welcome gift to special guests and important people who deserve social felicitation, and also as a souvenir to specific persons on certain functions, to dignitaries and other visitors who visits the state or as personal presents.

In 1975, when Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo started the Peoples Conference Party, this *puan* became the symbol of the Party and its personalities on the advice of his father in law.<sup>167</sup> He started to wear this *puan* as a gesture of no retreat as it is symbolized by this cloth in the traditional society. It became synonymous with his political image and appearances. Similarly, those who worked closely with him had also started to imitate this and *Tawlhloh Puan* was given

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<sup>167</sup>Thankhumi, interview, 2014

a new political meaning. In an interview, C. Vulluaia<sup>168</sup> a retired member of the Mizoram Legislature said that the use of *Tawlhloh Puan* was a representation of what the *puan* indicate. The dictum of their party was that, if it was for the betterment of the Mizo or Mizoram, nothing would make them retreat or fall back in the pursuance of their endeavours. On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1976 when he was initiated into the People Conference Party, C. Vulluaia recalled mentioning in his speech that as a sign of never retreating, he was wearing the *Tawlhloh Puan*. They would even wear it in the Assembly House and that this *puan* was a symbol of the People Conference Party.

He also mentioned that the symbolic red, black and white colours of the Young Mizo Association (YMA), which is the largest non-governmental organisation in the state of Mizoram, also has connotation of *Tawlhloh Puan*. In 1974 this tri-colour was officially declared as the colour of the Central YMA. It is said that it was R. Zobela of Mualvum, a YMA leader and a regular writer in the monthly journal of *Kristian Tlangau* magazine, who first moved the idea of using these three colours as the symbol of YMA as they are the colour of the *Tawlhloh Puan*, hence signifying what the *puan* means, which was no retreat. Another reason why these colours were favoured was because they represented the traditional Mizo society whose knowledge for dyeing was limited to the use of white, black and red. Primitively they used white, which was the natural colour of the cotton, sourced black colour from the indigo plant and made the red colour from lac and other tree bark. C. Vulluaia agrees with this and said as a general secretary he liked to believe and also propagated that the three colours are also representative of the three mottos of YMA.

### 2.3 Festive / Occasional Dress:

The following dresses are worn only on festivals and on special occasions such as *Khuangchawi*, *Chawngchen* and cultural festivals such as Chapchar Kut, Mim Kut, etc. Wearing these dresses signifies the importance of that particular occasion or festival for the culture and the society. On the other hand, such occasions also symbolise the momentous feature of the dress

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<sup>168</sup> C. Vulluaia interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 17 May 2017 at his residence in Dawrpui Vengthar, Aizawl. He is a retired Youth Coordinator of the Union Territory of Mizoram, ex-Legislator, Mizoram and Finance Secretary 1971, Assistant Secretary 1972-73, and General Secretary 1973-76 of Central YMA.

for the culture. The dresses worn on festivals and particular events were *Puanrin*, *Puanlaisen/Puanchei*, *Kawrchei*, *Puandum* and *Puanropui*.

### 2.3.1 *Puanrin*:

The base of this *puan* is black, fully woven in a thick weft-faced where the warp yarns are embedded by the weft<sup>169</sup> called *hruih* and a white transverse stripe of about two and a half inches are at regular interval. Therefore it was very thick in nature. The white band panel is woven in a rib structure creating a three or more vertical lines parting the *puan* into a few equal parts. The black colour of the cloth highly contrasted the white, giving the cloth a beautiful and regal look. The centre band in the middle is closely bracketed by smaller lines. This *puan* was worn on social occasions and on days they wanted to dress up. It was a man's cloth created by the women which was as long as 80 inches in length and about 20 to 23 inches in width or as wide as could be supported by the loom<sup>170</sup>. This same *puan* is also worn by the elite and ruling clans of the Lai and *Mara* tribes as well. It is said that on festivities and celebrations, Chiefs would come out wearing this *puan*.

It is one of the oldest designs on a piece of cloth created by the Mizo. The antiquity and significance of this *puan* can be measured by its appearance in the story of Zawlpala and Tualvungi, a popular folktale of the Lusei. This story was narrated by a ninety one years old lady, Tlangmawii<sup>171</sup> as told to her by her grandmother wherein she recollected an event when Tualvungi hearing about the death of her lover Zawlpala had tried to go back to her village. Her husband Phuntiha not wanting her to go has planted a sharp knife on the door frame and thus Tualvungi cut her foot on her way out. Not deterred, Tualvungi took out and tear off her *Puanrin* and banded her bleeding feet with it.

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<sup>169</sup> Boichhingpuii, 'Mizo Traditional Textiles and Designs,' unpublished paper presented at Art & Culture Department & Mizo Writers' Association Seminar on 'Mizo Traditional Textile', Babutlang, Aizawl, 29 September, 2011. Also see Ralte, *A study on The Textile*, p. 25

<sup>170</sup> Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 95

<sup>171</sup> Tlangmawii interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 5 May 2017 at Aizawl. She was born on 21 February 1926. She is a retired schoolteacher and the daughter of one of the pioneer pastors of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, Rev. Saiaithanga.

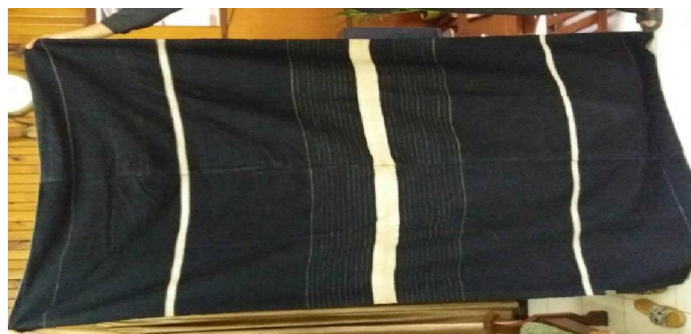


Fig 2.25 *Puanrin* of Vuttaia

This *puanrin* in figure 2.25 was owned by Vuttaia, a Sailo chief and measures 84 inches in length and 49 inches in width. To comprehend the age of the *Puan*, the only relevant source is to identify the age of its owner Vuttaia. However, the exact date for the birth of Vuttaia like many Mizo chiefs and their regnal chronology is shrouded in approximations. While some says that he was born in 1776, there are facts which do not corroborate this. Some contradicted this by claiming that he was born in 1808. A sketchy estimation can be done from the birth of his son Kairuma. Zokima is of the opinion that Vuttaia's son Kairuma was born in 1852, shortly before the *Chhim leh Hmar Indo* (War of the North and South), while they were still in Hualtu.<sup>172</sup> According to Rev. Liangkhaia, *Chhim leh Hmar Indo*, a famous battle of the North and South in Mizo history erupted in 1849 and went on till 1858 AD.<sup>173</sup> The war was caused by an event where Vuttaia who decided to locate himself in Buanhmun was preceded by a southern chief Laithangpuia who established himself in Buanhmun while Vuttaia was preparing himself. This led to the war.

While the birth of Kairuma is roughly calculated to be around the early 1850's it can also give us a rough calculation on the age of Vuttaia. Zokima says that he was born in 1852. If Vuttaia was born in 1776 or even 1800 as speculated by some, he would have been too old to have a son by the early 1850's. But if he was born in 1808, as early as maybe determined, Vuttaia would have been 48 years old when his son was born and this has some possibility. Nonetheless, Vuttaia was only 20 years old when he started to have his own village after his father died at Hreichhuk. From Hreichhuk he started his own village at Arte with his mother and took over the chieftdom of both villages. Whichever year it may be, the *puan* is definitely about

<sup>172</sup>Zokima, *Mizo Lalber Kairuma Sailo*, Aizawl, V.L.B Press Venghnuai, 1993, p.93

<sup>173</sup>Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p.108

150-200 years old. It is remembered as Vuttaia *Muallam Puan* which means a cloth worn by Vuttaia on festivities when he would dance out in the open ground. It is now in possession of his great great-grandson who claimed that it was dyed with indigo.

### 2.3.2 *Puanlaisen* / *Puanchei*:

*Puanlaisen* or *Puanchei* is the most worthy and coveted cloth of the Lusei. Both the terms are often used simultaneously to represent the *puan*. However, the term *Puanlaisen* is seems to be in used earlier than *Puanchei*. Till the 1950's *Puanlaisen* swas the term more popularly applied to the *puan* while the term *Puanchei* has now become the name given to this *puan* perhaps because of the more decorative motifs incorporated into the *puan*. Because of that, in order to make our study more unambiguous and comprehensive, the term *Puanlaisen* shall be used to refer to the *puan* of the pre-colonial period where much changes were not featured in it. On the other hand, the term *Puanchei* would be used to this *puan* during the colonial period and also those evolved pieces of the *puan*, which contain more variation in design and colours. According to Thankhumi it was always called *Puanlaisen* by her mother but since they incorporated more design they started to call it *Puanchei*, so also others.<sup>174</sup>

*Puanlaisen* in literal terms means a cloth with a red middle or centre. Lai in the *Lusei* dialect means centre and *sen* means red. The vital surface of this *puan* is mainly white with red threads of about 10-12 inches wide running horizontally in the middle without the intricate design of the modern *Puanchei*. *Chei* means to decorate hence *Puanchei* simply means a decorated cloth.

*Puanlaisen* therefore is a simpler or lighter version of *Puanchei*. It makes an important part of the Lusei wardrobe but at the beginning it was a man's blanket.<sup>175</sup> As a man's dress they were made bigger in size. On the other hand women also wore it as shawls and it later formed the very core of a Lusei lady's wardrobe. Every Lusei woman strove to possess a *Puanlaisen* as it was considered to be the most decorative and beautiful of her *puan* designs. Customarily, every woman aspired to make at least one *Puanlaisen* for herself. However, the fact that this was a status defining dress is corroborated by Hrangkili, who said that in her village Khawbung, even

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<sup>174</sup>Thankhumi, interview, 2014

<sup>175</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 104

during the colonial period, only the daughter of the chief owned a *Puanlaisen*.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, though wanted by all, it was not accessible to all.

This *puan* comprises of a technique of weaving where the weft yarns form a ribbed structure in such a manner that the warp yarns were imbedded by the weft to produce a raised ribbed effect.<sup>177</sup> This line runs perpendicular to the selvedge at two ends of the cloth in such a way that the cloth is divided into three equal parts. This was worn on every festive or important occasion, whenever they were required to dress themselves up. This *puan* and *Kawrchei* is what *Thangchhuahnu* wears on the *Khuangchawi* day with *Vakiria* on her head. One significant occasion where the women were specifically expected to wear *Puanlaisen* was at ceremonies when they were to perform the *Cheraw* dance. *Cheraw* which is the traditional dance of the Mizo is believed to have existed in the 1st century A.D, while they were still somewhere in the Yunan province of China, before their migration into the Chin Hills in the 13th century A.D.<sup>178</sup> This migratory history reveals that the art of dyeing and use of colour, especially of black and red must have already been known to the Mizo during that period. Carey and Tuck had also mentioned the use of colours before the British ingress into the Chin culture.<sup>179</sup>

*Cheraw* is known as *Rawkhatlak* by the Lai while the Lusei and most other Mizo clans call it *Cheraw*. The Lai performed it to bid a safe journey to the spirit of woman, if she unfortunately died at childbirth. There is a conjecture that Mother Mortality Rate (MMR) was very high in the pre-colonial Mizo society and in fact it was one of the main reasons of death for women. So, the dead mother's spirit was given a lot of significance. They believed that the way to *Pialral* was filled with bushes and thorns and it would be very difficult for the pregnant mother to pass through deep trenches and thick forests on the way. So if this ceremony was performed for her, they believed that it would somehow help her reach *Pialral* and it was mandatory to perform this ceremony within three months of her death. This event was known as *Ngandam Kut*. In this ceremony, the male members of the village would perform a game called *Pualthawh*. This is equivalent to the Lusei wrestling game called *In buan*. The family of the deceased were expected to feed the whole village with meat and rice beer. *Rawkhatlak* was performed in the village by

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<sup>176</sup>Hrangkili, interview, 2018

<sup>177</sup>Ralte, *A study on The Textile*, p.25

<sup>178</sup>*Popular Dances of Mizoram*, Aizawl, Art & Culture Dept., Govt. of Mizoram, 2014, p.3

<sup>179</sup>Carey, & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 171

women while the game of *Pualthawh* was played outside, on certain possible spaces near rivers.<sup>180</sup>



Fig 2.26 Chief of Lailak wearing *Puanlaisen*



Fig 2.27 Kaithuami and friends wearing *Puanlaisen* 1927.

Another occasion they perform *Cheraw* was at the celebration of a bumper harvest by an individual family where they made a feast for the whole village. This was known as '*Buhza Aih Cheraw*'. This was Lusei tradition. Also on moonlit nights, young boys and girls would come out and the girls perform *Cheraw* out in the open spaces while some others sing. When they formally perform the *Cheraw* dance on festivals or specific occasion girls would wear *Puanlaisen* and *Kawrchei* and their most coveted jewelleryes.

Besides cultural festivals, the Lusei brides wore it at weddings. The significance that a *Puanchei* hold for the Mizo as a whole and the women in particular can hardly be comprehended. Even after Christianity was fully absorbed after the colonial intervention and Christian weddings became a part of the social-cultural rituals of the Mizo, *Puanchei* continued to be an eminent bridal costume, especially amongst the *Duhlian* speaking brides. Again due to the intricate design, it could not be made by every woman and this made it all the more valuable. It is also reasonable to say that it has evolved in the course of time as the most creative representation of the Mizo natural talent for weaving. The simpler design of *Puanlaisen* has evolved into a more intricate design and the older design was hardly seen for decades. But today, the simpler design is being revived by a number of loom owners. This is by far the most popular,

<sup>180</sup> *Mizo Lam Thenkhatte*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 2010, p. 160



colourful and perhaps the most significant and valued possession of every Lusei lady. However, the modern version of this *puan* is quite different from the original and because of its cultural value; a thorough explanation is necessitated.

In fact the design of the *Puanchei* with all its intricacies and colours stated above originated only in the 1919-1920s. As is widely seen, the Lusei traditional dress, for women at large, is identified as *Puanchei* and *Kawrchei* with *Thi Hna* and *Vakiria* as the complementary accessories. However there is no official declaration or cultural assertion to this particular set of clothing. However, it is assumed as the traditional dress of the Mizo, especially of the Lusei and not just in Mizoram but all over the world. Though this affirmation is highly debatable, from a cultural or academic point of view, it is this contentious nature that makes it all the more interesting and worthy of study.

In the *Puanlaisen* there is hardly any embroidery work seen at the front except for a few lines at times. The only decoration is in the centre of the cloth running horizontally with a single line of motifs. But in *Puanchei*, both ends of the cloth contain profuse embroidery works on the edges of the same pattern. As it evolved, sometimes the heavily patterned embroidery is also repeated vertically in the centre as well. The surface displays stripes of different dimensions with a preponderance of red stripes of different shades. The intricate design is highlighted by the vivid colours with which they are woven such as green, yellow, blue, deep pink, red and black on a background of black and white stripes. The line of black band called *hruih*, runs along on the breadth of the *puan* which when worn, fall right on both sides of the hip, following the hip and down the calf. This is where we see a reappearance of the thick weft band prominently displayed in *Ngotekherh*. Some *Puanchei* also exhibit the grid pattern of *Mangpuan* in the background creating diversity in the same *puan*. This type was called *Mangpuanchei* or *Puanlaisen Mangpuantial*. This has lines of about an inch crossing each other creating small block of rectangles on the whole surface like the *Mangpuan* and the decorative patterns of *Puanchei* are woven on top of that. This way as it evolve, *Puanchei* now mainly refers to the modern version of the cloth. True to its name, *Puanchei* or the decorated cloth is heavily patterned with motifs not found in *Puanlaisen* though the primary pattern of the old version remains. Thus, *Puanchei* essentially is an improved and more decorated version of *Puanlaisen*.

Thankhumi learnt to weave at a very young age and she produced her first *Puanchei* at the age of 13 in the year 1942. She claims that she developed the design of her *Puanchei* and that it was the first of its kind. The designs of *Puanchei* by this time have evolved into a more obscure and elaborated version than the original *Puanlaisen*<sup>181</sup>. Just like her, women in different parts of Mizoram were churning out their own version of the *Puanlaisen* creating beautiful multiplicity with the same *puan*. She said that even as a child she remembered her mother, who was educated and creative in the art of weaving had only *Puanlaisen* and that she would wear them on formal occasions. Thankhumi's mother, Kaithuami belonged to a well to do family. She was the first trained nurse of Mizoram and went on to marry the first veterinary doctor P.S Dahrawk. Thus, if the modern *Puanchei* was a traditional design and popular or in trend, it was only natural that she would own one or would have learned to weave it during her time. In the light of this research, *Puanchei* or incorporating a more intricate design on *Puanlaisen* became trendy around the 1920's only and very few skilled weavers knew how to make one and own it. This can also be corroborated by the few photographs, available for that period, where women are seen wearing only *Puanlaisen* and never *Puanchei*. Thankhumi went on to say that she was inspired by the different designs of weaving that she saw and thus developed her own design.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, it is interesting to find that it was during this period, a round the twenties that many of the designs of the traditional *puan* make their appearance in *Puanchei* in some way or other. For example, as mentioned, the grids of *Mangpuan* and the two deep black woven band of *Ngotekherh* prominently appear in the *Puanchei* and are not allowed to be covered by any other coloured thread. Motifs like *sakeizangzia*, *disul* and *lenbuangthuam* were also incorporated into the *Puanchei*. These varieties of designs infused onto *Puanlaisen* and it becomes apt to call it *Puanchei* and its design is still evolving till date.

Some other early *Puanchei* or its varieties could also be seen in later years and the designs are picked up by weavers not just in Mizoram but in different places of Burma and Manipur where Mizo and their culturally related tribes still resides. However, most of these *puan* which were collected for museums, exhibitions and some photographed by ethnographers and British officials are all dated later than the one made by Thankhumi. Others that are available in Aizawl and also from the photographs taken by missionaries are dated later than 1920.

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<sup>181</sup>Thankhumi, interview, 2014

<sup>182</sup>Thankhumi, interview, 2014



Fig 2.28 *Puanlaisen* made by Thankhumi 1942



Fig 2.29 Exhibited at the Art of the Zo, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Also, the colour of the red thread would run due to the quality of its dye. Because of this the red thread which was used at the hem of the *puan*, over time, would turn pink, instead of red. Due to this, many people today think that a pink hemmed *Puanchei* is the original or authentic while it is only due to the quality of the dye. Nonetheless, pink is also deliberately used as a warp at the hem. Thus, *puanchei* as we know today was not known as part of the pre-colonial wardrobe of the Mizo women but only *Puanlaisen*. However, it has evolved into one of the most beautiful creation of the Mizo woman today and is still considered a must have in every closet.

### 2.3.3 *Kawrchei*:

This is a blouse, which accompanies *Puanlaisen* in the past and today, *Puanchei*. It is worn mainly at festivals and on formal occasion. The base of the top is white and the middle of the front and back are also decorated with the design of *Puanlaisen* running vertically about one and a half inches on each side of the front opening about two inches in the middle with black border of about one inch at the hem, neckline and sleeves. The middle of the sleeve was also decorated with a band of the same design as *Puanlaisen* or *Puanchei* which is a band of red weft with the *lenbuangthuam* motif running in the middle attached in the middle of the sleeve. It is an upgraded version of *Kawrmawl* worn by the ladies in the olden days. Today not just the sleeves but the fronts are also decorated with the motif of *Puanlaisen* or *Puanchei* and again, there are regional variations, which however are not lucid. But the photographic sources from the colonial period show that this was worn mainly with the accompaniment of *Puanlaisen* or *Puanchei* and only when they needed to dress up.



Fig: 2.30 *Kawrchei* made by Thanthuami in 1966.

#### 2.3.4 *Pawndum*:

*Dum* in Lusei means black, so *Pawndum* literally means a black cloth. However, a *Pawndum* is not just a plain black cloth but coloured with specific colour such as red white and yellow and green, which render it as a significant piece of adornment. It is said to be of an earlier origin than the *Puanlaisen* and it quite fit the description of the dark blue cloth with a few stripes of white, yellow, or red, or all three interwoven into the textile mentioned by it Woodthorpe.<sup>183</sup> But this particular *puan* has black as a base decorated with different colours in the weave with countered weft twining. It has a deep cultural value and it is indeed one of the few traditional dresses, which still preserve its cultural significance to a large extent till date. Depending on the purpose for which it is utilized, *Puandum* presumed a different name. On being presenting as a token of love and affection, it is called *Zawlpuan*. Presenting *Pawndum* to another person signified friendship in the early Mizo society.<sup>184</sup> This *puan* again is very significant because a bride is required to carry this *puan* when she enters her husband's house. Girls weave *Pawndum* but they keep them at the bottom of their *thul*. When they marry, they would include one *Pawndum* in their trousseau to use it as a shroud if the husband eventually dies during her lifetime. When the husband dies, a Mizo woman is expected to cover his body with *Pawndum*. This tradition of covering the body of a husband or a loved one is again perceived in the tale of Tualvungi and Zawpala. In the story it is mentioned that when Tualvungi, in spite of hurting her foot left her house to go to her village on hearing about the death of her lover Zawlpala took with her a *Zawlpuan* evidently to cover the body of Zawlpala. It could also be used as a shroud if a

<sup>183</sup>Woodthorpe, *The Lushai*, p. 75

<sup>184</sup>Chatterji, *Puan*, p. 33

family member dies. Today when a comrade or a close friend dies, friends and colleagues of the deceased come to funeral wearing *Pawndum* to show their respect.

Also, another significant use of this *puan* is that when a girl's mother wants the boy to marry her daughter, she would place *Pawndum* on the bed, for them to sleep together, thus gesturing her approval of their courtship. This tradition is known as *Dawnpuanphah*. When used as *Dawnpuanphah*, it is acknowledged as a formal engagement.<sup>185</sup> But if the boy takes advantage of this and after this permission, refused to marry the girl, he would be fined a mithun or forty rupees for defamation.<sup>186</sup>

*Pawndum* is also worn while performing *Khuallam* dance. *Khuallam* is a traditional dance form of the Lusei performed during the *Khuangchawi* ceremony. *Khuangchawi* is a ritual to celebrate the coveted title of *Thangchhuah*. Thus, guests from other villages are invited to attend this ceremony and they would enter the arena wearing *Pawndum* while dancing. A folktale reveals that when the guests from other village enter the arena, somebody shouted, 'E, *mikhual an rawn lam e*' which mean 'look guests are dancing', hence the name *khuallam*.<sup>187</sup>

*Khual* in Lusei means guest and *lam* means dance. Thus *Khuallam* literally means 'Dance of the Guests'. The dancers would wrap the *Pawndum* over their shoulder, holding each ends with their hand and sway left and right to the beat of the sets of gongs called *Darbu*. Earlier, women never participated in this dance. It was the dance of the men. At present, this *puan* is still used as a sign of mourning at funerals. Friends of the deceased young or old will show at the funeral wearing it over their shoulder to show sympathy and condolence. It is therefore not a garment usually worn or used on ordinary occasions but only on specific occasions.

*Pawndum* as *zawlpuan* is also mentioned in the folktale of Zawlpala and Tualvungi. As narrated earlier, Tualvungi had taken a *zawlpuan* with her doubtlessly to cover the corpse of Zawlpala. This reiterates the significance and importance of *Pawndum* in the Lusei society from time immemorial and somehow proves that it is supposedly one of the oldest amongst the Mizo *puan*.

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<sup>185</sup>Sangkima, *Essays on the History*, p. 200

<sup>186</sup>Animesh Ray, *Mizoram*, Calcutta, National Book Trust, 1990, p.86; Also see Chatterji, p. 34

<sup>187</sup>*Mizo Lam Thenkhatte*, p. 61



Fig 2.31 *Pawndum* estimated 1900-1930



Fig 2.32 MNF personnel in *Pawndum* carrying remains of their deceased friends 1986

Although *Pawndum* is claimed to be a Lusei dress, *Hmar*, *Kuki*, *Thadou*, *Zahau* and other Mizo tribes claim it to be their dress. In spite of this claim there is no antagonism but on the contrary, it confirms the close affinity among them. Also similar designs are found among the *N'men* of Southern Chin Hills. It is also an integral part of their culture as they wear them to war and other activities. This is one of the most popular and widely acknowledged items of Lusei dress in the pre-colonial times and is still popular even today. Most pre-colonial *puans* as they have evolved into more contemporary patterns with innovative and beautiful designs and the original designs still form an integral part of a formal dress of Lusei women in the modern Mizo society.

### 2.3.5 *Puanropui*:

This *puan* is of a recent innovation and specifically worn by females. *Ropui* in Lusei translate to grand, magnificent, glorious, majestic, etc.<sup>188</sup> Though almost all Lusei traditional attire were worn by men, there are no evidences that this *puan* is worn by males. Even though this *puan* is fully accepted and included as a part of the Lusei traditional trousseau, its origin seems moderately recent. In spite of meticulous browsing through old photographs and documents, mention of this *puan* is popularly found only in the late sixties except for one single piece woven by Thankhumi, who claims to have made it around 1950. If her claim is true, then this *puan* must have become popularized in the sixties. There are no rigid specifications as to the

<sup>188</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 391



colour of this *puan* or the background to be used. Motifs employed in this *puan* also vary from place to place and weaver to weaver. Though there is a recurring zigzag motif which is common in most of *Puanropui*, it is not necessarily constant.

The creation of this *puan* may be explained by the socio-political state of affairs in Mizoram in the early 1960s and later. During the Mizo national movement owing to regular curfews and relentless tensions, people stayed home and people in villages were also affected as they could not go to work. Under such circumstances, women would weave all day gathering leftover threads from their previous weavings, aimlessly trying to fill their days. This however, led to the formation of new styles and set off the creation of new patterns using the motifs that they knew and also to the development of new motifs and designs in weaving. This statement is validated by all the women interviewed for this research some of whom actually experienced and weaved during those years of conflict and violence. The design of this cloth is still evolving but all *Puanropui* features a deeply intricate design befitting the name or in other words, one has to weave complex and convoluted designs, whatever the motifs may be, to make any *Puanropui*. This makes it one of the most popular and valued dress of not just the Lusei but all Mizo, after *Puanchei*.



Fig 2.33 *Puanropui* 1950

In early 1968 Renhchin moved to Shillong with her family as her husband was a member of the Mizo District Council. She recalled that a number of Mizo ladies whose husbands were working under the government would order *puan* made by her, as she was known for her skill in

weaving. She weaved and also knitted to supplement her family income. In the meantime, another Lusei lady whom she called Pi Zauvi would assist her in her loom and with her she claimed that they made their first *Puanropui* without imitating anyone. She asserted that they just wanted to create something different and therefore incorporated into their textile a few rows of the motif called *Kikiau* along with some motifs from the Lai traditional dresses, alternating it with the motifs called *Senior Maimu* throughout the whole *puan* using different colours. Once they finished the garment, she professed that they were very happy with the result. Other women saw it and really liked it. When asked what the name of the *puan* was, Renhchin recalled that she and her friend thought their creation was quite grand. So even though it was not like other types of *Puanropui* that they had seen, they decided to call it *Puanropui* too, adding a variation to the rest.

During that period there were a number of Mizo families living in Mandanriting Shillong, whose husbands were serving in the Army. They had gotten orders from them as well and some even made it themselves imitating the design of Renhchin and her friend. The *puan* became very popular among the Mizo women in Shillong and then eventually became popular in Mizoram as well.

When Varthanpari<sup>189</sup> was interviewed, she alleged that what Renhchin said could be true because Mizo women in Shillong were thought to be quite trendy and therefore, their styles were easily emulated in Aizawl. Boichhingpuii also categorised *Puanropui* as one of the *puans* which was invented after *Rambuai*.<sup>190</sup> She herself hailing from a military family in Shillong confirmed that if *Puanropui* was from an earlier era or decade she would have seen it as a child or as she grew older as her mother was an ardent and skilful weaver. Boichhingpuii also made her own *Puanropui* in 1969. Oral evidence also reveals that this *puan* evolved only from the end of the sixties, through to the seventies and onwards. Thus, though a lot of us accept this *puan* as a part of Mizo traditional dress, it may actually be a recent addition, an invented tradition. This

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<sup>189</sup>Varthanpari interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 6 March 2016 at her residence in Upper Republic, Aizawl. She is 65 years of age and a retired government servant and great granddaughter of Suaka, chief of Durtlang. She is the daughter of V. Thanzauva, the first Mizo Sergeant of the Royal Air force. She was born in Bangalore and moved around where her father was posted while serving in the RAF and hence having an inkling of what a life in a Mizo community outside Mizoram was like as a young child.

<sup>190</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p.160



confirms Hobsbawm's theory that '*traditions*' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.'<sup>191</sup>

## 2.4 Style of Wearing *Puan*:

All the clothes described were worn by both men and women except for *Hmaram* and *pawnfen* which were skirts exclusively for young girls. However there were special dresses which could be worn only by specific persons defining their achievements and status which could not be shared or worn by women or any other persons therefore distinguishing the wearer and elevating him from normal social stature.

There were not many styles applied by the Lusei in the way of adorning themselves with cloth. Once they advanced from the use of bark of trees and shifted to the use of cottoncloths, women employed a small strip of cloth to cover the hip areas leaving the rest of the body naked. Men subscribed to the loin cloth which was longer as compared to the girls' *Fenphel* or *Fente*.

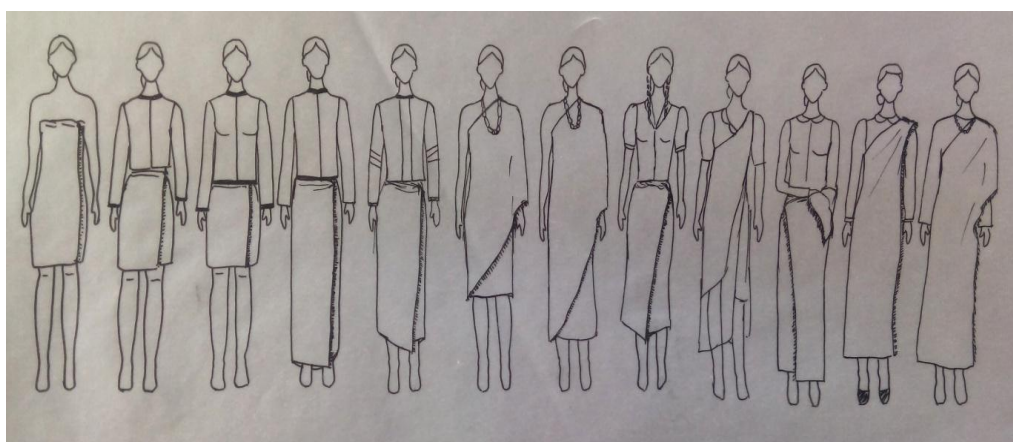


Fig 2.34 Illustration of different styles of wearing *puan* over the years by Stefanie Halliday

But as reported by Lalbiakliana<sup>192</sup> of Muallungthu, D. Ralkapthanga<sup>193</sup> and others, the men's loincloth sometimes consisted of two pieces of cotton cloth at the front and back, sutured together at the waist by a string. This must be the *Hrente*.

<sup>191</sup> Eric Hobsbawm in 'Introduction' to Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Cambridge University Press, 2000(reprint), p. 1

<sup>192</sup> Lalbiakliana, interview, 2017

Once they had a settled life with adjusted lifestyle leaving them with more time to pursue fashion and improved skills in cloth production, the pieces of clothing became bigger and more elaborated. Yet the earliest proper clothing seems to be a small skirt as early records states that the female wore “*cloth of their own manufacture, which falls down from the loins to the middle of the thigh; and both sexes occasionally throw a loose sheet of cloth over their bodies to defend themselves from the cold.*”<sup>194</sup> So they were pretty much naked above the waist except for when they wear cloth in a *hnubih* fashion.

#### **2.4.1 Puansin / bat:**

When they were cold they would put on another cloth as blanket or shawl over their *puan*. Later even when blouses were introduced, they would bring one end of the shawl over one shoulder from the back. They would then bring the other end under the arm to the front and throw it back over the shoulder. The way of wearing a cloth as shawl is called *puansin* or *bat*. *Sin* is to wear as covering and *bat* is to wear the stole or scarf on the shoulder or through it. So these trends of men and women seemed to have been around even after the creation of top wear and synchronised with the existing trend, bringing variety and alternative to the dressing style of Lusei during the pre colonial period and even in the colonial period.

#### **2.4.2 Puanven / bih:**

Men simply wear the *puan* on their waist which falls below the knee, mostly till the shin and they remain naked above the waist most of the time. This style of wearing the cloth by the men was known as *puanven* or *puanveng*. When it was chilly, they would throw another cloth over their body to keep themselves warm. The style of wearing *puan* at the waist with blouses was later applied by women as well but it retained the word *bih* from the word *hnubih* and thence is called *puanbih*. The different terminology of wearing a *puan* namely *bih* and *veng* which was technically the same is also note worthy. Perhaps it was chance or on the other hand an attempt to make gender distinction. But it is apparently correct to conclude that wearing *puan* at the

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<sup>193</sup>D. Ralkapthanga, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 13 April 2017 at Aizawl. He is 78 years of age and a retired headmaster of Sialsuk Middle school

<sup>194</sup>John Macrae, ‘Accounts of the Kookies or Lunctas’, *Asiatic Researches; or, Transactions of Society, Instituted In Bengal for Enquiring into The History, The Antiquities, The Arts And Sciences, And Literature of Asia*, Volume-VI, Calcutta, 1805, pp.184-185

waist, regardless of gender is *puanveng* and wearing it on the chest above the breast is *puanbih*. The expression seems to be based more on the place where it is worn and fastened than who wears it.



Fig 2.35 Suaka and family with the women draping *puan* over their body, a style called *Puan sin*, 1921

Yet, till the beginning of frequent British encounters-from 1866 onwards, women were clad in the scantiest of blue skirts round the hips, the upper part of the body shrouded in the national home-spun sheet.<sup>195</sup> Men also started using *Puanmawl* and *Puantlangdum* in lieu of the *Hrenpereng* and *Hnawkhal*. When they wear *puan*, men mostly wore nothing underneath it, not even the loincloth. But the use of cotton *Hrenpereng* and *puan* was simultaneous as the cotton *hrenpereng* was what they wore to work<sup>196</sup> as it was easier and it freed the hands and limbs. They would have heaved a sigh of relieve with the revival of weaving as the texture of cotton must have been so much easier on the skin and in handling and wear than that of the bark of a tree. In short, the way women wear *puan* on their waist is known as *puanbih* and when men wear *puan* on their waist like a skirt or in the length of shorts, it is called *puanven*.

### 2.4.3 *Fenthuah* / *Fen*:

*Fenthuah* is a bigger skirt, worn upon other skirt. *Thuah* in Mizo mean to double or to give lining. So *fenthuah* basically would mean the outer lining of a skirt, not the inner, over another skirt or simply to wear more than one skirt. *Fen* is a term used for wearing skirts. The way of wearing a skirt is *fen* and this term is not applied for when they are wearing a full-

<sup>195</sup>Lewin, *A Fly*, p. 198

<sup>196</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p.28

fledged *puan*. It may also be assumed that not just young girls but at some point even the adult women have worn the small skirt.

#### **2.4.4 *Hnutebih* / *Hnubih* / *Thinbih*:**

So as the *Puan* became bigger, the earliest style was to wear it on the chest. It was wrapped around under the arms, each end overlapping the other on the front, covering the breast. The outer end would be tucked tightly where it ends into the other side lining the body, over the bosom. This style of wearing a *puan* was the common technique followed by all and called *hnutebih*, *hnubih* or *thinbih*.<sup>197</sup> This style gives more coverage to the body as compared to than *Siapsuap*. As the material was cotton, it was much more preferable too. Upon *hnubih*, they could throw over another *puan* as a shawl upon their right or left shoulder without any undergarment, until they created a blouse. Young girls also used to covering the upper part of their body with a separate *puan*. Even after blouses were created, this style of wearing cloth in which the other hand is free was still practised by women.

In an interview, Thankhumi pointed out that when she was a young girl, her grandmother always wore her *puan* in *hnubih* style<sup>198</sup>. Similar experience is shared by Kawlveli who expressed that as a child in her village, Sialsuk, there were a few older women who wore their *puan* on their chest, leaving the shoulder quite bare. But sometimes when they were cold, they would throw another *puan* over their shoulder to cover themselves which is what basically known as *puan sin* or *puan bat*<sup>199</sup>.

*Sin* is to wear and *bat* is to wear it using the shoulder on or through it. So these trends of men and women seemed to have been around even after the creation of top wear and synchronised with the existing trend, bringing variety and alternative to the dressing style of Lusei during the pre colonial period and even in the colonial period.

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<sup>197</sup>Boichhingpuii, p. 44

<sup>198</sup>Thankhumi, interview, 2014

<sup>199</sup>Kawlveli, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 3 February 2014 at Aizawl. She is a retired Nurse Matron at the District Civil Hospital, Tezu, Arunachal Pradesh, hailing from Sialsuk.

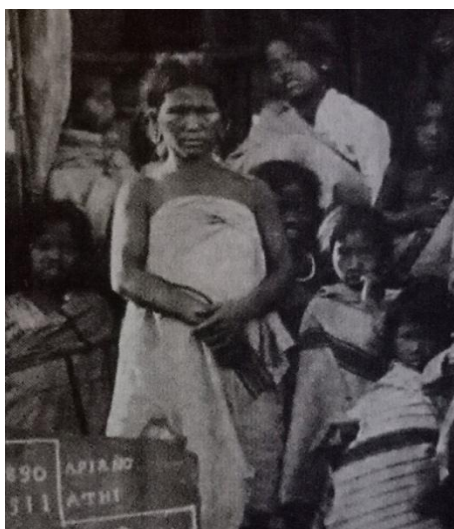


Fig 2.36 Woman wearing *puan* in *Hnubih* style, 1914

#### 2.4.5 *Kawrtawng hak*:

This is similar to the style of the Lai men called *Hnoisawt*. See chapter 3, 3.5 and figure 3.11 for description and photographs.

#### 2.5 Size:

Since clothes were mostly made for specific persons, on a need basis, the size of the *puan* vary. The size of the skirt for younger girls such as *Hmaram* and *Fenphel* were small, barely covering their hips. *Hrengpereng* for the men was much longer but there were some men who used only a small piece of cloth to cover themselves. In contrast to these items of clothing, the proper pieces of clothing for the men were always bigger in length and width as compared to the ones worn by women. It was mainly because of the physical build of the men as they were bigger and also the way the men wear the *Puan*. There were certain particular pieces of clothing whose size was to be big naturally due to their significance such as *Thangchhuah Puan*, *Puan Rin* etc. that were mostly eighty inches long and forty or more inches in width. These types of big cloths could only be woven in a specially made loom called *Thembupui*, which was a loom bigger than the ordinary loom used by all. So, as much as the size of a cloth was determined by the size of the wearer, its size was also decided by its social implication and vice versa.

## 2.6 Conclusion:

When it comes to Lusei dress there is a clear indication of evolution in motifs and patterns, the use of raw materials for clothing and the increasing use of colours as they moved from one place to another, and as they encountered other tribes and communities, they were able to draw and borrow from these encounters enriching their culture and inventing traditions through dress along the way.

Also, the use of dyes and intricate colours and patterns reveals the social structure of the Lusei in the pre-colonial period. It can be construed that it was easier for the richer and elitist sections to dye their threads and infused designs into a *puan* because of the better availability of manpower for them while it was rather challenging for commoners to do so. Hence dress in the form of designs, colours and accumulation of readymade *puans* reveals that social disparity did exist in the pre-colonial Mizo society. A number of Lusei dresses, mainly multi-coloured ones and those with decorative motifs are mostly status defining items, worn only by certain groups of people. Though there were no rigid restrictions to their production and usage they were hardly afforded by the commoners hence indicating the existence of economic disparity in pre-colonial Lusei society on the basis of access to basic resources.

It may be worthwhile to contend that Lusei never used silk for dress-making and all their dress materials were of cotton. Certain dresses such as *Puanchei* and *Puanropui*, which are considered the traditional dress of the Lusei, were actually created only in the colonial and post-colonial period. Lusei have statutory dress which proves that the pre-colonial Lusei society was not an egalitarian one in the true sense. There are motifs which are exclusive to the Lusei. Many of their motifs were inspired by nature and animals. Though there were no restrictions on the use of motifs for commoners and elite except for *Thangchhuah* and the Chief and that the pre-colonial Lusei society did not incorporate much intricate patterns into their dress except for *Hmaram*, *Puanlaisen* and *Ngotekherh*.

## Chapter 3: Lai Dress-From the Earliest to Colonial Times

### 3.0 Introduction:

This chapter discusses the different Lai dresses and tries to understand the terminologies used for the different dresses and their names, how they are being worn and their subsequent purposes. Photographic evidences are given and explained as far as possible to justify the skill, the materials, patterns and colours.

### 3.1 Lai Dress:

Notwithstanding the multiplicity and ambiguity in the origin of Lai as an ethnic category, they have achieved cultural advancements especially in dress making. Some of the finest clothing and dresses in history are the handiwork of artisans and weavers of the oldest and advanced civilizations. Through their expertise they refined the techniques of their dress making skills and improve their products. This process perhaps can be applied to the Lai production of dresses.

The expertise of the Lai women in weaving is rather superior. They developed beautiful cloths with intricate weaving patterns. The use of silk in their dress shows off their skill beautifully. According to Barker patterning with silk threads is reportedly a late nineteenth century Chin innovation.<sup>200</sup>

The women in the pre-colonial Lai society wore different varieties of *puan* or skirt which they call *Hni.Hni* in Lai literally means skirt. It was a little different from the Lusei *puan* which were made in different design and pattern. Ethnographic sources, particularly of dress reveal that the Lai and Mara may have the same origin with slight variations in their culture due to the nature of their migration and settlement. Their dresses and accessories are almost entirely similar except for the names given to them which are mainly due to the linguistic difference.

The Lai dress includes pieces of cloth, which serves as skirt and men's blankets. It is used in the same way as *puan* of the Lusei and there are also instances of fusion and mutual borrowing of dress between the Lai and the Lusei. The Lai has a few variant of *puan*, exclusive to them,

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<sup>200</sup>John Barker, 'Chin Textiles,' in Elizabeth Dell & Sandra Dudley (eds.), *Textiles From Burma*, London, Philip Wilson Publishers, 2003, p. 59

which are worn by both men and women for specific purposes and on special occasions. They are as follows:

### 3.1.1 *Chawngnak*:

In the pre colonial period, this was a sacred cloth especially woven for the chief and men who complete one feast of merit i.e. *Chawng* which is a ceremony where the host gave feasts for seven day to the whole village to proof that his wealth was worthy of recognition and thus his status. When this was done a person became worthy of wearing *Chawngnak*. When male child were born in a chiefly family, their mothers made this *puan* for their sons for them to wear it on the days of their glory and as a shroud when they died. This act is called *phuhrin*<sup>201</sup> which basically means a ‘gift from mothers’. Also when a chief died, his slaves and servants would cover his body with this cloth as a symbol of their loyalty even in the after life and danced around his corpse bidding him goodbye.<sup>202</sup> This is to signify that the spirit of the chief is worthy of serving even in the after life.

The design of *Chawngnak* is quite intricate. There is a prominence of red, yellow and green threads of silk embroidery in the weave. Sometimes thread of grey or very light blue colour is thrown in. It was made in silk with warp-faced tabby ground, twill weave, discontinuous supplementary weft patterning.<sup>203</sup> It takes an experts hand to do the *thawi* and weave it. *Thawi* means ‘embroidery’ in Lai. It is generally 60-65 inches in length and 40-45 inches in width. It maybe longer depending on the person for which it is woven. Given its size and embellishment, it may take a year to weave a *Cong-nak puan*.<sup>204</sup> This *puan* is an exceedingly valued piece of clothing for the Lai.

It was originally a man’s blanket and it remains to be one of the few pieces, which have not been altered in design or colour. The women wear a similar design but it is smaller in length and breadth to suit the wearer and the design is also different with fringes while the traditionally *chawngnak* was a blanket with no fringe.<sup>205</sup> But as a man’s blanket, motifs called *chawite* and

<sup>201</sup> Chinzah, interview, 2016; Hrangthliai (79 years old) interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 11 August 2016 at her residence at Lawngtlai. She is a commoner.

<sup>202</sup> Darsiempuii, *Visual dictionary*, p. 60

<sup>203</sup> John Barker, *Chin Textiles*, p. 60

<sup>204</sup> Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 171

<sup>205</sup> Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 65



*hniar* were applied which are missing in the *puan* woven for women. Also today very few people have the skill and knowledge to make these particular motifs.<sup>206</sup>



Fig 3.1 *Chawngnak Puan*, Courtesy Renhchin Chinzah

While this was an exclusive piece of clothing meant for the chiefly lineages and men who have completed at least one feast of merit during the pre colonial period, the *Chawngnak* became accessible to the commoners but the design for commoners was slightly different than the ones worn by the powerful and wealthy folks.<sup>207</sup> Though, members of the Lai community interviewed corroborate this claim, they were not able to pinpoint the difference but they all agree that it could be in the materials used, which are mainly silk and cotton. It is believed to have originated in Burma, specifically Haka and that the patterns and *thawi* of *Chawngnak* have been widely influential and inspiring as they have long been seen among other Chins groups in Burma and among the Mara and Lai of Mizoram.

### 3.1.2 *Pu Puan / Maimaw Nak* : ( Refer to fig 2.22 a & b)

*Pu* or *maimaw* means silk and so as the name suggests, it is made from pure silk thread in black or red and white check worn as a shawl by the Lai folks. It is similar to the Mara *Phiphia poh*.<sup>208</sup> It was worn on formal occasion. The same type of tartan was exhibited as coffin cover in

<sup>206</sup> Chinzah, interview, 2017

<sup>207</sup> *Mizo Incheina*, Aizawl, Tribal Rresearch Institute, 1993, p. 9

<sup>208</sup> K. Pari, '*Hlano Mara Su Peimawhrazy*' Saiha, Department of Tourism, Mara Autonomous District, 2016, p. 6

Tiddim and is still found in Kalembo, Burma.<sup>209</sup> Though it is supposedly a man's blanket, the women of Haka, between 1908 and 1920 and villagers of Zyhno, in 1930 in northern Chin State of Burma and the men of Ro village in southern Chin Hills were photographed wearing this cloth.<sup>210</sup> This indicates that women too used this blanket as shawl to cover themselves up in the chilly weather. In fact Stephen Ni Kio states that it is a woman's blanket.<sup>211</sup> It is very thin and slippery to touch as compared to other clothing items of the Lai. Besides, these names, it is also called *Tlangthing Puan*, depending upon where or who the wearer is. This seems to be the mantle mentioned by Carey and Tuck which they say was worn over the white mantle, but usually on special occasions.<sup>212</sup>

Stephen Ni Kio also expresses an opinion that this particular *puan* was not the creation of the Lai but rather bought from the Indian traders who were already settled in Burma.<sup>213</sup> Before independence, Indians made a dominant presence in urban-centred commercial activities.<sup>214</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, Calcutta, the intellectual and cultural capital of British India, maintained very close contact with Burma for political, commercial, strategic and economic reasons. For example, Fort William in Calcutta was the centre of the military operations for the British annexations of Burma. The University of Calcutta, as the first university of colonial India, produced "educated" and "smart" Bengalis who were sent to Burma to run the day-to-day bureaucracy.<sup>215</sup> Chettiyar moneylenders and other Indian traders controlled the local trading, banking and money lending activities. Indians also dominated the security and military forces, as well as the education, health and administrative sectors of British Burma.<sup>216</sup> This *puan* can be said to be the result of the ties between India and Burma hence creating a new tradition for the Lai in particular and the Mizo in general. Again, the antiquity of this cloth cannot be claimed because, it seemed to have been a colonial invention. There is no doubt that this cloth is very

<sup>209</sup> Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 91

<sup>210</sup> Fraser & Fraser, pp. 58, 101, 143

<sup>211</sup> Stephen Ni Kio, *Lai Nunphung (Chin Culture and Traditions)*, Rangoon, U Chit Nyunt, 2011, p. 498

<sup>212</sup> Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 170

<sup>213</sup> Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 498

<sup>214</sup> Michael C. Howard, 'Burma,' [everyculture.com]. Available from: <http://www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Burma.html#ixzz4fpN5dFon> (accessed 1 May 2017)

<sup>215</sup> S. Bhattacharya, 'A close view of encounters between British Burma and British Bengal', presented at the 18<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Sweden, 2004. Available from: <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/EASASpapers/19SwapnaBhattacharya.pdf> (accessed 1 May 2017).

<sup>216</sup> Devleena Ghosh, 'Burma-Bengal Crossings: Intercolonial Connections in Pre-Independence India', *Asian Studies Review: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Contemporary and Modern Asia*, Vol-40. Published online: 21 Mar 2016. Available from: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357823.2016.1158237> (accessed 1 May 2017).

different from the other Lai cloths as it is made up of separate pieces stitched together to form one piece of clothing. The single piece is called *thongkhat* in Lai. Then each piece of about five or six is stitched together overlapping each other at about one and a half inches all over. The area where the pieces overlap gripping each other is called *lukiing*.

A similar *puan* chequered with black and white was also made by Khamliana the chief of Lungleng,<sup>217</sup> However, Khamliana used cotton and the back strap loom. This serves as an evidence for the fact that cloths illustrate the kinship of different clans through their textiles. This also helps explain that the migration of the Mizo tribes and their kin have scattered them to different places where they settled but their affinity can be gleaned through photographs and their textiles.

### 3.1.3 *Chanlo / Tawnlo Puan*:

The term *chanlo* means unaffordable. The Lusei word for that this is *changlo* or *changphalo* or not worthy of receiving. *Tawnlo* also means to not meet or to not get. This cloth thus is used as a symbol of wealth and aristocracy because it could be afforded only by the elite section or the chiefs' families. It is also called *Chenlo* which means 'not of the same level' to show that common people could not be at the level of the nobility.<sup>218</sup> It takes longer time to weave this cloth due to its convoluted design. An extra-ordinary skill is required to weave this cloth and hence there was and is still few Lai weavers endowed with the knowledge of this craft. If a skilled weaver works on it the whole day, she might be able to finish about six inches of the *puan*. This is the reason why this particular piece is incredibly expensive. This particular dress is also a coveted part of Mara wardrobe and they called it *Chylao Poh*.<sup>219</sup> It is a man's blanket, worn only by the men folks on special occasions. In some places, it is worn only during sacrificial rites and rituals.

It is known that women with great weaving skills are highly eligible among the Mizo tribes. This perhaps has given them a better social status in the way of marriages as well. The wives of chiefs and other men with high social standing must be highly skilled in weaving as Carey and Tuck remarked: 'Traditionally, weaving a *Chanlo Puan* was said to be the only labor

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<sup>217</sup>Laldingliana Sailo, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 2 December 2015 at Aizawl. He is the son of Khamliana who also said that the tartan is still kept by the Chief's grandchildren at Khatla, Aizawl.

<sup>218</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 497.

<sup>219</sup>Pari, *Hlano Mara*, p. 8

for the wives of chiefs and other high status men.<sup>220</sup> It is made using both silk and cotton. The base of this *puan* is white which is fully covered with black thread inlay. Then the designs are made with brick red and yellow on top of the black thread. White weft stripes are made at both ends, without the black inlay. For the Lai yellow is the distinct colour while orange is a distinct accent for the Mara in this weave. Anthropological sources in Burma and peripheral areas suggest that it has been adopted by other Chin tribes such as the *Khumi* who call it the *Chylao*, for ceremonial purposes.<sup>221</sup>

The fact that these *puan* such as *Chawngnak* and *Chanlo* are highly valued by all Chin people in Chin Hills of Myanmar, the Lai in Mizoram and other parts of the world is quite interesting. It may be due to the fact that these people tell the myth about the origin of these two particular *puan* everywhere. In an interview, elders of Halkha town had a unanimous tale told to W.R. Head, who recounted that a woman at Bungtuah village had a strange dream and woke up in the morning with the knowledge of how to weave the *Chawngnak*.<sup>222</sup> An elaborated version of the dream and legend is given in appendix 1.<sup>223</sup>

Moreover, this *puan* is revered and believed to be sacred. As the design of was stolen from a mythical creature, sacrifices were needed before making it. Whenever a new *Chawngnak Puan* is to be manufactured, all parts of their loom and yarn are to be purified. Therefore, they sacrificed a chicken to the god *Khawzing* to protect the weaver. This sacrificial rite is called ‘*thyadungthah*’ in Zotung dialect. Also they will sacrifice another chicken to the mermaid of Letsa River or ‘*Letsa Lui Huai Tui Thang Nung*.’ Whenever they kill a chicken or make a sacrifice, the weaver eats the meat together with her friends who will help her. This sacrificial feast is only for women and men are not allowed to join them.

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<sup>220</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hill*, p. 171

<sup>221</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 69.

<sup>222</sup>W.R. Head, *Handbook on the Haka Chin Customs*, Burma, Office of The Superintendent, Government Printing, Rangoon, 1917, p. 48. Available from: [archive.org/details/handbookonhakach00headialan](http://archive.org/details/handbookonhakach00headialan) (accessed 14 August 2016).

<sup>223</sup>See appendix 1, 2 & 3



Fig 3.2 *Chanlo/Tawnlo Puan* courtesy Renhchin Chinzah

To corroborate this, David and Barbara also write that only women of high status clans weaved it and chicken must be sacrificed at the start of the weaving.<sup>224</sup>

In an interview, 79 years old Pi Hrangthliai of Lawngtlai while narrating her knowledge of weaving recalls that some elders mentioned that the design and pattern of *Chawngnak* and *Chanlohpuan* are inspired by rainbow.<sup>225</sup> This is also echoed in the work of Stephen Ni kio.<sup>226</sup> This may also be acceptable to many as the different colors of rainbow are seen in these *puan* but somehow the rustic red color seems to be the most prominent. Also the motifs used by the Lai weavers such as *khikhiang*, *thawikulh*, *parpi*, etc. do not seem to have any association to rainbow whatsoever. They appear to have more connection to the folktale recounted.

What is ambiguous is that all these designs whatever their sources may have been are brought to Mizoram in the course of their journey from the Chin Hills to their present domicile; similar designs with comparable motifs are found in different parts of South East Asia, especially among the tribes of Taiwan and SW China. So it is possible that the designs have been imprinted on their brains as they left their old settlements and recreated when they relocated themselves in new places.

Figure 3.2 is an heirloom of the Chinzah family of Lawngtlai made by Bawntiali, daughter of Suiera, a Songte chief of Halkha in Burma. She was the grandmother of Renhchin Chinzah. Bawntiali made this *tawnlohpuan* for her son, Renhchin's father who died in 1940 at the

<sup>224</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 71

<sup>225</sup>Hrangthliai, interview, 2016

<sup>226</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 494

age of 40. This *puan* was inside the *thul* of her father, and she has kept it since. Calculating from the genealogy of the Chinzah family and the Lai chronology, with the help of two renowned Lai historians Dr. Vanlalringa Bawihlung and K. Hrekunga, the approximate age of this *puan* is estimated to have been about 152 years old.

### 3.1.4 *Puanlaisen*:

This literally means a *puan* with red in the middle. True to its name, this *puan* has white as base with red in the middle and sometimes black at the hem. Sometimes, a diamond shaped design called *halkha* by the Lusei is put in the middle of the red line.<sup>227</sup> This motif was named after the Lai from Halkha who brought it from Burma to Mizoram. This particular motif is similar to the *semit*, meaning the eye of mithun, but without the dot at the centre and also *fanghmamu* which means the seed of cucumber which are popular designs of the Lusei. It is worn on formal occasions. This is the same as the Lusei *Puanlaisen* and it seems that they have borrowed it from the Lusei at an early period. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this was a

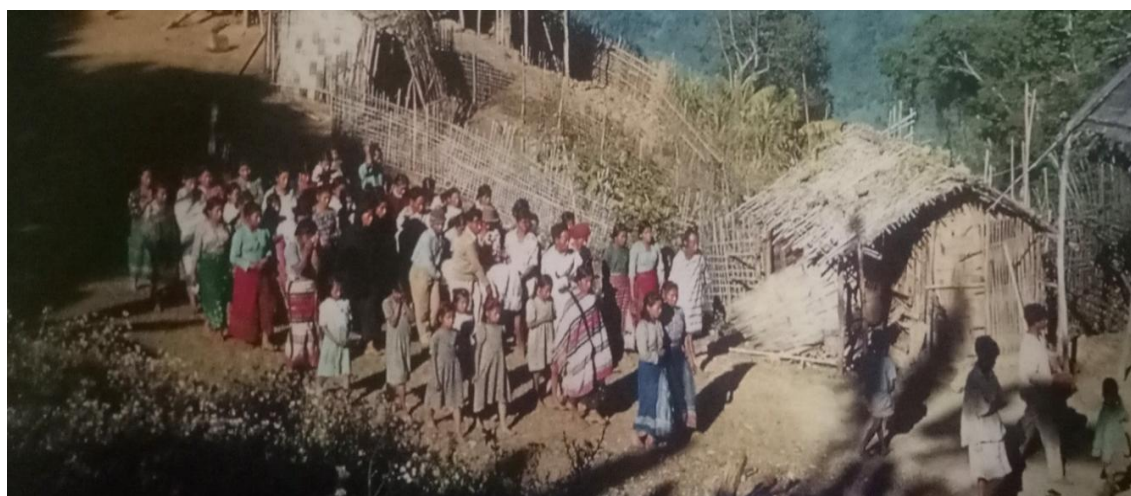


Fig 3.3 *Puanlaisen* worn at Mara funeral procession, 1962

man's clothing at the beginning. Later, both men and women used it and today it has been accepted as a traditional dress of the Mizo women marking it as the most popular dress for identity.

Not just with the clans of Mizoram but tribal arts all over the world have a lot of similarities in patterns and motifs, which makes it extremely difficult to conclude the question of

<sup>227</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 152

originality. The similarities of the Southeast Asian designs with those of the early American civilization are also very striking. Nonetheless, since most early cultures draw inspirations from nature, it is not surprising that there are similar patterns and designs in the cultural dress and traditional art of civilizations all over.

### **3.1.5 Puanlamkalh / Puanrang Lamkalh:**

This is a casual common cloth for the rich and poor, men and women. Every woman intended to make one for her children and husband hence it was everyman's cloth. Made from the crudest form of cotton in the earliest days, the material was refined along the way. Nonetheless, some, mainly commoners used it to cover the dead body of the owner. A black band panel line is woven in a rib structure on both sides dividing the cloth into three parts. This design is the same as the Lusei *puanhruih*. The main cloth is white in colour, in the natural form of the cotton yarn. Similar *puans* are found among the *Zahau*, *Zanniat*, *Matupi* and other Mizotribes living in Arakan and Chittagong.<sup>228</sup> This design must have been borrowed around among different tribes in the course of their interactions. This *puan* was in use well into the colonial period as it was easy to make yet respectable enough to use everywhere. It was also utilized as a blanket at night.

A *Puanlamkalh* made by Nithluaii, mother of Renhchin in 1936 and Hrangthliai's mother in 1942 are shown in fig. 3.4 and 3.5. Of the one made by her mother, Hrangthliai said that she would take it with her when she died.<sup>229</sup> This shows that *Puanlamkalh* is indeed conventionally made and used by both royalty and commoners alike and that the commoners did use it as mantle to cover a dead body.

The dresses discussed above are worn by Lai men and mostly by elites except for *Puanlamkalh*. They are also bigger in size. Occasionally women were allowed to wear them but they are exclusively for men.

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<sup>228</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, pp. 99-101

<sup>229</sup>Hrangthliai, interview, 2016





Fig 3.4 Made by Nithluaii in 1936



Fig 3.5 Made by Bualmeuhvi in 1942

### 3.2 Men's Dress:

The different dresses of the male were *Hnawkhal*, *Hrenpereng*, *Angki*, *Kawrfang* and a piece of cloth was also used as a wrap for the upper body. The style of wearing this was called *hnoisawt*.

#### 3.2.1 *Hnawkhal* :

The Lai men also wore *Hnawkhal* which is yet another item of dress shared by the Lusei and Lai. In fact according to Carey and Tuck, *Hnawkhal* or a straw raincoat as an early dress of the men was shared by not just the Lai and Lusei but universally worn by all people in the Chin Hills of Burma before the British occupation and well into the colonial period.<sup>230</sup> The *Hnawkhal* as an apparatus for measuring social status, its features, significance and its economic value have already been discussed in details in the previous chapter and therefore it shall not be explained again in this chapter. A grass rain cape was also worn by the Lai called *Hnusep*. It was to cover them in the fields against rain and shine. Lorrain also mentioned *Hnawkhal* in his dictionary as *Hnaw-kal*, which he explained was a raincoat used by the *Pawis*, made out of long strips of leaves ingeniously twisted together with the ends hanging down.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>230</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hill*, p. 171

<sup>231</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 172.





Fig 3.6 Similar straw raincoat of the Japanese 1904

However, it is difficult to verify whether the Lai and the Lusei used the same exact type of *Hnawkhal* or raincoat but since there was a lot of borrowing, they may have used the same. But the fact that *Hnawkhal* did not cover the head lead one to think that the one mentioned by Lorrain is not a raincoat but a primitive dress of the Mizo. This is more likely because the use of *Siksil*, a handle-less umbrella for rain or shine was prevalent among the Mizo. It was made from a *Siksil* tree (*pterospermumacerifolium*) whose leave was used to line the umbrella.<sup>232</sup>

### 3.2.2 *Biar Pi* / *Hrenpereng*:

Lai men like the other clans were often naked at the upper half of the body in the pre-colonial period and all through to the colonial period. Carey and Tuck remarked that the Lai men always wore a loin cloth in addition to the mantle, which was used for warmth.<sup>233</sup> The loin cloth, which they used, is called *Biar Pi*. The common people used a simple loin cloth of plain white colour in general but on special occasion a loin cloth with embroidered flaps on each end was used. The end of such loin cloth was dyed black up to about one foot or more and the *thawi* used in these flaps is patterned like the *Chanlo puan*.

<sup>232</sup>Lorrain, p. 418

<sup>233</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 170

Fig 3.7 Illustration of Lai chief in *Biar Pi*Fig 3.8 *Biar Pi*

This type of loincloth was used widely in different places in the Chin Hills and Lushai hills. In Thlantlang, it is known as *Hrente*, and in *Falam* it is called *Pawr* and the Mara calls it *Dua ah*.<sup>234</sup> The descriptions and details of this dress item of both the Lai and Mara are all the same. As they are highly skilled in weaving the Lai men had variety of loin cloth available to them as is seen in various places of the Chin Hills. But *Biar Pi* is the most popular amongst the Lai of Mizoram. The word *biar* means a draped cloth and *tial* means stripes of colours. It is worn like the Indian *dhoti* where it is draped around the hip and the end is pulled up from the back to the front after being fastened and both ends of the cloth hangs in the front covering the loin and at the back hardly covering of buttock. The end of the cloth where the *thawi* is made is also called *biartuan* or *biartial* and this is also used to denote the whole piece of loin cloth as well.<sup>235</sup> The whole piece is about five to seven feet long and one to one and a half feet in width.

This kind of loin cloth was still worn by the Lai men in some villages even after the colonial era. In an interview, F.C Zathang narrates that in the village of Sihhmu, in Thantlang district of Burma, his father and many other men of his age wore only *biar* even after India's independence and later alternated it with short pants under the influence of the westerner. He went on to say that the Lusei often refer to the Lai as *Hrendumho* or *Hrendumkaihho* indicating

<sup>234</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 104

<sup>235</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 501

to the black hemmed loincloth worn by the Lai of both Haka, Burma or in Mizoram.<sup>236</sup> *Hrendum* is the black loin cloth and *kaih* is to swathe. It was made with cotton and the embroidery was done in cotton and also silk, depending on its availability.

### 3.2.3 *Hnathawh Kawrfual / Angki* (Men's Upper Garment):

This is the work dress of the men in the Lai community. They seem to have made progress in improving the technology to stitch clothes. *Angki* was developed as a new style of dress. The main cloth was white in colour, with different colours infused at the shoulder. This cloth was woven by the women, who made it in to something wearable. It was a cotton coat, which falls nearly to the knee and is shaped to the general lines of a frock coat.<sup>237</sup> It was opened at the front and they would put short threads at regular intervals at the front to tie up the open cloth. This was also worn at home, even when they were not working.<sup>238</sup> This is like a version of the woman's *kawr* but longer.<sup>239</sup> The sleeves are long and banded with black at the elbow and the wrist. The length of the dress was sometimes decorated with red and black vertical lines.

### 3.2.4 *Kawrfang*:

After *Angki*, they evolved a new style of dress, which was called *Kawrfang*. However, this was more or less the same as the other dresses. It was plainer yet finer in texture and weave and described as 'a sleeveless coat of the same pattern is also worn.'<sup>240</sup> As they slowly advanced in different fields, there was progress in their skill of weaving and dress-making. The quality of their cloth and the way they were cut and sewn were also improved. Thus, the technological advancement of the Mizo people and the refinement of their skill were vividly reflected in dress, through the years.

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<sup>236</sup>F. C. Zathang, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali, on 16 May 2017 at his residence in Khatla, Aizawl. He was born in 1935 in Burma and is a retired personnel who worked under Mizoram Police Radio Organization (MPRO) which started operating in 1972 when Union Territory was granted to Mizoram. He is now a resident of India after migrating in 1976.

<sup>237</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 171

<sup>238</sup>*Mizo Incheina*, p. 11

<sup>239</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 104

<sup>240</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 171s



Fig 3.9 Man's Jacket

### 3.2.5 *Hnoisawt*:

Although men were shirtless before the creation of *Angki*, they did wear the men's blanket using certain style to cover the upper part of their body. This style is called *hnoisawt*. Sometimes the cloth itself was also referred to as a *Hnoisawt*.<sup>241</sup> The method was practical as it frees the arms and yet served its purpose of covering the body against abrasion and cold. There are three ways to do a *hnoisawt*. The first is a *puisathhnoisawt*. In this style the shorter side of a rectangular cloth is brought through the back with one end under the arms and the other from the shoulder and tied at the front. The same is done with the other ends of the cloth thus forming a cross on the torso.

Another manner in which the men wore a blanket on their body is known as *sialkhaltlaihhnoisawt*. Here two ends of the *puan* are tied at the front by bringing them together from the right underarm to the left shoulder. The other ends are brought to the front from the right shoulder and the left under arm after making a fold at the back and tied at the chest. Though this created the same cross pattern at the front it also created a bag like space at the back with the help of the fold. There is opening at the hip level on both sides like a pocket and it was utilized to carry smaller tools and food items such as fruits etc.

<sup>241</sup> Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 500; Siangchhin Chinzah, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 17 May 2017 at her residence at Dawrpui Vengthar, Aizawl. She is the President of Women League of Chinland at the time of the interview



Fig 3.10 Chin men wearing *puan* in *Hnoisawt* style

### 3.2.6 *Nu Hnoisawt*:

A different way of wearing a cloth as a top by the women was called *Nu Hnoisawt*. *Nu* here refers to women. It is quite different from the style of men as in this technique the head of the wearer is covered with the cloth. The length of the cloth was stretched at the back while covering the head with the centre of the piece. The end of the mantle was then brought from the back, through the under arms up to the shoulders on both sides and brought towards the back of the neck and tied. The part of the cloth which was still hanging was then tied at the front, at the level of the hips. Since this covers the head and pretty much the whole upper body, it keeps the wearer warm in the chilly weather.

### 3.3 Women's Dress:

The expertise of Lai women in weaving is one of their significant characters. The art of weaving was also seen as a status defining endowment on the part of the women. It also added to their flair that they were able to weave silk for clothing. This however created a discriminating line for the richer and poorer section of the society base on the material used as silk could not be afforded by the commoners. But silk or cotton, Lai women did create a number of *puan* exclusive to them and they are as follows.

### 3.3.1 *Thi Hni*:

This is worn by the ladies in the chiefs' household and families of the ministers, aristocrats and the well to do families on ceremonial events like *khuangchawi*, *safim Ni* and *Chawng Ni* (a social ceremony) to show their wealth. *Thi* refers to jewels, mainly a necklace and *hni* means skirt, thus *Thi-hni* means a be-jewelled skirt. For the base of the skirt a black cloth lined with yellow and red threads is used and decorated with cowries and local grown seeds used as beads called *pawhte* of different kinds and colourful threads<sup>242</sup>.



Fig 3.11 Renhchin wearing *Thi Hni*

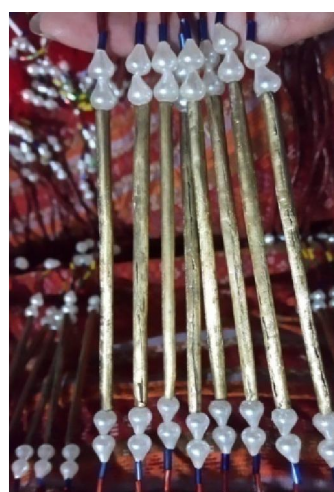


Fig 3.12 close up of *Thi Hni*

Around 140-150 beads are strung in each tassel along with green beetle wings at the lower end. Small brass pipes are also used for the decor. They could be as long as necklaces. These tassels are left to hang as fringes at the bottom half of the skirt<sup>243</sup>. In *Thi Hni* made with cotton, red tassels are also used to finish the *thi* at the bottom. The whole cloth is about 50-55 inches in length and 40-45 inches in width to the skirt. Due to the decoration added to the skirt, it can be very heavy weighing up to as much as 6 to 7 kilograms at times. This skirt is a highly valuable item forming a part of bride's dowry in marriage.

Like the Lusei *puan*, two pieces of woven cloths are joined in the middle where the upper part is left, as it is which are sometimes black in colour and the lower half of the skirt is decorated with silk threads. The ornaments are like a long necklace attached to a *puan* and when worn they move along with wearer's movements and looked quite beautiful and graceful.

<sup>242</sup>Darsiempuii, *Visual dictionary*, p. 8

<sup>243</sup>Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture*, p. 81

This skirt however was barely within the reach of the common people. This was primarily due to the fact that silk threads were very difficult to get, as they were not found in Mizoram. They could be bought from the Chin or Burmese traders who bring them from Burma and Thailand and from Chittagong. The royal families expressed their exclusivity through the use of silk which was fondly called Siam silk.<sup>244</sup> Here ‘*siam*’ refers to Thailand from where the silk are procured, brought through Burma to Mizoram by traders. Consequently, silk threads were very expensive and the common people could hardly afford them. This also marked the demarcation of social status between the elite few and the ordinary people. On occasions that the common people did manage to make one they used cotton threads to make the *puan*. Silk filaments were so expensive that till the late 1950’s a bundle of silk yarn was about five to six hundred rupees. Except for the Mithans, there is no class of goods that doesnot come directly or indirectly from the trade with other civilization including brass pots, metal gongs, silver jewelleryes, silk threads and blankets etc. and a great deal of what comes from outside may be classed as luxury goods which at the same time were essential to the social and political organisations.<sup>245</sup> Renhchin also mentioned that she bartered a bunch of silk yarn with a small brass gong.<sup>246</sup>

### 3.3.2 Hni Phiak:

This is a decorated cloth woven in silk for a skirt. Women particularly wear it on happy occasions and ceremonies. *Phiak* in Lai means vertical lines,<sup>247</sup> which is evident in the design of the *hni*. *Arsi* motifs are made with different colours of green and blue or purple on the black and grey vertical background lines woven into the *puan*. It is also known as *Arsi Hni*. *Arsi* in both Lusei and Lai means star denoting the star motif, which is used in this *puan*. Besides the star motif different designs could be incorporated in the skirt depending on the weaver. Because of this it is also known as *Phiakthlorh*.<sup>248</sup> Later on, different colours were used for background once

<sup>244</sup> Chinzah, interview, 2016; Hrangthlai, interview, 2016

<sup>245</sup> Lehman, *The Structure*, p. 169

<sup>246</sup> Chinzah, interview, 2016; C. Dawthlei, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 5 August 2016 at her residence at Saiha. She was born a *Mara* princess of Chakhang in 1939. Her mother Socho married her cousin brother, who was the brother of a *Chozah* Chief. She claimed to have woven more than a hundred pieces of traditional *Mara* clothing. Besides her, two of her daughters namely Nango Chozah, a skilled weaver and Popi Chozah, lecturer in Govt. Saiha Higher Secondary School were also interviewed.

<sup>247</sup> Darsiempuii, *Visual dictionary*, p. 62; Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture*, p. 85

<sup>248</sup> Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 502



they had easier access to diverse colours of silk threads. Today this *hni* is also made with other synthetic yarns as part of the ever-evolving nature of dress and economy and it has become cheaper.



Fig 3.13 Silk *Hni-Phiak*

### 3.3.3 *Hnisen / Hniren:*

*Sen* in Lai means red and since red is used as the base of this cloth; it is also called *Puan sen*<sup>249</sup> or *Hnisen*, which is to some extent like a half *Chawngnak*. The designs are very similar yet there is a slight difference. The main motif used in this skirt is called *Arpifarual*.<sup>250</sup> It is a *puan* where the upper half is plain black and the lower half is decorated or embroidered with designs similar to *Chawngnak*. It is worn underneath *hnileng*. It is not worn alone but serves somewhat like a petticoat or underskirt with decorated hem. Over this *puan*, *Hnileng* is worn which is a shorter skirt so that underneath it the design of the lower half of the *Hniren* or *Hnisen* can be shown off perfectly.

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Note: Rehnchin and Hrangthliaii, both belonging to the *Lai* tribe are from chiefly and a common lineage respectively. They are interviewed due to dearth of textual source about the dress history of *Lai*, their memory and clothing materials are used as sources for *Lai* dress history because of their contradicting social status, as both made their own clothes and still have a few of the clothes made by them.

<sup>249</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 63

<sup>250</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 501



Fig 3.14 Silk *Hni-sen*

### 3.3.4 *Khuptangtial* / *Hnileng*:

*Tial* in Lai and Lusei language refers to more than one colour. Hence this has a mix of black, blue and red colour. The main colours are red, black, and white. This is a short skirt which falls till the knee but is worn upon another skirt. *Hni Phiak* is kept in the middle sandwiched at the top and at the hem by *puantial* which has three lines of zigzag motif laid horizontally at a regular interval and another line at the gap of around six to eight inches on the hem line. The lower piece of *Puan tial* is attached to the *Hni Phiak* at the level of the knee hence the name *Khuptangtial* which essentially means knee length stripes. *Khup* in both Lai and Lusei mean knee. The contrast of the vertical lines of *Hni Phiak* with that of the horizontal zigzag is quite interesting and unique.

On formal occasion they would usually wear it with over *Hnisen*. Remarkably, the Lai women are fond of layering their skirt with the outer one worn higher than the inner skirt.<sup>251</sup> This way the design of the inner skirt is revealed. The undergarment is customarily longer than the upper garment, so the beautiful design of lower half can be seen. This is a very unique feature of the Lai trend of wearing their skirts. The picture of a *Sabeu* woman in Parry's *Lakher* also depicts a similar way of dress which evidently demonstrates the closeness of the Lai and Mara.<sup>252</sup>

<sup>251</sup>Mizo Incheina, p. 8

<sup>252</sup>Parry, *The Lakher*, p. 3



Fig 3.15 Haka woman wearing *Hnileng* 1908-1920

### 3.3.5 *Hnikakalkhat* / *Khanghni* / *Kawlhni*:

These different names are clubbed together in this point because the designs and purpose of the skirts are parallel. *Hnikakalkhat* is used as an under garment usually worn with *Hnika* and *Hni-phiak*. *Kalkhat* literally translate to one way or one track, hence the singular line in this *hni*. *Khang* literally translates to horizontal lines and major pieces of the Lai dresses are woven with designs laid horizontally. This way, exclusive expressions are given to these skirts, depending on the number of horizontal lines that appears in the cloth. When there are three horizontal bands in *ahni*, it is called *Nawnthum hni* and if there are five such bands, it is called *Ka Nga*,<sup>253</sup> 'nga' meaning five.

This type of skirt is also called *Kawlhni* perhaps because the design was again brought from their previous settlement with the *Kawl*, a name given to the people of Burma. These skirts were worn by both the aristocracy and the ordinary people alike. Nonetheless, while the royal household and nobility utilized silk to embroider this *hni*, the poorer section of the society employed cotton to make it. The Lai and Lusei have been closely living with each other with a lot of interactions; therefore, there lot of similarities exist in their language as well. So much so Lusei tribe easily understand the names of their puans. Perhaps it is due to this close affinity that *Puanlaisen* which is supposed to be exclusive of the Lusei form an integral part of the Lai

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<sup>253</sup> Mizo Incheina, p. 8

woman's wardrobe in many places and that the Lusei *Puanmawl* is also a part of an ordinary Lai woman's clothing. On the other, the basic plain skirt, *Puanmawl*, without any design and dye was used by all clans as it was easy to make and served a general purpose. In any case, there were lots of borrowing among the clans and this shows their closeness as tribe and kinship.



Fig 3.16 Silk *Nawnthum*

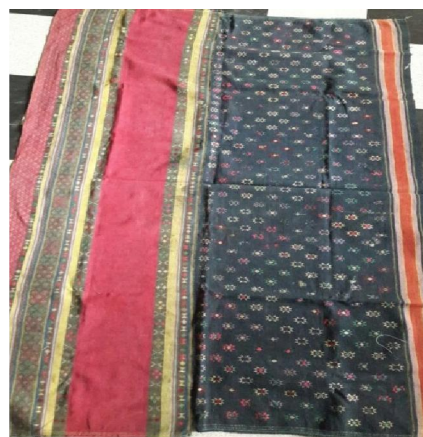


Fig 3.17 Cotton *Nawnthum*

### 3.3.6 *Hnirang*:

*Rang* in Lai language means multi-colour or colourful. According to Lorrain *rang* is to blotched, mottled, spotted or marked in any way with white, grey or other light colour.<sup>254</sup> Contrary to this explanation, this is a plain black *puan* or skirt dyed with the indigo. It is noteworthy that there is no other colour in this *puan* except black for it to be called a colourful *puan*. It is usually worn to work or at home. It is a casual dress. Ethnographic sources reveal that the skirts of the Lai in Mizoram, Falam, Haka and other places where Lai are scattered are apparently similar. But close inspection will expose how there are lots of variations in the skirts. The women who made them combine patterning in variety of distinctive way and the finest ones with overall patterning are made from a single loom width.

### 3.4 Lai Women's Blouse:

Ethnographic sources written by John Macrae, Parry, Shakespear and Lewin all agree that the Mizo in general were naked above the waist at their earliest encounters. However, Renhchin claimed that women in the Lai royal families always wore a blouse and that wearing blouses for the common people was perhaps a later addition to the tradition. At the same time,

<sup>254</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 378

Lewin spoke of how he encountered royal Shendoo women with chemise covering their bosom.<sup>255</sup> Since the Lai and Mara share very similar cultures, it would be fair to assume that who Lewin refers to were women of the Lai aristocratic families. Also, the continuous flow of migration from the Chin Hills perhaps influenced the trend of wearing blouses. However, it is hard to trace the exact date as to when the women started wearing blouses. But they did have blouses on the eve of the British colonization and they were given an impetus to wear for all women through the efforts of the missionaries.

### 3.4. *Chawngnak Kawr*

Besides the skirts, they also made blouses amongst which, *Chawngnak Kawr* is the most popular blouse of the Lai women. *Kawr* means blouse in Lai. It is made from the *Chawngnak Puan*. It has no sleeve and is stitched together in the middle of the back and middle of the front. Earlier threads are used to pull it together at the front. During the colonial times safety pins were a popular tool to close the front. Today they stitched up front and back leaving enough room at the collar free for the head to slip in and out and forming a V shaped collar. It is mainly worn with the *Chawngnak* and *Khanghni*. Like the skirts, this blouse is worn by all women, rich or poor while the rich employs silk for the designs the poor used cotton all through.



Fig 3.18 Cotton *Chawngnak Kawr*



Fig 3.19 Silk *Chawngnak Kawr*

#### 3.4.2 *Kawr Rang*:

This is a work dress and was worn on an everyday basis. It is also worn at home. It is white in colour which is the natural colour of the cotton and a black band is sometimes integrated

<sup>255</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 163; also see Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 149

on the sleeves and is worn with *Hni Rang*. The incorporation of the black band came later, which is also evident in the cut of this blouse, which is different than the *Chawngnak*. It is like the Lusei blouse where the sleeves are stitched on to the main body of the blouse. This was worn by both the sexes.



Fig 3.20 *Kawr Rang*

### 3.5 Silk Weaving:

Stephen Ni Kio is of the view that the use of silk by the Lai started only after the First World War because it was only then that Lai men were recruited in the British army and they were able to reach Thailand.<sup>256</sup> It was from Thailand that they brought the Siam *pu* or the Thai silk. However this argument is contradicted by the statement made by Renhchin and the material remains she kept. She still has with her a *hni* of silk made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, remnants of cultures in Burma suggest the use of silk from a very early stage and for the Chins in Burma to have not encountered such development would not have been possible. Again the *hni* that Siangchhin has with her belonged to her grandmother who was born in early 1800's and died the year Siangchhin was born, in 1958 at the age of more than one hundred. This also shows that silk was very much a part of the Chin culture and its incorporation into dress was evident way before the First World War. On the other hand, silk rearing was never a part of the Mizo culture but once they had peaceful trading relations with the neighbouring states, silk threads were brought not only from the east but it was also brought from Cox's Bazaar and its immediate vicinity where silk trade was thriving.<sup>257</sup> Power is represented, constituted, articulated, and contested

<sup>256</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 504

<sup>257</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 251. Further details on silk and its use in Mizoram refer to chapter 6 sub point number 6.2.1

through dress.<sup>258</sup> This could be seen in the pre colonial Lai society as well. Dress was a status defining symbol. Among the Lai the status of a person was determined by the number and quality of cloth owned by the bride and given to the bride's family by the groom's which would be laid along the path she takes to the groom's house.<sup>259</sup> C. Dawthlei also corroborated this by saying that her mother's family had laid silk cloths on the path that she took, from their house to the groom's.<sup>260</sup>

### 3.6 Conclusion:

It should be kept in mind that the style, quality and quantity of the dresses of different Mizo tribes were roughly the same from village to village, from tribe to tribe. Apparently, it was due to the fact that they have all come from the same lineage, following similar cultures and customs at some point before and through the course of their migration, living in the same place or at very close quarters. The slight differences are also indicative of the geographical pattern of their migration and eventual settlements.

While describing the earliest forms of dress of the Lai people, this chapter also signifies in the process the progress of their dress and the changes in the way they wear them. The skill of the Lai women in dress making cannot be ignored. The motifs and patterns employed in the weaving, the beautiful combination of colours and the fine finishing only confirms their talent in weaving. Even with the scarcity of silk threads, there was enough of it to dress the royalties to maintain their status in the society which is evidence their wealth. On the other hand, the evolution of dress or/ and lack of it for a number of decades evidently presents a socio cultural scenario which though not progressive in terms of economic development was exceedingly satisfied with their possessions and approvingly happy with the society they were living in.

What stands out in the Lai society is the incorporation of silk by the royalty and nobility while the common people employed cotton. The main reason for this was the economic differences as silk was expensive therefore could not be bought by the common people.

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<sup>258</sup> Giselle Aris, 'The Power and Politics of Dress in Africa', *Penn Humanities Forum*, 2007; Available from: [http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=uhf\\_2007](http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=uhf_2007) (accessed 23 November 2017)

<sup>259</sup> Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 33

<sup>260</sup> C. Dawthlei, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali, on 7 August 2016 at Saiha. Her two daughters namely Nango Chozah, a skilled weaver and Popi Chozah, a lecturer were also interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali at Saiha. C. Dawthlei was born a princess of Chakhang in 1939 whose mother Socho also married her cousin brother, who was the brother of a *Chozah* Chief. She claimed to have woven more than a hundred pieces of traditional *Mara* clothing.

However, pictorial evidences will also reveal that there was no rigidity or restrictions when it comes to designs. The commoners could use any of the designs worn by the elite sections but the skills and technique might have been lacking. To be a chief's wife required a woman to be highly skilled and knowledgeable in weaving. So, it can be easily assumed that since commoners hardly enter the royal household and vice versa, there were no chances of disseminating knowledge. But as Hrangthliai stated, most talented Mizo women could imitate the designs and motifs just by looking at them and imitate them and sometimes slightly alter them to their convenience or vision. This is one of the reasons why there were slight differences in patterns as well. It could also be assumed that knowledge was withheld due to the fear of losing power by these women.

Clothing made of silk defined a higher status and certain pieces of clothing such as *Chawngnak* and *Chanlo Puan* could only be worn by the royalties and the elite revealing that social demarcation on the basis of dress was prevalent. On the other hand, because they lived in a pre-literate society, there was no bar to the exotic and expensive items that could be owned by the chief or the rich families which created a line of demarcation between the rich and the poor. While it was accepted that there should not be any one greater than the chief in any village, the chief could also make sure that there was none in any aspects be it wealth or dress. By prescribing certain dress code they could have been making sure that there would be no competition and that with those dresses, their power could be identified. While there were good and kind chiefs, there were cruel and overbearing chiefs as well. Hence, there are reports of instances when a poor commoner's earring or necklace would be snatched from their ears and neck on the ground that it did not suit a commoner or a poor person to be wearing such pieces of value. But such instances do not define the society as a whole.



## Chapter 4: Mara Dress - From the Earliest to Colonial Times.

### 4.0 Introduction:

This chapter contains descriptions, elaborations and insights into the dress of Mara tribe of Mizoram. It attempts to examine the culture and history of the Mara people through dress and strives to throw light on the material remains such as dresses and accessories owned by people belonging to the Mara tribe. Any similarities in raw material, design, pattern, use of colours and mode of production of dress with the Lai, due to their close proximity in terms of space and cultural attachment, descriptions pertaining to the details of the cited attributes will not be repeated unless necessary and will be referred to when needed. This chapter in short aims to bring forth an understanding of the Mara culture and history through dress.

### 4.1 Mara Dress:

Information like the ones provided by Lewin in his account is evident of the advancement of the Maras in dress as compared to the other tribes around them who were remarkably scanty in their clothing. He described that it was very rare to see a skirt below the knee; but the *Shendu* women covered their bosoms with a decent chemise and wore clean and long home-spun petticoats while over their shoulders hung handsome robes of the *Shendu* plaid.<sup>261</sup> R.A. Lorrain also illustrated that young unmarried women wore short breast jackets.<sup>262</sup> However, these women that Lewin mentioned must have been from the royal lineage or young unmarried women like the ones seen by Lorrain. The common women, especially married ones hardly wore blouses. It was explained by C. Dawthlei and K. Pari that women from the poorer section of the society hardly wore blouses. The married women, after their first child, as a rule, cast off the breast-jacket. They either go with the body above the waist in nude condition around the village, or else when they go into jungle to fetch their wood or their water, wear a white cloth coat with sleeves, covering the whole bare part of the body. This jacket was mainly worn to ward off evil spirit<sup>263</sup> and while at home they stay naked at the bosom. In the pre colonial and colonial times, commoners wore the same type of garments.

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<sup>261</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 163

<sup>262</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 111

<sup>263</sup>Lorrain, pp. 111-112



Like in all the three tribes under study, their skirts are an open cloth big enough to be wound around the waist amply and for the Lai and Mara, long enough so that the legs do not show. Like the Haka and Chin samples, the Mara and Lai skirts reach well below the knee till the ankles. Wives of Mara chiefs never worked in the fields and their



Fig 4.1 (a) Wife of Lakher Chief photographed by R.A. Lorrain



(b) Topless women photographed by F.W. Savidge

main occupation was to weave. This is the reason why when looking for brides, the foremost quality for a chief's wife was to be a skilful weaver. This was also true of the well to do nobles and other members of the royal household. Women in general took pride in their proficiency and flair for weaving and in fabricating textiles. Their competence is shown till date, in the brilliant colour schemes and excellent construct in designs exhibited in the dresses of both themselves and the men. Hence, this observation support the hypothesis that in comparison with the other tribes living around them, the Mara were rather developed in terms of textiles, designs and construction of garments.

The Maras have different kinds of dresses and clothing which when compared to other Mizotribes is much higher in quality and skill. Their expertise in the use of silk threads is unmatched by any other tribe in Mizoram except for the Lai. In fact they are the only two tribes in the pre-colonial period that has incorporated silk into their garment. Base on information gathered which includes primary, secondary and other available sources, the Mara dress is divided into the dress of men and women.

## 4.2 Men's Dress:

The dress of Mara men consists namely *Dua Kalapa*, *Dua Ah*, *Chylao Poh*, *Chyna Poh*, *Poh Zahpa*, *Thakao Poh*, *Phiphia Poh*, *Tlahtho Poh*, *Chhameikaru*, *Pohzahpa* and *Kei-o-poh*. Though these are listed as male garbs, some of them were worn by the females as well. But originally, they were made for men. While somewhat firm demarcation was shown in garments worn on specific occasions, it can be perceived that gender lines were rather blur when it comes to the clothing worn on an everyday basis. Therefore, the following points are formulated for a clearer understanding of the Mara dress, their gender distinction, their evolution, significance, production and patterns while their jewellerys and accessories will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 4.2.1 *Dua Kalapa* and *Dua Ah*:

The pre-colonial dress of the Mara male like the other tribes of the Mizo was a loin cloth or *Dua Kalapa*. There is hardly any written or documented proof of a more primitive dress, like the *siapsuap* of the Lusei. So what is believed to be the most primitive dress of the Mara men in Mizoram was a loin cloth. However, it is generally assumed that a crude form of loin cover, specifically straw or shredded bark of a tree was used before the knowledge of the As they improved upon their dress in terms of the fabric, weave, etc. they developed better loin cloths namely *Dua Kalapa* and *Dua Ah*.

#### (a) *Dua Kalapa*:<sup>264</sup>

This is a cotton loincloth which is 9.5-10 feet long and 1.5-2 feet in width which was plain and white in colour, wound around their waist and between the legs. The manner of tying this one is rather complicated. Also according to Ngotlai, the original word should be *Dua Kala* and if the syllable '*pa*' is added, that makes it informal. However, it is indeed a casual dress worn to work by the men everyday.<sup>265</sup> Because of the length, it takes expertise to wear it properly. It was worn by pulling it up between the legs several times and fastened at the hips.

<sup>264</sup>Parry, pp. 29-30; also see *MizoIncheina*, p. 22; Pari, interview, 2016;Pari, '*Hlano Mara*,' p. 13

<sup>265</sup>Parry, p. 31

Unlike the Indian dhoti, it could not cover the legs widely since the breadth of the cloth is only 1.5ft in width. In fact, it covered much less. It was a common garment worn by every man on an everyday basis. It was not considered an undergarment, but an outerwear of the men during the early phase.

If primitive raw materials were used, it is probable that the straw dress or something similar to the Lusei *Hnawkhal* and the Chin raincoat must have been used by the Mara as well.<sup>266</sup> However, there is no specific indication to this. According to N.E. Parry, it was quite possible that the elemental cloth mentioned by Longtha which he quoted in his work was *Siapsuap* or something similar. He said that the men's dress appears to be a rudimentary form of the *Dua Kalapa*, which is probably an improvement from it. In 1901, when they were still absolutely untouched by the outside influences, these primitive clothes were in vogue among the poorer classes.<sup>267</sup> This implies that the loin cloth of the common men and the elite were not the same and it is also indicative of the fact that dress designated social status. It would not be wrong to assume that the report of Mr. C.B. Drake-Brockman, at Lungleh on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1901<sup>268</sup> noted by Parry was either the same kind or very similar to the Lai loincloth. R.A Lorrain also confirmed that he had seen the men wear a small loin cloth with a string of beads which was their whole attire during the hot weather.<sup>269</sup>

While the use of loin cloth seemed to be a regular outfit among the Mara, the statement of Lewin<sup>270</sup> back in the late 1860's illustrated the high standard of Mara women even at that time, in dress and peripherals. Lewin was of the impression that the Mara in general and the women in particular were a higher race than the ordinary hill people in terms of dress and skill. However, once he went deeper into the *Shendoo* country, Lewin witnessed that there were people who were not clothed in a manner described by him and he also encountered women with just one waist cloth and a pewter girdle.<sup>271</sup> Thus when one talks about the dress of the Marain the pre-colonial or colonial period, it cannot be generalized as the quality and amount of dress, mantle or

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<sup>266</sup>Shakespeare, *The Lushei Kuki*, p. 213

<sup>267</sup>Parry, *The Lakheres*, p. 32

<sup>268</sup>Parry, p. 32

<sup>269</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 111

<sup>270</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 149

<sup>271</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 153

accessories worn would differ from place to place and group to group depending on their economic status, skill and encounter with other tribes by way of loots and barter.

**(b) *Dua Ah*:** (Refer to chapter 3, *Biar Pi* fig 3.9)

*Dua Ah* is another loin cloth of the Mara which was worn on formal occasions. Its description and use is the same as the *Biar Pi* of Lai.<sup>272</sup> This is of the same size and length as that of the *Dua Kalapa*. It was white in colour but at each end of the cloth, upon the last 2.5 feet was stitched on a dark blue cloth which was decorated with richly embroidered pattern in different colours of silk thread. It was worn the same way as the *Dua Kalapa* but both ends of the cloth were embellished using similar motif as the *Chylao Poh*. This decorated part is called *Amao*<sup>273</sup> and it would not be pushed inside but let to hang in the front and at the back, as an adornment. The middle portion of the *Dua Ah* is in its natural colour of white. It would be made as single piece and at the place where the transition in warps number is made has been interpreted as a seam between separate pieces of cloth.<sup>274</sup> This particular loin cloth is more of an ornamental cloth, mostly worn with the *Chylao Poh* on certain social events such as beer parties, public gatherings, festivals, weddings and other formal occasions and ceremonies.<sup>275</sup> They would also wear this when travelling for something important in another village.<sup>276</sup>

**4.2.2 *Viapako*:** (refer to Lai *angki* fig 3.10)

This was a plain white cotton jacket worn by the men, during the colonial period. It was like a jacket and shirt rolled into one. This was also an everyday dress occasionally worn to work. It is highly probable that this was a very practical piece of dress. The length of this dress was till the knee hence covering much of the wearer's body. The sleeves were also long so as to protect the wearer and also to enable him to move his arms without the burden of the *poh* yet protected enough to perform his chores freely. This was one of the most practical pieces of dress owned by the Mara men. This is equivalent to the Lai *Angki* and *Kawrfang* or *Hnathawh Kawr* of the Lusei. It does not have a differentiating gender term. Any attire worn on the half top of the body

<sup>272</sup>Refer to Chapter 3, 3.3.1 of this thesis.

<sup>273</sup>Pari, interview, 2016; Ngotlai Chozah, interview, 2016, and Nango, interview, 2016

<sup>274</sup>Howard, *Textiles*, p. 112

<sup>275</sup>Pari, interview, 2016

<sup>276</sup>Ngotlai, interview, 2016

is referred as *kawr* for both women and men. Similar coat is seen in a number of the neighbouring states of the north east.

#### 4.2.3 *Chylao Poh (Cheulopang)*:

The *Chylao Poh* is the finest cloth produced by the Mara people. It was a man's shawl or blanket worn on specific occasions. The word *poh* is broadly used to mean a shawl or cloth. Though there seemed to be no rigid restrictions against women wearing it, this exact same piece is seldom seen worn by a woman. According to K. Pari it was only worn by those belonging to the royal or aristocratic family, in short the chief's family. The background of this cloth is black or dark blue<sup>277</sup> with two white lines running down the middle. It is similar to the *Chanlopuan* of Lai. Even though some claim that there are slight differences in the design and pattern, it is barely found. Perhaps the differences are insignificant said Pu Chatlu<sup>278</sup> in an interview. The whole cloth is thickly embroidered with an intricate pattern in silk. To corroborate this, Tuck and Carey pointed out that this mantle was woven entirely of silk and not only is the material expensive but the weaving by hand of the plaid is the daily work of quite a year even for the quickest and most experienced woman.<sup>279</sup> Unlike other woven garments, A. Zakia,<sup>280</sup> and his wife Thleiso claimed that the traditional designs cannot be altered as any alteration will dilute its authenticity. But in later years, there were a number of designs created by women when they weave enriching the dress culture of the Mara. Taking inspirations from wilderness surrounding them, some of the design incorporated in the *Chylao Poh* is said to represent the eyes of different birds and beasts. Designs such as *Semit*, *Halkha*, *Halkha de*, *Fanghmamumeng*, *Mitmurual* etc. are also emulated from nature and borrowed and shared from Mara dress by the Lusei and other tribes in a number of their dresses.

Woven and embroidered with pure silks, this majestic black *Chylao Poh* was traditionally owned and used by royal and nobility on joyous festivals, courts, marriage ceremonies and other formal occasions.<sup>281</sup> It was indeed a very popular type of blanket worn by all high status men.<sup>282</sup> Owing to its stature, difficulty of production and expensiveness, *Chylao Poh* was beyond the

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<sup>277</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 32

<sup>278</sup>K. Chatlu, interview, 2016

<sup>279</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 171

<sup>280</sup>Zakia, interview, 2016

<sup>281</sup>Pari, 'Hlano Mara,' p. 8

<sup>282</sup>Howard, *Textiles*, p. 99

reach of poor and ordinary people. The fact that this piece of clothing was very much a part of the Mara dress in Mizoram around 1864-65 as mentioned by Lewin<sup>283</sup> lead us to think that, they had been wearing this blanket for a long time even before the British came. At the same time, the verity that *Chylao Poh* is also very much a part of the Chin and Haka culture in Myanmar shows that they are indeed a part of the same culture and that the origin of this *poh* is not Mizoram but a previous settlement or era from which they have migrated bringing the art and culture along.

Due to its beauty and rarity, *Chylao Poh* when worn by chifs and royalty would attract eyes whenever it is seen, enhancing the status of the wearer. Like, the other exclusive pieces of clothing, this also has a legend surrounding its origin.<sup>284</sup>



Fig 4.2 *Chylao Poh* bought by Ngotlai

This piece is owned by Ngotlai who bought this *poh* in 1995 for rupees thirty seven thousand. It was a family heirloom brought to Saiha by a Mara prince from Halkha, who was around 25 years of age at that time. He claimed that this *poh* belonged to his great grandfather who was a Halkha chief. In the event of the military regime in Burma, a number of people, especially the youth wanted to leave their country in search of better life and a number of them went to Singapore. She said that the young prince was forced to sell a family heirloom to go to Singapore. From his genealogy, they have calculated that this *poh* was supposedly made around the 1850s and now would cost almost double the amount paid for.

<sup>283</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 162

<sup>284</sup>See appendix III

#### 4.2.4 *Cheunapang / Chyna Poh:*

This is another fine cloth worn and owned mainly by aristocrat, rich families and wealthy section of the society. It has a brick red background and it is embroidered with red and yellow silk. It is woven just like the women's skirt *Hnokao* using pure silks, but with lesser layers of embroidery and longer in length. The '*fine Shendoo cloth*' worn by the old *Kuki* chief Teynwey mentioned by Lewin (1870) seemed to be a *Chyna Poh* made by the Maras.<sup>285</sup> It is obvious that, these beautiful clothes were great and valuable items for trade with their neighboring kingdom or other clan fetching high prices. C. Dawthlei mentioned that around the late 1940's and 50's, they would go to Tuipang and Serkawr villages to sell the *poh* they have made. The simpler ones fetched three to five rupees while *ChylaoPoh* and *Chyna Poh* were sold for rupees fifty or so. There are a few variations of this *poh* where along with red, yellow and green a bit of black or dark blue is thrown in but just as beautiful.

The Mara worn *Chyna Poh* during religious ceremonies and funeral services and it was deemed a highly sacred piece of clothing. Though it is easy to assume that religious ceremonies called for formal dressing, the funerals were equally given importance in terms of dress. Popi Chozah<sup>286</sup> described that in traditional Mara funerals, particularly of the chiefs, members of the royal families and the nobility, a man fully dressed in the Mara traditional attire, wearing the *DuaKala* with a head dress and *Thisai Rih* necklace, spear and gun in tow will lead the funeral procession, dancing and occasionally firing the gun. He would be followed by two women who were dressed in their finest *Chyna Poh* wearing *Lakhang* on their head, and all the accessories of a Mara woman such as the necklaces, bangles and belt, dancing. All the others attending the funerals were also expected to dress in their best dress. Interestingly, they bury the dead in a stone tomb. Most royal families own such tombs and C. Dawthlei and her family still have such tomb at Chakhang, 10 kilometers from Siaha where she hopes to be buried alongside her ancestors. The dead body of the deceased would be covered in plain simple clothing but different types of valuable mantles and accessories, brass gongs of different sizes; *tuibur*<sup>287</sup>, which was considered a luxury along with other valuable items owned by the person, would be buried along

<sup>285</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 162

<sup>286</sup>Popi Chozah, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9 August 2016 at Saiha. She is the youngest of the five daughters of C. Dawthlei, who is a lecturer at the Govt. Higher secondary School in Saiha. She weaves and often assisted her mother and elder sisters when they weave.

<sup>287</sup>Lorain, *Dictionary*, p. 522

with the body. This explains the close link of dress with life and death, and how dress along with other items of clothing was being considered a part of the wealth of a man in the Mara culture. Therefore, like the Lai, this blanket is surrounded with a folk tale revealing the story of the origin of *Chyna Poh*.<sup>288</sup>

The *Chyna Poh* is said to have been a part of the Mara culture approximately in the early part of the sixteenth century AD (1500 AD). Apparently, the first *Chyna Poh* was believed to be woven by the wife of Laithlu and it became the heirloom of Laithlu's first daughter, Maihdâ. When Maihdâ died, she was to be buried with this *Poh*. But it turned out that she was not allowed to enter the realm of the Dead with this *Poh*. From then onwards, the *Chyna Poh* was regarded as a curse but later gained a sacred status and revered to be used only at religious ceremonies and funeral services and forbidden from ordinary wear and function.



Fig 4.3 *Chyna Poh* made by C. Dawthlei



Fig 4.4 *Chyna Poh* owned by Ngotlai

It is a tradition among the Mara women that one must not weave both the *Chyna Poh* and *Chylao Poh* without performing required and prescribed sacrificial ceremonies. The weaving must begin with the sacrifice of a swine. This is in similar lines with the Lai folk tale. Traditions has it that if one weaves *Chyna Poh* or *Chylao Poh* without performing necessary rituals of sacrifice, one will not be able to complete the weaving, that is, the weaver would die before the completion of the weaving. On better-woven blankets, the ends of discontinuous supplemental wefts are completely hidden on both the obverse and reverse sides.<sup>289</sup>

<sup>288</sup>Pari, 'Hlano Mara,' p. 9; also see N.E Parry, p. 31; Darsiempuii, 'Visual dictionary,' p. 73; Ngotlai, interview, 2016; Pari, interview, 2016; Nango, interview, 2016 and A. Zakia interview, 2016

<sup>289</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 68



#### 4.2.5 *Thakao Poh* : (refer to chapter 3, fig 3.5 & 3.6)

This is a common blanket for men. Woven with fine white cotton and horizontally lined with black colour and normally two inches wide. It is similar to the *Puanlamkalh* of the Lai and the older version of the Lusei *Ngotekherh*. The Mara *Thâkao* has the same significance and the same pattern made with the *hruih* design with two black bands vertically woven creating three sections to the *poh*. This *poh* was quite common and popular among the Mizo. Though an actual factor for this cannot be ascertained, it may be assumed that it was easier to make as compared to the other heavily embroidered skirts and perhaps because they were influenced by the style of the neighboring clans. This was largely the shawl of commoners. Commoners use this shawl on most occasions, particularly when it was cold. R.A Lorrain mentioned that during the cold season, men wear a large sheet of their own manufacture, having two black stripes running through it.<sup>290</sup> It was also used as a shroud for the dead bodies.

#### 4.2.6 *Phiphia Poh*:: (refer to chapter 2, fig 2.23 a &b)

It is a check or plaid cloth woven with a combination of black and white cotton threads. This check shawl is used popularly by the Mara men and women. This particular tartan was very popular in the Chin Hills of Burma as well.<sup>291</sup> The Mara seems to have brought it from Burma when they migrated to their present habitation. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, this *poh* is the same as that of the Lai *Pu Puan* or *Maimaw Nak Puan* and the description for this *poh* is already given in details in Chapter three of this thesis.<sup>292</sup>

#### 4.2.7 *Tlahtho Poh*:

This tartan is made with overwhelmingly red color cotton and black ones. Sometimes it is made in red and white check.<sup>293</sup> *Tlâhtho Poh* is essentially the red version of *Phiphia Poh* with a modified check style. Both these cloths were worn as shawl by the Mara men and when need be, they would tie up all the four corners of the rectangular cloth on their chest and use it like a shirt just like the Lai *hnoisawt*. The women however wore them as shawls, over their normal

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<sup>290</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 111

<sup>291</sup>Pari, 'Hlano Mara,' p. 9; also see N.E Parry, p. 31. Darsiempuii, *Visual dictionary*, p. 71 and Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, pp. 57-102 (see figures)

<sup>292</sup>Refer to Chapter-3, 3.2.2. of this thesis.

<sup>293</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 91. (see figures)

attire. *Tlahtho* and *Phiphia Poh* seems to be the ones, which Parry referred to when he wrote ‘Burmese check cloths are also popular’.<sup>294</sup>

Both *Phiphia Poh* and *Tlahtho Poh* are an interesting part of the Mara dress. The picture of these blankets are often termed as plaid which can be rather indefinite since existing literature pays little attention to these so called plaid as they are simply dismissed as copies of Burmese *longyi*. This may indeed be the case but it is also possible that the different highland groups have distinct styles.<sup>295</sup> Whatever the case may be with these shawls, the ones in Burma are similar with the ones worn by the Mara in Mizoram. *Phophia Poh* is highly popular and the red version of the check seems to be a recent addition into the Mara wardrobe.



Fig 4.5 *Tlahtho Poh*

#### 4.2.8 *Chhameikaru Poh / Pohzahpa / Kei-o-Poh:*

Besides the the popular shawls and blankets already discussed, basic white mantle with beautiful woven designs with no other color were also a part of the Mara culture and clothing. They are of different textures, pattern and thickness, used as blankets and as materials to stitch blouses and later pants in the colonial periods.

(a) One of them was the *Chhameikaru*. Using pure and strong cotton, the finished shawl of *Chhâmeikaru Poh* looks like that of the empty corn stalk after the cobs are removed. *Chhâmei* means corn in Mara and *Karu* is the corn stalk. This was a common man’s dress.

<sup>294</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 31

<sup>295</sup>Howard, *Textiles*, p. 99



Fig 4.6 *Chhameikaru*

(b) Another one is the *Pohzahpa* or sometimes called *Lahypa Poh*. This *poh* is made of strong white cottons and is plain white cloth with no ornamentation<sup>296</sup>. It is like a smooth shawl without any design. It was an everyday dress, worn by both men and women at home or at leisure or to work. Worn like the *Phiphia Poh* or using the Lai method of *hnoisawt*, the four corners of the cloth was tied at the front in a particular way, especially to work to supplement a shirt.

*Pohzahpa* is usually about 7 feet long and 5 feet in width. It was also worn like a shawl in the same way the Lusei men wear their *puan* by drawing it over the right or left shoulder over the chest and under the arm while the other end is thrown over the other shoulder again. If the wearer does not wear a shirt underneath, one of his shoulders would be bare. As the rest of the mantle hangs down it covers the whole body and somehow generate a certain degree of warmth on a cold chilly day. This type of plain white cotton was a recurring piece of clothing in all parts of Mizoram during the study period. Besides being a blanket it also served as a fabric for stitching cloths. When the men started wearing trousers, shorts and shirts, they were probably all made from this material. When stitched into a trouser, it could be the modern day equivalent of cotton jeans or casual pant. It is comparable to the basic Lusei cloth or *Puanhlap*. It was used both for daytime and night time and mostly used by common people.

(c) Another garment made with white cotton is the *Kei-o-Poh*. It is woven to exhibit different designs and textures and was used as a blanket and as a shawl.

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<sup>296</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 31



Fig 4.7 *Pohzahpa*<sup>297</sup>

The pure white cloths, mentioned above are worn by the Mara men along with their loin cloth to war. They are also worn on an everyday basis and owned by everyone. All the clothes mentioned are worn by both men and women alike. It seems that they did not use coloured cloth when going to war.<sup>298</sup> Though no document could be found corroborating this claim, no one objected it either.

### 4.3 Women's Dress:

The dresses of the Mara women are quite exquisite in terms of dexterity and the raw materials used. They were really fine and beautiful and cover much more than that of their male counterparts. They wore their skirts in layers one upon the other. They are skilfully made and show cased the skills and incredible talents of the Mara weavers. Hence, it was only befitting that they are called Lakher by the Lusei in admiration for their talent in textile production. Again like the other clans, there are a lot of variations in the Mara women's dress and this could be seen in the slight changes in colour, pattern and the density of it. However, the basic formation of the cloth was unanimous in all the places where they could be found from the Hills of Myanmar to Mizoram in India. The pre colonial dresses of the Mara women can be classified as follows.

<sup>297</sup> Renhchin Chinzah Collection

<sup>298</sup> Dr. Bobby Beighachhi, Asst. Professor, Pachunga University College, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 13 July 2016, at Aizawl. Parry, *The Lakher*, p. 35

#### 4.3.1 *Hnokao*:

*Hno* in Mara means a skirt and *Hnokao* is like a smaller version of the men's blanket *Chyna poh* made for women. It has similar designs and motifs like the *Chyna Poh* made with red, yellow, green and sometimes light blue or grey colours but the interwoven lines crossing each other which form a hazy background in the *Chyna Poh* is replaced with designs which are properly lined horizontally. It is a skirt worn by women hence need not be as big as that of the men's blanket. Nonetheless, the significance and importance of this cloth is as much as that of the *Chyna Poh* is for the men. It was worn by the royalty and aristocratic women. It is the most valuable possession of a Mara woman, worn on festive occasions and weddings. It is entirely made of silk. It is similar to the *Chawngnak Puan* of the Lai and therefore detailed descriptions for this skirt and its distinctions are already indicated in the previous chapter on Lai dress.



Fig 4.8 *Hnokao* made by C. Dawthlei

#### 4.3.2 *Kaohrei*: (refer to Chapter 3, 3.19 & 3.20)

This is known to be the traditional blouse or tunic of the Mara. It is usually made from the *hnokao* with the red background but there are *Koahrei* which were made with a black background, probably worn with *hno* with the same colour backdrop.<sup>299</sup> Two pieces of fabrics are joined together at the back and front leaving the middle part open for the head to get through. Sometimes the front is left open and small threads are attached to tie the open front together like the Lusei tunic. Later on, once they got hold of safety pins, using safety pins to hold the tops together became quite popular. It is the only blouse of the Mara women and it is worn mostly

<sup>299</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 149

with *Hnokaob* but also other skirts. This must be the short chemise mentioned by Lewin in both his monographs of 1870 and 1912.

However, it should be noted that this blouse was worn only by the elite section and younger women while the older ladies were content with wrapping cloth around their upper body and tying it in the neck as that made the hands free for chores, without wearing anything underneath. Women, especially the ones married were pretty naked most of the times. Colonel McCulloch cited by Tuck and Carey said that the *Kookie* women wrapped a scanty strip of cloth round their persons sufficient to prevent them from being called naked.<sup>300</sup> But Lewin was surprised by the remarkable amount of clothing worn by the four *Shendu* women accompanying a *Shendu* Chief, who covered their bosoms with a decent chemise with handsome robes of *Shendu* plaid hanging over their shoulder.<sup>301</sup> There is no doubt that this chemise noted by Lewin is a *Koahreias* it is the only blouse or upper garment for Mara women. So *Koahrei* must have been developed and worn from a very early time by the women of Mara royal families. Again as much as there are variations in the *Hnokao*, there are variations of *Koahrei* in terms of design and pattern.

#### **4.3.3 *Hnokao kakhap* and *HnoKaothopa*:** (refer to chapter 3, fig 3.17 & 3.18)

These are skirts of great value and worth and still are as popular as the *Hnokao*. Though the diamond shaped motifs with the eye like pattern and the zig-zag designs of the *Hnokao* are a part of this skirt and they do not necessarily have to embroider the skirt in full. It is different because, patterns are woven in horizontal lines. *Khap* in Mara means a line or a column and *ka* is one or single. So *Kakhapa* in Mara means one layer.<sup>302</sup> If a *Hnokao* has only one line of decoration or one large column, covering only the lower half of the skirt, it is called a *Hnokao Kakhapa* referring to the number of stripe present in the *hno*. Therefore, a *Hnokao kakhap* refers to a single lane of embroidery. In this skirt, the upper part of this cloth is mostly made with plain black or dark blue coloured yarns and only the lower half is decorated.

<sup>300</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 138

<sup>301</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 163

<sup>302</sup>Pari, interview, 2016 and Dr. K. Robin, interview, 2016

These days, the upper unembroidered half is also made in red colour which shows the augmentation of this piece of clothing. There is also another layered *hno* called *hno-kaothopa* which means three layers. There are three layers of embroidery which runs horizontally using the same pattern as the *Hnokao* and the warping around the waist is left unembroidered. In a *Hnokaothôpa* some lines in between the embroidery are just left without decorating it which has its own unique beauty. This way the value and name of this *hno* can be easily calculated depending on the number of lines decorated or the density of the designs woven in a single *hno*. These disparities in layer using the same design make the Mara textiles richer.

#### 4.3.4 *Sisaihno*: (refer to Chapter 3, fig 3.12 & 3.13)

This is a beaded skirt which is another coveted possession of the Mara woman. It is again the same as the Lai skirt *Thi-hni*. The *Sisaihno* is exclusively worn by women belonging to the royal household and made by them. Different kind of beads and cowries are attached to the lower half of a *Hnokao* or *Hnokaokhapa* as ornamentations. Both *Hnokao* and *Hnokaokhapa* are equally accepted as the base for these decorations. These ornaments are strung in rows of cowries followed by a row of small round beads called *chhihrang*. Below this is a row of wild coix seeds called *sachipa* followed by *chhihrang* and red beads called *sisai*. A hollow brass beads called *dawchakopa* in shape and size of a match<sup>303</sup> is also attached in the string along with the other beads. These rows are repeated in a different order or as one wish. They are then ended with red tassels of silk on the bottom. Sometimes, comparable to the Lai, wings of brilliant green beetles are used to finish the embellishment. The ornamentation differs from villages to villages.<sup>304</sup> These beautiful skirts are worn on ceremonial occasions, weddings and festivals. Though they command a ready sale, they hardly wanted to part with the ones made for oneself. This is because of the sentimental values attach to the ones particularly made by them.

#### 4.3.5 *Hnolakhai* : (refer to Chapter 3, fig 3.14)

It is a common Mara skirt and is embroidered on the black cotton warping using motifs lined on the vertical lines of purple, blue, black and white, for this colour base the motifs are in light pink, light blue, yellow, etc. *Lakhai* means embroidery along the lines. The most important

<sup>303</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 38.

<sup>304</sup>Darsiempuii, 'Visual dictionary', p. 74

element to this skirt is the design and motif. The colour of the warps and wefts may be changed according to the whims of the weaver. Though made mostly in cotton, those who could afford made this in silk as well which give the *hno* a beautiful and different texture.

#### 4.3.6 *Hnokhah*: (refer to chapter 3, fig 3.16)

This textile is similar to the Lai *puan* called *Khuptangtial* or *Hnileng*. It is given this name due to the fact that the upper most and lower end of the *hno* are decorated with horizontal zigzag stripes which is then stitched on to a middle part decorated differently than the upper and lower part which. This skirt is a combination of three pieces of cloth with a combination of two kinds of *hno*, one vertically patterned and the other horizontally. *Hnokhâh* is a stylish Mara women's dress.<sup>305</sup> The middle part of this skirt is designed like the *Hnolakhai* which is yet smaller in size than the ones singularly worn. It is kept in the middle, framed between two separate *hno* with a zigzag motif which lay horizontally. The lower piece of the skirt is attached to the *Hnolakhai* roughly at the level of the knee. Sometimes, the upper horizontal part is detached and sometimes only the two pieces, the *Hnolakhai* and the horizontal patterned cloth is stitched together. This is to make it shorter, so that when worn over another *hno*, particularly the *Hnokao* or *Hnokaokhap*, the lower end of these beautiful designs could then be exposed. The contrast of the vertical lines and the horizontal zigzag is quite rare and fascinating. This dress was very popular in the Chin Hills of Burma and it is obvious that they have brought it along when they moved to the present location.

#### 4.4 Conclusion:

To gain status, the pre-colonial Mizo accumulated certain materials among which heirlooms were one of them which included woven blankets made with locally sourced cotton and dyes along with metal tools, beaded jewellerys, brass gongs, pots, silk and other types of dyes and silver which were acquired outside through direct trade or indirectly through exchange with other clans and tribes. Amongst these items textiles were used to manifest the status and wealth of the wearer as well as for utilitarian purposes. As observed by Sharma there are hardly any other area of material culture, other than weaving where artistic or aesthetic considerations

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<sup>305</sup>Pari, 'Hlano Mara,' p. 3



play a sufficiently conscious and externally visible role.<sup>306</sup> As revealed in this research, textiles were often made for specific sexes and also on a need base. Certain textiles were reserved for ceremonial feasts, celebrations related to successful hunting, weddings and funerals. The status of some individuals is reflected by what they wear while some are allowed to wear particular clothing only if they achieved some criteria.

Until recently, before the influences of colonialism and its concomitant forces, except for the ceremonial clothing, men did not change their clothing at night, and they wore the same clothes they did during the day even when they sleep. But the progress in terms of attires and hygiene, and the general consciousness towards dress and fashion have drastically changed since the colonial period till today not just among the Mara but all over Mizoram.

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<sup>306</sup>Vijay Prakash Sharma, *The Hmars of Manipur: An Anthropological Exploration*, New Delhi, Anmol Publications, 1992, pp. 73-74

## Chapter- 5: Traditional Jewelleries and Accessories

### 5.0 Introduction:

Jewels and ornaments have always been a part of human culture. It is agreed that history of jewellery is closely parallel with the history of mankind. But the Neanderthal jewelry made of eagle talons found in Croatia, indicates that the need for ornaments predates the modern men, since the pieces were dated to have been made 135,000 years ago.<sup>307</sup> From the times humans first started using clothes and tools, jewels were produced from any kind of materials that were available. People who lived inland used as ornaments materials from the animals they had killed for food: reindeer antlers, mammoth tusks, and all kinds of animal bones along with stones, plants, shells, wood and natural made semi-precious materials. After they had been transformed from their natural state into various elaborate forms, these materials, together with animal skins and bird feathers, provided sufficient decoration. However, even with all advancements of metallurgy and gem processing, the purpose of wearing jewelry always remained the same - they enabled the wearer to express himself non-verbally, showcase wealth, rank, political and religious affiliation or affections toward someone.<sup>308</sup> Used as amulets to protect against harm and worn for ceremonial occasions, jewels signalled wealth, power and position.<sup>309</sup>

This chapter aims to focus on the accessories, jewelleries and the additional fitments of the Mizo tribes in the pre-colonial and colonial period. Even though accessories are a part of the whole dress, the substantial number of these accessories and jewelleries compels it to reserve a separate chapter. It will include in the wider sense of the term, not just the basic fashion accessories as is known but the auxiliary items, which were highly popular all over Mizoram and commonly used by all Mizo tribes. Besides the regular manner of style and decorations, some feasible items, such as the haver sack, while serving a more sensible need of the users owing to their practicality and the convenience they created, unintentionally also becomes fashionable accessories, particularly in their progression as an article of traditional significance till date. This is also a sign of the Mizo creativity in handiwork, art and craft. The different pieces of

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<sup>307</sup><http://www.ancientfacts.net/7-oldest-pieces-jewelry-world/> (accessed 13 September 2017).

<sup>308</sup><http://www.historyofjewelry.net/> (accessed 13 September 2017)

<sup>309</sup>Dr. Manish Rai and Dr R. Gopal, 'A Study on the Purchase Behaviour of Indian Women When Buying Diamond Jewellery from Different Retail Formats', p. 1. Available from <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jbm/papers/ies-mcra-ibrc/volume-3/RC-26.pdf> (accessed 13 September 2017).

accessories discussed in this chapter will be explained as a Mizo accessory, but they will be explained indicating as far as possible their significance and definite utilization, common or specific to a tribe or tribes. This is because while some of the accessories and adornments were restricted to certain groups, many of them were commonly used by all the three tribes exclusively identified in this research.

## **5.1 Jewelleries and Accessories:**

Every culture has their own unique sets of jewelleries and accessories. The variety of these ornamentations however depends on the passion they have for adornments and other such items which is reflected in the customary juncture where these decorative pieces are worn which may be regular or occasional. The use and ownership of jewelleries and accessories as an indication of wealth and power have always been a prominent trait of many cultures including the Mizo. It has also been worn to enhance beauty and status. However, among the Mizo they were also commonly used as weapon in a quarrel, especially at local brawls, to stab the opponent with a spikey hair pin made of bamboo, iron and brass.<sup>310</sup> This is similar to many cultures in Southeast Asia, especially the Chinese whose use of the hairpin to kill the enemy is popular. On the other hand items such as the traditional bag, little kits to carry their basic necessities and other accessories have also been an important part of their life. In fact these things play an essential role in pursuit of their identity as a tribe and in locating their ethnic vicinity. In this way, jewelleries and accessories are an integral part of the Mizo custom and dress and therefore they will be discussed in the following points.

### **5.1.1 The Trendy Mizo Men:**

The significant feature which distinguished the Lusei from their southern counterpart such as the Lai and Mara was the way they wore their hair. The hair style of the Lai and Mara is the same, which was a knot just above the forehead or on top of the head called *hrum* in the Lai language. The Lusei men wore their hair in the same manner as the women, by coiling a chignon at the back of the neck and this was called *sam zial* for both the gender. Since both Lusei men and women wore their hair bun at the nape of the neck, outsiders found it very difficult to

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<sup>310</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 169

differentiate between the sexes.<sup>311</sup> R.A. Lorrain stated that the simplest way to distinguish them was that the men smoke a pipe with a straight stem similar in style to the English pipe, while the women smoke a pipe having a water vessel underneath through which the smoke must pass.<sup>312</sup>

A similar account has been narrated by an officer who conducted topographical survey in Mizoram, then called Lushai Hills in the wake of a colonial military expedition of 1871-72 in these hills:

*‘the Lushai part his hair in the middle, and braiding it smoothly on each side of the face, binds it in a knot on the nape of the neck, secured by large copper or steel hair-pins. The Pois part their hair across the back of the head, from ear to ear, all above this line being drawn upwards or forwards bound in a high double knot on the forehead, and fastened by a small ivory or bone comb, generally ornamented with some little design in red; but all the hair below this the parting is allowed to hang in a wavy curls over the back and shoulder.’*<sup>313</sup>

How the Lusei recognized the Lai and Mara by the way they wore their hair, according to one scholar eventually led the Paite and Lusei to call those who tie their hair on the top of their foreheads as *Pawi*, another name for Lai.<sup>314</sup> This could be interpreted by saying that in the early pre-colonial and early colonial period certain people were distinguished on the basis of the way they dress their hair.

The chignon, buns and ‘*top-knot*’ as they are fondly called by fashion stylists today, formed a common feature of hair dressing amongst the men in many of the south east and eastern Asian cultures such as the Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese etc. Hair dressing was a very serious element, particularly for men in these cultures; it became a distinctive feature of their traditional dress. In fact, in ancient times the Chinese men could easily be categorised on the basis of how they wore their hair.

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<sup>311</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for 16 January 1894

<sup>312</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years* p. 48; Available from: <http://www.arcliive.org/details/fiveyearsunknoOOIorrialala> (accessed on 9 July 2016).

<sup>313</sup>Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition*, pp. 71-72

<sup>314</sup>Vumson, *Zo History*, p. 48

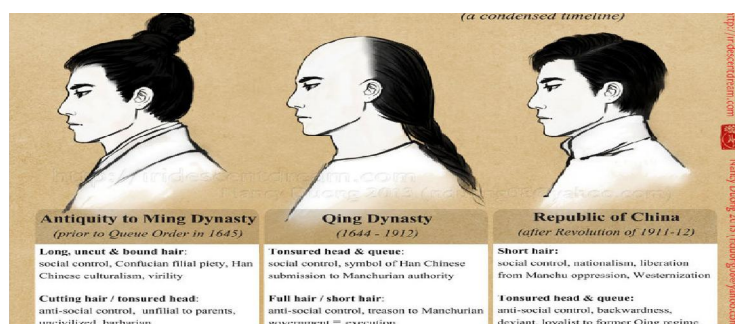


Fig 5.1 Politics of Men's hair in Chinese history

Among the Samurais of Japan, top knot was an important part of the samurai costume. It was not only the samurai warriors but the Japanese men in general wore their hair on top of their head in knots way into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The top knot or men buns as it is fashionably called nowadays has become a integral part of the men's fashion scene in the past few years among celebrities and fashion-forward youths in general in different parts of the globalised world. This goes on to confirm that fashion along with history often reappears in one form or another and in this reflection, fashion and history becomes one of the primary element in understanding a culture.



Fig 5.2 Portrait of a Japanese Samurai

Hence two conclusions can be drawn that the Mizo men have either taken to such hair style in the course of their migration or from where they originated; and since both the Lai and Maramen wore their hair in the same style they seem to have belonged to the same tribe or started off from the same place. To supplement this, the Lusei even clubbed them together by calling them *Lakheyr Poy*,<sup>315</sup> perceiving the Poy or Pawi (Lai) and Lakher (Mara) as one whole tribe. Eventually, since the Lusei came much earlier than these two tribes under British colonial

<sup>315</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 151

rule the Lusei exonymns for them-Pawi and Lakher became formalised in the colonial vocabulary replacing previous usages such as Shendu for Mara.<sup>316</sup>

This hairstyle was so synonymous with the Lai that anyone wearing their hair on top of their head in buns was referred to as Lai and called with the suffix of Pawi which as previously pointed out is the Lusei name for Lai. Woodthorpe also mentioned that in their camp when a Sikh sepoy binded his long hair into a knot on the top of his head, tying one end of the turban into it, the Pois at once hailed him as Poi and a brother.<sup>317</sup> Since then, the Sikh with their hair in buns on top was called '*vaipawi*'. Another incident which refers to the Sikhs as '*vaipawi*' was when Superintendent of Aizawl sent a troop of Sikh polices to Zawngtah village to arrest Lamsuaka. According to James Dokhuma when these turban wearing Sikh policemen entered the village the people called them '*vai-pawi*'.<sup>318</sup>

*Vai* in Mizo meant a foreigner or foreigners, excluding Europeans, and latterly the better known neighbouring tribes as well.<sup>319</sup> The term *vai* is used in similar manner by all the early Lusei, Lai, Mara and other Mizo tribes signifying an outsider dwelling in the plains, be it in Myanmar or in India. At the beginning it was an expression illustrating a neighbour who were better off and had more to offer them and it was used mainly in reference to the Burmese.<sup>320</sup> With the same implication after settling in Mizoram, the Mizo people had often interacted with Indians living in the plains for trade and other purposes. People from the neighbouring states, who were dark skinned and who were clearly not mongoloid, were generally called *Vai* and this is how people from mainland India are still acknowledged today. It is not a moniker or a nickname but what they are known as in Mizo. So when they encountered *vai* with buns on their head they called them *vaipawi*. This kind of identification was still wedged in the minds of the people even till the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Mizo independence movement was carried out by the 'Mizo National Front (MNF)' who went underground. To clarify our point, on January 14, 1967 the MNF attacked a group of Indian soldiers led by Captain Grewal Singh at Fartlang near Champhai. But realising that half the troop was made up of Mizo coolies, the MNF retreated. But in retaliation, Captain Grewal Singh, a turban wearing Sikh, killed 18 men on the spot. Till today

<sup>316</sup> Pachuau & Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, p. 27

<sup>317</sup> Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition*, p. 72

<sup>318</sup> James Dokhuma, *Chhakawm Keipui Lamsuaka (Biography)* (2001), Aizawl, R. Lalrawna, 2003(reprint), p. 114

<sup>319</sup> Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 539

<sup>320</sup> Lehman, *The Structure*, p. 30

he is remembered as *Pawi-suala*.<sup>321</sup> *Pawi* because of the way he wore his hair and *sual* meaning bad, naughty, wicked, sinful, evil, vile, etc, mainly because of his action towards the MNF cadres.

Consequently, the way a man wear his hair was a direct mark of identity in the early Mizo society and it continued to be so in the modern society but the trends and interpretations have drastically changed since the colonial period. This shall be discussed later in another chapter.

### 5.1.2 Women's Crowning Glory:

Mizo women had always employed a shared hairstyle, the general manner of which was to sweep the hair backwards in a smooth way, locking it in a bun at the nape of the neck. This look is common to the specified tribes of Lusei, Lai and Mara. Except on festivals where they brought out the elaborated head gears, the hair style of the Mizo women was quite insignificant. Instead of decorations, they seemed to have given more attention to the hair itself. Plaiting the hair was popular among the Syin and Sokte clans but not so much among the Lusei, Lai and Mara. But what they all were fond of was to comb and oil their hair with pigs' fat, which was the only oil available among the Mizo in the pre-colonial period and into the colonial years serving as as a postmatum for both men and women.<sup>322</sup> The same oil used for cooking was also used on the hair. Oily hair was considered easier to manage as it hold stray hair and keep the buns neat which was considered smart for a woman. They were fond of straight smooth hair. As Lorrain noted, '*curly hair is greatly disliked by the Lushais*.'<sup>323</sup> So as filthy as it may sound, they would rub on the oily pig fat on their head to smoothen their hair. Sometimes they dip flower petals in the pot of the pig fat to make it fragrant.<sup>324</sup> Slickly combed hair, parting in the middle and pulling it back at the nape of the neck in a bun, was the style of the Lusei. There was hardly anyone without long hair except for young children.

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<sup>321</sup>Dr. Lalrinmawii Tochwawng, '*Remembering the Rambuai: Constructing Memories of Terror*', in an unpublished paper presented at UGC sponsored National Seminar on '*Re-writing The History of Self-Autonomous Movement In North East India*' organized by Govt. Hrangbana College in collaboration with Mizo History Association, Aizawl, during 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> March, 2017

<sup>322</sup>Shakespeare, *The Lushei Kuki Clan* (1975), p. 169

<sup>323</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for March 1894

<sup>324</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 19.

Thick long hair was a crowning glory of any Mizo woman. The size of their bun was also given a lot of attention and among the Lusei women with thick hair with big buns were called '*Tuk liani*'<sup>325</sup> meaning a woman with huge hair. After coiling the bun, a few inches of the end of the stresses would be pulled out of the knot which was placed be seen from the side and the smaller end of the pin was also set to be seen even from the front. If the end of the hair shown off of the bun was thick, it was a sign of healthy hair of which the women were quite proud. To ensure that the bun stayed in place, they utilized different types of hair pins.

## **5.2 Hair Accessories, Headgear and Turbans of the Mizo:**

The Mizo have varieties of hair accessories which are mainly hairpins. Most of these hairpins are unisex except for *Hrukpi* and most of them were worn everyday as hair was given a lot of attention in spite of the lack of hygienic consciousness. Women's hair was neatly done in braids on either side of the face and knotted behind.<sup>326</sup> The hair of the man is tidy to the extreme, and gives to him a superior appearance. The hair of a woman is by no means so often greased with pig's fat, and is tied in a loose knot at the nape of the neck, leaving the ends hanging down the back in a very slovenly, unkempt condition, while huge brass hairpin, as a rule keeps the knot in position.<sup>327</sup> They are as follows:

### **a) *Hrukpi*:**

*Hrukpi* is a Lai name for a specific hair pin mainly made from ivory or bones. The Lusei and Mara did not seem to have separate names based on the material used but generally called it *Dawhkilh* and *Sakia* respectively. This particular piece was used by women of all the three clans namely Lusei, Lai and Mara. This hairpin is exclusively for women. In fact it is the only exclusive hairpin of the women as the rest are shared by both men and women. A *Hrukpi* is made mainly from the skewers of bones of big animals such as mithun, deer and if they are lucky the bones of an elephant and its tusk, ivory. It is a flat hairpin of about half an inch in breadth at the

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<sup>325</sup>Boichhingpuii, p. 20; also reiterated by Thanchhumi in an interview with Rosaline Varsangzuali on 30 June 2017 in Aizawl. Thanchhumi was a 90 years old retired Primary School teacher, a war veteran, serving in the Women's Auxilliary. She was also the grand daughter of Suaka, daughter of Thangluaia, the first *Lusei* officer under the colonial government in Mizoram.

<sup>326</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 163

<sup>327</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, pp. 110-111



top end which is the widest part. It is then tapered down from the middle of its length to around three centimetres at the end and it is mostly seven to eight inches in length.



Fig 5.3. *Hrukpi*

Some decorative carvings, circles and lines are also made depending on the whims of the owner. When pushed into hair, the wider end of the pin would be kept at the nape holding the bun together. This was worn whenever they wanted and there was no specific occasion for wearing a *Hrukpi*. Both the Lai and Mara wear this but it was not really a part of the Lusei woman's trinket.

#### ***b) Dawhkih / Sokahro:***

This is another hair pin which has a straight shape with tapered spiky end. It was used by both men and women of all the clans. They are made of brass, wood and bamboo. Wood and bamboo are sometimes lacquered. The bamboo spikes when lacquered and engraved prettily were a favourite gift of young men to their sweethearts.<sup>328</sup> The women used it in the same way as *Hrukpi*. *Dawhkih* is a name given by the Lai and Lusei while the Mara calls this hair pin *Sokohro* referring specifically to the polished bamboo hair pins. The Mara and Lai men ran the hair pin through the comb which was worn at the back of the hair knot to hold it in place.<sup>329</sup> The Lusei men and women who wore their hair alike used *dawhkih* to keep their chignon in place. All their hairpins also served as a tool to scratch the head which was mostly filled with vermin.

*Hrum* or the bun was considered a sign of respect among the men and they would mock each other when the hair was cut. In May 1901, the valiant Lai chief of Lungtian, Dokulha<sup>330</sup> was imprisoned for the second time on charges of killing a white dressed *vai* who came to his village.

<sup>328</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 170. Also see, Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 110.

<sup>329</sup>Parry, *The Lakheres*, p. 33.

<sup>330</sup>Doungel, *Lai Chieftainship*, p. 70.

Fig 5.4 *Sokahro*

Though there was no direct evidence, he was given away by the false statement of his son-in-law who had a grudge against him. He was given a life sentence and sent to the Jail in Andaman. He was then shortly joined by his good friend Hnawncheuva who was also charged with murder. Incidentally, when Hnawncheuva saw Dokulh-a he had a good laugh mocking him because his hair was completely shaven and he was bald. It is said that, to this mockery Dokulha replied to Hnawncheuva that he will not laugh for long because his *hrum* too was not going to last more than that day and true to that, Hnawncheuva's head was also shaven bald the next day. Shaving off one's hair by a superior or an opponent is often a sign of defeat or disrespect. Hence the insolent treatment along with detestation of the colonial must have deeply affected Dokulha that on his release he killed another *vai* and was sent back to jail where he died. He is considered the first martyr of the Lai clan.<sup>331</sup> This practice of cutting off an enemy's hair or skinning the head in war was prevalent among many tribes in the neighbouring hills which were done mainly as a show of contempt as long hair with bun was revered.

**c) *Thimkual* (Lusei) / *Hrukkual* (Dawhkihual) (Lai) / *Hrokei-Sakia* (Mara):**

This brass hairpin was worn by all Mizo men and women of all the tribes. The Lusei call the half rounded hair pin *Thimkual* while the same is known as *Hrokei* for the Mara women and *Sakia* for the Mara men. The Lai call it a *Hrukkual* or *Dawhkihual Kual*. *Kual* means round, referring to the rounded shape of the hair pin. This hair pin is made of a brass pipe with a hollow of about 6 centimetres in diameter. It is round on one end while the other two ends of the pin are pointed for easier glide into the hair. Shakespeare rightly mentioned that the head of the two-pronged brass pin was shaped like the alphabet G with the length of about three to eight or nine inches.<sup>332</sup> Carey and Tuck writes that the whole thing is about 5 to 6 inches in length weighing 2 to 5 ounces or 14 to 15 grams approximately. However, the claim of Carey and Tuck that the

<sup>331</sup>K. Hrekunga, "Lai Lal Hmingthang Dokulha" in H. Lalruatkima (ed.), *Mifirte Sulhnu*, Lawngtlai, Art & Culture Department, Lai Autonomous District Council, 2008, p. 132

<sup>332</sup>Shakespeare, *The Lushei*, p. 12

two-pronged brass skewer of the Haka women that they saw weighed around 2 to 5 pounds<sup>333</sup> may seem a bit exaggerated as 5 pounds equals more than 2 kilograms. But there are also bigger and smaller versions of it depending on which the weight may vary. Incidentally there are two types of *Thimkual*, the longer and the shorter version. The longer type is called *Thimkual Ke Sei* and the shorter ones *Thimkual Ke Tawi*. *Ke* in Lusei means leg, *sei* means long and *tawi* means short. The long legged *Thimkual Ke sei* was used by men while the women mainly used the shorter *Thimkual Ke Tawi*.<sup>334</sup>



Fig 5.5 *Thimkual* (19<sup>th</sup> century)

The main purpose of this pin was to tighten and to hold their buns down and in place for the women. They wanted to maintain a neat bun at the nape of the neck and unwound. This was the most common yet valued hair accessory. Men showed politeness whenever they wrestle with each other by taking off their *Hrukkual* to avoid hurting each other with the pointy end. They would keep it with someone they trust as it could be quite harmful as a weapon. This is a hairpin made of brass probably obtained from Myanmar. They also get iron and brass from the neighbouring territories of Bengal. When a boy wants to marry a girl, he gives his *Thimkual* to the girl as security. Eligible girls who attract many suitors used to receive several *Thimkual*.

**d) *Samkhuilh* (Lusei) / *Sathichapawpa* (Mara) / *Samthih* (Lai):**

*Samkhuilh* means comb. It was made out of bamboo or wood about three inches long in which the teeth of stripe of bamboo about two inches long are inserted close together to form the comb. There were two main uses of combs, one to comb their hair in general as both men and women kept their hair long. The tiny comb was also used to keep the hair and buns intact.<sup>335</sup> After smoothing their long hair with it they would pull their hair towards the front and make a bun right on top of the forehead or at the nape of the neck. They would then tuck the small comb into the bun and push it inside to cover it with the rounded mould of the bun. When they are

<sup>333</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 170

<sup>334</sup>Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture*, p. 73

<sup>335</sup>N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 43

satisfied with their buns, only then they would wear the turban. The business of hair was taken quite seriously by the men folks too.

The comb was smaller than normal comb of today and the back of the wooden combs were generally crescent shaped and often lacquered red and inlaid. Since the shape of the comb resembles the crescent moon that the Lai and also Lusei call the curvy line of a crescent moon itself *Samthih thuangtle*.<sup>336</sup>

There were also combs made out of ivory, which was very rare and was highly valued and treasured. Only women from rich families, mainly royalties could afford to own such combs. Combs besides being used for combing hair, especially the decorated ones were also worn casually as hair accessory. *Sathichapawpa* was a term used by the Mara men and women particularly referring to the glossy engraved comb with rounded end while a plain comb made from bamboo with a straight flat edge is called *Sathichanongpa*.<sup>337</sup>

Comb was something very exclusive and personal. The Mara men hardly share these hair accessories for fear of getting infected. They fear that if a man subjected with a headache or with *ahmaw* which was a vampire's soul, uses their comb, they would be infected with the other man's disease.<sup>338</sup> It was not just the Mara but other Mizo tribes in general barely shared their comb with others. They also believed that sharing a comb would pass on diseases. Though there seem to be no religious connection to this restriction, they appear to have followed certain common tradition. On the other hand this could be explained by the fact that the traditional religiosity of the Mizo was itself centred on fear; fear of diseases, fear of death, fear of evil spirit called '*huai*' by the Lusei, etc. Therefore, restriction of sharing the comb could be considered a religious act based on such beliefs.

Among some tribes, entitlement to using a senior's comb and its inheritance was a very serious issue. A respected member of a family or clan could choose who would share or inherit his comb that was a sign of his trust or closeness to that person and it did not necessarily have to be his direct descendant. The politics of a comb in the pre colonial Mizo society was pretty interesting as Shakespear quoted his Lusei informant who suggested that a higher clan man will

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<sup>336</sup>Bawitlung, interview, 2016

<sup>337</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 43

<sup>338</sup>Parry, p. 34

be contaminated if he uses a lower mans comb.<sup>339</sup> This may suggest that social division on the basis of hierarchy was prevalent in the pre-colonial Mizo society.

### 5.2.1 Headgear:

The Mizo women were also endowed with beautiful headgears which were like formal headpieces. They are classified as formal because they were worn only on special occasions such as festivals, *Khuangchawi* and other important occasion such as weddings.

#### a) *Lemlu*:

This is a head piece made from two or three lines of small red beads called *khuangtan* and beads of white colours made from animal bones and cowries which are strung together. This string of beads is then used as a band on the head. On this band of string, additional lines of strings are hung at the back, front and on both sides of the head. *Lemlu* was worn by the wife of the brave hunter on the occasion of *Sakeilufim* or *Sakei Aih* and on the day of *Khuangchawi* by *Khuangchawinu*, the wife of *Khuangchawipa*. This was a tradition of the Lai and sometimes even adopted by the Lusei.<sup>340</sup>

#### b) *Lu Khimtung* / *Lakhang*:

This is the most desired head dress of the Lai and Mara. While the Lai call it *Lu Khimtung*, it is called *Lakhang* by the Mara. This is made of brass and beads. Generally four to eight rectangular shaped flat pieces of brass about two to 3 millimetre in thickness and an inch wide of about eight to 10 inches long is threaded alternately with beads. Two of this brass is kept on each side of the headdress i.e the front, the back and on both sides of the temple. Tiny holes are made at regular intervals in the thickness of the brass plate into which strings are inserted to hold the strings of beads, mainly *sisai* for the Mara.<sup>341</sup> The brass plate is kept in an upright position and held in place by the beads that are strung in the thread which goes through the brass plate that is sandwiched between rows of beads. Once the strings fully covered the frames which are about one foot and two inches long, tail feathers of parrot and feathers of birds like *Vahui* and *Vaiva* are attached at the top of the head gear. The lower end of this head piece is wider in

<sup>339</sup>Shakespear, *The Lushei*, p. 12

<sup>340</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, pp. 504-505; Hrangthlai, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 12 August 2016 at Lawngtlai; Siangchhin Chinzah interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 17 May 2017 in Aizawl

<sup>341</sup>Kio, p. 505; Hrangthlai interview, 2016; Renhchin Chinzah, interview, 2017

diameter to fit the head of the wearer and it is narrower at the top end. The reduced end at the top decorated with feathers of parrot on quills was then attached to the head piece using beeswax called *khuaiseng* to hold them in place.

This headgear can be rather heavy due to the brass plates and it is highly valued. It is made and decorated much more densely than the Lusei *Vakiria*. When not in use, the feathers attached on the top would be taken off and kept safely due to the fear of losing them and also because as remarked by Renhchin, they could be quite smelly.<sup>342</sup> When kept upright, it is much taller than the *Vakiria* and because the small brass frames are held together by the string of beads in between, it can be folded when not in use. Significantly for the Mara when the owner of a *Lakhang* gets married, she wears it on her wedding day and takes it with her to her husband as part of her property. This kind of headgear could not be afforded by the commoners and it was owned only by the royal families and the elite. This was worn mainly by the wife of a chief on certain special occasions.



Fig5.6 Lu khimtung/ Lakhang (19<sup>th</sup> Century)

### c) *Vakiria*:

This valued headgear originally known as *Chawilukhum* was worn by the Lusei women and women of other clans such as Hmar, Paite etc. on festive occasion. On the occasion of *Khuangchawi* feast, *Thangchhuahpa* and his wife would be lifted on an open palanquin made of bamboo and taken to the venue of *Khuangchawi* celebration. *Chawi* means to lift and *lukhum* means a hat or headdress. So before she is lifted up, she would put on a headdress especially made for her and aptly called *Chawilukhum*.<sup>343</sup> It was made with a rounded weave of the cane finely threaded with coloured yarn, which forms the base of the headdress. In between the

<sup>342</sup>Renhchin Chinzah, interview by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 11 August 2016 at Lawngtlai

<sup>343</sup>C. Lalaudinga, 'Vakiria Nge Chawilukhum?' *Meichher*, Department of School Education, Government of Mizoram, December, 2017, p. 30

weaves thin bamboo strips which would easily sway around would be placed with tassels on top. Later, *sakuh*, a porcupines quill is used in lieu of the strips, fixed vertically and tassels made with colourful threads are attached at the top end. Later, parrot tail feathers were also attached to the band and sometimes both were alternated. Both *sakuh* and the feathers flexes as the wearer moves or when the wind blows them. The parrot tails retain their original colour and look quite beautiful. At the back of the headband, a bamboo stick bedecked with white beads is attached horizontally in which strings are made to hang, threaded with beads and ended with small shiny green wings of beetles. A *Vakiria* acquired in 1882 by the ethnographic collector Emil Riebeck from a Mizo chief has been narrated in the following manner:

*'The central part of the headdress is made of strips of bamboo interwoven with bits of red and yellow orchids and bands of tin. Left and right two extensions are fastened to the back of the headdress by means of tufts. These extensions consist of small bamboo rods with multi-coloured appendages. Both the appendages and the tufts are made of black cotton threads with pearls and bunches of pigeon feathers as tassels. Porcupine quills are stuck into the top of the central piece to which are attached tail feathers of parrots with little tufts of pigeon feathers on top. The feathers have their natural colour.'*<sup>344</sup>

This more or less corroborates the description of Parry and others except for the band of tin which must have been acquired from outside. It has to be understood that variations occurs from place to place in making accessories and ornamentations depending on the raw materials available at the time or on the artistic streak of the maker. With the increasing use of parrot tail feathers, the name *Chawilukhum* became frequently alternated with *Vakiria*, named after the parrot feathers. And today, the name *Chawilukhum* is fully taken over by the *Vakiria*.

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<sup>344</sup> Pachuau & Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, p. 283





Fig 5.7 Riebach's Illustration of *Vakiria*



Fig 5.8 The remains of *Vakiria* bought and donated by F.J Raper at BCM Archive, Serkawn.

It is noteworthy that when it comes to traditional items of the Lai and Mara, which were valued and with which they exclusively identify their culture, variations hardly occurred. But the Lusei seemed more flexible and adaptive. *Thangchhuahnu* wear such headgear with *Puanlaisen* and *Kawrchei*. Today, this statutory head piece, worn only by deserving person in early Mizo society came to be worn with *Kawrchei* and *Puanchei* on cultural festivals and special occasions, specifically while dancing the *Cheraw* and by anyone who affords to own one. This way, *Vakiria* continues to evolve into an indispensable accessory in the Mizo woman traditional costume yet evading its status-defining element of the pre-colonial era.

### 5.2.2 Turban and Men's headdress:

Overall, wearing turban was very popular among men all over Mizoram. Almost all clans wore turbans and *Vakulchang*, *Bhimaraj*<sup>345</sup> or tail-feathers of "*beemraj*"<sup>346</sup> were attached to their head cloth by the chiefs. The men, to signify their social status also wore other types of feathers. This is recurring item in a number of ethnographic records of Europeans such as Woodthorpe, Parry, Lewin, Lorrain etc. Depending on the length of the cloth or the way it was worn also added to the heights of the wearer. The turban was one of the significant features of men's accessories.

<sup>345</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, October 1894

<sup>346</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 15.





Fig 5.9 Lai man with white turban



Fig 5.10 Lusei Chiefs in white turban

While all the clans commonly wore white turbans as daily wear, the Mara had a distinct feature in head-dressing which was to bind a scarlet cloth, on their turbans when they go to war. This was symbolic of a story of a bloody faced owl bitten by a squirrel, which then devoured the squirrel and his young ones in anger. The scarlet cloth represented the bloody frightful owl, hoping that like the owl, they may take heads.<sup>347</sup> The Lusei turban was generally a white cotton cloth made long enough to tie around the head several times. Sometimes, when they work under the sun, if they wear loincloth, they would take off the *puan* they are using to cover their body to cover their head as a protection from the heat.

**a) *Lupawng* (Lai) / *Khutho* (Mara):**

This turban for men was used by the Lai and Mara who called it *Lupawng* and *Khutho* respectively. After tying their buns with smaller piece of cloth, they wear this turban on special occasions such as on war path or journey, in festivals and while performing sacrifices and on official meetings. *Lupawng* is a long piece of cloth with an inch and a half of black thread vertically woven in the middle. It is tucked into the back of the bun and made to go around the head. As it goes around, it is pushed into the bun with a small comb to keep it in place and the end of the strip would be tucked into the bun. As it was neatly done, no hair could be seen as the *Lupawng* covers it all and the black vertical line shows on the front somewhat giving it a respectful look as compared to the plain white turban. Another type that the royal and richer families used was a bit yellowish in colour. *Lupawng* was the exclusive headdress of the chief and celebrated men of the Lai society. There are a number of instances when social status was

<sup>347</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 163

displayed through dress and accessories. This confirms that there was indeed a social hierarchy apparently in the pre colonial Mizo society based more on heroic deeds rather than wealth.



Fig 5.11 Mara chief, Likebo wearing *Khutho* Turban

The Mara called their turban *Khutho*. It is about twelve feet long and a foot wide. A black stripe of an inch wide is woven about a foot and half from each end of *Khutho* which was the formal *Khutho* and were worn by the elite. This seems to be a progress from the informal piece or the old *Khutho* which has been replaced by the new one. Because of its exclusivity, *Khutho* was mostly worn by the older men and could be hardly worn by young men as respect was given mostly based on deed and it was difficult to achieve such stature at a young age. The method of wearing a *Khutho* is quite elaborated as narrated by Parry:

*'The hair is worn in a knot on top of the head just over the forehead. The Khuthang is first wound around this top-knot. It is held in both hands; the end held in the right hand is put around the top-knot and then twisted around the back of the head from right to left. After this it is twisted round the top-knot again once or twice or as many times as required, and the end is adjusted at the same spot on the top-knot as that from which the Khuthang started, but the Khuthang must be so tight that the black stripe 1 ½ feet from the end of the cloth is in an exact line with the wearer's nose.... The Mara men wore their hair in a knot on the top of the head just over the forehead which round the Khutho is first wound, followed by twisting round the back of the head from right to left, round the top knot again once or twice or as many times as are required. Finally, the end is adjusted at the same spot on the top-knot as that*

*from which the Khutho started. The Khutho must be so tied that the black stripe from the end of the Khutho is in an exact line with the wearer's nose.*<sup>348</sup>

The younger men wore a plain white *Khutho* in the same manner. According to Lewin their turbans were wound into lofty horn-like projection over the forehead. When Lewin inquired about the origin of the style, he was informed of a story of the horned owl and a squirrel whose young had been devoured by the horned owl.<sup>349</sup> This was accepted as an instruction from God and they started wearing their hair high in their forehead with a turban like the horns of the owl. When they go to war they bind scarlet cloth on their turbans, so like the owl, they may take heads.<sup>350</sup> This shows that wearing a turban, especially for the Mara men was not just an accessory or for protection but it was a symbol of courage, bravery and respect.

***b) Lu Domh (Lai) / Diar (Lusei) / Khutho (Mara):***

This is a head band worn by the men most of the time. It is a turban of white colour worn by the common people and the slaves or servants of *Khuangchawipa* on social occasions. Basically this was an everyday wear. This could also mean what Carey and Tuck remarked as a common rag bound round the head. This is also called *Tomlangh* by the Lai which was a small piece of cloth always worn to tighten their hair buns. It could be worn alone with just a *Dawhkih*. The Mara distinguished their headdress between formal and informal *Khutho*. Parry had also written about this saying, "The Mara men always wear *pugrees* called *Khuthang*."<sup>351</sup> At home, at work or on ordinary occasions they merely wear a piece of rag in place of their formal *Khutho*.

Besides the smaller rag serving as a hair band the Lai and Mara also wore a lengthier white turban, which was wrapped around their buns and then bound it around the whole head. The Lusei literally used it as a head wrap and call it *Diar*. Hence the length of the turban and how it was worn was different for the Lusei and their southern counterparts. The Lusei head wrap was a small piece of cloth about 8 to 10 inches in width and 3 to 4 feet in length which was wrapped around the head covering a little bit of the ear and leaving the top bare. The end of the cloth is then tucked in a proper way right at the left ear pulling a little of the cloth out upon the

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<sup>348</sup> Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 33

<sup>349</sup> Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 163

<sup>350</sup> Lewin, p. 163.

<sup>351</sup> Parry, *The Lakhers* (1932), p. 32.

rounded band like a half bow, tightening the cloth.<sup>352</sup> If done by an amateur, it comes off easily. They also wore it in the *pugri* style as well, mostly in informal set up. Turban was popular because it helped them against the sun and it also served as a kerchief while working. Generally if a Lusei was wearing two pieces of cloth and should he find the sun warm, he will wear one as *pugri*.<sup>353</sup>

Even the women wrap their heads while working in the cultivations and older women were found wearing it most of the time. However the turban that women wore was not like that of the men. It could be any available piece of cloth, which was worn when out in the field on the head for protection against the sun. Younger women did not cover their head generally. Other than this, women did not wear turban except for older ones, who wore them regularly. It was worn by wrapping the head over the forehead backwards and overlapping both ends at the back of the head and holding it tightly to push one end into the other tightened fold. Sometimes, on the field they would also wrap their head the way a towel is wrapped after one washes hair. This trend is still prevalent among older women, especially in villages.

### c) *Diartial*:

This is a coveted head wrap of the Lusei men. It was worn only by special persons like the Chief or *Thangchhuahpa*, who would attach *Vakulchang*, a thick plume tail feather of a bird called *Vakul* or *bhimraj*, (*greater racket-tailed drongo*) to their headband called *Diartial*, to show their social status. *Diartial* was not like the ordinary plain head cloth but made in the same design of *Thangchhuahpuan*. It was a headband of the same size with the normal *Diar* but chequered with red, yellow and black. *Diar* simply means headband and *tial* means chequered. The *Diartial* was reserved for the chief, *Thangchhuahpa* and the braves and the heroes. Today *Diartial* totally replaced the plain white ones on festivals and cultural events. Though a *Diar* is not popular anymore on a day o day basis, for the Mizo men in the pre-colonial period, they were what completed his attire. Whether it was the chequered or plain, the turbans of the Lusei men were often embellished with plumes and feathers.

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<sup>352</sup> Malsawmkima, Secretary, Cultural Sub-committee, Central YMA, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 15 August 2015 at Aizawl

<sup>353</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki*, p. 9



Fig 5.12 *Diar Tial* of Chief Vanpuilala Sailo

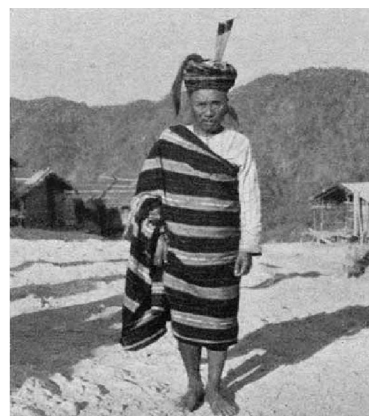


Fig 5.13 Mizo Chief wearing *Diar Tial* with *Vakulchang*

#### d) *Chhawndawl*:

This is a special Lusei headdress reserved for men who have killed in war. It was a thick tassel of hair made from the sacrificial goat's tail called *Kelsam*. *Chhawn* is a Lusei word for things or decorative pieces worn on the head. But since it has always been synonymous with good deeds and omen it is an ornament meant to bring good fortune.<sup>354</sup> After boiling it with the bark of a tree called *Saphit* the tassel of goat's tails would be rendered red. This red bunch of hair would then be fixed on a long flexible stick made of lac and brass called *Ngenchi*. It was valuable because, not everyone could give a goat for sacrifice often.

This plume of hair was highly significant as it was a sign of bravery, respect as well as status in the community. It was suppose to be worn specifically by the brave warriors only during *Muallam* when their heroics were celebrated. There was even a special dress code for such occasions and day after the celebrations were over, a warrior was not allowed to wear *Chhawndawl* anymore.

#### e) *Lenchhawn*:

This is also a tassel of the same made but less in thickness than *Chhawndawl* and worn by men. This could be worn by the brave celebrated warrior from the day after the *Muallam* event for the next seven days only. A man wearing a *Lenchhawn* was highly honoured and respected to the point that no one dared to cross him. The deserved roamed around wearing the plume wherever they go for seven days during which he was looked up to as unbeatable. *Len* in

<sup>354</sup>Kyle Jackson, *Mizos, Missionaries, and Medicine: Religious and Medical Contact in Lushai Hills*, Master of Arts Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2009, p. vi.

Lusei means to roam; hence *Lenchhawn* is an apt name for this head accessory while roaming. If he happened to encounter any brawler or someone who stood against him, the warrior would proudly tell him to get away before the bunch of bobble on his head hit him.<sup>355</sup>

**f) *Thihchhawn*:**

It is the same as *Lenchhawn* but less in thickness. However it was important because it was to be worn only when a male person die. A dead body is made to wear this before he is buried. So, *Thihchhawn* basically means a head accessory for the dead male body.

**g) *Zawngchalchhawn*:**

This again is made from the plume of a goat's tail worn on the hair or attached to their turban. A long piece of this hair was dyed in red and black mixed with the natural white colour of the hair and then braided. It was pretty long so much so that it could be the size of a man's fist when rolled into a ball. This is the thickest of all the *chhawn* and worn only by the rich amongst and the bravest of brave in the village. This was mainly because one needed to be rich as it took more than one goat to get a thick ball of goat hair.

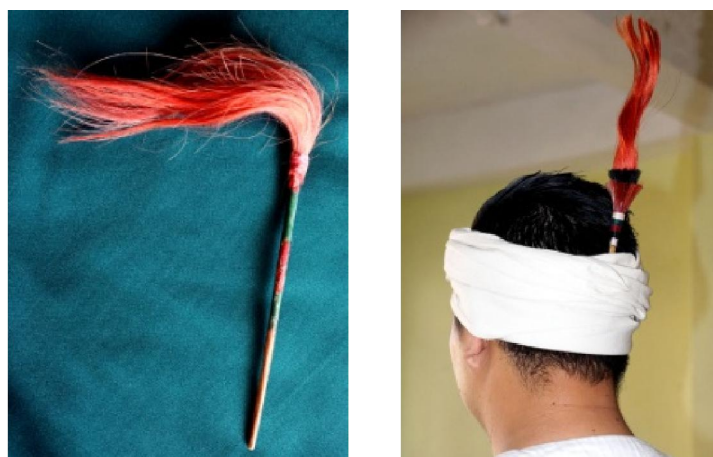


Fig 5.14 *Chhawn*

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<sup>355</sup> *Mizo Incheina*, p. 3

### ***h) Arke ziak:***

It is a tassel or plume of red, black and white yarn made in honour of the prowess of men in war worn by women, especially for the *Muallam* event.



Fig 5.15 Arkeziak

In the *Muallam* event, there was a special and specific dress code to be followed in the way that the brave men wore their *puan* while dancing. It was known as *kawngtawngghak* (Lusei) and *arpuinawihlawh* (Lusei) or *Hnoisawt* (Lai).<sup>356</sup> The men come out wearing their best cloth for this occasion and this particular way of wearing a *puan*, especially for war was a trend for all Mizo men and their kins even in the Northern and Southern Chin Hills.

### ***i) Tuirual:***

It is a woman's ornament consisted of cotton yarn rolled into small balls as a spinning top in the shape of a spindle. The upper part of the *tuirual* is red and the lower part is white. Later, when they could get woollen threads after the colonial period, it was used to make *tuirual*, instead of the cotton strands. Three *tuirual* were attached to one thin slice of bamboo which was flexible enough to bent and sway with movement. This way each bamboo slice carried three *tuiruals* and they would be attached to the head band called *Chawilukhum*.<sup>357</sup> *Chawilukhum* was an intricately knitted headband made with fine strips of cane called *sairil* which formed the base of different decorative strips including *tuirual*, feather of a parrot, porcupine's quill and *vakiria*. *Tuirual* attached on *chawilukhum* completes the head dress of women in *Muallam*. Sometimes, a piece or two of *tuirual* would be held in their hands so that it would move with the rhythm of their dance

<sup>356</sup>See chapter 3, 3.3.5 fig 3.11

<sup>357</sup>Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, p. 57



**j) Dartawnsuk:**

This is a decorative piece for the white turban worn by men whenever they wanted. It is made of a red and white tassels of cotton fixed at one end of a thin brass stick which could move flexibly with the wearer's movement.



Fig 5.16 Tuirual



Fig 5.17 Dartawnsuk

### 5.3 Necklaces:

Like any other culture, the Mizos had their own coveted pieces of jewellery. Amongst them were the necklaces which were highly valued. Though they did not have much varieties, what they had were mostly made from carnelians beads, agate, shells and reddish-brown amber beads. Later in the colonial period Indian copper and silver coins, buttons, strings of glass, brass and metals beads were also made into necklaces. Besides the mentioned material, they also wore various kinds of beads necklaces and later, buttons were also worn as necklaces.<sup>358</sup> The number of beads or the thickness of the necklace depended upon her ability to purchase. But every female child and woman throughout the Hills wears a necklace even if it was a single bead thread on string. Small female child mainly wear a single bead strung on a thread as necklace. But those who have it also flaunt them as sometimes the weight which a woman hangs around her neck exceeds five pounds, for in addition to the ordinary necklaces, they would wear one or more large white polished shells weighing from half a pound upward.<sup>359</sup>

<sup>358</sup>Thankumi, interviewed, 3 August 2013; C. Thantluanga, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 16 May 2014 at Aizawl; R.L Thianga interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 10 October 2012 in Aizawl. Also see Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki*, p. 13

<sup>359</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 173



### 5.3.1 *Thi hna*:

*Thi Hna* was one of the most desired necklaces of the Mizo.<sup>360</sup> It is made of reddish-brown amber beads. It comprises of long, cylindrical reddish-brown amber beads which are sometimes two to three inches long and over an inch in diameter. Sometimes the bigger ones are separated by smaller ones. These types of amber is known as burmite, a type of fossilised amber that originates in Burma's Kachin State, and which was known to the Chinese as early as the Han period (206 BC-220 AD).<sup>361</sup> The Mizo are believed to have worn this from a very long time and that they obtained it while they were in Burma.<sup>362</sup> The Mizo people who possessed a *Thi Hna* got it through inheritance and also from traders who brought it from china through Burma to Mizoram.<sup>363</sup>



Fig 5.18 *Thi Hna*

This type of necklace was owned and worn only by the richer section of Mizo society as it could not be afforded by the commoners. Some of them they would own only a single bead. Amongst fossilised amber this type of bead was not the finest but it was what was afforded by the Mizo people. This thus shows that, as compared to their neighbouring areas they were not economically and materially advanced when it comes to jewelleries and other possessions. The Mizo prized Burmese amber for its reddish-brown mottled colour as the darker colour was supposedly fossilised longer and beautifully clear hence more precious.<sup>364</sup> It was considered to be a part of an heirloom and those with histories attached are valued more. It was worn by both the male and female. Since it was hard to possess a *Thi Hna*, even a single bead was worthy. Today, though there are imitation pieces available in the market at cheaper rates, the original *Thi*

<sup>360</sup>*Mizo Incheina*, p. 6

<sup>361</sup><http://www.michaelbackmanltd.com/> (accessed 21 April 2017).

<sup>362</sup>Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki*, pp. 11-13; Also see Lianhmingthanga, *Material culture*, p. 74

<sup>363</sup>B. Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 2014, pp. 86-87.

<sup>364</sup>Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki*, p. 13

*Hna* will burn a big hole in a pocket because of its gemmological value. Today, it is said that traders often visit people with possession of *Thi Hna* to buy it off of them.

### 5.3.2 *Pumtek*:

This was a man's necklace earlier but women could wear it as well. *Pumtek* was another highly valued necklace of black / brown and white beads worn by the Mizo. *Pumtek* was an important part of the bride price, especially among the Lai and Mara in the Haka region and this tradition was carried on when they came to Mizoram. They are bought and brought from Burma.<sup>365</sup> These necklaces were readily exchangeable for any other valuable such as cattle, guns and slaves.<sup>366</sup> Some with history which are considered heirloom can even fetch a whole village. Hence they never wanted to part with such pieces. Was it due to the value attached or superstition is not known, but it has become a tradition and a premonition to part with an heirloom. It is customary for Chiefs owning very special beads (or property) of good quality to hold a feast, and, in front of the assembled company, to forbid his heirs to part with certain beads and gongs and order that they must be kept in the *hmunpi*; the result is that no Chins will dispose or part with these heirlooms if he did so, ill-luck would befall and he would die and, further, his wife become barren.<sup>367</sup>

The Lai also differentiate them on the basis of the natural design in the bead and label them. The most precious or original *Pumtek* are called *Sepui man hen* meaning a single globule or an assortment worth a Mithun. Then there is a *tialhleikai*, with more intricate design, *Bawmcuang*, refers to the boxy shape as *bawm* means a box. *Tial kawi*, is the ones with the zigzag pattern as *tial* means to color or make design and *kawi* means not straight or with crooked lines. *Menthetlep* is another design and *vamit* is the ones with a bird eye drawn. This way the Lai categorized the beads based on their shape and insignia. The old *Pumtek* beads are very valuable and expensive while the recently imported replicas from Myanmar and these days, made in India are of poorer quality and are not expensive.

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<sup>365</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 42.

<sup>366</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 173

<sup>367</sup>W.R. Head, *Handbook on the Haka Chin Customs*, Rangoon, The Superintendent, Government Printing, 1917, p. 48

Fig 5.19 *Pumtek*

The word *Pumtek* maybe translated as 'buried thunderbolts'. It was also called *Mahooya* beads.<sup>368</sup> As mentioned they have decorative symbols composed of circles, ovals, squares, waves or zigzags, stripes, lines, diamonds, dots, and various other symbolic patterns. Colors mainly range from brown to black, with the pattern usually in ivory white. This type of bead is one of the more remarkable beads in the Myanmar, India and Bangladesh border areas given the scarcity and the longevity of their heirloom tradition. They are made from the fossilised or opalized wood of a certain type of palm (*borasus flabellifer*) and are decorated with white geometric designs against a purposefully darkened base. Instead of opalized palm wood many *Pumtek* beads are also made of other forms of petrified wood-often in the form chalcedony. This opalized material is indigenous to Burma.<sup>369</sup> This is the type that is commonly available today among the Mizo tribes. Among the Mizos the long barrel white etched beads are quite popular.

This is also similar to the *Dzi* beads that became popular in Tibet as they were also used as prayer beads by the early Buddhist.<sup>370</sup> The religious connotation attached to the beads for Buddhists is mainly based on the eye design that appears in the stone. Though the *Dzi* beads are attributed with talismanic or protective properties, there is no mention of this in relation to this particular necklace among the Mizo. However, an interesting fact is that according to Oxford and Merriam Webster dictionaries the old English word '*gebed*' means prayer which has a Germanic origin in '*gebet*.' In the medieval ages, the English word *bede* meant "a prayer." People then, as now, often kept track of the number and order of a series of prayers with the help of a string of

<sup>368</sup>W. R. Head, *Handbook*, p. 48.

<sup>369</sup>Garuda, 'Brief Introduction to Pumtek Beads of Burma', [pumtek.blogspot.in](http://pumtek.blogspot.in/2009/02/excerpt-from-hand-book-on-haka-chin.html), 20 February 2009  
<https://pumtek.blogspot.in/2009/02/excerpt-from-hand-book-on-haka-chin.html> (accessed 9 September 2017).

<sup>370</sup>Gunnar Myhlman, *Suleimani- Babagoria Agate Beads*, [Ancientbead.com](http://www.ancientbead.com),  
[http://www.ancientbead.com/suleimani\\_agate\\_beads.html](http://www.ancientbead.com/suleimani_agate_beads.html) (accessed 7 September 2017).

little balls. Because each of these balls stands for a prayer, the word *bede* came to be used for the balls themselves.<sup>371</sup>

The beads were made in Waddi, a walled town of the Pyu, the Indianized founders of the first state in what became Burma (Myanmar) which lasted from the fifth to the thirteenth century AD.<sup>372</sup> The main buyers at the time of the beads appear to have been the Chin people and it became an important part of complex Chin inheritance systems. Later, as they moved to Mizoram the Mizo people continued wearing *Pumtek* beads which became an integral part of the Mizo culture.

### 5.3.3 *Thi fen* (Lusei) / *Naba* / *Theisa* (Mara):

This is another Lusei necklace made from carnelian also spelled cornelian. Like the previous ones, it was also a man's necklace also shared by women. The colour is red as opposed to the brown ones of *Pumtek*. This is another exceedingly cherished necklace. They are red in colour and about forty to eighty beads go to make up this necklace and only one string was worn at a time and sometimes mixed with blue beads. They were mainly bought from Cox Bazaar, Chittagong and Assam.



Fig 5.20 *Thi fen* (19<sup>th</sup> century)

Gemstones have been used in beading for centuries. Most gemstone beads have attributes that are traditionally associated with a particular culture with various effects on the body and in one's environment. Among these gemstone cornelian is one of the most popular stone with a customizing value. It is believed that the vibrant orange, carnelian beads radiate energy. Carnelian is associated with motivation and is used to stimulate career growth. Believed to

<sup>371</sup><https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bead> (accessed 11 September 2017).

<sup>372</sup><http://www.michaelbackmanltd.com/> (accessed 21 April 2017).

protect against fear, Carnelian was also employed to ward off melancholy, envy and rage. It was also used in charms for love and seduction.<sup>373</sup>

This is one of the earliest stone used for ornamentation. There is no evidence that the Mizo ancestors knew about these spiritual undertones of the gem but they did attach exceeding value to it. The use of carnelian bead stone are be traced back to the Neolithic flint remnants of the Sahara, in the Indus Valley civilization and it also forms an integral part of the decoration of the Taj Mahal.<sup>374</sup> So, as the Mizo move from one place to another in their search for a permanent settlement, they borrowed cultures and customs of others and these invented traditions including the use of stone became a vital part of the Mizo traditional trousseau.

A conch shell is sometimes attached to this necklace adding to its value. They are called *kihlong* by the Mara. When they wear a carnelian necklace, the incised conch is fastened and let to hang at the back of the neck. Conch shells which were also brought from the sea shores of Arakan were rare, so greatly prized.<sup>375</sup> The Mara and Lai would engrave them with circles and dots making it a part of their traditional jewellery.

#### 5.3.4 *Thi Val*:

This necklace is made from agate and is extremely valued. Like the other necklaces of value, both men and women also wore this. It formed part of a bride price. Twenty to thirty beads of *Thi Val* were adequate to form a wearable necklace and strung together on a single string. One wearable length of *Thi Val* was called *hruikhat* and this was worthy enough to buy a Mithun or other equivalent valuables.<sup>376</sup> This necklace formed a part of a woman's prized possession. Single beads or just two or three were also corded in thread and worn by women and children.

*Thi* meaning necklace, *val* refers to a stain or a mark indicating the natural motif of the gem. To clear the confusion between the similar colour of carnelian and agate and the different name given to them it is necessary to provide a gemological explanation. There is no chemical difference between carnelian and agate as both formed in the same way. But while carnelian has

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<sup>373</sup> 'Gemstone Beads: Meaning and Attributes', <https://crystal-cure.com/article-beads-attributes.html> (accessed 9 September 2017).

<sup>374</sup> [http://ancientbead.com/old\\_carnelian\\_beads.html](http://ancientbead.com/old_carnelian_beads.html) (accessed 6 September 2017).

<sup>375</sup> Parry, *The Lakhers*, p.45

<sup>376</sup> *Mizo Incheina*, p. 6.

complete even coloring, agate has stripes. Their only difference is in appearance. If a piece of orange agate is cut into even color it can be quite acceptably be called carnelian. A lot of carnelian today is pale agate material that is soaked in a solution containing iron compounds and then heated to oxidize the iron to the familiar orange of natural carnelian.<sup>377</sup>



Fig 5.21 *Thi Val*



5.22 Agate stone

Agate is a banded form of finely-grained, microcrystalline quartz. The lovely color patterns and banding make this translucent gemstone very unique. Agates can have many distinctive styles and patterns, but each agate is unique in its own habit, with no two agates being the same.<sup>378</sup> Hence to mark these apparent distinctions, the Mizo has also given different names to necklaces made from carnelian and agate though they look very similar to untrained eyes.

### 5.3.5 *Thihnun (Lai) / Tangka thi (Lusei) / Taka Ri (Mara):*

This necklace is a colonial innovation worn by the three Mizo clans. *Thihnun* is an assortment of different coins available during the colonial period. Coins showing the images of British monarch such as George VI and Queen Victoria of 1891 were the ones most prized by them but among them the one with the face of George VI was valued the most.<sup>379</sup> George VI ascended the throne in December 1936 following the abdication of his brother Edward VIII. On the Imperial coinages of British India, it had become customary to make changes in the design of some denominations at the beginning of a new reign. In 1937, A.P. Spencer, the engraver of His Majesty's Mint, Calcutta from 1938-1947 re-designed the coinages of King George VI and commenced work upon a modified reverse designs for the entire series and as a guide for the silver denominations he used as his model the original design. This was the pattern rupee of 1910, the reverse of which was engraved by F. K. Wezel from a design and model prepared by

<sup>377</sup> [https://ca.answers.yahoo.com/question/index;\\_ylt=A86.JyCluLNZ1WYAx0EPxQt.;\\_ylu=X3oDMTByYnR1Zmd1BGNvbG8DZ3ExBHBvcwMyBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzcg?qid=20090313201005AACDplT&p=what%20is%20the%20difference%20between%20agate%20and%20carnelian](https://ca.answers.yahoo.com/question/index;_ylt=A86.JyCluLNZ1WYAx0EPxQt.;_ylu=X3oDMTByYnR1Zmd1BGNvbG8DZ3ExBHBvcwMyBHZ0aWQDBHNIYwNzcg?qid=20090313201005AACDplT&p=what%20is%20the%20difference%20between%20agate%20and%20carnelian) (accessed 9 September 2017).

<sup>378</sup> [http://www.minerals.net/gemstone/agate\\_gemstone.aspx](http://www.minerals.net/gemstone/agate_gemstone.aspx) (accessed 9 September 2017).

<sup>379</sup> Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 511

Mr. P. Brown, Principal of the School of Art, Calcutta.<sup>380</sup> These are the coins that we see as evidence in many of the private jewellery collections photographed.

As for the Mizo, they always barter goods in the pre-colonial time. The use of money was new to them and instead of using whatever coins was available to them they would make jewellery out of the coins. The original necklaces were mostly silver and extremely treasured. To corroborate this R.A Lorrain described how a *Lakher* woman only wanted four *pice* instead of the more valuable two *annas* in exchange for her vegetable because she wanted to hang the four *pice* around her neck as an ornament.<sup>381</sup> Sometimes, coins were attached to other valuable necklaces to increase the value quotient.



Fig 5.23 *Tangka Thi*

It is noteworthy that jewellery made of coins is popular among other tribal groups in India as well. In fact pre colonial empires such as the Maurya and Gupta amongst others had an economic system where coinage and barter system were operated side by side. Coins were utilized even by the Rajputs but remarkably, many tribal groups of Rajasthan in the west and tribal groups elsewhere continue to wear coin necklaces till date as a part of their traditional attire. It may be due to the fact that, among tribal groups of India use of money or coins were not prevalent as barter was the prevailing system of exchange in most of these culture. It may also be caused as issued coins reached only the higher section of the society and hence barter remained the method of economic exchange. Due to this even when they could get hold of coins, they were valued as much as jewellery so much so that they were made into it.

<sup>380</sup> [http://www.britnumsoc.org/publications/Digital%20BNJ/pdfs/1968\\_BNJ\\_37\\_19.pdf](http://www.britnumsoc.org/publications/Digital%20BNJ/pdfs/1968_BNJ_37_19.pdf) (accessed 25 September 2017).

<sup>381</sup> Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 90.

### 5.3.6 *Kel Sam / Kel Mei:*

Young Lusei men wear a small bunch of white goat's hair, on their neck gathered together with a red thread as ornament as well as a good luck charm. It was very popular among the men. They wear it more because of its spiritual property than for ornamentation. Kyle Jackson described it as an ornament of goat's hair dyed red to bring good fortune.<sup>382</sup> Lorrain narrated an incident where a young man that they hired, named Saia was filled with fear on the loss of his charm made from a goat's tail.<sup>383</sup> A tuft of cock's feather which had been sacrificed was also worn as a charm in times of illness.<sup>384</sup> In the proliferation of superstitious environment, *Kel Sam* or other charm formed an important part of a man's outfit not just as an accessory but more so to ward off evil.

### 5.3.7 *Sakei Ha:*

*Sakei Ha* literally means tooth of a tiger and it implied that the tooth of a tiger which was hung around the neck as ornament mostly by men. They also believed that it possessed magical properties as well. They are worn mostly by the ones who kill a tiger and it was very rare and prized as it not easy to kill a tiger. Thus *Sakei Ha* definitely endorsed an elevated status among the men.

### 5.3.8 *Sisai / Chhisaih Rih (Mara):*

*Chhisaih* exclusively worn by Lai and Mara is a necklace made from small, long cylindrical red opaque beads. *Chhisaih* literally mean red necklace.<sup>385</sup> It was worn by women and the men do not share this necklace. The origin of these beads like all other Mizo necklaces is Burma. There is no manufacturing of these beads in Mizoram and they are still imported. Thirty or forty long strings of these beads are worn at a time.<sup>386</sup> The end is often coloured with blue and pink beads. They are pretty heavy and could be worn on any festive occasion. This was owned by all women as it was not as scarce or *expensive* as the other necklaces.

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<sup>382</sup>Jackson, *Mizos*, p. vi

<sup>383</sup>Lorrain, *Log book*, entry for April 1894

<sup>384</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 173

<sup>385</sup>Hlychha, *Mara-te Tobul*, p. 137

<sup>386</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 42





Fig 5.24 *Sisai* (19<sup>th</sup> century)

### 5.3.9 *Sisa* (Mara):

This is a common style of wearing necklaces made from white beads or different materials used by the Mara and Lai women. The same type of necklace is dotted with black colour and beaded together. Other necklaces of a single string with different colour beads were also worn by them depending the accessibility of the beads and also if they were available for purchase. Such multi coloured necklaces are called *Sisa Rih* in Mara. *Sisa* literally translate to multicolour. This is basically an assortment of different necklaces worn together.

### 5.3.10 *Dapachhi*:

*Dapachhi* is a Maranameforanother necklace made from a white clear glass beads shaped like the *Chhisai* and *lavaw* which is a white hard wild bead. The beads come from Arakan and the wild beads were also locally found and were valued at only an *anna* a string. To increase its value, five or more strings would be worn at a time.

### 5.4 Earring / *Bengbeh*:

Earrings were an integral part of the Mizo accessory. Both men and women wore earrings. The significance of earrings is proven by the fact that all children shortly after birth have their ears bored by punching a whole through it with a needle or porcupines quill.<sup>387</sup> For the girls, the holes were plugged with a wooden stud at first and they will be replaced with bigger studs until the ivory earring could be worn.<sup>388</sup> Besides the prized ivory earring, earrings of brass,

<sup>387</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 172

<sup>388</sup>Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki*, p. 13

metal, silver and animal bones and fangs were also worn by the Mizo. While the earrings of women were bigger, most men wear only a small earring.<sup>389</sup>

#### 5.4.1 *Sai Ha Bengbeh*:

In the pre-colonial period ivory earrings called *Sai Ha Bengbeh* was very popular among the Lusei women. It is an ivory disc with an inch or inch and a half in diameter, with a hole in the centre. This was expressed by R.A. Lorrain as he writes that Lushai women wear a large round disc of ivory inserted in the lobe of their ears.<sup>390</sup>



Fig 5.25 *Sai Ha Bengbeh*



Fig 5.26 Woman wearing *Sai Ha Bengbeh*

In fact, Lusei women gave a great deal of importance and value to this particular earring which is shown by the fact that, when they pierce the ears, the main goal is to be able to fit *Sai Ha Bengbeh*. They distend the lobe of their ear to an enormous size with circular discs of wood or ivory.<sup>391</sup> Wearing an earring was also used as a way to show status as when a widow decided not to remarry, she would cut through the earlobe where she has pierced it and stopped wearing earrings. Again, because they constantly wear *Sai Ha Bengbeh*, the hole in their earlobe expanded.<sup>392</sup>

#### 5.4.2 Cornelian Earrings:

They also wear earrings made of cornelian suspended by a piece of strings. A single droplet of amber or cornelian strung on a thread was also worn by the both the male, young women and children. These earrings made of stones are treasured and considered family

<sup>389</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 49

<sup>390</sup>Lorrain, p. 49

<sup>391</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 135

<sup>392</sup>As a child, I have seen old women, friends of my great grandmother, with big ear hole in which we could easily put through a finger and some big enough to pull the fingers in and out without touching the skin. Even my great grandmother's earlobes had pretty big holes as compared to younger females..

heirloom, passed on from one generation to next. Since these beads are of great value, commoners hardly afforded to wear earrings of beads. This was more popular among the Lusei and Lai.



Fig 5.27 Cornelian beads

### 5.4.3 Feather Earrings:

The Lusei men were fond of wearing in the ear a small bunch of brilliant feathers.<sup>393</sup> This was mostly coloured goat's hair. It is said that Lai men too wore this type of earring. The Mara were said to be fond of feathers as well. The two long feathers in the tails of Paroquets are considered of value in the hands of a Mara tribesman.<sup>394</sup> They not only used it for earrings but also for other items of decorations and ornamentations.

### 5.4.4 *Mipa Bengbeh* (Lusei) / *Thangraheu* (Mara):

Most male earrings were studs. The Lusei men wore an earring which was made of a wooden stud with flat head and coloured red. This was the same as common earring worn by every Mara man and woman which was a stud earring shaped like a stud or nail and made by them from wood using their knives. Most Mizo were fond of earrings. The head of the earring was decorated with different colours. This was called *Thangraheu* by the Mara.

### 5.4.5 *Takaraheu* (Mara):

Another type of earring called *Takaraheu* by the Mara was made from metal. This was less common as metal was not found in abundance. Made of silver or white metal filled with lac, it was mostly bought from Burmese traders. A *Takaraheu* is made with wood and shaped like an

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<sup>393</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 135

<sup>394</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 18

American football. The middle part of the earring is plumped up and both end of the earring was spiky.<sup>395</sup>

#### 5.4.6 *Hawmiraheu* (Mara):

*Hawmiraheu* again is made from white molten metal by the Mara. It is the only earring and one of the little jewellery locally manufactured. It was worn by both male and female, in fact younger male from the age of nine wears this up till their marriages.<sup>396</sup>

### 5.5 Bangle, Armlets and Bracelets:

Bangles were also worn by the Mizo but there are not many variety of it. Most bangles were of metal like silver and brass and also beads. The Mara calls a bangle or bracelets *Lakyu*<sup>397</sup> in general while the Lusei and Lai calls them *ngun* or *banbun*, affixing to it the name of the material used to the name of the bangles. Lusei did not seem to be very fond of bangles. The dearth of mention of Lusei bangles in ethnographic writings may also be used as evidence to this. Among the southern Mizo, in particular Lai and Mara, bangles were quite popular. They have different names for different bangles, again based on the material used. While the Lusei use of bracelet is not known, the Lai and Mara wore bracelets. Later during the colonial period, the Lusei women seems to have started this trend of wearing a singular metal bangle but it seemed more like an outside influence, probably imitated from the Indians around them. Because they lived in such close quarters with intermarriages and interrelations a number of traditional items and traditions were inevitably borrowed from one clan to the other. There might have been an instance of a Lusei wearing a *Viachhipang* but that does not make it a Lusei tradition unless there is a continuation of the trend to the point where it becomes a borrowed tradition. Bangles were worn by women while the men wore armlets.

#### 5.5.1 *Rahongpachhi* (Mara) / *Khi Ing* (Lai):

This is made from a brass. Brass was molten to small beads and collected in a thread like a necklace and worn on the wrist. They would wind it around their wrist two to three times and

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<sup>395</sup> *Mizo incheina*, p. 27

<sup>396</sup> Parry, *The Lakhers*, pp. 34, 40

<sup>397</sup> Hlychha, *Mara-te Tobul*, p. 138

wear it as a bracelet. This was the only bracelet manufactured here in Mizoram since their settlement. It was worn by both the Lai and Mara women. This was also worn by the Lai.

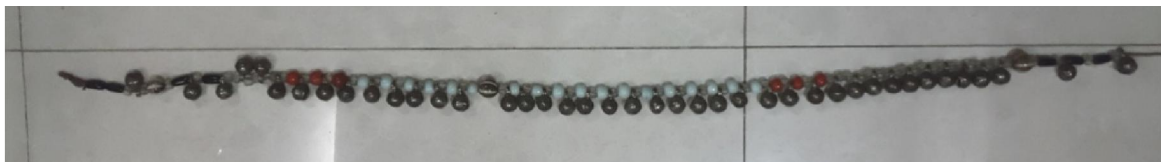


Fig 5.28 *Rahongpachhi*

### 5.5.2 *Viachhipang* and *Chhihrang*:

Other bracelets worn by the Mara were *Viachhipang* and *Chhihrang*. *Viachhipang* was made up of small black and white beads which resembles the *Pumtek* but much smaller.<sup>398</sup> Like the *Rahongpachhi*, the beads were threaded on a cotton strings and wound around the wrist two or three times as bracelet. This seems to be the same as the black and white beaded necklace *Sisa*. *Chhihrang* on the other hand is made of small solid green beads which look quite beautiful and precious.

### 5.5.3 *Bankhih* (Lai) / *Lakya* (Mara):

This is like the Indian *Kada*. It was made of brass and also silver. It was precious just the same but it could be worn whenever they wanted. Though they do not wear bangles and bracelets every day, it was considered a must on special occasions and festivals.<sup>399</sup> They have it for since they can remember.



Fig 5.29 *Bankhih* / *Laky*

<sup>398</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 44

<sup>399</sup>Hlychha, *Mara-te Tobul*, p. 138

#### 5.5.4 *Khikhiang* (Lusei / Lai):

This is a man's armlet worn on festive occasions. It was a hollow metal of either silver or brass in a rounded shape and both end of the armlet do not touch each other *Ngun* is a Lai word for silver yet a Lusei word for bangle. It is interesting to note the connection. It was worn on the upper arm with the open end on the outside. It was owned and worn only by the rich families. It was worn only on festivals and important events like *Khuangchawi*.



Fig 2.30 *Khikhiang*



Fig 2.31 *Khikhiang*

According to Siangchhin *Khikhiang* in fig. 2.31 belonged to her father and is made of silver. Her father Vuta was the son of Thlantlang Chief Zahuata. Vuta was the third son who died in 1968 at the age of 67. This armlet belonged to his father Zahuata whose year of birth, calculated roughly from his third son's age could be between 1785- 1790. If he had acquired the *Khikhiang* during the time his first son was born it could be around 1815. Hence this *Khikhiang* is believed to be at least two hundred and two years old or a bit less. However, it cannot be less than a hundred years old.

#### 5.5.5 *Tangka Banbun* / *Kuthrawlh* (Lusei / Lai) / *Taka Lakyu* (Mara):

This is a colonial bangle. This is again the most popular of Lai and Mara bangles known as *Tangka Banbun* in Lai and *Taka Lakyu* in Mara. This was made from silver and brass with an open end to easily adjust the wearer. At one end of the bangle a coin is attached. There are two elements which determine the value of this bangle. One is the number of lines contained in the bangle and the second being the value of the coin attached to the bangle. Then depending on the value of the coins, lines are created in the bangle.

As mentioned earlier, with the increase in the availability of British coins under the colonial managements, the Mizo also had access to coins through petty trade and payments. Though they valued these coins, the Mizo operated on the barter system within the society. However, they cleverly maintained the value of the coins by making them part of their jewellery.

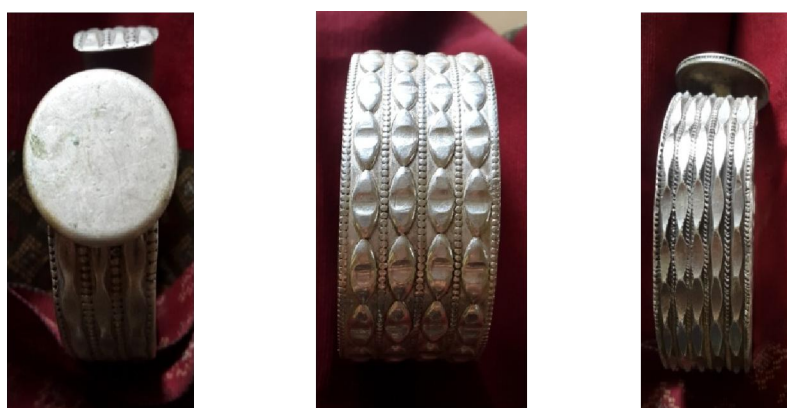


Fig 5.32 *Tangka Banbun* (a) *Den thum* (b) *Den Li* (c) *Den Nga*

*Tangka banbun* are differentiated on the basis of the lines found in the bangles called *den*. If there are five lines in a bangle it is called '*dennga*' and a one rupee coin will be affixed in the bangle. This is the most valuable bangle among them. The ones with four lines are called '*den li*' and they have a fifty paisa coin attached to it and those with three lines have a twenty five paisa coin fastened at the bangle. This way the values of the bangles are determined.

### 5.6 Ring-*Kutdonghrolh* (Lai) / *Zungbun* (Lusei):

Rings were not a big part of the Mizo jewellery. The reason for this is hard to comprehend. However, it may be due to their economic activity. The Mizo life from the earliest known period till the colonial period gyrated around agriculture. Their festivals, social culture and way of life was fully influenced by cultivation so much so that even in the little time they had off the field was occupied with handiwork especially for women. In such an environment, wearing rings might not have been so favourable. Also rings were an extravagant accessory for a society which depended on others for most of their jewellery. Hence rings were not common and worn only by the elite section of the early Mizo society or those who could afford to not work such as the wife of chiefs. As such there could barely be any diversity and it was hardly owned by commoners.



Those who could afford wore a ring made from silver and aluminium worn on festive occasion.<sup>400</sup> It was also worn by both men and women but the sizes differ.. But later in the colonial period simple metal band for rings became quite common. This was worn by Lai, Mara and Lusei. However these ring, particularly the plain band did not hold any significance as it was in the western society. It was simply worn for the sake of decoration by a few who afforded it.

Even after the Christianization of the Lushai Hills, many could not afford wedding rings and it was not given much importance. But the introduction of Christian marriages along with the westernization that it entailed brought wedding rings into trend and the most common rings were made metals such as silver and brass and not gold.

### 5.7 Belts:

Belt was another vital item of jewellery used by the Mizo. Belt in general is called *Kawnghren* in Lusei, *Taivel* by Lai. The Maras have different names for different designs. Mizo, especially Lai and Mara were quite fond of belts made from metals mainly silver, brass and aluminium, the last metal being the most common material used in the making of belts and other forms of jewelleries. An interesting fact remain that most Lai and Mara claims that jewellery made of aluminium are silver and the ones of brass were made with gold in the ancient times. It would be fascinating to comprehend their riches if all their aluminium jewelleries were to be silver and also gold. But in the light of the fact that, silver was very expensive and not within the grasp of these mobile hill tribes only explain their lack of the metal or deeper knowledge of it. So using silver, aluminium and brass, there are different types of belts used by them. Though gold was known to them, there is very rare information about anyone owning gold jewellery in the pre colonial Mizoram.

Belts utilised by the Lusei in Mizoram in the pre-colonial period was the same as those of the Lai and Mara. Some of the belts of Lai and Mara, namely *Chhumchhi* and *Kharvar* were also popular among the Lusei who again borrowed them as they were not as elaborated in their jewellery, especially belts. The earliest skirt *Fenphel* was so short and brief that, it could hardly be worn without a belt. This was when copper belts such as *Chhumchi* and *Kharvar* may have been borrowed. However, the use of belt by the Lusei did not reach the level of their southern

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<sup>400</sup>B. Lalthangliana, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali at Aizawl on 11 March 2017



brethren. Also these belts made from metals could not be accessed by all. So, *Darzai*, which was a thin single thread of brass, was used as belt by those who could afford or get a hold of it. The long tiny strips of cotton cloth woven by little girls to learn weaving in their miniature looms were also utilized as belt by many. Also, sometimes they would tear off pieces of clothing to use as belt. These were utilized not for fashion but more for their practicality. In the event of borrowing from other clan, some Lusei person may have the belts of Lai and Mara clan in their possessions. In general, fancy belt was not much of a part of the Lusei woman's clothing and every day wear as much as it was for the other two clans.

As explained, the Lai and Mara women were known for their belts. There are four main different belts which were worn by the Lai and Mara women in the pre colonial times. They are *Hrakhaw*, *Chaiphiapa*, *Chongchi* and *Saka* for the Mara and *Hrawngkha*, *Lawngka*, *Chhinchhik* and *Chhumchhi* in Lai. These belts are important because ordinary skirts and petticoats are held up by these belts around the waist and the buttocks. Since the best of their skirts are made with silk, it was difficult to hold them up like the Lusei.<sup>401</sup> So the belts, apart from being a piece of jewellery have important function in the Mara dress. They were made mainly of brass and white metal. They are worn in such a way that, they hang down till the hips and buttocks, serving as jewellery. The *Saka*, which was made with the white metal, was highly valued by the Mara women. It is made up of small circular rings obtained from Arakan in Burma. Some of the most common belts used by the pre colonial Mizo were:

#### **5.7.1 *Chhumchhi* (Lai) / *Darkawngchilh* (Lusei) / *Saka* (Mara):**

This was a made of small rings of metals such as brass, silver and earlier gold,<sup>402</sup> which were put on a thick thread called *la hruihrual* to form a belt, thus the name. According to Parry, *Saka* is a white metal belt of hundreds of small circular , metal rings like tiny washers, and is obtained from Arakan, the old belts are highly prized and the *Saka* are most preferred belts above all else by *Lakher* women.<sup>403</sup>

But the name *Chhumchhi* is how it is popularly known among the people. There are different sizes to the diameter of the ring. The diameter could range from half to one centimetre.

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<sup>401</sup>Dawtlei, interview, 2016 and Ngotlai, interview, 2016; Nguri Chinzah, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali at Lawngtlai, 2016

<sup>402</sup>Dawthlei, interview, 2016

<sup>403</sup>Parry, *The Lakher*, p. 39

The length of this belt depends on the wearer or the maker but *Cumci* is usually very long. Normally it was made to go round the wearer's waist and hips at least four times or more. There are times when the wearer would circle a *cumci* round the hips more than forty times.



Fig 5.33 *Chhumchhi*

The smaller ones are made to encircle the hips around ten times, after which the bigger circles are used. The smaller circles and bigger circles are kept on different set of strings. Some would even encircle it round 45 times, using 10 circle of bigger rings strings and 35 circles of smaller ring strings.<sup>404</sup> Due to the length and the nature of the belt, it was very difficult to keep them without getting attached or cleaving. This could be worn on both formal and informal occasions but due to its intricate nature and weight, it was not very suitable to wear every day.

### 5.7.2 *Hrakhaw* (Mara) / *Hrawngkha* (Lai):

*Hrakhaw* is a heavy, flexible belt made of links of brass joining into each other. It is like a link chain design, which can be stretch when worn. These are sold to Lakher by Chin merchants and are made by the Chin *Hnarang*. There is a smaller and lighter brass belt made in the same way and also called *Hrakhaw*.<sup>405</sup>

### 5.7.3 *Lawngkham* (Lai) / *Chaiphiapa* / *Kharvar* (Mara):

*Lawngkha* popularly known as *Kharvar* was a belt of assortment of rectangular pieces of brass strung together in a thread. It was an inch in length and half an inch in width. On each side of the length a channel was made for the thread to enter. Designs are made in the center of the rectangular piece and when a lot of them are strung together, it makes a beautiful belt. There are

<sup>404</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, p. 506

<sup>405</sup>Kio, p. 565; Also see Parry, *The Lakher*, p. 40

three patterns or variations in the design of the brass piece.<sup>406</sup> One string of this belt was enough to wear but sometimes five to six of them were worn by those who have them.



Fig 5.34 *Kharvar*

There are approximately twenty five to forty pieces in a single string depending on the size of the wearer and also depending on the number of pieces was owned. This belt was worn on festive occasions and on any formal occasion. It was one of the most valuable yet most popular belts of the Mizo women. It was not worn by the men.

#### **5.7.4 *Chhinchhik* / *Cikcin* (Lai) / *Chongchi* (Mara)**

This is a spiral brass tube through which a string is made to hold the belt together. It was again very long like the other belts and worn in the same way. This belt was made to go only two or three times round the hips. It was worn by women and not by men. Towards and during the colonial phase, the use of this belt seems to have deteriorated. Perhaps due to this, an original piece of this belt cannot be found, though many people affirmed its existence.

#### **5.7.5 *Ngunthihruai* / *Tangka Kawnghren* / *Taisawm*:**

This is basically a belt made of an assortment of tiny metal links made of melted coins. Like the other jewelries made of coins, this was basically colonial jewelry. Any Indian coins or British coins which they could have or owned were attached to a strong string of thread and made into belt. These coins were melted and crafted into a design which was like small tiny pieces of hooks. These were then put together as a belt in a pattern resembling the chain mail shirt of medieval army dress. The width of the belt was mostly four or five inches and the length depended on the size of the wearer. A buckle of rectangular shape *was* kept at the front made of a silver plate in the width as the belt with an approximate length of five to six inches. A ruby or a red colored stone was attached at the center of the buckle.

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<sup>406</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 39



Fig 5.35 Ngunthihruai / Tangka Kawngghren / Taisawm

As this belt was made of pure silver coins and precious stone with an intricate design, it was a prized possession of the Lai and Mara women. This belt was an exclusive ornament of the southern clans and not worn by the Lusei. A broader belt made of pure silver with a ruby at the buckle, which weighed four to five kilograms would cost almost thousands of rupees in today's term.

#### 5.7.6 *Darzai*:

Those who did not afford to use elaborated belts especially among the Lusei, a thin strip of metal was a common belt. This narrow sliver of brass was called *Darzai*. Though it was just a band of metal, it was a standard accessory generally used on a day to day basis as belt.

Because brass was not found in the present Mizoram, it was hard to possess especially by the common people. Hence, these belts were also made in aluminium and almost everyone owns them as it is cheaper. In fact any type of a metal strip could be used as belt.

#### 5.8 Accessories:

According to the oxford dictionary, an accessory is a thing which can be added to something else in order to make it more useful, versatile, or attractive. It also implies a small article or item of clothing carried or worn to complement a garment or outfit such as a hat, bag or shoe etc.<sup>407</sup> Although accessories were an integral part of the Mizo life, they were not varied. Their accessories were mainly limited to the use of cloth bag and hats which served more as a necessity rather than complimentary adornment. Also, the Mizo were not too elaborated when it comes to accessories. Nonetheless, the accessories that they have were popular and highly in demand.

<sup>407</sup><https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/accessory> (accessed 22 September 2017).

### 5.8.1 *Ipte Pui*:

*Ip* literally means a sack or a bag of any kind.<sup>408</sup> But *Ipte Pui* refers to a man's cotton bag especially woven by the women. It is a white bag which was made from cotton retaining the natural colour of cotton. The main part of the bag and the strap are woven separately and then stitched together to form a shoulder bag. It was a big bag with no compartment inside. Men would carry this bag to work to carry their tools such as *Chem* (dao), tinder box and tobacco box.<sup>409</sup> This was a standard accessory of all the men. They also used it to carry fruits and vegetables back from their jhum.

A question that remains here is that though this bag is accepted as a traditional accessory of the Mizo, there is no mention of this in the ethnographic documents of the Chin and Howlong. Also, senior citizens, experts and academicians interviewed and consulted on this matter could not come to a precise information as to when the use of this bag became a part of the Mizo culture. But what they all agreed to is that it was used by their forefathers but all within the colonial period. Lianhmingthanga vaguely suggests its use in the 17<sup>th</sup> century after weaving was mastered though there is hardly any valid source for this claim. However, rare pictorial evidence given in the next photograph suggests that cotton bag or the cotton rucksack was used alongside the useful style of *hnoisawt* for the Lai and Lusei, where men would carry fruits and any other thing in the fold of their cloth which was still customary among them well into the colonial period. This may indicate that even if use of the shoulder bag was not quite the trend in their early life in the Chin Hills, it definitely became an adapted mode of carrying their tobacco pipes, *tuibur* flint and steel boxes and a knife whose handle was always pointed towards his hand while their agricultural tools were carried for them by the women in the back-basket. This bag became an important part of a man's daily wardrobe.

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<sup>408</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 220

<sup>409</sup>Lianhmingthanga, *Material culture*, p. 76



Fig 5.36 Man with *Ipte Pui*

### 5.8.2 *Ipte Chei* / *Khiangkawi Ipte*:

This is also a shoulder bag but as the name implies is a coloured, striped or ornamented satchel worn by men.<sup>410</sup> However, this bag could not be owned by everyone because it was difficult to make as it took time. It is like a decorated version of *ipte pui*. Apparently Shakespear pointed out that, '*as the Lushai has no pocket, he carries, wherever he goes, a haversack made of some pretty coloured cotton cloth slung over his shoulder by a strap of the same material*'.<sup>411</sup> Again the cloth for *ipte chei* and its sash are separately woven with loom.<sup>412</sup> These intricately embroidered bags indicated the status of the wearer as well the artistic skills of the Mizo women who created an art that represents their material culture and what they see around them. There are various designs made by different clans of the Mizo. It was also a sign of wealth and high status as it was carried only by the chiefs or *Thangchhuah Pa* or the likes. Moreover it was supposedly worn only on festive occasions contrary to what Shakespear wrote. Mothers and wives often make this bag for their families and sometimes the designs and the general quality of the weaving confirms the importance of the occasion or the wearer.<sup>413</sup>

<sup>410</sup>Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 221

<sup>411</sup>Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki*, p. 9

<sup>412</sup>Lianhmingthanga, *Material*, p. 77

<sup>413</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 110

Fig 5.37 (a) A man with *Khiangkawi Ipte* (19<sup>th</sup> Century)(b) Modern *Ipte Chei*

It was classified as a men's accessory especially the Lusei. It is decorated with similar design of *Puanlaisen* and therefore the main colour of the bag is red in colour. Like in *Puanchei*, it is known as *Ipte Chei* due to its decorativeness, especially in comparison with the everyday bag of the men folks. The bag of other clans has other designs which are slightly different than *Ipte Chei*. However, as the name suggests, *chei* literally means decorate, so *Ipte Chei* literally includes any decorated bag of the Mizo.

### 5.8.3 *Sahria* / *Kauloh* (Mara):

This is a Mara man's bag. The dress of a Mara man is never complete without this bag. It is a small embroidered cotton shoulder bag which is normally worn hung over the left shoulder. The Mara women make different kinds of colors and shapes of *Sahria* for their men-folk. They are made with the cloth of skirts or shawl and sometimes, they are made using plain cloth but embellished with cowries and other beads available to them. These bags too are for carrying the nicotine water flask, pipe, and tobacco and tinder box.

The bag in the picture was made by C. Dawthlei for her son Joseph Koma Chozah when he was born in 1982 as a symbol that he would carry the bag when he visits people in the name of God in his pastorate. She recounted that after three girl child she really wanted a son and so she prayed for a son and promised that if she had a son, she will prepare and give him to be the Lord's servant. Her prayers were answered and she kept her promise.



Fig 5.38 *Sahria / Kauloh* made by C. Dawthlei

#### 5.8.4 *Lukhum / Lukhu (Mara) / Khumbeu (Lusei):*

*Lukhum* means a hat. The Mizomen as much as they were fond of turbans were not so much a fan of hats. However, they did wear hats mainly as a guard against the rain. Incessant rain was a considerable part of their climatic condition and hence they needed something to cover them as the Mizo especially the Lusei had a strong objection to getting their head wet. The Chins wore coat along with a large and broad hat, made of bark, grass, bamboo and the leaf of the date-palm to protect the body from rain.<sup>414</sup> The Mara called their rain hat Lakhu which resembles the rain hats of many other Southeast Asian countries. This must have continued when they migrated and settled in Mizoram as Shakespeare wrote in confirming that the original rain hat was almost flat and circular. They were made of strips of bamboo or cane plaited and lined with smoked leaves.<sup>415</sup> However, during the colonial period this rain hat gave way to a new style of hat called the *Khumbeu* which was still made with the same materials but the shaped like a helmet. Today the *Khumbeu* has evolved into a prominent item of the Mizo traditional package while the rain hat has been quite obliterated from the scene.



Fig 5.39 Modern *Khumbeu*

<sup>414</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 171

<sup>415</sup>Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki*, p. 9



### 5.8.5 Footwear:

Footwear was not a part of the Mizo accessory in the pre colonial period. The Mizo never wore shoes. When a foot or a toe was hurt, they make a protective cover using bamboo strip to prevent further injury. This was the closest they came to anything related to shoe or footwear as far as evidences are concerned. R.L Lorrain while narrating their travel through the steep and slippery slopes mentioned how their boots not being able to grip the ground as firmly and surely as the naked feet of the Lakhers are able to do.<sup>416</sup> Wearing shoe came to be a later colonial injecture. The missionaries, who worked closely with the locals, often handed down their cloths and other items. But prior to this, the trade contacts between the Mizo and their neighbouring states must have already introduced them to footwear. However, the Mizos were not perhaps keen to take up this particular item of accessory as many found it quite uncomfortable to wear shoes.

Nonetheless it was the men, who took to shoes first. With the introduction of western education and Christianity, shoes were slowly becoming a symbol of education and status. Wearing of shoe seemed to have caught on mainly because of the status that it brought to the wearer. Also, it could not be afforded by commoners as it had to be ordered through traders who went to Silchar or Sylhet which were the main places visited by merchants. Therefore the earliest wearer of shoes was men from wealthy families or those who were in close relation with the British officials and missionaries and are educated. During the colonial period, wearing shoes or western apparels were considered to be signs of being at par with the *Sap* or being educated. Mizo women started wearing shoes much later than their male counterparts. It was only around the 1920's that photographs showing women wearing shoes started to appear. The trend became prevalent during the colonial period but financial factors restricted most people. The Mizo fascination for shoes, especially with boots was mentioned Lorrain in his log book.<sup>417</sup>

One of the earliest samples of shoe was called *Mangai Pheikhawk*. *Pheikhawk* in *Duhlian* language means a shoe while *mangai* seems to have been taken from the Hindi/ Bengali word *mangana* or *manggai* which means to order or call for. The shoes were ordered through traders and hence the name. The earliest groups of people who wore shoes were the educated lot, who

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<sup>416</sup>Lorrain, *Five Years*, p. 12

<sup>417</sup>Lorrain, *Log book*, entry for 16 December 1896

would sometimes wear the old shoes handed down to them by the Missionaries and soldiers. Some of the earliest shoes worn by men were formal leather shoes and military boots which were brought home by the Mizo soldiers serving in the First World War. Owing to the patriarchal system of the Mizo society, it was only in the twentieth century that woman started wearing shoes. One of the early shoes for women was the white laced up canvas ked. Leather shoes were hardly afforded by women. Women themselves did not feel qualified to wear one. This also reveals a social construct where women are convinced to bear the heavy load of the work burden yet are often denied their dues in terms of status and luxury.

### 5.9 Conclusion:

The study of jewelleries cannot be complete without a thorough understanding of the history, culture and environment. It is important because the knowledge of jewellery and accessory practices can be a vehicle for social change, understanding, activism and dynamics. The pre-colonial Mizo society can also be understood through the kind of jewelleries they make or use. Sources indicate that metal and precious beads such as amber were not found in Mizoram. But metallurgy in its very crude form was available, in the form of black smithy but not in jewellery making. Moreover, precious jewellery making was not done in Mizoram in the pre-colonial and colonial times. This realization on the other hand reveals that through direct or indirect trade Mizo tribes of Mizoram obtained most of their jewelleries and other items of decoration from the people of Burma, Chittagong hills and Arakan. Like any other culture, ornamentalations were very much a part of their lives and given a lot of importance, which is revealed by the fact the ownership of valuable pieces of jewelleries, was a symbol of status, wealth and power. It may be concluded that though the Mizo were self sufficient and not very materialistic in nature, jewellery was among the few things they imported from their neighbours. It was the need which led them to import metals, ambers, colours and other ornaments.

Most jewellery was status defining. Such pieces were hardly owned by the common people and they were only found in the possession of the royal and rich families. Hence, wearing of precious ornaments automatically reveal the economic status as well as the social position of the wearer. An important example is the women's headgear like *Vakiria* or *Lakhang* which could be worn only by the chief's wife and the wife of *Thangchhuahpa*. Even the men's accessories such as *Diar* and *Chhawn* also had specified meanings and they were not for the general public.

The rarity and expensiveness increases the value to the point that while it was very difficult for the commoners to own many of the prized items, it elevated the owners to a certain level of power and authority, besides its provision of vanity. Besides reflecting the socio-economic conditions of the Mizo tribes in terms of communities and individual members of a society, jewelleries and other exotic items of dress were also construed to have endowed the owner or wearer certain advantages over those who did not have or not wear them from the numerous vagaries and vicissitudes of life which they believed were the handiwork of the fearful spiritual beings. Therefore, wearing certain dress accessories which are considered to have ward off the bad spirits and augured fortunes were indispensable especially during the pre-colonial period. Depending on the kind of accessories they wore, phrase like '*thi beh lo*' were popularly used in derogatory manners to express that words of a man without precious earrings or necklace need not be heeded. Hence, jewelleries and accessories are important tools in showing the social and economic structure and that some form of social differentiation exist in pre-colonial society is also argued on the basis of the restrictions imposed on the usage of certain jewellery items or accessories for everyone except the chiefly clans and other wealthy families whose usage and access to such objects of desire were unrestricted and free.

## Chapter 6: Dress Productions-The Loom, The Tools, The Rules

### 6.0 Introduction:

This chapter contains descriptive analysis of the traditional raw materials and the tools and techniques of dress making used in the traditional Mizo society. Emphasis shall be given to the traditional method of cotton planting to making cotton threads and fabricating them into dresses and cloths with the conventional technique used in a loom, in particular the loin loom. Step by step description of how cotton was treated and made into thread will be made along with how cloth making was a community activity of the women which also reflected their status in the Mizo society. Also, the employment of colours and dyes, the different plants and method with which dyes are made will also be explained reflecting the crude scientific methods applied by them.

### 6.1 Dress Makers:

In the traditional Mizo society, cloth making depended entirely in the hands of the women. They would foresee the whole process right from the beginning when cotton would be sown in the jhum along with the paddy till the time clothes would be spun, woven, and made ready to be worn. They practically made all their clothes. They would ready the cotton yarn all year through in their leisure, which was mainly at night. The Mizo woman would do the house work, tend to their fields, carry water from the foot of the hills to the top where they made settlement usually and collect firewood, hull and winnow the grain and then in her free time, pick up her back-strap loom and weave her exquisite patterns. Upon the women falls the whole burden of the bodily labour by which life is supported.<sup>418</sup> Weaving was mostly done by a woman after the harvest and her bouquet of products would constitute, beside her own and her family's requirements of clothing, other products like the *Mut Puan* (quilt or blanket) and accessories made from cloth. If a woman was blessed with the qualities of *Nu Zamtha* (a fast weaver or active worker), she would store the surplus in her *Thul* (Cane basket). Such *puans* were often described as *Puanthulkhung*.<sup>419</sup> This mainly points to *puan* which were saved up for later use and jewelleries. The term *thulkhung* has a connotation which generally means something which is kept in secrecy or safety, because of its worthiness. *Thul* was a safe for the women to keep

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<sup>418</sup>Lewin, *Wild Races*, p. 134

<sup>419</sup>B. Zodinpuui, 'Puan-Pride of Mizos,' in *Chapchar Kut Souvenir*, Aizawl, Information & Public Relations, Govt. of Mizoram, 2010, p. 58.

their valuable possessions which consisted of *puan* as the main part and other valuable jewellery if she owns them. Zodinpuui recounts that her mother used to weave late into the night under dim lights using her back-strap loom.<sup>420</sup> One of her mother's *Puanthulkhung* is still with her and she cherished it dearly. This also brings to light the fact that women would pass on their possession to their daughters which was essentially *puan* that they weaved themselves. Many of the old *puan* owned by women interviewed in this research were also handed to them by their mothers or grandmothers.



Fig 6.1 *Thul*

Studies indicate that every known society recognizes and elaborates some differences between the sexes, although there are groups in which men wear skirts and women wear pants or trousers; it is everywhere the case that there are characteristic tasks, manners and responsibilities, primarily with women or with men.<sup>421</sup> So when it comes to the task of weaving and dress making it was customary for every Mizo girl to know the art of weaving and it was her duty to provide for and make the clothing need of her family. However, among the *Lai* there were men who could weave and there was no prohibition or discrimination.<sup>422</sup> This tradition of men weaving has continued till date as many commercial looms in Mizoram employ men from Myanmar who

<sup>420</sup>Zodinpuui, 'Puan' p. 58

<sup>421</sup>Kaiser and B. Susan, *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearance in Context*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Fairchild Publications, New York, 1997, p. 186.

<sup>422</sup>Pi Renhchin, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9 August 2016 in Lawngtlai. She is a direct descendant of the royal Chinzah family. Born in 1933, she is the daughter of Lianduna Zathang, chief of Vawmbuk and Nithluaii, a *Lai* princess from Hmunhalh, Chin Hills. Her father, Lianduna was the first chief in the eastern Lushai Hills to convert to Christianity. Since her father died early the responsibilities of the household as well as that of the royal duties fell on the shoulder of her mother and herself as her brother Ukmang Zathang was still a minor. Hrangthliai interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9 August 2016 at her residence in Lawngtlai. She is a commoner born in 1927. Dr, Vanlalringa Bawitlung, Associate Professor, Govt. Lawngtlai College, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 9 August 2016 at Lawngtlai.

are talented weavers and preferred by some for their strength and speed. Sometimes men helped in spinning when idle or as a joke. Lusei men hardly touch the loom but they are responsible for making loom parts and machineries. Also, as they court women at night, the men helped women with their yarns, especially in rolling the yarn into balls.

Weaving is learnt by Mizo women whilst in their teens. Most girls would start weaving by the age of thirteen.<sup>423</sup> They would sit near their mother or the older women in the family and watched them weave. Miniature looms were made by fathers or the older male member of the family for the little girls to train their skills. When they are ready, they would be made to sit in the loom to practise the art of weaving under the watch of the elder women of the house and with practise, they eventually learn to weave. All the free time of the women are taken up by weaving. Courtship of the young, known as *Nula Rim* could not be pictured without a girl with her loom.<sup>424</sup> And when they had enough yarn they would store them safely, sometimes keeping them inside their *Thul* to be woven during '*Favang Awllen*', a period when major part of the jhum works were done and they had to wait for the harvest, which was mainly in the month of October. It was during this period of leisure that the yarns were woven into fabrics and then into dress and other basic clothing needs such as blankets, blouse, bags, etc. However, blankets were not woven every year as they lasted for a long time. Blankets were woven only when the need arises and there was hardly time for extras when it came to clothing. Weaving blanket was a collective work done by women as it was thick and long hence needed more hands and help.

Though women were active agents in the domestic economy, they were frequently ignored by historians, sociologists and writers in general. The economic contribution of Mizo women to society, especially in cloth making was much more than that of the men. This aspect of history has hardly been documented or mentioned. Due to the patriarchal system, it was taken for granted, even by the women themselves that the load of work on their shoulder was a natural course of occurrence. Christian doctrines and Biblical teachings, introduced in the colonial period, with their inherently patriarchal ethos and subordination of women did not help either in lessening the load of women. To a certain degree, women's conditions improved after

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<sup>423</sup>Some of the women interviewed for this research i.e. Thanchhum interview, 2016; Thankhumi interview, 2014; Renhchin interview, 2016; Dawthlei interview, 2016; Hrangthliai interview, 2016.

<sup>7</sup>Stefenie Lalthansangi Halliday, '*Puan-The tradition of The Mizos*', Unpublished MA dissertation, Stella Maris College (Autonomous), Chennai, 2011, p. 7.

Christianity; however, their status in terms of work and contribution especially within the household almost remained the same.



Fig 6.2 Lushai women at the loom, Pakhoma's village, 1882 (engraving by Richard Brend'amour)

## 6.2 The Raw Materials:

The most primitive dress of the Mizo, believed to be *Siapsuap* comes from the bark of a tree called *Vaiza*. Very little is known about the production and treatment of this material.<sup>425</sup> Then there were two basic materials used in the production of dress and other items of clothing by the Mizo, cotton and silk. Although cotton has been and still is the key raw material in the production of dress in humankind's history, the higher and the wealthier section of the Lai and Mara tribes used silk in their dress making, which they had apparently been doing even before their settlement in Mizoram.

### 6.2.1 Silk and its Production:

John Crawford in his report in 1834 mentioned that the silk fabrics of the Keyn (Mara) were of a much finer and better texture than those of the more civilized Burmans. He said that they had consisted of rich and heavy crimson scarves or narrow shawls, occasionally embroidered with gold, and not destitute of beauty.<sup>426</sup> This seems to be the *Chyna Poh* worn by the Mara ladies with a stole of the same design. Carey and Tuck also write that the plaids of the Hakas (Lai) are often woven entirely of silk.<sup>427</sup> This tradition was brought to Mizoram when they migrated and the Lai and Mara continued to employ silk in their clothing though it was rather difficult to acquire it.

<sup>425</sup>See Chapter 2, 2.1.1 for details

<sup>426</sup>John Crawford, 'Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Court of Ava', Volume-II, London, Henry Colburn, 1834, p. 109

<sup>427</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 171

It should be kept in mind that silk was found sparingly in the Chin Hills and more so in Mizoram. Even later when they settled in the southern Lushai Hills there is no evidence of silk production in the pre-colonial period, yet the Lai and Mara used it for their dress. They acquired silk threads from Myanmar. Even during the colonial period, silk threads were often bought from traders and sometimes exchanged for other valuable items such as the gong. This is indicative of the value of a silk cloth and why it could be worn only by the royal families or the richer section of the society and not the commoners within the Lai and Mara societies in particular. This is also evidence of the import of silk. The silk used by the Lai was called *Pu La*; *pu* means silk and *la* means thread. In an interview, Renhchin Chinzah said that her families sparingly used the ordinary *pula* but only a higher quality silk, called *Siam Pu La* in Lai dialect.<sup>428</sup> Here *Siam* refers to Thailand or Siam which she confirmed is the source of the silk that she and her family wore as long as she could remember.<sup>429</sup> Along this line F.K. Lehman wrote in 1963 that even the Chin imported silk to embroider blankets as one or two dyes were not locally extractable.<sup>430</sup> Other informants also tell of merchants bringing silk from Mandalay to villages from hundreds of years ago.<sup>431</sup> Therefore, there is no doubt that the Chin Hills' supply of silk would have been from Burma, China and Thailand which were the nearest places where production of silk was a big industry and whose production could easily reach the Chin Hills.

For they all started to learn to weave at an early age, Renchin evidently did make a number of dress using Siam silk and she still has with her a few silk *puan* made by her and also by her mother and grandmother. (Refer to chapter 3, fig 3.14). After the Mizo settlement in the present location, trade was accelerated by the occupation of the Hills by the British. Earlier, trade was carried on through the barter system as the hill people in general were not born traders like the people in their neighbouring plains of Myanmar, Chittagong and Assam. Even after commercial ties were established, the principal articles of import were salt and iron. Other items were of luxurious features such as gongs, brass, iron pots, beads, ornaments, silk threads,

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<sup>428</sup>Chinzah, interview, 2016; Dawthlei, interview, 2016; Nango Chozah, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali, on 5 August 2016. She is the daughter of C. Dawthlei and a skilled weaver. Popi Chozah interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 5 August 2016. She is also the daughter of C. Dawthlei and assists her sisters and mother in weaving. She is lecturer in Govt. Saiha Higher Secondary School.

<sup>429</sup>Chinzah, interview, 2016

<sup>430</sup>Lehman, *The Structure*, p. 166

<sup>431</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p. 39



coloured cotton yarns etc.<sup>432</sup> Traditional market in the pre British time was based on a few traders, mainly Burmese or Chin coming through the Thlantlang sub area of Chin Hills, Burma into the Lushai country through the southern hills.<sup>433</sup> This route was continued to exist under the British rule of Mizoram. In addition, items of Indian manufacture forced their way through the Lushai Hills from Chittagong and Akyab.<sup>434</sup> Lewin also mentioned that silk fabrics were much prized among the wealthier sort of people and that raw silk imported from Calcutta was woven into beautiful fabrics at Cox's Bazaar and its immediate vicinity.<sup>435</sup>

It would, therefore, seem that silk was imported and used as a raw material for dresses in southern Mizoram but it was not manufactured locally in its raw form. Also, the use of silk in dress production needed a definite skill. Since it was the wealthy and aristocratic women who employed silk for dress making, the method and expertise was also passed on only to women of such households. As the silk threads were so fine they needed proficiency in its processing, its use could not be identified among the common people and hence its limited use in dress production.

### 6.2.2 Cotton and its Production:

Cotton is one of the oldest fabrics in the world. Cotton remains as old as 5500 BCE have been discovered in Mexico while the Indus Valley civilization is known to have grown cotton around 2500 BCE. There are evidences that handheld cotton gins were used in India, China and Egypt from the 6<sup>th</sup> century onwards after which it was introduced to other countries.<sup>436</sup> However, it is rather difficult to say since when was cotton domesticated. Due to its significance in some of the oldest civilizations into the renaissance period for its importance in world economy, cotton is often referred to as the white gold. Unlike silk, cotton was a raw material within the reach of all section of the people. This was because cotton could be grown and produced by everyone and hence cheaper. As a result, it was only natural that the most common and most accessible raw

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<sup>432</sup>Carey, & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 214

<sup>433</sup>Lehman, *The Structure*, p. 168

<sup>434</sup>Carey & Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 215

<sup>435</sup>Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p. 251

<sup>436</sup>Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, pp. 1-6

Available from: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-x?c=acls;cc=acls;view=toc;idno=heb08947.0001.001> (accessed 15 March 2017)

material became the customary substance in the production for dress for the Mizo in pre-colonial times.

Along with rice, cotton seeds were sown and grown in the jhums. The seeds would be sown mainly in the month of May or April, when sowing of rice paddy are finished and the cotton flowers are usually plucked in the month of November or December, after the rice is harvested.<sup>437</sup> Home grown cotton is harvested in October or November in the Chittagong Hills and December in the Chin Hills<sup>438</sup> and around the same time in Mizoram. Although early tribal communities were not known to have modern scientific technique and knowledge, they were endowed with natural knowledge which comes through observations and experiences. As a rule, this knowledge was passed on from one generation to the next. In this light, the Mizo knew that cotton needed more sunlight and hence, it was usually grown on the side of the cultivation which gets more sunlight. This helped in the better growth of the cotton and it was more lucrative for it to get more sun. The kind of cotton plant grown by the Mizo was of average height. A grown cotton shrub would be till the waist and some of them also grow as tall as the shoulder.<sup>439</sup>

There are two basic categories of cotton grown namely flax and hemp. Mizos also often described the two types of cotton based on their colour, namely the white one and the brown one.<sup>440</sup> Hemp was raw cotton of the white variety and the brown coloured flax was referred by most Chin groups as *tlam*.<sup>441</sup> It was an important fibre in the traditional textile production. Sometimes it grows wild in fields which were abandoned due to the jhum system of cultivation, along with bamboos. It is what is known by today as linen used for bed sheets, table linens etc. Because it was thicker and pale in colour, it was used when the textiles was to be dyed.<sup>442</sup> However, flax has not been used in Mizoram over the past 60 years. Hemp or raw cotton on the other hand, was used when textile is to be left in its natural colour of white and it creates a coarse material.

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<sup>437</sup>Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 94

<sup>438</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, p.39

<sup>439</sup>Thankhumi, *Mizo Puan Tah*, Aizawl, SCERT, 1<sup>st</sup> edn., 1982, pp. 4-5; Laitanga, interview, 17 March 2015

<sup>440</sup>Kawlkungi, 'Mizote Inchei dan leh Nun dan' in *Mizoram Kum 100: Kum 100 Chhunga Mizote Awm Dan*, Aizawl, Synod Literature & Publication Board, 1996, p. 233

<sup>441</sup>F.K. Lehman, *Preliminary Field Catalogue*, p. 44.

<sup>442</sup>R. Allaby, et. al, 'Evidence of the Domestication History of flax (*Linum usitatissimum* L.) from genetic diversity of the sad2 locust'. *Theoretical and Applied Genetics*. **112**(1): 58–65. doi:10.1007/s00122-005-0103-3 (accessed 5 October 2017)

### 6.3 Cotton Processing:

The riping of cotton is called *La en*.<sup>443</sup> As soon as the cotton was ready, they would be collected in a bamboo basket called *Tlam Em*.<sup>444</sup> Sometimes a smaller basket was used to gather it. After the cotton had been gathered, they were spread out in the sun to dry for a few hours every day till they were dried to the weaver's satisfaction. Sometimes, they would be dried in the *Thlam* (a small hut build in the jhum field for them to rest, cook and eat) as well, while they would go to work at the jhum, before taking the cotton home. While they were being dried at home, housewives and girls would make sure that they were covered so that the domesticated animals, especially the hens and cocks would not walk and pick on the cotton. As there would be lots of dew in the early morning and at night fall during the winter, great care was taken so as not to soak the cotton with the dew as it easily absorb water and it will take more time for it to get dry again.<sup>445</sup>

Once the cotton was dry enough, the seeds were then separated from the flower. Unless the cotton was quite dry, it was difficult to separate the seeds. The seeds were also kept aside and preserved for them to sow the next year again. Sometimes, the seeds were also used to stuff the heads of effigies they made for *Mitthi Rawp Lam*, a ritual for the dead, observed by the Mizo during one of the festivals called *Mim Kut*. This festival was dedicated to the memory of their dead relatives, underlined by a spirit of thanksgiving and remembrance of the years. First harvest is placed as an offering on a raised platform built to the memory of the dead.<sup>446</sup> They would make effigies representing the dead members of their family and the head of these were stuffed with the cotton seeds.<sup>447</sup>

As most civilizations independently domesticated cotton, they converted it into fabric using tools made by them which included combs, bows, hand spindles and primitive looms.<sup>448</sup> One such important tool was the gin. The dry cotton was then cleansed in a wooden gin called

<sup>443</sup>Thankhumi, *Mizo Puan Tah*, p. 7

<sup>444</sup>The basket with which it was gathered was also called *Tlam Em*, thus conforming to the use of flax or *tlam*.

<sup>445</sup>Thanchhumi, interview, 2014

<sup>446</sup><https://dipr.mizoram.gov.in/article/mizo-sa-leh-an-khua-leh-an-k%C3%BBt/lang/mz>

<https://dipr.mizoram.gov.in/page/about-mizoram/festivals> (accessed 13 August 2015)

<sup>447</sup>C. Lalkunga, 87 years old, Middle School Headmaster (Retired), interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 3 September 2014 at his residence in Khatla, Aizawl. See also Shakespear, *The Lusei*, p. 88.

<sup>448</sup>Stephen Yafa, *Cotton: The Biography of a Revolutionary Fibre*, USA, Penguin, 2005, pp. 11-13

*Herawt* (Lusei), which was like small contort, a warp made of wooden frame holding two geared rollers to revolve in opposite directions. *Herawt* is called *Lari* in Mara.<sup>449</sup>



Fig 6.3 *Herawt*

The gins employed by the Mizo were basically homemade, made by the men. While the cotton passed through the roller, the seeds could not and they therefore were squeezed out.<sup>450</sup> Thus the seeds fall off and were left behind. The gins of the Lusei and the Mara were a little different. In the Lusei gin, the base and frame are cut out of a solid piece of wood while in the Mara gin, the base and the uprights (frame) are made separately and the latter are dove-tailed into the base.<sup>451</sup>

After the seeds were separated the cotton is then teased to make it soft and fluffy by using a scotching bamboo bow with a cane string which was attached to it which was called *Lasai* Lusei. It is called *Patai* in Thadou<sup>452</sup> and *La kah-nak* by the *Lai*.<sup>453</sup> The tool has a wide base and a narrow top, with a cane string attached to both ends of the stick. The bamboo bow would be held tightly by the person operating it while the string is flicked on to the cotton. Through this process the cotton become cleaner as the dirt which could not be removed by the gin is also cleaned and the cotton heap increases sometimes as much as five times its original size. Along with the increase in volume the cotton became more pliable, supple and downy. The main purpose for this process was to soften the cotton as much as possible to prepare it for the next stage.

<sup>449</sup>William Shaw, 'Notes on Thadou Kukis', *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol-xxiv, no.1 Calcutta, 1928, p. 92: Available from [https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.30057/2015.30057.Journal-And-Proceedings-Of-The-Asiatic-Society-Of-Bengal-Vol-xxiv1929\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.30057/2015.30057.Journal-And-Proceedings-Of-The-Asiatic-Society-Of-Bengal-Vol-xxiv1929_djvu.txt) (accessed 13 August 2015)

<sup>450</sup>Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture*, 1998, p. 64.

<sup>451</sup>Parry, *The Lakheres*, p. 95.

<sup>452</sup>Shaw, 'Notes on Thadou Kukisi,' p. 92

<sup>453</sup>Lalchhuanpuia, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 20 April 2015 at Aizawl. He is a Research scholar belonging to the *Lai* tribe

Fig 6.4 *Lasai* (Scotching bamboo)

The next process is what is called *Chawnzial*. The process is also called '*Lachawn*'. '*Zial*' in Lusei means to roll, so *Chawnzial* basically means to roll the cotton. This is to make the cotton ready to be spun. A piece of cotton would be taken and spread thin. It was then placed on a plain smooth plank and rolled on to a piece of wooden stick the size of a lady's pipe. A small stick is use for this purpose. Generally, a piece of bamboo is made into a stick to roll the cotton. Some also used the stem of a tall grass called *Hmunphiah*, (jhadu plant) which is also a family of bamboo. It is approximately the size of a pen or pencil in circumference. The length of the wood also differs from place to place. While some make it as long as a one feet, in some places it would be as long as the length of the palm of a hand, roughly 8 to 10 inches. The piece of cotton is then rolled around the wooden stem on a smooth plank of wood and sometimes on the thighs as they sit. The cotton is rolled around the stick without flattening it too much. When the stick is covered with enough cotton, the roll of cotton is then taken out of the stick. The cotton rolls are about 6-8 inches long and sometimes they would be rolled as big the wrist. These cotton rolls are called *Lachawn*. *Lachawn* are then put together in heaps, but great care was taken so that they will not be flat or that they will not get flatten under each other's pressure.

Fig 6.5 *Lachawn*

When they have enough *Lachawn*, they would be put to the spinning wheel called *Hmui*, to make it into threads. The spinning wheel was made from wood and cane and the actual spindle is made of iron.<sup>454</sup> While spinning maybe done with the drop spindle, spinning wheel and bobbin winder was used later, to make it finer. The frame on which the axle of the wheel revolves is made of solid wood, the base of which is about 3 inches thick with two pillars at each end. Each pillar has a hole in the middle, about 2 feet high from the base, to hold the axle of the wheel, which is usually about 18 inches long. On the outer end of the pillar, mostly right, a bamboo handle to turn the wheel is attached. At the other side which is about 15 inches away is another frame, again with a thick wooden base. It is in this frame that the iron spindle is fixed. This straight iron rod, in the middle is what holds the thread when the spinning starts and this puts the thread in place when they spin. This is called *Hmuithal*.

Before spinning they would make a short thread using the cotton roll with their hands and tie it as tightly as possible into the iron spindle, so that they would not slip when they spin. Both the frames are bind together in the middle by a piece of wood dove tailed into both base. Sometimes there would be only one piece of wood and sometimes two, joining the two frames. The wheel is usually comprised of four wooden spokes at each side of the wheel. The spokes faced each other but they are not stationed opposite each other but alternatively. Narrow slates of split cane are tied into the end of each spoke and stretched diagonally forming something like a wheel.

Since making of *Hmui* involves technical expertise, it could not be made by everyman. In fact many of their tools of weaving were passed on to them from their ancestors. Thus, *Hmui* was considered a significant tool which was expensive. The price of a *Hmui* was equivalent to the price of a piglet. Sometimes, women with gawky and inept husbands would exchange a *Hmui* in lieu of a piglet which was considered an important animal by the early Mizo in terms of economy.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> *Mizoram State Museum Catalogue*, Aizawl, Dept. of Art and Culture, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2008 p. 79; C. Chhuanvawra interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 8 May 2011 at his residence in Tuikhuahtlang; Thanchhumi interview, 2014. Thankhumi, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 3 August 2014

<sup>455</sup> Zodingliani, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 12 August 2014 at her residence in Ramhlun Veng, Aizawl;



Fig 6.6 Woman demonstrating the use of *Hmui*

The size or thickness of the cotton roll being put into the *Hmui* differed, depending on the kind of clothing they intended to make. They would spin out thick threads when they planned to make a blanket called *Puanpui*, which was a basic household item owned by each family, the number of which would depend on the number of members consisted by the family. If they planned to make *puan*, they would spin thinner threads in the *Hmui*. It took expertise to make evenly turned threads.<sup>456</sup> The thickness of the thread was determined by the thickness of the cotton roll which was pushed into the *Hmui*. It was rather difficult for beginners to maintain the same thickness. If not done by an expert, the threads would come out unevenly, thick at some point and thinner at some. This would make it difficult to weave and also give an uneven surface to a finished product. It was preferable if the same person feeds the roller with the rolls of cotton and pull out the ready-made threads. The balance was kept on the amount of pressure given when threads are pulled. If it was pulled with more force, then the thread was likely to be thin, while thicker threads could be achieved by spinning a thicker amount of cotton roll and pulling it out with controlled force. They needed thinner threads which produced finer fabrics to make their clothes and thicker threads for the blanket and rough wears. These readymade threads are called *Latui* and to have more *Latui* was a competition amongst the Mizo girls, showing their hard work and expertise.

When they had spun all the rolls of cotton, the threads are then put into a *Dinlek*. This is to make the yarn into skeins (*A quantity of yarn, thread or the like, put up together, after it is taken from the reel, usually tied in a sort of knot or coils of worsted yarn*) or *Laduang*. A *Dinlek* is a straight bamboo rod/stick of about 2 feet, which has holes at both end to vertically hold two other bamboo sticks of about 1 foot each. The longer stick is affixed right at the centre of both

<sup>456</sup>Laitanga, interview, 2015; Thanchhumi, interview, 2015; Lalthankhumi, interview, 2015

shorter sticks, which are of the same length. The threads are then entwined on to the *Dinlek* with equal number of turns around the bamboo sticks at the end of the longer bamboo stick. This was to untangle or unravel the messy threads so that they are easier to handle.



Fig 6.7 Woman using *Dinlek*

The next step is the process of maintaining the size of the yarn called desizing. This process is done to clean and evenly thicken the threads. This procedure involves boiling the yarn in rice water. Technically, it is to starch the yarn by boiling it in rice water with the little quantity of rice flour as a base that is retained by the water use for boiling rice<sup>457</sup>. Sometimes, the yarns would be boiled in a pot with rice with more water than usual. Among the Mizo, this starching is particularly for warp threads.<sup>458</sup> When the yarns are taken out, the soupy rice in the pot would be eaten by children. This was a highly anticipated event with children when their mothers or sisters prepare their yarns.<sup>459</sup> Sometimes even adults join their feasts.

The starched yarns would then be put to dry in a specially made pole called "*Lazar*". It is a bamboo pole with two upright poles vertically rooted on the ground with two horizontal poles, one at the top and the other just above the ground. This is basically to hang dry the yarns outside. The skeins are then put up on this *lazar* and while they are still wet, they would be combed with *Lakhuilh*, a comb for the purpose. The tool for combing is obtained in the form of a shell of a fruit with hard, stiff pointy outer, which when dried could be used as a harsh comb. The shape and appearance of this fruit is somehow similar to a pineapple<sup>460</sup> which is called *Lakhuilhthei* by the Mizo. *Thei* in Mizo means fruit. There is a speculation that pineapple got its name in Mizo from

<sup>457</sup>Biaksiami, *Mizo Hmeichhe Tangruol*, Aizawl, 1982, p. 41

<sup>458</sup>Sharma, *The Hmars*, p. 71; Chatterji, *Puan*, p. 28; Lorrain, *Five Years*, 1912, p. 137

<sup>459</sup>Zodingliani, interview, 2014

<sup>460</sup>Halliday, *Puan*, p. 16



being so similar to the thread comb. The threads are combed thoroughly so that the remains of rice or starch were fully removed and each strand could be finely smoothen and separated to roll into balls. Starching is a fairly technical process which the weavers have to acquire patiently under the expert guidance of their elders.<sup>461</sup> Also well boiled and well dried threads are silkier and stronger making weaving much easier and fine.<sup>462</sup>

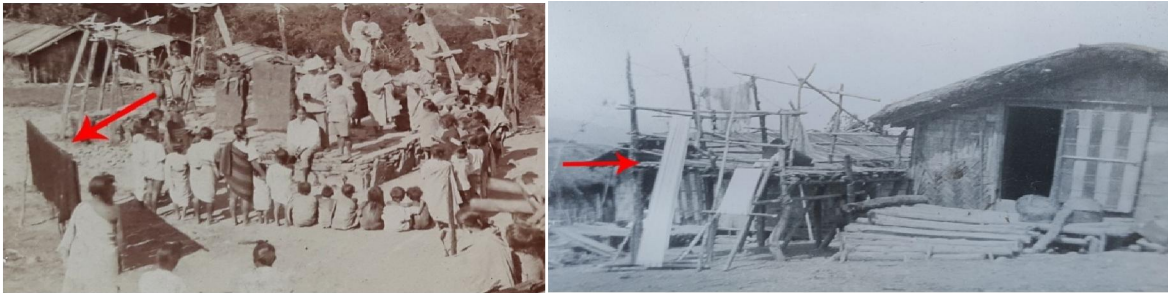


Fig 6.8 (a) & (b) Lazar

After the yarns are thoroughly combed and dried to the weaver's satisfaction, they would be put into a tool called *Suvel*. A *Suvel* is made of wood and bamboo. On a thick block of wood, a small stick or iron is fixed and a hollow bamboo rod is vertically placed on it. The loose hollow of the bamboo rod allows it to move around when pulled. Two bamboo sticks crossed each other horizontally on top of the bamboo rod. These two sticks have small vertical protrusion of about 2 inches at each end to hold the yarns around. When the yarns are put around this tool, the simple yet useful technology allows the threads to be rolled around on a small stone, to form a ball. When all the threads are rolled into balls of the same size, they are ready to be woven.



Fig 6.9 Girl on *Suvel*

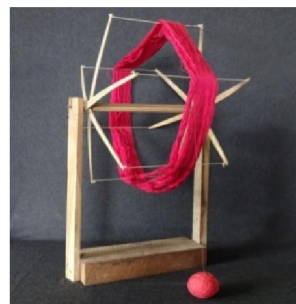


Fig 6.10 *Suvel*

<sup>461</sup>Chatterji, *Puan* p.28

<sup>462</sup>Biaksiami, *Mizo Hmeichhe Tangruai*, p.42

#### 6.4 The art and process of dyeing:

The use of pigments made from ochre (a natural earth pigment) for black, white, yellow and reddish colours is evidenced in the cave paintings of France and Spain dating back to more than 20,000 years ago in the Upper Palaeolithic. Although early use of red pigment has long been associated with early modern humans in Africa and the Near East, the first evidence for core-shell processed natural pigment that was prepared by prehistoric people from hematite red ochre in Hungary. Using radio carbon dating, the antiquity of this site is calculated as having operated between 14–13 kcal BP, during the Epigravettian period.<sup>463</sup> With the adoption of farming and permanent settlements, human beings began to produce and use textiles and started adding colour to them. Before the introduction of synthetic dyes, people used natural dyes to make colours from the locally available raw materials in their surroundings such as tree bark, flowers, leaves, roots, fruits insects, etc. Until the second half of the 19th century, everywhere in the world, natural dyes were the only sources of colours for everyday textiles.<sup>464</sup>

The art of dyeing the yarns was definitely known by the Mizo. But in Mizoram, there are indications from written and oral sources that dyeing became popular only in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Mizo traditionally employed only natural dyes. Like the rest of the world, they learnt that certain barks, roots herbs and leaves could yield different colours such as black, red, brown, green, blue/grey and even yellow. So when the yarns were combed, they would be dyed with organic colours, made from different plants. In the earliest stages, they had very limited options and the basic variant colours were mainly black and red and white, which was the natural colour of the yarn. Black or very dark blue, blue and grey as a hue was sometimes achieved when the colour black runs or when the organic dye could not produce black and becomes blue or greyish blue. The indigo plant called *ting* was well known to the Mizo for the production of

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<sup>463</sup>Sajó IE, Kovács J, Fitzsimmons KE, Jáger V, Lengyel G, Viola B, et al. (2015) Core-Shell Processing of Natural Pigment: Upper Palaeolithic Red Ochre from Lovas, Hungary. Available from: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0131762> (accessed 14 November 2017)

<sup>464</sup>Sangeeta Chakravarty and, Rani Hazarika Kakaty, 'An Analytical Study on The Traditional Techniques of Dyeing Textiles with Natural Dyes in Assam, India', *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, European Centre for Research Training and Development, UK, Vol-3, Oct. 2015, p. 1. Available from: <http://www.eajournals.org/wp-content/uploads/An-Analytical-Study-on-Traditional-Techniques-of-Dyeing-Textiles-with-Natural-Dyes-in-Assam-India> (accessed 10 June 2016).

black or dark blue. In fact indigo was grown along with cotton in their fields.<sup>465</sup> The use of yellow and green seems to have come much later.



Fig 6.11 Rolled and Loose Indigo Dyed thread

The transition from producing simple thick white cloth called *Puan Ngo* to the art of dyeing is rather interesting. Was it by accident? Was it a natural phenomenon? Did they already know the art of dyeing but had to stop while they could not grow cotton and revived the art once they could weave again? Or did they learn the art of dyeing from other tribes that they came across in their process of migration? These are questions which need to be answered. As cloth making is considered to be an art, and art reflects the society and time in which the artists live, the answers would certainly bring us closer to our quest for more information on our cultural affinities and thus our origins.

The process of organic dyeing is the same for most colours. Plants, herbs or bark of the tree to be used for dying are collected and then thoroughly pounded and crushed in a wooden trough. It was then boiled along with the threads which are to be dyed. After the herbs or plants are taken out, ashes are added to the pot and the threads are then boiled again. Once the threads are thoroughly immersed and kneaded, they are wrung and hung in the *Lazar* and combed dry in the sun. This process maybe repeated depending upon the weaver's satisfaction. This process is repeated thrice in order to make the dye fast and lasting.<sup>466</sup> For cold water dyeing, ashes along with alum are added to the solution. After scrupulous drenching and kneading, the threads are kept overnight in the solution.

All thread used in the weaving are first dyed according to the need of colour combination to be used says Chatterji, but her claim: '*sellers of yarn usually bring white yarns from outside*

<sup>465</sup>Kawlkungi, 'Mizote Inchei dan,' p. 232

<sup>466</sup>Lianhmingthanga, *Material culture*, p. 87; Chatterji, *Puan*, p. 28

and have them dyed properly at Mizoram to ensure fastness of colour before selling<sup>467</sup> is barely corroborated by any source.

There is no doubt that the introduction of soluble dye made it much easier on the weavers and depending on their needs, there might be have been weavers who particularly like to dye yarns by themselves. In the seventies, other states of India, including Assam had advanced quite ahead in the technology of manufacturing yarns and dyeing, while there was no factory for such products available in Mizoram. As a matter of fact, Mizoram till date has not produced yarns of any kind commercially. There is no known dyeing factory or dyer for hire for that matter then and now and those who did use locally dyed yarns did it for self use only. On the other hand, lac dyeing was the culture of the ancient Assamese people and lac industries are still flourishing in the Kamrup district of Assam and the adjoining districts of the state of Meghalaya.<sup>468</sup> In fact, it was from Assam that most yarns were procured during that period. Hence to claim in the 1970's that sellers bring white yarns to get them 'properly' dyed in Mizoram can be highly subjective and equated to asserting that locally dyed yarns and threads were better which is highly doubtful as most weavers shifted to soluble dyes from natural process of dyeing. However, the Mizo had their own way of protecting the fastness of dyed colours. In an interview Pi Hrangthliai<sup>469</sup> mentioned how they used the leaves of a plant which was sour in taste and when crushed and boiled was used as the final dip of a dyed thread. This is corroborated by Renhchin and Dawthlei and also by Ni Kio.<sup>470</sup>

A number of sources throw light on the fact that Mizo villages were often visited by merchants from Burma even in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, selling different kinds of goods. The looting of three merchants selling *Thi Hna* leading to the subsequent hanging of a Lusei brave heart Lamsuaka in 1900 by the British government is also evidence of the presence of traders from Burma.<sup>471</sup> In the course of their trade, soluble dyes were acquired from these Burmese traders who along with other trading items would bring other distinct colours which were not locally available. Sometimes, rich ladies and those who could afford would also ask

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<sup>467</sup>Chatterji, *Puan*, p. 28

<sup>468</sup>Chakravarty, and Kakaty, *An Analytical Study*, p.1

<sup>469</sup>Hrangthliai, interview, 2016

<sup>470</sup>Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, pp. 495-497

<sup>471</sup>Dokuma, *Chhakawm Keipui*, p. 109

traders to bring specific colours.<sup>472</sup> This made it possible for the women to produce colourful pattern in their *puan* and to develop new designs. In fact, till the partition of India, there was free trade between Mizo Hills and *Burma*.<sup>473</sup> W.R. Head stated that raw cotton is cultivated, spun into thread and then dyed. They used lac and home-grown vegetable dyes<sup>474</sup>. Lac is a scarlet dye like cochineal used formerly in dyeing and pigment making and obtained from stick lac by extraction with alkali which produces a vivid red excreted by the female *Laccifer locca* which parasitize on the *Fabaceae Maoraceae* plant. Its main ingredients are shellac acid A, B, C and E.<sup>475</sup>

However, once they realized its commercial value, lac would not be collected. They would sacrifice part of their scruples because while the local price of lac was Re.1 per viss, the price goes by the market rate if traded in Burma. When silk thread was used, it was purchased in skeins from Burma and then dyed to the requisite colour.<sup>476</sup> On the other hand, Woodthorpe also mentioned about procurement of tartans from Manipur and Cachar in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>477</sup> The establishment of *bazars* was an important part of the British method in dealing with the Mizo. Three *bazars* were set up namely *Tipaimukh Bazar* on the bank of *Barak River*, *Sonai Bazar* on the bank of *Sonai River* and the *Changsil Bazar* on *Dhaleswari* or *Tlawng* as is known by the Mizo. The latter two were spoken of before the expedition of 1871-72.<sup>478</sup>

As the *Bazars* thrived, it is possible that synthetic dyes could have been a part of their trade. However there is no doubt that powdered dyes became commonly used during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Mizo soldiers came home from France. After the First World War, Mizo soldiers brought with them among other things, powdered or soluble dyes. Powdered dye was highly valued by those who owned it as it helped them to add more colour to their weaving easily. Later, through various interactions with traders from Cachar, the Mizo became more accustomed to varied kinds of dyes, the result of which was vivid in the *puan*. The easy availability of the synthetic dye slowly brought to an end the natural process of dyeing. After the

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<sup>472</sup>Laitanga, Interview, 2015; B. Lalthangliana, interview 2015 and Thankhumi, interview, 2016

<sup>473</sup>Baveja, *The Land*, p. 65

<sup>474</sup>Head, *Hand Book*, p. 48

<sup>475</sup>Available from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lac%20dye>; <https://www.naturalpigments.com/lac-dye.html>; <http://www.bkherb.com/Lac-Dye.html> (accessed 9 June 2015).

<sup>476</sup>Head, *Hand Book*, pp. 47-48

<sup>477</sup>Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition*, p. 75

<sup>478</sup>*The Lushais*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 2008, p. 41

Second World War, the Mizo soldiers brought home dying soap, which was easier to use. Although natural dye was still in use and indigo still grown widely and used through much of the 20th century, natural dyes were gradually replaced by chemical dyes. Powdered dyes and dyeing soap were simultaneously used till other type of synthetic dyes and coloured yarns were introduced by the British through trade by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time when diverse designs and motifs in Mizo dress evolved.

### 6.3 Table on plants and materials use for organic dyeing in Mizoram.<sup>479</sup>

Name of Plant	Botanical Name	Colour it yields
Ting /Assam Indigo Plant (Lusei)	<i>Strobilanthes flaccidifolius</i>	Black, blue and grey
Meithui/Japanese Varnish Tree (Lusei)	<i>Toxicodendron vernicifluum</i>	Black, blue
Khei (Lusei)		Black, blue and grey
Zawngbin (Lusei)		Black, blue
Keifang /Bay Berry (Lusei)	<i>Myrica esculenta</i>	Red
Thil (Lusei)	<i>Quercus polystachya</i>	Red
Sentezel (Lusei)	<i>Calophyllum polyanthum</i>	Red
Tawkzaat (Lai)	<i>found in the Lairam, small shrubs as tall as coffee with leaves of</i>	Red/brown
Purunsen/Red Onion (Lusei)	<i>Abutilon</i> <del>long and an inch</del>	Brown
Hnahkiah (Lusei)	<i>Callicarpa arborea</i>	Brown
Fah (Lusei)	<i>Lithocarpus dealbata</i>	Brown
Khawkherh/Walnut (Lusei)	<i>Juglans regia</i>	Brown
Azeu (Mara)	<i>Duabanga Soneratioides</i>	Blue

<sup>479</sup>This chart is prepared with information gathered from, Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 261. N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, pp. 105-106. Halliday, *Puan*, pp. 34-35; Fraser & Frase, *Mantles of Merit*, pp. 30-40; Lianhmingthanga, *Material culture*, pp. 87-90; Stephen Ni Kio, *Lai Nunphung*, pp. 509-510 and Professor Ramnghinglova, Dept of Botany, Mizoram University, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 8 May 2015 at Aizawl.

Awhmangbeupa/Benth (Mara)	<i>Pithecolobium angulatum</i>	Blue
Thal hrit/ That it ((Lusei/Lai)	<i>Lac-insect deposit</i>	Red
Patsanlo( <i>Vaiphei/Gangte</i> )	<i>Creeper</i>	Red
Sonsen( <i>Thadou</i> )	<i>Creeper</i>	Red
Aieng/ Turmeric(Lusei)	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	Yellow
Titaang( Mara)	<i>Small fruit</i>	Red
Saphit (Lusei/Lai)	<i>Tree</i>	Red

### 3.6.4 Loom:

The traditional textiles of the different tribes of the Mizo like many cultures in Southeast Asia and even in the Americas are exclusively woven on the back-strap or back-tension loom. Although there are different varieties of looms, the fundamental technique involved in their style of weaving is essentially similar. The back strap loom is one of the oldest weaving devices. In primitive societies it provided a weaving device at very little cost and it is highly portable and easy to set up anywhere. Although this loom may pre-date history, it is still in use today even in the most advanced countries.

All the other elements of the loom depends on the main components of the loom which are the two posts stoutly attached to the ground or on a wall or somewhere firm in their home, where the warp beam is firmly attached at both end. The warp beam and the weaver instantaneously face each other. The distance between the warp beam and the weaver depends upon the length of the cloth required.<sup>480</sup> However, it is difficult to weave a very long and wide piece of fabric. It can only be as wide as allowed by both arms of the weaver. Due to this, two pieces of fabrics needs to be stitched together in the middle to form one full dress. Despite these limitations, beautiful cloths were woven by the Mizo. Even some African garments are assembled from narrow pieces of fabric that were woven on a back strap loom.<sup>481</sup> Though there

<sup>480</sup>Parry, *Lakher*, p. 102

<sup>481</sup><http://bobscrefts.com/bobstuff/backstrp.htm> (accessed 24 February 2016).

are several ways to do the warping, in Mizoram warping is done generally where the weaver would sit while weaving in order to avoid hassle of shifting the warp. The largest looms are mainly for blankets; middle range, for skirts and *puans* and the smallest looms are generally for bags and its slings.<sup>482</sup>

To set up the whole loom, the help of another woman is required as the weaver cannot do it alone. Setting up a loom also serve as a socializing factor for women and once the weaving is started, women would often visit to see and check out each other's loom. Younger women would also invite older women or experts to help them with design or to assess their loom in general.

To begin, the weaver attached the warp beam called *Themtlang* to two short tubby loop of ropes firmly attached on the wall or window pane of her house or at other possible places around the house to rest the warp beams. Then the weaver sits facing the warp beam maintaining a distance equals to the length of the cloth needed to be woven and put on the *Kawngvawn* which is the back strap that passes across her back, with both ends of the strap attached at the breast beam called *Themkawl* across her belly or waist. *Kawngvawn* is a hide belt or the strap that is worn around the weaver's waist. This strap is how the back strap loom received its name.<sup>483</sup> It may invariably be alternated by cane woven belt or broad thick band of cloth depending on the availability of hide belt in some region. In many places, the hide of Mithun was also used as the belt and later of cows and bulls.<sup>484</sup> After this thread for warp is tied at the left end of the breast beam and with the help of another woman, the warp thread is passed over the warp beam and under it and over the breast beam and then up over the warp beam repeating the process until the required amount of thread is secured for the warp. This process is called *puanban*.

At this point the weaver employs the other elements of the loom and starts weaving. In the process, the weaver would lean back on the *Kawngvawn* pulling the warp threads into tension to make the warp tout and straight and lean closer to loosen it. This is the reason why it is also known as the tension loom:

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<sup>482</sup>Lehman, *The structure*, p. 23

<sup>483</sup><http://samnoblemuseum.ou.edu/collections-and-research/ethnology/mayan-textiles/weaving-technology/backstrap-looms/> (accessed 24 February 2016).

<sup>484</sup>I have seen my grandmothers and aunts using a belt made of cowhide while weaving even in the early 90's.



*'In order to weave, the threads must be stretched in a horizontal direction and a means must be provided so that the threads can be separated into two (or more) parts so that a weft thread can be passed between the two sets of threads. The two sets of warp threads can then be reversed and a weft thread passed through again. By repeating this process, fabric can be woven.'*<sup>485</sup>

Simply put, the main feature of a loom consisted of bars or beams fixed in place to form a frame to hold a number of parallel threads in two sets, alternating with each other. By raising one set of these threads, which together formed the warp, it was possible to run a cross thread, a weft, or filling between them. The block of wood used to carry the filling strand through the warp was called the shuttle.<sup>486</sup>

The elements of basic Mizo loom consisted of a shed rod called *Thembupui*, made of bamboo which is bigger in diameter than the other rods. It passes over and under alternate warps, to define the shed. Then there is the heddle rod called *Themtang* which allows and helps in the manipulation of the string heddle. The string heddle is called *Hnahchawi* and it helps in lifting those warps passing under the shed rod to create a counter shed. They utilise a medium size stick called *Sahthlau* to roll the threads which acts as a bobbin carrying the weft through the shed and the counter shed. To tamp and compress the weft, a sword is used which is a smoothened flat piece of wood about three inches wide and three or four feet long, generally made of *Sasai* palm.<sup>487</sup> This is called *Themtleng*. Sometimes, depending on the design the weaver make use of a lease or coil rod to hold the warps in order. A temple which is a narrow piece of bamboo split is also employed to maintain the width of the cloth being woven. Often a warp spacer called *Tukrek* is also used when weaving an intricate design so that the warp would not stick too thickly making it difficult to weave. Also for supplementary weft decoration of selected warps, extra heddle rods and string heddles are added and a smaller sword called *Themtleng Te* is used to pick the selected warps. They use a porcupine quill called *Dawhkih* to manipulate supplementary wefts or discontinuous wefts, which after each use would be stuck into their hair buns for easy access and find. *Dawhkih* also helps the weaver to re-adjust a whole line when needed. The

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<sup>485</sup> 'The Backstrap Loom'. Available from: <http://bobscrafts.com/bobstuff/backstrp.htm> (accessed 24 February 2016)

<sup>486</sup> 'Loom'. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/technology/loom> (accessed 27 February 2016)

<sup>487</sup> Parry, *The Lakheres*, p. 103

Note: The botanical name of *Sasai* palm is *Caryota urens*.

sticks or smaller rods used in the loom besides the sword and shed rods are made of bamboo splits smoothly polished with beeswax.

When the required warp has been placed on the loom, the wooden temple is placed to maintain the width of the weave and then weaving begin. The sword is turned up on its edge, in between the warps giving enough space for the weft shuttle called *Laphei* or *Puanphei* to pass through. After it passed through the warp, alternate threads are then lifted to make room for the sword which pushed the weft down to the point where it crosses with the warp threads. The alternative warps are then lifted up again and the warps which were above the weft are now placed below, interchanging the position of the alternative warps. This is the basic step by step description of the Mizo loom weaving. This is the basic narrative for the production of simple design or *plain puan*. But when heavily embroidered *puan* is to be produced, the number of sticks and tools increases depending on the intricacy and complexity of the design. Once definite amount of work is finish, extra breast beam or warp beam are employed to wind or roll up the finished woven area and to stabilize the warp.

In between a lot of other chores, sometimes it takes the Mizo woman months to finish a *puan*, depending upon the design and time she can spare for weaving. To pass on the knowledge of weaving, for their leisurely activity and to make young girls aware the importance of weaving, fathers would make miniature loom for their daughters which makes for a great practise and learning.

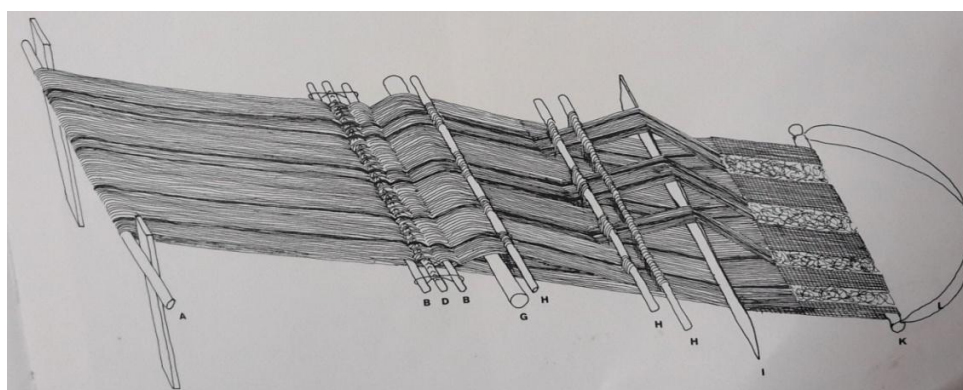


Fig 6.12 Illustration of basic Mizo loom

A and K are the warp beams called *Themtlang* and *Tainam/Themkawl* respectively. B is the coil or lease rod called *Themtang* and D is called *Tukrek* which is a notched warp spacer. G is the

shed rod called *Thembupui*. H is a heddle rod called *Hnahchawi*. I s the sword to tamp the weft into place called *Themtleng*. L is the back strap called *Kawngvawn*.<sup>488</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Most ancient culture, no matter how primitive, has woven on handlooms. The first evidence for the technique of weaving and the known oldest woven textiles are found in the context of the Eurasian Palaeolithic. Likewise the Mizo tribes have woven their clothing using handlooms, specifically the loin loom. The technology and expertise of the Mizo in dress making reveals that like other tribal communities around them they adopted the technology which were available in their society which were handed down from generation to generation.

For their dress production the most common raw material was cotton which was locally grown and processed using their traditional technique. Cotton processing require many stages of treatment and technological devices such as, cleaning the seed from the raw cotton using *Herawt*, making the cotton fluffy and soft using *Lasai*, converting the rolled cotton into threads using *Hmui*, etc.. The final cotton threads were then woven into different design with motifs using the loin loom. The loom itself, which is still used by many Mizos, is a very intricate and highly complex system comprising various parts requiring the hand of a skilled weaver to accomplish the job.

The pre-colonial Mizo tribes also coloured their fabrics using the traditional technique of dyeing. In the dyeing process they used materials available in nature such as tree barks, plants and flowers to render the desired colour. The most prominent colours of Mizo dresses were white, black, red and yellow. White was the most common colour because it was the natural colour of the cotton, the main raw material for dresses. While black colour was derived by dyeing the raw cotton threads with indigo other colours were derived from tree barks and plants. However, the technique of dyeing and the variety of colours elicited by the Mizos in the pre-colonial period lacked certain knowledge as far as fastness and variations in colour are concerned.

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<sup>488</sup>Fraser & Fraser, *Mantles of Merit*, pp. 40-42. Also see Boichhingpuii, *Mizo La Deh*, , pp. 74-80. Also see Thankhumi, *Mizo Puan Tah*, pp. 26-30.

## **Chapter 7: Evolution of Dress During Colonial Times.**

### **7.0 Introduction:**

This chapter examines some of the main transformations undergone by the Mizo culture during the colonial period and attempt to divulge the consequences and changes brought by them, particularly in the matter of dress and fashion. While the pre-colonial Mizos wore plain, minimal and clean cut dresses in the colonial era, Christianity, western education and the world wars had radically altered their fashion. However, it is important to understand the fact that the effects of these elements invariably overlap. While colonialism was an all encompassing factor with a definite time frame, the significance and meaning that Christianity and western education had on Mizo culture and society cannot be periodized and due to its homogenising factor, the different tribes could hardly be categorized. Therefore, this chapter will expediently club together the three specified tribes and trace the evolution of their culture as a whole during colonial times.

### **7.1 Colonialism and Dress - Colonial Overtures:**

After the First Anglo Burmese War, the entire Brahmaputra Valley and the neighbouring territories of Cachar, Jaintia and the Khasi Hills were subdued within a decade.<sup>489</sup> Meanwhile, in 1835, R.B. Pemberton had given a detailed report on the military and commercial routes that connected Bengal with Bhutan, Tibet, Sikkim China and Burma through Northeast India.<sup>490</sup> The anticipation of commercial and military expansion led the British to embark upon a decisive process of penetration into a region that had remained politically isolated from the rest of the country for centuries. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Naga Hills, the Garo Hills, the Lushai Hills, and the adjoining areas were also brought under British control. The 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the second half became a period of unprecedented dynamic changes in different areas of life in the north eastern India.

The Mizo need for economic expansion, their need for hunting and acquisition of wealth objects, impelled by the need for survival in a topography, which hardly supported sustainable

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<sup>489</sup>Priyam Goswami, *A History of Assam: From Yandaboo to Partition, 1826-1947*, New Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 2012, p. 2.

<sup>490</sup>S. Pemberton, '1835 Report on Eastern Frontier of India.' Available from: <http://pahar.in/wpfb-file/1835-report-on-eastern-frontier-of-british-india-by-pemberton-s-pdf/> (accessed 19 June 2015).

economic structure and a society where entrepreneurship was hardly a feature, set in motion a series of raids and counter offensive actions, which was thought to be the best and ultimate solution to survive in such a situation. This interaction along with a new found ambition on the part of the Mizo and the colonial state's need for supremacy and protection of their territories led to the most crucial transitions which occurred in the Mizo society changing the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions forever.

Early human clothing was necessarily functional, permitting hunter-gatherers, for instance, certain degree of protection from the elements while maintaining ease of movement.<sup>491</sup> This was very true of the Mizos in particular. As they developed and made progress in realm of accessories and jewellery when the British entered the hills, there were also varieties in patterns and fashion consciousness in terms of elaboration and adornment which was involved in the production of early clothing. Though the basic style of draping continued to be in vogue, new styles of wearing *puan* evolved and the basic function of cloths as protection was slowly paralleled by a gradation of styles weighed by fashion and trend. Hence by the end of the colonial rule the Mizo, especially the men had largely taken to western clothing.

### **7.1.1 Colonial Approach on Dress:**

The world history of colonialism shows that the conquerors usually considered the conquered to be alien and different. Upon entering an unknown land, colonial rulers transformed most of the natives' socio-economic and cultural set up including dress. Appearance has always been a strongly contested area in the relationships between colonizers and colonized. The colonialists often encountered indigenous societies who adorned their bodies with cosmetics, tattoo or scars, wore feathers and other forms of ornament, and sometimes show themselves naked or dressed in animal skins or other non-woven materials. Those who wear dresses do it in the form of clothing that was draped, wrapped, or folded rather than cut, stitched, and shaped to the contours of the body. These dresses and textiles often expressed gender and rank in ways unfamiliar to the colonizers. This along with their nakedness was taken as evidence of their inferiority. Therefore for colonizers who considered their own norms and lifestyles to be proof of

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<sup>491</sup> Nicole Smith, 'Clothing and the Communication of Culture : The Sociology of Fashion'. Available from: <http://www.articlemyriad.com/clothing-communication-culture-sociology-fashion/> (accessed 13 May 2014).

their superior status, dress became an important boundary-marking mechanism.<sup>492</sup> Eventually it was the Christian notions of morality that guided the cultural norms of the Western colonial encounters that was translated into action across the colonial world by missionary societies from numerous denominations such as in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of Latin America, the Dutch in Indonesia, and so on. In Africa and in the Pacific too, one of the objectives of the missionaries was to cloth the natives or indigenous people. Missionaries were pleased when indigenous peoples accepted their clothing proposals, seeing it as a sign of religious conversion in the new moral economy of mind and body.<sup>493</sup> One of such effects in the encounter between the West and the non-West was innovations and transformations of clothing which resulted in new styles and designs.

When the colonialists entered India, colonial rulers and ethnographer would often refer to the dresses of the people as costume, a terminology that is often questioned by many sociologist and dress historians. When the colonialists referred to the dresses of the colonies as costume, it apparently differentiated clothes from the people who wore them. The colonialists hardly referred to their own clothing as costume and they would often collect these so called costumes of the people that they had encountered with as museum pieces. Before the availability of mass photographs, objects played a vital role in symbolising strange and exotic places. Clothes, weapons and curiosities were collected and exhibited in museums. These artefacts would then form the public's perception of those cultures. Later on, "*with the new medium of photography to record their findings, ethnographers put together large volumes which classified native peoples according to their physical appearances, including their dress.*"<sup>494</sup> Also, the nakedness of the people that they encountered in the colonies such as in India was the subject of great fascination. Emma Tarlo has also pointed out that one of the first thing that intrigued European travellers in India was their nakedness.<sup>495</sup> And this has become the basis of what the world has perceived of those cultures, which are exhibited through their dress or the way they wear or do not wear them. It also led to discourses relating to society, gender, morality, race and economy. To bring home the exoticness of the colonies and to transform objects into artefacts, antiquity and art,

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<sup>492</sup> Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Colonialism and Imperialism*. Available from: <http://fashion-history.lovetoknow.com/fashion-history-eras/colonialism-imperialism> (accessed 15 January 2018).

<sup>493</sup> Hansen, 'Colonialism and Imperialism'.

<sup>494</sup> Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters-Dress and Identity in India*, London, C, Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1996, p. 3.

<sup>495</sup> Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, pp. xvii-xxi.

paintings were also promoted in the nineteenth century. Cohn referred to Mildred Archers' documentations of drawings and paintings, illustrating the appearance, customs, dress, and occupations of the Indians.<sup>496</sup> These representations by British and Indian artists became very popular in both the country becoming one of the important sources for the study of dress history of people. Likewise, such illustrations and drawings of the early Mizos by R.G Woodthorpe,<sup>497</sup> E.P. Leach<sup>498</sup> and Richard Brend'amour<sup>499</sup> have been helpful for the reconstruction of the early Mizo dress and culture.

### **7.1.2 Colonialism and Dress in Mizoram:**

When the British entered the Lushai Hills the clothing identity of the Mizo was revealed to the world on a wider scale. What followed was a combination and fusion of fashion and tradition where the assemblage of culture other than European was considered traditional or primitive. This became one of the highlights of colonial enterprise in the colonies.<sup>500</sup> By the end of the 19th century, fashion as a notion was being given a substantial conceptualisation in the European societies, but the concept of fashion and trend was still a new fixation for the Mizos. This does not mean that the notion of fashion did not exist earlier among the Mizos but the completely diverse and variation of style brought by the British intrigued the Mizos and it easily became a new trend. All the while in Europe, the bourgeoisies began to demand constant change as an intellectual, aesthetic, and, above all, economic stimulus for modern times. This signifies a change in the system of cloth production. Clothing began to be produced in large quantities in accordance with certain seasonal rhythm. This in turn started to have an effect on sartorial appearances within a society. This was then termed and exported as a "style," and that is consumed according to a prescribed agenda.

It is established through the colonial ethnographies that the Mizos were already in contact with the other tribes and ethnic groups living in the peripheral areas. In fact the regular raids were how these neighbouring tribes and Bengalis in the Chittagong hill tracts identified them

<sup>496</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British In India*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 99.

<sup>497</sup> Pachau & Schendel, *The Camera*, pp. 29, 30, 38, 46, 60, 61 & 63

<sup>498</sup> Pachau & Schendel, pp. 109, 110 & 112

<sup>499</sup> Pachau & Schendel, pp. 34 & 113

<sup>500</sup> Victoria L. Rovine, 'Colonialism's Clothing: Africa, France, and the Deployment of Fashion,' *Design Issues*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Design in a Global Context (Summer, 2009), MIT Press, p. 44. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20627816> (accessed 4 December 2017).

with even before the British East India Company sent the Kheddahs in 1750.<sup>501</sup> Whatever their environment of dealings may have been, we cannot rule out possible exchange of influences in the socio-cultural outlook and expression of the Mizo, vis-a-vis their dress. Looking at the style of dress in the cultures that the Mizo have encountered in China or Burma, *puan* was mostly wrapped around the body. The women wore it on their chest and cover their shoulder with another *puan* as shawl. The men wore them as body wrap, crossing both ends across one shoulder. The Mizos have been influenced by their encounter with the people living in the neighbouring areas. It appears that the later trend of wearing a shawl only on one shoulder, without covering the other shoulder like that of a *pallu* of a Sari was influenced likely by the Bengali or other Sari wearing groups, whom they have come upon a number of times before the colonial periods and more so during it.



Fig 7.1 Girl wearing *puan* like sari and Serkawn girls students draping *puan* over their body 1925- 1935

Therefore, it was not just the British that the Mizo imitated. In fact, in the 1890s, Baia and his brother Zapuithanga, a respected minister of Chief Kalkhama, who spoke fluent Bengali were often sent as emissaries for their chief, and often acted as interpreter in the talks between the colonial government and the Mizo chiefs.<sup>502</sup> They were also reportedly employed as interpreters in the talk between the Chief Commissioner and the Maharaja of Manipur.<sup>503</sup> They are the father and elder brother of Thangphunga, the first student of the Missionaries. There were others with the knowledge of Hindi and Bengali such as Dokhama, his brother Nela, and a Nepali named Lal Singh called Lalchhinga by the Mizo who became important people under the

<sup>501</sup>C.Vanlalruaia, *Pipute Rammutna*, Aizawl, St. Joseph Press, 2001, p. 55. Also see F. Lalremsiama, *Mi Lu Lak*, p. 83.

<sup>502</sup>Lalhruaitluanga Ralte, *ZoramVartian: Chhanchintha leh Thuziak Khawvar Tan Dan* (2008), Aizawl, Synod Press, 2009(revised), p. 246.

<sup>503</sup>John Hlira, 'M. Suaka Chanchin' in *M.Suaka, DurtlangLal 1868-1953*, Aizawl, JJJ Enterprise, 1993, p. 8.



colonial government due to their linguistic skill and knowledge.<sup>504</sup> This indicates the level of interactions that the Mizo have had with the Bengali or others in the neighbouring areas, especially Cachar and Manipur. Many of the young lads copied the Indian style of wearing dhoti and pugri, which was prevalent amongst Cacharis and even the Manipuris.



Fig 7.2 Man wearing *puan* in a dhoti and *pugri* style 1894

These were later criticized by the early educated Christians and even government officials.<sup>505</sup> Hence assumptions can be made about certain pieces and style of dresses that may infiltrate the Mizo garb. It is believed that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century a beautiful Sailo chieftainess, Vanhnuaithangi, sister of the famous Suakpuilala, often visited Cachar and that she used to wear sari on these visits and was often spotted using a hand fan which was popular among the Bengalis.<sup>506</sup> According to Zopari, born in 1940, her mother who trained as nurse in Dibrugarh in the 1930s wore sari as uniform.<sup>507</sup> Even Ziki when visiting Sylhet with Chapman often wore a sari. Hence the Mizos were quite familiar with the Indian way of dressing in the pre-colonial times and they continued to be so even during the colonial period.

Until recently, most people often dress in a way which is culturally dictated to them over generations and sometimes the clothes that people wear would be prescribed to them through caste or religion, which is true especially in India. According to Vinay Bahl there is a certain

<sup>504</sup> C. Hualkunga, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on September 2014 at his residence in Mission VengAizawl.

<sup>505</sup> S. Ch. V. 'Kamanding Sap Duhzawng', *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, April, 1903, pp. 9; See also J. N. Sarma, 'Tangka NeiTheina Thu,' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, May, 1903, p. 1

<sup>506</sup> Lalhruaitluanga Ralte, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 26 September 2014. He is researching for a book on Vanhnuaithangi who is referred to as 'Baniatangi' in colonial government proceedings. Also see *The Lushais*, Aizawl, TRI, 2008, pp. 72-73.

<sup>507</sup> Zopari, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 28 February 2018 in Aizawl. Zopari hails from a well to do family in Thakthing and is amongst the first to record songs at All India Radio Aizawl.

extent to how free people are to make choices of their style and clothes because of restrictions in the form of economic conditions, control over personal choices, colonial or post colonial status, availability of alternatives, personal satisfaction and the notion of overspending.<sup>508</sup> The Mizos, however did not specified any particular clothing for the masses when it comes to religious purposes but restriction and dictation of dresses, particularly for the common people was based mainly on economic condition. The world over, people would identify themselves through clothes affiliated to the culture or community that they belong. Thus most cultures all over the world have their own traditional dress with which they identify themselves or the culture that they represent. Within that culture or community, there would be variety of designs and different types of clothing with which the sub cultural groups or sub tribes identify themselves or their clan. However, there are repetitions of contentious moments when individual and groups choose to change their clothes or combine one type of clothing with another.

Since fashion is ever evolving, influenced by the changes in different elements surrounding it, it is rather difficult to limit a particular dress to a particular time and space. Fashion and clothing can be a product of context and could function as fashion at one moment and as clothing at another.<sup>509</sup> For example, while *Siapsuap* is generally believed to be the earliest form of dress worn by the Mizo, there are references of it being worn well after the availability of improved form of clothing, sometimes due to economical reason such as poverty and later as a show piece in events as part of public history. This kind of evolution and repetitions in dress and clothing are a part of the Mizo culture and social evolution as well after they came into contact with people outside of their tribe particularly the *Vai* and then the British.

The changes also came in the form of new motifs created during the colonial and post colonial period. From the late 1940's onwards, there had been a surge of new designs and patterns incorporated in Mizo dresses, especially women's *puan*. The British rule which had forbidden wars between ethnic groups in the hills had actually succeeded in maintaining peace which facilitated more in trade dealings, greater exchange of social and cultural dynamics including ideas, personal friendships and interactions with the neighbouring tribes. Earlier, their contacts were usually through either war or marriages, mostly negative and limited. Colonial

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<sup>508</sup>Vinay Bahl, in the introduction to 'Shifting Boundaries of "Nativity" and "Modernity" in South Asian Women's Clothes,' *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 29, No. 1 Springer 2005, p. 87. (accessed on 23 January 2018)

<sup>509</sup>Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 171.

period encouraged positive attitudes and though most missionary accounts are silent about it, there seemed to have been direct and indirect effect where colonial rule promoted interaction between people of different ethnic groups in the hills. Also, their understanding of time, the art of its management and the availability of leisure brought about more creativity and space for the growth of artistic growth. Therefore, the colonial period escalated an inspiring circumstance for growth of creativity in design and aesthetic.

Hence it is important to analyse specific historical and contemporary sources to reveal the active role that clothing has played in the identity construction of individuals, families, social class, religions and nations.

### **7.1.3 Dress and Appearance - New Social Realities:**

Photographs dating back to the mid nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century provide us with a rich detail of the dresses worn by Mizo who had come into contacts with the European and whose changed garments are evidently shown in such pictures. Many photographs of Mizos taken by Lewin and his writings became the most innovative process in giving a civilize visual of the people in Lushai Hills.<sup>510</sup> These photographs shows the Mizo dress and customs to the outsiders and gives us a platform to work on the eventual evolution and changes in the dressing style of the Mizo during and after the colonial era.

It is apparent that there existed different dresses for the people whose lives had changed due to such contingent historical factors as colonialism, western education and Christianity. The fashion and exported 'style' of Europe was introduced to the Mizo society. However, at the beginning there had not been a large number of the local Mizo population who came under direct influence of these socio-religious, and cultural factors until the first half of the last century. The new converts to Christianity attended the Mission schools and after having completed their curricula, they were recruited by the missionaries in various capacities such as clerks, teachers and evangelists. These individuals constituted the earliest educated elite in the Mizo society that

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<sup>510</sup>Pachau & Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, p. 26. Also see John Whitehead, *Thangliena: A Life of T. H. Lewin*, Kiscadale, Gartmore, 1992.



Fig 7.3 M. Suaka, Thangphunga and Babua wearing western clothes in 1895

also included the first pastors and mission workers. Most of the early educated lot were also engaged in administrative works under the colonial government. A majority of the photographs available of these educated elite are what has given us an idea of the dresses that were worn by them during the colonial period whether formal or informal. However, this elitist group was not enough to represent the entire Mizo society but a tiny fraction of the educated class. Also, those who were around the vicinity of government stations did not necessarily imbibe western attire overnight as evident in many candid photographs (refer to chapter 6, fig 6.8). The photograph shows a man wearing traditional attire, listening to the preaching of J.H Lorrain. On the other hand, the vast majority, particularly those in the rural areas who could not get access to western education and those who did not feel the need were much less susceptible to these changes in dress. Conforming to their social, cultural and political environment, how individuals dress themselves could be explained. The context of how a person uses his/her dress is equally important, especially in societies with more complex, rigid and varied ways of dressing.

In the pre-colonial Mizo society, certain statutory dress such as *Thangchhuah Puan* along with specific head accessories for the Lusei and head gear for the Lai and Mara were only for certain individuals with power and achievement. The pre-colonial Mizo dress was not as complex as some of the other Indian societies, especially the Hindus. The Mizo men in general did not care or did not seem to care about their fashion and women who stress on their appearance and vanity were also scorned. On the other hand, if a woman while fulfilling her

social responsibilities provides enough clothing for her family with plenty of *puan* for herself, she was applauded. This shows that the Mizo woman like in many other societies was burdened with a huge amount of social as well as domestic duties. Adorned clothes and statutory garments, worn in social events, along with ownership of clothing in plenty in the traditional society used to represent power and status. This equation of power dressing was somehow changed with the introduction European dress as it has become equated with power and class. The Mizos who first wore western dresses somehow became looked upon as elitist, and not necessarily the Chief in the traditional context or *Thangchhuahpa* particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time the significance of *Pawndum* as a shroud for the dead husband and it being a crucial part of a bride trousseau remains. These examples show that pattern of clothing also signify a variety of social and political ideas such as hierarchy, respect, a relationship between dress and social order in terms of power, authority, gender, status, and class.<sup>511</sup>

During and after the colonial period, the Mizo society also came to be distinguished based on the relationship a person has with the government and the British officials for whom they worked at an official or personal level, therefore, emulating their dress, habits and lifestyle. The British on the other hand provided the cultural resources for those who sought to imitate them.<sup>512</sup> Another factor for imitation was purely on the ground of fascination of the dress and the items. J.H. Lorrain on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1896 entered in his log book that boots have a special fascination for Lushais.<sup>513</sup> He also mentioned later that on the arrival of his new slippers, one boy directly asked him to order him a pair. Even before the First World War, there seemed to be some Mizo boy possessing an old pair of sepoy boots who were envied by their mates.<sup>514</sup> At the same time, the influences of western dress did not reach the remote areas. The photographs and illustrations in Emile Riebeck's collection<sup>515</sup> portrays that colonialism may have been the most important single factor in changing Mizo adornments but it is not the only factor in changing the dress habits of the Mizo.

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<sup>511</sup>P. Storm, *Function of Dress Tool of Culture and the Individual* (N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2000) as quoted in Vinay Bahl's Introduction to *Shifting Boundaries*

<sup>512</sup>Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, translated by Howard Greenfield, London and New York: Earthscan Publication Ltd, 2003, p. 57 quoted in St  phanie Marie R. Co  , *Clothing and the Colonial Culture of Appearances in Nineteenth century Spanish Philippines (1820-1896)*, PhD Thesis, The Universit   Nice Sophia Antipolis, 2014, p. 47 (Accessed 4 January 2018).

<sup>513</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book, 1890-1936*, entry for 16 December 1896

<sup>514</sup>Lorrain, entry for 26 January 1897

<sup>515</sup>Pachau & Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, pp. 33, 34

## 7.2 Christianity and Dress – Cleaning the Dirt:

The Mizo tribes went through years of struggle and adjustment in the socio-political milieu brought about by British colonialism. The most significant change in the Lushai Hills in the nineteenth century was the proselytization of the tribal population of Mizoram (formerly Lushai Hills) by the British. Under the aegis of the British rule, Christianity became one of the most consequential elements which transformed the Mizo society, especially affecting the traditional culture, including social system and social life in general, health, politics, dress, educational system and the whole outlook of the Mizos, towards themselves, others and the world per se. This was achieved by the persistent effort of the pioneers from Arthington Aborigines Mission in London, who entered Mizoram in 1894 and established the first church, the Presbyterian Church in Aizawl in 1897.

For the Mizo, who often felt the need to please the evil spirits, Christianity provided a stable ideological institution and foundation. It emancipated them from fear and danger which they conceived were presented in their surrounding environment which initiated a number of significant social and cultural changes. These changes however could not fully supplant the traditional social structure leading to the emergence of a parallel structure represented by church leaders as religious elite. This legitimized the authority of the Missionaries within the church establishment and among the church members enabling them to elevate the position and status of their close associates.

19<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Evangelicalism placed emphasis upon Christianity-as-lifestyle. Maintenance of certain standards of conduct was required in which personal cleanliness and healthy living conditions were stressed upon.<sup>516</sup> As the church services became slowly regularised from 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1895, Lorrain expressed his desire to make restrictions during the services. On 16<sup>th</sup> October 1895, he wrote,

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<sup>516</sup>Frederick S. Downs 'title of the article' in Milton S. Sangma and David R. Syiemlieh eds., *Essays On Christianity In North-East India*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing Company, 1994, pp. 147-149.

*'We cannot lay down any hard and fast rules with these people with regards to services: but we shall soon have to make a few restrictions. One will be that the ladies and gentlemen who attend leave their pipes at home. The odour arising from them, especially the ladies' pipe is not at all nice, and when the smoke gets down the throat, it does not facilitate speaking or singing.....that no one is allowed to howl in the ear of his neighbour while singing. One other condition will be that no one with more than a month's dirt upon him shall be allowed admission.'*<sup>517</sup>



Fig 7.4 First Sunday school in Mizoram, 1897

Under these conditions and the Mizos failing ever so, the first Lushai church was started and Sunday schools were started for children. By 1897, though some of them still wore scanty cloths, children who were barely clothed started wearing clothes and dresses, some even taking up western garb like waistcoats and coats. Children who attended Sunday school also looked much cleaner than the average children. As the early converts took to 'civilized' clothing sense taught to them and the western outfits of the Missionaries, the allure of the new style of dressing was so strong that some even took to stealing goods from the Missionaries, amongst which was an unpaired boots, a new night suit and two shirts in 1896.<sup>518</sup> Notwithstanding the offense committed, it was only natural to imitate the character and appearance of somebody they perceived as superior to them. Also, the missionaries would often give their used clothes to some of the active converts such as coats and trousers and wearing those cloths elevated the person's status in the congregation as well as in the society. One of the main purposes of promoting

<sup>517</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book, 1890-1936*, entry for 16 October 1897

<sup>518</sup>Lorrain, entry for 9 January 1897

trousers to Mizo men who normally wear *puan* was that they would often re-arrange their *puan* by unwrapping it and then closing it again while wearing nothing underneath, thus displaying their naked lower halves, which was seen as vulgar and inconsistent with the moral and cultural standards of the western missionaries.

A somewhat similar situation occurred in the dealing of the Erromango tribe by the missionaries at Vanuatu in the Pacific Islands. Here the missionaries endowed the wearing of European dress with great significance and they used clothing to mark distinctions among Christians. Cloth was among the earliest enticements offered by Europeans trying to establish relations with the Erromangos.<sup>519</sup> Food and clothing was given as presents and payment to the locals. Although the traditional leaf skirts were accepted, missionaries put pressure on the dignity of wearing trousers, shirts coats and hats. Dress became the simplest way of approaching Christianity and potentially sharing the influence and spiritual power of its practitioners who used clothing as a distinguishing feature of Christian identity by the 1890's in colonial Vanuatu.<sup>520</sup>

In Mizoram, by distributing their old clothes to the few fortunate ones, the Missionaries tried to teach them to maintain their clothing cleanly along with their body as it affected the issue of health. The unhealthy conditions in which babies were given birth and cared for was a matter of great concern as it led to a high infant mortality rate in Mizoram. Hence articles would be written to educate people that wearing a clean dress were not about being westernised or flirty but more about health and that even the food should be clean.<sup>521</sup> Mothers were taught the importance of proper and healthy breastfeeding methods and how to take care of babies.<sup>522</sup> The nakedness and dirty living manner of the Mizos was seen as disturbing by the missionaries. They were often urged to clothe themselves more cleanly and fully. Lorrain once mentioned how Savidge forced one of their house boys to have a bath under his supervision who claimed to have bathed at least twice in his life time.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>519</sup>Barbara Lawson, 'Clothed and in their Right Mind': Women's Dress on Erromango, Vanuatu', in *Pacific Arts Association*, p.77. [JSTOR]. Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23411462> (accessed 4 December 2017).

<sup>520</sup>Lawson, 'Clothed and in their Right Mind', p.p. 77-79

<sup>521</sup>S.Ch. V., 'Ai Ka Duh Lo,' in *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, March, 1903, p.11

<sup>522</sup>Zotuawnga, 'NaupangHriselna,' *Mizo Leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, June 1911, p. 2. Also see 'Naushen Enkaw! Dan', *KristianTlang-Au*, Kum V, Bu 5-na, November, 1915, pp. 167-169

<sup>523</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for 22 February 1897.



The missionaries recoiled at the living condition of the Mizos which was dirty and unhygienic prompting them to promote a healthier and more hygienic way of dressing and living. The early educated converts were also filled with the zeal to teach their brethren the importance of cleanliness. Zotu-awnga, one of the frequent contributors of *Kristian Tlang-Au* monthly had even strongly remarked that ‘*dirt can be called the mother of death.*’<sup>524</sup> The notion of cleanliness took quite some time to catch up especially in rural areas. To persuade people who had great difficulty in accessing water was no small thing.<sup>525</sup> So even as late as the 1960’s, school children in the remote village of Rawpui in the southern part of Mizoram still needed to be coaxed to have a bath. Students were yet told by their teachers to bathe at least twice or thrice a week and reluctant students were even disciplined.<sup>526</sup>

### 7.2.1 Christianity and Dress –The Fascinating *Sap* Style:

The rapid transformation in Mizo life and thought in the beginning of the twentieth century, especially through westernisation which was an immediate impact of Christianity also affected the Mizo wardrobe so much so that the traditional classification of Mizo dress ceased to be relevant anymore. Similar to the trickle-down theory and “reverential imitation” of Herbert Spencer, an entire new set of dresses came into vogue with the early Christians wearing clothes akin to the missionaries or colonial officers. There were articles about the basic use of cloth in general as to when and how much to wear.<sup>527</sup> Chapter 11 of the book of 1 Corinthians where Paul gave details on a respectable form of dress, head and hair dressing for both men and women was elaborated and commented in an article in a monthly Christian journal, *Kristian Tlangau*.<sup>528</sup> Men slowly gave away their traditional dress and ornaments. Those men who were wearing earrings at church were now looked upon as comical and not respectable.<sup>529</sup> These articles were mostly written by early Mizo Christians, teaching about what they were taught and what they believed was biblically correct. Some men held on to their accessories and traditional jewellerys, especially the necklaces. (See fig. 7.3). These conventions instructing what may be moral or taboo, what may be the degree of bodily coverage and what may be considered a zealous

<sup>524</sup>Zotu-awnga, ‘Mi Ti Hlum Thei,’ *Kristian Tlang-Au*, July 1914, p. 130

<sup>525</sup>Downs ‘title of the article’, p. 149

<sup>526</sup>Dr. K.C. Vannghaka, Associate Professor, Govt. Aizawl College interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 21 February 2018 at Aizawl.

<sup>527</sup>‘Puan Shin Thu,’ *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, March, 1911, p. 31-32

<sup>528</sup>Zosaphluia (D.E. Jones), ‘Korinth Bu Hrilhfhahna (Bung 11),’ *Kristian Tlang-Au*, June 1913, p. 302-305.

<sup>529</sup>‘1916 a Durtlang leh Sihphir Inkhawmpui,’ *Kristian Tlang-Au*, March 1917, p. 49.

religious dress may differ greatly from one culture to another and from one space to the other. Nonetheless, in Mizoram the missionaries pressed on in their conviction about cleanliness in body and dress which in turn was understood as a concept of westernisation in attire by the locals.

Once the church started functioning properly, the missionaries regularly taught about conducts and behaviours inside the church.<sup>530</sup> And the two main signs that a Mizo was serious about his conversion were his abstinence from drinking and young men giving up the wearing of *Kel Mei*<sup>531</sup> as charms. As the Missionaries taught them about the importance of cleanliness and the need to present oneself in the best way, the classification of dress shifted from the conventional set to everyday and Sunday dresses. The church leaders by the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became more firm towards the dress codes particularly at important church events such as Baptism, Weddings and the Holy Communion whereby they said that coming with dirty body and clothes in such sacred events was to disrespect God. Those getting married should come dressed in their best and their hair combed smoothly. That they should be clean inside as well as the outsides.<sup>532</sup> Hence, Mizo Christians who toiled in their fields all day realised that it was not acceptable to wear dirty clothes to church and they had to have a separate sets of dress to wear on Sundays. Such dresses were reserved only for Sundays and shoes were also reserved for Sundays, the most common pairs being the brown canvas shoes. Lalchhuanliana, C. Chhuanvawra and Dr. K.C. Vannghaka all agreed that they used to have two sets of clothing-one to wear everyday and one to wear on Sundays and this was the norm for all regardless of their status till the 1950s.<sup>533</sup> The Mizo Christian notion of the importance of Sunday dress till date is the impact of this colonial idea. Even today, Sunday formals are mostly reserved for Sundays and other important church services only.

The missionaries while endorsing cleanliness did not forbid the use of accessories and jewelleries. Even though they did not particularly emphasized on western dress, they knew that the Mizos were imitating them yet they did not seem to mind the emulation of western dress. Much as they seemed to mingle and are eager to evangelize, the British both officials and

<sup>530</sup>Zosaphluia (D.E. Jones), 'Hmeichhe Naupang Tawngtai', *Kristian Tlang-Au*, March 1914, pp. 49-50.

<sup>531</sup>Refer to Chapter 5-5.2.2(d), 5.3.6

<sup>532</sup>Thanga and Chuaftera, 'Kohhran Ho Dan', *Kristian Tlang-Au*, August 1914, pp. 146-147.

<sup>533</sup>Lalchhuanliana, interview, 2018; C. Chhuanvawra, interview, 2013; Dr. K. C. Vannghaka interview, 2018.

missionaries constantly symbolised their separateness in dress and demeanour. At home, in the office, hunting or preaching in villages, the British always dressed in their own fashion.<sup>534</sup> This was true of the missionaries and British officials in Mizoram as well. Their wish to distinguish themselves and maintain proper dress could be seen in the way they raised children of the missionaries in Serkawn such as F.J. Raper whose child David Milton, born in 1937, fondly called Zomawia by the Mizo was restricted to only a few playmates and a well dressed nanny.<sup>535</sup> Lalthlamuana of Serkawn reminisces how his elder brother who was of the same age as the son of the Baptist missionary Rev F.J. Raper, who arrived in 1932 was regularly called to be a playmate. Lalthlamuana said that he often accompanied his elder brother. This eventually led to them receiving a number of foreign clothing items and other articles which were not within the reach of normal children of that time and place. He remembers that they would feel very proud about it as it elevated their social status besides other things. It was only natural because the Mizo children have never experienced and got hold of such articles and items of clothing, let alone owns them. Their fascination with the *Sap* was reiterated by C. Lalmawia<sup>536</sup> who said that as children they would scavenge on the things thrown by the Missionaries bringing home things as trivial as broken cups and empty tins of biscuits which they considered was a good find. He also particularly mentioned that the missionaries never give anything which they themselves would not use. Their story is also confirmed by Thanthuami<sup>537</sup> who has also hailed from the same community at close quarters with the missionaries.

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<sup>534</sup>Cohn, *Colonialism*, p. 111

<sup>535</sup>Lalthlamuana interview, 2016: He said that Raper's family would call on his elder to play with baby Raper as they were of the same age and no other was allowed to play with them except himself who sometimes accompanied his brother and two other girls. He also mentioned that a nanny named Zomari was hired who was always well dressed with neat hair and accessories cause the sap did not like shabby dresser. Also see Chapter 2, p. 17.

<sup>536</sup>C.Lalmawia interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 13 November 2017 at Aizawl. He hailed from Serkawn and was educated at the Serkawn Mission School. He retired as an AEO from the Dept. of Agriculture, Govt. of Mizoram and lives in Aizawl. He is the elder brother of Lalthlamuana.

<sup>537</sup>Thanthuami interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 12 August 2016 at Serkawn. Her mother Darnghengi was an orphan looked after by the Missionaries who later became a trained nurse and her father Chalngura was a compounder working at the Mission Hospital at Serkawn.



Fig 7.5 Zomawia (David Milton), Zomari and Lalsanga 1937

The differences in the European clothing and dress aesthetics and that of the Mizo were drastic. It was difficult for both the parties to adjust to each other's dress sense. While the British view the Mizo dressing as too bare and undisguised, theirs was regarded as highly different and complex by the Mizo. But the admiration of the British administration and culture by the Mizo eventually made it easy for the Mizo to emulate western dress and deem it to be advanced. But as Lorrain noted:

*'We can see the difference between those who have come in contact with their conquerors and those who have not. The former class wash their faces and some even make themselves look very nice.'*<sup>538</sup>



Fig 7.6 J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge posing for the Wide World magazine in Mizo dress

<sup>538</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for 16 January 1894

This also reveals the fact that the European notion of cleanliness and dress sense though easily picked up by those who came in contact with them, took some time to reach everyone in the hill. In spite of their efforts, it was only in 1899 that two Mizos Khuma and Khara were baptised. And as can be expected, a picture taken of them before they travelled to spread the gospel, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century showed them wearing western coat, most likely gifted to them.



Fig 7.7 Khuma and Khara, the first Mizo Christians, 1899.

Alarmed by the manner in which the Mizos adopted western attires and Indian dresses, a colonial official tried to prescribe appropriate dress code for the Mizos depending on occasions and their relationship with the government. At the same time while favouring traditional Mizo dresses for the masses, the official insisted that government employees should dress as per the government prescription. While trying to uphold Mizo traditional dress, the same official said that the most important part of dressing is cleanliness and that hair should be smoothly combed.<sup>539</sup> It was obvious that the practicality of the western trousers and shirts and the warmth it provided in the chilly weather of the hills was a welcomed change. While traditionally dressed people were accepted into the fold of Christianity, dressing like the *Sap* became fashionable, trendy and socially elevating. However, the truth about cleanliness in terms of body, cloth and ones surrounding leading to better health and life was something that required greater effort and time. This kind of teachings and instructions were widely common till the 1940's and in fact till date. Hence, education on a basic and systematic level became a much needed instrument in evangelizing and transforming the Mizo society.

<sup>539</sup> S. Ch. V., 'Kamanding Sap Duhzawng', *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, April 1903, pp. 9-10



Fig 7.8 Liangkhiyai and his friends 1919



Fig 7.9 Some of the translators of the Mizo Bible 1959

### 7.3 Education and Dress - The Foundation:

The introduction of education was another crucial feature which radically changed the mindset and gradually the dress sense of the Mizo. Formal education and written form of languages was never introduced in the pre-colonial Mizoram. The only mode of learning in the form of oral education was imparted in the family and *Zawlbuk*, a bachelors' dormitory. Girls learn their vocations from the elder women in the family. Even after the colonial rule was introduced in Mizoram, the need to educate the whole community was not felt by the government except for a few clerical works and to translate. However, when the Missionaries arrived, they felt the need to learn the Mizo language as well as to educate the Mizo in their own language. This they felt was necessary to preach the Gospel and also to 'civilized' the Mizos. In fact J. H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge had already prepared a structure of the Mizo letters while in Silchar in 1893. They developed an alphabet based on the Hunterian system, using Roman letters.<sup>540</sup> They went to different villages collecting information about Mizo language and reducing them to writing following the roman script.<sup>541</sup> Based on what they have created, the present sets of alphabet containing 25 letters were devised and modified by Edwin Rowlands.<sup>542</sup> They started the first school on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1894 in Aizawl after staying here for only two and a half months. Their first pupils were Thangphunga and Suaka who learnt the alphabets and one

<sup>540</sup> Lalhrualtuanga Ralte, *Zoram Vartian*, p. 212. Also see P. Chakaborty, 'Administration of Justice in Mizoram' in Ram Narayan Prasad and Prithwipati Chakraborty (eds.), *Administration of Justice in Mizoram*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 2006,

<sup>541</sup> C. Nunthara, *Mizoram: Society and Polity*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing, 1996, p. 103

<sup>542</sup> J.V. Hluna, *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram*, Delhi, Spectrum Publications, 1992, p. 52

word within a week. The school timing was from 9 to 11 every morning.<sup>543</sup> Working further towards spreading the Gospel, using the alphabets they created along with the help of their first students, the Gospel of Luke and John were translated to Mizo language and published in 1898 and 1899 respectively. This way the first ever printed form of the Mizo language and script were selected books from the Bible. This generated a lot of enthusiasm among the people and Lorrain revealed his excitement that when after the translation, the easier part of the book of Luke was read to the children, they understood.<sup>544</sup> This became a Sunday school routine. In the process the missionaries also produced the first grammar and dictionaries of the Mizo language.<sup>545</sup> This way the eternal relation between Christianity and education in Mizoram was established.

Government schools both in the north and south were already running by the time the first mission school was started by Lorrain and Savidge at Aizawl in the year 1894. While the objective of the government school was to maintain law and order,<sup>546</sup> the missionaries accepted education as their main ministry.<sup>547</sup> By October 1903 there were as much as nine schools in different parts of Mizoram and five in Aizawl, three of which were reserved for girls. It was also reported that children and young men were very happy and excited about the school in Biate. In the south, the first Mission school at Serkawn was started on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1903, with seven students.

The newly literates, fervently wanting to pass on their knowledge went to villages where they would be paid with rice and a hut build for them.<sup>548</sup> But everyone was not so fortunate. In spite of the difficulty in disciplining students and making them adjust to academia, the zeal to educate and the appetite to learn multiplied.

### 7.3.1 Women's Education and Dress:

Because women were the sole maker of dress the evolution of Mizo dress is directly connected with the education of women in more ways than one. The first voluntary school for girls was started in 1902. Prior to this in 1899, out of the 56 pupils who attended the only school in Aizawl, 6 were girls. By 1900 there was an increase of 5 girls and in the next year there were

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<sup>543</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for 2 April 1894

<sup>544</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for 20 February 1896

<sup>545</sup>Pachau & Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, p. 89

<sup>546</sup>A.G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1977(Reprint), p. 197

<sup>547</sup>Hluna, *Education and Missionaries*, p. 53

<sup>548</sup>Zosapthara (Edwind Rolands), 'Thingtlang a Zo-Sap Skulte,' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, January, 1903, p. 4-5

20 girls out of 180 students in Aizawl.<sup>549</sup> In 1903 there were two girls amongst the 27 candidates sitting for the lower primary exam in Mizoram. Because it was difficult to get girls to come to school due to the reluctance of parents, there was a gap of 25 years between the first male candidate for middle school exam and the first female.<sup>550</sup> During 1902-1903 three temporary Girls' Schools were opened with 20 girls in total. By 1904, K.E. Jones, wife of D.E. Jones started the first Mission Girls' School with 12 girls at Aizawl and with this the existing mission school was converted into Boy's school<sup>551</sup> hence separating the boys and girls. K.E. Jones with the help of two Mizo girls took care of the girls' education. Then Mrs Margaret Sandy followed Mrs. Jones work with the help of the wives of other missionaries would cater to the few girls in their homes or whenever possible till Miss Catherine Lewis came to help them as a teacher in 1922 followed by Miss Morfydd Davies and the subsequent arrival of Miss Katie Hughes known as Pi Zaii in 1924.<sup>552</sup> In the south, the first school with boarding for women was started in 1907 with seven girls. Mrs Lorrain took charge of the girls' school conducting sewing classes in addition to general subjects. She was joined by Miss E.M Chapman fondly called Pi Zirtiri in 1919 and Miss Marjorie Clark in 1923. However, as expected of a patriarchal society, women's education encountered a lot opposition all over Mizoram. Not only men but women opposed female education mainly because girls were too useful at home and most were willing to spare the boys who were just 'ornaments'.<sup>553</sup> Contrary to the apprehensions, though it was difficult at the beginning a number of article appeared in the Mizo *leh Vai Chanchin Bu* and *Kristian Tlang-Au* encouraging women's education.<sup>554</sup> By the 1930's some chiefs also started encouraging girls' education and by 1935 there were as many as 534 girls attending school.<sup>555</sup> By 1940 as Welsh Mission Girls' school in Aizawl was finished including a hostel and separate room for hand work, the number of female student considerably improved.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>549</sup>Hluna, *Education and Missionaries*, pp. 151-152

<sup>550</sup>Gwen Rees Roberts, *Memories of Mizoram: Recollections and Reflections*, Indian edn. Aizawl, P. C. Girls School, 2002, p. 87; Also see Upa K.L. Van Ngaia, *Serkawn Baptist Kohhran Chanchin*, Serkawn, Serkawn Baptist Kohhran, 1994, p. 645.

<sup>551</sup>Lalhmuaka, *Zoram Zirna Lam Chhinchhiahna*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1981, p. 27

<sup>552</sup>Hluna, *Education and Missionaries*, p. 155. Also see Gwen Rees Roberts, *Memories of Mizoram*, p. 54

<sup>553</sup>E. Chapman and M. Clark, *Mizo Miracle*, Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1968, pp. 38-39

<sup>554</sup>Sap Nula, 'Hmeichhe Naupang Zirtirna Thu', *Kristian Tlang-Au*, May 1923, pp. 72-24

<sup>555</sup>Hluna, *Education and Missionaries*, pp. 163-164

<sup>556</sup>Roberts, *Memories of Mizoram: Recollections and Reflections*, p. 77



Female education was a vital factor in the transformation not just Mizo dress but culture as a whole. The contribution of girls within the house and outside was incomprehensible so much so that with education, it was only inherent that the face of the society went through a drastic change and upliftment. The most crucial aspect was the curriculum of the girls' school. Fortunately, the advent of western education for women came with the wholesome meaning of imparting an all round development. The Mission schools both in the north and south of Mizoram made it necessary to focus on vocational learning as a part of their curriculum. Once girls were admitted to school, the school authorities thought it best to introduce vocational curriculum including weaving, sewing and knitting, simple medication, and craft works, domestic science including child care and sanitation and other basic life skills. The women missionaries in the schools promoted conventional loom using threads made entirely by the students from raw cotton with the traditional method. One of the main focuses of this was to prepare girls to become self reliant when they gain adulthood and become respectable wives and mothers.

Among the list of vocational crafts, sewing inclusive of cutting, making up of garments, shirts, pants, coats, frocks etc. along with thread works and crochet when introduced made the girls really happy and interested. They were to maintain craft notes on sewing and stitching patterns which was a continued subject for the girls' way into the post colonial times. So besides, pottery and basket work, the older girls made shirts and shorts for the men and the staffs even made coats for men.<sup>557</sup> This also greatly influenced and enhanced the change in men's attire. Also, the revival of handloom led to fusion of motifs and designs. Especially at Serkawn where, the school was attended by Lusei, Lai and Mara students the interactions and exchange of culture brought a synthesis in designs as the ideas and inspirations came from the designs and motifs of other tribes.

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<sup>557</sup>Chapman and Clark, *Mizo Miracle*, p. 55



Fig 7.10 Pages from Nuchhungi's work book, Serkawn 1939 -1942.

These endeavours of women missionaries and in reviving the art of weaving eventually led to the restoration and progression in motif designs and development. All the more it ignited a sense of pride towards one's own dress among the Mizo women. At the same time, instead of promoting a totally alien dress for women, female missionaries introduced new styles on familiar background. The introduction of girls' school uniforms using traditional textiles made it easier for the girls to slowly enter the threshold of westernised fashion. This in turn generated mutual trust between the female missionaries and the Mizo women, leading to the production of new dynamics in their relation which in turn created an avenue for the female missionaries to push forth agendas for innovations in creativity. All the while stress on neatness and cleanliness was continued. The discipline, cleanliness, the neatness of their dress and appearances of the girls often surprised officials and visitors. Even to this day, Welsh Mission Girls' school, which is now called the Presbyterian Church Girls' School continue to be an institution often chosen as exemplary on the visits of the highest official such as the President of India.

In the Welsh Mission Girls' School, to promote the vocational curriculum in 1916, the government bought looms for Mizo girls and two girls were sent to the Kalimpong Industrial School to learn embroidery and weaving respectively.<sup>558</sup> In 1925 Serkawn Girls' School added a new feature of making vests and jumpers using only Mizo cotton yarn and crochet books made by the girls themselves. This not only made the girls happy but had given them a purpose to provide children in their villages warm cloths.<sup>559</sup>

<sup>558</sup> Malsawmi, *Mizo Kohhran Hmeichhiate Chanchin*, Aizawl, Synod Printing Press, 1973, p. 3

<sup>559</sup> Hluna, *Education and Missionaries*, p. 162

It was under the supervision and guidance of the female missionaries at the Welsh Mission Girls' School later called Presbyterian Girls School in Aizawl and Mission Girls' English School, Serkawn that a lot of the designs and motifs of the Mizo women's *puan* were created. As mentioned by Chapman and Clarke, the Director of Public Instruction in Assam who visited Mission Girls' School, Serkawn in 1939 wrote in his report: "It is no exaggeration to say that this school has revived the art of weaving in Lushai, and that many beautiful designs now produced in the Hills have originated there." These motifs created in both schools became widely embraced and they are accepted as an integral part of Mizo dress and even given the nomenclature of 'traditional' dresses. As a result of these innovations, these girls' school became the centre for the development of new styles in dress and new trend in Mizo fashion. Motif such as *arsipar*, *naia sawmpar*, *senior zeh*, *lace par*, *phengphehlep*, etc have all culminated from this period. The facilitation of the traditional art of weaving encouraged girls to create their own designs and sometimes copy and combine each other's design. This period saw the borrowing and fusions of motifs such as *semit* and *harzai* from the south and *lenbuangthuam* and *kikiau* from the north culminating into the enrichment and mutual accommodation of the Mizo tribes through culture.

Existing traditional designs were modified to create new patterns. This enthusiasm to weaving and creation of new designs spread to different parts of Mizoram and this is what led to the modification and enrichment of the much treasured *Puanlaisen* into a more intricate *Puanchei*. *Puanchei* as we see it today is the invention of colonial times. Around 1920's the traditional *Puanlaisen* was a popular wear all over Mizoram and even in the schools. It became a centre of focus as it was modified with new intricate design incorporated into it and it became more popular slowly losing its earlier nomenclature and coming to be known as *Puanchei* in many of places. These experimentations with their dress, incorporating the new fashion and the easier accessibility and availability of ornamentations and raw materials enhanced their skills. For this 'invention of tradition', the female missionaries played an influential role and their contributions in the evolution of Mizo dress is undeniable.



Fig 7.11 Mission Girls School wearing school (1960) and Bulbul uniform (1957).

### 7.3.2 Men's Education and Imitation:

Once the number of literate increased and educated Mizos were employed by the Mission and the government in different fields, long hair among the Mizo men slowly disappeared as colonial modernity also dictated the clothing style and hairstyle of the men to be cut short.<sup>560</sup> The changing trend was common among the educated but not so in others. Also, there were debates as to why one should imitate the 'Sap' or the white superiors. While some thought that it was embarrassing to imitate the 'Sap' without the knowledge of 'Sap tawng' or language of the whites, others were of the opinion that the knowledge of 'Sap tawng' should not be the only qualifying factor to wear western clothes and accessories like neck ties and hats. They argued that one should know how to balance one's appearance, western or not.<sup>561</sup> By this time a sizeable number of Mizos have had already embraced western dresses even without the knowledge of English language. It was only by the middle of the 1930's that Mizos living within and in the vicinity of the Mission and government stations at Aizawl and Lunglei appeared to have largely adopted western garbs while in the interior parts of Mizoram, they continued to hold on to their traditional attires. The concern with cleanliness was also in connection with the European concept of smartness. Office dresses took the form of shorts, trousers and formal shirts and later coats with matching smart shoes for men. The link between education and European style and dress was established early on, and it persisted.<sup>562</sup> In the 1940's, there were also women, probably students, studying outside Mizoram, embarrassed to wear *Kawrchei* and *Puanchei* to

<sup>560</sup>Lorrain, *Log Book*, entry for 23 May 1894

<sup>561</sup>Danthaduhvea 'Kan Theihngihl Ta e,' *KristianTlang Au*, October, 1924, pp. 167-169

<sup>562</sup>Pachauau & Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, p. 50

which an article in the monthly magazine retorted by saying that we should not be ashamed of our traditional attire.<sup>563</sup>

Regardless of the changes and additions, the attitude towards traditional attires was very positive as women stuck to their traditional style of wearing *puan* as they used to, prior to the colonial rule and they continued to do so, for the lower half of their dress till date. Skirts like their uniforms were also not worn frequently outside the school or they would cover themselves in *puan* as a shawl. They were much slower in adopting European style and they still have not fully embraced westernisation in their dress like the men as *puan* is still very much a part of Mizo woman's wardrobe till date. It was only in the 20th century that they started wearing polyester or mill blouses, coming away from the loom woven blouses that they were accustomed to. This was a turning point in the history of the Mizo dress.

However, a combination of the European and local dress continued to be prevalent and there was no discrimination towards such. (See fig 7.9). Although they did not fully embraced the dresses of the colonizers, it was the male who took the first step in changing their way of dressing by imitating the '*Sap*' who they now believed were far more advanced and superior to them in all realms of life. As the Mizo society was deeply patriarchal, colonialism and Christianity instead of re ordering the society only affirmed the pre-colonial orders where the advancements and transformations that it brought would first be enjoyed by the men in all its forms. Today, Mizo men discarded their traditional attires entirely by embracing western clothing in all stages.

In a similar situation in Goa during the nineteenth century, Goanese Christians also experienced the European influence in their sense of dressing. Like the Mizo society, while the Goanese Christian men were fully clothed in European attires, the women have retained Indian style of dressing.<sup>564</sup> This may reflect the familiar social structure in India and also in Europe, of the patriarchal system in which men always comes first to act and to receive the boons and powers that comes with new developments and infiltrate it to other section of the society as per their convenience as they have control over things at all levels and equations.

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<sup>563</sup> Author & Title of the article *Mizo Leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, April, 1940, p. 52

<sup>564</sup> Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, p. 39

#### 7.4 The Wars and Dress-The First World War:

The two world wars remarkably enhanced and popularised western dress among the Mizos. In 1917, the British government announced that it wanted at least two thousand volunteers to go to work in France. The Mizos fascinated by the rumours surrounding the war, eager to know more about the outside world, succumbing to the lure of exemption from forced labour and the annual house tax, volunteered enthusiastically. They were indeed mesmerized by their uniforms, the boots, the food and the whole paraphernalia of being in the army and fighting in a war. However, they were recruited for labour in the Indian Labour Corp and the Mizo formed The Lushai Labour Corp.<sup>565</sup> They found out that they were about 16 miles away from the actual battle ground, and not fighting, some of them lost interest in the war and some revealed their eagerness to actually fight.<sup>566</sup> The soldiers found it quite difficult to adjust to the uniforms especially the boots provided in the army because they never wore shoes earlier. Due to the stiffness of the leather boots, many of them had blisters in their feet which made it all the more difficult for them so much so that many of them hang the boots on their shoulder and walked barefooted.<sup>567</sup>

In spite of such occurrences, one of the most striking effects of the war on Mizo dress was their uniforms including the dress, footwear and other accessories. When their duty was over in 1918, most Mizo soldier declined from renewing their contract. While the heroism associated with going to the war somehow elevated their social status, their uniforms and boots, along with the other accoutrements were something new to the whole Mizo society. Army uniforms were hardly worn by anyone at leisure prior to the war. There were few Mizo men recruited in the Assam Rifles before the war, but after the Mizo participated in the First World War, fondness for military uniforms as a whole grew. Soldiers were idolized by the young ladies and lads alike who boosted their confidence so much so that, they would flaunt and make it a point to wear some item of their uniforms all the time. This style of wearing military inform by some Mizo was criticized by some one that if one is wearing a uniform it should be worn respectfully. Otherwise

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<sup>565</sup>Sangkima, *Mizos*, 1992, p. 154

<sup>566</sup>Thanghlianga 'Sap Ram a Mizo Kulite tan a Hlauhawmlohzia,' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, February, 1918, p. 21-23. Also see Sainghinga, Retd. A.D.C., *Indopui 1914-1918:France Ram Kal Thu*, Thakthing Bazar Press, 1974, p. 24

<sup>567</sup>Lalchhuanliana interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 26 February 2018 at Aizawl. He is a war veteran who served as a clerk in the Assam Regiment in the Second World War. His father Ch. Pasena also served in the First World War as personnel of the Lushai Labour Corp.

they should not wear it at all because it is degrading and other people will laugh at them. The article also mentions that soldiers from outside Mizoram are dressed more respectfully.<sup>568</sup>

Another significant feature of the Mizo involvement in the First World War that altered Mizo dress and dress making was the synthetic dyes or soap dyes that the soldiers brought back with them. The war returnees brought these for their girlfriends, mothers and sisters. As it was much easier to use, it became very popular and prized among the women. Besides clothing, vanity was introduced by the First World War. The soldiers brought back with them bathing soaps which smelled nice and also powder for the ladies. For a society that uses pig fat and a fruit called *Hlingsi*<sup>569</sup> as soap to be a part of their futile effort at vanity, being familiarize with such items of cosmetics and self care was very significant. On the whole, they brought new ideas along with them and thus helped in introducing new ideas to the society.<sup>570</sup>

#### 7.4.1 The Second World War and Mizo Dress:

The Second World War came to the doorstep of the Mizo. As the Japanese moved forward invading Burma, it was obvious that they would be heading towards northeast India. So in April 1942, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills in his call for war convinced the Mizo Chiefs who pledged their allegiance to the British crown. Though, Mizoram was spared from the Japanese onslaught, Mizos were once again asked to join the war. The Lushai Hills War Committee was formed in 1941 and in March 1944, a regular Indian Army Brigade was formed in Aizawl named “The Lushai Brigade” which had about 400 hundred Mizos along with recruits from other communities.<sup>571</sup> A number of educated men and women joined the British Army and over 3000 youth were recruited in different regiments and at different levels.<sup>572</sup> An important aspect of the Second World War was that this time a number of women joined the army. Most of them were posted at the clerical levels and some girls trained at the Mission Hospitals did admirable service all over the world. The men were recruited in Assam Rifles, Assam Regiment,

<sup>568</sup>TunlaiTlangvala, ‘Kan Incheina leh Chibai,’ *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, May, 1938, p. 71

<sup>569</sup>The botanical name of Hlingsi is *Sapindus saponari*. It is also known as Reetha or Chinese Soapberry. <http://www.flowersofindia.net/catalog/slides/Reetha.html> (accessed 13 January 2018)

<sup>570</sup>Sangkima, *Mizos*, p. 154

<sup>571</sup>Vergheese & Thanzawna, *A History of The Mizos*, p. 351

<sup>572</sup>Sangkima, *Mizos*, p. 154

Indian Hospital Corps, and Labour Corps while some joined the Royal Air Force and some were posted as far as Iran.<sup>573</sup>

This war drastically altered fashion in Mizoram, more so the women's fashion. Women who firmly clung to their traditional dress now had to put on uniforms and wear shoes at all time. A lot of the women easily embraced this change of fashion. Even when off duty, these women started to integrate the *sap* way of dressing so much so that they slowly started to fully assimilate into the western dress culture wearing skirts and coat suits, dresses and frocks, with hats and lipsticks accompanied by high heels and socks. Some cut their hair short and curled them; scarves and pearls and other jewellerys alien to the Mizo were added to their outfits. Some even married their British colleagues in the army creating a whole new level of cross cultural relations. Biakkungi's friend Melody, from a village in Mizoram, who was a daughter of a renowned Pastor named Fehtea ended up marrying a Burmese officer and led quite a fashionable and luxurious life.<sup>574</sup>



Fig 7.12 Melody on 16 November 1954

Zopari recounts that her locality in Aizawl, Thakthing Veng had about four women who served in the Women Auxiliary of the British Army. Among them was Thankimi who used to wear red lipstick which used to really intrigue them as young girls. Thankimi went on to marry a British officer. Zopari spoke of an incident in the late 1940s, when Thanchhumi another one in the army came home during a holiday. She reminisces that she and her friends as little girls of about 7-9 years old waited eagerly for her to get down from the jeep that dropped her off.

<sup>573</sup>Verghese & Thanzawna, *A History of The Mizos*, p. 352.

<sup>574</sup>Biakkungi, a war veteran serving as wireless operator in the Second World War, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 27 February 2018 at Aizawl.



Thanchhumi appeared wearing trousers with matching uniform blouse, leather shoes and socks and as young girls they were deeply mesmerised and followed her till her house where she gave them each a small amount of face powder, which they all folded in a paper. She recalled that this was her introduction to face powder.<sup>575</sup>



Fig 7.13 Biakkungi and her colleagues 1945

The Mizo men joining the Second World War also became more polished and suave in their outlook and mannerism. The crudeness of the personnel in the previous war was replaced by the actual experience of living with and like the British, with whom they actually shared rooms and barracks, offices and dinners.<sup>576</sup> *'Mizo women recruited as nurses and clerks in the Women's Auxiliary used to look really nice and beautiful. They looked like real 'sap,'* said Chhuanliana.<sup>577</sup> Hence, the men and women who joined the Second World War became trend setters and fashion champions who literally changed the way a Mizo dress and bring in a consensus of real acceptance to western dress and the way a Mizo perceive it. The fact that they had access to cinemas had also familiarised them with the western lifestyle. Chhuanliana also mentioned that even though he did not finish high school, more than his clerical job, watching cinemas regularly helped him improve his English speaking skills and introduced him to a lifestyle which did not exist in his surroundings. Also when they came home for holidays, they were looked upon as advantageous and privileged even among their peers and girls and this

<sup>575</sup>Zopari, interview, 2018

<sup>576</sup>Thanchhumi, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 23 October 2014 at Aizawl. She is a War veteran serving in the women Auxiliary of the Royal Air Force. V. Thanzauva interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 7 July 2015 at Aizawl. He is a war veteran serving as the first Mizo sergeant of the Royal Air Force.

<sup>577</sup>Lalchhuanliana, interview, 2018

boosted their confidence in the society.<sup>578</sup> So when the ladies too come home during their holidays, they became the centre of attentions everywhere. Thankhumi<sup>579</sup> said that when these ladies came home, they would gush and stare at them in awe as if they see them on the roads.



Fig 7.14 Thanchhumi in Shillong and Sgt. V. Thanzauva at Coimbatore, 1941-1943

### 7.5 Uniform and dress:

The introduction of uniforms in the army and later in schools established a certain sense of discipline and control among the Mizos. The introduction of school uniform was intended to instil a sense of discipline in the students as well as in the personnel. By the Second World War when the Mizos entered the military life, school uniforms were not fully introduced in the schools. The Boys Middle School at Aizawl in the early 1940's had khaki short as uniform. Chhuanliana said that the Sap teachers decided on khaki because dirt did not show too much. Besides the normal students, Wolf cubs and Boys scouts also wore khaki suits with dark maroon and dark blue scarves respectively. Wearing shoe was not allowed in the school even for those who could afford it as the teachers wanted to maintain equality because a larger number of the students could not afford a pair.<sup>580</sup> Although the change of dress in Mizoram was more of an imitation than an imposition, when it comes to education and the army life, wearing uniform was an imposition. However, in schools, it could not be strictly followed as in the army because many students could not afford to wear proper uniforms and certain rules on genuine grounds

<sup>578</sup>Lalchhuanliana, interview, 2018

<sup>579</sup>Thankhumi, interview, 2015

<sup>580</sup>Lalchhuanliana, interview, 2018

had to be relaxed by the school at times. Till the 1960's there were many schools in remote villages which could not afford to demand uniforms due to poverty.<sup>581</sup> Shoes were hardly worn by the women even outside the school. Even in the 1950's Mission girls school students were mostly barefooted. In Aizawl, families who had access to money and those working under the mission had shoes which were worn mostly on Sundays. Shoes were very hard to come by especially in villages. Hence, it was only in the 1960's that people in general actually worn shoes. However, there were still many in villages that could not afford shoes and those who were reluctant because of its restraint.

It is generally agreed that the mentality of a person wearing a uniform has more control on the wearer than a normal set up. The introduction of uniform in the colonial period seemed to help school authority. It is not clear whether the use of uniform was employed to generate colonial hegemony in Mizoram. But, the dress code introduced in schools, church and offices, which stresses more on cleanliness and neatness, was gradually followed by the people to the point that they started imbibing other traits of the *Sap*. This helped in the smooth dissemination of the administrative work and in controlling the people. This is true for many people that what we wear is what we are. A person wearing casual clothing will definitely feel lighter pressure in movements and gesture than a person wearing a suit or a formal outfit. Such restriction perhaps helped the brain to act in a restricted mode and the body to behave in a way which translates to respectful and disciplined.

However, uniform was first introduced among the staffs rather than students. At Serkawn the school colour was navy blue and lighter blue and white. From the late 1920's to the 1930's girls in the lowers sections were seen wearing plain white tops and skirts which were worn mainly by the school's hostel boarders.

Day scholars mostly came in their traditional attire, which was generally *puan* largely *Puanlaisen*. This is also indicative of the fact that *Puanlaisen* was considered their best dress, presentable enough to wear in the schools before their *sap* teachers. Two years after the missionaries trained Chhumi, their first pupil, uniform for the staffs at the girls' school was

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<sup>581</sup>Vannghaka interview, 2018 and C. Lalmawia Interview, 2018

introduced as the traditional style of draping was creating a hindrance for quick movement, physical exercise and games.



Fig 7.15 Making pots at Serkawn 1928



Fig 7.16 Primary section girls, Serkawn 1928- 1930

So a new staff uniform for both nationals and foreigners alike was designed consisting of a top garment of white jumper with a quarter sleeves having bands of school colours down the middle front and back and round the sleeves. The skirt was navy blue with pin stripe of lighter blue which was longer and fuller than their traditional skirt. These were made from the fabrics woven by the girls themselves.<sup>582</sup>

In the pre-colonial and colonial period, *Hmaram* for younger girls and *Fenthuah* or the under skirt, which was not to be shown were the only form of skirts worn by women. Therefore, for the first time longer skirts worn without the cover of a *puan* was worn by girls' school staffs with matching blouses and this became an important defining point in the history of Mizo women's dress.



Fig 7.17 Serkawn girls school staffs in their uniform, 1937.

<sup>582</sup>Chapman and Clark, *Mizo Miracle*, p. 60



In the north, traditional dress was also worn in the girl's school. They did not have proper uniforms till Gwen Rees Roberts fondly called Pi Teii took over the charge of the school in 1945. Even after her tenure, school uniforms for girls were not introduced till the middle of the 1960s. Light blue and white colour for girl guides was introduced prior to proper uniform. Once school uniform was started, it was decided on locally woven green fabric with white lines at the hem as skirt and a collarless jacket as the uniform for the Welsh Mission Girls' School.

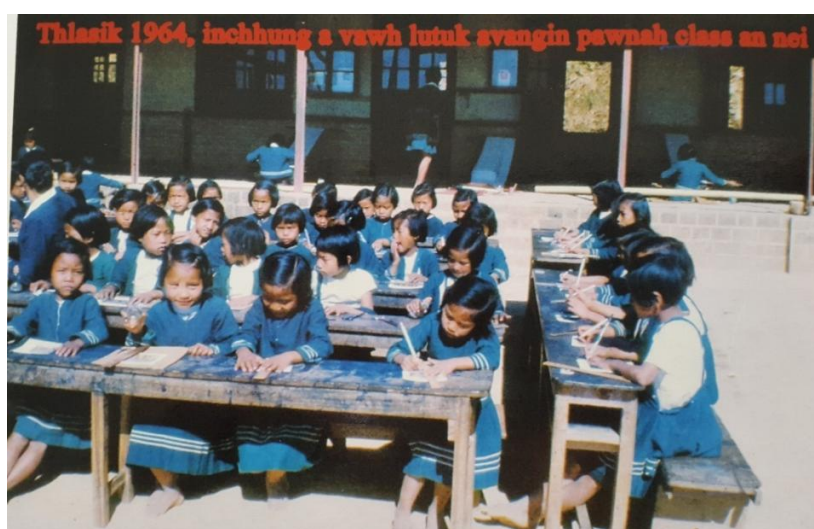


Fig 7.18 Students of Welsh Mission girls school, 1964.

Lalchhuanliana remarked that in 1947, when High school was started, both boys and girls had to be catered together in the same class and the girls at both middle school and high school did not wear uniform.<sup>583</sup> C. Lalmawia said that he does not remember wearing proper school uniform at Serkawn till the 1950's but most students were dressed alike as there could not be much variety mainly due to poverty.<sup>584</sup> These statements corroborate Dr. K.C. Vannghaka's account. As school uniforms were difficult to insist in the Mission stations both at the north and the south; it would have been more challenging in the villages. However, by the second half of the 1960, most schools came to have uniforms, even in the villages.

The introduction of school uniform not only promoted skirts but it also freed the hands of girls which were handicapped by the way they wear their *puan*. As felt by the missionaries at Serkawn, Thankhumi also mentioned that their teacher in high school often remarked how the

<sup>583</sup>Lalchhuanliana, interview, 2018

<sup>584</sup>Lalmawia, interview, 2017

girls could not do anything with the end of their *puan* hanging on their arms. She said he would tell them to tuck it on their waist like men and from then on, they slowly started to wear *puan* on their waist like it is done today.<sup>585</sup> Lalchhuanliana also recalled an incident when a woman reading a Bible in the church was repeatedly rearranging the end of her *puan* which kept falling off her arm to which his father Ch. Pasena who was the chairman had suggested that women should change the way they wear their *puan* and that they should wear it on their waist like men as it was more practical.<sup>586</sup>

Therefore, the introduction of skirts in schools and the question of sensibility led to the adoption of new trends in fashion. As the men, women too slowly changed their style for practicality. Although it is hard to specify a particular time frame, by the 1960's most women had given up holding the end of their *puan* with one arm or using it as a shawl to cover their body and started wearing their *puan* on the waist. This led to a whole new look in the appearance of Mizo women.

## 7.6 Dress and Identity:

Mizo church leaders and teachers, who have been taught by the missionaries, carried on the legacy of dress decorum. In fact the first Mizo Choir touring northern India in 1929 consisting of 12 women, 36 men, accompanied by Katie Hughes (Pi Zaii) were dressed in uniforms. While the male members wore suits and ties, the women were seen in *Kawrchei* and *Puanchei* with their hair comb smoothly in buns as usual.<sup>587</sup>

The uniform of the women also served as an identity of the tribal group who wear them. Early school teachers were seldom seen with shambled hair and wrinkled clothes. They always pay attention to personal hygiene and smartness in dress. This was to impress and motivate the students.<sup>588</sup> Even church leaders always make it a point to dress formally in and around the church. Thus uniforms and tidy dressing not only regimented the students but it disciplined the lifestyle of the teachers as well as religious leaders. The designation of the teachers carries with it the burdens to look neat and tidy at all times. Their lifestyle guides them so much to the point

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<sup>585</sup> Thankhumi interview, 2015

<sup>586</sup> Lalchhuanliana interview, 2018

<sup>587</sup> Rev.J.Merion Lloyd 'Early Mizo Choir' Available from:

[http://www.mizostory.org/mizochoirsindex/mizochoirsindex/1\\_Early\\_Mizo\\_Chair.html](http://www.mizostory.org/mizochoirsindex/mizochoirsindex/1_Early_Mizo_Chair.html) (accessed 4 February 2018)

<sup>588</sup> Vannghaka interview, 2018

that, it is very easy to notice and recognized a retired teacher or a pastor. Hence neatness and smartness becomes the identity of teachers all over Mizoram regardless of their religion.



Fig 7.19 First Mizo Choir, 1929.

The impact of these impositions also led the Mizos giving deep value for Sunday dresses. The significance of a Sunday dress also led to the changes in the Mizo notion of formal dress. In the pre-colonial era, formal dress consisted of dresses mainly worn for festivities and specific occasions. In the colonial and post colonial period, the concept of Mizo formal dress has slowly shifted from traditional ideas to a western connotation, particularly for the early converts. As most Mizos became Christian within fifty years after the arrival of the missionaries, formal dress came to mean Sunday dress for both men and women. Western get ups and the fusion of western and traditional attires for men became a formal dress of the men during the colonial period. On the other hand, Mizo women though had given up on locally woven fabrics for blouses by the end of the colonial rule, the smooth evolution of Mizo women's traditional attire and its eventual incorporation of western blouse and accessories while retaining the *puan* for formal dress is one of the most significant features of the evolution of Mizo dress. At the same time, it created a new identity for Mizo women.

They often ridiculed the converts and called them imitators of foreigners.<sup>589</sup> Even among the Christian what to wear was an ongoing debate. In the Christmas celebration function at Thakthing in 1912, the topic of debate was the critical assessment of both Mizo and *Vai* dress.<sup>590</sup>



Fig 7.20 K. Sisters 1959



Fig 7.10 Venghnuai Choir 1951

Even amongst the educated Mizos, there were questions on whether to fully embrace it or not. Some suggest that it is better for men to wear *puan* like a dhoti rather than showing their buttock or they should just wear shorts.<sup>591</sup> An article in *Kristian Tlangau* for the month of October, 1924 says that if one cannot speak in English, wearing a tie or a bowtie is not advisable. If one wears a white or brown hat like the *Sap*, people will assume that they are educated and if one could not reply when spoken to in English, it would be very embarrassing.<sup>592</sup> There were also articles containing advises suggesting that boys should not be roaming around with costly cloths and shoes. There are some who are barely literate and starts acting big. They should be studying instead. Also, they should take up wearing loincloth instead of being naked.<sup>593</sup>

The implications of British clothing habits in the hills and mainland India was quite different yet related not only to social and psychological factors but also to the physical environment. The perpetual rains and damp weather in the hills often led to accumulation of moth and smells in the cloths and sometimes even destroy them. It also led to the requirement of

<sup>589</sup>Pachau & Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, pp. 67-70

<sup>590</sup>*Mizo leh Vai* Chanchin Bu, January 1913, p. 11

<sup>591</sup>'Phaitual zin dan', *Mizo leh Vai* Chanchin Bu, November 1913, p. 202

<sup>592</sup>Danthaduha, 'Kan Theihngihl', pp. 167-169

<sup>593</sup>Harish Chandra, 'Thu Benglut Chanchin Thar', *Mizo leh Vai* Chanchin Bu, June, 1908, pp. 78-79



warm clothing. On the other hand, in the plains of India, European women complained of their suffocating customs such as wearing suede gloves at public functions during the midday sun and also had to succumb to wearing *sola topis* to protect from the sun and also provide a distinctive image to immediately make them recognisable as European. Hence while the British were intensifying their identity through dress, the Indian elite were beginning to adopt European dress partially and some fully.<sup>594</sup> This was an exact scenario even in colonial Mizoram.

For the Mizos, especially in the colonial to post-colonial period, the homogeneity in dress and attitude, particularly with Christianity, became a unifying factor. Therefore, while they were taking inspirations from nature and their surroundings, there were also borrowing and blending of designs and motifs from other tribes and resurfacing and popularising of pre-colonial motifs. Mizo as an identity construct was emerging which attempted to bring all Mizo tribes together encouraging a cultural synthesis not only in religion but in all other aspects of life.

### 7.6.1 Mizo Dress and Colour:

The political agenda of the colonisers was not all lost in the case of the dress. According to T. H. Lewin, the Lushais were not really fond of dress. Their dress was basic and simple, mainly white in colour, even in times of war.<sup>595</sup> He mentioned that he was much struck by the whiteness of the Lushai garments when they were fighting in 1892. And the clothes of all the Lushai warriors who had come to fight were all similar. This observation and other information leads us to conclude that, prior to their political and religious interaction with the outside world, Mizo were not confluence by style or trend as is the discourse of fashion in the west and that dressing was kept to the minimal, keeping it as basic as possible in style and colour. Especially for the men, colour did not hold much significance, if not for certain special occasion as *Thangchhuah* or festivities, for which they would permit themselves the use of accessories like feathers in their headband and the colours of men's clothing remained mostly white except for *Thangchhuahpa*, the honorary brave soldiers and the chief. The basic colour for women was also white or the original colour of the cotton except for festivals and special occasions where they would wear colourful costumes. Whatever their reasons for this partiality towards white fabrics

<sup>594</sup>Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, pp. 38-39

<sup>595</sup>T. H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and The Dwellers Therin; With Comparative Vocabulary of The Hill Dialects*, Calcutta, Bengal Printing Company, 1869. Available from: <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924023625936#page/n3/mode/2up> (accessed on 9 November 2016).

maybe, it went on for a long time as can be seen in photographs until recently where a gathering of the Mizos would witness an excess of black colour everywhere. Dr. K.C. Vannghaka is of the opinion that because white was the natural colour of cotton, people held on to it as they were familiar with the colour. Also bright colours such as red were somehow disliked by the women for daily wear as it was somehow regarded as superfluous. Black or darker colours were worn mostly by men as coat during the colonial period and other than that the common use of black colour in dresses by both male and female is quite a recent trend.<sup>596</sup> It is interesting to note that by 1949, there were as many as thirty people with licence to sell cloth and yarn.<sup>597</sup> Lalhuanliana remarked that as far as he remembers, shops selling cloth in Aizawl used to sell mostly white chemise for men. Also, most fabrics at such shops were white and khaki. Zopari also recalled that, till the late 1950s, coloured fabrics were not as accessible in shops but white was common even when they were buying fabrics to stitch blouses. So they would decorate it with embroidery and other things such as buttons and pins.

The pre-colonial Mizo society did not really have a deep consciousness of colour. Colour in clothing was considered a luxury because dyeing consumed a lot of time and labour by the women which could not be easily afforded by the women with all their other chores. This is corroborated by both Thankhumi and Hrangkili who affirmed that coloured thread was expensive. So, even though it was available through merchants, they hardly afforded to buy it.<sup>598</sup> Because of these reasons, infusion of colours into dresses was limited to festive and statutory dresses. It is not that particular colours hold significance but the difficulties accompanied by the fabrication of colour into clothing made colours luxurious and valuable besides the intricate designs which may have been woven into the cloth.

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<sup>596</sup>Vannghaka interview, 2018. Dr. Lalrinawma interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 23 January at Aizawl. He is an Associate Professor in the Dept of Mizo at Govt. Hrangbana College. Prof. Darchuailova, interviewed by Rosaline Varsangzuali on 23 January at Aizawl. He is an Associate Professor in the Dept of Mizo at Govt. Hrangbana College.

<sup>597</sup>Office of the Rural Development Department, Aijal Subdivision, Lushai Hills letter to the Assistant Secretary to the Government of Assam (Textile Dept.). List of security Deposits for licenses of cloth and yarn, 9 May 1949. Mizoram State Archive.(accessed 13 July 2014).

<sup>598</sup>Thankhumi, Interview 2018, Hrangkili interview 2018.

Anthropologists and art historians have also discovered that culturally, the human perception of colour begins with three primary colours: black, white and red.<sup>599</sup> Likewise, the basic known colours of fabrics of the pre-colonial Mizos were black and red besides the white natural colour of the cotton. However, the early Mizo notion of *thim* or dark and *eng* or light must also be seen in the light of their perception of good and bad influence by their traditional belief. The general association of black with death as well as misfortune or literal darkness is a common theme in most cultures. This may be also reflected in the Mizo tradition of covering a dead husband with a *Pawndum* by the wife. The same *Pawndum* was used as a sign of engagement signifying the bethrothal and the lost or giving away of a daughter.

Again phrases like *thihna thim* or *thlan thim* refers to death and the grave as dark. White on the other hand symbolises purity, light and goodness in general all over the globe. Similarly Mizo word like *khawvar* means dawn where *khaw* refers to the environment and *var* is white. White was the most common colour for everyday dress and also the base of most of the dresses showing the fondness for white. In the event that black and white is not scientifically considered as colour, red is the oldest colour in the world used since the Neolithic period. There are pigments of red used in paintings dating back perhaps 15,000 BC.<sup>600</sup> The representation of red varied in different cultures. It is a sign of life, aggression, alertness, courage, happiness, love and even fertility. A popular character in Mizo folktale, called Chhurbura identified the colour red with danger. In some societies, the privilege of wearing red was reserved exclusively for the upper class. It was expensive and a colour of class.<sup>601</sup> Even in the pre-colonial Mizo society the use of red colour for clothing and accessories was not a chance but for specific reasons. Clothing items with red colour were mostly worn on specific occasions. In that way colours do hold a certain important place in the life of the pre-colonial Mizo tradition.

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<sup>599</sup>Jess. 'Black, Red and White: Colour Symbolism Throughout Culture.' *nexuszine.wordpress.com*, 9 October 2008. Available from: <https://nexuszine.wordpress.com/2008/09/10/black-red-and-white-colour-symbolism-throughout-cultures-by-jess/> (accessed 6 March 2018)

<sup>600</sup>Kate Carter, 'Why red is the oldest colour,' *The Guardian*, 1 September 2015. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/sep/01/why-red-is-the-oldest-colour> (accessed 6 March 2018).

<sup>601</sup>Susan Stamberg, 'The Color Red: A History in Textiles,' *National Public Radio*, Inc.[US]. 13 February 2007. Available from: <https://www.npr.org/2007/02/13/7366503/the-color-red-a-history-in-textiles> (6 March 2018).

## 7.7 Death and Dress:

Mizos have always treated death and the deads with a sense of respect and acceptance. The cultural ethos and religious beliefs of the Mizo prepares each person about the inevitability of death. They believe in a spirit world beyond the grave. Each Mizo tribe follows a similar belief system. For example, the Lusei even before the advent of colonialism and Christianity, perceived death as the doorway either to *Mithi Khua* which was dead man's village where life was difficult and if a person met certain criteria, a doorway to *Pialral*, which was an abode of bliss.<sup>602</sup> In such an environment, a lot of activities and deliberations surrounded death. Hence when a person dies, his body would be buried with items of value including jewellerys, weapons, pots food and clothing consisting mainly of *puan* for them to wear in the afterlife.

The Maras dealt with their dead elaborately. When a person dies, close relatives wash the body with warm water and dressed it up with loin cloth, body cloth and *pugri* for a man and a woman would be dressed with all her best clothes their hair smoothly combed and tied. Since they did not use coffin like the Lusei, a fully dressed dead body would be wrapped in a blue cloth before being buried. The socio-economic status of the dead person affects his funeral rites and the materials that were included in the grave. So, when a wealthy or an important person dies, *Rawkhatlak* dance is performed. This is similar to the Lusei *Cheraw* but performed only on funerals. The male performers wear their best dress while female performers come with their best dressed carrying new cloths, skirts, loin cloth, new woman's coat and a bag for the spirit of the deceased to take to Athikhi.<sup>603</sup>

Festivals commemorating both people, who have died, as well as death itself, can be found in a large number of distinct and different cultures around the world. *Los Dias de los Muertos*, or the Mexican Days of the Dead Festival, *P'chum Ben*, or the Festival of the Dead in Cambodia, the *Obon*, or the Festival of the Lanterns, also known as the Festival of the Dead in Japan, Halloween in America, etc<sup>604</sup> all celebrate and honour the ancestors and death. The Mizo also have *Mitthi Rawp Lam*, a religious events during the Mim Kut festival which lasts for about

<sup>602</sup>Shakespeare, *The Lusei Kuki*, 2008, p. 62

<sup>603</sup>Parry, *The Lakheres*, pp. 399-405

<sup>604</sup>National Endowment for Humanities, 'Not Just Halloween: Festivals of The Dead From Around The world,' Available from: <https://edsitement.neh.gov/not-just-halloween-festivals-dead-around-world> (accessed 5 January 2018)

four days. On the last day, effigies representing their deceased relatives are made and dressed in the finest attires and the best necklaces. These are then strapped in square bamboo frames and the tallest pole represents the progenitor of the clan. The oldest member of the clan would then come out, chanting all the while feeding these effigies with rice beer. He would then go inside and cry. They believe that this kind of ritual is supposed to be pleasing to the spirit of the ancestors who can either bless or curse them.<sup>605</sup> This kind of practice is given away as part of the Mizo culture once Christianity prevailed. But putting a person's favourite piece of clothing, shoes and other items inside the coffin before burials is still relevant.

In an event of death by accident, when the body may not be so presentable due to an attack by wild animals, drowning, in the war, etc., men who first reach the location of the accident would make it a point to cover the body in respect of the dead person, to keep his honour intact and to make it presentable to the family. Such practices were prevalent through the colonial period till date. The August 1911 issue, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu* reported an incident where a man from Lalhleia's village drowned while fishing with a group of men. When the men of the village found the drowned body, the first to contact the body, Chalek-a took off his *puan* and used it to cover the dead body.<sup>606</sup> Today men in Mizo society do not wear *puan* anymore yet accidents like this still happens. So, men who goes out in search of the dead body carries with them, simple plain *puan* to cover the corpse.

The pre-colonial Mizo society did not have a specified dress code for funerals. But continuing the colonial legacy and following the western Christian fashion, from about the last two decades or so, wearing a black dress or use of black coloured clothing during funerals has become a trend. Covering a deceased person with a plain *puan* or giving one to the bereaved families' remains an integral part of Mizo culture. A bride trousseau still consists of several simpler *puans* and a *Puandum* to be used as shroud for her husband's dead body. This custom is now added with the practice of covering a loved one's dead body with *Puanchei* or any other valuable *puan* owned by the wife or close family members if they wanted to do so.

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<sup>605</sup>Shakespear, *The Lusei Kuki*, pp. 88- 89

<sup>606</sup>Salngenga leh Tangbea, 'Tui Tla Chanchin,' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu*, August, 1911, pp. 208-210

### 7.7 Conclusion:

The British rule, Christian missions and education in Mizoram have deep impacts in transforming Mizo society in terms of health and knowledge and by also renouncing the Mizo traditional life in many ways. Colonialism, the new religion along with their new world view interfered with a lot of their traditional customs. The colonial rule and its entities also led to the emergence of new identities as European dress became the mark of the new elite. The pre colonial elitist crest of feathers, head gears and designated cloth gave way to suits and boots. This set them a class apart from the old leadership. The educated Christians could now be easily recognized by how they dress. For the women, *Kawrmawl* and *Kawrchei* gave way to fancy blouses and outfits. Tight hair buns with pins were alternated by braids and bobs, ribbons and band with canvases and leather shoes in tows as seen in many of the photographs of that period.

The basic motive of the British when they entered the Lushai Hills might not have veritably included changing the dress system of the Mizo or if it was at all a part of what they intended to do, it did not seem to be one of the important vestiges of their colonial agenda. On the other hand there were a number of contestations against the western attires, especially from the non Christian Mizos who resisted Christianity and westernisation calling the missionaries vagabonds, showing scepticism.

Like in many colonies, tradition was attacked and modified in Mizoram. But the Mizo society uniquely adjusted to the persuasive outside influence on its tradition and was able to regulate a culture where customs and innovations could coexist side by side in the form of traditional attires and modern dresses, western designs and native garbs, embracing Christian values within their own cultures and owning it.

While the men wear a fully non traditional outfit for both formal and non-formal settings, for the women, *puan* remains part of the most important events and affairs. In a situation where the socio-political influences in the form of various elements of progress and developments invade the society, emulating the fashion trend and style of others and their way of life continues to characterise the Mizo society. Also the stress on the importance of formals as Sunday dress still persists.

The patriarchal attitude towards unequal division of labour between men and women became the one of the basis for dissemination of vocational courses especially to girls. Instead of balancing the labour, girls were taught to excel at what they do in and out of their homes so as to earn enough respect for themselves. This brought a lot of changes in the equation of the male-female relationship.

After the Second World War, in which a number of Mizo women participated, the equation of Mizo fashion took a more definite turn towards the global trend. The pace of fashion was also quicker than ever before. Fashion consciousness grew amongst the Mizo, especially young women. This phase was also augmented by the easier access to media in the form of magazines, music and cinema. Another factor pushing the fashion consciousness was the relative ease in travelling. The Mizos were spreading out all over the country and the world, travelling, working, learning and some even settling. Hence from the 1940's even if they lacked progress in other fields, the Mizos became exposed to the global fashion and developed taste for it.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Dress is a fundamental means, indeed sometimes one of the only available ways, by which groups and individuals express and negotiate their identities. That is why scholars from disciplines ranging from anthropology to media studies engage with dress and its meanings. Worn by all but scrutinized by far too few, whether spectacular or humble, celebrated or ignored, cherished or discarded, dress has a uniquely expressive capacity to carry a range of cultural information and meanings, past and present.

This research has been an attempt to investigate and document the history and evolution of a variety of Mizo dresses, their meaning and the technique involved in their production. The scattered nature of the available sources and the lack of academic studies for Mizo dress have prompted this research to merge all potential sources and thereby adopt practical approaches in order to explore the privilege communicative capacity of dress by taking the position that dress is both a product and as a process that distinguishes human beings from other animals.

Encompassing the pre-colonial to the colonial periods, the research looked at the historical contexts of the appearances of the variety of dress pieces-how colonialism, Christianity, western education and eventually, the two world wars altered the Mizo dress and their meanings. History writing ultimately necessitates a discussion of change and continuity. While the research consciously attempts to cover the given time frame (pre-colonial to colonial periods), it is also acknowledged that Mizo dress continued to evolve beyond these periods. The Mizos, holding on to traditional ethos and customs, had slowly adjusted to the changes in their political, social and economical environment. The clothing trend that evolved from the colonial period gradually became adopted as a significant part of the Mizo culture, which evidently experienced a wide array of modifications and invariably inventions of Mizo dress style and culture informed by increasing incorporation of westernization and modernization in Mizo society till date.

Of the Lusei dresses, 22 items have been identified and documented inclusive of statutory, specified and everyday dresses. A number of these dresses such as *Hnawkhal*, and *Hrenpereng* which were worn in the pre-colonial period are of course not used anymore. The use of skirts such as *Hmaram* and *Fenphel* too are restricted to certain festivals and occasions. The



use of *Dawlrem Kawr* had also ceased in the colonial period while *Kawrmawl* were still in use even during the colonial era. Some *puans* with certain designs and motifs have evolved into a dress worn only on formal occasions. Some of the colonial and pre-colonial motifs are being revived in one form or another by weavers today. For the rest of the dresses, their color combinations and motifs continued to be a part of the Mizo dress in the colonial and post colonial Mizo society with significant modifications to the original pieces. The only differences are in the way motifs and designs are incorporated into the dress or modified to create new ones. The pre colonial way of wearing a *puan* called *hnubih*, across the chest leaving the shoulder bare and *puan bah* which is to wrap a big *puan* across the body covering only one shoulder had slowly disappeared in the colonial period as well. The only implemented style of wearing a dress retained till date is called *puanven/ puanbih*, the style of wrapping the *puan* on the waist.

When it comes to Lusei dress there is a clear indication of evolution in motifs and patterns, the use of raw materials for clothing and the increase of colours utilized as they move from one place to another and as they encounter one other tribes and communities they were able to draw and borrow from these encounters enriching their culture and inventing traditions through dress along the way.

Also, the use of dyes and intricate colours and patterns reveals the social structure of the Lusei in the pre-colonial period. It can be construed that it was easier for the richer and elitist sections to dye their threads and infused designs into a *puan* because of the better availability of manpower for them while it was rather challenging for commoners to do so. Hence dress in the form of designs, colours and accumulation of readymade *puans* reveals that social disparity did exist in the pre-colonial Mizo society. A number of Lusei dresses, mainly multi-coloured ones and the ones with decorative motifs are mostly status defining items, worn only by certain groups of people. Though there were no rigid restrictions to their production and usage they were hardly afforded by the commoners hence indicating the existence of economic disparity in pre-colonial Lusei society on the basis of access to basic resources.

It may be worthwhile to contend that Lusei never used silk for dress-making and all their dress materials were of cotton. Certain dresses such as *Puanchei* and *Puanropui*, which are considered the traditional dress of the Lusei, were actually created only in the colonial and post-

colonial period. Lusei have statutory dress which proves that the pre-colonial Lusei society was not an egalitarian one in the true sense. There are motifs which are exclusive to the Lusei. Many of their motifs were inspired by nature and animals. Though there were no restrictions on the use of motifs for commoners and elite except for *Thangchhuah* and the Chief and that the pre-colonial Lusei society did not incorporate much intricate patterns into their dress except for *Hmaram*, *Puanlaisen* and *Ngotekherh*.

The pre-colonial Lusei dress was less embellished with motifs as compared to the other tribes such as Lai and Mara. Looking at the pre colonial Lusei dress through photography there seems to be very little incorporation of motifs as compare to the late colonial period. Except for *kawkpuzikzial* motif in *Hmaram* and the small line of motifs in the middle of *Puanlaisen*, there was hardly any use of motifs. However, a number of new motifs and designs were invented during the colonial periods which became an essential part of Mizo dress, particularly the women even today.

Contrary to common perception that the design of *Ngotekherh* is the grid pattern of black and white, this research discovered that the original version of this *puan* has plain white colour as base with the thick weft design at both end of the *puan* running vertically in black when finished. The grid pattern was developed during the colonial period by mixing it with the *Mangpuan* pattern. *Puanchei* as the modern traditional dress of the Lusei existed only from around the 1919's and 1920's is a modification of a much older and more simpler *puan* in terms of motif and design originally known as *Puanlaisen*.

Regarding the Lai 17 different dress items have been examined and among which dress such as *Hnawkhal* almost disappeared in the colonial period while the use of *Angki* and *Biarpi* drastically declined after the colonial period due to conversion to Christianity, education, and the easier access to factory made clothes among the Lai people. Most of the Lai dresses of statutory significance, generally worn by men remained to be valued due to their historic and economic value in the colonial period. Many of them can still be found in their original state, in the possessions of the families who were handed down these dresses by their ancestors.

Most of the Lai women's dresses are still used as formal dresses and they are also worn on cultural and religious festivals. Though imitated, the Lai motifs are very difficult to master

due to their intricacy and use of silk. Perhaps it is due to this that the Lai dresses have been meticulously preserved till date with regards to their motifs and designs, the colour combination and patterns along with the materials. It should be kept in mind that, the style, quality and quantity of the dresses of different Mizo tribes were roughly the same from village to village, from tribe to tribe. Apparently, it was due to the fact that they have all come from the same lineage, following similar cultures and customs at some point before and through the course of their migration, living in the same place or at very close quarters. The slight differences are also indicative of the geographical pattern of their migration and eventual settlements.

While looking at the earliest forms of Lai dress it is evident that the evolution of their dress in terms of production and the way they wear them had undergone significant changes. The skill of the Lai women in dress making cannot be ignored as reflected in many of their handiworks. The motifs and patterns employed in the weaving, the beautiful combination of colours and the fine finishing only confirms their talent in weaving. Even with the scarcity of silk threads, there was enough of it to dress the elite section of the society to maintain their status. On the other hand, the lack of innovations in their dress style and production process for a number of decades evidently presents a socio-cultural scenario where a vibrant and stable economic foundation was absent due to its reliance on subsistence farming economy thus, preventing the Lai tribe from making any radical experimentation in dress making and rendering them from relying more on importation of finish product from Burma than indulging in local base manufacturing of dress.

What stands out in the Lai society is the incorporation of silk by the elite section of the society while the common people employed cotton in dress making. The main reason for this was the economic disparity between the elites and the commoners as silk was exceedingly expensive than cotton, thus preventing the non-elites from acquiring it for dress production. However, pictorial evidences also reveal that there was no rigidity or restrictions when it comes to designs and motifs. The commoners could use any of the designs worn by the elite sections but the skills and technique to produce an exact replica of those worn by the elites might have been lacking. To be a chief's wife required a woman to be highly skilled and knowledgeable in weaving. So, it can be easily assumed that since commoners, especially women rarely enter the elite households and vice versa, there were no chances of disseminating weaving knowledge. It is

also plausible to surmise that knowledge was withheld due to the fear of losing power by these elite women. However, most talented Mizo women could imitate the designs and motifs just by casual observation of those worn by the elites and imitate them and sometimes slightly alter them to their convenience or vision. This is one of the reasons why there were variations in patterns as well.

Clothing made of silk defined higher status and certain pieces of clothing such as *Chawngnak* and *Chanlo puan* could only be worn by the chiefs and the elites revealing that social demarcation on the basis of dress was prevalent. On the other hand, because they lived in a pre-literate society, there was no bar to the exotic and expensive items that could be owned by the chief or the rich families which created a line of demarcation between the rich and the poor. While it was accepted that there should not be any one greater than the chief in any village, the chief could also make sure that there was none in any aspects be it wealth or dress. By prescribing certain dress code they could have been making sure that there would be no competition and that with those dresses, their power could be identified. While there were good and kind chiefs, there were cruel and overbearing chiefs as well. Hence, there are reports of instances when a poor commoner's earring or necklace would be snatched from their ears and neck on the ground that it doesn't suit a commoner or a poor person to be wearing such pieces of value. But such instances do not define the society as a whole.

To maintain status in the pre-colonial period, the Mizos accumulated of certain materials, such as heirlooms which included woven blankets made with locally sourced cotton and dyes along with metal tools, beaded jewellerys, brass gongs, pots, silk and other types of dyes and silver which were acquired outside through direct trade or indirectly through exchange with other clans and tribes. Amongst these items textiles were used to manifest the status and wealth of the wearer as well as for utilitarian purposes. As revealed in this research, textiles were often made for specific sexes and also on a need base. Certain textiles were reserved for ceremonial feasts, celebrations related to successful hunting, weddings and funerals. The status of some individuals is reflected by what they wear while some are allowed to wear particular clothing only if they achieved some criteria.

Until recently, before the influences of colonialism and its concomitant social and economic forces, except for ceremonial clothing, men did not change their clothing at night, and

they wore the same clothes they did during the day even when they sleep. But the progress in terms of attires and hygiene, and the general consciousness towards dress and fashion have drastically changed since the colonial period till today not just among the Mara but all over Mizoram.

The pre-colonial Mara dresses are almost similar to the Lai dresses due to their close cultural affinity. This research has documented and studied 16 pieces of dresses belonging to the Mara tribe. It has been found that most of the pre-colonial attires still formed a part of the Mara wardrobe in the colonial period including the *Dua Ah* and *Dua Kalapa*. However, in the post colonial period, the use of the loin clothes slowly disappeared except on cultural festivals and shows. The dresses of men, which had great social and economic values continued to remain so till date even though their use, especially as statutory shawl by the men has drastically declined. Nonetheless, like the Lai dresses, their historical and economic values continue to increase even in the post colonial period. Besides owning such pieces of clothing, they have also been imported from the neighbouring state of Burma to increase one's wealth and as a part of trade fetching high prices.

Most of the dresses of women continued to be worn during the colonial period, till the blouses were replaced by more convenient western and factory blouses. Today the lower section of the Mara women's traditional dress still forms a part of the formal dress for women while the traditional blouses are worn only on cultural events. There has also been slight addition such as the small stoles made in the same design as the traditional skirts, matching the attires.

The social distinction between the elite groups and commoners was more marked in Lai and Mara society than the Lusei. This was demonstrated by the use of silk threads and certain exclusive clothing by the elites in the Lai and Mara societies such as *Chawngnak* and *Chan-loh* of the Lai and *Chylao Poh* and *Chyna Poh* of the Mara.

This research identifies and documents a wide variety of jewelleries and accessories of the pre-colonial Mizos which includes 10 different headgears for Mizo men, three main headgears for women from the different tribes under study along with four different varieties of hairpins used both by men and women during from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. The Lusei, Lai and Mara together wore 10 different types of necklaces and six different earrings

within themselves. These are worn by both male and female on certain specific occasions and some of them on daily basis.

Most of these jewelleries were worn from the pre-colonial period all through to the colonial period but, their use were discontinued in the post-colonial period except for cultural festivals and other occasions. Some of the simpler hairpins are still in use for everyday purposes. Interestingly, one single piece of accessory which transcended time is the use of *Ipte Chei*. Decorated cotton bags called *Ipte Chei* continued as an integral part of contemporary Mizo society. They are used on both Sundays and any other days. The use of many of the head gears and accessories continued even in the post-colonial era but restricted to specific cultural events. Statutory headgears were now worn by anybody who had access to them. In that way, though a lot of the significance of the jewelleries has been lost, they are preserved in museums and in private homes. Also, replicas of these jewelleries have been produced on a mass scale and they now are owned by each and everyone notwithstanding their social or economic status.

The study of jewelleries cannot be complete without a thorough understanding of the history, culture and environment. It is important because the knowledge of jewellery and accessory practices can be a vehicle for social change, understanding, activism and dynamics. The pre-colonial Mizo society can also be understood through the kind of jewelleries they make or use. Sources indicate that metal and precious beads such as amber were not found in Mizoram. But metallurgy in its very crude form was available, in the form of black smithy but not in jewellery making. Moreover, precious jewellery making was not done in Mizoram in the pre-colonial and colonial times. This realization on the other hand reveals that through direct or indirect trade the Mizo tribes obtained most of their jewelleries and other items of decoration from the people of Burma, Chittagong hills and Arakan.

Like any other culture, ornamentations were very much a part of their lives and given a lot of importance, which is revealed by the fact the ownership of valuable pieces of jewelleries, was a symbol of status, wealth and power. It may be concluded that though the Mizo were self sufficient and not very materialistic in nature, jewellery was among the few things they imported from their neighbours. It was the need which led them to import metals, ambers, colours and other ornaments.

Most jewellery were status defining possessions for the owners in the context of pre-colonial and early colonial Mizo society. Such pieces were hardly owned by the common people and they were only found in the possession of the chiefly and rich families. Hence, wearing of precious ornaments automatically reveal the economic status as well as the social position of the wearer. An important example is the women's headgear like *Vakiria* or *Lakhang* which could be worn only by the chief's wife and the wife of *Thangchhuahpa*. Even the men's accessories such as *Diar* and *Chhawn* also had specified meanings and they were not for the general public. The rarity and expensiveness increases the value to the point that while it was very difficult for the commoners to own many of the prized items, it elevated the owners to a certain level of power and authority, besides its provision of vanity.

Besides reflecting the socio-economic conditions of the Mizo tribes in terms of communities and individual members of a society, jewelleries and other exotic items of dress were also construed to have endowed the owner or wearer certain advantages over those who did not have or not wear them from the numerous vagaries and vicissitudes of life which they believed were the handiwork of the fearful spiritual beings who coexisted. Therefore, wearing certain dress accessories which were considered to have warded off the bad spirits and augured fortunes was indispensable especially during the pre-colonial period. Depending on the kind of accessories they wore, phrase like '*thi beh lo*' were popularly used in derogatory manners to expressed that words of a man without precious earrings or necklace need not be heeded.

Hence, jewelleries and accessories are important tools in showing the social and economic structure and that some form of social differentiation exist in pre-colonial society is also argued on the basis of the restrictions imposed on the usage of certain jewellery items or accessories for everyone except the chiefly clans and other wealthy families whose usage and access to such objects of desire were unrestricted and free.

Most ancient culture, no matter how primitive, has woven on handlooms. The first evidence for the technique of weaving and the known oldest woven textiles are found in the context of the Eurasian Palaeolithic. Likewise the Mizo tribes have woven their clothing using handlooms, specifically the loin loom. The technology and expertise of the Mizo in dress making reveals that like other tribal communities around them they adopted the technology which were available in their society which were handed down from generation to generation.

These complex procedures were still adhered to even during the colonial times. However, the growing trade transactions and alternatives provided during the colonial period, in the form of synthetic fibres and dyes slowly gave way to the decreasing use of locally procured yarns and dyes. However, in spite of the rising availability of mechanical looms in the post-colonial period, loin looms continued to be an important tool for dress production.

For their dress production the most common raw material was cotton which was locally grown and processed using their traditional technique. Cotton processing require many stages of treatment and technological devices such as, cleaning the seed from the raw cotton using *Herawt*, making the cotton fluffy and soft using *Lasai*, converting the rolled cotton into threads using *Hmui*, etc.. The final cotton threads were then woven into different design with motifs using the loin loom. The loom itself, which is still used by many Mizos, is a very intricate and highly complex system comprising various parts requiring the hand of a skilled weaver to accomplish the job.

The use of raw cotton thread was slowly replaced by the use of synthetic thread, mainly acrylic during the colonial period. These threads were acquired mainly from Cachar and Burma, and also other neighboring areas with whom they shared trading relations. This was mainly the case in Aizawl and the towns situated along the routes leading to Silchar and other trading areas. At the same time, raw cotton threads continued to be used as the basic material for dress making in the villages which did not have easy access to the synthetic threads. The use of raw cotton threads for general use continued till the 1960's after which it slowly disappeared owing to its replacement by the more convenient synthetic fibers.

The pre-colonial Mizo tribes also coloured their fabrics using the traditional technique of dyeing. In the dyeing process they used materials available in nature such as tree barks, plants and flowers to render the desired colour. The most prominent colours of Mizo dresses were white, black, red and yellow. White was the most common colour because it was the natural colour of the cotton, the main raw material for dresses. While black colour was derived by dyeing the raw cotton threads with indigo other colours were derived from tree barks and plants. However, the technique of dyeing and the variety of colours elicited by the Mizos in the pre-colonial period lacked certain knowledge as far as fastness and variations in colour are concerned.



The use of synthetic dyes was known even before the First World War. However, it seemed to have become easier to procure the dyes after the First World War. Additionally, Mizo soldiers fighting abroad during the war brought samples of synthetic dyes back home from the war which accelerated the popularity of synthetic dyes. Traditional dyes continued to be used in dress making until it was fully replaced by the synthetic dyes.

Owing to the complexities involved in the process of dyeing, the original colour of cotton which was white remained the most dominant colour of Mizo dress from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. Except for the statutory clothes and significant pieces, white formed the basis of almost all *puans* and clothing made by the Mizo. This trend was carried on till around the 1970's which is reflected in some of the photographs of the era. Women somehow shied away from wearing vivid colours, especially in monotonous. Black blouses which were hardly worn by the women in the pre-colonial and colonial periods by women.

The unequal division of labour, particularly in the field of dress making, is reflected by the attitude of men towards it. Patriarchy was fully at work as men, specially the Lusei completely refused to participate except in rolling a few balls of cotton sometimes when courting a girl for fear of being labelled unmanly. This continued to be the mind-set towards dress making until recently.

The British rule in Mizoram with its concomitant forces such as Christian missions and education have deep impacts in transforming Mizo society in terms of health and knowledge and by also renouncing the Mizo traditional life in many ways. Colonialism, the new religion along with their new world view interfered with a lot of their traditional customs. The colonial rule and its entities also led to the emergence of new identities as European dress became the mark of the new elite. The pre colonial elitist crest of feathers, head gears and designated cloth gave way to suits and boots. This set them a class apart from the old leadership. The educated Christians could now be easily recognized by how they dress. For the women, *Kawrmawl* and *Kawrchei* gave way to fancy blouses and outfits. Tight hair buns with pins were alternated by braids and bobs, ribbons and band with canvases and leather shoes in tows as seen in many of the photographs of that period.

The effects of colonialism as in different parts of the world were also felt in Mizoram. Amongst other elements, this was vividly reflected in dress. Dress became a marker of social status and identity which manifested in the dress of the educated class and the earliest Christians. Female missionaries conspicuously advocated traditional weaving and endorsed the creation of new designs and motifs. However, they did revive local handloom which was on the downslide with the coming of Indian textiles at cheaper rates. It was the missionaries who transformed the politics of dress. The dress quotient of the nobility versus commoners was changed into western versus traditional.

The basic motive of the British when they entered the Lushai Hills might not have veritably included changing the dress system of the Mizo or if it was at all a part of what they intended to do, it did not seem to be one of the important vestiges of their colonial agenda. On the other hand there were a number of contestations against the western attires, especially from the non-Christian Mizos who resisted Christianity and westernisation calling the missionaries vagabonds, showing scepticism.

Like in many colonies, tradition was attacked and modified in Mizoram. But the Mizo society uniquely adjusted to the persuasive outside influence on its tradition and was able to regulate a culture where customs and innovations could coexist side by side in the form of traditional attires and modern dresses, western designs and native garbs, embracing Christian values within their own cultures and owning it.

While the men wear a fully non traditional outfit for both formal and non-formal settings, for the women, *puan* remains part of the most important events and affairs. In a situation where the socio-political influences in the form of various elements of progress and developments invade the society, emulating the fashion trend and style of others and their way of life continues to characterise the Mizo society. Also the stress on the importance of formals as Sunday dress still persists.

The patriarchal attitude towards unequal division of labour between men and women became the one of the basis for dissemination of vocational courses especially to girls. Instead of balancing the labour, girls were taught to excel at what they do in and out of their homes so as to

earn enough respect for themselves. This brought a lot of changes in the equation of the male-female relationship.

After the Second World War, in which a number of Mizo women participated, the equation of Mizo fashion took a more definite turn towards the global trend. The pace of fashion was also quicker than ever before. Fashion consciousness grew amongst the Mizo, especially young women. This phase was also augmented by the easier access to media in the form of magazines, music and cinema. Another factor pushing the fashion consciousness was the relative ease in travelling. The Mizos were spreading out all over the country and the world, travelling, working, learning and some even settling. Hence from the 1940's even if they lacked progress in other fields, the Mizos became exposed to the global fashion and developed taste for it.

## Appendix

### Introduction:

This is an appendage to Chapter 3 of this thesis titled 'Lai Dress from the Earliest to Colonial Times' and Chapter 4 titled 'Mara Dress from the Earliest to Colonial Times.' It consists of the famous legend of the Lai and the Mara people that tells of events which are believed to be the origin of the *Chanlo Puan* or *Chawngnak Puan* of the Lai and *Chyna Poh* of the Mara. Although these folktales have different versions, there are a number of similar notes in the theme such as the exclusivity and sacredness of these cloths.

### 1. Legend of the *Changnak Puan*:

According to Ni Kio, residence of Zotung village have similar story. While at the Chin Christian College, Saya Thawng Lut upon comprehensive research recorded the tale in *Kawl* language which is the dialect of the Burmese. This I deem is required to understand the significance of a particular piece of clothing and why it is valued so much by a particular group of people and individuals who wears and own them. This existence of this story is also confirmed by W.R. Head who stated that there is a fable that a woman of Bondwa village, in a dream, learned the art of weaving patterns; when she awoke, she put this into practice and then taught others.

"About 1400 AD, a rather fascinating incident occurred in the village of Sepi (Sepui) approximately 6 miles from the township of Lungngo which is within the perimeter of the Zotung borough in Chin Hills of Burma. There was an eligible and handsome lad named Tho Khe. One day he set out to fish in the Letsa (Myittha) river and never came home. For days the villagers searched for him but in vain as he was nowhere to be found. They therefore assumed that he must be dead already and so a proper funeral with all the rites and rituals was prepared in his regard.

Three years after this incident, Tho Khe unexpectedly returned to the village, surprising everyone, shocking even. This aroused curiosity of not only the villagers but his own family who knew nothing about his disappearance and whereabouts for the past three years. However, even upon much perplexing, questioning and interrogations no one could get an answer out of him. His only respond was that the moment he told anyone about his whereabouts, he would die instantaneously. His riposte deepened the curiosity of the people around and they became more and more intrigued by the mystery of Tho Khe.

Notwithstanding the threat to his life, their inquisitiveness of the people got the better of them and they continued to pressure him with the same questions time and again. Succumbing to the pressure, Tho Khe decided to reveal his secret. He acclaimed that he'd realized his own folks were more interested in what he had to say and they could not care about what would happen to his life and therefore he would tell them what they wanted to know. He however made them promised to bury him exactly the way he wanted for which he had given them details. The people promised to grant him his wish and gathered blanket along with all that was needed for his funeral and burial. When all was ready as he wanted, Tho Khe finally recounted what has happened to him. He said, "At the Letsa River, as I was readying myself to fish, I saw this beautiful woman in the middle of the river waving and gesturing me to go to her. She was so beautiful and enchanting that I was mesmerized and all I wanted was to obey her. She then took me inside the water to live with her and that is where I was for the past three years. However, I started feeling homesick and miss my folks, so I requested her to let me come home and stay with you all for a few days. If I live through, I will go back to her in a few days". The people gasped at his story about *Tuichhung Nula* (mermaid) but Tho Khe after making a soft snarl, cried and died right there and then as he had predicted.

"The people mourned his death and kept his body for three days and two nights. On the third night, at midnight, all of a sudden, everyone fell into a deep sleep as if they were drugged except for an old lady who for some reason remained awake. Nobody could wake up even when loud sounds were made. At that moment, a beautiful woman, who they believed to be the *Tuichhung Nula* turned into human entered the room carrying beautiful pieces of artifacts and clothing items. She hang the pieces of *puans* she brought near Kho The's dead body and began to cry. According to folktales, she wailed and said these words which in *Zotung* is,

*'Honangla, Honangla ka cu khaw, hoi khyh ka ci miarrih kingkae.*

*A hoi ka ci vapi sue.*

*Tuisii ngapae pui sa la ka nge Tho Khe ngo law zawng*

*Boilyn lamyng se sa la ka nge Tho Khe lo ngo zawng.*

*Loram Saphin ly sa la ka nge Tho Khe lo ngaw zaw.*

*Cunginn kuitpong phou kei ccu, cciraw langphae khungawngvae'*

The rough translation of these lines of lamentations in Halkha dialect would be,

*'Ka ta Tho Khe chim zarh kaan ti lengmang I na chim mu*

*Suinga tampi um hmanh hnasehlaw nang ka ta Tho Khe an in tluk kho hnga maw ?*

*Sen muici phun tlinh mi Va phun tam len hmanhsehlaw ka ta Tho Khe Nang iang kho an um hnga maw.*

*Nunnak nge saram phun tling hmanh um hna seh law ka ta Tho Khe Nang iang kho um hnga*

*Ka biakar dek kho loin thlanmual na liampi ai mu ka ta aw.'*

These line coarsely translate into Mizo as,

*'Sawi suh ka ti ka ti che a, sawi thiang lo tih hre reng si in I sawi chhuak ta tho maw,*

*Lenggha sang tam awm mahse Tho Khe, Nang tluk thei leh chhingzo awm ang maw?*

*Sensiar sirva leng thiam tam mahse Tho Khe, nang chhingzo awm ang maw?*

*Ramsa leng tin za tam awm mahse Tho Khe, Nang chhingzo an awm thei dawn em ni ?*

*Kan thutiam ruk vawng zo lovin fam dairial I chanpui si a maw.'*

In a gist, she is lamenting and telling Kho The that though there might be thousands of fishes in the sea, thousands of beautiful birds and animals, there was no one quite like him. She asked why had he revealed their secret which was to be kept hidden and because he could not keep a secret he had to die. This literal translation might not be so precise and poetically justified but it is clear that there was indeed a similar folktale owned and told by people living in these parts of the world. And this lamentation song is still sung at funerals and on social occasions when people come together to console families of a deceased person, even after their conversion to Christianity. It has become a traditional song of the Chin people.

The story went on and it so happened that at the dusk of dawn, the woman hurriedly gathered her belongings and left. In the morning, the old lady who witnessed the whole incident told everyone what she had seen that night and all who heard her swore to stay

awake the next night. At the night fall, there was a lot of murmuring and excitement and feeling of apprehension within the whole village. At the stroke of midnight, the same thing occurred and no one could keep awake but plundered into deep sleep. The beautiful woman came, bringing with her all that she brought the previous night and recited the same expression of grief and cried. At the dusk of dawn, the second time, the woman quickly gathered her possessions but in her scurry, forgot a bag and left one behind. The bag was made of cloth, the length of which was as long as the arm and the width about as broad as a loin cloth. The bag was woven and beautifully decorated in yellow and seeing that, the people of Sepi called it '*pingtiahnun*'.

During this time there was a reputed weaver in the town of Lungngo called Pi Riatin. When the chief of Lungngo heard about the story of a mermaid, he sent people to fetch the old lady who had seen the whole incident and asked her to narrate everything to Pi Riatin. From what was narrated to her, Riatin started to weave a new design on her loom and created what is known as the *Chongnak Puan* or *Cue Lia* or *Tue Lia* in Zotung. Henceforth, through war, inter marriages and trade, these *puan* and its design proliferated to different parts of Chin Hills in Burma such as Halkha, Than Tlang, Falam, Miram (Mara), Lautu etc.

Major Cia Bik validated the story and alleged that the bag that the mermaid left behind was shown to Pi Riatin and she was asked to imitate the design and reproduce it. Riatin gathered threads and colored them similarly. Due to the intricacy of the design, Riatin found it quite difficult to make. When the weaving was finally finished, Pi Riatin became seriously ill and she had to see the local medicine man, who suggested that her sickness was due to the fact that she made a copy of the bag from the underwater and hence she had to sacrifice a mithun. If she does not do as instructed, she will die. This put Pi Riatin in a dilemma as she was only a poor woman. The chief of Lungngo offered to loan her a mithun and she made the sacrifice. Pi Riatin was well again but since she had no means of paying back her loan to the chief, she became his slave. In the course of time, the bag that the mermaid (*Tui Thang Nung* / *Tuichhung Nula*) left behind also deteriorated like any other piece of clothing but its design and the myth lives on.

## 2. Legend of the *Chylao Poh*:

Like the Lai cloth, there is a story with this piece of clothing which is an important element in demonstrating its significance. According to the tale, Vangia was a queen of the Hlaipao Kingdom famous for her beauty. She lived in the capital city called Uacha-Nachhôn Lytlâh with her husband, King Haoma, with whom she had a love marriage. One day, King Beihra of Topa made a royal visit to the Hlaipao Kingdom. When he saw Queen Vangia, he was captured by her beauty and wanted her to be his wife. He then craftily asked King Haoma whether Vangia was his wife or sister. King Haoma mockingly replied that Vangia was his sister. King Beihra then took this opportunity to make King Haoma heavily drunk during which he took away queen Vangia. The queen, sensing the inevitable separation from her beloved husband, took the *Chylao Poh* that she weaved for her husband and covered him with it, as he lay drunk. When King Haoma woke up, it was too late as it would take a big war to get Vangia back. So he in his lament sang this song:

*Majestic Chylao Poh,*

*Weaved for me by the very hands of Vangia,*

*Go and hang, hang on the line,*

*Let the people behold and enjoy its beauty!*



### 3. Legend of the *Chyna Poh*:

The story was that one day, Laithlu, King of Ngiaphia Sizo (now in the Chin State of Myanmar), went to the Beinô, the River Queen for fishing. While casting his net, he saw a red shawl spreading on a rock some thirty feet high and took it. It turned out that the red shawl belonged to a band of fairies called Vâhiah who were drying their shawl under the sun. When the night falls, the fairies followed King Laithlu to his palace. The whole night, the fairies demanded that their shawl be given back to them. King Laithlu, knowing that fairies were repulsed by the smell of fermented soya beans spread fermented soya beans on the shawl and thrust it to them. Unable to tolerate the odor, the fairies ran away. After a while, the fairies came back and asked King Laithlu if he could at least cut away a small piece of the shawl's corner (end) and give it to them so that they could make another shawl from it, King Laithlu agreed. But the fairy warned and asked him not to use it for any other purpose other than a shroud.

The next day, *Chyna Poh* that Laithlu got from the fairies was exhibited for all citizens to see, to marvel and enjoy its beauty, especially the wisdom and technique of weaving. The women of the Kingdom soon mastered the technique and king Laithlu delightedly sang:

*'Go and hand the shawl on the line,*

*Let the citizens behold and enjoy its splendor!'*

Note: These legends have been compiled from the oral testimonies of Lai and Mara scholars and knowledgeable persons interviewed and they all agreed to the tales narrated in this appendix. There may be slight differences in the details of the tales from village to village, clan to clan or person to person as is often the case of oral tradition. That is the reason why, especially for the Lai legend, the narration of Ni Kio has been repeatedly utilized, besides other narrations, as he is one of the few, who have documented the legend properly in writing. The Mara folk tale is also corroborated by C. Dawthlei, K. Pari and K. Robin, who have been interviewed for this thesis.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Ahmaw</i> (Mara)	the act of not sharing one's comb with others for fear of being infected with the other man's disease
<i>Aieng</i>	turmeric
<i>Amao</i>	the decorated part of <i>Dua Ah</i>
<i>Angki</i> (Lai)	it is a white coloured blouse or chemise
<i>Anna</i>	a currency unit formerly used in India and Pakistan, equal to 1/16 rupee
<i>Arkeziak</i>	a tassel or plume of red, black and white yarn made in honour of the prowess of men in war worn by women, especially for the <i>Muallam</i> event
<i>Arpifarual</i>	main motif used in <i>Hnisen</i>
<i>Arpuinawihlawh</i> (Lusei)	a special and specific dress code worn by the brave men on the event of <i>Muallam</i>
<i>Arsi</i>	star/ star motif
<i>Arsi par</i>	a motif on cloth depicting a star
<i>Athikhi</i>	village of the dead in Mara
<i>Awhmangbeupa</i>	<i>Pithecolobium angulatum</i> plant
<i>Azeu</i>	<i>Duabanga Soneratioides</i>
<i>Banbun</i>	bangle or bracelet
<i>Bankhih</i>	a bracelet
<i>Bat</i>	to wear a stole or cloth on the shoulder or over it
<i>Bawm</i>	box
<i>Bawmcuang</i>	one of the design in a <i>Pumtek</i> bead
<i>Bazaar</i>	market

<i>Beemraj</i>	racket tail drongo
<i>Bengbeh</i>	earring
<i>Bhimaraj</i>	tail feather of a racket tail drongo
<i>Biar Pi</i>	a loin cloth decorated at both ends, worn by the Lai men in addition to the mantle which was used for warmth
<i>Biartial</i>	word denoting the whole piece of as <i>Biar Pi</i>
<i>Biartuan</i>	same as <i>Biar Pi</i> or <i>Biartuan</i>
<i>Bih</i>	to wear a cloth by fastening one edge of it tightly across the breast and back under the armpits with the opposite edge being tucked into the tightness
<i>Buanhmun</i>	village in Mizoram
<i>Buhza Aih Cheraw</i>	a feast given to the whole village by an individual family in celebration of a bumper harvest
<i>Chakma</i>	a member of Tibeto-Burman people of Bangladesh and Northeast India
<i>Chanlo</i>	unaffordable
<i>Chanlo puan</i>	men's shawl or blanket worn on specific occasion by the Lai
<i>Chawilukhum</i>	original name of <i>Vakiria</i> ; <i>chawi</i> means 'to lift' and <i>lukhum</i> means a hat or hair dress
<i>Chawite</i>	a motif common among the <i>Lais</i> exclusively used in exclusive in embroidering men's blanket
<i>Chawngnak</i>	a ceremony where the host give a seven day feast to the whole village to proof that his wealth is worthy of recognition and thus his status
<i>Chawngnak Kawr</i>	the most popular blouse or tunic of the Lai women
<i>Chawngnak puan</i>	Lai men's cloth worn by specific person

<i>Chawng Ni</i>	last day of Chapchar Kut festival when everyone comes out to celebrate with feast, dancing and merry making
<i>Chawnzial</i>	a process to roll cotton to make it ready to be spun; also known as <i>Lachawn</i>
<i>Chem.</i>	knife used for cutting or as a weapon
<i>Chenlo</i>	not of the same level
<i>Chhawndawl</i>	special Lusei headdress reserved for men who killed in war; <i>chhawn</i> means ‘things or decorative pieces worn on the head’ and <i>dawl</i> means ‘hold or to hold’
<i>Chhim leh Hmar Indo</i>	an infamous event in Mizo history when the chiefs of the north and south were at war with each other
<i>Chhisaih</i>	Mara necklace
<i>Chhisaih rih</i>	a thick and heavy Mara necklace
<i>Chindwin</i>	a river in Myanmar, main tributary of the Irrawady
<i>Chei</i>	to decorate
<i>Cheraw</i>	Mizo dance using crossed pairs of bamboo staves
<i>Cheunapang / Chyna Poh</i>	a fine cloth worn and owned mainly by royal, aristocrat, rich families and wealthy section of the society
<i>Chhameikaru</i>	Mara common man’s cloth with corn stalk pattern
<i>Chhihrang</i>	a small round beads
<i>Chhimpuantlang tial</i>	women’s skirt with coloured hem
<i>Chhinlung</i>	a cave, located in China from where the Mizos are speculated to originate
<i>Chhinchhik</i>	a spiral brass tube through which a string is inserted to hold the belt together; also known as <i>Cikcin</i>

<i>Chhumchhi</i>	the name of a brass girdle
<i>Chongchi</i>	see <i>Chhinchhik</i>
<i>Chumchi</i>	same as <i>Chhumchhi</i>
<i>Chylao poh</i>	Fine Mara man's shawl worn by the elite on specific occasion
<i>Chyna Poh</i>	a fine red Mara cloth worn and owned mainly by royal, aristocrat, rich families and wealthy section of the society
<i>Cumci</i>	see <i>Chhumchhi</i> and <i>Chumchi</i>
<i>Dapachhi</i>	Mara necklace made from a white clear glass beads
<i>Darkawngchilh</i>	a belt made of small rings of metals such as brass, silver and earlier gold which were put on a thick thread called <i>la hruihrual</i> to form a belt, similar to <i>Chhumchhi</i> , <i>Chumchi</i> or <i>Cumci</i>
<i>Dartawnsuk</i>	a decorative piece for the white turban worn by men whenever they wanted; it is made of a red and white tassels of cotton thread fixed at top end of a thin brass stick which could move flexibly with the wearer's movement
<i>Darzai</i>	thin brass wire used as belt.
<i>Dawchakopa</i>	a hollow brass beads
<i>Dawhkilh</i>	a straight hair pin with tapered spiky end usually made of brass, wood and bamboo
<i>Dawhkilh kual</i>	half rounded hair pin; <i>kual</i> meaning 'round'
<i>Dawlrem</i>	It is an insect named cicada. It has a greenish line across the back of its head and wings and its name is partly derived from its cry and partly from the fact that it appears when the edible arum leaves and stalks ( <i>dawl</i> ) are withering ( <i>rem</i> ), hence ' <i>dawlrem</i> '.
<i>Dawlrem kawr</i>	a blouse or top dress decorated with transverse stripes and bands, named after the insect <i>Dawlrem</i>
<i>Den</i>	line of design that differentiate an armlet

<i>Den li</i>	four lined armlet; <i>li</i> means four
<i>Den nga</i>	five lined armlet; <i>nga</i> means five
<i>Dhoti</i>	<i>It is a traditional men's garment of a long rectangular unstitched cloth wrapped around the waist and the legs and knotted at the waist, worn in the Indian subcontinent.</i>
<i>Diar</i>	a turban
<i>Diartial</i>	head wrap of a chief or a socially eminent person with a thick plume of the tail feather of a racket tail drongo attached to it
<i>Disul</i>	a design or a motif based on a flower
<i>Di hnah</i>	thatching grass
<i>Dinlek</i>	a straight bamboo stick of about 2 feet, which has holes at both end to vertically hold two other bamboo sticks of about 1 foot each on which cotton threads are swivelled around
<i>Dua ah</i>	it is another loin cloth of the Mara which was worn on formal or dressy occasions; same as <i>Lai Biar Pi</i>
<i>Dua Kalapa</i>	it is a cotton loincloth which is 9.5 -10 feet long and 1.5-2 feet in width which was plain and white in colour, wound around their waist and between the legs; same as <i>Hrenpereng</i>
<i>Duhlian</i>	a name given to the upper classes or clans of the <i>Lusei</i> and to the dialect they speak – which is regarded as the purest form of the Lushai language
<i>Dzi</i>	popular bead in Tibet
<i>Eng</i>	light; also yellow
<i>Fah</i>	Name of a tree to get brown coloured dye ( <i>Lithocarpus dealbata</i> )
<i>Fanghma mu meng</i>	a popular woven motif among the <i>Lusei</i> depicting the seed of fanghma (cucumber)

<i>Favang Awillen</i>	the period between completion of jhum works and harvesting, mainly the month of October
<i>Fen</i>	to wear a skirt on the waist
<i>Fenphel</i>	a smaller petticoat or underskirt which has a slit on the side, worn under a cloth
<i>Fenngo</i>	a plain unbleached skirt wrapped around the waist which is in the natural white colour of the cotton
<i>Fenthuah</i>	an apron; a cloth or skirt worn by women over the <i>pawnfen</i> to protect it from dirt while working
<i>Gesellschaft</i>	Social relations based on impersonal ties, such as duty to a society or organization
<i>Haka</i>	<i>a corrupted version of Halkha used by the British.</i>
<i>Halkha</i>	<i>a powerful Lai chiefdom in the Chin State, Myanmar; now the capital of Chin State; also a motif copied from the Halkha</i>
<i>Halkha de</i>	<i>a variation of the Halkha motif</i>
<i>Harzai</i>	a motif
<i>Hawmiraheu</i>	Mara necklace made from white molten metal
<i>Herawt</i>	a wooden gin
<i>Hlingsi</i>	It is also known as <i>Reetha</i> or Chinese Soapberry, the fruit of which was used for washing
<i>Hmar am</i>	name of a short woman's skirt or kilt worn by young girls which is black in colour with vertical white embroidery at regular interval
<i>Hmui</i>	spinning wheel to make cotton into yarns
<i>Hmuithal</i>	a straight iron rod in the middle of a <i>Hmui</i> that holds the yarn when the spinning and puts the yarn in place when spun

<i>Hmunpi</i>	main station or main residence in Lai
<i>Hmunphiah</i>	broom grass
<i>Hnahchawi</i>	string heddle of a loom
<i>Hnahkiah</i>	name of a tree whose bark is used as dye ( <i>Callicarpa arborea</i> )
<i>Hnarang</i>	metal worker/ metal craft smith
<i>Hnathawh</i>	labor, task, job occupation, employment, work
<i>Hnathawh kawr</i>	work cloth
<i>Hnawkhal</i>	pre-colonial men's dress or a rain-coat used by most Mizo tribes made out of long strips of leaves ingeniously twisted with the ends hanging down
<i>Hni (Lai)</i>	skirt in Lai
<i>Hniar</i>	an exclusive motif in designing men's blanket common among Lai
<i>Hnika</i>	same as <i>Hni</i>
<i>Hnika kalkhat</i>	it is used as an under garment usually worn with <i>Hnika</i> and <i>Hni-phiak</i> . <i>Kalkhat</i> literally translate to one way or one track, hence the singular line in this <i>hni</i> .
<i>Hni leng</i>	horizontally patterned <i>Lai</i> women's skirt <i>Hniphiak</i>
<i>Hniphiak</i>	<i>Phiak</i> in Lai means vertical lines hence a vertically lined and decorated skirt of Lai women. It is particularly worn by women on happy occasions and ceremony.
<i>Hni rang</i>	plain black Lai cloth or skirt dyed with the indigo
<i>Hnisen</i>	<i>Sen</i> in Lai means red and since red is used as the base of this cloth; it is also called <i>Puan sen</i>
<i>Hno</i>	skirt in Mara



<i>Hnoisawt</i>	a common draping style of wearing cloth by the Lai men to cover the upper part of the body
<i>Hno Kaothopa</i>	skirts of great value and worth with three horizontal patterns or layers
<i>Hnolakhai</i>	<i>Hno</i> in Mara means skirt and <i>Lakhai</i> means embroidery along the lines; it is a woman's dress
<i>Hnokao</i>	it is like a smaller version of the men's blanket <i>Chyna Poh</i> made for women women's skirt
<i>Hnokao kakhap</i>	skirts of great value and worth with single horizontal pattern or layer
<i>Hnubih</i>	a style of draping or wrapping cloth around the chest under the arms covering the breasts
<i>Hnu sep</i>	a grass rain cape as called by the Lai
<i>Hrakhaw</i>	a heavy, flexible belt of Mara made of links of brass joining into each other
<i>Hrawngkha</i>	Lai word for <i>Hrakhaw</i> ; see <i>Hrakhaw</i>
<i>Hreichhuk</i>	a village in Mizoram
<i>Hrendum</i>	a black loin cloth or the Lai <i>Biar Pi</i>
<i>Hrendumho / Hrendumkaihho</i>	those wearing a black loincloth referring to the Lai with the black hemmed loin cloth
<i>Hrente</i>	a smaller version of <i>Hrenpereng</i> barely covering the loin
<i>Hrenpereng</i>	a loin cloth
<i>Hrokei</i>	see <i>Dawhkilh Kual</i> ; Mara word for <i>Dawhkilh Kual</i>
<i>Hruih</i>	a transverse stripe design in a cloth, so woven that the weft almost completely hides the warp from view. When along the border of a cloth it prevents it from slipping

<i>Hruikhat</i>	one wearable length of <i>Thi val</i>
<i>Hrukkual</i>	see <i>Dawhkilh Kual</i> ; Lai word for <i>Dawhkilh Kual</i>
<i>Hrukpi</i>	Lai hair pin made from ivory or bones
<i>Hrum</i>	hair bun
<i>Huai</i>	evil spirit in Lusei
<i>Hualtu</i>	a village in Mizoram
<i>Incheina</i>	dress, ornaments
<i>Ipte chei</i>	a colourfully embroidered shoulder satchel
<i>Ipte pui</i>	a man's cotton bag mainly plain white in colour
<i>Jhum</i>	agricultural land where slash and burn is used to cultivate
<i>Kada</i>	Indian bangle
<i>Kaih</i>	to swathe
<i>Kakhapa (Mara)</i>	one layer in Mara; <i>ka</i> means 'one or single' and <i>khap</i> means 'line or column'
<i>Ka Nga</i>	<i>nga</i> means five in Mara
<i>Kawk</i>	a common leafy vegetable the tip of whose leaf curls in a rounded loop
<i>Kauloh</i>	a small embroidered cotton shoulder bag for Mara men
<i>Kawk</i>	a common leafy vegetable the tip of whose leaf curls in a rounded loop
<i>Kawkpuizikzial</i>	a motif imitating <i>kawk</i>
<i>Kawl</i>	people of Myanmar
<i>Kawlnham</i>	a sword

<i>Kawngghren</i>	belt
<i>Kawngtawngghak</i>	away of wearing cloth in such a way that all four corners of the <i>puan</i> are brought to the front, two corner over the shoulder and the other two from under the arms and they are tightened together like a shield covering the back; see <i>Arpuinawihlawh</i> ; also see <i>hnoisawt</i>
<i>Kawngvawn</i>	back strap of a loom
<i>Kawr</i>	a coat, a jacket, tunic
<i>Kawrfang</i>	casual tunic/ everyday blouse
<i>Kawr mawl</i>	simple cloth
<i>Kawrtawng</i>	see <i>Kawngtawngghak</i>
<i>Kawr fang</i>	plain dress/common dress
<i>Keifang</i>	a shrub with edible fruits, used as dye extracted from its bark
<i>Kei-o-Poh</i>	Mara garment made with white cotton
<i>Kelmei</i>	tail hair of a goat
<i>Kelsam</i>	see <i>Kelmei</i>
<i>Khah</i>	horizontal in Mara
<i>Khanghni</i>	<i>Khang</i> literally translates to horizontal lines and major pieces of the <i>Lai</i> dresses are woven with designs laid horizontally; also see <i>Hni kalkhat</i>
<i>Kharvar</i>	Mara belt of assorted rectangular pieces of brass strung together in a thread, an inch in length and half an inch in width; see <i>Hrakhaw</i>
<i>Khawkherh</i>	walnut
<i>Khaw var</i>	dawn; day break; first light; <i>khaw</i> refers to environment and <i>var</i> means white
<i>Khawzing</i>	Mizo mythological deity or god

<i>Kheddah</i>	a Hindi word meaning ‘ditch’, used as a trap to capture wild elephants
<i>Khei</i>	red Japan or a red powder used in japanning
<i>Kher</i>	to dig or pick out
<i>Khi ing</i>	Mara bracelet made of brass
<i>Khikhiang</i>	Lai men’s armlet worn on festive occasions
<i>Khual</i>	guest
<i>Khuangchawi</i>	it is a feast organised and sponsored by a rich person to gain and celebrate the coveted title of <i>Thangchhuah</i>
<i>Khual lam</i>	traditional dance form of Mizo preformed by men
<i>Khuangtan</i>	lines of small red beads
<i>Khumi</i>	a community inhabiting the Chittagong Hills Tract of Bangladesh; also a dialect used in South East Asia
<i>Khup</i>	knee
<i>Khup tang tial</i>	knee length stripes or designs
<i>Khutho</i>	a turban about twelve feet long and a foot wide worn on special occasions by Mara men
<i>Kikiau</i>	rows of motif
<i>Kihlong</i>	conch shell necklace
<i>Khuaiseng</i>	beeswax
<i>Khuavang</i>	the name of a guardian spirit
<i>Khumbeu</i>	a hat
<i>Koahrei</i>	traditional blouse or tunic of the <i>Mara</i>
<i>Kuki</i>	a name given to the <i>Mizo</i> and related tribes by the British

<i>Kuthrawlh</i>	bangle made of silver or brass with an open end for easy adjustment
<i>Kutdonghrolh</i>	ring
<i>Lace par</i>	a motif on cloth depicting a lace design
<i>La duang</i>	to make yarns into skeins
<i>La en</i>	ripe cotton
<i>Lakhai</i>	embroidery along the lines in Mara skirts
<i>Lai</i>	one of the three major tribes in Mizoram
<i>Lai</i>	middle
<i>Lakhang</i>	most desired head dress of the Mara women
<i>Laimi</i>	people belonging to the Lai tribe
<i>Pu Puan</i>	cloth made from silk
<i>Lahypa Poh</i>	a smooth shawl without any design
<i>Lakher</i>	see Mara; a reference by the Lusei to people who pick cotton or people who were good in weaving— <i>la</i> means ‘cotton’ and <i>kher</i> means ‘to dig or to pick’
<i>La kah-nak</i>	a scotching bamboo bow with a cane string used to make cotton soft and fluffy by teasing it
<i>Lakhang</i>	coveted head dress of Mara women
<i>Lakhuilh</i>	yarn comb; to comb the yarn while it is wet; <i>la</i> means thread and <i>khuilh</i> to comb
<i>Lakhuilh thei</i>	pineapple
<i>Lakyu</i>	bangle or bracelet
<i>Lam</i>	Dance

<i>Laphei</i>	weft shuttle of a loom; also known as <i>puanphei</i>
<i>Lari</i>	see <i>Herawt</i>
<i>Lasai</i>	see <i>La-kah-nak</i>
<i>Latui</i>	readymade yarn
<i>La ung puan</i>	any piece of clothing made with naturally brownish colour thread
<i>Lavaw</i>	white hard wild bead
<i>Lawngkha</i>	see <i>Kharvar</i>
<i>Lazar</i>	a bamboo pole with two upright poles vertically rooted on the ground with two horizontal poles, one at the top and the other just above the ground used to dry starched yarns
<i>Lemlu</i>	head band made from flat pieces of brass worn by the wife of the brave hunter who killed a tiger in game hunt
<i>Lenbuangthuam</i>	an intricate geometrical motif
<i>Lenchhawn</i>	a tassel head dress worn by chiefs and respectable men
<i>Len</i>	to roam
<i>Lentlang</i>	a hill rang in Chin State, Myanmar
<i>Los Dias de los Muertos</i>	the Mexican Days of the Dead Festival
<i>Lu Domh</i>	a Lai head band also known as <i>Tomlangh</i>
<i>Lu khimtung</i>	most desired Lai head dress
<i>Lukhu</i>	a hat
<i>Lukhum</i>	see <i>Lukhu</i>
<i>Luking</i>	an overlapping area in a <i>Pu puan</i> where the pieces grips each other when stitched is called <i>luking</i> in Lai
<i>Lungleh</i>	a village in Mizoram

<i>Lungthu</i>	a trivet
<i>Lu pawng</i>	a long piece of cloth with an inch and a half of black thread vertically woven in the middle, used as a turban by Lai to cover the head
<i>Lushai</i>	see Lusei
Lusei	major tribe of <i>Mizo</i> and largest tribe in Mizoram
<i>Ma</i>	dream
<i>Maimaw Nak</i>	cloth made from silk
<i>Malkalh</i>	the most ordinary type of weaving
<i>Mang</i>	normally implies a person who is above the ordinary folks
<i>Mangai pheikhawk</i>	ordered shoes from traders; <i>mangai</i> , <i>mangana</i> or <i>mangai</i> in Hindi/Bengali means to order or call for
<i>Mangpuantial</i>	a motif with grid pattern
Mara	sub clan of Mizo; literally, Mara means ‘dreamland’ and is composed of two words <i>ma</i> and <i>ra</i> , meaning ‘dream’ and ‘land’ respectively
<i>Mawl</i>	simple
<i>Mawra (Maura)</i>	bamboo land
<i>Meithui</i>	Japanese varnish tree
<i>Menthetlep</i>	one of the many designs of a <i>Pumtek</i> bead
<i>Mim</i>	short for <i>Vaimim</i> meaning maize
<i>Mim Kut</i>	festival dedicated to the memory of dead relatives, underlined by a spirit of thanksgiving and remembrance
<i>Mipa Bengbeh</i>	male earring made of wooden stud with flat head colored red
<i>Mitmurual</i>	a motif

<i>Mitthi khua</i>	abode of the dead
<i>Mitthi rawplam</i>	a ritual for the dead observed during <i>Mim Kut</i>
Mizo	refer to Department of History and Ethnography, Mizoram University statement
<i>Muallam Puan</i>	a particular cloth worn by chiefs during festivities when they would dance out in the open ground
<i>Mut puan</i>	quilt/blanket/bedding
<i>Naba</i>	necklace in Mara; see <i>Thifen</i>
<i>Naia sawm par</i>	a motif on cloth depicting a ten paisa coin
<i>Ngandam Kut</i>	a ceremony performed within three months of the death of a woman who died during childbirth so that her spirit could reach <i>Pialral</i>
<i>Nawnthum Hni</i>	When there are three horizontal band pattern in a <i>hni</i> , it is called <i>Nawnthum Hni</i> in Lai
<i>Ngenchi</i>	a long flexible stick made of lac and brass
<i>Ngo</i>	white/fair
<i>Ngotekherh</i>	It was a plain white <i>puan</i> with two thick weft-faced lines of black, which divides the <i>puan</i> into three equal parts. Later a grid pattern was incorporated in the <i>puan</i>
<i>Ngun</i>	bangle or bracelet in Lusei
<i>Ngun</i>	silver in Lai
<i>Ngunthihruai</i>	a belt made of an assortment of tiny metal links made of melted coins
<i>Nu</i>	mother, woman, feminine
<i>Nula Rim</i>	to court a girl



<i>Nu Zamtha</i>	a woman who has the qualities of a fast weaver or worker
<i>Obon</i>	the Festival of the Lanterns, also known as the Festival of the Dead in Japan
<i>Paite</i>	one of the Mizo tribe
<i>Pallu</i>	the flowy end of an Indian sari of about three to four feet which is thrown across the shoulder from front to back and let to hang at the back
<i>Parpi</i>	a Lai motif
<i>Pasaltha</i>	a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter
<i>Patai</i>	see <i>La-kah-nak</i>
<i>Patsanlou</i>	creeper in Vaiphei or Gangte used as red dye
<i>Pawhte</i>	locally grown seeds used as beads
<i>Pawi</i>	one of the major tribes of Mizo now mainly known as Lai in Mizoram
<i>Pawi</i>	sad, tragic, regrettable in Mizo
<i>Pawi-suala</i>	reference to an Indian army captain Grewal Singh who killed eighteen villagers at Fartlang on January 14, 1967; <i>Pawi</i> because of the way he wore his hair and <i>sual</i> meaning bad, naughty, wicked, sinful, evil, vile, etc.
<i>Pawndum</i>	literally, a black cloth; it is also a plain black cloth but coloured with specific colour such as red white and yellow and green which render it as a significant piece of adornment
<i>Pawr</i>	loincloth in Falam / Chin dialect; see <i>Dua Ah</i>
<i>Pheikhawk</i>	shoe
<i>Phel</i>	to split, to cut in halves

<i>Phengphehlelep</i>	butterfly
<i>Phiak</i>	vertical lines in Lai
<i>Phiarthlorh</i>	a <i>Hniphiak</i> skirt of <i>Lai</i> decorated with motifs based on the whims of the weaver besides the original star motif
<i>Phiphia poh</i>	a Lai check or plaid cloth woven with a combination of black and white cotton threads
<i>Phulrua</i>	name of a species of large clump bamboo
<i>Phuhrin</i>	special gift or inheritance from mothers in the form of a shroud or cloth
<i>Pialral</i>	the Lushai paradise, the further side of the Pial River
<i>Pice</i>	colonial era coin
<i>Poh</i>	shawl in Mara
<i>Poh zahpa</i>	see <i>Lahypa Poh</i>
<i>Pualthawh</i>	a wrestling game
<i>Puan</i>	cloth
<i>Puanban</i>	to pass the yarn between the warp beam and the breast beam in order to warp the yarn for looming; warp
<i>Puanchei</i>	the most coveted dress of the Mizo decorated with colourful intricate designs
<i>Puandum/Pawndum</i>	see <i>Pawndum</i>
<i>Puan hlap</i>	ordinary cloth
<i>Puan hruih</i>	see <i>hruih</i> ; see <i>ngotekherh</i>
<i>Puanlaisen</i>	cloth with a decorated red middle; older version of <i>Puanchei</i>

<i>Puanlamkalh</i>	A black band panel line woven in a rib structure on a white base on both sides dividing the cloth into three parts; a common blanket for Lai men,
<i>Puan mawl</i>	a plain white cloth
<i>Puan ngo</i>	a white cloth
<i>Puanpui/pawnpui</i>	Mizo blanket
<i>Puan rin</i>	a fully black cloth woven in a thick weft-faced where the warp yarns are embedded by the weft called <i>hruih</i> and a white transverse stripe of about two and a half inches are at regular interval dividing the cloth into three parts
<i>Puanropui</i>	one of the most popular and valued dress of all Mizo, right after <i>Puanchei</i>
<i>Puan tial</i>	a chequered cloth
<i>Puantlangdum</i>	cloth with a black hem
<i>Puantlangtial</i>	cloth with coloured hem
<i>Puanthulkhung</i>	valued surplus woven cloths stored in <i>Thul</i>
<i>Pu la</i>	silk thread, in Lai; <i>pu</i> means silk and <i>la</i> means thread
<i>Pugri</i>	a turban in Hindi / Punjabi
<i>Pui</i>	large, big, great
<i>Puk</i>	cave
<i>Pumtek</i>	a necklace of black / brown and white beads of great value
<i>Purunsen</i>	red onion
<i>P'chum Ben</i>	the Festival of the Dead in Cambodia
<i>Rahongpachhi</i>	Mara bracelet made of brass
<i>Ram</i>	land

<i>Rambuui</i>	‘Troubled years’; the two decades of political turmoil from 1966-1986 in Mizoram subject to the ‘independence movement’ launched by the Mizo National Front
<i>Ramhuai</i>	evil spirit, demon
<i>Rang</i>	colourful in both Lai and Lusei
<i>Rawkhatlak</i>	see Cheraw
Riang (or Reang)	one of the 21 Tribes of Tripura
Sabeu	a sub-group of the Mara tribe
<i>Sachipa</i>	a motif with rows cowries
<i>Safim Ni</i>	day of ceremonial feast to celebrate one’s hunting prowess
<i>Sahria</i>	see <i>Kauloh</i>
<i>Sai Ha Bengbeh</i>	ivory earring; <i>Sai Ha</i> means ivory
<i>Sairil</i>	cane
<i>Saka</i>	a white metal belt of hundreds of small circular, metal rings like tiny washers obtained from Arakan highly prized belt by the Mara women
<i>Sakei Aih</i>	ceremony performed over the killing of a tiger
<i>Sakei ha</i>	tooth of a tiger
<i>Sakeilufim</i>	see <i>Sakei Aih</i>
<i>Sakeizangzia</i>	a motif depicting or named after the striped back of a tiger
<i>Sakia</i>	name of a hair pin in Mara
<i>Sakuh</i>	porcupine
<i>Samkhuih</i>	comb in Lusei
<i>Samthih</i>	comb in Lai

<i>Samthih tluangte</i>	a curved end of a comb resembling the crescent moon
<i>Sam zial</i>	to coil a chignon at the back of the neck
<i>Sap</i>	white people / the white colonialists and missionaries
<i>Sap tawng</i>	the English language; language used by the colonialists
<i>Saphit</i>	name of a tree whose bark is used as dye by boiling
<i>Sasai</i>	a species of palm
<i>Sathichanongpa</i>	plain comb made from bamboo with straight flat edge in Mara
<i>Sathichapawpa</i>	comb in Mara; see <i>Samkhuih</i>
<i>Sathlau</i>	a stick used to roll yarns acting as a bobbin carrying the weft through the shed and counter shed in Mara
<i>Selutan</i>	one of the motifs embedded in <i>Thangchhuah Puan</i>
<i>Se mit</i>	the eye of a gayal; motif depicting eye of gayal
<i>Sen</i>	the color red
<i>Senior Maimu</i>	a motif on cloth
<i>Senior zeh</i>	a motif on cloth
<i>Sepoy</i>	an Indian soldier serving under British or other European orders
<i>Sepui man hen</i>	a single globule or an assortment of valuable beads worth the price of a mithun; measure mainly of the value of <i>Pumtek</i>
<i>Sentezel</i>	name of a flowering plant used as dye ( <i>Calophyllum polyanthum</i> )
<i>Shentoos (Shendus)</i>	highly widespread and well settled tribe in the Lushai Hills, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Arakan areas even in the early nineteenth century; Lakher; Mara
<i>Sialkhaltlaih</i>	a style of wearing cloth by Lai men where two ends of the cloth are tied at the front by bringing them together from the right underarm to the left shoulder

<i>Siam</i>	modern day Thailand
<i>Siam pu la</i>	silk obtained from Thailand
<i>Siapsuap</i>	crude form of fringy clothing made from the bark of a tree
<i>Siksil</i>	a tree (pterosperrum acerifolium)
<i>Sin</i>	to wear by covering oneself
<i>Sinlungi</i>	see <i>Chhinlung</i>
<i>Sisa</i>	multi-colored
<i>Sisai</i>	red beads
<i>Sisai hno</i>	a coveted beaded skirt of the Mara woman
<i>Sokohro</i>	Mara word for hairpin; see <i>Dawhkilh</i>
<i>Sola topi</i>	sun hat made from the pith of the stems of sola plants; also the hat of the Indian sepoy during colonial times with a rounded top
<i>Sonsen</i>	creeper in Thadou used as red dye
<i>Suvel</i>	a tool made of bamboo and wood used to roll yarns around a small stone to form a ball
<i>Taisawm</i>	see <i>Ngunthihruai</i>
<i>Taivel</i>	belt
<i>Taka Lakyu</i>	Mara bangle with coin attached at one end
<i>Takaraheu</i>	Mara necklace made of silver or white metal filled with lac
<i>Taka Ri</i>	Mara necklace of assorted coins
<i>Tangkabanbun</i>	see <i>Taka Lakyu</i>
<i>Tangka Kawnghren</i>	see <i>Ngunthihruai</i>
<i>Tangkathi</i>	Lusei word for <i>Taka Ri</i> ; see <i>Taka Ri</i>

<i>Tawkzat</i>	small shrubs used as dye
<i>Tawlhlo</i>	to stand still or to not budge
<i>Tawlhlohpuan</i>	a chain-like intertwined design in red white and yellow, running across the length of the <i>puan</i> in vertical stance
<i>Tawn-lo</i>	to not meet or to not get
Thadou	one of the Mizo tribe
<i>Thaihruih</i>	a transverse stripes on cloth using a particular pull thereby making the design look thick or dense; also see <i>Hruih</i>
<i>Thakao Poh</i>	a common blanket for Mara men
<i>Thal hrit</i>	sealing wax
<i>Thangchhuah</i>	the title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts.
<i>Thangchhuah pa/nu</i>	the person who achieve the coveted title of <i>Thangchhuah</i> / his wife
<i>Thangraheu</i>	decorated earring head of Mara
<i>That it</i>	see <i>thal hrit</i>
<i>Thawi</i>	embroidery in Lai
<i>Thawikulh</i>	a Lai motif
<i>Thei</i>	fruit
<i>Theisa</i>	see <i>Naba</i>
<i>Thembupui</i>	the name of the large bamboo bar in Mizo loom which raises the warp threads which are not raised by the <i>hnachawi</i> and <i>themtang</i> .
<i>Themkawl</i>	breast beam of a loom
<i>Themtang</i>	heddle rod of a loom

<i>Themtlang</i>	warp beam of a loom
<i>Themtleng</i>	a sword-like smoothened flat wood used to tamp and compress the weft
<i>Themtleng te</i>	a smaller <i>themtleng</i>
<i>Thi</i>	necklace
<i>Thifen</i>	see <i>Naba</i>
<i>Thi hna</i>	a necklace made of reddish-brown amber beads
<i>Thi-hni</i>	a be-jewelled Lai skirt
<i>Thihnun ()</i>	Lai word for <i>Taka Ri</i> ; see <i>Taka Ri</i>
<i>Thih</i>	dead
<i>Thihchhawn</i>	head accessory of a dead body
<i>Thihna thim</i>	a phrase referring to death as dark
<i>Thil</i>	name of a species of oak used as dye ( <i>Quercus polystachya</i> )
<i>Thim</i>	dark
<i>Thimkual</i>	see <i>Dawhkilh kual</i>
<i>Thimkual Ke Sei</i>	long rounded hair pin usually used by men; <i>ke</i> means leg and <i>sei</i> means long
<i>Thimkual Ke Tawi</i>	short rounded hair pin usually used by women; <i>tawi</i> meaning 'short'
<i>Thinbih</i>	see <i>Hnubih</i>
<i>Thisai rih</i>	Mara necklace
<i>Thi val</i>	necklace made from agate; <i>thi</i> meaning necklace, <i>val</i> refers to a stain or a mark indicating the natural motif of the gem
<i>Thlam</i>	small huts build in the jhum field to rest, cook and eat



<i>Thlan thim</i>	a phrase referring the grave as dark, thlan means grave
<i>Thongkhat</i>	this refers to the single piece of the many pieces of silk cloth stitched together to form a <i>Maimaw Nak Puan</i>
<i>Thul</i>	the name of a large basket with a close-fitting conical lid or cover for storing valuables by women
<i>Thulkhung</i>	a connotation which generally means something which is kept in secrecy or safety, because of its worthiness
<i>Thydungthah</i>	a Mara sacrificial rite performed on the occasion of the start of manufacturing a new <i>Chawngnak puan</i> by purifying the loom and yarn
<i>Tialhleikai</i>	an intricate design in <i>Pumtek</i> bead
<i>Tial kawi</i>	one of the many designs of <i>Pumtek</i> with zigzag pattern
Tiau	a river bordering Myanmar and India
<i>Ting</i>	indigo plant
<i>Titaang</i>	Mara name for a small fruit plant used as red dye
<i>Tlam</i>	reference to brown coloured raw cotton
<i>Tlam em</i>	bamboo basket for keeping cotton
<i>Tlang</i>	hill
<i>Tlangau</i>	a village crier; to proclaim; to make known
<i>Tlangthing puan</i>	the other name of <i>Pu puan/Maimaw Nak</i>
<i>Tlâhtho Poh</i>	essentially the red version of <i>Phiphia Poh</i> with a modified check style
<i>Tlohsai</i>	one of the clan and dialects of the Mara
<i>Tualtah</i>	locally woven or made
<i>Tualtah kawr</i>	locally woven dress; see <i>Kawr mawl</i>

<i>Tual puan</i>	any locally woven cloth
<i>Tuibur</i>	nicotine water from a pipe
<i>Tuibur um</i>	container for nicotine water usually made from dry calabash
<i>Tuipal</i>	the hem of a <i>puan</i> is called <i>a tuipal</i> , which basically means the part that gets wet or touches the water
<i>Tuirual</i>	a woman's ornament consisting of cotton yarn rolled into small balls as a spinning top in the shape of a spindle mainly worn as a headdress
<i>Tuk liani</i>	Lusei woman with thick hair buns
<i>Tukrek</i>	warp spacer of a loom
<i>Ung</i>	brownish color, or to be made brownish with smoke
<i>Vahui</i>	wood pigeon
<i>Vai</i>	a non-Mizo, referring to a person from the plains
<i>Vai Pawi</i>	refers to the Sikhs who, like the Lais, wear their hairs in buns on top
<i>Vaiva</i>	hill mynah
<i>Vaiza</i>	name of a flowering tree ( <i>Hibiscus Maerophyllus</i> )
<i>Vai la</i>	threads imported from the plains; the name of a yellowish species of cotton
<i>Vakiria</i>	traditional head gear of Mizo women
<i>Vakulchang</i>	tail feather of racket-tail drongo
<i>Vamit</i>	bird eye; motif
<i>Veng</i>	to gird around the waist
<i>Viachhipang</i>	Mara bracelet made of small black and white beads

<i>Viapako</i>	a plain white cotton jacket worn by the Mara men, during the colonial period
<i>Zahau</i>	one of the Mizo tribes
<i>Zawlbuk</i>	a bachelors' dormitory
<i>Zawlpuan</i>	a <i>Puandum</i> when used as a token of love and affection
<i>Zial</i>	to roll or to make round
<i>Zik</i>	a shoot, a sprout
<i>Zu</i>	fermented rice beer
<i>Zungbun</i>	a ring

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**EVOLUTION OF MIZO DRESS: A HISTORICAL STUDY**

**(ABSTRACT)**

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR IN PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY**

**BY**

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## **I. Introduction:**

The state of Mizoram has a long international boundary of 318 Kilometres with Bangladesh on the west and about 404 kilometres with Myanmar on the east and south; it also share an inter-state boundary of 123 kilometres with Assam on the north, 66 kilometres with Tripura on the west and 95 kilometres with Manipur on the north. Therefore, even though located in the remote corner of north eastern India, its strategical significance both geographically and politically is undeniable. Mizoram enjoys a very moderate climate all through the year due to its mild tropical location. The maximum average temperature is 20 – 30°C in summer while in winter it is 11° – 21°C.

The Mizos were nomadic in nature, migrating from China to Kabaw Valley in Burma from where they moved on to the Chin Hills due to the Shan invasion. The Chin Groups (including the Mizo) are said to have arrived in the Chin Hills of Burma during the first half of the 13th century AD. It is believed that from the Chin Hills, they migrated to the present habitation, in three major movements approximately between the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17th centuries, gradually settling and spreading all over the present Mizoram while some even settled in the neighbouring states. They belonged to the Tibeto Burman language group with physical and facial features of the Mongoloid race.

## **II Approaches:**

Scholars from disciplines ranging from anthropology to media studies are engaged with dress and its meanings. This is because dress is a fundamental means, indeed sometimes one of the only available ways, by which groups and individuals express and negotiate their identities. Scholars across the globe mainly use five different approaches namely the object-based research approach, the culture-based approach, the material culture approach, the practice-based approach and the production-based approach individually or in combinations to express the capacity of dress to carry a range of cultural information and meanings, past and present.

This research attempts to document and investigate the history and evolution of a variety of Mizo dresses, their socio-cultural meaning and the technique involved in their production. The scattered nature of the available sources and the lack of academic studies for Mizo dress

have prompted this research to merge all potential sources and thereby adopting existing approaches in order to explore the privilege communicative capacity of dress by taking the position that dress is both a product and as a process that distinguishes human beings from other animals. By using the material culture approach in the study of dress history, this research has attempted to weave together different conceptual frameworks and disciplinary approaches in studying the traditional dresses, accessories and production of dress among the three largest tribes of Mizo, viz., Lusei, Mara, and Lai.

### **III Sources:**

Considering the fact that ‘dress history’ and ‘fashion studies’ come under the domain of history and cultural studies, a wide variety of sources have been utilised which are listed below.

#### **A. Archival sources:-**

- (1) Mizoram State Archives, Aizawl
- (2) Mizoram Baptist Archives, Lunglei.
- (3) Mizoram Synod Archives, Aizawl
- (4) Aizawl Theological Collage Archives, Aizawl.
- (5) Library of The Integrated Christian Studies (AICS), Aizawl
- (6) Collections of the British Library Endangered Archives Project (EAP 454).  
Department of History and Ethnography, Mizoram University

#### **B. Personal photographic collections:-**

- (1) Vanlalruati, Serkawn
- (2) Sapkungi, Serkawn
- (3) Thanthuami, Serkawn
- (4) Lalthlamuana, Serkawn
- (5) V. Thanzauva, Aizawl
- (6) Thanchhumi, Aizawl
- (7) Zodingliani Chawngthu, Aizawl
- (8) Thankhumi, Aizawl
- (9) Vanlalhruaia Ralte, Aizawl

- (10) Rev. C. Thansiam, Aizawl
- (11) R. Zamawia, Aizawl
- (12) Lapuii Chawngthu, Aizawl
- (13) Boichhingpuii, Aizawl
- (14) Siangchin, Aizawl
- (15) K. Pari, Saiha
- (16) Zopari, Aizawl.
- (17) C.H. Liana, Durtlang
- (18) Hualkunga, Aizawl
- (19) Zopari, Aizawl
- (20) Joy Pachuau, New Delhi

#### **C. Material culture/object studied:-**

- (1) Thankhumi, Aizawl-*puan*
- (2) Boichhingpuii, Aizawl-*puan*
- (3) Sairengpuia Sailo, Aizawl-*puan*
- (4) Siangchin, Aizawl-*puan*
- (5) Thanthuami, Serkawn-*puan*
- (6) Renhchin, Lawngtlai-*puan*, hairpin, other accessories
- (7) Sangpuii, Lawngtlai- *puan*, necklace, bangles
- (8) Hrangthlai, Lawngtlai- *puan*, blouse
- (9) C. Dawthlei, Saiha-*puan*, necklace, bangles, ear rings, hairpin, other accessories
- (10) Nango Chozah, Saiha-*puan*, necklace, bangles, hairpin
- (11) Pawpi Chozah, Saiha- *puan*, hairpin, bangles
- (12) Puia Hnamte, Ratu- *puan*.
- (13) Lalnuntluaka, Khawbung- *puan*.
- (13) Collections at the Mizoram State Museum

#### **D. Oral sources/Interviews:**

- (1) Thankhumi, Aizawl.
- (2) Boichhingpuii, Aizawl



- (3)Sairengpuia Sailo, Aizawl
- (4)Siangchin, Aizawl
- (5)Thanchhumi, Aizawl
- (6)Zopari, Aizawl
- (7)Lalchhuanliana, Aizawl
- (8) C. Laitanga, Aizawl
- (9) C. Chhuanvawra, Aizawl
- (10) B. Lalthangliana, Aizawl
- (11) R. L. Thianga, Aizawl
- (12) C. Lalkunga, Aizawl
- (13) C. Thantluanga, Aizawl
- (14) D. Ralkapthanga, Aizawl.
- (15) Lalbiakliana, Muallungthu.
- (16)V. Thanzauva, Aizawl
- (17)V. Thanpari, Aizawl.
- (18)Kawlveli, Aizawl.
- (19)Tlangmawii, Aizawl
- (20)Biakkungi, Aizawl.
- (21)R. Zamawia, Aizawl.
- (22)C. Hualkunga, Aizawl.
- (23) Thanthiangi, Serkawn
- (24)Vanlalmuana, Serkawn
- (25)C. Lalmawia, Aizawl.
- (26) Renhchin, Lawngtlai
- (27) Nguri Chinzah, Lawngtlai
- (28) Hrangthliai, Lawngtlai
- (29)C. Dawthlei, Saiha
- (30) Nango Chozah, Saiha
- (32) Pawpi Chozah, Saiha.
- (32)K. Chatlu, Saiha.
- (33)Dr. Vanlalringa Bawitlung, Lawngtlai.

- (34) K. Hrekunga, Lawngtlai.
- (35) Dr. Vannghaka, Aizawl.
- (36) Bobby Benghachhi, Aizawl.
- (37) Dr. K. Robin, Aizawl.
- (38) K. Pari, Aizawl/Saiha
- (39) Malsawmtluanga, Aizawl.
- (40) Ngotlai Chozah, Saiha.
- (41) A. Thleiso, Saiha.
- (42) Azyu Zakia, Saiha.
- (43) Zodingliani, Aizawl.
- (44) C. Vanlalruaia, Aizawl.
- (45) Dr. Lalrinawma, Aizawl.
- (46) Prof. Darchuailova, Aizawl.
- (47) C. Vulluaia, Aizawl.
- (48) F.C. Zathang, Aizawl.

#### **E. Secondary Works, Journals, Theses and Dissertations.**

##### **Secondary works:**

- (i) Ethnographic writings, reports by British colonial officers and missionaries.
- (ii) History and culture of Mizoram written by Mizo authors (in Mizo)
- (iii) History and culture of Mizoram written by non-Mizo authors (in English)
- (iv) Works related to dress, fashion, costumes, and textiles in India and Southeast Asia
- (v) Works on dress history and fashion studies

##### **Journals**

- (i) *Fashion Theory* (The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture)
- (ii) *Dress* (The Journal of the Costume Society of America)
- (iii) *Costume* (The Costume Society of Great Britain)
- (iv) *International Journal of Fashion Studies*

### **Theses/Dissertations**

- (i) Susan R. Ralte, 'A Study on the Textile Motifs of Mizoram and the Awareness among the Present Generation'. Unpublished MA Dissertation submitted to National Institute of Fashion Technology, New Delhi. 2016.
- (ii) Elizabeth Darsiempui, 'Visual Dictionary of Mizo Textiles: Building Identity Through Language and Traditional Textile Symbols'. Unpublished Master of Design Dissertation submitted to National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai. 2016.
- (iii) Stefenie Lalthansangi Halliday, '*Puan* the tradition of the Mizos', MA Dissertation submitted to Stella Maris College, Chennai, 2011.

### **F. Libraries consulted for published materials:**

#### **Libraries in Mizoram**

- (i) Mizoram State Central Library
- (ii) Aizawl Theological College Library
- (iii) Academy of Integrated Christian Studies Library Aizawl
- (iv) Mizoram University Central Library, Aizawl
- (v) Govt. Hrangbana College Library, Aizawl
- (vi) Pachhunga University College Library, Aizawl
- (vii) Govt. Aizawl College Library, Aizawl

#### **Libraries outside Mizoram**

- (i) Centre for Contemporary Studies (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti), New Delhi
- (ii) Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, New Delhi
- (iii) Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi
- (iv) Northeast Study Centre, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)
- (v) State Central Library, Shillong
- (vi) Library of North Eastern Hills University, Shillong

#### IV Review of Literature:

One of the most influential books of the twentieth century on colonialism and which has inspired scholars from various disciplines Edward Said's *Orientalism*. (Pantheon Books, New York, 1978). Said critically asserted that the world's perception of the orient, including Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East are deeply rooted in the imperialist ideas and attitude. In this book Said questioned the dispute over the understanding of what is the East which was a confusion created by the west. The book provided an original insight about colonialism from the perspective of the colonised and continues to be one of the most cited works in postcolonial studies.

Roland Barthes' *The Language of Fashion* (Translated by Andy Stafford, Berg/Power Publications, 2006) consists of a series of essays, interviews and articles written by him before and immediately after publication of his influential *Système de la mode (The Fashion System)* in 1968. It was in the arena of fashion and clothing studies that he developed a complex analytical framework for clarifying the signifying structures behind the representation, consumption and circulation of meanings in the quotidian experience of contemporary society. In admitting that fashion has its own internal logic such as 'something is fashionable because fashion says it is', irrelevant to outside concerns such as history or utility or even aesthetics, Barthes structured his analysis on the literariness of fashion, decoding the links between image and text. This forms a crucial element of Barthes' broader writings on semiotics, attempting to give a semiotic clarity to the slipperiness of the fashion 'form' throughout history. He constantly criticizes the formulaic determinations between the historical zeitgeist and fashion 'styles,' providing one of the most engaging aspects of the collection for contemporary readers.

In *Fashion as Communication* (Routledge, London. 2002), Malcolm Barnard considers the meaning of fashion in society from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Malcolm Barnard introduces fashion and clothing as ways of communicating and challenging class, gender, and sexual and social identities. Drawing on a range of theoretical approaches from Barthes and Baudrillard to Marxist, psychoanalytic and feminist theory, Barnard addresses the ambivalent status of fashion in contemporary culture. He looks at the producers, consumers and critics of fashion, exploring the tensions between haute couture and high culture, and asking who generates meanings and how.

*Fashionology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Berg, New York 2005) by Yuniya Kawamura provides a concise and much-needed introduction to the sociology of fashion. The book gives an overview of classical accounts by scholars such as Simmel, Veblen, and Toennies, as well as more modern and empirically based studies including those by Blumer, Davis, and Bourdieu. Kawamura argues that clothing is a tangible product whereas fashion is a symbolic cultural product. She explains that fashion is not about clothes but is a belief. There is an institutional structure, ignored by many fashion theorists that has shaped and produced the fashion phenomenon.

In *The Fashion History Reader: Global Perspectives* (Routledge, London, 2010), the editors Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello in their introduction remarked that fashion, generally thought of as an ‘up-to-the-minute’ cultural phenomenon, has a troubled relation with history. Yet the contributions they assembled from nearly 60 scholars provide a compelling case to consider fashion as a major question for almost every social, cultural, and economic pursuit in multiple cultural and temporal contexts. Riello and McNeil characterize fashion as having an inherent yet complex relation to time, which makes it a key material and conceptual formation for reflecting on the very construction of cultural history. The editors do not claim to have discovered a new field, or to have solved all of its problems. On the contrary, *The Fashion History Reader* opens debates that are yet to take place in fashion studies, but that will be necessary if it is to develop as a field of research.

Lou Taylor’s *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester University Press, 2002) is an innovative work by one of the pioneers of the study of dress history. Taylor stresses on the importance of interdisciplinary sources using material culture, art history, ethnography and cultural studies. The book explains the issues surrounding dress history and explores new techniques and methods that could be applied to the study of dress history so as to bring to light a new understanding that study of clothing is more than just studying the object. Taylor emphasizes on the critical analysis of academic gender rendering it to be comprehensive, engaging and bringing respectability to the study of dress history.

In *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Rutgers University Press, 2003), Elizabeth Wilson traces the social and cultural history of fashion and its complex relationship to modernity believing that fashion has the power to mark out identity or to subvert it .

*Clothing as Material Culture* (Berg Publishers, 2005) edited by Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller is an important work promoting the material culture approach to the study of dress. It has nine articles ranging from aesthetics of the self to recycling and second hand clothing, Turkish headscarf to Polynesian quilts, thrift fashion to chiefly dress and threads to fabrics. The wide range of information collected from field works, photographs, museum and various other sources underscore the significance of combining the material and social aspects of dress and contextually analyzing dress in its proper milieu.

In *Dress and Identity in India* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), Emma Tarlo examines sartorial style from the late nineteenth century to the present, showing how trends in clothing are related not only to caste, religion, wealth, urbanization and levels of education, but also to a larger cultural debate about the nature of Indian identity. She explores how Indians have chosen their clothes to express various social and political positions from the late 19th century to the 1990s. Among the topics are the influence of Gandhi's concepts of nationalism and simplicity, the blurring and deliberate violation of traditional caste markers, village dress, peasants, pastoralists, and modern fashions. Tarlo documents the changing attitudes towards clothes in India from the early colonial period to the present day.

Using photographs and illustrations from the famous James Henry Green collection at Brighton Museum along with other collections, private and public, *Textiles from Burma* (Phillip Wilson Publishers, London, 2003) is an assortment of articles written by ten textile and art researchers from all over the world edited by Elizabeth Dell and Sandra Dudley. The book contains themes on history, production, meaning and collection of textiles from Burma while the vivid collections display the richness of the textile traditions in Burma. Chapter 4 contains articles on Chin and related group and their textiles which offer an array of facts and pictures valuable to this particular research. It also provides glimpses into textiles that are extinct and helps in the revival of those textiles. This book is a popular source of information for fashion and textile study of Burma.

*Textiles of The Highland Peoples of Burma* (White Lotus, Bangkok, 2005) by Michael C. Howard is one of the most detailed work on the culture, specifically dresses of the Naga, Chin, Jingpho, and other Baric-speaking groups of Burma. As an anthropologist, Michael's work provides background on these peoples and their textiles which includes a great deal of new

information provided through dozens of black and white photographs, maps, 264 colour photographs and 96 plates. The book contains seven chapters with lots of details based on interpretations of ethnographic works and his field work. The last chapter of the book is dedicated to the Northern and Southern Chin group which is especially consequential to this research.

Another publication from Bangkok is the *Mantles of Merit* (River Books, Bangkok, 2005) by David W & Barbara G. Fraser which compiles photographs and texts showing and explaining the beauty of Chin textiles from Burma, India and Bangladesh. Besides independent researchers and private collectors, the pictures have been gathered from the Victoria & Albert Museum, American Baptist Historical Society, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Denison University, The Textile Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, American Museum of Natural History, British Library and University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Such wide ranging collection is very rare and valuable, especially for the study of Chin textiles enhancing the work and elevating its status as one of the most important work on Chin textile in recent times. However, the maps illustrated in the book lack authenticity especially figure 88 on pages 57. This lack of cartographic validity sets back the value of the work. Also many of the clans mentioned as owner of certain blanket and dress could easily confused readers leading to false interpretation and ownership.

A recent publication in the study of dress history entitled *Dress History: New Directions in Theory and Practice* (Bloomsbury, London, 2015) and edited by Charlotte Nicklas and Annabella Pollen contains twelve articles written by fashion writers, theorists and dress historian from all over the world. Their themes and contents explore the exponential growth in dress history in the past two decades with in depth investigations, pushing boundaries of disciplines. Focussing on the etymology and methodology of dress and fashion history, the book offers deep insights into the contribution and application of object studies with simplicity and brilliant clarity. By including different items of dress such as gloves to shoes, spanning time frames from the nineteenth century to modern era, employing new terms, themes and tools, this book affirms the ascendancy of dress history as a sub-discipline providing new meanings, methods and directions in its scholarship.

*Puan the pride of Mizoram* (Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1978) by N. Chaterji is a book on the traditional cloth of the Mizo, made from loom by the women and worn by wrapping it around the waist. The book is specifically dedicated to this piece of clothing. It introduces the Mizo culture and retrospect on the *puan* to enable readers to have an understanding of the importance of certain *puan*, the varied designs and their particular usages and how some particular *puan* signifies the social status of the wearer. The book also describes in details 27 different varieties and designs of *puans* which are indigenous to the Mizo, their intricacies and how a certain design belongs to a particular tribe or clan. All these are accompanied by pictures, shown with plates.

One of the most comprehensive books on Mizo dress is the recently published *Mizo La Deh leh Zethlan* (Published by Hmingthanzuala IAS, 2016) by Boichhingpuii. This book is the latest work relating to Mizo traditional dresses, their designs and motifs and their evolution over the years. The title essentially means the process of Mizo loom and patterns and it is the most comprehensive book on the evolution of Mizo dress detailed description with 359 photographs from the author and from private collection. Her fascination for weaving and her tenure as an officer and eventually as the Director in the department of Art and Culture under the government of Mizoram has also pushed her further into researching, conserving, creating and developing Mizo *puan* and designs. It also put her at an advantageous position in collecting and exploring Mizo loom and its productions in different parts of the state. The book deal with different dresses of the Mizo tribes, production of Mizo dress, the gender differentiation, the traditional motifs and their eventual progression under the colonial rule, independence and the influence of the political movements in the 1960s leading to the evolution of contemporary Mizo dress and its production. The textual and visual contents of the book are highly informative, comprehensive and valuable for students, historians, scholars of social sciences or anyone interested in the Mizo art of dress making and fashion.

In 2015 one of the most comprehensive research works on the socio-culture history of the Mizo was published by Cambridge University Press co-authored by Joy L.K. Pachuau and Willem Van Schendel. This book created a paradigm shift into how Mizo history is perceived with the use of photographs curated from wide ranging private collections, archives, universities and libraries across the United Kingdom and Mizoram. Through these photographs, the history



of the Mizo people are studied in relation to the events happening around the world and it traces how the indigenous people of Mizoram have in such a situation evolved a new identity.

Coming to ethnographic works, while serving the British government in India as an Indian Civil Service officer, N.E. Parry was appointed the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills district between February 1924 to April 1928 and later as the Deputy Commissioner of the Lushai Hills district from 1953 to 1958. During his tenure he observed and studied the Lakher and the Lusei, often visiting the Lakher country where he collected information on their life and culture. Based on his observation and the information he gathered during this period, his monograph on the Lakher was first published in 1932 reprinted twice in 1976 and in 2009. In the introduction of this book J.H. Hutton remarked that this book has yet greater details in many respects than that yet recorded of any other Assam tribe. This statement of Hutton cannot be argued with as the 614 pages of monograph clearly has details about the Lakher habitat and language to their physical characteristics, domestic life, laws and customs and religion to folklores. The chapterization is very similar to that of Shakespear's *Lushei-Kuki Clan*. The text comes with illustrative sketches and etched photos, making it easier to understand the descriptions. Specific description of dress and accessories, dress making technology and tools along with their significance in the social structure of the Lakher and the Mizo as a whole has is invaluable for anyone. Although it comes with its share of mis-spellings of names of places and persons, which has become a norms in all ethnographic works, it has become the most cherished source for the study of Mizo cultural history in general and that of the Lakher in particular.

Another significant anthropological work on the Chin society titled '*The Structure of Chin Society: A Tribal people of Burma*' is the famous anthropologist F.K. Lehman. The book is based on the field research carried out by the author in the Chin Hills of Burma from February 1957 to August 1958. This book was first published in 1963 by the University of Illinois and later reprinted by Tribal Research Institute in 1980 under arrangement with the University of Illinois. This book is one of the firsts to be authored by a trained professional anthropologist and an academician. Earlier, most monographs were prepared by government servants with very little knowledge of history writing or anthropology. This can be called the first academic work on the Chins and their kin hence any cultural study of the Mizo in general cannot be complete without looking into the information provided by F.K. Lehman. The book contains detailed analytical

description on the land, the people, their economy, politics and religion while outlining the recent socio- cultural changes brought about by the said elements. The book also comes with a number of photographs to help readers easily understand the nature and context of the contents of the book and also detailed summary chart of agriculture, ceremonial and secular calendar. It gives us a peek into the everyday life of the people and their culture, how they have evolved from a pre colonial culture into a modernized society by adapting to new economic systems, trade and politics. The significance of this monograph continues, especially as interdisciplinary approaches to cultural studies have become the trend in academic fields.

*Five Years In Unknown Jungle, For God And The Country* (Published by Lakher Pioneer Mission, London, 1912) is an account of the life of a missionary named Reginald A. Lorrain in the Lakher country. Although this book is written from the perspective of a missionary with zeal to make converts of the local people, it delivers along the process a number of data about the people that they had encountered from the beginning of their journey into the hills, including the Lusei, Lai and Mara. A number of essential information about their day to day life, food habit, social interaction and mode of clothing are discussed in passé which gives readers insights into the culture and dress of not only the Lakher but also other clans that they have come across. Though it is not a historical work, it throws light into the life of the Mizo in colonial period and as such it has become an important piece of ethnographic source for the study of cultural history.

*Wild races of South-Eastern India* first published in 1870 by Wm. H. Allen & Co. London and later reprinted by Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl Mizoram and *A Fly on the Wheel, or: How I Helped to Govern India*, first published in 1912 and later reprinted by Tribal Research Institute in 1977 are both written by Thomas Herbert Lewin. Written while serving as a Deputy Commissioner of the Hill tracts, these books are basically a memoir of Lewin as a British colonial officer, who lived and explored the hill areas of Bengal and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. As written by him in the preface of the latter title, the books contained details from his life in these hills recorded in his diaries, kept carefully for his home-folks. However, the private diary and records of Lewin in the form of these books have become the most read, referred source and sought after works for scholars and everyone interested and trying to understand the people living of this area, before and under the colonial reign. However, the names of tribes, clans and persons given in the books are based on the understanding of the author, in the absence of any

anthropological or linguistics knowledge. This makes it very problematic for readers to understand or locate them in the right category or place. The superiority complex of the colonizer is quite vivid in the narratives. The failure to comprehend the context of the people under observation on the part of the writer creates a gap in information. Notwithstanding these biases, these books supply one of the earliest reports on the dresses of the Mizo, when they first encountered the British thus giving us a glimpse into the life of the Mizo and their dresses prior to the coming of the British.

## **V Objectives**

The objectives of the current study are as follows:

- (i) To provide a descriptive analysis of the traditional dresses of the three major tribes of Mizoram namely Lusei, Lai and Mara.
- (ii) To analyze traditional dress production techniques of the Mizo.
- (iii) To evaluate the impact of colonialism on the evolution of Mizo dress.

## **VI Methodology:**

The study tries to combine historical and material culture approach to understand the evolution of dress by using private and public photographs. Objects related to the topic were examined by the object-based analytical technique to elicit their meanings, origin, functions, and spatially ordering them in chronological order. Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted in order to place the objects in their proper socio-cultural contexts. Thereafter, surveys of textual sources provided the theoretical bases and directions upon which the research would be grounded and conclusions arrived at.

## **VII Scope of the Study**

The study covers the present state of Mizoram, India focusing on three selected tribes, namely, Lusei, Lai, and Mara. However, the scope of the research sometimes extends beyond the present boundaries of Mizoram understandably because the people of the state share cultural, social, religious, and ethnic affinities with those across the national and international boundaries. The time frame of the study stretches from the pre-colonial to the colonial period.

Within the given time period, the research has tried to document as well as geographically locate and historically contextualizes dress item and accessories and the knowledge of production through a combination of sources including archival, photographic, material culture, oral, print and electronic sources.

### **VIII Structure of the Study:**

The thesis is divided into the following chapters.

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The first chapter introduces Mizoram in spatial and cultural terms. It contextualizes the research by providing a discussion of the key ideas, theories and concepts in the study of dress history and fashion studies. It explains the terminology and analytical frameworks of the thesis. The relevance of different theories of dress and fashion are discussed and explored and the way these theories transcend boundaries of social orders, disciplines, time, and cultures. While clarifying five fundamental approaches to the study of dress it also validated that dress history is a sub-discipline of history. As much as 28 literary works including journals, books both in English and vernacular, ethnographies, theses and dissertations have been reviewed which all form an integral part of this research. The chapter ends with three objectives of the research, scope of the study, methodology used and structure of the study which highlights the composition of the eight different chapters which forms this thesis.

#### **Chapter 2: Lusei Dress-From the Earliest to Colonial Times.**

The second chapter identifies and documents 22 dress items of the Lusei. They are inclusive of statutory, specified and everyday dresses of the Lusei. A number of these dresses such as *Hnawkhal*, and *Hrenpereng* which were worn in the pre-colonial period are of course not used anymore. The use of skirts such as *Hmaram* and *Fenphel* too are restricted to certain festivals and occasions. The use of *Dawlrem Kawr* had also stopped in the colonial period while *Kawrmawl* were still in use even during the colonial era. Some *puans* with certain designs and motifs evolved into a dress worn only on formal occasions. Some of the colonial and pre-colonial motifs are being revived in one form or another by weavers today. For the rest of the dresses,

their color combinations and motifs continued to be a part of the Mizo dress in the colonial and post colonial Mizo society with a lot of modifications to the original pieces.

### **Chapter 3: Lai Dress-From the Earliest to Colonial Times**

The third chapter of this research is related to identification and documentation of 17 different dresses of the Lai tribe. Dress such as *Hnawkhal* almost disappeared in the colonial period while the use of *Angki* and *Biarpi* drastically slowed down after the colonial period due to conversions, education, and the easier access to factory made clothes among the Lai people. Most of the Lai dresses of statutory significance, generally worn by men remained to be valued due to their historic and economic value in the colonial period. Many of them can still be found in their original state, in the possessions of the families who were handed down these dresses by their ancestors. Most of the Lai women's dresses are still used as formal dresses and they are also worn on cultural and religious festivals. Though imitated, the Lai motifs are very difficult to master due to their intricacy and use of silk.

### **Chapter 4: Mara Dress-From the Earliest to Colonial Times**

The pre-colonial Mara dresses are almost similar to the Lai dresses due to their close cultural affinity. This chapter has documented and studied 16 pieces of dresses belonging to the Mara tribe. It has been found that most of the pre-colonial attires still formed a part of the Mara wardrobe in the colonial period including the *Dua Ah* and *Dua Kalapa*. However, in the post colonial period, the use of the loin clothes slowly disappeared except on cultural festivals and shows. The dresses of men, which had great social and economic values continued to remain so till date even though their use, especially as statutory shawl by the men has drastically declined. Nonetheless, like the Lai dresses, their historical and economic values continue to remain even in the post colonial period. Besides owning such pieces of clothing, they have also been imported from the neighbouring state of Burma to increase one's wealth and as a part of trade fetching high prices. Most of the dresses of women continued to be worn during the colonial period, till the traditional cotton blouses were replaced by a more convenient western and factory blouses.

## **Chapter 5: Traditional Jewellery and Accessories of the Mizo**

This chapter identifies and documents a wide variety of jewellery and accessories of the pre-colonial Mizos. These included 10 different headgears for Mizo men, three main headgears for women from the different tribes under study along with four different varieties of hairpins used both by men and women during from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. The three Mizo tribes of Lusei, Lai and Mara together wore 10 different types of necklaces and six different earrings within themselves. These are worn by both male and female. Most of these jewellery were worn from the pre-colonial period all through to the colonial period. However, the use of these jewellery and accessories were discontinued in the post-colonial period except for cultural festivals and other occasions. The use of many of the head gears and accessories continued even in the post-colonial era but restricted to specific cultural events.

## **Chapter 6: Mizo Dress Production- The Loom, the Tools and Rules**

This chapter describes the technology and procedures involved in the course of the Mizo dress making till colonial times. The Mizo method of making threads, the loin loom used and the process of dyeing cloths have been documented in this chapter. These complex procedures were still adhered to even during the colonial times. Gradually, the growing trade transactions and alternatives provided during the colonial period, in the form of synthetic fibres and dyes slowly resulted in the decreasing use of locally processed yarns and dyes. However, in spite of the rising availability of mechanical looms in the post-colonial period, loin looms continued to be an important tool for dress production.

## **Chapter 7: Evolution of Mizo Dress during Colonial Time**

This chapter examines the major factors responsible for the evolution and modification of pre-colonial Mizo dresses throughout the colonial period. The chapter traces the advent of colonialism along with Christianity, western education, and the two world wars in the light of their impact on Mizo mentality and culture, particularly on dress. There seems to be no argument against the significant influences of these elements on Mizo dress during the colonial period and their role in the drastic modification of the pre-colonial Mizo attire which eventually led to the westernization of Mizo culture through dress and appearances. At the same time, these changes

and modifications brought about by the external elements left enough room for traditional and western dresses to flourish side by side, creating a unique style of dress for the Mizo society which in turn gave them a distinctive identity in the colonial and post-colonial times.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This is the concluding chapter of the research. The research looked at the historical contexts of the appearances of the variety of dress pieces from the pre-colonial to the colonial periods and acknowledged that Mizo dress continued to evolve beyond these periods. The Mizos, holding on to traditional ethos had slowly adjusted to the changes in their political, social and economical environment. The clothing trend that evolved from the colonial period gradually became adopted as a significant part of the Mizo culture and invariably led to inventions of Mizo dress style and culture informed by increasing incorporation of westernization and modernization in Mizo society.

22 Lusei dress items have been identified and documented inclusive of statutory, specified and everyday dresses. Though traditional color combinations and motifs continued to be a part of the Lusei dress, there was clear indication of evolution in motifs and patterns and the increase of colours utilized in the colonial period. The pre-colonial way of wearing a *puan* called *hnubih*, leaving the shoulder bare and *puan bah* which is to wrap a big *puan* across the body covering only one shoulder had slowly disappeared in the colonial period while the only implemented style of wearing a dress retained till date is called *puanven/ puanbih*, the style of wrapping the *puan* on the waist.

Also, the use of dyes, intricate colours and patterns reveals the social structure of the Lusei in the pre-colonial period where it was easier for the richer and elitist sections to dye their threads and infused designs into a *puan* because of the better availability of man power while it was rather challenging for commoners to do so.

It may be worthwhile to contend that Lusei hardly used silk for dress-making and all their dress materials were of cotton. Certain dresses such as *Puanchei* and *Puanropui*, which are considered the traditional dress of the Lusei, were actually created only in the colonial and post-colonial period. Lusei have statutory dress which proves that the pre-colonial Lusei society was

not an egalitarian one in the true sense. A number of new motifs and designs were invented during the colonial periods and *Puanchei* as the modern traditional dress of the Lusei existed only from around the 1919's and 1920's which is a modification of an older and simpler *puan* originally known as *Puanlaisen*.

Regarding the Lai 17 different dress items have been examined and among which dress such as *Hnawkhal* almost disappeared in the colonial period while the use of *Angki* and *Biarpi* declined after the colonial period. Most Lai dresses of statutory significance, generally worn by men remained to be valued due to their historic and economic value in the colonial period.

Though imitated, the Lai motifs are very difficult to master due to their intricacy and use of silk, hence Lai dresses have been meticulously preserved till date with regards to their motifs and designs, the colour combination and patterns along with the materials. If there are slight differences, it is indicative of the geographical pattern of their migration and eventual settlements.

Even with the scarcity of silk threads, there was enough of it to dress the elite section of the society to maintain their status. On the other hand, the lack of innovations in their dress style and production process for a number of decades evidently presents a socio-cultural scenario where a vibrant and stable economic foundation was absent preventing the Lai tribe from making any radical experimentation in dress making and rendering them to rely more on importation of finish product from Burma.

The incorporation of silk by the elite section of the Lai society while the common people employed cotton in dress making indicates the economic disparity between the elites and the commoners as silk was exceedingly expensive. However, there was no rigidity or restrictions when it comes to use of designs and motifs by commoners. To be a chief's wife required a woman to be a highly skilled weaver hence weaving knowledge was withheld within the chief's household due to the fear of losing power. However, most talented Mizo women could imitate the designs and motifs just by casual observation and sometimes slightly alter them to their convenience or vision. This is one of the reasons why there were variations in patterns as well.

Clothing made of silk defined higher status and certain pieces of clothing such as *Chawngnak* and *Chanlo Puan* could only be worn by the chiefs and the elites revealing that



social demarcation on the basis of dress was prevalent. By prescribing certain dress code the elite could have been making sure that there would be no competition and that with those dresses, their power could be identified.

To maintain status in the pre-colonial period, the Mizos accumulated certain materials, such as heirlooms including woven blankets made with locally sourced cotton, dyes and metal tools, beaded jewellerys, brass gongs, pots, silk and silver acquired from outside through trade. Amongst these items textiles were used to manifest the status and wealth of the wearer as well as for utilitarian purposes. The status and achievements of some individuals were reflected by what they wear.

The pre-colonial Mara dresses are almost similar to the Lai dresses due to their close cultural affinity. This research has documented and studied 16 pieces of dresses belonging to the Mara tribe. The dresses of men, which had great social and economic values in the pre-colonial times continued to remain so till date. Most of Mara women's skirts continued to be worn during the colonial and post-colonial period, but today traditional blouses are worn only on cultural events. Also slight addition such as the small stoles made in the same design as the traditional skirts, matching the attires.

The social distinction between the elite groups and commoners was more marked in Lai and Mara society than the Lusei. This was demonstrated by the use of silk threads and certain exclusive clothing by the elites in the Lai and Mara societies such as *Chawngnak* and *Chan-loh* of the Lai and *Chylao Poh* and *Chyna Poh* of the Mara.

This research identifies and documents a wide variety of jewellerys and accessories of the pre-colonial Mizos which includes 10 different headgears for Mizo men, three main headgears for women from the different tribes under study along with four different varieties of hairpins used both by men and women during from the pre-colonial to the colonial period. The Lusei, Lai and Mara together wore 10 different types of necklaces and six different earrings within themselves. These are worn by both male and female on certain specific occasions and some on daily basis.

Most of these jewellerys were worn from the pre-colonial period all through to the colonial period but, their use discontinued in the post-colonial period except for cultural festivals

and specific occasions. Interestingly, one single piece of accessory which transcended time is the use of the decorated cotton bag called *Ipte Chei*. This continued as an integral part of contemporary Mizo society. Statutory headgears are now worn by anybody who had access to them. In that way, a lot of the significance of the jewelleries has been lost as they became preserved pieces in museums and in private homes.

Sources indicate that metal and precious beads such as amber were not found in Mizoram. Moreover, precious jewellery making was not done in Mizoram in the pre-colonial and colonial times. This realization on the other hand reveals that through direct or indirect trade the Mizo tribes obtained most of their jewelleries and other items of decoration from the people of Burma, Chittagong hills and Arakan.

Most jewellery were status defining possessions for the owners in the context of pre-colonial and early colonial Mizo society. Such pieces were hardly owned by the common people and they were only found in the possession of the chiefly and rich families. The rarity and expensiveness increases the value to the point that while it was very difficult for the commoners to own many of the prized items, it elevated the owners to a certain level of power and authority, besides its provision of vanity.

Besides reflecting the socio-economic conditions of the Mizos, some accessories were also construed to have endowed the owner or wearer certain advantages over those who did not have or not wear them from the numerous vagaries and vicissitudes of life. Therefore, wearing certain accessories which were considered to have warded off the bad spirits and augured fortunes was indispensable especially during the pre-colonial period. Hence, jewelleries and accessories are important tools in showing the social and economic structure.

The Mizo tribes weave with handlooms, specifically the loin loom. The technology and expertise of the Mizo in dress making reveals that like other tribal communities around them they adopted the technology which were available in their society, handed down from generation to generation. In spite of the rising availability of mechanical looms in the post-colonial period, loin looms continued to be an important tool for dress production.

For their dress production the most common raw material was cotton which was locally grown and processed using their traditional technique. Cotton processing require many stages of

treatment and technological devices and the loom itself, which is still used by many Mizos, is a very intricate and highly complex system comprising various parts requiring the hand of a skilled weaver to accomplish the job.

The use of raw cotton thread was slowly replaced by the use of synthetic thread, mainly acrylic during the colonial period acquired mainly from Cachar and Burma, and also other neighboring areas with whom they shared trading relations. At the same time, raw cotton threads continued to be used as the basic material for dress making for those who did not have easy access to the synthetic threads. The use of raw cotton threads for general use continued till the 1960's after which it slowly disappeared owing to its replacement by the more convenient synthetic fibers.

The pre-colonial Mizo tribes also coloured their fabrics using the traditional technique of dyeing using dyes sources from nature such as tree barks, plants and flowers to render the desired colour. The most prominent colours of Mizo dresses were white, black, red and yellow. Black colour was derived by dyeing the raw cotton threads with indigo. However, the technique of dyeing and the variety of colours elicited by the Mizos in the pre-colonial period lacked certain knowledge as far as fastness and variations in colour are concerned.

Though known earlier, the First World War accelerated the use of synthetic dyes as Mizo soldiers brought samples of synthetic dyes from the war. Traditional dyes continued to be used in dress making until it was fully replaced by the synthetic dyes. Except for the statutory clothes and significant pieces, white formed the basis of almost all *puans* and clothing made by the Mizo, a trend carried on till around the 1970's reflected in some photographs of the era. Women somehow shied away from wearing vivid colours. Black blouses which were hardly worn by Mizo women in the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

The unequal division of labour and patriarchy, particularly in the field of dress making, is reflected by the attitude of men towards it. Lusei men completely refused to participate except in rolling a few balls of cotton sometimes when courting a girl for fear of being labelled unmanly.

The British rule in Mizoram with its concomitant forces such as Christian missions and education have transformed Mizo society in terms of health and knowledge and in renouncing traditional Mizo life leading to the emergence of new identities as European dress became the

marker of the new elite. The pre-colonial elitist crest of feathers, head gears and designated cloth gave way to suits and boots setting them a class apart from the old leadership. The educated Christians could now be easily recognized by how they dress. For the women, *Kawrmawl* and *Kawrchei* gave way to fancy blouses and outfits. Tight hair buns with pins were alternated by braids and bobs, ribbons and band with canvases and leather shoes in tows as seen in many of the photographs of that period.

Dress became a marker of social status and identity which manifested in the dress of the educated class and the earliest Christians. Traditional weaving and the creation of new designs and motifs were endorsed. Local handloom which was on the downslide due to cheaper Indian textiles was revived transforming the politics of dress. The dress quotient of the nobility versus commoners was changed into western versus traditional. On the other hand there were a number of contestations against the western attires, especially from the non-Christian Mizos who resisted Christianity and westernisation showing scepticism. But the Mizo society uniquely adjusted to the persuasive outside influence on its tradition and embraced Christian values within their own cultures.

While Mizo men wear a fully non-traditional outfit for both formal and non-formal settings, *puan* remains the most important dress for the women. Also the stress on the importance of formals as Sunday dress still persists. And progress in terms of attires and hygiene, and the general consciousness towards dress and fashion have drastically changed since the colonial period all over Mizoram.

The unequal division of labour was countered with teaching girls to excel at what they do in and out of their homes so as to earn enough respect for themselves. This brought a lot of changes in the equation of the male-female relationship.

With the participation of, a number of Mizo in the Second World War, the equation of Mizo fashion took a more definite turn towards the global trend especially for the youth. Augmented by the easier access to media in the form of magazines, music and cinema and the relative ease in travelling, Mizos were spreading out in the world, travelling, working, learning and some even settling outside the hills becoming exposed to the global fashion from the 1940s.