

Surplus Appropriation and Power Structure in Mizo Social Formation

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The first and foremost need of all living things is food. Scientists these days use the term "food chain" to determine the relationship between living things in the world of nature. Therefore, while determining the processes of mankind's cultural evolution, it is primarily imperative to take account of the impact resulting from that unending quest for food.¹ There is no denying the fact that 'the general ecological character of the human groups was determined at first exclusively, later very largely, by how they got their food.'² Morgan succinctly sums it up when he suggested 'the important fact that mankind commenced at the bottom of the scale and worked up is revealed in an expressive manner by their successive arts of subsistence.'³

The process of man's cultural evolution is mostly explained in terms of how man has acquired means of exploiting earth's resources, established preponderance over other living things, and concurrently, how certain human groups have triumphed over others. Generally, cultural and social anthropology of the 19th and even most of the first half of the 20th century subscribe that it was through the ability to produce food in a large scale, by domestication of plants and animals that the first human settlements and societies evolved. Before this, hunting and gathering allowed for only small groups or bands to stay together.

The advent of agriculture, as it gave a quantum leap in cultural evolution, has been highlighted by Gordon Childe as the "Neolithic Revolution".⁴ From this stage onwards human societies are seen to develop even better means in exploitation of nature and an accompanying change in human relationships dictated by this process. The stage was set to elevate humans above the ordinary level of subsistence. The ability to produce surplus food, while allowing for large human conglomerates, resulted in diversification of profession and social stratification. Consequently, the wealth generated by this technological prowess led such societies to develop a hierarchical structure which differed from the tribal and egalitarian character from which it emerged. The egalitarian tribal society becomes increasingly eroded and crystallizes into an entity characterized by private property and privilege. The general tendency is therefore a gradual change resulting in a form of society which is called the state.

This short paper examines this crucial factor-surplus production and appropriation in context to the Mizo tribal formation and their vicissitudes from the 16th century onwards. As simple as this may sound, this necessarily leads to the highly controversial issues on the nature of human adaptiveness, the character of social and ecological systems, the rationality of social systems, and most importantly, the forces which promote social change. It further devolves into the debate concerning the process of social stratification and state formation. Even while scientists generally agree on certain features of the state (in the fact that it is essentially different in form to those previous to it), they differ substantially in determining its main character. Much of these are beyond the scope of this paper and whatever may be related to these matters in the presentation are only incidental to the main theme — surplus.

It is necessary that, before presenting the actual context, that a presentation be made on the writings of some anthropologists on the main issue of surplus production and appropriation. Most of modern research and writing on this combines some aspect of Marxian thought with some of the ideas of Max Weber.⁵ While quite many social scientists ascribe surplus food production the key factor in determining social change,⁶ they have not been unanimous in the motive for the production of it. Pierre Claustras,⁷ Lizard⁸ and Jacques Ellul⁹ assert that early societies, or primitive

societies, lack the necessary propensity to produce surplus. Pierre Claustrus contends that in the absence of 'external force' acting on them, primitive societies' 'refusal' from working themselves to produce a 'useless excess' stems not in their technological inability, but in their determination to make 'productive activity agree with the satisfaction of needs'. Lazor even asserts that primitive societies, as exemplified by the Yonomami, are societies characterized by the contempt for work and disinterest in technological progress. In chorus to this Jacques Ellul points out that, for such societies, work was a punishment, not a virtue, and that men work as little as possible and were content with a restricted consumption of goods.

The observation and assertion made by these writers is difficult to refute outright. Undeniably, humans do not necessarily like work, especially agricultural work. But this does not warrant such generalization as made by them. In fact, the conclusions they draw of the societies they studied seem to be more exceptional to the given standard. It is difficult to accept, against the universal principle that with food determining the difference between life and death, societies with the ability to produce more would consciously and deliberately limit themselves to produce just the bare minimum. There is always the desire, even in simple societies, i.e. at the biological level, to have more food. This has been prompted by increase in population.¹⁰ Once a society has found ways of increasing its food supply it is but natural to exploit this vital knowledge for augmenting food supply. In fact, recent studies have shown that even hunting communities had this tendency to indulge in excess.¹¹ In the face of it, therefore, one is inclined to believe that Claustrus, Lazor and Ellul were consumed by their own reaction against the capitalistic creed of their own societies and sought the contradiction of it by placating primitive societies suggesting different value systems and alternatives. Most likely, these writers did not take full account of the reality of the societies they observed. While they overemphasize on the rationality of human action, they also suggest the same of being able to discern beforehand the consequence and impact of these actions. As these scientists see the production of surplus as directly leading society towards social stratification and class structures and rendering inequality and exploitation they have been most negative about it. Conclusively therefore, in their opinion, surplus is produced

only when a power structure emerges in a society and the general community is put to work, against its will, and further deprived of the fruit of labour. Otherwise, as postulated by Claustaras, Lizzor and Ellul, these societies, of their own free will, have neither the will nor the desire to produce beyond their need to sustain a bare existence. It is likely that while trying to identify a utopia (of a classless or egalitarian society) they have tried to placate primitive societies with their ideals and in the process have unwittingly 'put the cart before the horse'.

It must not be assumed that egalitarianism has ever really existed in reality. Societies are primarily concerned with their survival, and the history of mankind suggests more this drive (as evidenced by the drive for more effective technology) than with 'loving their neighbours as themselves'. Humans, on the whole, especially before the Industrial Revolution, have not planned for any form of society; rather, they have been more concerned to exploit resources as their given level of technology enables them. Therefore, society is as much an adaptation of humans to the given dictates of their technological prowess and capability as they struggle to enhance their survival. While this is coupled to their own ingenuity of making arrangements to form a working relationship amongst themselves, their choices are necessarily limited. As such, in determining human behaviour, environment and technology, which provide the means in which human relations are worked out, have always had a strong role to play in the process of social formations. The basic instinct for survival drives the society to make meaning of its reality to cohere all these factors together, thus establishing a framework of human interaction.¹² However, this is not to suggest that all human thoughts and actions operate only within these boundaries.¹³

Evidence furnished by Sahlin and documented in his work 'Stone Age Economics' clearly establishes that there can be strong drives for producing surplus at a very basic level, not necessarily prompted by any external force, but inherent and dynamic within itself:

But there appear to be many societies, even with subsistence economies, in which some people work harder than they need to just for their own families' subsistence. What motivates them to work harder? It turns out that many subsistence economies are not oriented just to household consumption. Rather,

sharing and other transfers of food and goods often go well beyond the household, sometimes including the whole community or even groups of communities...In such societies, social rewards come to those who are generous, who give things away. Thus, people who work harder than they have to for subsistence may be motivated to do so because they gain respect or esteem thereby.¹⁴

Another anthropologist, Melville Herskovits, working on the tribes of New Guinea adds another dimension to the propensity to produce surplus food, has argued that the tendency is inbuilt within agriculture. His argument is that:

with agriculture, people really have to produce more than they need so that they can protect themselves against crises such as crop failure. The group that makes feasts may be indirectly ensuring themselves against crises by storing up.¹⁵

Perhaps, the most elaborate formulation in the hypothesis on state formation is that of William Irwin Thompson. Thompson also suggests that from a simple unified society of the hunting, society becomes increasingly diverse and divided from the agricultural phase with the production of surplus. In his own words:

The Tribal Society seems to express the value which Yeats called Unity of Being, for all the complementary and opposing forces seem to be in balance. But the appearance of economic surplus created by the change from food-gathering community to a food-producing changes all that. The surplus enables society to support specialists, and this new specialization increases the 'distance between men in different roles. With the appearance of literate specialists, relations are no longer immediate but intermediate, for the new elite comes between man and the reading of his environment.¹⁶

Thompson claims that opposing forces are inherent in human society and they gain preponderance more and more with the growth of man's power over nature. Nowhere does Thompson use the word contradiction, but his theoretical framework seems to closely follow upon Marx's class struggle but making it multi-layered and more complexed. He contends that society has four main components¹⁷ which, according to him, are initially expressed in the hunting-gathering stage in the character of the Shaman, the

Hunter, the Military, and the Clown; and these four roles, though having clearly differentiated functions, are 'under the control of the strongly cohesive field of the community' because they are 'obliged to hunt and work together, so there is no extreme division of labour which can set the men apart from one another.' Surplus production changed all this. It effected a move from individuals to institutions and from unity to multiplicity. Therefore, according to him:

The economic surplus affects a social transformation whereby the part-time Shaman grows into the institution of religion with its full-time specialists. The Headman grows into the institution of the State, the physical hunter into the Military, and the Clown, who mocked mysteries of the Shaman, the authority of the Headman, and the physical grace of the Hunter, into the institution of Art. Because men are now full-time specialists, they no longer have to share in one another's lives. Social distance becomes extreme as new elite begins to lessen the authority of the other members of the society. Now social roles become markedly differentiated and oppositions become more energetic as society tries to counteract the expanding forces of the economy. Art is the opposite of the State; Religion is the opposite of the Military. Each institution activates certain values in conflict with its opposite, which seeks to activate other values. Human society becomes, in the terms of the physicist, a many-body situation in which values can only be achieved in conflict with opposites.¹⁸

Surplus Appropriation and Mizo Society

The written information that one has of the Mizo tribes from the 18th century comes from the records of British administrators.¹⁹ The Mizo lived in villages of thatched huts, usually numbering from 400 houses and above,²⁰ perched on the side of hills where the biggest was that of the chief which was only superseded by *Zawlbuk* or the tenement of the bachelors. As horticulture enabled the formation of villages it also fostered and necessitated close co-operation among the denizens. While production of necessary items was at the basic level of the family, i.e. the household, the whole village was a network of ties established within clan and outside of it. In so far as their basic technology is concerned (i.e.

tools and equipages in food production) they had availed to iron, which they procured from neighbouring areas, but their agricultural technique was of slash and burn. Without this supply of iron from outside they were obliged to fall back to the use of digging sticks and deer antlers as their chief instruments for planting of rice and other crops. In this regard, autochthonously, their material development was hardly above that of Neolithic societies. Therefore, in essence, the Mizo villages were societies geared for collective survival against lean times and calamities.²¹ During such times, even those contributions made to the chief's granary could be availed by the needy. However, under normal circumstances, their swidden offered enough to afford them a life well beyond bare subsistence. The surplus grain that accrued from their rice harvests provided the means for sustaining a full time chief and necessary item of the accoutrement for participation in the corporate life of the community. The surplus grain was utilised for manufacturing various types of alcoholic beverages, *zu*. Every household manufactured its own stock of *zu*. Along with *zu*, domesticated animals provided the accoutrement for the many rituals and sacrifice which had become a necessary part of their communal ethos. Particular value was adhered to the semi-domesticated wild buffalo (*sial*) which was slaughtered and sacrificed when occasion called for a grander scale of conviviality beyond the ordinary and seasonal obligations of fulfilling social formalities and festivities. In fact, the incentive for surplus production is clearly visible when seen in the light of the important institutions and mores of the society and which had overt expressions and connotations. While we may use a folk story of Chhura²² to show the desire for improvement of technology, the need for surplus production is clearly seen in the day-to-day needs of fulfilling social etiquette, rituals, and festivals. We may divide the utilisation of surplus production in terms of regular, seasonal, and special.

Regular

Numerous occasions arose for the Mizo, throughout the year, for consumption of animals and *zu*, beyond the basic need of satisfying the realms of the stomach. Almost all of his sickness was attributed to the visitation of evil and malevolent spirits. Healing, placating,

or exorcism was a ritual conducted by the *puithiam* or shaman who sacrificed an animal and made much use of *zu*. The animal sacrificed may be a fowl, goat, or pig. Occasions such as marriages, the inauguration of a new house, of births and deaths, also generally follow the same process of making *zu* a necessary item as the occasion is presided by the *puithiam* who, it seems, had little or no way of functioning without it.

Seasonal

The Mizo lived a close community life. All year round there were innumerable occasions of sharing in the village. Festivals commemorated the commencement and ending of the many stages of the agricultural cycle. These were occasions spent with much consumption of meat and *zu* — as was affordable and expendable to each and every householder. There were as many as three festivals annually — Chapchar, Mim, and Pawl *kut*.²³ Every householder had to be amply stocked with enough *zu* and meat for these occasions. Embarrassment and humiliation followed those who did not have the required condiments for the conviviality.

Special

The Mizo were intrepid hunters and raiders. Hunts and raids were undertaken whenever the situation allowed. While hunting in the vicinity may be undertaken at the individual level, hunting parties set out to hunt for meat and set out for days altogether. As those members of a hunting party share in the success and the benefits that accrue from it, the animals killed are always shared and there were set formal conventions for distribution amongst the villagers. A successful hunt called for celebration. Depending on the size of the animal killed, the size of the celebrating party could vary from those of a few adjacent huts and relatives and friends to encompassing the whole village. The killing of an animal larger than a deer is always followed by a ceremony called *Ai*.²⁴ The *Ai* ceremony is most elaborate in the event of a tiger killed or the heads of slain enemies are brought home. No less than a few *sial* (tame bison) and pigs are sacrificed on such occasions. These need not be those owned by members of the hunting party. Others eager

to make a contribution on such auspicious occasions readily offer them while the event also serves to provide them an opportunity to gain appreciation from the hunters and the general community. The meat of the tiger was not consumed.²⁵

Desire for surplus produce, or the use of it, is epitomised by the ceremony called *Khuangchawi*. The person performing the ceremony had to not only give a lot of feasts but ended giving away most of his acquired and accumulated wealth. The successful performance of the ceremony brought no mean rewards to the performer. While it befittingly earned respect of the villagers, designated as *Thangchhuah*, the person was distinguished from others by being privileged to wear striped shawl and headdress adorned with King Crows' feathers. Furthermore, the elevated position that was earned was carried over to the next realm. After death, the soul of the person could proceed unobstructed to *Pailral*,²⁶ otherwise for the non-privileged the destiny was *Mithikua*.²⁷ Symbolically, to designate this position, the person gets the honour of having a window in his hut. There were many stages in the process of the *Khuangchawi* ceremony and the full completion of it may take years or not be tenable at all. Each step involved the expending of a vast amount of meat, rice and *zu*, and only very wealthy people could afford it. In all, there were seven tiers of feasting ceremonies.

The biggest appropriator of surplus was the chief. By the time the British colonial rule set in, the chief had secured quite a few privileges. Besides being given a share of the harvested grain from every household, the chief had a share on every wild animal killed by a villager and on wild honey collected. He not only had the first pick on agricultural land, but he also gave the right of choosing after him, before the commoners, to the *ramhual* and *zalen*. While the *ramhual* benefited him by giving him more paddy than the commoners for this out of turn privilege, the *zalen*, on the other hand, were not under the obligation of direct contribution to his granary. However, they provided most of the *zu* while they were in the company of the chief. This was a daily routine as the *zalen* also were the members of the chief's council. From petty squabbles to major issues, the chief and his entourage established the court as judge and jury, ordinarily played out on the chief's courtyard. From these hearings the chief received fines in the form of fowls and other domesticated animals. The chief enjoyed the privilege

of having his house constructed by the villagers and could call on the denizens to perform social work.

These powers of the chief did not come overnight. It took centuries of rigor, trials and tribulations to build up. The careers of the Mizo chiefs were wound up with the development of their villages through their tortuous meandering and hazardous sojourn from the Chin Hills. While they all prevailed on more or less the same ecological-technological considerations, their location at times either enhanced or threatened their existence. In all these, the scope was open to human endeavor, resilience, ingenuity and resourcefulness. Therefore, though a common thread ran through all these settlements of 'wild tribes' it was the character of the chief that set the tempo and tenor, even the terms of communal living that may cause to extend, or terminate, the life of the village.

Antecedents

While we have quite a wholesome picture of the Mizo tribes in the 19th century mostly on account of the records made by the British and with folk memory rich on even particular nuances and traits not obvious and discernible to outsiders, it is difficult to reach back in time. Here, we have to fall back on folk tradition.

According to folk memory, the Mizo prevailed in the Chin Hills in the 16th century. Here, near the Tiau river, twelve clans of the Mizo formed a close cluster of villages. Among these were the Ralte, Chawngthu, Khiangte, Hauhna, Chuaungo, Chuauhang, Ngente, Punte, and Parte.²⁸ Though not free of conflict amongst themselves, they were constantly harassed by the other neighbours whom they commonly called Pawih. These were the Falam, Haka and Sukte. In these circumstances, they were barely able to eke out a living. They could not grow rice. Their little clothing made of hemp, they used digging sticks to carry on a very haphazard agriculture. It seems likely that villages were no more than some dozen houses of close members of/or clan groups. While their tools were poor, so were their weapons. Men fought each other with clubs. At this time, most of these clans had their own chiefs. It was here that the Hnamte clan, on the death of their chief, invited Zahmuaka, who had many sons, to become the chief of their village. Zahmuaka acquiesced only after the Hnamte villagers made a commitment that every year, a portion of their annual harvest

would be made over to him. This yearly subscription by the villagers of the staple grain to the chief's granary was known as *Fathang*. From Zahmuaka sprang a long line of chiefs of which one was the Sailo. By the time the British control was established in the Mizo hills, the Sailo predominated as chiefs in the area which has been established as the present state of Mizoram. While these clans were living a wretched life in the eastern side of the Tiau river, there were those already settled on the western side. These were the Mirawng, Rengpui, Darlong, Ruankhum, Tlangau, Pang and Chawrai. Their material life must have been much better than those on the other side of the Tiau.²⁹ Other clans like the Thadou soon appeared on the western side.

Mizo folk memory of these earliest times allude to a *volkerwanderungen* of the tribes — the saga when the momentous move was made towards the place of their present habitat by the crossing of the Tiau river. Those from the eastern side soon overran the earlier settlers on the west.³⁰ The weaker ones were obliged to move first. But even the stronger villages could not establish any permanence. The compulsion of having to look for new land for swidden necessitated shifts, even if not under threat from others. It seems that at this time, the power of the village under Sailova had gained strength to demand the respect and fear from the others. Among the Thangur³¹ chiefs Sailo was the last to make the crossing of the Tiau.

As they sojourned from the Chin Hills major changes occurred. The continued warring with each other resulted in the decimation of many villages while others increased in size. There was a natural process of restructuring of villages. Since the method of war was not to annihilate, the denizens of humbled villages were absorbed by the victors. This was through an established system known as *tuklut*. Since safety and security was greatly determined by size, a village would try, within the given conditions, to expand to its utmost size within which the given ecological conditions permitted. Accordingly, many clans waned while others soared up. As the process continued, villages became more composite and complexed. The single clan structured village began to give way for a more cosmopolitan one. As necessitated by the new conditions that impinged upon successful villages, required adjustments were made accordingly to the need. As it was more difficult to maintain harmony the chief had to exert more authority

amongst his more numerous and mixed villagers. A certain amount of cohesion, order, and discipline were the benefits that accrued from this according the chief with the prerogative to settle the disputes that were beyond the boundary of the clan. Along with the village there was a substantial increase in the power of its chief, and corresponding to the increase and strength of the village their appropriation of surplus accrued from it.

The shift from the mountain ridges of Thantlang and Lentlang brought about a tremendous improvement in their material life. Here, they were able to cultivate rice. This must have resulted in a steady increase in population. Rice cultivation was enhanced by the availability of iron tools and weapons procured from the neighbouring areas. This vital addition to their technology was duly given its importance by the incorporation of the village blacksmith who was also given, after the chief, a portion (*thirdengsa*) of the animals killed in the chase. Large villages there were serviced by blacksmiths who were scattered out in the various localities (*veng*) and receive their payments from their respective *veng*. In most villages, the Bachelor's Dormitory (*Zawlbuk*) was established. As with the blacksmith, large villages had multiple *Zawlbuk*. The population of the village was divided in terms of clans. Clans that were big enough had their own locality and *Zawlbuk*. Strict rules were made for the layout of the village. Streets were straight and ordered. The chief's hut, flanked by the elders', was berthed in the center of the village facing the dominant clan's *Zawlbuk*. As with their improvement in tools and weapons, they were able to grow cotton from which garments were made. The strong sense of order and discipline, and the hierarchy that prevailed in the village was visible even in the rude dwellings from their size and location. These villages were all stockaded with elevations made for sentinels and sentries posted at the entrance of heavy sliding timberwork.

Remarkably, in addition to the iron tools and weapons, even in the deep recesses of dense forests, gun technology also entered the scene. It almost but shattered the prevailing law of the jungle of which the Mizo was much a part. Guns quickly displaced bows and arrows. Ironically, while it made the villages more secure from animal predators, it made them more vulnerable to their own kind. The availability of this new weaponry made long raids on other

villages and hunting trips more viable and frequent and tribal wars more volatile. In the hands of these 'wild tribes' muskets drastically increased violence in scale and magnitude. It accelerated the pace of changes that were already afoot. Since they were not able to manufacture it, aside from making repairs and process their own powder, they were obliged to procure it. Lacking of goods to exchange them with they undertook raids to capture slaves whom they traded with the Burmese for guns.³²

Raiding had set in as a way of life. Essentially, their living condition made them predatory. Firstly, their main lifeline, horticulture, which made them jealously claim as much territory as they could control, provoked it. Secondly, the natural environment, teeming with all sorts of predators and parasites, suggested it. In the midst of preying animals and insects, survival necessarily followed the law of the jungle. Complementary to the harsh conditions they faced, they also evinced a social system and an eschatology that promoted and prompted the maximization of the building and utilization of resources outside for collective survival within the walls of their villages. Individual strength was respected, but only honoured when directed for service of the collective. In terms of wealth and resources, it was not so much in how much one could get, but in how much one could give. Therefore as temporary as their settlements were, they worked fervishly to gain status through the processes established and institutionalized under these given considerations. Along with the desire for securing guns and slaves, there was a huge rush for prestige goods and items. Concomitant to this, salt³³ as a commodity became a means of establishing status and, already in short supply,³⁴ added attraction for undertaking raids. Motivation in life was galvanized by the prospects of garnering the same fruits and rewards after death.

The Chief as Appropriator of Surplus

While writing on the society of the American Indians Carol R. Ember and Melville Ember humorously mention that 'Identifying the chief in some American Indian villages became something of a joke among early ethnographers, who reported that they looked for the poorest man. Apparently, the demands of redistribution

were so great that the chief gave away everything he could accumulate and was left with prestige alone.³⁵ With regard to the Mizo chief the information furnished by Shakespear is interesting when he mentions — any present given to the chief are common property. His people walk off with them, saying: "He is a big man, and will get lots more given to him. Who will give us if he does not?" On the other hand, all that is in his village belongs to the chief; he can and does call upon the people to furnish him with whatever that he requires.³⁶

The Mizo chiefs were surely not as kind as those American Indian chiefs, but the demands of reciprocity and redistribution for general well being was certainly a check to hoarding and accumulation. Though there is no record of their having given away prestige goods, they had to give feasts from time to time, as they could not afford to be outdone by others in this though already maintaining their position as chiefs. It would be embarrassing for a chief to have less *seluphan*³⁷ to decorate the front of his house than any other person in the village. The chief was bound by the communal ethos which demanded a sharing of resources especially at the extreme level of survival. In fact, he was supposed to be an example of it. In this way, the commoners were justified, by convention, to help themselves to the chief's granary in times of shortage. In such a situation, the chief was to look away while the man was raiding his granary, the act being embarrassing to the person in need. Therefore, the position the Mizo chief somewhat follows with the general statement made by Herskovitz about reciprocal and redistributive societies that the underlying validation of social position would seem to be expressed in this sentence: "Obligations as well as benefits accrue from wealth: rich men gain prestige and security, not by hoarding, but by judicious distribution." The *Khuangchawi* ceremony facilitated the necessary formality of ordination of status harmonized with the sharing of resources within and amongst the villagers. At a certain stage of the ceremony, with all the drinking and feasting they sponsored the couple performing the *Khuangchawi*, while being carried on the wooden frame on the shoulders of people along the streets, throw away their prestige goods and use items to the jubilant crowd. Like the American Indian chief, they had to purchase name and fame in this way.

Towards State Formation

We have seen how the surplus in rice production, aside from freeing the chief from agricultural labour and receiving *fathang*, started to aggrandize his position. *Fathang* also facilitated keeping of slaves as he had a good amount of ready stock of rice that accrued from his villagers. It also enabled the chief to keep concubines. Within the village, the chief could also exploit a person by default. He was empowered to harbour people who took shelter in his hut. Nobody could venture beyond the chief's door to pursue a fugitive. Those who avail to this sanctuary end up as domestic slaves (*Bawih*) of the chief. Through the judicious use of *fathang*, a successful chief could keep extending his realm over which he had absolute and total control. The chief, being bound by convention, could not increase his *fathang* directly from the people, would naturally take this course of action open to him to enhance his power and prestige without overriding the social norms of the community.

Therefore, despite natural conventions to which the chief was obligatory, there were developments that suggest a slow build-up towards the process of the formation of the state. Especially towards the later half of the 19th century, we find many of the villages having composite population. With the exception of the Thadou and Lakher most of the clans were becoming intermixed through village wars. Many villages were decimated and the denizens were obliged to flee elsewhere, and too little in number to establish new villages they were forced to seek admission into other's. The Lusei dominated villages had many clans who composed separate lanes and localities and their own *zawlbuk*. Those who were not the original founders of the village occupied an inferior position to the ones who established the village. They retained their own identity as separate clans.³⁸ As the village absorbed the new members coming in large groups, their placement in the village structure facilitated social differentiation. Though they were not denied the access to the means of production, i.e., their own land holdings, they had an inferior position. As in the case of the Ralte clan 'a separate portion of the village is assigned to them, and if a human sacrifice is necessary; they enjoy the privilege of providing the offering.'³⁹ It seems that

in certain villages where there were plenty of Ralte, they were inducted with an obligation to procure human heads from other villages as the honour of sending dead souls to accompany the dead chief was considered their responsibility and they had to obtain it through raids on others.

Quasi-royal lineages were being established. Where they dominated, while the Sailo monopolized the chiefship, the Lusei clans generally prevailed as councillors or elders (*upa*), who, against the position of the commoners, composed the *Zalen* who were exempt from paying the *fathang*. Though this is not equivalent to land grants, it definitely has social undercurrents of nascent privileges leading to, under right conditions, to emergence of the nobility with its accompanying concomitants of land alienation, private property and therefore a class society. [At some point, in order to augment their granary the Sailo chiefs also devised a new strategy. They enabled a class of people to choose land before the commoners. These were called *Ramhual*. In return for the privilege given to them for choosing before commoners, they gave a much larger share of their produce to the chief.] This arrangement can be seen as leading to land speculation and realization of rent. It also shows the increasing power of the chief by suggesting his proprietorship on land. [Among the Pawih chiefdom was clearly entrenched within the Chinzah family, while the Paite (outside of the areas dominated by Lusei and Pawih) the Guite family remained preponderant. The power of the chiefs of some villages radiated outside and beyond their village ramparts. Many satellite villages were established or brought within the ambit of their rule.] At the same time, satellite villages were established as outgrowth of a dominant one. Members of the village would set out with the son of a chief and set up a new one. In this way those whose clan had been accepted as chieftain clans proliferated and dispersed.

However, there were natural brakes to the growth and power of the chief and the village. All these actually stem out from the technological — environmental factor. The agricultural method was subversive to the entrenchment of power. The shifting cultivation acted as a pernicious agent thwarting and undermining permanence. It made impossible the main ingredients necessary for empire building or formation of state edifice — centralization of power. No matter the resourcefulness of the chief, the technological-environmental factor set the conditions. The

instability of the villages due to the shifts of location inbuilt to the agricultural method militated against permanence, curtailed size, and made control difficult. Even when a village expanded beyond the normal it was difficult to retain a populous one. Villages could hardly expand beyond a few thousand houses. While size may serve to provide assurance of security against neighbours, it was at a great cost. The village's rice fields become too distanced from the village. Without any means of transport, managing these fields becomes strenuous. Therefore, while the villagers were obliged to suffer these inconveniences during warring periods, the peace that follows lulls them back to a condition where they could easily reach their rice fields. As the depletion of local resources (exhaustion of land and depletion of animals) obliged the villages to shift, dispersal in smaller groups gave for better and more efficient means of exploiting the natural environment. As mentioned already this is normally done with some of the villagers going with a chief's son to establish a new village. In course of time this offshoot village may develop into a large one. Though the kinship ties link it to the parent one, it naturally develops the character of the village-loyalty confined to the village. At the same time, it becomes increasingly difficult for the parent one to maintain any semblance of control. In course of time they may even be feuding on each other.⁴⁰

One main factor which provided a strong check on the power of the chief was that the society, as precariously as it existed, depended for its protection, much upon its militia — the young men. The chief had consolidated his position such that, especially with the Sailo, they did not normally lead in wars.⁴¹ The burden of defending the village had fallen on others. These were the young men who were generally led by the *pasaltha*. Though these young men did not have a recognized platform to articulate themselves in the decision-making of the village, politically they exerted a very strong control and influence. These men were not necessarily obliged to the chief save to follow the given norms set for communal life. Though the chief enjoyed prerogative of speech the young men were not his retainers. They were free men. As such, the Mizo chief had no special apparatus for the systematic application of force even within his own village. However, they could be easily provoked to direct their energy against other villages. The death of a chief was necessarily followed by raids to

procure heads so that the souls of the victims would be dispatched to serve as servants for the dead chief in *Pialral*. This was binding to the villagers — that they assure that he entered the spiritual realm with the position he normally enjoyed while in his temporal life. The funerary rites following the death of a chief were not only more expensive, but special.

Thus, beyond the assertion of his chiefship in his village within the given constraints, there was little else to which the Mizo chief could aspire. The lifespan of a village was at best a decade. The chief's consciousness was tempered by the same element that bound him and his villagers together. The impermanence of their reality made them exert their utmost and, within their capacity, to live in abundance. The chief as with the commoners had to carefully balance their resources. While they were promptly and enthusiastically converted much of their harvested grains to *zu* they had to be prudent and careful to set aside the necessary amount for their meals. They had to be even more careful not to indulge in excesses in their consumption of *zu* thereby exposing their village to be ravished by others.⁴² While the villagers sought the warmth of a hearth and the protection offered by the village and were more than willing to give their utmost in the strengthening of it, the chief had to be careful not to lose their trust and confidence. Transgressing on these overriding principles could always render the chief the lone subject of an abandoned village. In the words of Shakespear:

The chief was in theory at least, a despot; but the nomadic instinct of the people is so strong that any chief whose rule was unduly harsh soon found his subjects leaving him, and he was therefore constrained to govern according to custom.⁴³

Epilogue

The Mizo tribal history from the 16th century to the 19th shows a process of development from small clan based villages to larger and more complex ones. The study suggests that seemingly convincing theories established as universal laws determining and dictating the given character of societies may not really hold up. There are details that sometimes deny the possibility of fitting societies into neat categories.⁴⁴ On the other hand, it is uncanny that the Mizo tradition that relates the ascendancy of Zahmuaka

is a vindication of the theory of "Social Contract" in a real historical context. Concerning surplus, Mizo society furnishes evidence that surplus production need not be induced by any political force against the will of the people. In fact, it was the reverse, everybody wanted to produce surplus. It was a necessary part of the whole social life of the Mizo. Everyone appropriated surplus and even the subscription made to the chief's granary was common property in times of need. The compulsion for producing surplus was not external nor political but biological and social.

From the study of surplus in Mizo society there are indications that seem to deny much of the generalized assumptions and assertions made by some scientists of primitive societies. Of course, with nothing substantive known about the Mizo before that point of time it is difficult to even take for granted that they were truly primitive — if primitive means the physical (material) aspect rather than the mental. It is highly possible that the Mizo had degenerated from a higher culture. In any case, whatever be their origin, they had to begin from the 16th century as a people no different to primitive societies. Therefore from the materialist viewpoint we may accept them as primitive.

In this regard, the development of Mizo villages and the nature of society that emerged does not reveal an egalitarian society at any phase. This gives some reason to doubt the historicity of materialists' assumption that primitive societies are necessarily egalitarian. In fact, the Marxist assertion that two modes of production are inherently in conflict seems rather flimsy. The Mizo combined both hunting and agriculture harmoniously. While they benefited from horticulture, they were equally dependent upon hunting. Interestingly, the nature of social life shows that the men were incensed by hunting and would have exonerated themselves from the tedium of agriculture had the situation allowed. Against the natural conditions which they were pitted the two "modes of production" were like two arms working together — both needing and helping each other, equally and firmly connected, and equally serving the needs of the rest of the body.

When freed from the regular demands of agriculture, hunting was a major preoccupation of all able bodied men. *Kawngpuiiam*, a formal ceremony to assure hunting success for the village, is one of the most important occasions in the annual calendar of a Mizo village. Hunting raids provided the essential protein which was

scarce, as rearing of animals was difficult. As with the other resources, the meat brought in by the hunters was always distributed and shared. Especially with the availability of guns hunters traveled far in the forests and hunted animals such as the elephants which abounded in the foothills. The hunters' area of operation generally determined the control of the surrounding land and resources. Hunting trips and raids were also occasions which provided initiation and training of young men in discipline, in survival, in the arts of war, where their dedication, courage, patience, and perseverance were tested. The thick jungle and underbrush teemed not only with myriad of animals, insects and plants, besides having pockets of other human groups, it was host to the most dreaded creatures of darkness which constantly stalked and consumed the Mizo. For this reason the Mizo had a special position reserved for the hunters and warriors. Each human head brought home was celebrated with fervour, the victors uplifted. The society devised methods of adjusting its honoured members to positions outside of the chief's. They were designated *Pasaltha*. These men either endowed or attributed with qualities above the ordinary, enjoyed the adulation of the people. Though they led war parties and enjoyed the following of the young bucks, they did not seem to have striven to dethrone their chiefs but were content to live a normal life. The *Pasaltha* are revered till today as the shining example of self denial, sacrifice and courage, the virtues which were extolled by the Mizo as an ideal in their corporate life. This Mizo ethos is expressed as *tlawmngaihna*.

While we survey the characteristics of the Mizo 'village republics' it is apparent that they had not developed to that extent that people were distanced to the point of alienation. So here is a case where a society, even with agriculture, remains firmly integrated. The inherent nature of the agricultural society, according to William Irwin Thompson, is an aggravation of the different traits of the Headman, the Hunter, the Shaman, and the Clown. Since the Mizo were not truly agricultural,⁴⁵ this dichotomy is not clearly visible. As already shown, their condition did not allow for that. There was no specialist who was set apart so much from the common folk, not even the chief. Though chieftainship was becoming exclusive, there was hardly any means of asserting authority except in consonance of the common will. They of course tried to establish their bloodline intact.⁴⁶ They also chose their own

shaman from a particular clan, these were called *awzia*.⁴⁷ The most important matter that may be taken into consideration in the matter of chieftainship is to take into account all the variables that determine his position under the given conditions. Naturally some were much more powerful than others within and without the village.⁴⁸

Shamanism too, was still at a low level. They were not even given as much importance as the blacksmith. They had to undertake all the labours related to their own upkeep, like any commoner. They were paid as and when their services were called for. There were two types of shaman. The *sadawt* was concerned with the physical while the *puithiam* dealt with spirits. The *sadawt*'s medicine (i.e. healing from sickness and disease) was not particularly efficacious and people invariably resented them for making high demands (like pigs) when their service was felt to be not even deserving a fowl. The *puithiam* performed family and social rituals,⁴⁹ for divining; some were attributed with the power of exorcism and some with clairvoyance.⁵⁰ There were also sorcerers who were so feared they dispelled the enthusiasm of eager bucks from making raids on that village. A sorcerer suspected of nurturing malevolence on a co-villager received swift retribution from a frenzied mob. The fellow would be murdered outright.

In all, it may be said that the Mizo lived a precarious life. Whatever resources could be availed was ultimately compromised for collective survival. Living in little clearings made in verdant forests left no doubt to the Mizo as to the dangers that surround him. Agriculture afforded some amount of security as it provided a regular source of food and strength of numbers against insurmountable odds. While agriculture was not free of the caprices of nature, the village ramparts hardly a defense against the many predators and malevolent spirits that lurk about and stalk, insecurity drove the Mizo to try and enhance his life. In this, whatever he could produce, whatever he could muster, above fulfilling the bare needs of the realms of his stomach, was directed and utilized to that end. Therefore, as much as he could ordinarily coax, cajole, or wrest out from nature, the Mizo put his back to it. Surplus produce facilitated the means for establishing closer ties and bonds in society, a necessary item for dispelling spirits, a necessary condiment for houseguests and celebrations. Accordingly, as much contribution as he could physically render

towards village support he hastened to avail the opportunity. Hard as it was for the normal person, it was harsh on those whose ill fate made them widows and orphans, or those frail of body or mind, or those disabled or enfeebled by disease or injury — for those unable to contribute abundantly in the corporate life. Life inside the village ramparts was as near in form to the jungle outside, with the pressure on ordinary life being such, there was but little time or consideration for the weak, the infirm, and the destitute.⁵¹

END NOTES

1. Charles Singer et al., *A History of Technology, Vol. I* (England, 1978) p. 64: 'food stands on a footing different from all other materials since it is the only substance that man had always had to seek'.
2. J.D. Bernal, *Science in History, Vol. I* (England, 1954), p. 74.
3. L.H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Calcutta, 1982) p. 19. Although many of the assumptions and generalizations of Morgan have been considered untrue and outdated, this particular one can still be accepted to be applicable for the larger part of mankind's known history.
4. Gordon Childe, *What happened in History* (New York, 1964).
5. Melvin M. Tumin, *Social Stratification* (New Delhi, 1992), p. 12.
6. Another clear proponent of this is R.S. Sharma, he says "Surplus plays a key role in the formation of class and leads to the erection of an entirely new type of power structure called the state." R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (New Delhi, 1983), Introduction xv.
7. Pierre Claustrus, *Society and the State* (New York, 1977), p. 165.
8. 'Primitive societies are, as Lizor writes with regard to the Yonomami, societies characterized by the rejection of work, "the Yonomami's contempt for work and their disinterest in technological progress per se are beyond question" Ibid., p. 166.
9. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York, 1964), p. 65.
10. Michael B. Whiteford & John Friedl, *The Human Portrait* (1992, London).
11. There are scientists who believe that the woolly mammoth did not become extinct due to the climatic changes as once accepted. They became extinct simply because they were overhunted by cavemen.
12. Herbert Read, *Art and Society* (London 1967), p. 28. As 'human experience is produced by the interaction of three elements: man's primary needs, the primary germs of thought, and natural logic' with 'inventions and institutions the product of this work', these in turn also 'lay bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them'. If we accept these postulates as providing the basis for determining the ongoing nature of human existence we also can recognize the dynamism of surplus production and the drive for it.
13. Not as much as seem to be suggested in Karl Marx, *Das Capital, Vol. I* (London, 1957), p. 372 that these in turn also 'lay bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them'.

14. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London, 1966), p. 250.
15. Melville J. Herskovits, *Economic Anthropology* (New York, 1940), p. 413.
16. William Irwin Thompson, *At the Edge of History*, p. 110.
17. Interestingly, if not perceptively, Thompson claims that this 'model of four seems to be a persistent one; it recalls the rule of four in the Indian caste system, Plato, Vico, Blake, Marx, Yeats, Jung and Mc Luhan. So many people look at reality and come up with a four-part structure that one cannot help but think that it expresses the nature of reality and/or the Kantian a priori pure categories of the understanding'. While adopting this model he justifies it by saying that 'But whether the structure exists in reality or is simply a projection of the categories of the human mind, is of course, the traditionally unanswerable question of science. Since the mind is a part of nature, we make a mistake when we imagine that the act of perception is through a window in which we are on one side and nature on the other. We are in nature, so there is no reason that subjectivity and objectivity should be so dissonantly arranged; it is more than likely that the key in which the nerves and the stars are strung in the same. But if the question is ultimately unknowable, we can be less ambitious by using the model as a heuristic device. If it helps us to see new things and explain some old things, than that should be enough'. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North Eastern Frontier of India*, p. 332 — "The earliest notice of these tribes which Captain Lewin discovered dates from the year 1777...".
20. Shakespear *The Lushei-Kuki Clans* (London, 1912).
21. There were several occasions when the Mizo rice fields suffered the attack of rodents (which multiplied by the thousands overnight) locusts and pests. There were nobody to whom a village could turn to since the relationship with other villages was generally established on hostility and rivalry. Scarcity of food obliged the Mizo to resort to eating of wild plants, roots and shoots. In the face of all this, it was but natural to have a strong drive for surplus production in food.
22. Chhura, a folk and legendary comic hero of the Mizo people, in one of his many escapades, meets up with a witch-Phungpuinu. It all started when Chhura was asked one day by his wily brother Nahaia to exchange their jhumfields. Nahaia was petrified of an old witch who used to scare him in his jhum. She would come swinging out of the jungle in a vine. When Chhura mentioned to Nahaia he was dying of boredom with staying whole days in his jhum with nothing interesting happening, Nahaia cleverly enticed Chhura to exchange their jhum. He guaranteed Chhura that his *jhumfield* would provide Chhura enough excitement and adventure. The next day, Chhura went to Nahaia's plot. It was hot in the afternoon and he soon started dozing away instead of working. His sleep was disturbed by the hooting of the witch trying to frighten him. Chhura was very angry to be awakened from his sleep. He hid in wait of the witch. As she appeared he pounced upon her from behind and seized her by her hair. The old witch begged him to let go of her but Chhura adamantly refused. The witch then told him that she would give him a new hoe if he let go of her. Chhura asked her what was special about the hoe. Can it dig by itself? To this the witch confessed that it could not do so. So Chhura did not release her. The witch then said that she would give him a cornucopia. Chhura asked her what that was. After the witch explained and gave it to him Chhura finally freed her.

23. These are determined by the agricultural work and therefore follow the *jhoom* cycle.
24. The Mizo believed that every animal was attributed with a soul. This ceremony is to effect a pacification of the soul of the animal so as to render it harmless and subservient to the slayer (s). The soul of the animal killed then waits upon the soul of the slayer(s) as a servant or slave in the spirit world. The *Ai*, or pacification, is affected by sacrificing domestic animal accompanied by chants from the shaman. Again, the nature of the animal slain determines the domestic animal(s) sacrificed to pacify it.
25. The tiger was venerated and was considered to be the final arbiter and deliverer of justice. The Mizo only took the offensive against the tigers which indulged in wanton slaughter and pillaging of the village's domestic animals and its inhabitants.
26. A place where the soul of the Thangchhuah was berthed. There is nothing related to this place to suggest similarity to the Christian paradise, though many Mizo have tended to use the words synonymously. Mizo tradition merely says that the person was served husked rice in Pialral. No particular exultation is ascribed to the place, nor is it related to any pantheon or deities. The destination, after death, of the soul of a commoner was different to that of the Thangchhuah. Though the commoner follows the same path as that of the Thangchhuah while journeying to the final destination, the commoner is obstructed by Pu Pawla, who, with his gigantic bow, shoots equally big pellets at the trespasser. Pu Pawla's pellet sends the traveler to a place where it takes not less than seven years for the sores to heal.
27. *Mithikua* has been likened to the Jewish *sheoul*, a place associated with gloom and misery.
28. Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* (Aizawl, 1975), pp. 7-10.
29. B. Sangkhuma in *Mizo Thawnthu* (Aizawl, 1992) alludes that according to Hmar tradition, at this time, the Hmar were taught how to cultivate rice by non Tribals of the plains.
30. Liangkhaia, op. cit., p. 7-8, claims that various hills and villages where the earlier groups had settled in retain their old names. These are Biate, Chhungle, Darnagawn, Khawbung, Khawzawl, Ngur, thiak, Vankal, Zote, etc.
31. Thangur is the name of the progenitor of the long line of chiefs that branched out from the line of Zahmuaka.
32. Shakespear, *The Lushai-Kuki Clans* (London, 1912), p. 14: 'The Lushais have been in possession of firearms for the last sixty or seventy years. These weapons are flintlocks bearing the name of many European makers; many are Tower muskets, and guns bearing the marks of the French Customs Department are not at all rare. These guns came into the country first instance through Burmah, though no doubt some came through Chittagong, and much money must have been made, for the demand was large. When the weapons first began to appear, the Lushais and other western tribes used to obtain them from the tribes on the Burmah border, giving slaves in exchange, a strong male slave being equivalent to two guns.
33. Through the judicious use of salt, the Mizo were able to partially domesticate the wild buffalo, *sial*. Salt wrapped in cloth was proffered to the buffalo. The buffalo became habituated to getting the precious element in this manner. While the owner does not have to feed the buffalo anything else other than this ration of salt, the buffalo is partially reared by the person in this way. It

- is enough to establish the confidence of the buffalo allowing the owner to catch it for slaughter.
34. They made salt by boiling down, in earthen pots, water of brine springs (*chikhur*). These springs did not yield much. Naturally, salt springs were places where skirmishes frequently occurred.
 35. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember: op. cit. (New Delhi, 1993), p. 412.
 36. Shakespear, op. cit., p. 46.
 37. These are forked poles that were planted in front of the house. The whole tree, planted on the ground would measure to about nine feet or so. This was used to hang the skulls of wild animals and human skulls.
 38. There was a system of gaining membership to another clan. This was called *Saphun*. Usually this was availed by those whose number was so small that such member(s) sought the warmth of more dominant clans of that village. The formality was effected by making some sacrifice and swearing an oath of allegiance and commitment in front of the leaders of the dominant clan.
 39. Mc Cabe, p. 52.
 40. Shakespear, op. cit., p. 42, Among the Lushais, each village is a separate State, ruled over by its own *Lal* or chief. Each son of a chief, as he attained a marriageable age, was provided with a wife at his father's expense, and giving a certain number of households from his father's village and sent forth to a village of his own. Henceforth he ruled as an independent chief, and his success or failure depended on his own talents for ruling. He paid no tribute to his father, but was expected to help him in his quarrels with neighbouring chiefs: but when fathers lived long it was not unusual to find their sons disowning even this amount of subordination. The youngest son remained in his father's village and succeeded not only to the village, but also to all the property.
 41. Shakespear, op. cit., p. 58, 'I once asked one of the chiefs who had been very prominent in one of the later wars how many men he had killed with his own hand, and, on my expressing surprise at his admitting that he killed none, he naively remarked, "you see, we chiefs always go last, shouting 'Forward, forward' and by the time I reached the village the people had always run away".'
 42. Shakespear, op. cit., p. 56, mentions an instance when in the war between the Thangluah and the Sailo (1833-1850) the Thangluah massacred a Sailo village at the time when they were celebrating a great feast. As the villagers had gotten too drunk and the guards abandoned their posts to participate in the merriment, the Thangluah warriors infiltrated into the village and merged with the party. At a given signal the Thangluah fell on the drunken villagers and slaughtered them. Mizo folk memory is full of such instances when during the feasting of a village others would avail the opportunity to raid them. These usually end up with the celebrating party's sudden reversal of fortune — revelry turned into tragedy. They ended up dead or prisoners of the raiding party.
 43. Shakespear, op. cit., p. 43.
 44. Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Vol. III, p. 158, shows how Marx himself took note of this when he pointed out that 'it would be wrong to regard them (i.e. primitive communities) as all being one and the same level as in case of geological formations, historical formations constitute a whole series of primary, secondary and tertiary types'.

45. Michael B. Whiteford and John Friedel in *The Human Portrait*, pp. 180–186, show how anthropologists make a fine distinction between agriculturists and horticulturists. Slash and burn cultivators are categorically placed as horticulturists against permanent field cultivators are agriculturists.
46. The Sailo, as already mentioned, established new villages through their sons. During wars with each other they appealed upon their village bucks not to kill the Sailo chiefs of other villages. However, as mentioned, the raids made on each other, generally, even with other clans, were not to annihilate but to get booty. In this connection, kidnapping for ransom was prevalent. The Sailo also tried to inhibit men from the commoners' clans from marrying Sailo women.
47. These were mostly from clans who spoke a different dialect to that of Lusei.
48. T.H. Lewin's *Wild Races of the Eastern Frontier of India* (London, 1870), has an interesting anecdote presented by Lewin when, in 1866, as he and 'a leading Lhoosai Chief' were standing and talking in the village path, 'a drunken Lhoosai' came stumbling along, and finding them somewhat in the way, seized the Chief by the neck and shoved him off the path, asking why he stopped the road. The few seconds that the incident took place must have shocked Lewin and left him bewildered and speechless for sometime, with the embarrassment that must have followed (especially for the chief). It led to Lewin 'asking the Chief for an explanation of such disrespect being permitted'. To which the Chief replied, "On the war-path or in the council I am Chief; and my words are obeyed; behaviour like that would be punished by death. Here in the village, that drunkard is my fellow and equal." Lewin recounted this incident in order to expel myths and hearsay concerning the tribes that were living in and around the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This reference was made by him to question the prevalent notion of the Mizo in relation to their chiefs grossly understood as "a series of petty states, each under a Dictator or Presidents".
49. There was hardly any occasion when the *puithiam* addressed the whole village except on *Kawngpuisiam*.
50. Interestingly, those with the power to divine a cure under a spell, were generally women. They were called *zawlnei*.
51. There are tales with such pathos of the misery suffered by those orphaned and widowed that indicate Mizo society in those days had an inbuilt mechanism of scorning the poor and helpless. The Mizo were not very kind to widows and were often objects of derision. Even till today the word *hmeithai* (widow) evokes mockery and contempt, not compassion.