



MAXFORD DYNAMIC SERIES OF TRIBAL STUDIES

The Tribes of MIZORAM

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The Tribes of **MIZORAM**

Tribal population is mainly dominating in the thinly populated hill areas almost comprising of almost all percent of the total state population. In Mizoram upward of 98 percent of the population is tribal.

Often they practice farming by clearing a field by slash or burn methods, planting it for a number of seasons, and then abandoning it for a lengthy fallow period, rather than the intensive farming typical of most of rural India.

Undoubtedly the least explored and the most pristine state, Mizoram is a bouquet full of unique treasures of Nature. It is one of the most enriched states of flora and fauna, and distinct culture.

Lushais are the aboriginal tribal community of Mizoram. The book will unfold many more interesting things of the tribes of Mizoram with selected photographs.

Editors:



Dr. M.C. Arunkumar is not only known of his critical observation of the North East Societies but also of his creative works expressing his ideas of the people of this region. During his long career of anthropologist in Manipur University, he carried out many projects ranging from tribal studies to social problems relating with political culture and HIV/AIDS. His political plays are staged at state and national festivals by different theater groups. His doctoral work on Women's Crime in Manipur opens a new insight to the women's studies in the region. He is teaching Social Anthropology at present. To his credit, there are a number of academic papers as well as popular articles, number of books.



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VOLUME V
THE TRIBES OF MIZORAM



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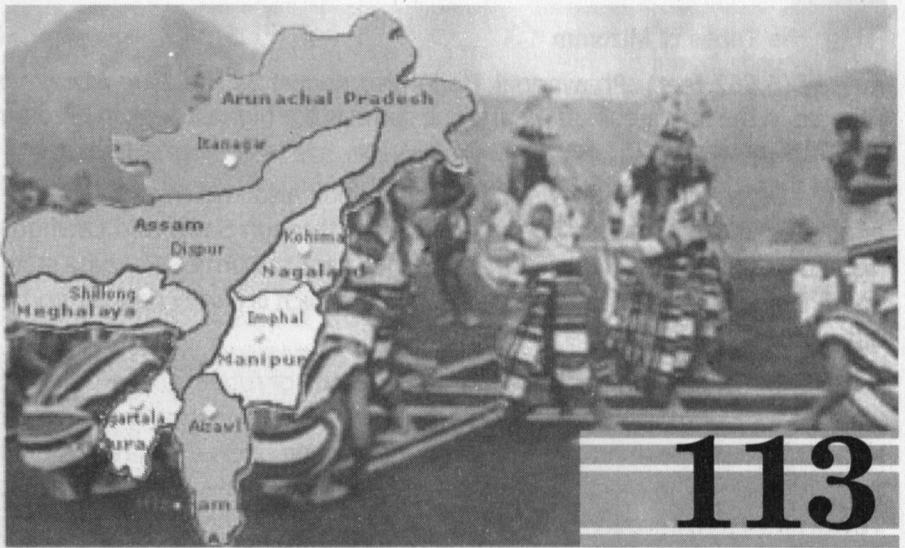
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INTRODUCTION

Mizoram literally means land of the Mizo people and it is one of the eight Sister States in North Eastern India, sharing borders with the states of Tripura, Assam, Manipur and with the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar. Mizoram became the 23rd state of India on 20 February 1987. The capital of Mizoram is Aizawl.

CLIMATE

Mizoram has a mild climate, comfortable in summer 20°C to 29°C (68°F to 84°F) and never freezing during winter, with temperatures from 11°C to 21°C (52°F to 70°F).

The region is influenced by monsoons, raining heavily from May to September with little rain in the dry (cold) season. The average state rainfall is 254 cm (100 in.), per annum. In the capital, Aizawl rainfall is about 208 centimetres (82 in.) and in Lunglei another major center about 350 centimetres (138 in.)

GEOGRAPHY

Mizoram is a land of rolling hills, valleys, rivers and lakes. As many as 21 major hills ranges or peaks of different heights run through the length and breadth of the state, with plains scattered here and there. The average height of the hills to the west of the state is about 1,000 metres (3,281 feet).

These gradually rise up to 1,300 metres (4,265 feet) to the east. Some areas, however, have higher ranges which go up to a height of over 2,000

metres (6,562 feet). Phawngpui Tlang also known as the *Blue Mountain*, situated in the south-eastern part of the state, is the highest peak in Mizoram at 2,210 metres (7,251 feet).

The biggest river in Mizoram is Chhimtuipui, also known as Kaladan. It originates in Chin State in Burma and passes through Saiha and Lawngtlai districts in the Southern tip of Mizoram, goes back to Burma's Rakhine state, and finally enters the Bay of Bengal at Akyab, which is a very popular port in Sittwe, Burma.

The Indian government has invested millions of rupees to set up inland water ways along this river to trade with Burma. The project is known as the Kaladan Multipurpose project. Although many more rivers and streams drain the hill ranges, the most important and useful rivers are the Tlawng, Tut, Tuirial and Tuivawl which flow through the northern territory and eventually join the Barak River in Cachar District.

The Chhimtuipui which originates in Burma, is an important river in the south of Mizoram. It has four tributaries and the river is in patches. The western part is drained by (Khawthlang tuipui) and its tributaries. A number of important towns, including Chittagong in Bangladesh, are situated at the mouth of the river.

Before Independence, access to other parts of the country was only possible through the river routes via Cachar in the north, and via Chittagong in the south. Entry through the latter was cut off when the subcontinent was partitioned and ceded to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1947.

The Palak lake, the biggest in Mizoram is situated in Saiha District which is part of southern Mizoram covering 30 hectares (74 acres). It is believed that the lake was created as a result of an earthquake or a flood. The local people believe that a village which was submerged still remains intact deep under the waters.

The Tamdil lake is a natural lake situated 85 km (53 mi) from Aizawl. Legend has it that a huge mustard plant once stood in this place. When the plant was cut down, jets of water sprayed from the plant and created a pool of water, thus the lake was named Pamdil which means of 'Lake of Mustard Plant'.

Today the lake is an important tourist attraction and a holiday resort. The most significant lake in Mizo history Rih Dil is ironically located in Burma, a few kilometres from the India-Burma border. It was believed that the departed souls pass through this lake before making their way to Pialral or heaven.

GEOLOGY & MINERALS

The folded structure of the Mizoram ranges is at the junction of two moving tectonic plates. (Indian and Burmese Desi Kachar 1974) The folded hilly or mountainous North South belts, with perpendicular faults, comprise sediments of the Surma, Barail, Tipam groups and Aluvium in river beds consisting of deposits of argillaceous and arenaceous sandstones, shale, siltstones and mudstones and greywacke.



Fig. 113.1: A hut in Mizo village

The rock system is weak, unstable, weathered and prone to seismic and weather influence producing landslides. The soft, black to grey rock is used locally for building materials and for low trafficked road construction work. There are no useful minerals of economic significance apart from clays in the River Tlawng beds. Typical soils are sandy loam, clay loam that have been heavily leached due to the high slopes leaving it porous and lacking in minerals or humus.

A number of oil and gas exploration activities have taken place due the geographical condition with which Mizoram has been formed, leading to the possibilities and high expectation that reserves would be confirmed. France, Russia and Cyprus as well as several Indian companies have already signed a 12% oil and 10% gas royalty arrangement with proceeds going direct to Mizoram state on any production (April 2009).

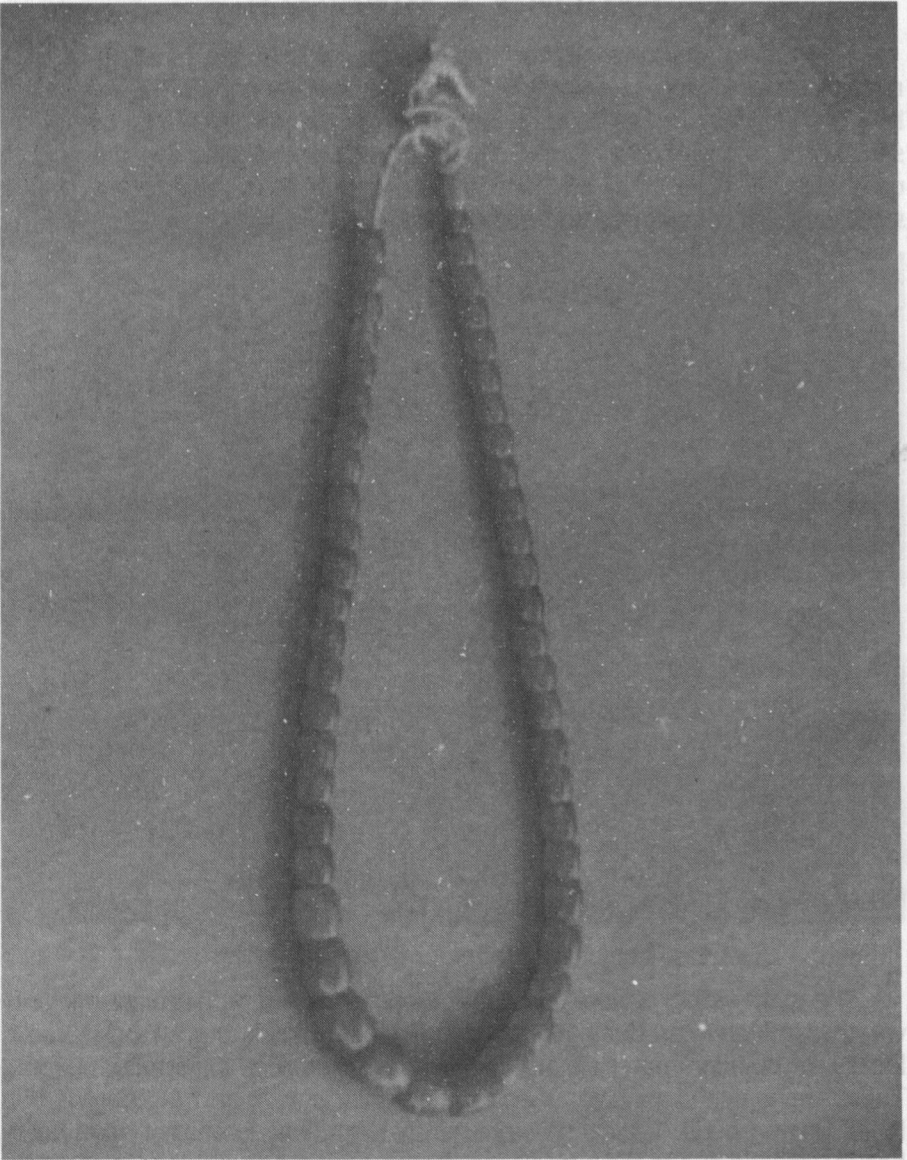


Fig. 113.2: A Mizo neck wear

HISTORY

The origin of the Mizos, like those of many other tribes in the northeastern India, is shrouded in mystery. The generally accepted view is that they are of Mongol descents and were part of a great wave of migration from China and later moved out to India to their present habitat.

It is possible that the Mizos came from Sinlung or Chhinlungsan located on the banks of the Yalung River in China, first settled in the Shan State and moved on in the middle of the 16th century to Kabaw Valley, Khampat, Tahan and the Chin Hills.

The earliest Mizos who migrated to India were known as Kukis. Mizo history in the 18th and 19th century is marked by many instances of tribal raids and head hunting led by the village chieftains. The Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was formed in 1952 and it led to the abolition of chieftainship.

The autonomy however only partially met the aspirations of the Mizo people so representatives of the District Council and the Mizo Union pleaded with the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) in 1954 for integrating the Mizo-dominated areas of Tripura and Manipur with the District Council in Assam.

The tribal leaders in the northeast were unhappy with the final SRC recommendations and met in Aizawl in 1955 to form a new political party, Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU). This group raised their demand for a separate state comprising of all the hill districts of Assam. The demand for a separate Hill state by EITU was kept in abeyance.

The Struggle for Independence

There was little development in the state and many people were in hardship including food shortages. The Mizo National Famine Front dropped the word 'famine' and a new political organization, the Mizo National Front (MNF) was born on 22 October 1961 under the leadership of Laldenga with the specified goal of achieving sovereign independence of Mizoram.

Large scale insurgency broke out on 28 February 1966 at the government installations at Aizawl, Lunglei, Chawngte, Chhimluang and other places and the Government of India responded militarily. This was the first time that India had used its air force to quell a movement of any kind among its citizens.

"In the afternoon of 4 March 1966, jet fighters attacked Aizawl. The next day, a more excessive bombing took place for several hours which left most houses in Dawrpui and Chhinga veng area in ashes," recollected 62-year-old Rothangpuia in Aizawl.

The Mizo National Front was outlawed in 1967 and the demand for statehood increased. The Mizo District Council delegation met prime minister Indira Gandhi in May 1971 and demanded full fledged statehood for Mizoram. The Indian government offered to convert the Mizo Hills into a Union Territory (U.T.) in July 1971. The Mizo leaders accepted on the condition that Statehood occurred sooner rather than later.

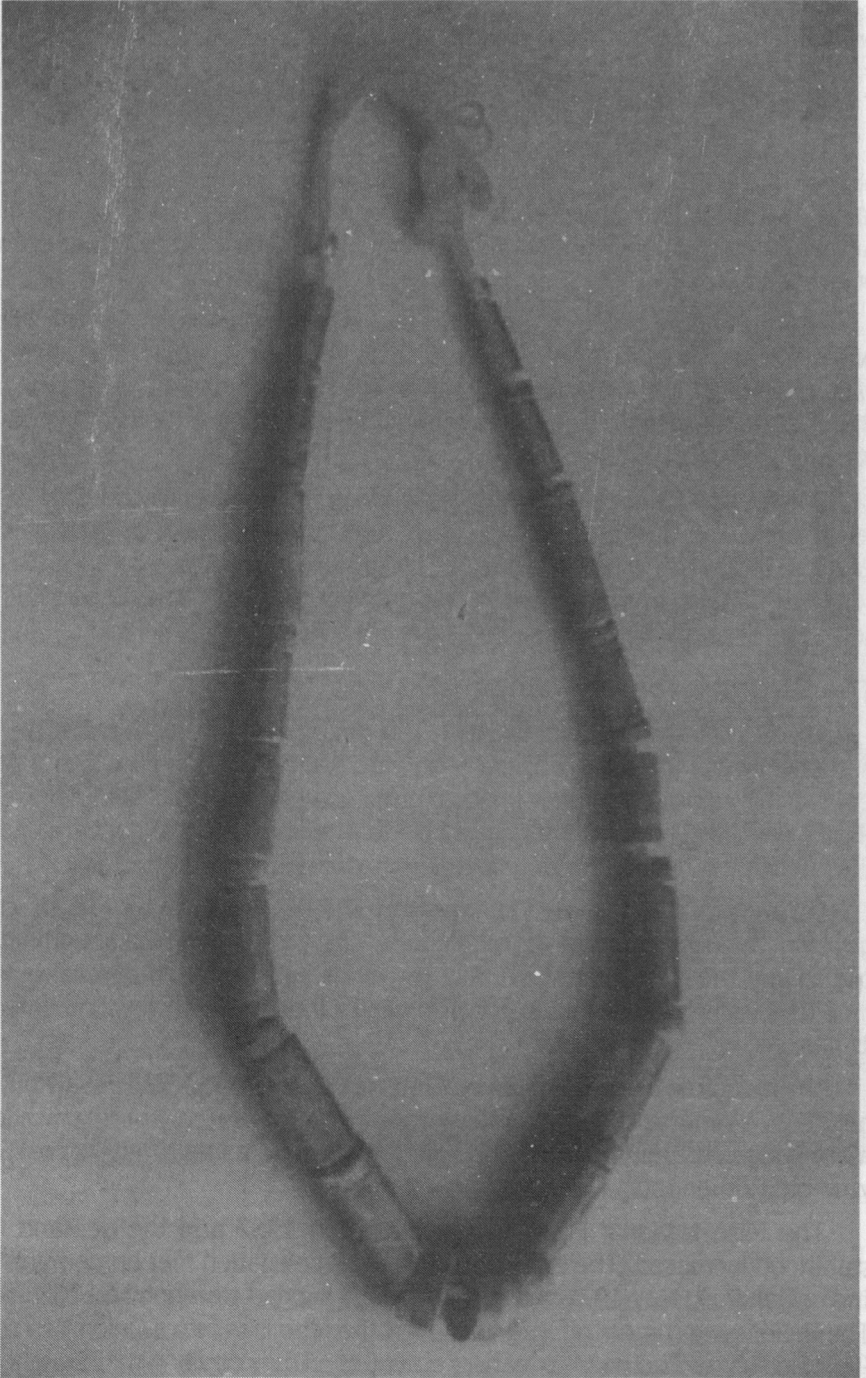


Fig. 113.3: A Mizo necklace

Birth of Mizoram state

Rajiv Gandhi's election to power following his mother's death signaled the beginning of a new era in Indian politics. Laldenga met the prime minister on 15 February 1985. Some contentious issues which could not be resolved during previous talks were referred to him for his advice.

With Pakistan having lost control of Bangladesh and no support from Pakistan, the Mizo National Front which had evolved from the Mizo National Famine Front after the great famine of 1958 used the opportunity that had now presented itself.

New Delhi felt that the Mizo issue had been dragging on for a long time, while the Mizo National Front was convinced that disarming, to live as respectable Indian citizens, was the only way of achieving peace and development.

Statehood was a prerequisite to the implementation of the accord signed between the Mizo National Front and the Union Government on 30 June 1986.

The document was signed by Pu Laldenga on behalf of the Mizo National Front, and the Union Home Secretary R.D. Pradhan on behalf of the government. Lalkhama, Chief Secretary of Mizoram, also signed the agreement.

The formalization of the state of Mizoram took place on 20 February 1987. Chief Secretary Lalkhama read out the proclamation of statehood at a public meeting organized at Aizawl's parade ground. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi flew in to Aizawl to inaugurate the new state. Hiteshwar Saikia was appointed as Governor of Mizoram.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Sociology

The great majority of Mizoram's population is several ethnic tribes who are either culturally or linguistically linked. These ethnic groups are collectively known as Mizos (Mi= People, Zo= Hill). One should note that 'Mizo' is a generic term which denotes a particular group of hillmen who are closely linked culturally and linguistically. Moreover these group of people of hillmen share close physical similarities.

There is an increasing unity among Mizo tribes who are spread throughout the northeastern states of India, Burma and Bangladesh. The Mizos are divided into numerous tribes, however, to name a particular tribe as the largest would be an unreliable task as no concrete census has ever been undertaken till date.

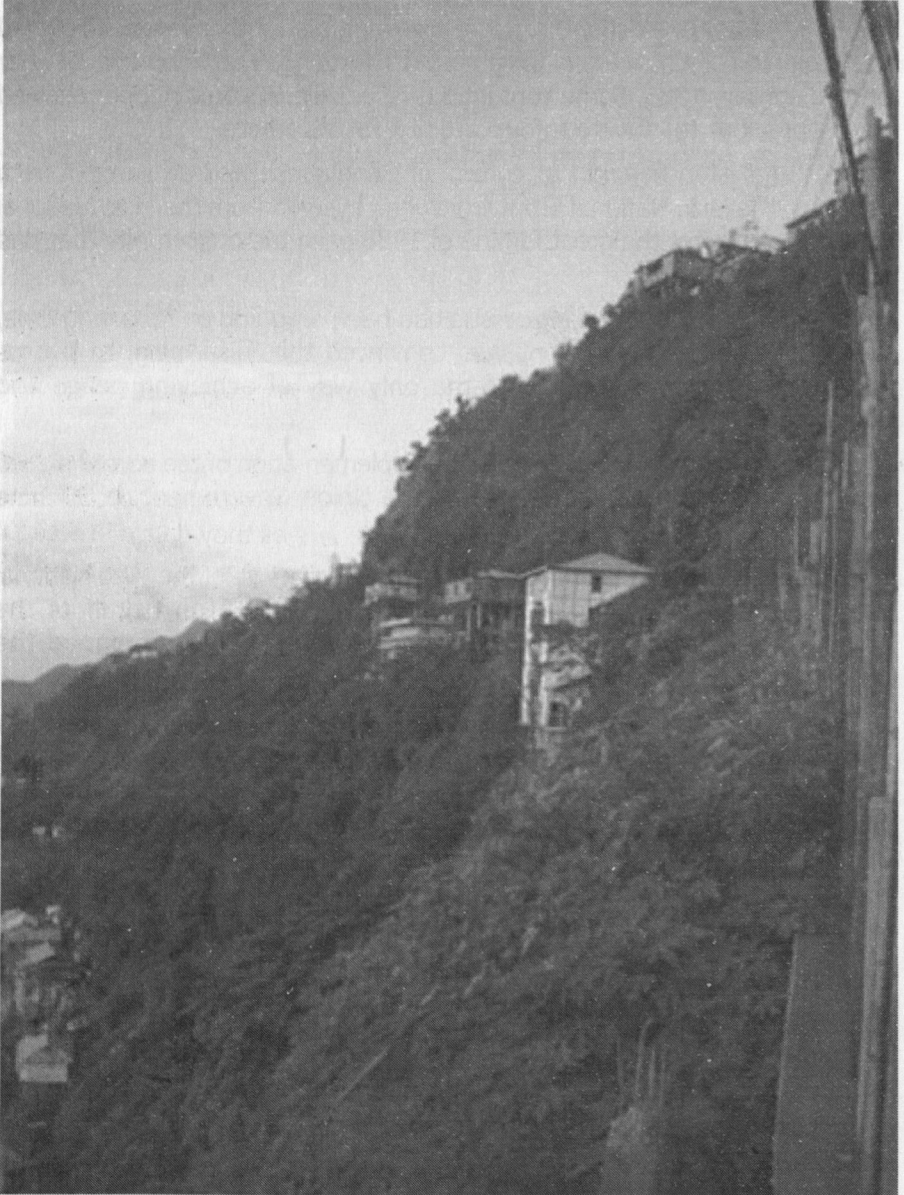


Fig. 113.4: A steep slope accomodating residential homes

In order to better understand the Mizos, a substantial knowledge and understanding of the various Mizo Tribes (Tibes who fall under the term Mizo) is a requirement. The Mizos include Hmar, Lushei, Paite, Lai, Mara etc. a few among others.

MUSIC

These tribes are divided into numerous Clans within themselves, and these Clans are further divided into sub-clans, for example the Hmars are divided into Thiek, Lungtau, Darngawn, Khawbung, Zote etc. These Clans sometimes have slight linguistics differences.

The Riang, a subtribe of Tripuri and the Chakma of Arakanese origin, are a non-Mizo tribe living in Mizoram.

The Mizo people usually suffix their descriptive given names with their tribe.

Mizo traditional tunes are very soft and gentle, with locals claiming that they can be sung the whole night without the slightest fatigue.

The guitar is a popular instrument and Mizos enjoy country style music. Within the church at services drums, are commonly used known locally as "khuang".

They are made from wood and animal hide and are often beaten enough to instigate a trance like state with worshippers as they dance in a circular fashion.

Mizos enjoy singing and even without musical instruments, they enthusiastically sing together, clapping hands or by using other rhythmic methods. Informal instruments are called Chhepchher.

The early Mizos were close to nature and music is still an essential part of cultural life. Whilst gospel music remains an integral part of Mizo culture, Western influence is evident from the contemporary music scene as young people experiment with rock, metal, rap, pop and hip-hop types.

FESTIVALS

Young Mizos are leaving traditional customs and adopting new ways of life which are greatly influenced by western culture.

Christmas is probably the biggest festival and local communities contribute towards large feasts, typically organised by nearby churches, where many hundreds in a local community would eat together.

Traditional Mizo social gatherings revolve around the agricultural calendar.

Mim Kut

The *Mim Kut* festival is usually celebrated during the months of August and September, after the harvest of maize.

Mim Kut is celebrated with great fanfare by (illegally) drinking rice-beer, singing, dancing, and feasting.

Samples of the year's harvests are consecrated to the departed souls of the community.

Chapchar Kut

Chapchar Kut is another festival celebrated during March after completion of their most arduous task of Jhum operation i.e., jungle-clearing (clearing of the remnants of burning).

This is a spring festival celebrated with great fervour and gaiety.

Pawl Kut

Pawl means "Straw" hence pawl kut means a straw harvest festival. It is typically celebrated in December and is another important festival.

DANCES

Cheraw

The most colourful and distinctive dance of the Mizo is called *Cheraw*. Long bamboo staves are a feature of this dance and it is known to many as the Bamboo Dance.

Originally, the dance was performed to wish a safe passage and victorious entry into the abode of the dead (*Pialra*) for the soul of a mother who had died in childbirth.

To dance *Cheraw* takes great skill and alertness. On March 12, 2010 Mizoram also sets Guinness World Records with a 10-minute performance of its famous *Cheraw* "Bamboo Dance", featuring 10,736 participants in 671 groups.

Khuallam

Khuallam was originally a dance performed by honoured guests while entering into the village arena where a community feast was held.

To attain a position of distinction, a Mizo traditionally underwent a series of ceremonies and performed the dance before the guests.

Khuallam is a group dance performed in colourful dress to the tune of gongs and drums.

Chheih Lam

Chheih Lam is the dance done over a round of rice-beer in the cool of the evening.

The lyrics in triplets are usually spontaneous compositions, recounting their heroic deeds and escapades and also praising the honoured guests present in their midst.



Fig. 113.5: Bamboo Dance



Fig. 113.6: Mizo girls

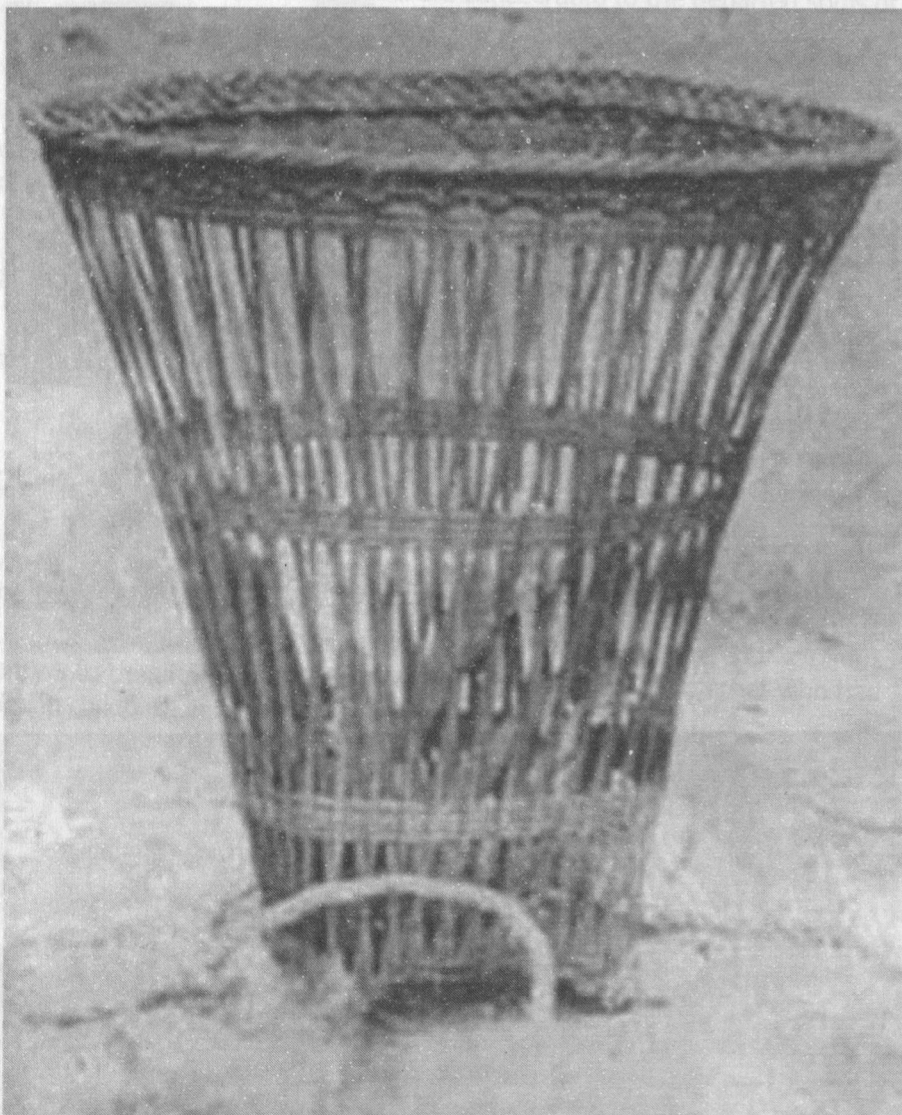


Fig. 113.7: Bamboo basket

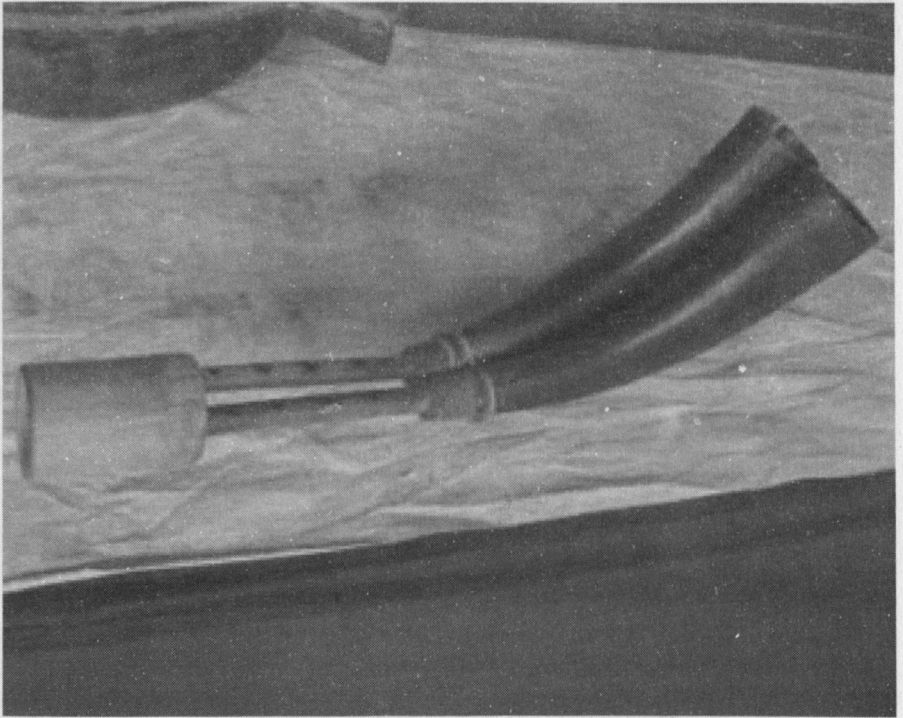


Fig. 113.8: Seki

