

Chapter – 1

Introduction

Bonded labour is the least form of slavery practiced around the world today. It involves the use of people as collateral against debt and other reasons. These people are promised work only until their debt is paid off, but in reality it is almost impossible to buy their freedom. As a result their children often inherited the debt, perpetuating a vicious cycle of bonded labour practices for generations. The history of bonded labour in India is an outcome of certain categories of indebtedness, which have been prevailing for a long time involving certain economically exploited, helpless and weaker sections of society. It originated from the uneven social structure characterized by feudal and semi-feudal conditions. This was also a common phenomenon in the North Eastern region of India. It is in this connection that the present study has been designed. It studies the system of bonded labour in the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram)¹ where one can see them in different forms such as the infamous *Boi* system, the bonded subjugated tribes, the population captured in different raiding expeditions and those purchased from slave traders. The people in general were also subjected to colonial labour machine in which they had to work for colonial establishments as porters for the purpose of constructing roads, buildings, and other menial works as ‘impressed labourers.’ Therefore, this study concerns with the history of the *boi* system on the one hand and on the other the existence of other forms of bonded labour perpetrated upon certain sections of the hill population such as the subjugated tribes under Lusei chiefs, the captives of raids from the plains, the women folk who have been virtually reduced into bonded labour under patriarchal customary practices and labour under the colonial regime.

Defining Slavery, Bonded Labour and Forced Labour

Prior to discussing the bonded labour systems practiced in colonial Lushai Hills, it is imperative to review the definition of certain forms of serfdom which come within the

¹ Throughout this work the colonial term ‘Lushai Hills’ is used which is however coterminous with the present state of Mizoram.

premise of the chapters and their relevance in the hills. These are Slavery, Bonded Labour and Forced or Compulsory labour.

Slavery

Article 1 of the slavery Convention signed at Geneva on 25th September 1926 defines slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised, and the slave trade includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged, and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves.”² Section IV Article 7 of the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, 1956 also defines slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised, and "slave" means a person in such condition or status; "A person of servile status" means a person in the condition or status resulting from any of the institutions or practices mentioned in article 1 of this Convention; "Slave trade" means and includes all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a person acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged; and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves by whatever means of conveyance.”³

Slavery is the condition in which one human being is owned by another. Slaves were considered by law as property or chattel, deprived of most of the rights ordinarily held by free persons. A precise definition of slavery to fit in all societies is not a possible task as the nature and practice of slavery differs from civilization to civilization, nation to nation, and region to region. However, the common characteristics of slavery can be summarized as “Slaves are obliged to live their lives in perpetual servitude to their masters, an obligation that only the master (for the state) can

² *Slavery Convention* signed at Geneva on 25th September 1926, www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/Slavery/Convention.aspx, accessed: 21.09.2014.

³ *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery*, 30th April 1956. www.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/SupplementaryConventionAbolitionofSlavery.aspx, accessed: 21.09.2014.

dissolve; Slaves are under the complete power of their masters, although the state or community may impose certain restrictions upon the master's treatment of the slave; Slaves are property, which may be sold or passed along as an inheritance at the master's discretion; and the condition of slavery is transmitted from parent to child."⁴ According to Orlando Patterson, "slavery is a parasitic relationship between master and slave, invariably entailing the violent domination of a natal alienated or socially dead person. The phenomenon of slavery as an institution is a single process of recruitment, incorporation on the margin of society and eventual manumission or death."⁵ The practice of slavery is not same everywhere. Its forms, extent and uses may also differ with regional differences. However, slavery is a bondage in which the personal freedom of a man is so curbed that life loses its beauty. Bonded labour system, a branch of slavery equally robs a person of his freedom. This type of serfdom prevalent in the sub-continent also spread its evils even in the remotest interiors of the country like the Lushai Hills.

Bonded Labour

The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 (Act No. 19 of 1976) defines bonded labour as "any labour or service rendered under the bonded labour system."⁶ A bonded labourer means "a labourer who incurs, or has, is presumed to have, incurred, a bonded debt", and the system means "the system of forced, or partly forced labour under which a debtor enters, or has, or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor to the effect that,--(i) in consideration of an advance obtained by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants (whether or not such advance is evidenced by any document) and in consideration of the interest, if any, on such advance, or (ii) in pursuance of any customary or social obligation, or (iii) in pursuance of an obligation devolving on him by succession, or (iv) for any economic consideration received by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants, or (v) by reason of his birth in a particular caste or community, he would render... labour or service to the creditor for a specified period or for an unspecified period, either without wages or for nominal

⁴ Sue, Peabody, *Slavery and the Slave Trade, Europe, 1450-1789*: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World, 2004.

⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Harvard University Press, USA, 1982, p. 8.

⁶ The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 (Act No. 19 of 1976) <http://indiacode.nic.in>, accessed: 21.01.2012, p. 2.

wages.”⁷ How far these definitions have been true for different regions are evident in many contemporary works.

Forced Labour

The ILO defines forced labour as “work or service exacted from a person under threat or penalty, which includes penal sanctions and the loss of rights and privileges, where the person has not offered him/herself voluntarily.”⁸ Definitions in the law may not be able to define forced labour due to its complexities, as a person is denied his/her rights in very particular social and economic conditions. An example best suited to describe the law’s difficulty is the Palermo Protocol, which indirectly makes a distinction between human trafficking, a form of forced labour, and smuggling. According to this protocol, human trafficking is defined “as where coercion, threat, force, or deception is used in the recruitment, transportation and harbouring of persons.”⁹ When persons are involved in illegal border crossings through complicity with recruiting agents, it is considered a case of smuggling. But here, none of the above forms may occur. A trafficking scenario is defined by law as a particular set of conditions, setting it apart from smuggling. But practically, situations may differ from the neat separation as when smuggling turns into trafficking due to trickery or deception at some point in the chain, it involves the connivance of actors and agents. At such times, there may be areas between legal concepts and practical situations, underscoring the practical difficulties that can be encountered in measuring/weighing forced labour.

These difficulties notwithstanding, the ILO has categorised “forced labour into five key areas for practical purposes.”¹⁰ These include “slavery and abduction, misuse of public and prison works, forced recruitment, debt bondage and domestic workers under forced labour situations, and internal or international trafficking.”¹¹

⁷ The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 (Act No. 19 of 1976), <http://indiacode.nic.in>, accessed: 21.01.2012, pp. 2-3.

⁸ (ILO 2001a), Forced Labour Convention No. 29 (1930) (ILO 2001a:9).

⁹ This is the protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Trans-national Organized Crime (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2002:7).

¹⁰ This is a rough reading of the concept. A precise description of the terms can be found in the United Nations Economic and Social Council document on the subject (2000).

¹¹ The earlier work by the ILO has eight separate categories of forced labour (ILO 2001a). The five key areas mentioned are used in this work.

Statement of the Problem

The most common and controversial form of bonded labour in the Lushai Hills was the *Boi* system. According to this system there were three classes of *Bois*: (i) *Inpuichhung bois*, (ii) *Chemsen bois*, (iii) *Tukluh bois*, (*inpui*-big house, *chung*-within) viz., those who live in the big house or the chief's house; consisting of persons facing extreme poverty – destitute, widows, orphans and others who had no relatives willing to take them in. *Chemsen bois* (*Chem*-dao, *sen*-red) viz., criminals, debtors and thieves, who, to escape from the consequences of their ill deeds, take refuge in the chief's house. *Tukluh bois* (*tuk*-promise, *luh*-enter) were persons who during war, desert the losing side for certain reasons and joined the victors by promising that they and their children will be *bois* of the conquerors.

When the controversy on the *Boi* system continued to be debated among scholars, there were however, other forms of bonded labour practiced in Lushai Hills during the period under study which seldom attracted serious attention. The bonded labour undertaken by the subjugated tribes were generally overlooked despite the fact that they constitute the largest number of bonded population in the Lushai Hills before colonial occupation. They belonged to the conquered tribes who were compelled to submit before the paramount Sailo chiefs as their *Bois* and since then remained under their subjugation virtually losing their mobility and other customary rights. They included both the population belonging to the Lusei and non-Lusei tribes. Regarding their relative familiarity with the *Tukluh bois* as in their state of subjugation and the nature of their bondage, they were probably understood as *Tukluh bois*. But from its essence and conception this subjugated/conquered tribes were different from *Tukluh bois* who were generally known to be people who voluntarily deserted their village and willingly submitted to the more powerful or the victors in war.

Another category of bonded labourers where no serious attention was paid was the captives of war and raids. They were captured from the plains and other rival tribes in the various “raiding” expeditions which make the name of Luseis (in)famous all through the nineteenth century colonial records. Both the categories were clubbed under the local term *Sal*. They were reduced to virtual servitude as the mere property of their captors who were sold and bought as commodities, could be killed as animals if the master wishes so, could become concubines to the master in case of a female *sal*, yet

live lives as part of the family, marry as circumstances permitted but with no social and ritual status. The main role of this *Sal* was to work first for the master sincerely, tirelessly and without any murmur besides trying to meet his own ends. Col. T.H. Lewin noted that the real slaves in Lushai Hills were those “men and women taken prisoners by force in war and sold like cattle from master to master.”¹² They were virtually different from those of the general *bois* and indeed could not come under the category of the *Boi* system.

Besides, the labour system under the colonial regime was also a less attended subject in the study of labour history in the Lushai Hills which is overwhelmed by the (in)famous *Boi* system. People in general were under virtual bondage under colonial regime of its infamous labour machine known as “impressed labour” system. Scholars in general were impressed by the colonial instrument of discourse in its various records that since these labourers who worked on the various colonial projects in the hills and beyond were paid petty daily wages, they could not come under the category of bonded labourers. However, looking from the standpoint of its nature of recruitment and its very inception, the so-called colonial “impressed labour” system was one of the most oppressive and obnoxious labour system to the local people during the colonial period. The fact that everyone, including the proud chiefs, were compelled to work for the various colonial state projects as an instrument of subjugation was indeed the major source of discontentment during the period. The nature of compulsion, even when the hill people were in the peak hour of their cultivation or otherwise made the system as servile and oppressive as other bonded labour systems.

One may keep on extending the issue of labour system to include even the women of the hills who had shouldered the whole economic activities of the hills along with the so-called slaves. These womenfolk in general, were subjugated under the patriarchal set up of the hill society although they were the backbone of economic activities in the hills and served, along with the “slaves,” as virtual labour force. Lewin noted that “Upon the women falls the whole burden of the bodily labour by which life is supported. They fetch water, hew wood, cultivate and help to reap the crop, besides spinning, cooking, and brewing.”¹³ In this sense women have also formed part of the

¹² Lt. Col. T. H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, H. Allen & Co, Waterloo London, 1870, p. 52.

¹³ T. H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, Reprint, TRI, Aizawl, 1870, p. 134.

labour forces which invariably falls under the category of bonded labours sanctioned by customs. But this study will skip this last issue and other related labour systems that prevailed in Lushai Hills although the issue will come out again and again during the course of discussion throughout the work.

The central problem of labour issue arises from the very nature of colonial discourse on the tribes. The emergent colonial political economy in the hills divorced kinship from politics and focused on the extraction of labour and taxation regime to refine hierarchies. It was a common practice in colonial period to reduce many forms of bonded labour to a customary practice so that the colonial regime got their much needed labour services. Although colonial officials denounced debt bondage, they did not try to eradicate it because it generated large profits from India's cheap labour markets. British India officially abolished slavery in 1843, but debt bondage continued to flourish. "Slavery became defined as corporeal and involuntary while debt bondage became defined as non-corporeal and voluntarily entered."¹⁴ Thus in the prevailing colonial discourse, "Indian slavery was seen as a relatively harmless institution that even served some positive social functions."¹⁵ It was under such colonial censorship of certain inhuman practices that the issue of bonded labour is located and studied in this work. In this respect, the labour practices among the hill tribes of Northeast India pose an important field of study.

The study takes the view that bonded labour is not an exclusive heritage of the valley state system. It did occur, and was sometime even worse than the plains, in the hills among the *tribals*. The study takes the position that bonded labour is very much part of the social and cultural practices among the hill tribes. Whereas some of the bonded labour practices in the hills in pre-colonial Lushai Hills came to an end by the force of colonialism itself, such as bonded labour undertaken by subjugated tribes and the captives from raids, some (the *Boi* system) continued to thrive even under the roof of colonial regime in the name of "customs" while there was also an introduction of an un-commutable form of bonded/forced labour system under the colonial rule. This study is therefore, an investigation not only on the prevailing labour systems in the Lushai

¹⁴ Prakash, Gyan, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 146-47.

¹⁵ Chatterjee, Indrani et al., (ed), *Slavery & South Asian History*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, U.S.A, 2006, p. 225.

Hills during the colonial period but also a critical study on the colonial discourse of different forms of labour systems in the Lushai Hills in particular and among the Northeast tribes in general.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are examined by this study:

- the history of bonded labour system in the Lushai Hills during the colonial period
- the *boi* system practiced in Lushai Hills
- the state of subjugated tribes under Sailo chiefs
- the state of those captured in different wars, raids and purchased from slave traders
- the state of colonial “impressed labour” system during colonial period
- the discourses (debate and controversies) on bonded labour system in the Lushai Hills
- the nature, forms and extent of bondage to the group of bonded labourers noted above.

Methodology

This study is an empirical research based mainly on archival materials. However, oral traditions are also taken into account whenever required to substantiate the archival materials necessary for analysis in the subject under study. Secondary materials are also used in large amount for discussion on the various issues of bonded labour in the Lushai Hills. For collecting the required archival materials field works have been undertaken in the Mizoram State Archives, Aizawl, Assam State Archives, Dispur, Guwahati, and National Archives of India, New Delhi. Records of Foreign Department, Home Department and miscellaneous files, census reports, and other related files were

consulted from the above archives. For oral sources, I have interviewed certain knowledgeable persons in Mizoram and North Cachar Hills district apart from utilizing the available written materials initially adapted from oral accounts, written both in English and *Duhlian/Lusei* dialect. Quantitative data has been presented with the help of tables wherever possible to bring out the subject on more concrete form. Overall, the approach taken is both analytical and narrative in essence.

Review of Literature

Patrick Manning's "*Slavery and African Life*¹⁶" is the author's modern interpretation essay on African history. The study seeks to reconstruct the past reality of slavery and the African life. The book covers the period from the 16th century onwards. As an introduction to the subject of slavery in Africa, he argues that many studies on slavery in Africa have rarely mentioned the continent and mostly have concentrated on the plantation slavery in the Americas. Slavery and African life according to Manning is an attempt to summarize the impact of slavery on Africans. The study places slavery in Africa in a wider global context. The book is based on three pillars: it looks at the African economic and social life and how it was transformed by the slave trade from the 7th to the 19th century. He argues that the slave trade was not a "long misfortune for Africa" but, a series of transformative misfortunes. External transformations came mainly from European, Middle Eastern and Asian demand for slaves and thirdly, transformation from within Africa itself through conflict among various societies."¹⁷

The author criticizes the past studies of African slavery that concentrates on the American plantations. "He concentrates on the demography of slavery from the point of fertility, mortality, and migration of slaves. He focuses on the economics of slavery, paying a close attention on the price of the slaves. He also concentrates on the transformation of slave institutions within Africa. Finally, he analyses the ideology of slavery within Africa."¹⁸

Divided into three main geographical areas: the Western Coast, the Eastern Coast and what is left of the continent which he calls Savannah and Horn, the author divides slavery in Africa into three categories: "the Occidental trade, Oriental trade, and

¹⁶ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental and African Slave Trades*, Volume 67 of African Studies, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

¹⁷ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, pp. 8-9, 26.

¹⁸ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, p. 9.

the African trade. Although using old terms such as Occidental and Oriental, these terminologies have two components: cultural and geographical. Occidental trade covered all the trade conducted by Europeans in the Atlantic slave trade and the Indian Ocean slave trade where slaves were destined to the Americas and Mascarene islands. The Oriental slave trade covers all trades passing through the Sahara and Indian Ocean which were destined towards the Arabian Peninsula, Persian Gulf, India, and the Ottoman Empire. The third category, he calls the African slave trade which he applies to the slaves destined for other parts of Africa.”¹⁹

The book covers a period of five centuries. It has nine chapters; dealing with the “political economy of slavery in Africa, reasons for enslavement of Africans, where the big question is “why Africa?,” demographic effects of slavery where he asks questions like ‘why are Africans more visible in the Americas than for example, the Ottoman empire? He also provides diagrams showing the process of enslavement and enslaved people in the slave society, “model in schematic form” it is confusing for a non-mathematics major to follow, let alone understand it.”²⁰ He used graphs to explain the quantitative impact of the slave trade; showing variables like sex-ratio, slave exports and so on. These graphs are supported to illustrate the impact of slavery on the African people. Through geographical simulations, he tells us that inferences collected from the simulated data show the effects of catastrophes like famine, drought, and epidemics paled in comparisons to the profound effects on slaves.

Another important contribution on slavery in India is the work of Indrani Chatterjee on “*Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*.”²¹ This is an outcome of her incessant quest on gender, slavery and law in colonial India. The author studied the past and present societies in South Asia which have been dominated by the concept of communities and households made up of biologically and emotionally connected relatives. She shows how this apparent bedrock is unstable and theorizations based upon it are blind to the continual flow of slaves across the supposedly impermeable barriers of descent, caste and community. With the aid of evidences drawn from the ruling households of eastern India in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, she illustrates how the slaves contributed to the institution of family and kinship. She

¹⁹ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, p. 10.

²⁰ Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life*, pp. 39-40.

²¹ Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

argued that slave formations and practices lay at the heart of ideologies by which “elite” classes could be separated from non-elites and genealogical kin could be separated from non-kin and illegitimate kin. She also contended that colonial legislators left these ‘domestic’ slaves out of the abolitionist agenda while simultaneously erecting standards of legitimacy, proofs of marriage and purity of descent that eroded the position of those that were slave-born in pre-colonial times.

On slavery in South Asia Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton’s edited volume *Slavery and South Asian History*, is informative especially on the *Boi* system of Lushai Hills. Generally the volume addresses the remarkable range of types of slavery that appeared across a thousand years of South Asian history. The volume defines and helps one to understand various terms like *ghulam*, *banda*, *laundi*, *boi* and *dasa*, meaning slaves or those different from members of their society. Since each instance of slavery in South Asia was shaped by a unique conjunction of contingent factors, the essays in this book places each one in its own unique context. The most important chapter with regard to this proposed study is chapter 12 titled ‘*Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence*’ by Indrani Chatterjee, where she deals with the ‘*Boi*’ system of the Luseis in North East India. The author concludes with the view of the colonial administrators and missionaries regarding the *Boi* custom. She has persuasively dealt with how the imperial censorship of the use of ‘slavery’ for *boi* system was made during the colonial period. Chatterjee shows how the *boi* children and women particularly disliked the *boi*-hood, avoided it as much as they could, and how one accumulated their debts, beginning from their parents, own, and to their children, and how payment of fixed amounts could not easily buy their freedom. She also shows “how the *bois* lost their ritual status, disposed from kinship network, and the gradual ‘stripping away of personhood’ in lifetime and end with ‘non-being’ by death. Thus showing how physical proximity to the chief as *boi* only increased one’s ‘debt’ and ‘exiled’ a person from one’s family and clan.”²² She concludes that the *Boi* system was very much a slavery system which the colonial regime tried to unmake ‘a slave a slave.’

The study of bonded labour has gone a long way. One path-breaking work is that of Gyan Prakash in his book “*Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in*

²² Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence,’ in *Slavery and South Asian History*, Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton (eds), pp. 296-97.

*Colonial India.*²³ He argues that ‘bonded labour,’ as it is understood today, came into being during the colonial period of India. He outlines the contentious ‘genealogies’ of bonded labour, its historical roots, causes, effects and shows how the twin powers of colonialism and capitalism have transformed ‘Kamias’ (serfs) into “bonded labourers.” Prakash shows that the colonial administration in India misrepresented bonded labour as a cultural or regional tradition. Colonial reports typically explained indebtedness as the result of expenses incurred by costly customs associated with marriages, funerals and religious ceremonies. But Prakash interprets these explanations as an attempt, on the part of the colonial administration to conceal its complicity in creating the bonded labour system.

Akin to the situation of the hill tribes several studies have also contributed towards the understanding of the subject under study. One interesting case is the study on the Tamil labourers in Sri Lanka by Oddvar Hallup in his *Bonded Labour: Caste and Cultural Identity among Tamil Plantation Workers in Sri Lanka*. He shows how the descendants of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka, whose forefathers has been brought over as ‘coolies’ to work first on coffee then in tea and rubber plantations, have retained their caste and cultural identity despite the long separation from their homeland. He concludes that despite some minor changes such as the abolition of the Kangani system under which they were recruited and the increasing emphasis on ethnic identity in Sri Lanka, a kind of caste system has been maintained within the community. This has been facilitated by their geographical and social isolation in the hill country. This is interesting in that such continuity seems to be minimal in the case of the isolated hills in Northeast where absorption apparently has been the dominant form of bonded labour.

In “*Bonded Labour-Justice through Judiciary*²⁴” (1997), Mahaveer Jain, Fellow and Head of the National Resource Centre on Child Labour at the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, reports his findings to the Supreme Court of India, which had appointed him as a socio-legal investigating commissioner in 1988 to enquire into and report on the extent to which the twenty-one directives issued by the Apex Court vide their order dated 16.12.83 had been implemented. This was the outcome of a writ petition No.2135 filed by Bandhua Mukti Marcha, an NGO in February 1982 against

²³ Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge, 1990.

²⁴ Mahaveer Jain, *Bonded Labour: Justice through Judiciary*, Nataraj Books Publication, 1997.

the Government of India and others stating cases of bonded labour in Kattan, Anangpur and Lakkarpur areas of Faridabad district of Haryana. This report brings to light how the author had met the labourers –interstate migrant workers recruited from the states of Bihar, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, brought in by agents of quarry contractors of Faridabad. However, they have been caged and confined without their faults. The report throws light on the stark realities of the working and living conditions of these quarry workers. They suffered from insufficient clean water, safety equipments, first-aid, freedom and security in their day-to-day lives, facilities for the education of their children, non-medical aid to workers suffering from pulmonary diseases and non-payment of compensation in accident cases. Observations made in this regard are many such as; there is a creditor and debtor in case of quarry workers, the workers worked for the benefit of contractors on account of loans/debts and advance taken earlier from them, wages received were not commensurate with the efforts of the quarry labourers, they were tied to the contractors and had no freedom of movement with regard to seeking employment elsewhere so long as their debt remained unpaid.

The later 1990s witnessed another great work in the form of *Bonded Labour in India: A Socio Legal Study* by Nainta Rishpal, where, he states that bonded labour which had remained largely confined to the agricultural sector has now spread to other areas like stone quarries, brick-kilns, construction sites, forestry, carpet-weaving, fishing, bidi-making etc.

In the late 1990s, we find another great work on the subject in the form of *Bonded Labor: Tackling the System of Slavery in South Asia*,²⁵ authored by Siddhart Kara. This was his second book on the subject, a follow up of the first, titled *Sex Trafficking-Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. The first book had exploded with the new form of slavery - sex where hundreds and thousands of women were caught, trafficked, plundered, and devastated only to be disposed of when they lose their flavour. Unlike any other industries like narcotics, the sex slaves do not need processing. They are just to be consumed and this made it easier and more profitable. The present book in discussion is an outcome of his 11 years of research in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh where he delves into the ever extending ancient mode of slavery in which he states that six out of every ten slaves in the world were

²⁵ Siddhart Kara, *Bonded Labor: Tackling the System of Slavery in South Asia*, Columbia University Press, 2014.

instrumental in generating 17.6 billion in 2011. Of these, hand-woven- carpet making, tea and rice farming, construction, brick manufacturing and frozen-shrimp production are the industries studied and investigated by the author. He witnessed millions of impoverished men, women, children who contributes to the global market at a wage next to nothing. The author links this chain of business directly to western consumers. Kara's analysis encompasses human trafficking, child labour and global security. Although he is a bit weak on the solutions he offered regarding slavery, the book is a valuable resource for human rights activists, policy-makers, legal experts, and business with supply chains in developing countries and for academics.

Still, the 21st century continues to produce stark realities of the bonded force. Kevin Bales in 1999 came out with his book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, updated with a New Preface.²⁶ The author states that more than 27 million people are trapped in one of India's oldest social institutions. His is a disturbing story of slavery where people as mere commodities could be disposed when not in use. Rishpal's bonded labourers of the stone-quarries, brick-kilns, construction sites etc., that were cited above have been promoted and taken up to the brothels of Thailand, and to the offices of multinational corporations. His investigations in Brazil, Mauritania, Thailand, Pakistan, India, reveals the tragic emergence of a new slavery linked intricately to the global economy.

Unlike the old forms of slavery that were long term investments, the new slaves are cheap, requiring little care and are very much disposable. Population explosion, revolution of economic globalisation and modernised agriculture that displaced farmers, rapid economic changes in developing countries that bred violence and corruption are, according to the author, key factors that help in the rise of this new slavery. His case-studies present actual slaves, slave-holders, and public officials. He notes the complex economic relationships of modern slavery where liberation of these can be a bitter victory when the result turns to starvation as freed bonded labourers usually face problems in finding work. He offers suggestions for the solution of slavery by urging his readers to join and help and support organisations like Anti-Slavery International, the Pastoral Land Commission in Brazil, and Human Rights Commission in Pakistan.

²⁶ Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, University of California Press, London, 1999.

He also urges researchers to follow up leads, ask hard questions of political leaders, corporations and so on in order to free bonded slaves.

Regional studies on the Lushai Hills known now as Mizoram deals almost with every discipline among which, notable works include that of colonial administrators. In this regard, a compact work of immense value describing the various communities and clans of Lushai Hills, their relation with one another, conflicts and peace, servitude and domination, society and politics of the hill tribes is dealt with by Lt. Col. J. Shakespear in his *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*.²⁷ A simple straight forward descriptive work that begins with the general aspects of the people of his theme, climbs to the domestic life, lingers in the law and customs and advances to the spiritual aspect of the people. He enlivens his reader to folklore of the hill people where he projects the simplicity and innocent believes of the hill tribes and the importance they paid to certain traditional customs. The author then suddenly takes a plunge at the different tribes and communities inhabiting the land, their division of clans, feuds that created political aspirations and the subsequent creation of chieftainship. He then takes his reader to the clan wars that led to the birth of certain dominant clans and resultant subjugation of weaker clans. Shakespeare's work is an important source of information for the first hand reports it contain. The monograph is most important and handy in imparting the customary practices and socio political situation of the hill tribes within the discussed society and the district as a whole. It is a must for study on the Mizo group of tribes. However, he being an appointed administrator with no background of scholarly training, his approach is essentially descriptive, lacking queries for the better understanding of societies in terms of their process of formation and subsequent development.

*The Lushai Chrysalis*²⁸ is an account of Lusei culture, government, and social change written by a civil servant who was for many years in charge of the Lushai Hills area of Assam. The people numbering some 150,000 at the time were organised under a number of hereditary chiefs whose power during the British administration in the hills was diminishing. After opening chapters on the history and culture of the area, including good first hand cases of legal administration and conflicts between local custom and missionary zeal, the author enters into an analysis of the problems of cross-cultural administration. It is this which is the most valuable part of the book, giving an

²⁷ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Reprint, 2008.

²⁸ A.G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, Reprint, TRI, Aizawl, 2003.

enlightened administrator's account of his problems vis- a vis (a) the administered, (b) the non-official but socially important missionaries and (c) the Home Office.

The growing importance of literacy and extensive wartime overseas experience of the young men dating from the first World War have contributed, with the missions, to important changes in the old cultures which often create problems not only for the Luseis but also for the administrator-messianic movements, white collar clerks who consider themselves superior to the older less acculturated chiefs (a phenomenon termed "black coatism"), mission concepts of right as against Lusei concepts of right, and the British administrators' problems in legal cases resulting there from.

In the chapter called "Lushai Chrysalis" the author presents a program for cultural re-adaptation of the local people in relation to Western influence, which includes visions for the development of cottage industries and specific exhortations for government to avoid the development among the Luseis of dependent ward ship attitudes (his term is "slave mentality"). Despite awareness of and concern for local cultural traditions and the need to strengthen indigenous social structures, the "Ten Point Code" that the British government has given the young people to develop a sense of united nationalism and pride, seems remarkably British in cultural tone.

This report of Lushai Hills before the Japanese invasion provides the student of cultural contact and cross-cultural administration with a valuable case study. Indeed, *Lushai Chrysalis* can probably be regarded as a type case of the acculturative process in a number of the hill areas in what used to be British Burma. The resulting transitional cultures with their inner conflicts and discontents form one of independent Burma's more difficult problems.

Sangkima's *Mizos: Society and Social Change* is a comprehensive study of the structure of the Mizo society before the advent of the British to the end of their rule. Himself a Mizo, the author had dealt fairly with the origin, habitat, ethnography, traditions of the population and discussed the changes the state had undergone during and after the British rule. The book is divided into seven chapters, where the first deals with the scope and nature of the study, the people and their origin, historical background and so on. The second describes the pre- British Mizo Society where he deals with the family structure, chieftainship, *zawlbuk*, *boiship/boihood* or (slavery), religious beliefs, sacrifices, feasts, festivals and the village life. Forces influencing

social changes and areas of changes form the flesh of chapter three and four respectively, whereas the next chapter examines how the Mizo society had responded to changes that have been introduced in their life. The author takes us to the epilogue in Chapter six acquainting the reader to the present status of Lusei (Mizo) society, and the last chapter concludes the work.

Sociology of the Mizos by H. L. Malsawma is the latest work providing as much accuracy as the author could, on the subject of the Mizos, formerly known as Lushais. The study is an attempt to investigate and analyse the basic Mizo social systems, history, life-structure, development and establishment of political and social institutions, rules of conduct by which the society has been regulated and maintained besides other varied systems and norms. The author has explained that the term ‘sociology’ has been used to acquire systematised and deeper knowledge of the diverse social systems of the indigenous life of the Mizos. Mention may be made here that Chapter three is dedicated to Slavery (*Bawih*) system of the Luseis where the society’s system of slavery is improved over that done by earlier British ethnographers and historians both in India and Mizoram. A number of books that have been written in the name of Kuki, Chin, Lushai and Thado by foreign writers before independence and before annexation of the Lushai Hills were done through local interpreters with little knowledge or data collected through native illiterate informants which are therefore, according to the author, ‘unreliable, confusing and sometimes obscure and contradictory’²⁹ for which they could not write any of the social systems ‘authentically.’ His sole endeavour in this work is to present a coherent picture of the Mizo tribal life- its history, traditional life, culture, practices and varied social norms, customary laws, evolution, changes, striving, trials and achievements.

The book is an improvement over the existing publications and literature on many topics of the Mizo life. The author had undertaken extensive tours in the interior places to collect data relevant and original. It is an improvement on the works of native authors like K. Zawla, Zatluanga, L. Hranglien Songate, V.L. Siana and B. Lalthangliana. His theories are based on “linguistic affinities” and “descendants of Israelites” besides the already existing ones. Formation and origin of clans is another area where the author made new discoveries. Regarding traditional structure of the

²⁹ H.L. Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, Spectrum, Guwahati, 2002, p.viii.

studied population, the work is an exclusive presentation. Clan endogamy and family exogamy which have never been studied by earlier scholars is dealt with. Though not properly analysed, the work is an authentic analysis of the Mizo language compared to those done by native writers such as Buchhawna Khiangte, K. Zawla, and C. Z. Huala. The possibility of abrupt conversion of Mizos to Christianity has been explained as owing to lack of tenacity of the Hindu or Muslim religion and the transformation from “Head-Hunting to Halleluiahs Chorus” is a marked development thoroughly surveyed by the author. A book with a vast difference, it can safely be said that this work enjoys tremendous superiority compared to any other on the subject available.

Lawmsanga’s *A Critical Study on Christian Mission with Special Reference to Presbyterian Church of Mizoram* is the author’s Ph. D thesis in which he dedicates a part of his second chapter on ‘Mizo slavery.’ He described the Lusei slave system as having two classes- captive slaves and non-captive slaves where he placed the *Bois* in the second category. He gave a short sketch of the system, discussed the colonial and missionary views on the institution, gave an account of the chiefs who had freed their slaves under the influence of Christianity, and discussed the post-colonial reading of the system that later underwent modifications. Lawmsanga looks at the controversy over the slavery system in connection with the gospel and culture in the Mizo context. “Are the Mizo *bois* really slaves?” This was the controversial question which he answered by quoting J. H. Lorrain’s inability to change the meaning of the word to ‘pauper’ or ‘retainer’ but maintaining ‘slave’ in his dictionary. He states: “therefore, the answer is ‘yes’, the *bawis* are slaves.”³⁰ He stated both missionary and colonial views regarding the system of slavery in the Lushai Hills. He finally concludes that “If the *bawi* controversy is studied from the postcolonial perspective, the Colonial administrators, with good intentions tried to protect the Mizo custom, tradition and culture for administrative purposes. Fraser criticized the unjust social structure in the light of the Bible and the British Law by pinpointing the slavery system.”³¹

Despite emphasizing on the charitable side of the institution, some works invariably recognized the fact that the position of *bois* in the society was different from other people in a big way. For instance, Varghese and Thanzawna in *History of the*

³⁰ Lawmsanga, *A Critical Study on Christian Mission With Special Reference to Presbyterian Church of Mizoram*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010, p. 111.

³¹ Lawmsanga, *A Critical Study on Christian Mission With Special Reference to Presbyterian Church of Mizoram*, p. 110.

Mizos talks about “a mithun for the price of freedom or changing master-chief, that the bride price of their daughters is the perquisite of the chiefs, and that children born from them invariably become *boi* on the principle of what they called “physical surrender without choice.”³² A part from bringing out this fact in clear terms they refused to talk about the *difficulties* the *bois* had found in getting their liberty like payment of one mithun for a *boi*. When the fruit of all their labour was reaped by the chiefs, it was not possible to find any other source of income for a *boi* to purchase his freedom. Hence, the *bois* continued to be *bois* and worst, their children continued to remain *bois* till they were emancipated during the colonial period. In this context, the wide doors of the chiefs were but the gateway to the hell of bondage and servitude.

Organization of chapters

The thesis is divided and organized into seven chapters. The gist of each chapter is given below.

Chapter-1: Introduction

This introductory chapter deals with the concept of bonded labour from the various existing literature, review of these literature and of those studies on the labour system of Lushai Hills, provided the historical, social, political and economic background of the Lushai Hills and the introduction to the various chapters of the work. In introducing bonded labour it found that it is the least form of slavery practised around the world today involving the use of people as collateral against debt and other reasons. Bonded labour and similar practices like peonage, debt slavery, serfdom, contract labour have been prevailing throughout the history of mankind. It originated from the uneven social structure characterized by feudal and semi-feudal conditions. This was also a common phenomenon in the North Eastern region of India. A modernization of the feudal system in America after the Civil War was ‘Peonage.’ It persisted in rural areas of India, Pakistan and Nepal. Tea and jute plantations in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam bind women who constituted the bulk of bonded labourers. Women are also forced to work in prostitution as a way to pay off the ‘debt’ they acquire when they are illegally smuggled to destinations.

³² C.G. Verghese and R.L. Thanzawna, *History of the Mizos*, Volume- 1, Vikash, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 39-41.

Bonded labour is defined as “any labour or service rendered under the bonded labour system,”³³ a bonded labourer means “a labourer who incurs, or has, is presumed to have, incurred, a bonded debt”, and the system means “the system of forced, or partly forced labour under which a debtor enters, or has, or is presumed to have, entered, into an agreement with the creditor to the effect that,--(i) in consideration of an advance obtained by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants (whether or not such advance is evidenced by any document) and in consideration of the interest, if any, on such advance, or (ii) in pursuance of any customary or social obligation, or (iii) in pursuance of an obligation devolving on him by succession, or (iv) for any economic consideration received by him or by any of his lineal ascendants or descendants, or (v) by reason of his birth in a particular caste or community, he would render... labour or service to the creditor for a specified period or for an unspecified period, either without wages or for nominal wages.”³⁴ This has been a subject that made “Colonial administration in India misrepresent bonded labour as a cultural or regional tradition.”³⁵ Colonisers typically interpreted indebtedness as the result of expenses incurred by costly customs associated with marriages, funerals and religious ceremonies. Although colonial officials denounced debt bondage, they did not try to eradicate it because it generated large profits from India’s cheap labour. British India officially abolished slavery in 1843, but debt bondage continued and flourished. Hence, “Slavery became defined as corporeal and involuntary while debt bondage became defined as non-corporeal and voluntarily entered.”³⁶ Thus in the prevailing colonial discourse, “Indian slavery was seen as a relatively harmless institution that even served some positive social functions.”³⁷

Geographically, the Lushai Hills presently known as Mizoram is a hilly, precipitous, landlocked area where lack of communication has cut it off for a long time. When the world outside was rearing to attain the highest degree of perfection in every aspect of life, our hills was still clothed in darkness with occasional glimpses of planes

³³ The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 (Act No. 19 of 1976), <http://indiacode.nic.in>, accessed: 21.01.2012, p. 2.

³⁴ The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 (Act No. 19 of 1976), <http://indiacode.nic.in>, accessed: 21.01.2012, p. 2-3.

³⁵ Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 31.

³⁶ Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India*, pp. 146-49.

³⁷ Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, (eds), *Slavery and South Asian History*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indianapolis, USA, 2006, p. 225.

flying high up in the skies, and with no idea of modernisation whatsoever. This was due to its physical nature for which it remained disconnected. The primitive ways of life, customary practices and the social conditions of the time had led to the discovery of the people by the British who annexed the territory in 1890 under a Political Officer with its headquarters at Aizawl. “It attained the status of an Autonomous District in 1952 which was renamed Mizo District by a legislation passed in 1954. The North- Eastern Reorganisation Act of 1971 granted the district the status of a Union Territory under the present name.”³⁸

The state is entirely covered by hill ranges that ran from north to south with an average height of about 900 meters. Of these, the Blue Mountain is the highest with a height of 2,063 meters. Several big rivers like the Karnaphuli, Tuirial, Tlawng, and Tut flow in and around the state. The forest area covers 7,127.22 sq. km and accounts for 34 percent of the total area. Three main types of forests like tropical wet evergreen, tropical semi-evergreen and montanne sub-tropical are found in Mizoram. Local species of teak, sal, pine, fir, eucalyptus are planted through the efforts of the Government. The general climate of the state is pleasant with a cool summer and a temperate winter.

Present Mizoram covers an area of 21,087sq. km lying between 20° 20' North and 20° 27' North latitudes, and 90° 20' East and 90° 29' East longitudes. It is bounded on the north by the district of Cachar in Assam, on the east by the state of Manipur and Burma and to the south by Burma and Bangladesh. The entire area experiences a south-west monsoon from May to September. The average rainfall is thus as high as 254 cm. per annum.

The economic system of the hill-tribes of the Lushai Hills was based on the age-old practice of jhuming where every possible food crops were grown for self-consumption. Sugarcane and cotton were also grown where the latter served as one item of trade. Jhumming was the mainstay of the population. Besides this, the hill men indulged in raids and wars from which they took captives to work in their jhums. Considering the changeability of village sites among the early populations, there was very little scope of amassing wealth and property. All that a person needed were the most basic which he could carry on his back in case of sudden migrations. They rear live stocks like mithun, pigs, dogs and fowl. They acquire beads, gongs and necklaces

³⁸ Sangkima, *Mizos: Society and Social Change*, Spectrum, Guwahati, 1992, p. 4.

from raids. Money was scarce in the hills and the only way they came to possess it was in taking booty from the raids. They carried some sort of trade with neighbouring areas, through barter, the main item of exchange being their jhum products. They also used ivory for such purpose. Zochungnunga states that: “the Lushais traded with the Bengalis and Chakmas in the south, Bengalis and Manipuris in the north, and welcomed traders because they got sulphur, gun and flint glass from them which had very important place in the Mizoram armament.”³⁹ Besides, “chiefs became rich through the war booties, the ransom money of captives, and through dowries of guns and gongs.”⁴⁰

Chiefs were economically well-off from the labour of the class of people known as *bois*. They also had a few *sals*/slaves which were first caught in any raid that were considered the common property of the village and usually given to the chiefs. Common people owned captives taken from raids and though they do not keep *bois*, they were benefited by the captive labour. Politically, the hills were under the administration of chiefs who were helped by his group of “*Upas*” or elders of his choice. They were expected to be well-versed in the custom of the community failure to which render them out from the service of the chief. The political system of the Luseis was incomplete without mention being made of the *Zawlbuks* which were important institutions next to chieftainship. The two institutions worked hand in hand and complemented on each other. For the success and betterment of the Lusei chiefdoms, *Zawlbuks* were a must.

The earlier Mizo society was made up of many tribes with their sub-tribes, and clans with their sub-clans. In the early stage, the groups that were included within the term ‘Mizo’ lived as one. However, with the passage of time, political awareness threatened their unity. “Lack of community, tribal wars, lack of arable land in the country caused Zo people to lose their racial harmony.”⁴¹ Growth of population began to cause more problems as fights issued over land. This became one major factor for the rise of disunity and subsequent division of the main bulk. Conditions so broke out that the Thangur clans of the Luseis emerged as the ruling authority in the hills. Gradually, the Thangur clans also began to fight among themselves constantly. In the process, other tribes in the areas were subjugated, absorbed and incorporated into the Lusei community either voluntarily or by force where force was more resorted to. Those that

³⁹ Zochungnunga, *Survey of the Pre- Colonial Mizo Economy, A Modern History of Mizoram*, Sangkima (ed), 2004, p.58-59.

⁴⁰ R.K. Lalhluna, *Mizo History*, J. P. Offset, Aizawl, 2013, p. 31.

⁴¹ Vumson, *Zo History*, Published by the author, Aizawl, 1986.

would not submit to subjugation fled the scene. The internecine wars continued with the result that the Sailo clan became victorious by defeating their own clansmen and establishing a strong rule to be crushed only by the alien British administration which subjugated them and finally annexed their territories.

The communities inhabiting the Lushai Hills were and are patriarchal, mostly speaking languages that slightly differ from each other. They belong to a common stock of Tibeto Burman Origin. The youngest son inherits his father's property. However, he could give a share to each of his sons. If a man's destiny did not favour him with a son, his property and responsibilities go to the nearest kin on the male side. "The society did not include women in laws of inheritance. They were confined to the kitchen and the field with no say in matters of politics. But in the house, they assert much authority on the men and family. Many men are much dependant on their wives and the Mizo men in general, are much influenced by their women."⁴² However, history records exceptional cases where women played an important role in politics. These were forced by circumstances that made them understand the gravity of their situation for which they sometimes even rose above men and become noteworthy examples. Two chieftainesses who had even gone to the extent of warding off the British intrusion into their land were Ropuiliani and Darbilhi. But the general patriarchal society hardly recognises a woman's importance except in the homes.

Before the advent of the British, the Luseis and for this matter, all the hill people were used to build their villages on the summits of a precipitous hill. This was mainly to gain protection from their enemies for the sites served as perfect lookouts. At the same time, it offered a strategically defensive location. Their villages were protected by stockades constructed by heavy logs of wood. People did not, in the beginning, purchase salt as salt-springs were found in some parts of the hills. Water was a big problem in high altitudes for which women had to go down miles to carry up the same.

As for caste or class division, there are no such rigid rules as the Hindu culture that provides casteism and division of men. Each Mizo can eat and drink together, worship and mingle as one. However, the absence of class division in the present Mizo society did not altogether mean that the society had never been influenced by such. The

⁴² Jagadish Kumar Patnaik and Lalthakima, 'Mizoram: A Profile', in *Mizoram, Dimensions and Perspectives: Society, Economy and Polity*, Concept Publishing, Mizoram, 2008, p. 3.

early history of Lushai Hills provide us with a glimpse of the society where there were ruling clans, privileged classes, commoners, and institutions like chieftainship, *boi*, *sal* and so on. Each of these had a specific place in society which is discussed in the course of the work. The British administration and the gradual Christianisation of the hill men through missionary efforts had far reaching effects in changing certain aspects of society, religion and economic condition of the hill people. The society at present is the result of many modifications over time.

Pagans in general, the earlier Mizo groups living in the Lushai Hills believed in *Pathian*, the Supreme Being. As he is the greatest, need no appeasement and sacrifices were not offered to him. But they believed that spirits like *ramhuai*, *dawi*, *khuazing* etc., live on earth, below it, in the sky, water, trees, caves, mountains, hills, houses, streams, jungles and even enter human bodies. Fear of these prompted them to offer sacrifices to propitiate the spirits and leave them in peace. Before setting up a new village, a house, or a cultivation site (*jhum*), people usually offer sacrifices to cleanse the place from spirits. Sickness, illness, or epidemics were considered to be the work of evil spirits and villages affected by these were often deserted along with the sick.

With the establishment of British rule and the consequent entry of missionaries, the age-old traditions and religious practices of the people were abandoned. Western education played a significant role in the religious life of the people. With better knowledge of science and medicine, their earlier beliefs of spirits acting as agents in sickness and other natural calamities were understood in a better light. They gradually moved away from their elaborate religious sacrifices and turned to medicine. Fear of unseen spirits which had occupied a big place in the minds of the people slowly disappeared. The common belief of *mithikhua* (place for the dead) was substituted by their belief in life after death.

The various tribes of Mizo who inhabited the Lushai Hills did not have any codified law. They were governed by customs. The chief of a tribe or clan was the guardian of these customary practices who was helped by a council of *upas*. One criteria of a council member's eligibility to the seat was being well-versed in customary laws. He was expected to know and advice the chief on these. Theft was an uncommon occurrence for which there were hardly any laws of punishment. However, when a person steals, the punishment meted to the thief was usually very severe. "The Mizo

groups seldom steal except during raids.”⁴³ In case of disputes arising out of land, marriage or other issues, the decision of the chief was final. But a chief who was cruel or had no respect for customary laws and the welfare of his people finds himself a chief without subjects.

Chapter-2: Social and Political Background of the Lushai Hills

The chapter discusses the geography of the Lushai Hills, present state of Mizoram, the general people who inhabited the Lushai Hills, the society and conditions prior to British entry. It also discusses the political condition of the hill people which led to the intrusion of alien rule and its final annexation. Generic names such as ‘Lushai,’ ‘Kookie,’ ‘Chin’ had been used to imply the various ethnic groups inhabiting the hills during colonial period. In this work, ‘Mizo’ is used to refer to all the ethnic hill tribes whereas ‘Lusei’ is used exclusively to mean the erstwhile ‘Lushai’ to indicate the descendants of Zahmuaka.

There are a number of separate tribes under the general ethnic broad groups of Mizo. These primarily include several tribal communities that have inhabited the hilly terrains for several decades. They included the following main tribes: “Lusei, Hmar, Poi/Lai, Lakher/Mara, Chakma, Thadou, Ralte, Gangte, Paite, Sukte, Pangkhua, Zahau, Fanai (Muallianpui), Molbem, Darlong, Khuangli, and Falam (Tashons).”⁴⁴ Apart from the main tribal groups, the Mizo people are divided into three sub-tribes namely Lakher, Poi and Lusei. The Chakma are another group which concentrate in one part of the state. All these tribes are known to exist in Mizoram ever since the hills came into existence. According to historic records, Tibetan, Burmese and Chinese people had a great influence on the lifestyle and behaviour of the core groups of Mizoram.

The first group to enter the hills were known as Old Kukis, which consisted of Hrangkhawl, Biate, Khawtlang, Langrawng, Pangkhua, Mawk and others. The second group were the New Kukis, composed of Changsan, Thadou, Lhangum etc., who were pushed out by the third group of arrivals known as Luseis. “Among these Lusei tribes, the most prominent was the Sailo clan, known to be the direct descendants of Thangura,

⁴³ Suhas Chatterjee, *Mizoram Under the British Rule*, Mittal, Delhi, 1985, p.6.

⁴⁴ S.C. Bhatt and Gopal Bhargava (eds), *Land and People of Indian states and Union Territories: (in 36 volumes). 19, Mizoram*, Gyan Publishers, New Delhi, 2005, p. 15.

a chief said to have existed in 1580.”⁴⁵ This group were said to have come to the present hills at the beginning of the eighteenth century. They acquired the name “Lusei” from their ancestor, Luseia. The group was also composed of various clans among which the Sailo is a household name. They trace their descent from Thangura, one of the six sons of Zahmuaka. The other five sons were Rokhum, Palian, Thangluah, Rivung and Zadeng.

The entry of this group spelt the disintegration of the first group of Old Kukis. The social life of the people changed drastically in the face of political aspirations. The Luseis fought against the tribes in and around the hills, conquered and subjugated weaker tribes in a bid to attain paramount power. Tribal wars were succeeded by inter-clan wars when the Lusei group fought among their own clansmen. In the process, the Sailo clan of the Thangur bloodline emerged as the undisputed ruling clan. Those that were conquered or voluntarily surrendered to them were kept in a ‘species of slavery’ and majority were absorbed to form the bulk of the Sailo subjects. But others escaped and fled to Cachar, Manipur, North Cachar Hills, Chittagong Hill tracts and Burma where they have carved a niche for themselves and remains to this day.

Chapter-3: Describing the *Boi* System of Lushai Hills

This chapter examines the *Boi* system of the Lushai Hills. The system of Lushai bondage was commonly understood as “*boi* custom.” It has been defined in different ways by different writers. Thomas Herbert Lewin, Verghese and Thanzawna, H. Vanlaldika and others define the term “*boi*” as “one who had lost the right of individual freedom of action,”⁴⁶ “an individual dependent upon a Lushai chief,”⁴⁷ “under-privileged strata of the society, belonging to the lowest strata of the society”⁴⁸ respectively. B. C. Allen defines it as having the “slightest tinge of slavery in the province...”⁴⁹ Lawmsanga,⁵⁰ J.H. Lorrain, Peter Fraser,⁵¹ defines *boi* as a “slave.”

⁴⁵ McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ Thomas Herbert Lewin, *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in the Lushai Dialect of the Dzo or Kuki Language with Vocabularies and Popular Tales*, Calcutta Central Press, Calcutta, 1874, p.80.

⁴⁷ C.G. Verghese and R.L. Thanzawna, *History of the Mizos*, Vol-1, Vikash Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997, p. 39.

⁴⁸ Andrew H. Vanlaldika, *Social Stratification Among the Mizos*, Ph.D Thesis, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 2003, p. 232.

⁴⁹ MSA, Aizawl, Letter from B. C. Allen, Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary General of Bengal, Letter No. 6866-67 No. 4902P, Shillong the 15th August 1916.

⁵⁰ Lawmsanga, *A Critical Study on Christian Mission With Special Reference to Presbyterian Church of Mizoram*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010, p.111.

Sangkima defines the system as “very similar to that of the custom called bonded labour.”⁵² Orestes Rosanga says that a *boi* was a “bonded labourer.”⁵³ They can rightly be called bonded labourers as they were not allowed to leave a chief’s house unless they pay Rs. 40/- for their board and lodging.

The *bois* were of three types- *inpuichhung bois*, *chemsen bois*, and *tukluh bois*. *Inpuichhung bois* (*inpui*-big house, *chhung*-within) viz., those who live in the big house or the chief’s house; consisting of persons facing extreme poverty – destitute, widows, orphans and others who had no relatives willing to take them. *Chemsen bois* (*Chem*-dao, *sen*-red) viz. criminals, debtors and thieves, who, to escape from the consequences of their ill deeds, take refuge in the chief’s house. *Tukluh bois* (*tuk*-promise, *luh*-enter) were persons who during war, have deserted the losing side and joined the victors by promising that they and their children will become the *bois* of their conquerors.

This chapter also investigates on the origin and evolution of the *boi* system in Lushai Hills and found that it originated from the system of debt payment. The origin of the system was seen to have begun with the custom of debt bondage which gradually included other groups of bonded labourers like war captives, destitute, criminals and those who were bought. They were also captured in raids. *Bois* were also recruited mainly from poverty and although it seemed to be a common practice, the custom also involved a great deal of coercion on the part of the *boi* holders and was the last resort on the part of the people who entered *boi*hood. The boyhood was found to be more prominent and thus the subject of great controversies immediately before the colonial occupation due to inter-tribal war fares.

It also discusses on the role of *bois* in the economy of the chief’s family. The *boi* system was undoubtedly the source of a chief’s wealth and even power. *Bois* worked in his *jhums*, he gained the marriage prices of the female *bois*, every married male *boi* stayed, and work three/six years for him after marriage and so on. Besides, it was the male *bois*, who become the personal close aide of the chiefs in all his transactions on the village affairs as well as to the other villages. Hence, not only in the economy of the

⁵¹ Peter Fraser, *Slavery in British Territory: Assam and Burma*, Canarvon, Gwenlyn Evans and Sons, 1913, p. 1.

⁵² Sangkima (ed), “Boi and Sal As An Important Economic Factor in Early Mizo Society with Special Reference to Chief,” *A Modern History of Mizoram*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2004, p.18

⁵³ Orestes Rosanga, *The Economic History of Mizoram from 1900-1940*, Ph. D Thesis, University of Delhi, 1990, p. 180.

chief but also to its political and social role the chief greatly benefited from his *bois*. It was due to this that the gradual abolition of *boi* system was detrimental to the power and influence of the chiefs during the colonial period.

This chapter also discusses on the debate and controversies on the *Boi* system during the colonial period, especially between the Christian missionaries and the colonial state of India. A controversy arose between the state and missionaries from 1908 which went on till 1912. The colonial state maintained that the *boi* system was a tribal custom that housed the poor and “not a bound slavery as they could be free by paying forty rupees or a *gayal*.”⁵⁴ Hence, it felt that the practice did not come under the banned slavery system in British Empire and need not be abolished. It felt that since it was a tribal customary practice, abolition would cause great resistance from the local people which were detrimental to the peace of administration. On the other side, the missionaries represented by the outspoken Rev. Dr. Peter Fraser, felt that the *Boi* system was “a real system of slavery.”⁵⁵ Accordingly, they insisted its abolition under the banned practice of slavery within British Empire. The controversies emerged into a huge political debate across the British Empire ranging from the heated debate between Fraser and the district officers, Assam government, and government of India and finally in the British Parliament and later in the United Nations. The debate came to a standstill with the outbreak of the First World War but again re-emerged after that. It was finally abolished in 1927 by the British Parliament.

The *boi* custom of the Lushai Hills generated a lot of controversy even among present day scholars, social scientists and historians who are divided in their theories about the system being slavery or otherwise. It had a quality of servitude and the *bois* were bound until they could buy their freedom. This in itself suggests that they were bonded labourers. In the present day Mizoram, *boi* custom is no longer a welcome topic of discussion. Even elderly people are reluctant to discuss anything in connection with the custom. Descendants of *bois* are reluctant to disclose their *boihood* which shows that it was indeed a shameful past which had nothing glorious about it. Although *bois* in the Lushai Hills were denied their slave condition, they were indeed slaves as they

⁵⁴ Copy of Government Order, November 1909, in “Chanchinbu Newspaper,” November 1909, f. 213 in Collections of the Anti-Slavery Society, Rhodes House, Oxford, as cited in Indrani Chatterjee, *Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence*, p. 300.

⁵⁵ Peter Fraser, *Slavery on British Territory: Assam and Burma*, (Canarvon, Gwenlyn Evans and Sons, 1913), p. 1.

could not obtain their freedom until they pay an amount of 40 rupees. Moreover, they were the legal property of the chiefs.

Chapter – 4: Subjugated Tribes, Bonded Communities

The chapter examines the state of communities who were conquered and subjugated by the Sailo chiefs. Shakespeare noted that they were “living among the Lusheis under the Thangur chiefs and have become practically assimilated and included in the wider term Lushai.”⁵⁶ They were often considered to be *tukluh bois* but from its essence and nature of bondage they were different from *tukluh bois*. In the case of *tukluh bois* it was voluntary in nature where certain families or sometimes the whole village voluntarily submitted to the more powerful Lusei chiefs for protection. But in such cases, they were always considered as the *bois* to such chiefs, the only condition being dictated by the Sailo chiefs for admitting under his village or protection. However, in the case of the so-called subjugated tribes they were forced to submit without having any other option than accepting the servitude under the Sailo chiefs. The only way to evade such forcible control and appropriations was flight. If certain group of people succeeded in escaping to other hills or more often in the British territory in places like Cachar, Chittagong Hills, Hill Tracts of Tripura, that is the only way out from such subjugation under the Sailo chiefs. Thus we see that a large number of hill populations continue to migrate into the British territory to evade the manpower of Sailo chiefdoms in Lushai Hills. Shakespear noted:

It seems most probable that the country, into which the various Thangur chiefs moved, under pressure from the Chins, was almost entirely occupied by small communities having no power of cohesion. The greater part of these were absorbed, and now form the majority of the subjects of the Thangur chiefs; but some fled north and west into Manipur, Silchar, Sylhet and Tipperah, where they are as Kukis and where their appearance caused much trouble, as, from the very nature of the cause of their migration, much ill-feeling existed between them and the triumphant Lushais.⁵⁷

The unfortunate groups who could not escape such control have to bear the burden of the sweeping political formation process in the Lushai Hills under the Sailo chiefs. Most of the early colonial accounts noted the condition of these subjugated tribes under the

⁵⁶ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, Allied Printers (Pvt) Ltd, New Delhi, TRI Aizawl, [1975], 2008, pp. 129-130.

⁵⁷ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 5-6.

paramount Sailo chiefs. Shakespear, for instance, noted Kairuma's village before it was burnt down by British forces. He found that there were 80 houses belonging to *Thado*, *Biate*, and other clans "living in his village in a species of serfdom very much on the footing of the *tukluh boi*, only that *Kairuma* received a mithun out of the marriage price of each of the daughters as well as the other dues." He said that "these people were remnants of conquered clans and were not allowed to leave the village. I was assured that, if any of them tried to run away, a party of young men would be at once sent off to kill or bring back the fugitives." They were finally liberated after the British burnt down the village in 1891. Shakespear noted that "all these people made their escape to the villages of their own clans."⁵⁸ In fact Shakespear also noted:

Many [Lushei] chiefs held considerable numbers of *Paihte* or *Vuite* or *Khawtlang* in a species of semi-slavery. These were captives or descendants of captives made in war, and nearly all have availed themselves of the *Pax Britannica* to return to their own people. Again, we found certain villages ruled over by non-Lushei chiefs, who were living under the protection of powerful Lushei chiefs. In the process of pacification, these non-Lushei chiefs, who were living under the protection of powerful Lushei chiefs, regained their independence and have gathered round them many of their clansmen, who formerly were scattered among the Lushei villages, and who, if we may judge by what has undoubtedly happened in other cases, would, in a short time have become completely absorbed.⁵⁹

This chapter therefore examines how the Lusei chiefs conquered the Lushai Hills in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century and eventually controlled over the tribes who lived there before their appearance. These subjugated tribes included *Hmars/Khawtlang*, *Ralte*, *Biate*, *Paihte*, *Vuite*, and so on. A large part of these original inhabitants were forcibly subjugated by the Sailo chiefs whereas many of them made their successful escape into British territory and Manipur hills. Those who could not make their escape were thus, subjugated, oppressed and forced to adopt the culture and customs of the victor, the Sailo chiefs. Shakespear, for instance, noted: "the population of a village ruled by a *Thangur* chief at the present time is composed of representatives

⁵⁸ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 48-49.

⁵⁹ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 40.

of many tribes and clans, which have all more or less adopted the language and customs of their rulers.”⁶⁰ He goes on to say:

Before the Thangur chiefs had risen to their present pre-dominant position there were many consanguineous communities scattered over the hills, living under headmen of their own and each using dialect of its own. Some of these communities appear to have had separate corporate existence for long periods and in consequences to have been subdivided into many families and branches, while others were quickly absorbed by the Thangur and consequently have few sub-divisions.⁶¹

To come to an understanding of the particular tribes under subjugation, the general tribes of Lushai Hills is discussed. Majority of the Lushai Hills population were subjugated under the Sailo chiefs and have been since living in the state of ‘semi-slavery’ until the Hills was annexed into the British Empire. Among these groups were the Old Kukis, New Kukis, and the Lushai/Lusei clans. The first group was the first to migrate from the Chin to Lushai hills and then to Chittagong tracts from where they migrated to North Cachar Hills. The second group of New Kukis, in course of time, was driven out by the Luseis. They went directly to the present Tripura towards the close of the first half of the twentieth century, but were pushed back by Colonel Lister for creating trouble in the British Frontiers. Some of them submitted to Lister who enlisted them as soldiers and formed a good outpost on the frontiers. On coming to their present habitat, the Luseis defeated the first and second group of settlers, and became virtual rulers over the people. In their attempts to extend their sway over the tribes, the British Government sent repeated expeditions against them since 1850.”⁶²

The main method of subjugation employed by the Luseis was raids. They raided each other constantly. These raids begot counter raids and the results were usually subjugation of the loser. In fact, Mackenzie had recorded that “the whole history of this frontier is indeed the story of their outrages and of their efforts to prevent, repel or avenge these.”⁶³ The main reason for wars or clan feuds were mainly quarrel for land, to make bois or slaves, or bonded labourers of one another, competition for the hand of maidens in marriage, marriage prices, revenge, and collection of taxes.

⁶⁰ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 40.

⁶¹ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 41.

⁶² Sangkima, *Mizos: Society and Social Change*, Spectrum, Guwahati, 1992, p. 20.

⁶³ Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, [1979], 2007, p. 331.

Besides conquering and subjugating other clans, the Sailo chiefly clan made others into *bois*. Some of these have been mentioned. “Hmars, Thadous and Biates, Hualngo, Hualhang, Vaisal (foreign captives) and Khiangte, Pnar in Meitei.”⁶⁴ These tribes were not only subjugated but kept in a “species of serfdom,” made to do all sorts of work. Besides these, the Fanais were forced to become *tukluh bois*, beginning with the son of their chief, Rorehlova. They were the major means of accumulating wealth and betterment of economic condition. Moreover, they were most useful as village defenders. They were made to fence villages, and build the houses of chiefs. It is said that it was from this time that forced labour for constructing houses of chiefs came into existence and continued until chieftainship was abolished in 1952.”⁶⁵ The condition of the subjugated tribes was such that they were reduced to mere labour force. Besides, the authoritative chiefs and “treated the commoners (*hnamchawm*) so badly that life among them became really hard” which became one major factor for the migration of the earlier occupants of the hills.”⁶⁶

Status of the tribes under subjugation of the Lusei chiefs is best explained through the role they played in the economic life of the hill people. They were simply tribute paying subjects who obeyed and did as directed. They could not even maintain their own identity and were sometimes absorbed and incorporated into the chief’s clan by the ceremony called “saphun.” All clans of the tribes listed above were not bonded to the Lusei chiefs. A few stragglers here and there might have promised to become *tukluh bois* or a fewer still might have been forced to become *bois*, but these does not stand for all clans in their entirety. Bondage of a few clans has led some modern writers to project and conclude that all clans of a particular tribe were *bois*, slaves or bonded servants.

Chapter- 5: The Sals: Captive Labourers, the Real Slaves of Lushai Hills

This chapter examines the labour performed by captives who were captured in various raids in the Chittagong, Arrakan, Tipperah, Burma, Cachar plains, and Chin Hills. They formed the real slaves in the Lushai Hills who were sold, bought, and could be killed as the master wished. They worked along with other people but their status was very low

⁶⁴ See McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, Elephant Industries, New Delhi, Reprint TRI [1949], 2003, p. 71; Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 48-49; Peter Fraser, *Slavery in British Territory, Assam and Burma*, p.17; IndraniChatterjee, “Slaves, Souls and Subjects in a South Asian Borderland,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debt> on 27.07.2010, Rutgers University, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, Swapna Printing Works Calcutta, Pvt, Ltd, L. T. L. Publications Aizawl, p. 105.

⁶⁶ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 138.

in the society, much below the *bois*. Besides these, other clans subjugated in inter-clan wars within the Lushai Hills were also reduced to slaves. Raids were prominent till the British administration entered the Lushai Hills. The chapter concentrates on the condition of the captives who were captured from the various raids on the plains and other far-flung tribes in the borders. As they belonged solely to the captors who would own, sell or even kill them at their disposal, they were considered forming the true state of slavery in the Lushai Hills. Lewin noted that the Lusei chiefs constantly fought among themselves and “when a short interval of comparative peace comes, they make a raid upon the nearest British territory to procure slaves.”⁶⁷

Captives in war or raids contributed much to the chiefdoms. They added to the importance of a person by increasing his economic status through their services. They also served as items of exchange, “sold like cattle and are distributed at a man’s death amongst his heirs in common with beads and guns.”⁶⁸ Besides, such captives were usually kept in the forefronts in battles. They were at times, promised freedom from slavery by the number of enemies they could kill or for their bravery.

The Chittagong Frontier recorded the highest incidents of Kuki raids. These became prominent from the 1830s which went on unabated till their country was occupied. We also see the same frequency of raiding in the frontiers of Sylhet, Cachar and Tripura since the 1820s. In the Burmese frontier too, one can see raidings since the 1880s. We can see that the main motive behind raiding was to procure slaves or captives, other items such as heads, booty and so on were merely incidental which often co-incided with the expeditionary raids. Those captured were, according to Carey and Tuck “sold like cattle and are distributed at a man’s death amongst his heirs in common with beads and guns.”⁶⁹

The indigenous economy of the hill society was dependent on the primitive form of agriculture, viz; *jhuming*. There was a great need of man-power as the size of the workforce determined the volume of production. Therefore, the more the number of persons in the workforce the better where a family of more members was economically better off than one with a small number of members. Workforce constituted of men,

⁶⁷T. H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, Elephant Industries, New Delhi, Reprint TRI Aizawl 2004, p. 148.

⁶⁸Bertram S. Carey and H. N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills* Vol-I, TRI Aizawl, Reprint, 2008, p. 204

⁶⁹Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, pp. 203-204.

women and children although the quantum of work varied according to capacity. The main brunt of economic work was born by the womenfolk. The male concentrated their works in clearing *jhum* forests, hunting animals for meat, raid expeditions, and purchasing necessary items from bazaars often two or three days' journey away.

Women figure prominently in the routine of cultivation. From sowing to reaping and storage, dawn to dusk and dusk to midnight their labour round the clock and the year, meant better homes and economic status. Household work from cooking to grinding, fetching fire-wood and water, cleaning, stitching, weaving, knitting, cooking and feeding live-stocks, looking after children require the hands of women. In the *jhums*, she was the first and the last. Lewin states that, "upon the women falls the whole burden of the bodily labour by which life is supported. They fetch water, hew wood, cultivate and help to reap the crop, besides spinning, cooking, and brewing."⁷⁰ A Lusei who helps a woman in her work was considered henpecked and mocked by telling him to wear petticoats. So, the main brunt of economic life was born by women. They were merely slaves of their lords. Women captives were doubly enslaved.

Children had a share in the daily routine work of the hill communities. Older children helped in looking after their siblings, carrying water, running errands for any elder in the house, looking after the cattle or watching the fields from pests and such usefulness were always fully utilized. Children in the house of a chief inspect the traps of the chief, deliver messages &c. A child could help his family and parents in many ways. Schools had no attraction to them. Therefore, from the time educational institutions were set up by Christian missionaries, no child attended it. For instance, "the Methodist opened a Primary school at Tahan and as there were no children closed it again in 1940. Their help was a great necessity to parents who were glad of any extra hand."⁷¹

It was in the context of this division of work in Lushai Hills that captives from other places were taken during the various raids in which women of young age and children of both sexes were more preferred. And, it was in the nature of these slaves that there were relatively very few slaves rescued after the Hills were occupied. Young

⁷⁰ T.H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, TRI, Aizawl, Reprint 2004, p. 142.

⁷¹ B. Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo*, Published by the author with Financial Assistance of the Mizoram Publication Board Aizawl, 2014, p. 88.

women who were captured as captives were generally married off, the bride price being enjoyed by the captor. Children were brought up along with the children of the family as if they were very much the children of the captors. Therefore, when they attained adulthood they remained very much part of the Lusei society. It was these slave populations who were absorbed within the Lusei society that this chapter is dealing with certain difficulties.

Chapter – 6: Forced Labour in Lushai Hills under Colonial Regime

This chapter examines the labour system enforced by the colonial regime in the Lushai Hills. It begins with the existing customary labour services to the chief. It gives the gist of selfless service known as *tlawmngaihna* among the many tribes of *Mizos*. *Tlawmngaihna* was a Mizo code of conduct through which the poor, needy, or anyone in need was given a helping hand without hopes of returned favours. “Since paid labour was unknown, community work known as *Hnatlang* was another way in which weaker sections of people were supported and uplifted.”⁷²

This chapter however concentrates on the labour regime under colonial rule where some of the colonial administrators employed impressed and forced labour to gain cheap labour in cutting roads, bridges, and construction of government quarters. The administration adopted rules that every Lusei village should pay tribute in the shape of rice, in addition every village should be liable to contribute labour for ten days irrespective of the days spent in coming and going, the carriage of luggage of officers and escorts, the maintenance of Government roads within their boundaries, the construction and maintenance of paths to admit officers touring freely without great hardships.”⁷³ Gradually, the hill population was reduced to a mere labour force. They were paid for doing such works but it was mandatory on the part of the hill people to contribute such stipulated labour whenever and for whatever it was called for regardless of their engagement in their own cultivation fields.

This mandatory nature of colonial labour service makes the system infamous throughout the hills. For instance, the rate of impressed labour was paid at 4 annas per diem. But the system of giving presents to individuals or chiefs for special services was

⁷² Sangkima, *Essays on The History of the Mizos*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 2004, p. 63.

⁷³ MSA, Letter from Major J. Shakespeare, Superintendent of Lushai Hills to the Secretary to the Government of Assam, Shillong .Letter No 931 G dated 24th November, 1904.

practised in which broad cloth, trinkets, necklaces etc., were purchased and taken along whenever chiefs and headmen of the plains were visited. When it came to the Lushai Hills, there were problems with regard to fixing this rate of impressment of labour. In 1896, Mr. Porteus, the Political Officer of North Lushai Hills was consulted on the matter in which he proposed that the labour they exact was “to be impressed labour on exactly the same footing as impressed labour in any plains district.”⁷⁴ Thus the rate for any impressed labour was paid at 4 annas in the hills. However, many cases usually escaped payment of such impressments.

Prior to the occupation of the hills by the British, forced labour already existed in the form of construction of houses of chiefs, free labour to work in the chief's *jhums* and so on. By the time the British entered the hills they added yet another set of forced labour over the existing free labour to their chiefs. Section VIII of the Bengal Regulation XI of 1806 authorised “impressed labour” for transport and supplies to officers on tour.”⁷⁵ It was under such regulation that the officers posted in Lushai Hills also adopted a set of compulsory/mandatory labour from the people. Road construction was one area where labour was most impressed. The rugged mountainous region as in the Lushai Hills devoid of any network of road in the strict sense of the term was where the hardest labour forces were required. It was here the hill labours were most employed causing unimaginable hardship especially when the proud Luseis were not willing to work for anyone.

Besides, the hill labours were utilised for the construction of telegraph lines, government buildings, roadside rest-houses, water reservoirs and so on. In 1896, there were six roads in the hills, 5 more roads in the 1920s and by 1936, 13 roads were completed in the district. Statement of Timber Bridges on Demagiri-*Lunglei* Road was given the same year which showed 12 timber bridges on Demagiri- *Lunglei* road were built, 2 suspension bridges on the Thega Khal and *Lunglei*, and 10 timber bridges in the Oldham Cart road were constructed by 1907.”⁷⁶ Huge labour forces were employed for

⁷⁴ MSA, Summary of events in the Lushai Hills District for the week ending the 2nd June 1896, GEN-49, June-December 1896.

⁷⁵ MSA, Letter from The Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department to The Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, (General and Judicial Department), Letter No. F. 187/2/30-Public, the 2nd February 1932, Political-99, p. 2.

⁷⁶ MSA, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Judicial Department, Pol-A, July 1907, Appendix B p. 13.

these. For instance, from 1898-1906 the total labour forces employed for the construction of various government projects were 6.5 lakh (6,55,564 labour).

It was because of this laborious nature of colonial “impressed labour” that the system was opposed by the hill people and the colonial officers had often to resort to military enforcement. For instance, we know that after subjugating the chiefs of western Lushai hills, the Political Officer “started demanding the *Mizos* in the eastern areas to supply coolies and manual labourers to do force labour” which they adamantly refused.”⁷⁷ In 1890, McCabe was attacked by a party of *Luseis* when he had gone to *Lalbura*’s village of *Sesawng* with a hundred soldiers to “enforce a demand for coolies.” The term “*Kulipui*” and “*Kulite*”, referring to the colonial “impressed labour,” are still a common adage today to mean torture and oppression. It was due to opposition from the people that the Government of Assam had even constituted an enquiry commission in 1936. The enquiry however found that “impressed labour” was useful and necessary for the officers working in the hills. Hence, the system continued till 1946 despite a stiff opposition from the people. The issue was finally taken over by the Mizo Union whose formation in 1946 heralded the beginning of Mizo nationalist movement against colonialism. Impressed labour issue immediately constituted one of the political issues carried forward by the Mizo Union.

Chapter - 7: Conclusion

This concluding chapter highlights the main points of discussion in the chapters, summed up the findings and concludes the work as a whole.

Source Materials

The source materials used in the present work consists of primary data like unpublished Archival materials collected from the *National Archives of India*. These are broadly divided into Administration Reports on South Lushai Hills (1890 - 1897), Government of Bengal, Diaries of the Superintendents of the South Lushai Hills District. Government of Assam Administration Reports on North Lushai Hills (1890 - 1898).Government of Assam’s Administrative Reports on Lushai Hills (1900 - 1947).Certain Diaries of Political Officers of the North Lushai Hills District,and Diaries

⁷⁷ B. Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo*, p. 75.

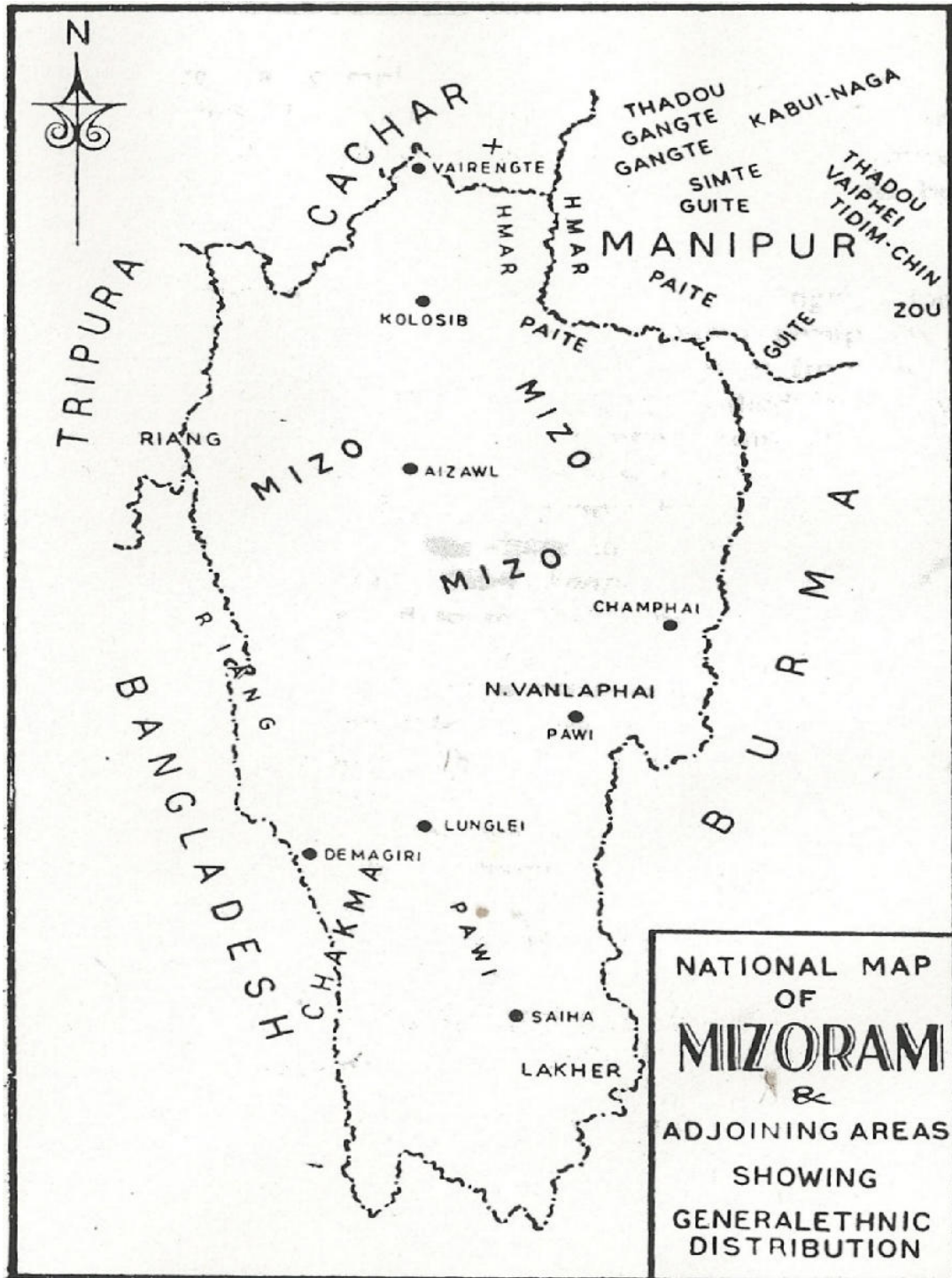
of Superintendents of the Lushai Hills District available from the mentioned archives have been consulted. They are also collected from the Assam Secretariat Proceeding files, Mizoram State Archive Records which includes both the British Government's and Missionary letters and reports. The Published primary sources include monographs, accounts and gazetteers of Lt. Colonel T.H. Lewin's accounts of wild races of South-Eastern India, McCulloch's accounts of the Manipur valleys, Lewin's monograph, John Shakespeare's detailed clans of Lushai and Kukis, A. S. Reid's Chin Lushai Land account, Bertram Carey and H. N. Tuck's report of the Chin Hills, and William Shaw's notes on the Thadou Kukis etc.

Unpublished Archival sources include Administration Reports on South Lushai Hills (1890 - 1897) Diaries of the Superintendent of the South Lushai Hills District from Government of Bengal Records, Administration Reports on North Lushai Hills (1890 -1898), Administration Reports on Lushai Hills (1900 -1947) from the Assam State Archives in Guwahati, Missionary letters and reports, Assam Secretariat Proceedings, and Mizoram State Archive Records. Besides the above, many secondary materials are collected from Tribal Research and Cultural Institute Aizawl, Synod Book Room at Thakthing, Aizawl, District Library Guwahati, K.K Handique Library Gauhati University, ICHR Library Gauhati University Campus, Jagriti Donbosco Library Guwahati, District Library North Cachar Hills Haflong, Central Library Assam University, Silchar.

During the process of data collection from the mentioned places, I could get ample material for the chapter for Chapters 3, and 6, both primary and secondary. But there was a lot of problem in finding documents or records for chapters 4 and 5 regarding 'Subjugated Tribes, Bonded Communities,' and 'The *Sals*: Captive Labourers- The Real Slaves of Lushai Hills' respectively. However, the few available accounts of colonial administrators are profusely used to substantiate the lack of archival materials.

MAP-I

Ethnic group distribution in 1958, Mizoram



Source: B. B.Goswami, 'The Mizos in the Context of state formation in Tribal Politics and State Systems in pre-colonial Eastern and North-Eastern India,' Surajit Sinha (ed) *Tribal Politics and State Systems in pre-Colonial Eastern and North-Eastern India*, Calcutta, 1989, p. 309