

## Chapter – 4

# Subjugated Tribes, Bonded Communities

The chapter examines the state of communities who were conquered and subjugated by the Sailo chiefs. Shakespear noted that they were “living among the Lusheis under the Thangur chiefs and have become practically assimilated and included in the wider term Lushai.”<sup>1</sup> 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 appropriation was flight. Escape was 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.

This chapter therefore, examines how the Lusei chiefs conquered the Lushai Hills in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century and eventually gained control over the tribes who lived there before their appearance. A large part of these original inhabitants were forcibly subjugated by the Sailo chiefs whereas many of them made their successful escape into British territories 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. The chapter also looks into the circumstances that led to the ultimate subjugation of the weaker clans, the role they played in the hill economy while looking at the status they were relegated to.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, TRI Aizawl, [1975], reprint 2008, pp. 129-130.

### Defining Subjugated Tribes

Subjugated tribes refer to those tribes who were conquered and subjugated in various wars both inter-tribe and inter-tribe wars, by the Sailo chiefs of the Luseis. Shakespear noted that these subjugated tribes were “living among the Lusheis under the Thangur chiefs and have become practically assimilated and included in the wider term Lushai.”<sup>2</sup> These tribes lived under the oppressive control of the Sailos. McCall also notes that “In about the year 1850, Liankhama Sailo, son of Vanhnuailiana Sailo, had a village of about 1,000 houses at Zawlnghak. Among these were 150 houses of the Rante clan, an offshoot of the Hmars.”<sup>3</sup> Shakespear again 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 who were “living in his village in a species of serfdom very much on the same footing as 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 also 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.”<sup>4</sup>

The subjugated tribes were therefore, those remnants of conquered clans, living under the oppressive control of the Sailos, living in a species of serfdom, treated on the same footing as *tukluh bois*. They were not allowed to leave the village, were chased and brought back forcefully if they made any attempt at escape. They have been scattered in many Lusei and non-Lusei villages and were either absorbed or were in the process of absorption when the colonial administration entered the Lushai Hills. In fact, Shakespear notes:

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 find certain villages ruled over by non-Lushei chiefs, who were

<sup>2</sup> J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>3</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p. 71

<sup>4</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 48-49.

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.<sup>5</sup>

Other colonial accounts also recorded instances of Lusei subjugation and the resultant condition of the subjugated. Peter Fraser the missionary, records the statement of a *boi* in the house of a certain chief who had once been a village headman. This man states that during a war with the Sailo clans, they had been defeated and taken captives. All those that could not run away remained and became slaves of the Sailo chiefs. He states:

I am an old slave. All we, the Hualngo and Hualhang are old slaves. When we fought with the Sailo clan (i.e. when they were becoming rulers of the country) we lost, and they made us captives. A few Hualngo and Hualhang ran to the Pawi country, some to the Sailo (villages) we all who were with Sailo chiefs became slaves.<sup>6</sup>

Major tribes under subjugation of the Sailo chiefs included the “Thadous and Biates, Hualngo, Hualhang, Hmar, Vaisal (foreign captives) and Khiangte, Pnar in Meitei.”<sup>7</sup> 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, who was brought up by Rohnaa, a chief of long standing. He was sent to form a village at Bawlte with 70 households to strengthen the border. But he was sagacious enough to enter into peaceful alliance with his enemies. He also developed friendly allies with Lallula Sailo with whom he lived for some time in the latter’s village.

A large part of the original inhabitants of Lushai Hills were forcefully subjugated by the Sailo chiefs. But many of these made a successful escape into British territory and Manipur hills. Those who could not make good their escape were thus subjugated, oppressed and forced to adopt the culture and customs of the victors—the Sailo chiefs. Shakespear again notes that: “The population of a village ruled by a *Thangur* chief at the present time is composed of representatives of many tribes and

<sup>5</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Statement signed by Vanchhunga Evangelist, November 4, 1910, in Fraser, *Slavery on British Territory, Assam and Burma*, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> 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; Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Slaves, Souls and Subjects in a South Asia Borderland,’ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debt> on 27.07.2010, Rudgers University, p. 9.

clans, which have all more or less adopted the language and customs of their rulers.”<sup>8</sup> Thus we see that the small Lusei community increased in population at the time. Linguistically, Ralte dialect was commonly spoken by the chiefs and had earned the name of ‘chiefly language,’ but it got no further due to lack of patronage. On the other hand, during the days of Lallula Sailo, Duhlian dialect was adopted and encouraged as the lingua franca among the so-called Lusei community. His sons popularised it and forced the other tribes under their jurisdiction to speak the language, thus attaining its present status as the official language of the state of Mizoram.

The first group of settlers in the Lushai hills, were the Old Kookie (Kuki) clans, democratic communities with very doubtful traces of having been once organised under chiefs, but the new Kookies were subject to chiefs whose families were regarded as almost sacred, and whose power was only limited by the possibility of a malcontent transferring his allegiance to a more popular chief of the same or some other semi-divine race. This second group, according to Edgar, had been “families whose feuds attracted most attention, and from whose raids we suffered most, were the Tlangums, Changsans, Thadoes and Poitoos, but about 1840, the Lushais (a new family) made its appearance, which by degrees has reduced to submission or driven out all the others, and for the last twenty years has kept possession of all the southern hills.”<sup>9</sup> Regarding the entry of the Luseis into the Lushai Hills, McCall notes:

In about the year 1780, the strong Sailo migration commenced moving from the south in a northerly direction driving before them the Hrangkhoh, Biate, Thado and other kindred tribes of the Lushai Hills until the Sailos, with their Lushai clans in 1810, chiefly under Lallula Sailo, had consolidated their internal position by occupying most of the country between Champhai and Demagiri northwards up to the borders of Cachar and Sylhet. This migration was probably caused by the Zahaus and Burma clans such as the Hualngos, Thlang Tlangs of Falam, Fanais and others becoming so strong that the Lusheis, under their Sailo overlords, were compelled to give way and establish themselves in the area known now as the North Lushai Hills.<sup>10</sup>

When the Luseis have settled in the northern part of the Lushai Hills, the Old and new Kuki groups were living in different parts of the hills, community-wise and in villages named after their own clans of whom mention is made. Besides, other tribes having

<sup>8</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Edgar’s report in Mackenzie’s *The North-East Frontier of India*, p. 438.

<sup>10</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, pp. 35- 36.

affinities with these were also settled in different parts of the hills. All these were either settled under organised chiefs or in a democratic state. Shakespear quotes from Stewart's Notes on Northern Cachar who states that "there is no regular system of government among the Old Kukis and they have no hereditary chiefs as among the New ones...whilst among the Khawtlang and Khawchhak clans, which after various vicissitudes, including a more or less lengthy sojourn among the Lushais, resently entered Manipur territory, the ghalim has become a feeble imitation of a Lushai lal."<sup>11</sup> Except for this slight difference in the system of government which was also the result of Lusei influence, their general appearance is all similar. In fact, many colonial officers who came in contact with them wrote about their similarities in customs and rituals and their general appearance. Shakespear writes:

All the Lushai Kuki Clans resemble each other very closely in appearance and the Mongolian type of countenance prevails...One meets however, many exception, which may be due to the foreign blood introduced by the many captives taken from the plains and from neighbouring tribes....The term Lushai .....covers a great many clans....under various chiefs of Thangur family that came into prominence in the eighteenth century and was responsible for the eruption into Cachar of Old Kukis at the end of that century and of the New Kukis half a century later.<sup>12</sup>

The Lusei group under their Sailo chiefs fought against these communities conquered and subjugated them. They forced them to adopt their customs and incorporated them. They were thus assimilated into the Lusei. By 1901, a census was taken of all the tribes inhabiting the hills. Not surprisingly, "the census figures did not show a single person belonging to the Mizo group. By 1961 we observe that the Lushai population is absent from the population figures. That means all those who called themselves as Lushai en bulk (and a substantial number from Hmar, Paihte, Pawi and Ralte) have declared themselves Mizo."<sup>13</sup> In this regard Shakespear writes:

The clans which live among the Lusheis under the rule of Thangur chiefs and have become practically assimilated by them. During the census of 1901 an unsuccessful attempt was made to get a complete list of the clans, families and branches. The causes

<sup>11</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>12</sup> J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>13</sup> B. B. Goswami, 'The Mizos in the context of state formation,' in Surajit Sinha's *Tribal Politics and State Systems in pre-colonial Eastern and North-Eastern India*, K. P. Bagchi & Co, Calcutta, 1989, p. 310.

of failure were the ignorance of the people themselves as to what clan or family they belonged to and the tendency to claim to be true Lushai.<sup>14</sup>

In the light of the existing state of affairs, mainly the social condition of the times, it is not wrong to say that force was applied for the purpose of taking in new Luseis or absorbing other smaller/weaker tribes within the Lusei. Shakespear, the authoritative personality in Lusei Kuki clans records that there were many consanguineous communities scattered over the hills who, at certain times, were living independently under a ruler of their own. This fact had been supported by earlier and contemporary scholarship. The areas where these communities settled were named after their own clans. For instance, the Hmar settlements were Khawbung, Khawzawl, Ngurte, Vankal, Darngawn, Leiri, Chhungte, Neihdawn, Tualte, Zote, etc. Their biggest settlements were around present Champhai. Another branch of the Hmar called Khawlhiring had established their settlement in Khawlhiringtang, and Lawitlang, located to the east of Seipui and Thiektlang. The village of Biate was one where the Biate community lived under their own chiefs and so on.

Some of these settlements must have been of noteworthy sizes as their grandeur is remembered in folksongs to the present times. Besides, the Thadou tribe with their numerous clans were concentrated in the Northern portion of the hills, ruled by their chiefs of no fewer dispositions than the Luseis. However, the *Palians* gradually moved towards the central part of the hills where they partially absorbed and dispersed the *Darlong*, *Biate* and some of the *Hmar* clans who were settled in the area. Those that resented the idea of absorption fled from the Palian and made their appearance in Cachar by 1780, later to be categorically named as part of the 'Old Kuki' groups by Shakespear. He states:

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.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 42-129.

<sup>15</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 41

Small and weak villages and clans especially vulnerable and exposed to constant raids could not stand the rising Sailo dominion. Thus, the political process of what B. B. Goswami called “state formation” left no other option open except to bolt or board. Those who did neither were held in captivity to be bonded communities, servile in status, or be left to the threat of complete extinction. This was in fact, the order of the day.

The Lusei migration from Chin to the Lushai Hills was also caused by constant pressures from the Pawi tribe which ultimately forced them to settle at Selesih located as Zawlsei village in the district of Aizawl. On coming to their present habitat, the Sailos fought and defeated the earlier clans and their chiefs became virtual rulers over the people. Guite notes that “Just as the ‘invasion’ was rapid, the rapidity of Kuki migration earned for them the name of a ‘migratory race’: some of them even reached the Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills and the Somra Tracts of Upper Burma. Thus, Lusheis, Thadous, Guites, Zous, Vaipheis and others fled from the Chin Hills when the Falam, Hakas and Soktes became formidable and the Thadous, Changsans, Lhangums, and the ‘Old Kukis’ fled the Lushai Hills when the Lusheis became formidable.”<sup>16</sup> This great clan gradually became proud, arrogant and fearless. While they pursued their conquest, they also became politically aware of the status they could achieve once they gained the entire hills. Every victory spurred its imagination for more. Within a short time, the whole of Lushai Hills except the south where the Pawis were concentrated came to be ruled by the representatives of this clan. They ravaged, robbed and raided the weaker communities that could not check the massive attacks, subjugated and made subjects of these communities within the district. Shakespear notes again:

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.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Guite, ‘Civilisation and Its malcontents: The Politics of Kuki raids in nineteenth century Northeast India,’ *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, <http://ier.sagepub.com/>, 48, (3) (2011): 339-76,

<sup>17</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 5-6.



Luseis fought against the peaceful tribes of the hills to gain control over all the tribes and attain the position of the sole rulers of the hills. In the process of political formation, the Luseis forced the clans to submit under their control resulting in the subjugation of whole villages or communities. To the north of the hills were the Paite and Bete (Biate) tribe who were conquered by the Luseis. The aggressions made on them forced villagers to desert their villages, lands and homes and moved to other places to escape subjugation. Some others fled to territories nearest their reach to find safety and security. In this respect, let us take the example of the Khawtlang clans who, Shakespear states, “have little power of cohesion, and they naturally gave way at once before the well-organised Lushais, and fled north and north-west into Cachar and Manipur, passing through the hands of the Thado clans and suffering considerably at their hands.”<sup>18</sup> Shakespear went on to say that

when the aggressions of the Thangur chiefs disturbed the Khawtlang and Khawchhak , one section fled through the country of the Thados into Cachar, another took refuge among the Chhinchhuan, a Thado family in the southern portion of the Manipur Hills, to whom they paid tribute and a certain number joined the Thangur villages. Between those who fled to the Chhinchhuan and the Lushais hostilities were carried on until our arrival in 1890, and, as in the case of the Vuite, we found many of them living in the state of semi-slavery in the Sailo villages, whence they have mostly rejoined their relatives, and there are now 296 households of these people in the south-west of the Manipur Hills and more in the adjoining parts of the Lushai Hills.<sup>19</sup>

When the Luseis became more established, they fought against the Thado clans and defeated them. This defeat resulted in their subjugation. But those that could flee the scene did so and resulted in the eruption of the New Kukis or Thados and cognate clans into Silchar about 1848.

Besides those that were subjugated and absorbed, Shakespear gives an account of non-Lusei clans and clans that have been included in the term ‘Lushai.’ “These were the clans that lived among the Luseis under the rule of Thangur chiefs and have become practically assimilated by them and included in the wider term Lusei. The second comprised the clans which, while still retaining a separate corporate existence, have been much influenced by the Luseis among or near whom they reside. The third were

---

<sup>18</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 184



those of the Old Kuki clans, and the fourth were the Thado clan with its numerous families and branches, often spoken of as New Kukis. The last were the “Lakhers who call themselves Mara.”<sup>20</sup>

Shakespear also notes some clans which, though not absorbed, have been much influenced by the Luseis of which were Fanai, Ralte, Paihte or Vuite, and the Rangte. Of these, the Fanai chiefs trace their pedigree back six generations to a man called Fanai, who lived among the Zahaos, to the east of the Tyao. His great grandson Roreiluova (Rorehlova) was a *boi* or was at least a dependent of a Zahao chief. Shakespear writes that “on our occupying the country in 1890, we found eight *Fanai* villages, containing about 700 houses, grouped along the west bank of the Tyao and Koladyne rivers, between Biате on the north and Sangao on the south. Roreiluova’s descendants seem to have inherited his skill in diplomacy, for they kept on good terms with their neighbours, and whenever these quarrelled managed to assist the stronger without entirely alienating the weaker.”<sup>21</sup> Perhaps it was their diplomatic skill that prevented them from being fully absorbed into the Lusei clan.

Of the Ralte, Shakespear states that “they had their villages near Champhai. Their chief Mangkhaia was captured by some Chuango, a family of the Lusei clan who were at that time living at Bualte. He was ransomed by his relatives...Manghawnga, father of Mangkhara, joined Khawzahuala the Zadeng but being ill-treated, the Ralte joined Sutmanga a Thadou chief at Phaileng, who treated them well. But his son Thawnglura showed his gratitude to Sutmanga by treacherously helping Lallianvunga the Sailo chief which forced Sutmanga to flee northwards. This treachery was rewarded by the enslavement of his clan, who, till our occupation of the hills, remained vassals of the Sailos. The Ralte are very quarrelsome, and have to a great extent resisted absorption into the Lushai.”<sup>22</sup>

The first Vuite village, writes Shakespear, “is said to have been at Chimnuai near Tiddim. Being attacked by the Sokte and Falam clans, they joined the Thangur chiefs, but were ill-treated and fled to the neighbourhood in which they now live and waged war with their oppressors till the establishment of the British rule. When the British occupied the Lushai Hills, Shakespear remarked that:

<sup>20</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei- Kuki Clans*, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 133.

<sup>22</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 137.

[M]any of this clan live [d] in a species of slavery in the villages of important Sailo chiefs. They have mostly re-joined their clansmen, from whom they had been carried off as prisoners of war.<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the Rangte, Shakespear writes that

they were a small clan which, after various vicissitudes, had settled down in 13 hamlets, containing 372 houses under their own chiefs in the south-western hills of Manipur. Their original villages were on two hills called Phaizang and Koku, from where they were ejected by the Chins and took refuge with Poiboi, one of the Sailo chiefs who opposed the British in 1871 from where they migrated northward to their present place of abode.<sup>24</sup>

War and raids were the main instruments of subjugation. The early history of Luseis is a constant war against each other. These wars begot counter wars and the results were subjugation of the loser. Raids were committed on each other incessantly where the conquered were forced into tribute-paying subjects. These villages were constantly at the mercy of the victors. Everything in the village could be demanded by the ruling chief, live stocks, fighting-men and so on. The more energetic fought back and did the same in certain cases. Thus, war followed war and in the process, the number of subjugates grew with each war. In fact, Mackenzie records that “the whole history of this frontier is indeed the story of their outrages and of their efforts to prevent, repel or avenge these.”<sup>25</sup>

Besides fighting other clans in their immediate surroundings and subjugating them, the Luseis, mainly under the six clans of Thangura, warred among themselves. In the midst of their fight for supreme control of the land, the Luseis could not, themselves, remain united. They fought among themselves to attain the status of the ultimate ruling clan. The Palians fought their brethren, the Rivungs did the same, and the Zadeng quarreled with the Thangluah, the Sailo with the Zadeng and so on. In the process of such a race for authority and supreme control, many tribes and communities were vanquished, displaced and absorbed within the Lusei. The Sailo clans continued to wage war on their brethren till they finally rose to the position of unequalled power over all the Lusei clans and tribes in the hills. This situation was noted by Shakespear as:

<sup>23</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p. 139.

<sup>24</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 143.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, [1979], 2007, p. 331.

In order for the Sailos to gain unchallenged paramountcy in the North Lushai Hills, they ultimately had to vanquish in battle, their remaining kinsmen who included the Thangluah clan, the Rivungs, the Palians and the Zadengs, all of whom were still holding together in separate camps but in some strength.<sup>26</sup>

War and Clan feuds were mainly caused by quarrel for land, to make *bois*, slaves or bonded labourers of the weaker, competition for the hand of maidens in marriage, marriage prices, revenge, and collection of taxes. Clan groups lived within a specific place in small units called villages, but these were located very near each other. Many a times, individuals of such groups engaged in quarrels over small matters. These quarrels drew the whole clan groups which resulted in war among them. Tribe against tribe, communities against another, chief against chief was the order of the day. Lewin states that the people lived a hazardous care-driven life. He noted the situation as:

[E]ach chief set against his neighbour; each clan against the other; their arms of offence and defence alike inefficient; their ambition but short sighted self-interest; their habits of life little removed from the wild creatures in the woods surrounding their villages.<sup>27</sup>

Thus the social condition of Lushai Hills in the eighteenth century provided a platform for social upheavals that gradually led to the subjugation of certain smaller and weaker tribes that had ‘no power of cohesion.’ Those that could not stand the rising power of the dominant clans and the consequent subjugation, fled from the scene and the rest continued to form part and parcel of the Lusei economic life through their bondage.

### **Status of Bonded Communities**

The long history of internal chaos in the Lusei struggle for supremacy and the subsequent emergence of the Sailo hegemony gave rise to the question of status among the various groups of people in society at the time of study. Colonial ethnographers and most contemporary literature denies the existence of class division among the inhabitants of the Lushai Hills. For instance, J. Zorema echoes what Shakespear, McCall and others have noted earlier when he states:

In the Lushai society, there was no caste or class distinction and as such they all ate and drank together. Any such distinction as there was between a chief and his villagers was

<sup>26</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, pp. 35- 36.

<sup>27</sup> T.H. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India*, p. 252.

rather functional than social and a man meanest in position could feed himself from the same table as a chief.<sup>28</sup>

However, the existence of social institutions like chieftainship, *ramhuals* and *zalens*, *bois*, *sals* (slaves) and others cannot be totally ignored as they serve as a distinct pointer in that direction. Although there was no specific class division worth mention like the Hindu society of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras, it cannot wholly be said that the Lusei society was completely free from class division. Every society at one point or other undergoes the phenomenon of class division. In fact, societies having slave systems, all had some sort of division. Likewise, the Lusei society could be roughly divided and arranged on similar lines into several categories according to their degree of importance. It would not be wrong to arrange the society in the following way. The chiefly clans with their kith and kin formed the first class in the Lusei society. These were followed by the *ramhuals*, *zalens*, the chief's councillors and anybody of importance in the society. The third class consisted of commoners or *hnamchawm*-those other than the previous mentioned categories. The bonded communities formed the next class followed by the last group of slaves or *Sals*.

A part of the bonded communities were known as *tukluh bois* with regard to their situation and conditions of surrender. There were also *chemsen bois* and *inpuichhung bois*, according to their conditions of bondage. But these were cases involving families, orphans, widows and sometimes individuals alone. However, during inter-clan or inter-village wars, a whole community or village, surrender to the more powerful promising to become *bois* to the victors. These communities obviously could not share equal status with the general population, not to mention the more privileged classes. Their status in society was simply that of *bois*, servants, dependents, half-slaves and so on. They had no rights in the social or political sphere of life. They were merely an added source of power and prestige to their conquerors. Their duty was simply to work for the chief, the village communities besides doing so for their own survival. In fact, their role (discussed below) in the social set up verifies the status they were relegated to.

Religious rites and bonded communities were two distinctions where the latter had no rights whatsoever. They could never play a significant or major role in any

---

<sup>28</sup> J. Zorema, *Indirect Rule in Mizoram 1890-1954*, Mittal, New Delhi, 2007, p. 12; T. H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, p. 133.

occasion, religious or social. Most of the time, they were considered ‘impure’ and ‘unworthy’ even to take part in religious ceremonies. This was largely evident even from the traditional practice of the Lusei chiefs in having chiefly/personal priests called *Sadawt* who perform religious rites only for the chiefs while the other villagers and commoners had the *puithiam* who offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. Left to the mercy of the chiefs under whom they had surrendered, bonded populations did not have any rights and privileges beyond the chief’s knowledge. They belonged to him and consequently adopted the clan religion *sakhua* of the victor.

Births and deaths marked the different status of the bonded communities. At the birth of a child, certain ceremonies like the tying of thread, prevention of parents from going out of the house for a fixed number of days etc., could not be observed. Christening was another special occasion when a number of live stocks were killed according to the status of the child’s parents and feasts were observed. There was no way for the bonded communities to observe such lengthy and costly ceremonies that required a touch of ‘social standing.’ In death, they were deprived of ceremonies like offertory of food to the dead, flowers or elaborate prayers and sacrifices. When it comes to religion, bonded people were anonymous. This anonymity was largely evident in social rites and rituals that did not include or recognize bonded communities. Regarding the status of *bois*, one of the bonded communities, Chatterjee states that “adult *bois*, along with their sons and daughters, lost all claims to belong to ritual and social networks outside of the chief’s household.”<sup>29</sup> She noted that:

Anonymity was hateful because it was reiterated during the rituals of “sacrifice,” elaborate funerals, and feasts of others. Only those who belonged to clans and lineages partook of the sacrifices made to the spirit protector of the clan (*sakhua*) at these performances. Estrangement from clanship and kinship led to an undignified funeral, when those without socially recognized descendants received no animal or bird sacrifices to accompany their souls on the journey to *Pialral* (the paradise reserved for great hunters and feast-givers) or *Mithikhua* (the abode of the dead). Hence dispossession of kin led to an undignified afterlife as well. Having received no food from mortals, in turn, these dispossessed and indebted souls were believed to remain

---

<sup>29</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence’ in *Slavery and South Asian History* p. 297.

“hungry” as spirits, desirous of “eating up” the wealth—animals and children—of the living.<sup>30</sup>

Deprived of such social and religious ceremonies, the bonded subjects of the Lushai Hills remained unknown, unappreciated in life and died with no identities. Their wandering spirits were certainly believed to find no resting places. They lived physically bonded and died spiritually bonded.

In the social sphere, the bonded folks were deprived of privileges that commoners enjoyed. The bonded community of *bois* may have a share of the chief’s clothes, guns and other things as long as they conform within limits of his endurance or as long as they remain within the norms encompassed by chief-*boi* relationship, but outside, they had no social standing. Excluded from the main groups of society, they remained *bois* or bonded from the day they surrendered to the day they stopped drawing breath. Everything they possessed belonged to their ‘benevolent chief’ who spoke and acted on their behalf. Jhum products, live-stocks, beads and necklaces, and everything of value in their possession belonged to him.

Unlike the *bois* living in the chief’s house, the bonded communities live in their own houses working for themselves and the chief. Their first concern was to carry out the interests of their masters, their conquerors. A bonded man’s social status can be judged from the fact that even his own daughters did not truly belong to him. Other than being a biological father, he enjoyed no authority over his daughters in service or in marriage and the aftermath. He could not exercise his duties to his daughters whatsoever nor lay claim to his daughter’s marriage price or the service to be rendered to him by his son-in-law. They belonged to the chief. In this regard, Shakespear in 1891, notes that Kairuma Sailo “received a *mithun* out of the marriage price of each of the daughters as well as the other dues from the Thado, Biate and other clans living in his village in a species of serfdom.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, for the bonded, social position was non-existent. Even the most successful could not go beyond the ‘chief’s favorite.’ They simply lived in a species of slavery in the villages of their conquerors.

The worst part of the bonded communities’ existence was their inability to migrate from the village of the chief who had subjugated them. The status they enjoyed

<sup>30</sup> Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence,’ p. 298.

<sup>31</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 48.

under the patronage of their conqueror was like that of the European serfs. They were bonded to the soil. Shakespear writes that they were “not allowed to leave the village,” 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. In fact, even among the common people, Shakespear states that:

The chiefs naturally tried their best to stop people leaving their villages, and it was customary to confiscate the paddy of any person who left the village without permission, but leave was seldom refused if the emigrant intended moving to the village of a friendly chief; and if the fugitive took refuge with a more powerful ruler, it was extremely likely that a demand for the prompt surrender of all his property would be made with such a show of force that it could not be ignored.<sup>32</sup>

If the commoners face the problem of not being allowed out of the villages of their settlements, it was only expectable that the conquered and surrendered communities would, in no circumstance, be allowed to migrate from the villages of their conquerors. It was also a custom to bring defeated communities to settle in the village of the conqueror. Customary practice of the Lusei chiefs of forceful retention of the general subjects made bonded communities more susceptible to “force” in their retention. For the bonded, escape from the hills was impossible. Forceful attempts of escape resulted in consequent death of fugitives. They were tied to the soil unless there were the interventions of some outside agents like British expeditions which directly or indirectly freed some bonded populations.

### **Role of Bonded Communities**

In an agricultural (shifting cultivation) society like the Luseis, bonded communities of the Hills played a significant role as the main producing class. We have seen time and again that raiding forays were undertaken for the purpose of taking captives. These captives and the defeated clans in certain wars became mere serfs of the Luseis who were bound to the soil and forced to labour in the *jhums*. The economy of the chiefs was based on the production of the bonded class, the *bois* and slaves/*sals*. Bonded folks being a majority among these serfs, had to produce enough for themselves and their masters, for, they were to render help anytime when called for in kind and in labour.

---

<sup>32</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 44.



The centrality of and their distinctive role as the producing class is stated by Chatterjee as:

All labor services, especially in sections of *jhum* (swidden) cultivation, were limited to activities that were considered especially hard, such as weeding. They were not ones which an unbonded subject—who paid fixed amounts of grain to his chief—performed, but were left to bondsmen and bondswomen, and to captives.<sup>33</sup>

All labour concerning agriculture and food production were left to the bonded class, captives, *bois* and *sals*. It was this need that prompted raids which were carried out to take captives. They performed all *jhum* labour from cutting down jungles, sowing, weeding, gathering crops, carrying them to the village stores and so on. In fact, the Lusei population from the chief to the commoners was dependent upon the agricultural labour performed by these classes, as, although *bois* were kept by the chiefs alone, *sals* were kept by anyone who managed to take captives in war and raids. They help the chief with rice when he demanded. They share every expenditure borne by the chief, even those incurred in entertaining his guests. However, these producing classes were the most to suffer in times of scarcity. In the chief's house, *bois* could not spend food grains according to their needs as it belonged to the chief and their masters. When the same was scarce, the chief did not like buying from other villages which often resulted in the starvation of his *bois* while checking his own being wasted. Famines brought out the worst condition of the bonded communities.

Besides playing the role of producing class, the bonded served as important protective walls in villages where they were resettled after being conquered. They were most useful as village defenders. Made to build their houses around the village with the chief's house in the centre, they became shields of protection to the chief, a fence or a protective wall built around him. This was what Captain Shakespear came across and recorded as:

When Colonel Lister in 1850 captured the village of Shentlang he was so impressed with the regularity with which the villages within sight were laid out that he was easily led to believe these were cantonments inhabited solely by warriors. If the village is a large one and contains a mixed population, it is divided into several quarters or "veng" which are generally inhabited by people of the same clan, and each will have its

---

<sup>33</sup> Indrani Chatterjee 'Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence,' p. 294.

*zawlbuk*, a large building constructed by the united labour of the men of the *veng* or the village.<sup>34</sup>

The quarters or ‘*veng*’ were composed of defeated and subjugated clans and those that were captured from the plains and other hill areas of neighbouring districts who were brought and resettled in the villages of their conquerors. The chief’s house was built in the centre by the *zawlbuk*. This custom had specific reasons. Among the Lakhers, “the reason for this location is that in case of a raid the centre of the village is the safest place, and raiders would be less likely to penetrate there and injure or kill the chief or cut down or mutilate the sacred *bongchhi*, either of which events would bring grave misfortunes upon the village.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, these houses served as “forts” to the safety of the chief. Likewise, the house of the Lusei chief was set up in the centre of the village for the same reason as such, surrounded by the houses of his subjects, where the number of houses belonging to the conquered communities usually outnumbered those of the free or original inhabitants.

In war, bonded communities had an important role to play in various capacities. Small boys ran errands for the chief and the warriors. Sometimes, they had to carry messages from one group to the other, and convey foodstuffs and weapons. They form the major part of fighting force in war just as they constituted the majority in the villages of their bondage. They were expected to be loyal and give their all to their chief. *Pasaltha*/warriors and seasoned fighters being few, the irregular troops acted as shields to protect the main body of warriors. When the enemy arrows and ammunitions were spent on them, the warriors emerge with full rigour. This was perhaps the reason for very few heroes dying on the warfront. The war over, those that managed to stay alive had another duty of burying their dead and carrying the heads of their enemies to their villages.

Another role of the subjugated tribes in the society was that of simple tribute paying subjects. For instance, in the Chin Hills, “the Haka chiefs demand a much heavier tribute than the Northern chiefs, and, although there was a recognized fixed demand, they try to squeeze out or forcibly seize as much as they possibly could whilst the dependents shuffle out of paying whenever possible. Two households seldom paid

---

<sup>34</sup> J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p.20.

<sup>35</sup> N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, Firma KLM, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Reprint 2009, p. 63.

the same amounts to the same chiefs and as Carey and Tuck states, it is no uncommon thing for a man to say:

I pay tribute to the chief of the clan and I pay tithes to the lord of the soil, who is not the chief of my clan; in common with my particular village I pay tribute to the chief who conquered us 15 years ago; I pay compensation yearly to the sons of a man whom my father killed many years ago, and also a fee to the grandson of the man whose slave my grandfather was.<sup>36</sup>

Tribes subjugated by the Lusei chiefs had to live with this legacy generation after generation. Their debt was never cleared by the immediate son or the grandson who had to work for his family, to pay off his debts as well as for paying his tributes and tithes. They could not even maintain their own identity and were sometimes absorbed and incorporated into the chief's clan by the ceremony called "*saphun*." These, along with the villages under the dominion of Sailo chiefs, remained the best source of replenishing low-ebb economy for which, the subjugated tribes sometimes replaced the captive labour when captives were scarce. Thus Mackenzie also commented that "The condition of these were almost equal to slaves who, among the wilder tribes the greater part of the jhuming operation is performed by slaves-captives of many a raid and border forays, which are indeed mainly undertaken to procure such labour."<sup>37</sup>

The strength of a village or chiefdom was one factor that necessitated absorption. There was no better way to claim support than creating a people of common culture and traditions. Economy, war and labour grew with the increase in population. The importance of a chief was also largely evident from the number of followers he had. Conquered clans were thus incorporated into the Lusei community to create a feeling of 'oneness' and to instill the spirit of belonging and 'being one of them.' In other words, the feeling of 'otherness' was expelled when ceremonies were publicly performed to make or 'remake' the 'other' into 'one among them.' It also gives more power to captors. Every weak tribe which was conquered thus found themselves resettled in the villages of their conquerors. This practice enlarges a village in population, strength and importance. Chiefs seldom turn away those that sought their protection or shelter. In fact, all captives taken were also encouraged to marry and settle

<sup>36</sup> Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, Vol. 1, Firma KLM, Calcutta, TRI, Aizawl, Reprint 2008, p. 202.

<sup>37</sup> Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 332.

in the victor's village. Thus, McCall noted the Thadou village of Kandung which had taken many Naga slaves and absorbed them within the tribe. He also noted some Manipuris who were gradually incorporated into the tribe. He writes:

Miscegenation with captives and neighbouring tribes exists at the present day among the Thadous. There are examples at Kandung village in the Naga hills and in many Thadou villages where Naga slaves have been absorbed. There are admitted instances of Manipuris becoming Thadous. But chiefs lose their position by such marriages, and they occur mainly among the ordinary villagers. The majority of the people in the North Lushai Hills are Lushais, traditional subjects of the ruling clan of Sailo chiefs while further south are more varied clans, akin to the inhabitants of the Chin Hills, and these include Pawis, Lakhers, and Fanais, the latter being famed in olden times for their ambassadorial genius.<sup>38</sup>

During Lister's Expedition, he and his troops came upon the village of one chief named Mulla (Ngura) whose village they burnt on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1850. The village consisted of 800 to 1000 houses, and Lister reports that:

The Lushais are a very powerful tribe under the government of six *sirdars*, of whom one is the acknowledged chief. They all have their separate cantonments with a number of dependent villages attached. In these cantonments the fighting men reside; in the dependent villages are located their ryots, who are *merely used as coolies*, and *for tilling the soil*. They consists, in many instances, of the *captives they have brought away* in their different expeditions, a great part of them probably *taken as mere children* and gradually reconciled to their captivity.<sup>39</sup> [Emphasis added]

Traditional rights and customary practices have many a time, pointed out the grave situation of a cruel or non-conformist chief whose position could be rendered 'a chief without subjects.' Herein lies the unending source of 'goodness, generosity, paternalistic trait' of the Lusei chiefs. Threatened by subject-less situations, many *lals* were forced to adopt nobility where there was none. It was not easy to put up a façade for long especially when touched by a taste of power. This trait of cruelty on the character of chiefs sometimes surfaced and resulted in the ill-treatment of the conquered communities. Therefore, Liangkhaia states that some chiefs "treated the more

<sup>38</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> Lister's Report in Alexander Mackenzie's *The North-East Frontier*, pp. 292-293.

unfortunate so badly that life among them became really hard,<sup>40</sup> and this ill-treatment became one major factor for the migration of the earlier occupants of the hills. Regarding Lalphunga and Vanhnuialiana's treatment of the Hmar communities subjugated earlier, Liangkhaia further states:

Hmar-ho an tukluh te kha an chhechhawl berah an hmang. Daian dotir a, lal inte an saktir a. (Chu mi atang chuan lal in sak hi a lo chhuak ani, an ti)<sup>41</sup>

Loosely translated it means:

Those Hmars they had forced to surrender were continuously used as labour force. They made them put up fences, 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)

Thus the subjugated tribes under Lusei bondage formed the workforce and made to cut and clear village paths and inter-village paths, fence villages for protection against enemies, in the jhums, in war and to fill the gap of labour force wherever and whenever necessary. Forced labour for the construction of houses of chiefs that emerged from those times continued until chieftainship was abolished in 1952.

Some chiefs were so reckless that they failed to treat their subjects according to custom. In this connection, the Zadeng chiefs were known for their cruelty, pomposity and inconsiderate treatment of their people. They were tyrants, arrogant and most self-contained. They forced their subjects beyond all human endurance only to achieve their ends. Their own clansmen were not sorry to see their defeat and fall at the hands of the Sailo clans. The recklessness of other chiefs were also evident from the fact that "Khalkom in 1880, oppressed and began to persecute his own men so much so that about 400 of his followers left his protection and took asylum in Cachar."<sup>42</sup> The same year, his minister, Ratan Singh, committed a savage murder at Changsil bazar by drowning some innocent women and children and thus created a terror at a place where lived a considerable number of traders who were British subjects. This action of his later brought about the termination of his career.

<sup>40</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, Swapna Printing Works Calcutta, Pvt, Ltd, L. T. L. Publications Aizawl, p. 138

<sup>41</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 105

<sup>42</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Mizoram Under the British Rule*, Mittal Publication, 1985, Delhi, p. 92

### **Polity formation: Circumstances leading to subjugation of tribes**

Pre-colonial Lushai Hills was marked by the external and internal feuds that arose in the fight for power from the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Political awareness and economic achievements of land was the major cause of feuds. Each chief claimed some patches of land to his name. But they lack a proper and clear cut picture of their boundaries or the extent of their chiefdoms. Accusation of encroachment and theft of land usually follow, each claiming the piece of land as his. This created friction and led to feuds. Kinship considerations were ruled out where land was concerned. Cultivation being the main source of subsistence, land was the resource that produced social and economic stabilities directly and indirectly. The immense role played by land is noted by Mangkhosat as:

Once they enter the hills with their steep mountains and deep gorges, things began to change fast. It was hard to find a flat land large enough to hold large settlements with the result that the group began to split up in smaller groups, often the same family or clan settling in the same village. On account of the difficulties of communication between the now scattered villages maintaining contact with each other became difficult and infrequent. Naturally therefore, each locality developed its own way of speaking, dressing, manners and customs....on those few occasions they meet, it was often in the form of conflict over jhum lands which created and perpetuated clan feuds. The scattered people completely lost their sense of national identity.<sup>43</sup>

But other reasons like bitter relationship with paramount chiefs, threat from more powerful neighbouring villages, famine &c, acted as the driving forces for feuds that consequently led to raids, wars and subsequent subjugation. Sipra Sen notes that:

A Chief's power of attracting supporters and ability to protect and safeguard his people created inter-tribal rivalries between stronger chiefs and weaker chiefs. As such, a dispute was always there with the clan members of eastern, western and northern areas of Mizoram.<sup>44</sup>

The subjugation of weaker clans was most profound among the Luseis who even fought among their clans in order to gain paramount power. We have seen that there were frequent wars fought even among the sons of Thangur. In the process of these clan

---

<sup>43</sup> Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture: The Encounter between Christianity and Mizo culture in Mizoram*, Mizo Theological Conference, Aizawl, 1997, p. 42

<sup>44</sup> Sipra Sen, *Tribes of Mizoram: Description, Ethnology and Bibliography*, Gyan Publishers, 1993, pp. 27-28

feuds and subsequent wars regardless of kinship, the Sailo clan's emergence as the paramount power is noted by McCall:

In about the year 1780, the strong Sailo migration commenced moving from the south in a northerly direction driving before them the Hrangkhoh, Biate, Thado and other kindred tribes of the Lushai Hills until the Sailos, with their Lushai clans in 1810, chiefly under Lallula Sailo, had consolidated their internal position by occupying most of the country between Champhai and Demagiri northwards up to the borders of Cachar and Sylhet. This migration was probably caused by the Zahaus and Burma clans such as the Hualngos, Thlang Tlang of Falam, Fanais and others becoming so strong that the Lusheis, under their Sailo overlords, were compelled to give way and establish themselves in the area known now as the North Lushai Hills. The Sailos claim to be descended from Sailova, one of the seven sons of the founder of all Lusheis, namely Thangur, and in order for the Sailos to gain unchallenged paramountcy in the North Lushai Hills, they ultimately had to vanquish in battle, their remaining kinsmen who included the Thangluah clan, the Rivungs, the Palians and the Zadengs, all of whom were still holding together in separate camps but in some strength.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the Sailo clan of the Thangur bloodline fought even their own kinsmen till they were sure of eliminating every sign of threat to their status as rulers. Shakespear states that "The Thangur chiefs effectively uprooted their brethren who had advanced before them and built the largest settlements through which the impressionistic ideas of social life and standards were imbibed, conveyed and imprinted in the minds of the tribal ensconced in this ecological niche."<sup>46</sup>

Emergence of the Sailo chiefly clan as the paramount power and subsequent subjugation of other less competitive tribes and clans began with the rise of Lallula, the greatest chief of the Sailo clans. He and his descendants played an important role in carving the Sailo dominion. The period of Lallula and his sons spelt the beginning of a single clan dominion under the Sailos that continued to the British occupation of the hills. One very remarkable outcome of their rule was the encouragement of Duhlian dialect which came to be adopted later as the state's official language.

---

<sup>45</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, pp. 35-36

<sup>46</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 5-6



### Lallula and the rise of Sailo hegemony

Lallula belonged to the Sailo clan of Thangur line of families. The western side of the Lushai Hills was occupied by small communities formed of blood relations each with feuds with its neighbour. When the need of good jhum land arose, the eastern clans made it impossible for the Thangur clans. Therefore, they moved westward, followed by the Rokhums and the Zadengs. "About 1830, they were reported to have ruled 1,000 houses divided into four villages situated near the banks of the Tlawng and Dalleswari river round the Darlong peak. Lallula's family attacked and defeated the Hualngos and the Palians. Subsequently, the Zadengs quarreled and fought with Mangpura in 1857, who, at his dying bed, bequeathed the feud to his relatives. Among these was Vutaia, who prosecuted the feud so vigorously that the Zadengs were defeated."<sup>47</sup> However, the Zadengs were not in the least sorry about their defeat as their chiefs were known for their cruelty, and their people chose to be under some other better chiefs rather than being under such cruel lords.

Lallula was already a young chief with a strong leadership quality when at Selesih. The disintegration of Selesih made him move eastward and occupied the village of Zopui. He organised a strong group of fighting men, taught the villagers the value of hard work that made Zopui a prosperous place within a short time. "A good number of people from Kawlni, a Ralte clan gave him a set of gongs to avoid becoming his slaves, and took refuge in his village of Zopui. This set of gong acted as a covenant between Lallula and the Kawlni. The remaining Ralte migrated to Mizoram and their last popular chief was Khelte chief, Mangthawnga, who founded a village near Champhai, but was later defeated by Zadeng chiefs. The Kawlni then suggested they invite the Siakeng, their close relations to join them in the village as well. Lallula took this as an opportunity to enlarge his village. But Mangula a noted warrior of the Siakeng chose to fight as he did not want to comply. Lallula fought and killed many of them. The rest were brought and settled at Zopui. A number of the Khawlhing clans also joined Lallula for fear of the Halkha Pawi. From this conglomeration, the village boasted of having as many as 500 houses."<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> *Mizo Lal Ropuite*, 'Lallula,' TRI, Aizawl, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1996, p. 7.

The position of Zopui was not safe from the danger of Pawi attacks. Lallula wisely married his eldest son Lalpuiliana to the daughter of a Zahau chief. This stopped the Zahaus from raiding or taking tribute from Zopui. But the Thlanrawn Pawi continued harassing and demanding tribute from the Sailo villages. Lallula hatched a plan to solve this. After making necessary preparations, he invited the Pawi chief Thanchhuma to celebrate a feast in honour of the good harvest that year along with the promise of gifts. The unsuspecting chief came with his troop of about 300 men. At the feast, they were plied constantly with zu/ fermented rice beer making them so drunk that they slept likelogs. That night, all the Pawis were slaughtered with the exception of Thanchhuma and his noted warrior Cherkuanga. The chief was ransomed with a necklace of ember beads while Cherkuanga was redeemed with three guns. This achievement made him a living hero and his fame spread far and wide. But Zopui was not safe from the incursions and wrath of the Pawis.

The neighbouring villages moved away gradually from the menace of the Pawi and Zopui was now alone. Lallula knew his village could not stand alone in the face of Pawi attacks. So, he moved towards west with Rorehlova, the Fanai chief with whom he had cultivated friendship on political grounds and settled in a locality of Zopui earlier. He moved to Lungchhuan and then to Piler. Here, he parted ways with Rorehlova and he moved on to Bawngchawm and then settled in Serchhip. From here, he moved on to the west and settled at Diarkhai near Sialsuk where his youngest son Vuttaia was born. He then shifted to Samlukhai and proceeded towards Sabual, Lalzatuaka's village of about 500 houses. The former was his cousin. As they did not see eye to eye, he moved on and established a new settlement at Darlung where his old villagers of Zopui joined him. From here, he threatened the Zadeng chiefs who were obliged to leave their settlements and moved away. Shakespear writes:

In alliance with the Sailo chiefs of Lalul's family, they attacked and defeated successively the Hualngo (a Lushei family settled between Tyao and Manipir rivers), and the Palian, who were their allies against the Hualngo. Subsequently, the Zadeng quarrelled with Mangpura, then the most powerful Sailo chief, who, dying about that time, bequeathed the feud to his relatives, one of whom, Vutaia, prosecuted it with such vigour that the Zadeng, inspite of an alliance with the Manipur Rajah, proved but a broken reed-had to flee southwards, and their last independent village, numbering only

100 houses, broke up on the death of the chief, which occurred at Chengpui, near Lungleh, about 1857.<sup>49</sup>

Lallula established his last village at Hreichhuk where he died a natural death around the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although Lallula did not establish any permanent establishment, his fame preceded him and all his sons Lalpuiliana, Lallianvunga, Mangpawrah, Vuttaia were established as chiefs in their own villages by the time he passed away. The area ruled by Lallula and sons faced frequent threat from others such as Pawi, Zadeng, Palian, Sukte, and Paite. But they persevered and rose to the status of paramountcy. Their diplomatic sagacity enabled them to rule over other clans. They dominated the northern part of present Mizoram. The total number of Lallula's descendants reached more than fifty villages. "Except for them there were villages of little significance belonging to the Hmar, Zahau, Hualngo, and Ralte bearing testimony of the administrative ability and greatness of this chief."<sup>50</sup> By the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Lusei hegemony was so established that A.W. Davis wrote:

There is one chief of the Chengkual clan, and all the rest of the chiefs of villages in the North Lushai Hills are of the Sailo, often misspelt Sylu, family, and are with the exception of the seven or eight villages near Sherchip, the direct descendant of Lallula, who at the beginning of this century headed the great Duliens or Lushei migration from the southeast, the result of which has been the establishment of the Duliens as chiefs in every village in the hills and their language as the lingua franca of the country from the Kolosib Hill in the north to the Blue Mountain in the south.<sup>51</sup>

The rise of Lallula and his sons to prominence might have been the genesis that chronicled a long line of Sailo chiefs and the establishment of Lusei dominance among other tribes in Mizoram. The triumphant Luseis became arrogant and more prone to fighting their neighbours. They created a condition that forced some of the earlier settlers to flee and continuously migrate from the menace of their oppressors. This situation was described by Guite as:

Just as the 'invasion' was rapid, the rapidity of Kuki migration earned for them the name of a 'migratory race': some of them even reached the Naga Hills, North Cachar

<sup>49</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> McCall, *The Lushai Chrysalis*, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> A. W. Davis, *Gazetteer of Northern Lushai Hills*, Reprint 1987, First print 1915, Matero Company, p.6.

Hills and the Somra Tracts of Upper Burma. Thus, Lusheis, Thadous, Guites, Zous, Vaipheis and others fled from the Chin Hills when the Falam, Hakas and Soktes became formidable and the Thadous, Changsans, Lhangums, and the 'Old Kukis' fled the Lushai Hills when the Lusheis became formidable.<sup>52</sup>

We have already seen the Sailo emergence as the undisputed chiefly clan among the Lusei clans. The Luseis, under the able leadership of the Sailo clans, now turned their attention towards other territories. Their forays into territories beyond their control, especially in British controlled areas became very frequent. However, these had various reasons behind them. One was procuring captives to work in their jhums. Incursions against the British were also due to its expansionist programs that began tea-plantations in the bordering areas nearest their hills. The plantations destroyed their hunting grounds which were against the Luseis. It was this great clan that came into contact with the British. "In their attempts to extend their sway over the tribes the British Government sent repeated expeditions against them since 1850."<sup>53</sup>

### **Conflicts among the Sailo chiefs : Internecine Wars**

The internal history of the early Luseis was full of inter-clan feuds that led to wars and consequent bloodshed. The chief causes of these were ownership of land, to make *bois* (slaves) of one another, competition for the hand of maidens in marriage, to take revenge for old or earlier misunderstandings, quarrels over marriage price and collection of taxes. Regarding feuds that arose on account of land, Mackenzie writes:

Even the chiefs claim no property in the land or in the forests. Each claims the men of his tribe wherever they wander, or in whatever part of the country they may settle for the time to jhoom. Generally speaking, the jhoomeas of each clan confine themselves within certain rough limits, but there is no real local jurisdiction vesting in any of the chiefs.<sup>54</sup>

The problem of boundary was one that causes feuds as a man sometimes ventured far enough to jhoom or hunt in another chief's *ram* or land. But these feuds played an integral part of tribal politics in the life of the hill people.

<sup>52</sup> Guite, 'Civilisation and Its malcontents: Politics of Kuki raids, p. 358.

<sup>53</sup> Sangkima; *Mizos: Society and Social Change*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1992, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*.

The first “known record of inter-clan wars was fought between the Kiangte and Chhakchhuak.”<sup>55</sup> In this war, the Kiangte proved braver and a large number of Chhakchhuaks died. Later, they asked help from the Ngente clan who, under the leadership of their chief Chhunruma, son of Chawngchawna, defeated the Kiangte and subjugated them in the 18<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Ngentes became vain in their defeat of the Kiangtes and challenged the villagers of Seipui. They also beat to death Lalremi, daughter of Thangkhara chief of Seipui. Another incident occurred where Thangchung, a Chhakchhuak from the village of Hriangngai, who was on a journey, was killed by the Ngentes at Lentlang Limkawn. This incensed the latter so much that they sent emissaries to Ngente, to make them aware of their grievances and announced war on them. Lalmanga, the chief accepted the challenge and fought with Zasela, chief of Seipui. But he was seriously injured and passed away. When they saw their fallen chief, the Ngentes lost heart. They were defeated and subjugated by the joined efforts of Hualngo and Hualhang. They occupied Chawnghawih, the Ngente hold and the latter set up a village at Bapuitlang. Being defeated, they were forced to leave their place. In the war between the Chuahang and Hualhang, the Hualhang were defeated and driven out from their big village of Khawkawk.”<sup>56</sup>

The most remarkable inter-clan wars fought in the Lushai Hills was between the North and South which took place about 1856-1859. The second was that of the East and West 1877 to 1888. In this war, Vuta and Vanhnuailiana were in the north while the descendants of Rohlura fought from the south. The main reason for the outbreak of this war was a quarrel over the possession of land. After defeating the Zadeng tribe, chief Vuta moved south and established a large village and named it Hualtu. After some time, he decided to move further south for which he built a temporary hut at Buanhmun to occupy till he could establish a large village. Before Vuta could occupy this hut, chief Lalpuithanga, a descendent of Lalrivunga forestalled and occupied it. On hearing this, the former was so enraged that he took his people and forcefully moved to Buanhmun. The latter was afraid and went back to Vanchengte. During this war, both parties raided each other incessantly. The most horrible raid in this war was that carried on the village of Khawnglung. The sons of Vuta and their allies entered the village, killed almost all the inmates of the Zawlbuk at night. Many women were killed in lanes and many

---

<sup>55</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 55.

children and young ladies were taken as captives and led away.”<sup>57</sup> This war lasted six long years in which Rohlura’s descendants were defeated. The war ended at the outbreak of *Mautam* (famine caused by flowering bamboos).

Between 1877 and 1888, war between the East and West broke out, the contending parties Liankhama of Tualbung and Kalkhama of Hmuizawl descendants of Lalsavunga and Manga respectively. Many raids were carried on each other by both sides. Liankhama attacked and raided Hmuizawl, killed many and took many captives.”<sup>58</sup> To counter this, Liankhama and his people again raided Liankunga’s village of Muthi. The westerners of Tachhip raided the village of Ruanzawl. When the villagers came out to go to their jhums, ‘the westerners shot them, killed many of them and captured many alive.’ Chief Lalbuka’s village of Vancheng with seven hundred houses attacked Kairuma’s village of Tlangpui where two each died from both sides. The war between the east and west came to an end with the outbreak of *Thingtam*, followed by the entry of the British into Lushai Hills.

The extent of the Lushai domination is marked by the areas known to have been under their control. There were two parties in the Lushai land commonly known as the Eastern and Western clans. On the eastern side were Lalbura, Poiboi, Lengkam, Chunglana, Bungteya (Bungtea) with Bhenkuia a northern Howlong, Savunga (Lalsavunga) and Sringalbura. On the western side were Sukpial (Suakpuilala), Khalkam, Lengpunga (Lianphunga), Sailenpui (Sailianpui) with the minor chiefs Darmangpui, Minthang, Thangula, Sunga, Pibuk and Kantangpui. Lalhais was said to have preserved strict neutrality.”<sup>59</sup> The western Sailo chiefs were the descendants of Suakpuilal who concentrated their rule over the western villages, Vonelel (Vanhnuailiana)’s descendants known as the Eastern Sailo chiefs ruled over the eastern villages. These paid tribute to the British establishment and supplied impressed labour when called for, and the villages in the south-west were ruled by Howlong chiefs, and the rest were ruled by Kairuma, descendant of Vuta.”<sup>60</sup> Villages not under the chief himself were placed under headmen. The main village used to have up to 400 houses and above. Majority of the inhabitants thus came to live in perpetual dread of the

<sup>57</sup> V.L. Siana, *Mizo History*, p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> R.K. Lalhluna, *Mizo History* (An Introduction to Mizo History), p. 128.

<sup>59</sup> Official Hand book of *The Lushais*, TRI, Aizawl, 2008, pp. 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> B.B. Goswami, ‘The Mizos in the context of State Formation’, in Surajit Sinha, *Tribal Politics and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*, K.P Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1989, p. 320.

Sailos. They had become so bold in their enterprise that one of their descendants made territorial claims even up to Chittagong Hill tracts.”<sup>61</sup> The Luseis thus fought among themselves, conquering, subjugating and absorbing the lesser or minor tribes.

Lister’s expedition curbed the Lushai spirit for some time. However, hostilities popped up again in 1877, the cause of which was the ‘right of ownership to certain jhum lands,’ which different parties were approaching from different ends. Several encounters took place. In the first, the belligerents were Khalkam and Poiboi. The second occurred in February of the same year in which the aggressor was Lalbura who attacked Suakpuilal. The third aggression took place in the month of April in which Poiboi and Suakpuilal were the contending parties. In the last encounter, Suakpuilal was said to have lost two followers. Some men were said to have been captured by the one side, and some mithuns seized by the other. These feuds continued unabated and fear forced both the parties to have fortified their villages and prepared for any emergencies.

True to their expectations, September 1877 saw Lengkham attacking Khalkam again. The reason ascribed was the theft of some salt by Khalkam. Lengkham attacked him and carried off 15 heads to revenge the theft. In the meantime, Lalhai, who had remained neutral, was drawn into a quarrel against Poiboi, which frightened his people and 35 of them migrated to the British territory. In July and August 1877, both sides appealed to the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar for assistance against the other but was refused. At the end of the year, they appealed for mediation again but to no avail. Early in 1878, 12 men from Lalruma’s village were caught stealing salt at the Lengvoi salt springs. Khalkam stripped and let them go.

Soon after this incident, some of Lengkham’s people went to the Sonai Bazaar and were caught by Khalkam. He imprisoned them for one night and let them go. Two days later, Poiboi and Lengkam attacked Khalkam, burnt 10 houses, killed 10 men and took 6 prisoners. To revenge this, Khalkam attacked Sengvong, a village under Poiboi, captured 5 women and killed 1 old man. In October 1878, Poiboi asked the Deputy Commissioner to aid him in his fight against Lalhai, but was refused. In December of the same year, Khalkam applied for help against the eastern tribes.”<sup>62</sup> Many mantries of chiefs were present at Silchar to find means of acquiring help to stop the continuous

---

<sup>61</sup> B. B. Goswami, ‘The Mizos in the context of State Formation,’ p. 314.

<sup>62</sup> Official handbook of *The Lushais*, p. 24.



fight in the land. But besides a reprimand and an advice for the stoppage of inter-tribe or clan feuds through peace-making, nothing much was achieved.

Earlier, the British government in Assam had strictly tried to follow the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the tribesmen who inhabited their immediate territories, which it followed as best it could. The government remained satisfied that the only means of compromising the quarrel between them would be to define on the spot the limits in the disputed tract of jhum land to which each chief's cultivation should extend. However, repeated entreaties to the British sometimes could not keep the government non-cooperative. For instance, in 1881, Major Boyd had hoped to arrange matters between the eastern and western Lushais, but the death of Suakpuilal put a full stop to all hopes of peace between them. Again in 1883, Knox Wight, having the same thought in mind, had advanced to Tipaimukh bazaar, but an attack in his camp by the Suktes necessitated his withdrawal even before he had begun the negotiations.

In April 1879, Lengpunga and one of his brothers attacked Poiboi and Lengkam, and another party went further south to raid on Lalbura, but Poiboi's grandmother intervened and the fight was prevented. In June the same year, Sailianpui and others started to attack Poiboi and Lengkam again, but rumours that troops were being despatched from Cachar to Tipaimukh stopped the impending war. Petty raids continued between the eastern and western clans in 1880. In September, the western chiefs raided a rani, killed 10 men and carried off a woman captive.

In 1881, Suakpuilal died, and this encouraged Poiboi and Lengkam to prosecute the quarrel. In April 1881, Lengkam, Poiboi and Chungleng attacked and burnt the village of Thangula, killed 150 of his people and took 39 prisoners. Thangula escaped the massacre and fled to Khalkam's punji, and later sought asylum in the village of Lalhai. However, the latter betrayed him to Poiboi and Lengkam. Thangula was detained a captive in the village of Poiboi and eventually effected his escape."<sup>63</sup> According to the same source, towards the close of 1881, Khalkam made an abortive attempt on Lalluava, son of Buangtheuva, younger brother of Lalbura. Thangula, son of Runphunga (Rawna) and Liankunga (son of Lalchhunga and grandson of Suakpuilal) made a successful raid on Lalruaia, who had been living with his father Poiboi and carried off two of his wives, besides looting ivory, gongs etc. Not long afterwards,

---

<sup>63</sup> Official handbook of *The Lushais*, pp. 25-26.

Poiboi and his son Lalruaia succeeded in effecting a surprise attack and rescuing the woman besides carrying off three of Dawkhuma's men as captives.

In 1882, *Thingtam* (famine) broke out and subdued the hostilities of both side. Peace was maintained till the spring of 1882. In 1883, a meeting was arranged to effect a further settlement of the jhuming rights on Bolte tlang, but was speedily terminated by the treachery of Sangvunga, brother of Bengkhuaia, and his son Liankhara. They murdered one of the four mantries sent by the Lushais to negotiate while the others turned back. In January 1884, Thangula took revenge on Poiboi's mantra who had ill-treated him during his captivity. Tunglena, the mantra of Poiboi was caught in Thangula's village and was at once put to death. In the cold weather of 1884, the military preparation of the Government of India along the frontiers diverted the attention of the Lushais from their internal hostilities. In 1886-87, Savunga and his son Lalngura were attacked by Bengkhuaia and Sangchungua of the Semaikachak tribe, forcing them to take refuge in Sailianpui's territory. In June 1888, Thangliana, Lalhrima, Kamlova, and Thlungbuta, the four sons of Bengkhuaia (brother of Savunga) the Haulong chief intended to attack Lalngura's village.

In October 1888, Kalkhama threatened to attack Lalruaia, son of Poiboi, who had been forced to move further west due to the pressure from the Suktes. Subsequently, Lalruaia left his village to live in the village of his father Poiboi. Like other Lushai chiefs in the east, Lalbura also moved westward due to fear of the Suktes of the Chin Hills in Burma.”<sup>64</sup> In November 1888, the mantries of Khalkam and Thangula in Silchar, declared that their masters had no intention of quarrelling with Poiboi, but in January 1889, Khalkam repudiated his mantri's statements, and objected to Poiboi; Lengkam or Lalbura having any share in the Sonai bazaar.

In 1888-89, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, the Council of Simla (under government of India letter No. 2424-E, dated 19 December, 1888) decided to take immediate military action against the Lushais. Accordingly the expedition named “the Lushai Expedition” was despatched, the object of which was essentially to prevent raids.”<sup>65</sup> This expedition left the Chins intact, but curbed the raiding spirit and feuds

<sup>64</sup> C. G. Verghese and R. L. Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, Vol-I, Vikas Publishing House, (Pvt), Ltd, 1997, pp. 260-261.

<sup>65</sup> C. G. Verghese and R. L. Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, pp. 260-261.

within the Lushai Hills for some time, until the annexation of the hills to the British Empire.

### **War with other tribes**

From the time of their migration into the Lushai Hills, the Luseis waged war with other tribes in and around the hills. They came in contact with earlier settlers who were already firmly established in territories of their own. Very often, there were clashes when it came to jhumland and settlement sites. When the Luseis were better settled, they became bold. Although small in number, their needs prompted them to stand their ground. Gradually, they were able to carve out a niche for themselves in the hilly terrains of the land which they later occupied after defeating or chasing out weaker and smaller communities. Some of the more important wars waged against other tribes are discussed in a nutshell.

### ***Lusei verses Zahau***

The main cause for the westward movement of the Luseis about “1740 was the menace of tribes like the Zahau, Haka, Thlanthlang and the Tlasuns. These four tribes followed and harassed the Luseis mainly for tribute whenever the Luseis attempted to settle in one location.” The Luseis thought out a plan to increase their number as a check to enemy encounters. Chiefs and leaders brought together other tribes and sub-tribes to settle in one place and be prepared for enemy onslaught. This idea culminated in the conglomeration of the most legendary and famous Lusei settlement known as Selesih where it was said that there were about 7,000 houses with seven chiefs of great repute. However, the strength and fame of Selesih did not in the least deter these tribes from their continued incursions into the Lusei villages “to demand treasures of Burmese gongs, brass and bells, mithuns and ornaments.”<sup>66</sup>

The menace of these tribes created so many problems that Lallula devised a plan to annihilate the Thlanrawn Pois. Vumson continues that when he became chief of Selesih Lallula began to scheme an end to the miserable plight and insecure life of his people. At that time, Rorehlova, a Fanai orphan was adopted by Rohnaa, Lallula’s father. When Rorehlova was of age he was made a *tafa* or dependant by Khawkimthang the chief of Zahau who sent him with 70 households to form the village of Bawlte near

---

<sup>66</sup> Vumson, *Zo History*, Published by the Author, Aizawl, 1986, p. 88

Champhai, to enlarge his territory. The Lusei had also given Rorehlova the land because they wanted a buffer state between them and the eastern tribes of Zahau, Haka, Thlanthlang and Tlasun. But Rorehlova entered into peaceful coexistence with the Lusei chiefs among them Lallula. Having gained the friendship of Rorehlova and the support of neighbouring Lusei chiefs, Lallula proceeded to carry out his plan of teaching a lesson to the eastern tribes. Once ready with his preparations, he invited the Zahau to collect the annual tributes. The Zahau chief came with about 300 followers with the hope of carrying the tribute gifts.

Contrary to the normal practice of the eastern chiefs who comes on their own initiative and at their own convenience, the invitation on the part of Selesih was not viewed as something sinister. They never saw nor suspected any foul play, being confident that the Lusei would not dare raise fingers against them. “Not only had the chiefs and their warriors, but their village elders and young boys also came to collect their prize. In the meantime, Lallula had asked all the neighbouring allied chiefs to come with their warriors. He instructed his villagers to prepare an adequate quantity of rice, *zu*(rice beer) and meat to feed the eastern guests who were led by their chief Thanchhuma. The leading elders accompanying him were Phunthanga and Cherkuanga. Their champion fighter, called Thanglianga, was also in the party. They were feasted continuously for three days by Lallula. On the third night when the entire village was asleep, Lallula and his warriors fell on them and a massacre followed. However, Thanglianga and two others escaped home to report the disaster. Thanchhuma and Cherkuanga were captured alive but the other counsellor Phunthanga was killed. This massacre came to be known as the ‘Thlanrawn rawt,’ meaning the ‘massacre of the Thlanrawn.’ This was about 1753-54 A. D. In the course of years, Thanchhuma and Cherkuanga were allowed to purchase their freedom and their ransoms being paid, were released. It was about this time that one of the *Chaihla* called *Zopui Zai*, sometimes called Lallula Zai (the poems of Lallula) was popularized.”<sup>67</sup>

This massacre fed fuel to the Thlanrawns who became more dangerous. Their attention was fixed on getting even with the people of Selesih. “The Luseis felt threatened and many of them migrated west. Lallula’s western migration was estimated to be in about 1757, and he wandered westward until 1786. His dwelling places were

---

<sup>67</sup> See B. Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo*, Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, Lalbiakthanga, *The Mizos: A Study in Racial Personality*, 1978.

Zopui, Vanlaiphai, Bawktlang, Zobawk, Lungchuan, Bawngchun, Zawngtah, Chamring, Diarkhai, and Parvatui where he died about 1803. Lallula was the most powerful Sailo or Lusei chief and since his rule the Luseis have used the Duhlian dialect or *Lusei tawng* as a common language. This dialect is spoken today by every Zo in the Indian part of Zo territory.”<sup>68</sup> Lallula’s sons patronised and encouraged the language and indirectly contributed towards its establishment of the official language on Mizoram’s attainment of statehood.

### *Lusei versus Thadous*

During their settlement by the river Tyao or Tiau, the Hangshing clan of Thadous had a strong village Lhungtin on the Salli range of hills. It was a big village which harassed the Luseis a great deal. So, the Luseis went to chief Jelhao with one spear, one shield and one ear bead and requested him to influence the Hangshings not to raid them. This brought peace between the Lusei and Thadous. Some of the Lusei villages also placed themselves under the Shingson clans.”<sup>69</sup> But matters did not end there, for the process of state formation demanded the vanquish of every other tribes that stood on the path of the Luseis and peace and peaceful co-existence had no meaning. War between the two was imminent.

The Thadous were a great many clans whose position was as strong and well established as the Luseis. Once, they had given protection to a clan called Galte who returned the favour by attempting the murder of their chief. However, they were so harassed by the Pawis that large villages like Sailhem, Songbem, Songlhuh, Lasan, Tuithang, Chahsat and Lhunting were destroyed. Even after this extensive destruction, the Thadous refused to submit to the Pawis and finally moved away northwards.

When the Luseis had begun their process of state formation, the northern part of the hills was occupied by the Sukte, Paihte and the Thadou clans who appeared to have been firmly established under regular chiefs. “When the Thangur clans had established themselves and the capable Sailo chiefs had come to prominence, they felt equal to fighting the Thadou clans, which were as highly organised as themselves.”<sup>70</sup> Lalngura, son of Lallianvunga and grandson of Lallula was at Lentlang when he decided to raid on

<sup>68</sup> Vumson, *Zo History*, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1986, pp. 88-89.

<sup>69</sup> William Shaw, *Notes on the Thadou Kukis*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, [1929], 1997, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 6.

the Thadous. While his cousin Lalsavunga raided Mawmrangtlang the village of chief Sehjapao, “Lalngura raided the village of Palsang which was under the chieftainess Mangchinu. Lalngura surrounded the village, called out the chieftainess and her husband and burnt the whole village. Many of the villagers died while a good number were captured.”<sup>71</sup> They also attacked their settlement in Cachar.

At this juncture, it must be recalled that some of the Kuki clans have fled the Lushai Hills when the Luseis became formidable and had taken refuge in Cachar under British protection. So, “in November 1849, Lushai Kookies, subjects of Lalingboong (Lallianvunga) attacked a settled Kookie village ten miles south of Silchar, belonging to one Seyahpow. Here, they killed 29 persons and took 42 captives. After this, they attacked the villages of Leelong Rajah and Augum, Kookie settlements in the vicinity of the station, burnt them and went their way. The government resolved on this occasion to take active measures. The Rajah of Tipperah was called upon to deliver up the guilty chiefs and their followers and to restore the captives. He was informed that if he was unable to comply with this demand, the government would march a force in his territory, as it was impossible to allow such body and wanton outrages to pass unpunished.”<sup>72</sup> Here comes the Tripura Raj’s role as a buffer state between the Lushai Hills and the Cachar district which sometimes came about through force from both sides. This incident was therefore, followed up by “Colonel Lister’s expedition on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1850 where he arrived in the village of Mulla (Ngura) where he reports that there can be no doubt that Mulla was the chief whose people committed the outrage on Roopa Cherra in November last, and to confirm this, an abkaree perwannah was found in his house, bearing the name of a man belonging to the Tripoorah village, which was plundered on that occasion, and dated 1849.”<sup>73</sup>

The war between the Luseis and Thadous had been responsible for the British expedition into the hills in 1849-50 which accidentally freed yet another “429 captives” from the hands of the Luseis.”<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Liankhaia, *Mizo History*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>72</sup> Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 291.

<sup>73</sup> Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 293.

<sup>74</sup> Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 293.

### ***Lusei - Haka War***

The Khawlhring and Zawngte clans of the Luseis were settled in huge numbers in the villages of Khawlhring and Vizang at a short distance from Haka. The Luseis had often threatened to invade Haka. When they therefore defeated the Sunthla, the Hakas became confident and turned their attention towards the Luseis. Accordingly, Liandun, the head of the Nunthua Suan family was sent to acquire a force of Burmans armed with guns. After several years of persuasion, Liandun succeeded in including Myat San, chief of Tilin, to join the Hakas. So, Myat San and 200 men armed with guns and twobrass cannons marched to join the Hakas' war against the Luseis. The joint forces of Haka and Burman soldiers surprised the Luseis in an attack at dawn. The Luseis at that time had no guns and were not a match for the armed forces. They were forced to flee from the field, deserted their villages and fled about in disorder. For several months afterwards, the Haka parties ravaged the country and eventually drove every Lusei across the Tiau.<sup>75</sup> The Lusei taunts and challenges of the Hakas thus ended in their total defeat and subsequent settlement across the river Tiau.

### ***Hualngo and Zahau against Sukte***

In 1876, Hualngo and Zahau clans combined to attack the Sukte clan. They set out some 300 strong, and suddenly attacked the village of Tungzang and killed 29 people. However, the Sukte people quickly organised and taking a shortcut to Inbuktlang, ambushed the Zahau-Hualngo group. The ambush was a failure, allowing the Hualngo and Zahau to escape with their captives. Haupum, the brother of Khawcin, was killed during the attack.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Lusei verses Pois/Shendus***

The Shendus inhabit the country northeast and east of the Blue Mountain. The Lushais were said to have been driven northward and westward by these Shendus or Pois "who gave much problems to the Lushais with their raids and forays into the Lushai territory."<sup>77</sup> They had very little to do with them. In September 1876, Suakpuilal suspected an inferior chief Laltuk of inclining to the Pois for which he decided to attack Laltuk's village. However, no account of his doings in this village was recorded. In May

<sup>75</sup> Vumson, *Zo History*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>76</sup> Vumson, *Zo History*, p. 95.

<sup>77</sup> Suhas Chatterjee, *Mizoram under the British Rule*, Mittal, Delhi, 1985, p. 146.



1878, there was rumour that Lengpunga's village had gone over to the Pois probably with a view to making a joint attack on Lalbura and Poiboi but this had transpired on a story that Suakpuilal's people had applied to the Pois for aid against the Eastern clans. During the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, the Shendus were left out or carefully avoided by the British. This made them quite bold and frequently tormented the Howlongs and Sailos.

Immediately after the Lushai expedition, these Pois or Shendus swooped down upon Rothangpuia and destroyed his clan. In 1882, about two or three hundred Shendus and Muallianpuis headed by Howsata attacked Lalseva who requested the authorities of Chittagong to aid him against the Shendus, but help was not accorded him. Bengal did not want to get involved directly with the Shendus and kept quiet. The authorities of Fort William followed a policy of conciliation and sent notes of instructions to the local officers of Chittagong to punish the offending Howlongs but not to disturb the Shendus. This policy yielded some results in that some of the Pois courted friendship with the British of whom the most important was chief Saipuia and his three brothers who became instrumental in helping the British during the Chin-Lushai expedition of 1889-1890

### *Luseis against Chins*

The pressure on the eastern Luseis from the Chins was severe and these sometimes resulted in wars and raids. For instance, "the Sokte chief Kanhow made a fierce attack on the Luseis especially on Vanhnuailiana and Lalbura. The cause of the war was that, being short of food, some of the Sokte people went to Vanhnuailiana and his son to buy rice, but these chiefs sent them back empty. The Soktes went again to buy rice, but this time, Vanhnuailiana and his son killed one of the parties and forced Kanhow to declare war against the Lushais. The Soktes destroyed Tumpai, Lenkam, Tlangkhua on separate occasions, and overran the whole of the country round Champhai with raiding parties, which took innumerable heads and some captives. The Siyins joined the Soktes in these raids and took the Lushais as their slaves. The Lushais did not quietly submit to the depredations of the Chins and Lalbura marched twice on the Soktes with a large force. On the first occasion, his objective was Saiyan but his party being discovered as the Soktes were pre-warned. While still on the other side of the river, the Lushais were ambushed and driven back. In this occasion, seven Lushais were taken by the Chins of

the Sokte tribe. Lalbura's second attempt was on Molbem where he succeeded in crossing the Manipur River unobserved. However, the Lushais had no chance and were again defeated and driven back. This time too, the Lushais lost two of their party while recrossing the river on their flight back. This was followed by the death of Kanhow in 1868 and the expedition against the Lushais in 1871-72."<sup>78</sup>

According to the Handbook of the Lushais, "The western Lushai chiefs were always more or less at enmity with the Sylus (Sailos) and Howlongs. During the time of Suakpuilal, neither he nor his sons entered into very close relations with them. Around 1876, the western Lushas joined in a common cause with the Sailos of Savunga against Bhenkuia and the northern Howlongs. In October of the same year, Lengphunga and Lalzika successfully raided on a southern village called Pugying (Pukzing) which was under Bhenkuia. The cause of the quarrel was that the village was formerly under Lalzika who wanted it back. In the raid, no resistance was made and no one was killed; but 40 to 50 of the inhabitants, 36 guns and much booty were carried off. A month or so after the raid, Suakpuilal, Lengphunga, Lalzika, Savunga and Bhenkuia all met at Lalzika's village and decided that Pukzing should remain subject to Lalzika.

All the captives and souls, except 3 guns and a gong, which Suakpuilal retained, were returned. A common boundary was decided upon then, but the land question being too severe a strain on their friendly relations for the truce to last for any length of time, both sides subsided in war again. In May 1878, four persons were carried off from Lalbura's village. In 1880, Bhenkuia and others announced their intention of crossing the common boundary fixed by Suakpuilal in 1876 and the death of Suakpuilal in 1880 offered them the much wanted chance. The death of Bhenkuia at the close of 1881 robbed the southern party of their leader. In February 1881, Sailenpui's report that they were shortly about to advance, made the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar to the Political Agent, Chittagong Hills to ask him to restrain the Howlongs and Sailos from carrying out their object, after which no further news of fighting was received."<sup>79</sup>

In 1883, Lengphunga intercepted and seized Rs. 300 worth of presents which Lalngura was sending to chief Vanhailiang in order to arrange a marriage between the latter's daughter and his son. In 1884, Sailenpui seized and detained 6 of Savunga's

<sup>78</sup> Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 121.

<sup>79</sup> Official Handbook of the Lushais, pp. 26-27.

men who had come up to purchase rice. The Deputy Commissioner had the six men released and peace between Sailenpui and Savunga ensued. In June 1888, Bhenkuia's sons intended to attack the village of Vanoya's widow (a Sailo), but the following October, the Chittagong authorities reported that the probable raiders were Suakpuilal's son Lengpuia and Kangsova, a northern Howlong chief. It was reported that Lengpuia had seized 9 metnas and killed one of the villagers of Jatira. In December of the same year, Khalkam and Khamliena committed a raid on Pakuma Rani's village. The explanation given for the outrage was that "Sailenpui had married a daughter of Lalngura's some years ago; that three months previously the latter's son, Khamliena, had gone with ten houses to live in Sailienpui's village, and that Thanthuama, a minor son of the diseased Lalzika (brother of Lalngura) with four houses had come to live with Khalkam; and that it is because of these desertions the people of Lalngura's village have brought the present charges against him. Lalngura himself, Khalkam said, was dead."<sup>80</sup> Reasons such the one above, cause quarrels and brought war between the Luseis and other tribes.

On the relationship of the Lushais with the Suktes, the eastern Lushais had been able to hold against the Suktes prior to the expedition of 1871-72. After this expedition, a large number of Kapui Nagas and Sokte deserted from the Lushais after and during the expedition of 1871-72 and by 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1872, 2549 souls arrived in Manipur; while two other instances of large immigration into Manipur took place. The Soktes in 1877-78, migrated to the Manipur territory in numbers over 2000, where they settled down on lands allotted to them by the maharaja in the neighbourhood of Moirang to the southwest of the valley; and the second occasion was in 1882, when 3000 Kukis, men, women and children deserted from the Lushai Hills and settled in the Maharaja's territory in sites south of the Cachar-Manipur roads. In 1884, when 180 families of Soktes under Sangam sought refuge in Manipur, they were assigned lands south of Moirang."<sup>81</sup> This expedition curbed the power of the Lushai chiefs somehow and this encouraged the Suktes to attack the Lushais. From that time on, the Suktes continuously pressed the Lushais and drove them further west. By May 1873, not a single important Lushai chief was left in the country of the eastern Lushais.

---

<sup>80</sup> Official handbook of *The Lushais*, p. 35

<sup>81</sup> Official Handbook of *The Lushais*, p. 140.

In February 1875, Manipur was preparing to attack the Suktes for which Lengkam sent down for aid from the British, but the latter took no action. During this year, there were several reports of hostilities between the Suktes and the Luseis in which the Suktes were once said to have been defeated and been forced to pay tribute in guns and cattle. The Luseis were closely pressed on the south and east by the Suktes which resulted in their movement to the north and west respectively. During the early part of 1876, Vuta advanced towards the Suktes and levied tribute from them. By November of the same year, both the parties were so much against one another that they were ready to kill each other whenever they came in contact. 1877 and 1878 saw Lushais moving northward with no news of fighting between them. In 1880, Suktes claimed tribute against the eastern Lusei chiefs, and in January 1881, the Suktes harassed the Luseis and pressed on them from the east. In January 1883, a party of Suktes fell on the Tipaimukh bazar and carried off some property and a boy. The Suktes were said to have prosecuted their feuds against the Eastern Luseis.

#### *Lusei – Sukte Wars*

The Sukte and Kamhau quarrelled with Lusei chiefs Lalbura and Vanhnuailiana and the Sukte and Kamhau destroyed Champhai, Lenkam and Thathlangkhua (Khuanglian) on different occasions. They overran the whole country around Champhai, capturing men, women, and children and took as many as two hundred captives. The Sizangs helped the Sukte in their operations. The Lusei chiefs did not quietly submit to the deprivations, as Lalbura marched twice into the Sukte area with a large force. On the first occasion, his objective was Saizang, but his party was discovered while still on the other side of the river. The Sukte having been duly warned succeeded in ambushing the Lusei and driving them back. But 7 Luseis fell into the hands of the Sukte in this encounter.

Lalbura's second attempt was aimed at Mualbem, and this time, he succeeded in crossing the Manipur River unobserved. Mualbem is however, perched on the summit of the high cliffs of the Manipur River, and as Mualbem was strongly defended, the Luseis had no chance. They were driven back to the river, and in recrossing two of them were drowned."<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Vumson, *Zo History*, p. 94.

Between 1871, the Suktes ran short of rice and a party went to chief Lalbura's village to buy the same. Lalbura not only refused to sell, but also killed a member of the party. Thus, Khawcin, a Sukte chief attacked a Lusei village. The attack occurred during the absence of the Lusei men who were on a fighting/raiding expedition to Cachar. The unprotected Lusei village was easily overrun by the Sukte and they killed a large number of women and children. The Suktes sent 4 heads of the people they killed to Manipur to manifest their friendship. The same year, the maharaja of Manipur sent a large brass pot to chief Khawcin, with the request that he help him in his war against the Lusei chief Vanhnuailiana. Khawcin assented, collected an army of several hundred men and accompanied by his brothers, marched to Champhai in two days. The Luseis, under Lalbura, collected a large force and prepared to counter Khawcin's attack. Champhai was heavily stockaded. However, the Sukte stealthily occupied a large stockade near the village. They opened fire and instantly killed three people. The Luseis defended themselves and stubbornly fought all day and killed three attackers.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the Lusei migration into Lushai Hills changed not only the landscape but the atmosphere of the district. Their subsequent settlement brought about internal and external chaos in the hills and areas surrounding it. Land became the cause of internecine wars. By and by, the race for supremacy among the Luseis gradually led to wars for 'state formation.' In the process of these constant feuds and wars, many tribes were subjugated. Weaker communities were forced to surrender or submit without a fight. These voluntarily surrendered or defeated communities were reduced to the status of bonded communities and were not allowed to leave the hills. They remain in the villages of their conquerors in a 'state of semi-slavery.'

The main reasons responsible for the subjugation of these tribes could be summed up in the following points: Firstly, tribes subjugated lack good leadership. Secondly, the defeated tribes had no power of cohesion for which they were easily defeated in groups. Thirdly, poverty created by occasional famines created an atmosphere of dependency on the more fortunate. Fourthly, the gullible nature of the hill-tribes offered a perfect background for the Luseis to proceed with their struggle for power. Fifthly, the earlier settlers settled in the midst of nature with no political awareness whatsoever. This opened the way for the Luseis to move ahead with their

struggle for paramount power leading to the establishment of the Sailo clan as the undisputed leaders of the Luseis. Their ruthlessness in subduing any opposition parties resulted in the surrender and subjugation of resistant tribes.

On the other hand, the Luseis had qualities necessary for overpowering the tribes and communities who had settled before them. The success of the Luseis rests upon important principles – they had good leadership, they possessed the power of unity, they had the sagacity to devise means to enlarge their strength in the villages of their settlements, they sanctioned and encouraged the office of a political chief. With the emergence of the Sailo hegemony, standard measures like non-engagement in open confrontation with the Pois were adopted. They always tried to put a buffer between them. They were more measured and calculating in their relationship with other clans and much more unscrupulous. Because of this, they began to occupy a central position in Mizo folklore from the time that the clans were settled along the banks of the *Run*.

As to the fate of the bonded communities, those that could make good their escape in the face of the existing circumstances, left the Lushai Hills and reached the North Cachar Hills, Manipur, Tripura, Sylhet and Burma where they have carved a niche for themselves. But for those that could not escape in the face of forceful absorption, formed parts of the Lusei society and continued even to this day. The saddest part is that the Luseis do not now fully accept them. These were developments owing to conditions of the earlier subjugation and forceful absorption. Political perspectives changed the earlier social conditions in later times. Those the Luseis had tried their best to absorb even by the use of force to people the land, were afterwards, politically isolated and dispersed while these people feel they have a share in the land where blood and sweat had been shed. The eighteenth and nineteenth century Sailo policy had undergone a complete change in the politics of statehood. Those that had a share in the nation-building process are considered as the ‘other.’ Shakespear’s observation of tribes and communities ‘having a tendency to claim to be true Luseis,’ need to be properly studied and analysed in the light of history and political developments in the later years.