

Chapter - 5

The *Sals*: Captive Labourers, the Real Slaves of Lushai Hills

When one talks about slavery in the Lushai Hills, the first thought is often directed towards the system of *Boi*. This system drew the attention of scholarship in the nineteenth century so much so that the Lushai Hills came to be associated with it. The mere mention of the word ‘*boi*’ rings an automatic bell that connects memory to the system of slavery. *Bois* were undoubtedly condemned as slaves and the *boi* system as slavery. It was on this particular system that a debate arose between the colonial state on the one side and missionaries on the other. Colonial administrators determined to follow the policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the people supported the system and sealed it as a most convenient custom of charity that housed the homeless. On the other hand, the missionaries of the district moved for its outright abolition on the ground that it was a ‘clear system of slavery’ and that such abominable system should no longer be practised within the British dominion under which slavery had been abolished in 1843. The colonial debate continued till the system was finally abolished in 1927. But post-colonial nineteenth century scholarship took up the debate and continues in the twenty first century. While one half represents the colonial administrators of the erstwhile Lushai Hills, the other half stands firmly on the side of the missionaries with no hope of arriving on a single platform of agreement.

While the debate continues to centre round the Lusei *boi* system as a system of slavery, the real system of slavery called ‘*sal*’ escaped the notice of philosophers and social scientists. The social and political background of the inhabitants had created many slaves and the system of slavery. This class of slaves had almost extinct by the time the colonial masters occupied the hills but remnants still remained. This chapter therefore, looks into the real slaves of Lushai Hills called “*Sal*.” It examines the labour performed by captives who were captured in various raids in the Chittagong, Arrakan, Tipperah, Burma, Cachar plains, and the Chin Hills. These captives formed the real slaves in the Lushai Hills. They were sold, bought, and could be killed according to the

master's wish. They worked along with other people but their status was very low in the society, much below the *bois*. Besides these, other clans subjugated in inter-clan wars within the Lushai Hills were also reduced to slaves. Raids were prominent till the British administration entered the Lushai Hills. The chapter concentrates on the condition of the captives who were captured from the various raids on the plains and other far-flung tribes in the borders. As they belonged solely to the captors who would own, sell or even kill them at their disposal they are considered forming the true state of slavery in the Lushai Hills.

Defining *Sal*

Sal is a term in the Lusei language meaning a 'person in captivity.' Captives were the personal property of their captors and could be used in any manner one chooses. They could be subjected to a hard toil day and night, sold as and when necessary, disposed of in a manner the owner wishes, killed or set free according to the whims of the master. They could also be used as one important medium of exchange, which was not an uncommon occurrence in and around the hill areas bordering the Lushai Hills prior to the introduction of money economy by the colonial administration. The class of *sal* could be compared to those slaves in the west, although the harsh treatment with the whips and chains were not heard of among the *sal*-owners of the hill people. The institution of *sal* was entirely a separate entity and very different from the *boi* system of the Lushai Hills. *Sals* could be kept by every commoner who had made any capture in wars, raids or individual bouts where the weak becomes the slave of the strong. They could also be acquired through gifts and purchase. Besides men *sals*, women captured in wars or raids were also clubbed together in the group of *sal*. Such women *sals* were also treated entirely according to their master's interest. However, they were more valuable in the slave market as their service was more in demand than the men folk. Besides, marriageable women were considered a prized-catch as owners benefitted greatly through their service and sale. *Sals* could purchase their freedom by paying a big ransom depending upon the demand made by their owner or captor. Keeping *sal* or owning them was much meaningful to the common men in the hill areas for the interest they brought in service, and the price they fetch in sale. The off springs of slaves may

be also treated as slaves under specific circumstances.¹ Judicial decrees or sentences on criminals reduce one to the status of slaves.

The *sals* were, as Needham had rightly noted, the ‘real slaves’ in the Lushai Hills different from the common *bois*. He said that “slavery is very prevalent” among the Lusei and Lakhers in the form of *sal*:

All captives of war and their descendants are slaves, and there are also a large number of persons who have become slaves from debt or poverty. All such persons are real slaves. They can be bought and sold, and those at any rate who live in the chief’s house cannot acquire any property. Their status is thus quite different from that of the *bois* among the Lushais and administered Lakhers.²

He also noted a large number of slaves who had run away from their masters in the un-administered parts of Burma to Lushai Hills in 1916:

I think I am right in saying that nearly all the immigrants from the trans-frontier tracts are slaves, who have run away to escape their obligations. Such persons are never sent back. As soon as they enter British territory they are free. We have had no dealings at all with the trans-frontier chiefs from some years back. It is probable that when we get into touch with them again, they will put in claims for compensation against their run-away slaves. Such claims would have to be decided in the merits. In no case would the run-away be sent back of course, but if a slave ran away to escape payment of a debt it would seem only equitable to allow his former owner to claim the amount lent. It should also be noted that in the trans-frontier tract not only chiefs, but commoners can own slaves³

Sal has been defined in many ways. According to Shakespear, *sals* were “persons captured in raids. As a rule only children and marriageable women were taken captive, and the latter were disposed of in marriage, the lucky captor acting in loco parentis and taking the marriage price. The children grew up in the captor’s house as his children, and as a rule were so well treated that they seldom wished to return to their former

¹ Lakshmidhar Mishra, *Human Bondage : Tracing its Roots in India*, SAGE, New Delhi, 2011, p.20.

² ASA, Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Needham’s Letter No. 130 D.C., dated the 22nd May 1916, forwarded to Commissioner of Cachar by J. Hezzlett, Superintendent of Lushai Hills, Political-A, April 1914, No.27.

³ ASA, Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Needham’s Letter No. 130 D.C., dated the 22nd May 1916, forwarded to Commissioner of Cachar by J. Hezzlett, Superintendent of Lushai Hills, Political-A, April 1914, No.27.

homes.”⁴ Another historian defines the term again as “*Sal* is a Mizo term for slave. They were indeed the personal property of their captors.”⁵ Yet another historian defined *sal* as “a man who is bought and sold, who is a property of a master, who makes use of him as he likes.”⁶ A criminal or fugitive taking shelter in the house of a “*lal*” cannot be harmed; but he becomes the slave of the *lal*. Slaves could also be acquired as part of a marriage price. In times of famine, people often had to go to the chiefs for help. The chief would give them paddy, and when this was exhausted they had no option but to enter the chief’s house and become his slaves. Anyone stealing from the chief became his slave. If anyone killed one of the chief’s slaves, he and his family became slaves. If a man committed a murder and the chief paid the *luteu*, he became the chief’s slave.”⁷ Among the Lakhers, “the first captive made by each warrior became the property of the chief and village, these captives were used to present as slaves to the chiefs of more powerful villages, in order to induce them not to raid.”⁸ As a rule, only marriageable women were taken captive, for the price they bring in marriage to their captors added to the economic status of a chief. Men who could not settle their debt ask for help from the chief and become his slave for life or unless freed from service, which was a rare occurrence in the hills. “When a slave is not acquired by war, he has always himself or his ancestors to blame for his position.”⁹ This sort of hereditary slavery was due to parents who had incurred debt or offered themselves to be the slaves of a chief in times of poverty and extreme hunger.

Sals were therefore, persons who were in captivity of some sort, due to their capture in wars and raids. The Luseis had a long history of raids within their own land, among themselves, and in the areas lying immediately at the foothills of their own land like Assam, the Burmese borders, the Chittagong Hills, the Chin Hills, and the Tipperah or Tripura. These raids were the main source of acquiring *sals*. Inter-clan and inter-tribal feuds produce wars and became the main important means of acquiring them.

⁴ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 49.

⁵ Sangkima, *Essays on the History of the Mizos*, Spectrum, United Publishers, Guwahati, 2004, p.78.

⁶ Ronald De Vaux, *Ancient Israel-Its Life and Institution*, Darton Longman & Todd, London, 1974 (edition), p. viii.

⁷ N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 224.

⁸ N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 222.

⁹ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 204.

Source of Sals

There were two main sources of slaves. Generally, they were acquired through raiding expeditions. They could also be a product of purchase and sale of individuals like chattel under a variety of compulsions (satisfying debt, escaping starvation, etc.) Sometimes, slaves were acquired through gifts. For instance, Thomas Lewin was “given a slave boy by the name of Adupah by the Mong Raja, who accompanied him to the village of Rutton Poia (Rothangpuia). This lad had been pledged to the raja when quite a child, as security for debt.”¹⁰ Debt slavery prevailed in the Hill Tracts, and according to this system, “If a man wished to borrow money he deposited as security a son or a daughter, whose services were taken as payment of interest for the debt, the release of whom was dependent on the repayment of the original loan.”

When the original and entire loan could not be repaid, the son or daughter who was deposited remained with the chief all his life, serving him as a slave. The children of such debt slaves carry their father’s debt, thus creating an unending increase in the number of slaves. “Slaves were inherited as property through marriage. Women slaves were acquired by gifts, abduction and guru dakshina (a ritual offering by a disciple to a preceptor or an offering by a king to a Brahmin priest.”¹¹ They were taken captives in raiding expeditions along with men. Colonial accounts of these raids show the innumerable captives taken for the sole purpose of making them captives. They were also bought from slave traders in the Chin and Chittagong hill tracts. The Lusei chiefs alone did not possess the right to purchase slaves, it was allowed to the common people as well. Many wars took place between inter-clan groups, and between tribes where the true Lusei method of making war was to raid the enemy’s villages and carry off as many captives and as much loot as possible.”¹² Besides captive made in war, there were other ways in which slaves were created. For instance, “If a chief or a noble brought up an orphan belonging to another clan from childhood, the orphan became the slave of the man who brought him up.”¹³ It was not possible for a man to enslave an orphan belonging to his own clan in this way, as fellow-clansmen were regarded as having duties to each other. Colonial accounts also tell us that if a man was so heavily fined

¹⁰ Lewin, *A Fly in the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India*, p. 204.

¹¹ Lakshmidhar Mishra, *Human Bondage: Tracing its Roots in India*, SAGE, New Delhi, 2011, p. 27.

¹² Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 55.

¹³ N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 223.

that he was unable to pay, he becomes the slave of his chief.”¹⁴ *Bois* also became *bois* under the same conditions but the difference here lies in the fact that *bois* voluntarily sought the assistance of the person who could save their hides with a promise of becoming his. On the other hand, *Sals* or slaves were forced to embrace their status.

Raids for procuring *Sals*

Raids were extensively committed by the hill tribes to capture men and women to make them slaves, who would perform labour in their *jhums* and homes. These raids became prominent from the 1830s onwards. They were carried out for reasons like (a) the recovery of debt, (b) for plunder or to wipe out the disgrace of a previous raid on themselves,¹⁵ or (c) to procure slaves.”¹⁶ In this regard, colonial accounts provide us with many raids that were carried out, the purpose of which, was largely the procurement of slaves, either for their labour or to sell them off for money or exchange them for something else like more modern weapons of war. For this purpose, raids were carried out in various parts adjoining the hill area. Frontier areas bordering the hilly tracts lying between Araccan, Chittagong, Tripura, Cachar, Manipur and Burmese plains were regions where raids were committed. Of these, the highest recorded incidents of Kuki raids came from the Chittagong Frontier. Raids became prominent from the 1830s under Kalindi Rani and the Phru country. “The first record of raids of these savages,’ states Col. Reid, ‘dates from 1777, when the chief of Chittagong, a district which had been ceded to the British under Clive by Mir Kasim in 1760, applied for a detachment of sepoy to protect the inhabitants against the incursions of the Kukis as they were then called.’”¹⁷

Besides raiding nearby villages and areas for captives, the Luseis had another reason. For instance, “the motive of the outrage committed by Lalchokla was to obtain heads to place on the tomb of his father Lassu, who had died a short time before. “Now no Kookie chief could go on his last long journey unaccompanied by attendance to do his bidding in the unseen world.so long as they could supply Bengali slaves, whose heads piled round the corpse of the chief were earnest that their ghosts were keeping

¹⁴ Lewin, *Wild Races of Southeast India*, p. 134.

¹⁵ G. C. Rigby, *History of Operations in Northern Arakan and the Yawdwin Chin Hills 1896-97*, Mizoram Government Press, Aizawl, 2000, p. 148.

¹⁶ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, W. H. Allen & Co, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1978, p. 139.

¹⁷ A.S. Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 2008, p.7.

company with his.”¹⁸ However, this was not true. Captives were taken for other economic purposes. The dead of chiefs and the raids that follow were purely incidental. During 1845 and 1847, the Luseis carried out a number of raids both in Manipur and Sylhet district (in the areas of Singla river or Thing Tlawng lui, west of Chatachura *Tlang*). In the Singla river area, the shifting of the Sylhet Light Infantry Post up to that part of the border was carried out by the Government of Bengal after a conflict with a large body of tribesmen. Though Lister was wounded in the expedition that was despatched in 1850, the Sylhet Infantry managed to push back the hillmen.”¹⁹ In 1854, the Superintendent of Police reported that there occurred 19 raids in the Chittagong frontiers during ‘the past seventeen years’, in which 107 people were killed, 15 wounded and 186 taken into captivity.”²⁰

The year 1860 marked the ‘Great Kookie Invasion upon the plains of Tipperah where 15 villages were plundered, destroyed, 185 people killed and about 100 persons taken into captivity’²¹ by the Luseis under chief Rutton Poea (Rothangpuia). Early 1861 witnessed a body of Kukis making fierce attacks upon three populous villages and a wealthy mart in hill Tipperah near Odoypore (Udaipur) killing 150 people and taking 200 into captivity. This body of attackers cut up and burnt several villages belonging to Kalindi Rani and attacked the British outpost at Kurkurea on their return journey. Between 1864-1870, Shendus and Lusheis under Howlongs (Hualhangs) again witnessed raids as annual occurrences into the country of the Poangs, Mrungs and the Mughs, especially in the Sungoo valley where several villages were plundered and cut up among which 8 incidents were recorded. Here, 7 policemen and several people including 80 persons of three villages near Khokheong were taken as captives.”²² For the next seventeen years, peace prevailed.

But in 1888, two sanguinary raids were again committed by the Shendus and Sailos. The Shendus attacked a party under Lt. Stewart and two other Europeans, one a sepoy. Then the Sailos attacked Pakuma Rani’s village, killing the rani and her 21 subjects. The village was burnt and 15 persons taken into captivity.”²³ The next year in 1889, between 8th and 10th January, the Sailos under Lalpunga and Zaroka, carried out

¹⁸ Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontier of India*, reprint 2007, p. 288.

¹⁹ C. G. Vergheese and R. L. Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, vol. 1, Vikash, Delhi, 1997, p. 173.

²⁰ Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 338.

²¹ Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 342.

²² Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 351.

²³ Reid, *Chin Lushai Land*, p. 46.

raids in the Upper Chengri Valley. They cut up 24 villages, killed 101 persons and took 91 persons as captives. The major constitutions of captives taken in this raid were women and children. In the report submitted by W. W. Daly submitted a detailed report of the operations of the Surma Valley Military Police Battalion in the Lushai country during 1889-90 where he states that “on the morning of the 30th January, fifty-eight captives were brought into camps, twenty three women and thirty-five children, and all they all seemed to be in good condition. They said one child still remained in captivity, and I send a demand for its surrender.”²⁴ Out of over the 90 captives taken in the raid, a child of eight years was still held by the Luseis, back who was later surrendered by the order of W. W. Daly.

In the Arracan frontiers “between 1863 and 1869, there were 30 separate raids reported in which 65 persons were killed and 268 carried into slavery.”²⁵ The Mizo chiefs needed slaves to work for them and the slaves could be procured from the territory of another chief or from the area controlled by the British. So they even attacked the plains area and took captives. Lister’s expedition could release 429 captives as slaves.

Raids were also carried out time and again in the Sylhet-Tipperah-Cachar Frontiers. The first such report was the massacre of a party of woodcutters in 1826 followed by a raid on Kundul village in 1836. Kochabari village was attacked in 1844 where 20 people were killed and 6 taken as captives.”²⁶ A series of raids in 1847 were again carried out by the Luseis in Sylhet where they killed 30 people. This was followed by an unsuccessful expedition under Hopkinson. Unprecedented hardships were encountered due to lack of adequate foodstuff and supply of drinking water which was further aggravated by impenetrable jungles, insects and often illness. Luseis also raided three Kuki refugee villages in Cachar in 1849, killing 29 people and carrying off 42 persons. At the same time, the Poitoos ransacked two villages and woodcutters in Sylhet.”²⁷ This was followed by Lister’s expedition in 1850. The force marched from Silchar on the 4th January and arrived at a village belonging to a chief called Mulla on

²⁴ NAI, Report of W. W. Daly, Esq., Officiating Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Bengal, to The Inspector –General of Police, Assam, dated Calcutta, 2nd June, 1890, Foreign Deptt, Ext B, September, No.179-181, p.137.

²⁵ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, Vol-1, p. 17.

²⁶ Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier*, pp. 274-90.

²⁷ Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 299.

the 14th January. The village was a large one that had 800 to 1000 houses. The colonel and his troop burnt this village on the 16th and returned.

The most notable result of this expedition, reports Lister, was that “during the confusion caused by the destruction of his cantonment, 429 captives made their escape from the villages dependent on Mullah, and succeeded in finding their way into Cachar.”²⁸ These captives have been captured from different areas in the hills and retained for their labour. In January 1862, a series of three outrages by Kookies were reported from Sylhet. Three villages viz., Ramdulal’s Bari, Rammohun’s Bari, and Chundraipara in the jurisdiction of Thannah Rajnugger, Sylhet were plundered and burnt and “a large number of the inhabitants were massacred or carried off.” These villages lie close together; about eight miles from Adumpore and this event came to be known as the Adumpore massacre. About the same time, a village called Lungaibaree had been destroyed, and an attack made on a party of men about half a mile east of Kolingat. The people of Chundraipara were emigrants from Hill Tipperah and had settled in the British territory. The raid had taken place because the emigrants had settled on the estate of a zamindar with whom the Tipperah raja had a standing feud. The Kookies who committed the raid were dependents of Murchoilo (Ngursailo), a son of Lalchokla (Lalsutla) whom the British had made a prisoner in 1844.

The year 1868, saw some villages in Tipperah were plundered and the Loharband Monierkhal tea garden houses were burnt down in 1869.²⁹ In 1871, the united force of Eastern and Western Lusheis committed organised raids between 23rd and 28th January. They plundered the tea gardens of CachareePunjee (Ainarkhal), Darnierkhal, Nundigram and Kacharipara and burnt them down. The Tipperah Hills recorded around 85 deaths including 6 policemen. These raiders were also reported to have carried off atleast 64 captives.³⁰ In Manipur, the Suktes (Soktes) began raids since the time of Nur Singh (1834-50). They conducted a series of raids in 1856. Hankeep and Saitol villages were raided in 1859 where they killed 15 persons and took 45 captives. The years 1857-71 recorded seven raids by the Kamhow Suktes, and in 1874, Kamsol and Mukoong were ransacked followed by a series of raids during 1876-80.³¹ The

²⁸ Lister’s report in Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 293.

²⁹ Lister’s report in Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 301.

³⁰ Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 305-09.

³¹ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 121; Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, pp. 165-71, 206.

Lusheis in 1847 raided a Changsan village where around 200 to 300 people were either killed or carried off.”³²

In the Burmese Frontier, the Soktes committed a serious raid on a village in Manipur in 1856. They overran the whole country round Champhai with raiding parties which took innumerable heads and some captives. The Soktes were joined by the Siyins in these raids.”³³ Raids into Burma were of annual occurrence during Kochim’s reign of which, many were undoubtedly committed by the Thados and Nwites. The Soktes later swooped down into the plains and raided Ateywa, Kambale, Kyigon, Sameikon and Kabungyon. In 1876, the Whenohs, some 300 strong, attacked Tunzan village and killed or carried off 29 persons.”³⁴ Meanwhile, the Haka and Yokwa Chins committed two raids in the Yaw country, killing 8 and carrying off 28 persons. The Tashons then committed two serious raids in the Kale valley on the 4th and 5th May 1887. The first was on Indin, and the second Chingaing. The Tashons then committed two serious raids in the Kale valley and Siyins attacked a party of Shans, killing one and carrying off four boys. The Soktes swooped down on the Kabaw valley and the Tashons on on the plains.

During the month of October, the Tashons committed one raid, the Siyins five and the Kamhows one. Thus, within 12 days, 122 Shans were carried off, 12 killed, and 14 wounded, resulting in the complete destruction of the ancient town of Kampat and loss of 35 houses by Kalemio.”³⁵ Above all, “the Lushais were the standing problem which embarrassed all local administration; they continually raided into the Hill Tracts, attacking and plundering the inhabitants, burning the villages, slaying the men and carrying off the women and children into slavery.”³⁶ Women usually stood their ground, and abused their grim assailants vociferously for which they were sometimes killed, but the major captives taken usually were women and children. Women and children were easily adaptable to their new society, and were also less likely to attempt escape. Children grew up in the house of the captor ‘as his children’ and were more likely to

³² Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 290.

³³ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 120.

³⁴ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 125.

³⁵ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, pp. 25-26.

³⁶ T. H. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India*, Tribal Research Institute, Art and Culture Aizawl, 2005, Reprint, pp. 189- 90.

remain with him than adults would be. When married to the hill men, women were more easily absorbed.”³⁷

When raiders have completed their slaughter, loot and diversion, they take all their prisoners, fastened together by a cord through the lobe of the ears, and the Looshai set out with their plunder on the return journey.”³⁸ Raids were so excessively and continuously committed that “the people say that from the source to the junction of the Pee Kheong with the Kolodyne there is not a single inhabitant. Two hundred years ago the valley was thickly populated, but the Kookies and Shendus have emptied it.”³⁹ These raids brought in captives from all tribes, especially the hostile ones that there was already a scarcity of labour forces in the hill areas for which the hill-men had to direct their attention to the plains. Thus, we see the changing phase of raiding in the plains since roughly about the 1840s when the rajas rose to prominence: attacked the villages in the plains, massacre the inhabitants, take their heads, loot and burn their houses.”⁴⁰ In all these cases of raids, as many captives as could be laid hands on, were taken by raiders, who were reduced to slaves and formed the backbone of labour in the hill country. It is known that the captured slaves or *sals* were not simply kept for their sole labour. They were sometimes sold to buyers in the neighbouring areas, and also bought slaves for their own use.

Role of Sals in the Hill Economy

Slave labour ranges from household duties to being political ambassadors from ancient times. Their labour was employed according to the demands of the slave-holding communities. In this respect, “As many as 30,000 slaves were employed in the silver mines at Laurium in Greece. They contributed substantially to the prosperity on which the Athenian democracy was founded. Slaves worked in dangerous conditions in gold-mining operations in Africa and in gold and silver mining, coffee and sugar plantations in Latin America. The operations in military fortifications, roads, irrigation projects, rowing in the galleys, and sailing in the Mediterranean were also very hazardous. Slaves were in great demand in growing olive, grapes, sugar, cotton, tobacco, coffee, rice,

³⁷ Jangkhomang Guite, ‘Civilisation and its malcontents: The Politics of Kuki raids in nineteenth century Northeast India’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, <http://iersagepub.com/>, 48, (3) (2011): 339-76, p. 370.

³⁸ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern Asia*, p. 140.

³⁹ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern Asia*, p. 156.

⁴⁰ Lister’s report as quoted in Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 287.

coconut, clove, peanut, sesame, oats, wheat, millet, barley, etc. While the economics of agriculture determined the average number of slaves employed, such employment was found to be economically highly rewarding. For instance, gang labour system in sugar cultivation in Brazil was most cost effective; it made Brazilian sugar cheaper in Europe than the sugar produced in the islands of Africa.”⁴¹ The slaves of Lushai Hills were also used according to the demands of the communities that kept them.

Most historians of slavery paid more attention to the general behaviour of masters in their treatment of slaves rather than that of the slaves. While some masters were literate or if not, were sagacious enough to keep records of their dealings, the vast majority of slaves in the plains or in the hills were illiterate and could leave no written records. Those in the hills were more so. They were therefore, simply seen as workforce that made life easier for masters and slave-holders. Scholars differ in their evaluation of slavery – where some portrayed it as benign, others depicted it as exploitative. While this is so, some scholars look not what slavery did to the slaves, but what the slaves themselves did. In this same light, the slaves of Lushai hills are studied as mere labour force for better economic stance of their owners.

The Lusei communities of Lushai hills as well as all other hill tribes were dependent upon jhum cultivation for their economy. The inhabitants had no knowledge of currency, or even could not value them. Barter was the main medium through which commodities of daily necessities i.e. the most basic were procured. Sometimes, it was necessary that slaves served as the medium of exchange. Besides being a form of acquiring better economic status, slaves also served as significant gift items that promote good will between chiefs, villages and regions. Unlike the more advanced countries and plain areas of the country, *sals* in the pre-colonial and colonial Lushai Hills had to do all works that made the hill man’s life better. The main economy of the Luseis in the early years was jhum cultivation which involved many hands for the betterment of annual products. The initial stage of jhuming involves as much man power as could be employed. The *sals* not only filled the gap for the need of extra hands, but bore the labour necessary in the hill areas. Colonial accounts record that “The men employ themselves chiefly in making forays upon weaker tribes, or in hunting. Of household work, they only clear the ground and help to carry the harvest;

⁴¹ Lakshmidhar Mishra, *Human Bondage: Tracing its Roots in India*, p. 22.

they also build the house. The men are generally to be seen lounging about, cleaning their arms, drinking, or smoking.”⁴² This made up the free man’s labour in a hill man’s economic life. *Sals* or the slaves performed all these besides carrying timber for construction of houses, bamboos to make parts of a house, split them etc., feed and look after cattle and live stocks for their masters, and performed all works that require hard labour.

They were also used as forefronts in the war-path along with the men folk of subjugated tribes and the class of *bois*. During raiding expeditions, slaves were put in the forefront to meet the advancing enemy. When most of the enemy’s arrows and bullets were spent, the best part of the Lusei raiders; (the heroes and best fighting men) take their stance. Death usually comes first to the insignificant slaves who had to obey orders implicitly. Those that rose above occasions earn favour in the eyes of their chiefs and acquire the status of “the chief’s favourite slaves.” But they were captured mainly for labour is evident from colonial accounts. The direct treatment of slaves on reaching the raiders’ village or sanctuary was recorded by Carey as:

slaves taken were usually hobbled and at once set to work in the fields or on household duties and, to give the savage his due, he did not as a rule maltreat his captives, provided that they did not attempt to escape. They had to work hard and in return they got their food. If they refused to work or worked slowly they were beaten or starved and, if they attempted to escape and were retaken, their heads were usually cut off and placed on a post. Of course a man’s slave was as much his property as his gun or his blanket and he could do what he liked with him.⁴³

In the homes, men engage themselves in basket works where “they manufacture the *thul*-a basket with four legs about twelve inches square at the bottom, widening till the mouth is a circle with a diameter of about thirty inches, *deron* (*doron*)-a basket for carrying goods; it is a truncated cone 30 to 36 inches long with a diameter at its mouth of about 24 inches, holding about 24 inches, holding about 50 lbs. of paddy; the *em*-similar to the *doron*, but about half the size, the *bomrang*-an open work basket with an oval mouth, 15 inches by 12, which is used for carrying goods on long journeys, the – similar in shape to the *em*, but with open work sides, used for conveyance of wood, water tubes, &c.

⁴² Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern Asia*, p. 134.

⁴³ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 230.

There are also several sorts of flat baskets for holding grain, each with its particular name. The containing capacity of these is approximately constant, and they are used as measures of quantity.”⁴⁴ The first basket is supplied with a conical lid and is chiefly used to keep valuables in. The outer layer is of finely split bamboo closely woven, and this is lined with broad leaves well dried, which are held in their place by an inner layer of bamboo more loosely woven. These baskets are quite waterproof.”⁴⁵ Basket works were mainly woven out of bamboo. For this purpose, one had to fetch the best kind of bamboos for the particular basket, cut it in small pieces, trim the sharp (blade-like) edges of the finely peeled out pieces of bamboo from cutting the man who handles them. These pieces of bamboos were sometimes dried in the sun or in the rack above the hearth. Sometimes they are used in their raw state. Canes were also used for the purpose and the most valuable baskets were made of these. However, canes were rare in the hills, and bamboos were commonly used for their bounty. Men were also engaged in brass works, “rough specimens of moulding in this metal, which show considerable if untrained talent, but they are very rare, and I attribute them to captives taken from the plains of India or Burma, or to persons who have learnt from them.”⁴⁶ Another work that engaged a man’s labour was iron-work. This job was however, assigned solely to the village blacksmith who was paid in kind for the work.

Weapons of war manufactured in the hills consisted of spears and dahs, shields of bison hides eighteen inches wide and about two feet long-used especially in the chase when the arrows were poisoned. Bows and arrows were other weapons of war.”⁴⁷ Bamboo spikes completed the manufactured weapons of the Lushai hills. These spikes were planted in the earth where territories were protected from enemies entering. Once the enemies ran over these, the spikes enter deep into the soles rendering them impossible to flee. Bamboos and wood were also sharpened into spikes and thrust in the earth to fence villages. These spikes were also used as traps to catch both animals and enemies.

Slaves captured from the plains also served as good teachers in the manufacture of weapons, and in making items that were not available in the hills. For instance, the Luseis have blacksmiths who were engaged in the manufacture of small items of daily

⁴⁴ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p.27.

⁴⁵ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 27.

⁴⁶ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 14.

necessities like the hoe, and axe, needed in their jhums, sickles for cutting, reaping or harvesting the crops and coarse knives or daos. Beyond these, they hardly had any knowledge of manufacturing more sophisticated tools or implements. However, every village had a rough forge in which they made these simple tools of daily necessities. On this subject, Lewin notes:

They work in iron. A rough species of forge is found in every village, and they have made some progress in iron-working, having been taught by Bengallee captives to repair the lock of a gun, as also to make spear-heads and fish-hooks. They cannot, however, make a gun-barrel. They are ignorant of the art of making pottery. Their plates and bottles are the leaves of the jungle and gourd; they use brass and earthen vessels when they can obtain them either in war or by barter at the frontier bazaars.⁴⁸

In times of war or sudden attacks, the slaves were the first to bear enemy onslaught. In wars or raids, they were placed in the front line. They were the first to fall in case of enemy attacks. When most of the enemy's ammunition is spent, the main body of the army or fighters emerge to fight the enemy. This was perhaps the reason for some of the Lusei warriors living for many years. "Messages and errands of a lal, or chief, are also done by his favourite slaves. They are his ambassadors in war."⁴⁹ To collect his people or in fact to authenticate any order, the chief's spear, which is usually carved and ornamented, is sent by a messenger from village to village. Should the message be a hostile one, the messenger carries a fighting dao, to which a piece of red cloth is attached.

Another method is by the "phuroi" which is a species of wand made out of strips of peeled bamboo, about eight inches long. If the tips of the cross-pieces be broken, a demand for blackmail is indicated: a rupee to be levied for each break. If the end of one of the cross pieces is charred it implies urgency, and that the people are to come even by torch-light. If a capsicum be fixed on to the "phuroi," it signifies that disobedience to the order will meet punishment as severe as the capsicum is hot. If the crosspiece is of cane, it means that disobedience will entail corporal punishment and so on. Such a messenger needed to be clever, alert, and one ready to die till the message has reached its stipulated place or performed his job. Slaves wanting to please their chiefs in all

⁴⁸ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, W. H. Allen & Co, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1978, p. 142.

⁴⁹ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, p. 133.

possible manner were more faithful to the chief's orders. They were most useful in running this sort of errand as they were ready to lay down their lives, for they had no other care left to them. This fighting strategy was mostly employed by the Lusei raiders, the result of which was that important and good warriors seldom die in battle.

Children of *sals* also contributed to the labour of their parent *sals* in accordance with their capacity. When the crops were about to ripen, pests, animals, birds, rodents, and thieves frequent jhums and become the first reapers of the harvest. These needed prevention or there was no harvest at all. Families who do not have regular guards usually stay in their jhum huts during this crucial period. But those who could manage to have *bois* or *sals* reserve this duty for them. So, prior to and during harvest or whilst the crop is in the ground "a couple of boys, usually slaves live in the jhum houses to defend the crop from the wild animals and birds; bears, deer, and monkeys are killed in numbers in the fields. The boys keep off sparrows and paraquets by hammering a hollow trough and by pulling strings connected with the four corners of the field to which are attached bamboo rattles, and which all lead to the platform of the house."⁵⁰

As for female slave children, they helped in carrying water in bamboo tubes, where the streams were usually miles away. They carry babies and look after the younger siblings, run errands for their mothers who worked for their masters, and helped in the household work. In the north the wives and daughters of all work alongside the slaves in the fields, but in the south no women of good family work in fields and the social position of a woman is thus always betrayed by her hand."⁵¹ Every available labour was performed by the slaves of the Lushai Hills, for the Lusei was recorded by colonial administrators as "lazy, strong-willed, and loves lying in the sun and smoking rather than work". It is no wonder that some of them were enslaved as Dun states, "due to sheer laziness."

Slaves were an important asset to the common population of the Lushai Hills. Their overall usefulness was evident from the kind of labour they performed which were those of the lowest that the common folk detest. When someone dies, they were made to dig graves, village paths and jungles that needed clearing were kept aside for slaves or captives. In war and peace, they were the first and last to suffer, in the village

⁵⁰ Bertram S. Carey and H. N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, Gian, Delhi (1896), 1987, p. 211.

⁵¹ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 213.

they worked from dawn to dusk doing all those that commoners shunned, in the jhums they sow, weed, carry food-grains and store them in barns. Even the joy of community work like construction of *zawlbuks* was reserved for slaves. Malabika writes:

Captives were highly valued among the Lushais as the greater part of jhumming operations was performed by slaves. They were used as coolies and for tilling the soil. They were engaged by the chiefs to clear the jungle paths during the winter to facilitate raids. The slaves also constructed the bachelors' dormitory or *Zawlbuks*, erected graves and stored food grains in the granaries. The Lushai aristocracy took pride in warfare, raids and hunting but were averse to manual labour. They left the work of cultivation entirely to the slaves. Slaves accompanied the chief's daughter when she proceeded to her husband's home at the time of the marriage ceremony.⁵²

With regard to division of labour, the Siyins use the expression that "A man should spend his life in fighting, hunting, and drinking, whilst labour is intended for women and slaves only."⁵³ Accordingly, women slaves whether acquired in raids, bought or received as gifts were reserved as slaves to perform jhum labour like sowing, weeding, reaping, gathering, winnowing. Even transportation of the harvested crops had to be done from the jhums to the village granaries, which came to be borne by the women slaves while the men of the house engage in hunting, fishing or waging wars.

The confession of slaves captured in raids bear witness to the labour performed by female slaves. Guite writes that "It is in this connection that ninety percent of captives taken in raiding expeditions always consist of women and children. Doimunte, who was captured from Chandroyparah in 1862, informed that the Kuki raiders kept her in their house and made her 'work in the field, hew wood, and draw water' and the other persons 'are employed to make cloth, draw water. Sroop also reported that she 'was put to heavy work, hewing wood and drawing water. In case I did not understand what they said, they used to beat me, otherwise I was kindly used. Ghunnu, another captive from Cachar in 1871, also said that the Luseis 'did not beat us, nor were cruel to us but we had to work hard. Our women were not insulted, but we had no meat or vegetables: only rice to eat. It was a hard life.' Paongti also reported that after reaching the raider's

⁵² Malabika Das Gupta, *Economic Impact of Raids on the shifting cultivators of Tripura*, Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2008, p. 30.

⁵³ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 134.

village, the chief's son took a certain Genna Charan's wife 'not with a view to marry her, but because she was a good spinner.'⁵⁴

Work in the jhum fields required the hardest labour. A person had to brave the weather be the scorching heat of sun or the downpour of rain. Situations sometimes arise that a particular piece of work for example sowing, had to be completed before the first rainfall. As many hands as could be found were usually engaged to complete the job. Malabika states that, "Among the Lushais, a greater part of jhuming operations was performed by slaves who were captives of raids and border forays mainly undertaken to procure such labour. They left the work of cultivation entirely to the slaves."⁵⁵ When a certain crop had to be gathered before the season ends, a slave had to at this stage, compete with the time. Even free women at such times were up to their necks in work. These crucial seasons reduce the *sals* the status of 'machines that produce labour' just as their counterparts elsewhere. As it is, even free women who hold their husbands as Gods determines their status as "slaves to their husbands" (*pati*) meaning authority, employer or hero, and he is simultaneously mentioned as having the quality of dominance as God, referred again as the possessor of the woman."⁵⁶ Wood was the only fuel used for burning in the hills. Jungles were scoured to find dry boughs of trees that were ready for use. Besides collecting firewood for daily use, they needed to be stored for the rainy season. These were arranged in stacks in one corner of the verandah beside the mortar. Sometimes, big boughs of trees were felled by the men in the jungle and were hewed by the women, which they again carry it home.

During the whole year round after a whole day's labour in the jhums, women would be seen carrying wood in their *paikawngs* or baskets along with the tools they used during the day, a few vegetables gathered from the jhum, water bottles made of gourds and sometimes even the man's bag containing his tobacco rolls, knife and cloth used to cover his head. This dry wood was hewed during the lunch break in the jhum hut; for a woman was never idle even during the lunch break. She prepares some simple curry which collects while weeding, kept in her small bag worn around her at all times. At lunch time, she had to prepare the vegetable as best she could, while the man rests in

⁵⁴ 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, p. 370.

⁵⁵ Malabika Das Gupta, *Economic Impact of Raids on the Shifting Cultivators of Tripura*, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2008, p. 30.

⁵⁶ Periyar E. V. Ramasami, *Women Enslaved*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 9-10.

the jhum hut, smoking his tobacco rolls at leisure. After lunch, while the man rests, the woman had to hew firewood to be carried home in the evening. The second half of the day sees the woman weeding alongside her husband while she goes on collecting vegetables, chilly and other things necessary for the evening meal at home. Sometimes, she had to find some eatables that would delight her children on reaching home. All the things collected and the firewood were carried on their return journey home.

Water was another problem in the hills. Villages were usually set up by a source of water. But these were usually very far away either downhill or uphill. Bamboo tubes were prepared by men by which women carry water from the far-off streams, which were sometimes several miles away. The women carry six to eight tubes filled with water at a time. During dry seasons, they had to wait in line for the small water-hole to be filled up so that they could fill their tubes with cups of dry gourds. The operation usually takes hours not to mention the time taken in coming and going to the stream or water-hole. Therefore, women had to compete in reaching the hole first so as to get hold of the water that had gathered during the night. They had to wake up at the first cock's crow while the men sleep in blissful peace, with very little care for the sacrifices that the woman made to give him all the comforts that allowed him to enjoy his arrogant manhood. Once at home, she had to cook, feed the pigs and chicken, attend to her children, pound rice in the mortar placed in a sort of verandah outside the door. All these being completed, she had to serve the food, pack a big lunch to be taken to the jhum, put out baskets-full of unhusk paddy to dry in the sun, while throwing hurried instructions to her children to guard the paddy from chicken, birds and cattle, and to fetch water at least once during the day or to look after the younger ones in her absence. The meal ends with the woman hurriedly cleaning the sparse wooden plates and the pots. She was then expected to carry the tools to be used during the day along with the lunch pack, a gourd of water, the man's tools and bags on the way to the jhum. It was the same story all throughout the year.

During autumn days, women collect cotton grown in the jhum, dry them in the sun, separate the seed from the cotton, spin them and weave them into cloth. These cloth pieces were again stitched into shirts and dress according to the need of the family members. It was a slow process as every cloth-piece was to be stitched with needles. A woman good at needle works or spinning and weaving was highly qualified for wife-material as the manufacture of clothes was one important activity. Besides, embroidered

cloths had to be weaved for the women folk to be worn at different festivals or occasion. A skilful woman was always the envy of other women folk in the village, for, she could wear the best designed cloths.

Female slaves with talents were highly in demand as they were most useful. Genna Charan's wife was taken captive not for the purpose of marrying her, selling or exchange, but for her skill in spinning. If such a slave was ever sold because of some pressing need or any other unavoidable circumstance, they earned more for the master. However, these were seldom sold for they were too useful to be parted with.

The condition of slave women was a double case of enslavement, exploitation of their labour was one, and exploitation of their womanhood. In ancient India in general and in the Vedic society in particular, the status and condition of women slaves were far deplorable than their male counterparts. They also outnumbered male slaves in population and acquisition just as their labour far outshone male slaves. Apart from being sources of unpaid labour and producers of slave labour, their comparatively higher utility flowed from their sexual and biological attributes. This was tied to the fact that their status was no higher than goods and commodities for trade in the market. As women slaves combined the dual function of domestic and biological reproduction they were seen as indispensable for many ordinary, as well as royal households. They were subjected to threats of physical violence and insufferable abuses from their masters. "Indian history has recorded some of the worst forms of cruelty, vengeance, and perversion which went unchecked and unabated for generations despite rigid rules/codes of conduct of the master and punishment of the offender for violation of the provisions laid down in the Arthashastra."⁵⁷ This vulnerability from exploitation came from a situation of powerlessness, helplessness, as well as fragility of physical strength in women, which was more so in the case of slave women who were even deprived of speech and thought.

Slaves captured from the plain areas were a constant source of utility to the remote hill tribes who had little knowledge of the world outside their own for the knowledge they impart to them, however slight. But they were most useful in supplying labour. For the Lusei chiefs, "During certain seasons, when workload becomes generally too heavy even for the slaves, small parties of the common people are told off

⁵⁷ Lakshmidhar Mishra, *Human Bondage: Tracing its Roots in India*, p. 27.

during the whole season to assist his own domestic slaves in tending the crop, repairing his house, and in supplying wood and water for the family.”⁵⁸ Women captives taken in wars, raids, bought and acquired through gifts were clubbed together in the category of slaves or *sals*. Generally, women and children constituted the captives taken in various raids. Women were easily adaptable to their new situations and once they were married to the hill men, they were less inclined to leave and settle down quietly. This was one common answer British administrators received whenever demands were made for the return of the captives they had taken in certain raids. For instance, Captain Stewart’s order for the return of the captives taken during the Adampore raid was met with the answer that, “many of the captives, were married to Lushais, and unwilling to leave them.”⁵⁹ The role played by this section of humanity was immensely significant and great. The Lusei economy or for that reason, tribal populations greatly depended on the labour of womenfolk, free and slaves alike. Free women in patriarchal societies could also be compared to slaves as their condition was hardly different from them. In this respect, Lewin notes: “Upon the women falls the whole burden of the bodily labour by which life is supported. They fetch water, hew wood, cultivate and help to reap the crop, besides spinning, cooking and brewing.”⁶⁰ This being the case even with free women, one can imagine the role played by enslaved women.

The immense role played by captive slaves in the hills was marked by their influence in the biological features of the hill men. This was particularly the result of union that took place between free and slaves or between slaves of different communities in the hills. We have seen that those retained could marry and have families however insignificant. It was from this that Lewin noted “the growth of long, bushy beards in the otherwise smooth and hairless Lushai face were the result of a mixture of Bengalee blood, from the many captives they have from time to time carried away.”⁶¹ They married, had off springs and multiplied in number. But they remained slaves and serfs throughout their lives unless freed or ransomed which was very rare. Their children inherit their fathers’ status.

⁵⁸ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 192.

⁵⁹ Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 300.

⁶⁰ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, p. 134.

⁶¹ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-eastern India*, p. 135.

Social position of the *Sals*

In general, the social status of slaves in any slaveholding societies is non-existent. Once a man becomes a slave through no fault of his, he loses his position in the eyes of the society and his membership is no longer valid. A slave had 'no social existence outside of his master.' A man becomes a non-being, Godless, kin-less, and with no identity. He becomes an 'outsider' to the society he once belonged as well as to the society he was introduced into. Even after being freed, a slave's position in the society carries a label of being 'once a slave.'

According to Patterson, "If the slave no longer belonged to a community, if he had no social existence outside of his master, then what was he? The initial response in almost all slaveholding societies was to define the slave as a socially dead person."⁶² He explains the two ways in which a slave acquires social death—"intrusive and extrusive. In the intrusive mode of representing social death the slave was ritually incorporated as the permanent enemy on the inside—the "domestic enemy as he was known in medieval Tuscany. He did not and could not belong because he was the product of a hostile, alien culture. He stood, on the one hand, as a living affront to the local gods, an intruder in the sacred space (the cosmicized circle, as Mireca Eliade would say, that defined the community). In sharp contrast with the intrusive conception of death was the extrusive representation. Here the dominant image of the slave was that of an insider who had fallen, one who ceased to belong and had been expelled from normal participation in the community because of a failure to meet certain minimal legal or socio-economic norms of behaviour. The destitute were included in this group, for while they perhaps had committed no overt crime their failure to survive on their own was taken as a sign of innate incompetence and of divine disfavour."⁶³ A slave taken from within the community or without had no place in society worth the mention.

The position of *sals* in the hills is best described in the words of Carey and Tuck who noted that: "A man had the same right to kill or sell his slave as his dog, and that a Chief used his female slaves as concubines if he wishes to do so; but, although the sacrifice of a slave was a rare occurrence in the south, slaves were occasionally shot by an angry master. A slave captured in war was usually held to ransom, slaves who have

⁶² Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 38

⁶³ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, p. 41.

accepted the position or who are held in satisfaction of debts can purchase their release. Slaves do not always have names, but are talked of as so-and-so's son or daughter."⁶⁴ Some of the slaves were simply kept for amusements. They had no identity and were sometimes called by 'grunts and nods.' Unless ransomed, the slaves were never free from their shackle of slavery. To an outsider, they may seem to live a normal life which was far from the truth for slavery, however softened, is radically bad. But they were invaluable to the hill society.

Sals/slaves were used in various capacities from household work to jhum fields, war, raids, hunting and so on. But they were most commonly used as:

- (a) Bride price-in cases when the owners did not possess enough bride price, *sals* were given to make up for the shortage as almost all households who made captives kept them
- (b) Exchange- when a master wishes to have a wife, female *sals* of the same age were given in exchange for the one taken, the chief or the *lal* having some *sals* besides his entourage of *bois*.
- (c) Payment of loans and debt- when a person could not repay all his debt, the remaining or sometimes, the whole debt was cleared in exchange for a *sal*.
- (d) Payment of tribute.
- (e) Source of earning profit through slave trade.
- (f) Exchange for guns.
- (g) Used as concubines by the chiefs.
- (h) Sent along with daughters of chiefs in their husbands' homes.

The same slaves, who had no social standing of any nature in the hills, played a pivotal role in the material foundation of the society. This is more so in the case of women of whom Shakespear notes, "as a rule only children and marriageable women were taken captive and the latter were disposed of in marriage, the lucky captor acting in loco parentis and taking the marriage price."⁶⁵ Marriage custom among the Lusei involved

⁶⁴ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 203.

⁶⁵ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 49.

sial or *mithun*. This may not be strictly followed in the case of female slaves, but their price was fixed according to their value. The “main price called (*manpui*) requires three to thirty mithan according to the family of the bride, to be given to the father of the girl or his representative.”⁶⁶ For the female slaves, the chief or their captors fix this price and were given sometimes in terms of *mithuns/metna*. But when the required number of *mithuns* could not meet the demands, they were substituted for in slaves. Since the chiefs had a number of *bois*, they did not need much service from the *sals*, but they did keep them and were sometimes used as exchange items.

Despite such contributions made by them, there is very little or nothing written about the treatment meted out to slaves which sound humane. They were treated as human chattel that could be owned or treated like any other commodity. They had limited rights of widely varying proportions in the society. Sometimes, even for the exercise of these rights, they were totally at the mercy of their masters. “In the hills, a slave had naturally to work for his living, but his day’s work is neither long nor arduous; all that he earns belongs to his master; his food is the same as his master’s, except in times of scarcity, when he fares badly and has to subsist on what roots he can find in the jungle and on the roots of the plantain tree. At feasts he drinks with the Chiefs and, when drunk, will knock them down as readily as any freeman. He sleeps in the house and, although he does not go through the form of marriage, he cohabits with the slave woman of his fancy and is fond of his children, whom he brings up in the same humble but not necessarily unhappy position as his own.”⁶⁷ They were so indispensable to the chiefs that Lewin notes: “The residence of a powerful chief is generally surrounded by the houses of his slaves, who marry and cultivate, enjoying undisturbed the fruits of their labour. On the death of a slave, however, his wife and children and all his property go to the chief.”⁶⁸ The houses of slaves acted as a fortress to the chief.

Sals were also a source of earning profit for the chiefs in particular and the common people in general. Chiefs having many *bois*, did not need many *sals* but those that were first captured in raids were given to the chief, which he utilise them in the trade, sold and got himself weapons for the purpose of defence against other powerful chiefs, or some other things not available in his land. Many instances of sale are

⁶⁶ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 197; N. E. Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, TRI, Aizawl, 2009, pp. 24-42.

⁶⁷ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, p. 204.

⁶⁸ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, p. 132.

recorded in the colonial records. *Sals* were also used in bartering them for guns in the hills. They were used in the payment of tribute by the Lusei chiefs to those chiefs who were more powerful than they were.

Lusei princesses or daughters of chiefs were also accompanied to their husband's house after marriage. It is a well-known fact that the Lusei economy was based on the labour of women. When a man marries a woman, she was expected to look after all his needs and perform the household works, bear children for him, and satisfy the needs, not only of his family members but, his entire kith and kin. There was no way that a chieftain's daughter, much pampered and softened by years of grooming and patting would perform labour usually performed by commoners. Therefore, female slaves were usually given as part of the bride's gifts that she takes to her husband's home. The slave woman thus continued slaving wherever taken to, her duties increasing double fold each time her married mistress bear children.

The role played by the Lusei *sals* as exchange value is also evident from the fact that they changed hands with guns with other tribes in the nearby areas. In doing so, the size, health, and the condition of such slaves were usually taken as factors of exchange. If the number of slaves to be exchanged with a gun were not to the satisfaction of the gun-owner, their number was increased so as to make up for the lack of the desired qualities.

Regarding the general treatment of *sals*/slaves in the hills, the ill-treatment of the class was rare as they were very difficult to capture or obtain. Their usefulness being more spelt with the discovery of their exchange value, the slaves were treated mildly compared to those in other parts of the world. Among the Chins, the ill-treatment of the class was not common. They were allowed to roam or go about freely and mingle with the common subjects of the village. Regarding the initial treatment, Reid states that:

When caught, the captives are put in stocks or otherwise confined for about a month, apparently with the idea of taming them, but after that they are granted comparative freedom; the penalty, however, for attempting to escape being death or a very severe beating. As an additional safeguard against such an occurrence the captive is made to take an oath either by eating a little earth and swearing that he has adopted the land as

his country, or by drinking some water poured over a spear or dha and declaring that he will accept death as a punishment for trying to escape.⁶⁹

However, there were a few occasions in which the master allows freedom to his captive on payment of ransom according to his demands. Reid continues that “in some cases, with an indulgent master a captive is allowed to work out his own ransom.”

Among the Lusei too, the harsh treatment of slaves was not common. This was evident from the records of colonial observers. For instance, during the great Lushai expedition of 1871-72, captives taken by the Luseis from the plains vehemently refused to be released. Lewin notes:

A remarkable circumstance transpired with reference to the people held in captivity by the Lushais, viz., that all unite in describing the treatment they received as *kind in the extreme*. In no case has it been ascertained that any violence had been offered to a female captive, while, as the list shows, many of them have actually married, and becoming incorporated with the tribe, *declined positively to be released*. The captives given up by the southern Howlongs had *to be brought forcibly* into the camp, and *clung to their Lushai friends, weeping piteously and entreating that they might not be made over to us*. Among the number of these suppliants was the wife and grown up daughter of one of my interpreters, and he was much disturbed by such an inopportune exhibition of unnatural feeling, ascribing it to Kookie magic.⁷⁰ [Emphasis added]

Lewin rightly described such ‘magic’ as ‘the white magic of kindness and human sympathy.’ The slaves of Lushai Hills were thus different from their counterparts elsewhere.

This relatively good treatment in respect of food, clothing, shelter and medical care (they were allowed to visit the village medicine man or missionary doctors) is somewhat a marked difference when compared to the global scene of slavery. However, the kindness and tolerance shown to *sals* did not emerge from natural or inborn goodness of chiefs. It was neither the outcome of generosity towards their slaves, nor a touch of love for their condition of slavery. It can be ascribed to their need for maintaining slaves in good physical condition. Reasons taken into consideration were

⁶⁹A. S. Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land*, p. 234.

⁷⁰ West Bengal State Archives, Letter from Lewin to Civil Officer, Right Column Lushai Expedition, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No. 22, dated Chittagong, the 26th March, Political Proceedings, August 1872, No. 212.

their use and exchange value, maintenance of female fertility, and to ensure their more output. Slaves were gradually becoming more in demand and their sale or exchange had become more frequent as they fetched good profits for the masters. Moreover, masters were forced to be lenient towards their slaves for fear of contempt that may lead to retaliations. The masters were therefore, forced to exercise constraints in their behaviour towards and treatment of their slaves.

Slave Trade and the *Sals*

Act V of 1843 declaring and amending the law regarding the condition of slavery within the territories occupied by the East India Company states:

It is hereby enacted and declared that no public officer in execution of any decree or order of Court or for the enforcement of any demand of rent or revenue sale or cause to be sold any person on the ground that such person is in a state of slavery.

And it is hereby declared and enacted that no rights arising out of any alleged property in the person and services of another as a slave shall be enforced by any Civil or Criminal Court or Magistrate within the territories of the East India Company and it is hereby declared and enacted that any person, who may have acquired property by his own industry, or by the exercise of any art calling or profession or by inheritance assignment gift or request shall be dispossessed of such property or prevented from taking possession thereof on the ground that such person or that the person from whom the property may have been derived was a slave.

And it is hereby enacted that any act which would be a penal offence if done to a free man shall be equally an offence if done to any free person on the pretext of his being in a condition of slavery.⁷¹

Slavery in India was henceforth, supposed to have been abolished by this Act V of 1843. But the act was just a partial abolition. In fact, it did not declare that the sale or ownership of a slave was a penal offence. It merely laid down that a master had no more power of coercion over a slave than over a free labourer. The Act also states nothing in regard to the prevention of traffic in child slaves or possession of the same. The reforms introduced in 1860 Penal Code made the possession of slaves including children and

⁷¹ D. R. Banaji, *Slavery in British India*, D. B. Taraporevala sons & Co. Kitab Mahal, Hornby Road, Bombay, 1933, p. 404; V. C. P. Chaudhary & Singh, P. P (eds) *Unclassified Clan Operation Under The Crown: An Archival Probe in India – Nepalis Relation on Slavery*, Rahul Press, Ptna-20, 1991, pp. 65-150.

traffic in these a penal offence. Even after this, the institution of slavery survived in India and its regions through customs that imbibed certain obligations. While the institution of slavery was backed by the rigid caste systems in urban India, remote parts of the country had not even an inkling of what was going round the world, or in the more civilized and sophisticated societies in central India.

Along with this institution, the trade in slavery continued. Even if the colonial masters had come across cases of slaves being kept by chiefs of the hill areas, they restrained from interfering in the affairs of the hill tribes. Lewin has stated that: “Here in these hills a chief is punished for keeping slaves or levying what we call an illegal cess on his people; when that chief or that Zamindar leaves jail, his people will flock round him to do him honour as an injured person. I do not attempt to defend slavery or to infer that bribery should not be put a stop to; I only say that there is no law the infraction of which carries with it no social penalty.”⁷² This was a confession made by a colonial authority in which he felt that there was absolutely no use of punishing an offender with regard to slavery and its practise, or was that the true reason behind this? From the beginning of its rule in the Lushai Hills, the colonial administration made certain rules to be followed in the course of their relationship with hill tribes. These rules clearly states that “The customs and prejudices of the people were to be observed and respected, and that the British Government in India was to interfere as little as possible between the chiefs and their tribes.”⁷³

Some factors behind this non-intervention could be explained as the wish to retain the natural or aboriginal look of the tribal population intact with their customary practices, thereby storing them as museum pieces. Interference and modification of their “state of being” would destroy such a precious find. Also, no or very little efforts were made for the prevention of practices such as these, for, their antagonism to hill chiefs could jeopardise their intention of ruling through the chiefs. In other words, the silent attitude of the government on the practices of slavery, or indulgence in the trade was a quiet consent to the hill men who, tranquilly continued their affairs undisturbed whatsoever.

⁷² Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, p. 39

⁷³ Lewin, *Wild Races of Southeastern India*, p. 35

Lusei slaves or *sals*, therefore, continued to serve in various capacities. Shakespear wrote that “*sals* were the personal property of their captors, and I am told that when guns first made their appearance in the hills the western tribes used to exchange their *sal* with the eastern tribes for guns, one strong *sal* being worth two guns.”⁷⁴ They were used as a medium of exchange within the tribes and with neighbouring tribes as well. Their position is clearly evident from this as they were merely bought, sold and disposed in a manner which pleases their masters. Slaves were thus kept not only for their use value or labour, but for their immense exchange value. This phenomenon is explained by Marx as: “Man has often made man himself, under the form of slaves, serve as the primitive material of money.”⁷⁵ They were the best means through which chiefs acquired wealth and money.

Sals of the Luseis as primitive material of money are evident from the excessive barter in the markets that existed in contemporary hill areas. The only parts of the world they remained in touch were those immediate areas lying in the foothills of their own land or its immediate neighbours in the surrounding directions. They carried on some sort of trade with Cachar, Burma, and Chittagong. But the only accounts of “these trade” we are allowed to see is their occasional journeys to the “four bazaars or markets in the hills, to which the hill people resort to barter their produce for such articles of daily consumption as salt, spices, dried fish, and the like, which are only procurable from the plains. These bazaars were situated at Kassalong, Rangamuttee, Chandragoona on the Karnafulee and Bundrabun on the river Sungoo.

The population of the hills also resort to such markets of the plains as may be within a day’s journey from their homes, along the border of the Chittagong District. The hill men bring down for sale cotton and timber either in the form of rafts or hewn into boats; and, if much pressed for money, they collect for sale the oil-bearing seeds of a tree in the jungle (Chalmongree) or cut and float down a raft of bamboos. They also occasionally bring in for sale ivory and wax in small quantities. The principal articles disposed of the hill people in the bazars are salt, tobacco (in small quantities), piece-goods, meal goods, trinkets, dried fish, pigs and cattle. About 50,000 cubic feet of timber per annum, it is calculated, is brought down yearly to the plains from the Hill

⁷⁴ Shakespear, *The Lushei- Kuki Clans*, p. 49

⁷⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol. I*, Moscow, 1986, (1954), p. 92

Tract forests; and 55,854 maunds of cotton are estimated to be yearly exported by the hill people.”⁷⁶

Early trade in the hills was of the most basic nature where the hill men purchased items like salt, tobacco, beads in exchange for their jhum products such as rice, cotton and basket-works in the nearby marts. The main routes to these bazaars were the surrounding rivers crossed with bamboo rafts or planks of wood tied together. The hill men load their items for barter on these temporary rafts and sail them down to the bazaars. Along with the simple trade, ‘other trade’ of a more devious nature was carried on with the surrounding territories. Paths were numerous in every direction, but they were admissible only to travellers on foot and there were no roads that could be used for transport in the true sense of the term. The construction of roads was an impossible task due to the nature of the country with its transverse ranges of hills, offering very great engineering obstacles even for the great British Government. However, the persistent need that arose with the annexation of the hills forced the British government to construct numerous roads which will be discussed in chapter six.

The slave trade was a globally recognised phenomenon from ancient times. “The Egyptian civilisation, or classical Athens, Roman Italy, the West Indian Islands, Brazil and the Southern states of the USA were slave societies. In each of these cases slaves played an important part in production and formed over 20 per cent of the total population.”⁷⁷ They were known to have engaged in the slave trade profusely. Ancient India too, did not lag behind in the trade. But the picture in modern times have assumed other modified forms of slavery like bonded labour, debt slavery, serfs, indentured labour and so on. Slavery has been modified with the change of time, and its trade in the present times is also seen in different forms like human trafficking. It includes the sale of women into prostitution, child trafficking for under wage workers in factories and so on. In earlier times, the slave trade flourished in regions where slave labour was employed. These occur in phases of early civilisations. In fact, great civilisations were built on slave labour. The early phases of great nations began with this abominable institution-the different functions like the sale and purchase of slaves.

⁷⁶ Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, pp. 9-10

⁷⁷ K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, Cambridge, 1978, pp. 9-100; R. S. Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1990, p. 183

Regional studies have also revealed the presence of slave trade in the pre-colonial period. Most regions of tribal concentration also show that some sort of trade in slaves had occurred at one time or other. In Assam, the prevalence of the trade was evident from colonial accounts, in Arunachal, slaves were owned and used as medium of exchange, and in the Lushai Hills, British administrators had all at some time or other, come in contact with the practise of slavery or its other forms of servitude (*boi* system) besides *Sal*. A colonial administrator had stated in clear terms that “Slavery by purchase is recognised and is not restricted to the chiefs.”⁷⁸ Besides the captives acquired in raids, commoners in a position to purchase them keep slaves to perform the most arduous tasks. It was a glorious day when captives were made, for they achieved much from their labour and sale or exchange.

Among the hill people, the prevalence of the slave trade was evident from the Siyins and Soktes who were the experts of the trade. Carey and Tuck, the authorities on the Chin Hills notes:

The Siyins and the Soktes were the professional slave-dealers of the Chin Hills and raids were regularly organised on account of the profitable trade, and also in order to get slaves to cultivate the fields and perform all menial services. The prices paid by the Burmans for the release of parents, wives and children average from Rs. 100 to Rs. 1,000, and until the money was paid, the captive, be he pongyi or official’s wife, worked in the fields or lay in heavy stocks

Slavery in the Chin Hills are of two classes; those who have been captured by force and those who have willingly submitted to the yoke or who were born in slavery or who for crimes committed were condemned to slavery.

Among the Siyins it was a point of honour not to ravish Burmese captives, and the women who lived with Chins as their wives usually consented to do so. The Siyins themselves look on a slave-owner who is cruel his slaves in the same way as we look on a bully.

The Siyins and the Soktes were the professional slave-dealers of the Chin Hills and raids were regularly organized on account of the profitable trade, (page.204) and also in order to get slaves to cultivate the fields and perform all menial services.

⁷⁸ Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 196

The prices paid by the Burmans for the release of parents, wives, and children averaged from Rs.100 to Rs.1000, and until the money was paid the captive, be he pongyi or official's wife, worked in the fields or lay in heavy stocks.

The Northern Chins armed themselves with guns with the proceeds of their Burman slave traffic, and the extent to which the traffic was worked is explained by the fact that in the last five years we have recovered some 700 slaves from the Northern Chin alone.

The freemen far outnumber the slaves, except in villages like Haka, where the population consists almost entirely of Chiefs and slaves.

Slaves were sold like cattle and were distributed at a man's death amongst his heirs in common with beads and guns.⁷⁹

Colonial accounts of head-hunting may persuade readers that raids were actually carried out to take heads, or to bury slaves along with the corpse of a dead chief. These raids, planned earlier sometimes co-incite with the unforeseen death of a chief. The taking of heads or scalps that usually follow raids and massacre were done to prove that enemies had been killed and finished off, or to prove a man's bravery. Their heads and scalps were evidence of the occurrence. When people were captured and led away to the hills and disappear after sometime, the only explanation seemed to be that they had been sacrificed or killed to adorn the graves of their dead chiefs. But what actually takes place is stated by Guite as: "An explanation to this reality was rooted in two hill practices: slave trade and absorbing them into the hill society."⁸⁰ Thus, we see "many instances of lies told by the Luseis that the captives taken in the various raids were either sold or had died."⁸¹ Repeated orders usually forced them to bring back the captives hidden, but their persistent denials were stated as:

"the Lushei chiefs for instance, consistently insist that their captives were either dead or sold to the Pois whenever their return was demanded; a young man of 4 ½ feet usually fetched them two guns....slaves also formed part of their 'tribute' to Poi rajahs: Venolel, one of the most powerful Lushei rajahs, used to pay tribute to Falam rajah 'in cotton clothes and slaves.'⁸²

⁷⁹ Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck, *The Chin Hills*- Vol. 1, Gian, Delhi (1896), 1987, p. 203

⁸⁰ Guite, 'Civilisation and its Malcontents: The Politics of Kuki Raid in the nineteenth century Northeast India', p.371

⁸¹ NAI, *Chengri Valley Raids*, Foreign Dept, Extl B, September 1891, Nos. 179-181

⁸² Guite, 'Civilisation and its malcontents : The Politics of Kuki raids in nineteenth century Northeast India,' pp. 371

Similarly, during the Chengri Valley raid, Lengpunga confessed that

The raid was made, and all the prisoners brought to my punji. There were about 70 captives. I killed none. Those not given up died of sickness or committed suicide. About two months after the raid a Tipperah jemadar, saying that he was in the Tipperah Raja's service, came to the punji, and suggested that he should be allowed to release the captives, but that he had brought no money with him for the purpose. He said 'If you will lend me money I will release the captives and pay you interest.' The jemadar borrowed Rs. 50 from me and Rs. 360 from the people of the punji. He promised to pay interest to all. He released eight captives, and paid the whole of the money he had borrowed to me, promising to return with the money to pay the loans, and to bring more for the release of the other captives. We have heard nothing more of this man. After this Gauri Charan chaprasi and Jadab came, but as I have been cheated by the jemadar, I was suspicious, and I said to them 'The captives are not British subjects, you don't ask for their release. If they had been British subjects, the Rai Bahadur would have been sent or Sib Charan.' I said 'If they are British subjects, take them.' Gauri Charan said he could not take so many men. He said 'Take care of them and don't sell them.'⁸³

Gauri Charan's concern regarding the plight of the captives and his entreaty to Lengpunga evidently states that selling slaves was a common practise and a well-known fact. There was no going round the bush with regard to the position of the captives and the impending sale has greatly inspired him to try his utmost in attempting their release and thus saving their hides. In the Chin Hills, 700 slaves were recovered within five years of British occupation and by 1893 more than 2,000 slaves were estimated to be recovered during the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72. These are evidences of captives surrendered to the Colonial rule, but those that have never been recovered or surrendered have a completely different story to narrate. Colonial records are filled with these reports. For instance:

In our frontier districts the severest punishments should be inflicted on all who possess slaves, no matter from whence obtained, for, so long as there are markets for slaves, the Savage Tribes will supply them, bringing the fruits of their raids into Tipperah for sale to my District or Araccan and vice versa.⁸⁴

⁸³ NAI, Statement made by Lengpunga at Camp No. 12, outside Lengpunga's punji on the 9th February 1890, Foreign Dept, Extl B, September 1891, Nos. 179-181, p. 3

⁸⁴ WBSA, Judicial Proceedings, May 1861, No. 17

The possibility of this trade in Tipperah, Araccan, Chittagong or Burma, lies in the general layout of the country. Lewin gives an account of the country known as the Hill Tracts of Chittagong. He noted that “the country was bounded on the west by the maritime district of Chitagong on the south and east, as far as the blue mountains, by the province of Arracan on the north, by the fenny river which divides the hill tracts from Hill Tipperah, a semi-independent state, while to the north and northeast the country is undefined, and may be said to be conterminous with the extent to which the influence of the British Government is acknowledged amongst the hill tribes in that direction.

The extent of the district, however, may be roughly summarised as the country watered by the Rivers Fenny, Kurnafoolee, Sungoo and Matamoorree, with their tributaries from the watersheds to the entry of these rivers into the Chittagong District. Of these, the Sungoo or Rigray Khyoung and the Matamoorree, or Moree Khyoung, take their rise in the range of hills which divides Arrakan from the Chittagong Hill Tracts on the south-east. Of these two rivers, the Karnafoolee is the principal. It is navigable at all seasons of the year, for boats of considerable size, as far as 20 miles beyond Kassalong. The depth of water in the Karnafoolee averages from 8 to 30 feet: the bed is muddy. From the banks of the Fenny river, perched on the ridge of some adjacent hill, may be seen the houses of the hill men.”⁸⁵

The Eastern Frontiers were not more than 300 miles from the western boundary of China and the tribes living in that direction is known to have intercourse with the Province of Meckley, subject to the King of Burmah.”⁸⁶ This layout offered possibilities of trade, at one time or other between the hill tracts and the countries nearby. Slaves were sold to purchase the much needed guns for raiding expeditions and to fight enemies. The Chittagong Hill Tracts, divided into four river valleys, marked out more or less distinctly by well-defined chains of hills running parallel from the south in a north-westerly direction offered them paths that were greatly needed for communication, although these were not well-defined routes.

The presence of a maritime trade offered shipping possibilities of slaves from the Chittagong and Araccan ports to other parts of the world through the Bay of Bengal. This could explain the untraceable captives who were never recovered. The Sungoo and

⁸⁵ Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong*, pp. 1-2

⁸⁶ Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong*, p. 5

Matamoree river run parallel to the hill ranges, till they enter the plains, forming two river valleys. On the other hand, the Kurnafoolee and Fenny run transversely across the line of the hills and the river valleys here are formed by large tributary streams entering the Kurnafoolee at right angles to its course. The hill areas were accessible through rivers where the hill people went to and fro, back and forth, mainly on rough boats or rafts. However, slave traders need these but little from the fact that all the captives taken were usually made to walk, the weaker being killed to avoid prevention of slow progress. "During the Great Kookie invasion of 1860 made on the Bengalee inhabitants of Kundal in Tipperah, the raiders fell upon the villagers, killed and took captives among whom was a young woman not accustomed to walking; so after the first day's march her feet swelled and she was unable to go further. The chief therefore, ordered that she should be speared."⁸⁷ Rutton Poia (Rothangpuia) then ordered his slave to do the work neatly, but the latter's stroke was ill-directed and the woman did not die. At this, the chief finished the work and made his slave lick the blood on the spear.

The slave trade was highly necessitated by the socio-political condition of the 18th century. Firearms had reached the hills where the Luseis, Shendus, Pois, Soktes, Siyins and every other tribe indulged in rivalries. Firearms could serve the cause to perfection. Arms and ammunition came to be one very important item of trade. The hill tribes began to trade extensively and encouraged traders to their hills which were not allowed earlier. To this effect, Zochungnunga states: "the Lushais traded with the Bengalis and Chakmas in the south, Bengalis and Manipuris in the north, and welcomed traders because they got sulphur, gun and flint glass from them which had very important place in the Mizoram armament."⁸⁸ But money being scarce in the hills other means were used to acquire these guns, the best being sale of or exchange of slaves captured in raids. Thus by the time the 'whites' came in contact with the hill tribes, some of the administrators noted the centrality of firearms and their availability. Shakespear states that:

The Lushais have been in possession of firearms for the last sixty or seventy years. These weapons are flint-locks bearing the names of many European makers; many are Tower muskets, and guns bearing the marks of French Customs Department are not at all rare. These guns came into the country in the first instance chiefly through Burma, though no

⁸⁷ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-eastern India*, p. 140.

⁸⁸ Zochungnunga, 'Survey of the Pre- Colonial Mizo Economy' in *A Modern History of Mizoram* Sangkima (ed), 2004, pp. 58-59.

doubt, some came through Chittagong, and much money must have been made, for the demand was large. When the weapons first began to appear, the Lushais and other western tribes used to obtain them from the tribes on the Burma border, giving slaves in exchange, a strong male slave being equivalent to two guns.⁸⁹

Women brought in more than the men from their sale. Chatterjee had noted that a “young male captive cost three mithuns whereas a single female fetched five mithuns; women and children captured by the Shendus were ‘sold to the Sailoos for two old tower muskets.’”⁹⁰ In his letter to the Government of India Colonel Phayre also states:

In former years I have myself been a good deal among all tribes except the Shindus. With continued intercourse, personal influences among them is readily acquired. But this intercourse must be constant, and it must be personal. If from any cause it be interrupted, the wild and fickle people soon forget their promises, and a chief of whom one may have formed good hopes, will perhaps next be heard of as heading a raid on a neighbouring tribe and killing all who are not fit to be sold as captives.⁹¹

Women slaves like Genna Charan’s wife brought more profit for their owner as “they had a skill” which could be exploited. The prices of skilful captives were more than the ordinary. Among the Lakhers, the price of a good male slave was 170 to 180 rupees, while healthy young female slaves easily fetched 200 rupees, or if sold to the Khumis, who gave high prices for slaves, even as much as 300 rupees. If given as part of a marriage price the value of a slave, whether male or female, was assessed at 100 rupees. If a chief’s slave was killed by a free man, the murderer had either to pay the chief 200 rupees as a *luteu*, or became a slave himself.”⁹²

Among the Shendus, a slave among them is valued at eight muskets to two guyals.”⁹³ After the Chengri Valley raid of 8th January 1889, J. D. Anderson wrote to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Cachar on 13th July 1889 wherein he recounted Lengpunga’s own account of the raid. Regarding the captives they had taken, he admitted that “eight souls, seven women and a boy were released two months ago, being ransomed by a “jemadar from Chittagong” who paid Rs. 185 in cash, and

⁸⁹ Shakespear, *The Lushei- Kuki Clans*, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence,’ p. 292.

⁹¹ Letter from Colonel Phayre to the Government of India as quoted in Mackenzie’s *The North-East Frontier*, p. 352.

⁹² N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 226.

⁹³ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-eastern India*, p. 150.

promised to pay Rs. 515 subsequently; the latter sum to be treated as a loan from Lengpunga to him at a rate of 10 per cent per mensem. He had not received the money subsequently and says that, if more money be not forthcoming in two months' time, he would raid again."⁹⁴ Following this further threat of Lengpunga, the Deputy Commissioner had to agree to a payment of Rs. 3,300 for the release of all the captives Lengpunga had taken. This account brings one to understand that the Lusei chiefs acquire money even from the British administrators for the surrender of their captives, which would have otherwise, brought them more profits were they sold to other traders or retained as slaves to labour in their jhums and houses.

In 1864, Captain Stewart, Deputy Commissioner of Cachar sent word to Sukpilal (Suakpuilal) for a meeting with regard to the captives he had taken during the massacre at Adampore, but the latter sent his mantris making an excuse that he was too ill to move. On asking the mantri about it, he was adamant, but "after some fencing the mantri admitted the facts of the Adampore massacre, but said some of the captives had been sold to the Pois in the south."⁹⁵ This confession clarified the sale of slaves to the Pois which was a regular occurrence.

The slave trade also benefitted the hill people in other ways. They came in contact with new people and learnt many things from the slaves they purchased. Besides the guns they obtain through the sale and exchange of slaves, they also procured gunpowder from other regions. Lewin states that "Gunpowder they obtain, it is said, from Burmah, and, until lately, from the Bengallees of Cachar and Chittagong. Latterly, however, increased vigilance from the part of the authorities has driven them to manufacture a rough sort of powder; they learnt to do this from the Shendus."⁹⁶ Guns used in the raids and wars were usually obtained through Arrakan. In one of his letters A. P. Phayre, states:

No doubt that those tribes are in part supplied through Arrakan: every possible precaution has been taken to check this pernicious trade. Last year a large seizure of arms was made in the Myoo River by Captain Hamilton, the Superintendent of Police; they had just been brought in, and, no doubt, would have been carried into the hills and

⁹⁴ Letter of J. D. Anderson to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, 13th July 1889, in Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883 to 1941*, Spectrum, Guwahati, 1997, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁵ Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 299.

⁹⁶ Lewin, *Wild Races of South-eastern India*, p. 141

sold to the adjoining tribes. Two men of substance were convicted and sentenced on this occasion under the Arms Act. I have orders that a close watch is to be kept on all Native vessels entering the bays and rivers on the coast of Arrakan: I consider it very necessary that similar measures should be adopted with reference to Cox's Bazar, where formerly I know a trade in arms and ammunition was carried on with the view of supplying the Hill tribes.⁹⁷

In spite of the measures adopted to guard the coast of Arrakan and Chittagong, activities related to arms continued. Before the vessels reach the main ports, they were usually relieved of their cargo. Besides, the hill tribes were supplied from Burma. People continued to visit the bazaars which were the main centres of purchasing items of daily necessities through the exchange of their jhum products like paddy and cotton. Ivory was another item of exchange. However, the most valuable was their own human counterparts for the acquisition of which, the Luseis had no qualms in destroying villages and killing all those unfit for sale or labour. Thus the statement of Liangphunga after the Chengri valley raid was reported by Daly as:

Out of the total of 90 captives taken during the Chengri Valley raids, Lengpunga stated that he had received only 70 out of which three of the original number are said to have committed suicide, rather than continue in captivity; eight are reported to have died, or four or five to have been sold to other tribes. They destroyed a punji in British territory, killing a number of our subjects, and selling others to tribes living beyond them.⁹⁸

The five captives said to have been detained turned out to be children of about six or seven years of age. The Luseis continued to detain a little girl of eight, but continuous pressure from Daly made them give her up. This showed yet the great demand for female slaves. Much has been written about the economics of slave labour and the contribution made by them to the prosperity of the owner and that of a society. Their role and status in the society not only as the labour class is highly evident.

⁹⁷ NAI, Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel A. P. Phayre, Chief Commissioner of British Burmah and Agentto Governor General, to the Officiating Secretary to Government of India, Foreign Department, Fort William, (No. 185-3020, dated Rangoon, the 20th July 1863), Foreign Department, Political-(A), No. 5, August, 1863

⁹⁸ NAI, Report of W. W. Daly, Esq., Officiating Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Bengal, to The Inspector General of Police, Assam, dated Calcutta, 2nd June, 1890, Foreign Deptt, Ext B, September, No.179-181, p. 138

The slave trade and the trade in arms were conducive to the social and political atmosphere that cropped up in the hills in the later part of the 18th century. The coming of firearms was one important factor that helped the rise of chiefs in the hills. Possession of arms strengthened the power of chiefs who were ambitious of enlarging their territories. The possibilities of changing arms with slaves raised the imagination of petty chiefs. *Sals* were many among the Lusei communities, but these were kept for their labour. The preference of slaves in exchange for guns however, changed the use of slaves. They were promoted from ‘labour machines to money that produced firearms and ammunitions.’ This explains the occurrence of sudden, fierce and excessive raids in the same period in areas nearest their settlements. Although keeping *sals* themselves, they were reluctant to part with people of their own blood groups as those were captured or conquered during inter-clan wars and they belonged to the same stock.

Therefore, the Luseis turned attention to areas beyond their own people to procure human booty for the purpose of procuring arms. But this changed the history, people and the landscape altogether. Guite states:

Firearms began to enter the Kuki country from Burma which brought the whole region into a state of confusion: ‘exterminating warfare,’ deaths, mass displacement, migration and subjugation. Within a span of less than half a century, most Kuki tribes were armed with firearms.⁹⁹

Of these, the first tribe to use guns were the Pois who became formidable to other tribes who had no possession of firearms yet. The Tashons, the Siyins, Hakas, Suktes and the Luseis also appeared to have at some point, paid tribute to Falams. The Shendus, becoming powerful due to the possession of firearms, drove out the Luseis across the Tyao, the Suktes also having come to possess firearms rapidly expanded northward until the Manipur valley, subjugating their kinsmen and northern tribes like the Guites, Zous, Thadous and Vaipheis. Thus a large number of them fled to the Lushai Hills and Manipur. The Luseis also fled to the Lushai Hills in about 1810. After procuring firearms, the Lusei chiefs also became formidable to the other tribes from the 1830s.

Firearms became so prominent in the subjugation of other tribes and consequent state formation process of the Lushai hills that they went to the extent of selling *sals*

⁹⁹ Guite, ‘Civilisation and its malcontents :The Politics of Kuki raids in nineteenth century Northeast India,’ p. 352

captured in the hills and in the plains. The centrality of firearms was seen from the fact that “in the 1860s and 1870s guns had almost replaced the Kuki’s traditional weapons like bows and arrows.”¹⁰⁰ Lalsukla was said to have possessed 100 guns in 1844, Suakpuilal was said to possess fighting men ‘entirely armed with guns,’ Gobind Ram, a Bengali interpreter told Lister that there was one musket ‘in each house in the raja’s village.’¹⁰¹ By 1866, Lewin described the “Lushais as having every man his guns.”¹⁰² 1871 saw Edgar the then Deputy Commissioner of Cachar passing through the poor village of Dhurmongpi reports several guns in almost every house. In 1872, Vandula was reported to have ‘at least 4000 fighting men, 2000 of them armed with guns.

By 1875, the Suktes had ‘at least 2000 men, two thirds of them armed with muskets.’ E. W. Dun noted that in Manipur the Simmtes (Guites) could master 850 fighting men with about half of them armed with guns, and 250 Chassad men with 20 per cent armed with guns.”¹⁰³ During the Lushai expedition of 1871-72, 156 guns were carried away by those Kukis who migrated to Manipur. Col. Nuthall, Political Agent of Manipur reported that 225 muskets (173 brought by runaway Kukis and 52 seized from Kokatung) were brought into Manipur during the expedition. When the Chin Hills was occupied, over 6986 guns were confiscated by 1897-98. In 1892-93, of the total estimate of 1700 guns with the Lusheis in the North Lushai Hills, about 601 guns were seized and, during the same year, 287 guns were ‘fined’ in the Lushai Hills. According to one estimate, “over 10,000 guns were confiscated from both the Chin and Lushai Hills after annexation.”¹⁰⁴ Although the British government tried to curb the growing trade in arms, it was discovered that above 95 per cent of the confiscated guns in the Chin Hills were made in England. Carey states:

Most probable explanation is that barrels were cut in half and thus more easily smuggled into Upper Burma, when they were pieced together again by Europeans in the service of the King, or by agents of the shippers. So well were these half barrels had been joined that it is often impossible to break them. it is more than probable that when

¹⁰⁰ A. S. Reid, *Chin Lushai Land*, p. 231; C. A. Soppitt, *A short account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-east Frontier: (districts Cachar, Sylhet, Naga Hills etc., and the North Cachar Hills), with an outline grammar of the Rangkhoh-Lushai language and a comparison of Lushai with other dialects*, Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong, [1887], 1976, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier*, p. 296, Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, p. 14.

¹⁰² WBSA, JP, April 1871, No. 272.

¹⁰³ E. W. Dun, *Gazetteer of Manipur*, pp. 33-35.

¹⁰⁴ Guite, ‘Civilisation and its malcontents :The Politics of Kuki raids in nineteenth century Northeast India,’p. 355.

the flint lock gave way to the percussion-cap gun, the obsolete weapons were sold as old iron in England, but, instead of being broken up, they were shipped to ports such as Rangoon and Chittagong to be sold to the natives; and when one sees one's comrades shot, or the tribesmen out of hand, it is very bitter to think that the weapons which are killing the people and causing us so much anxiety were manufactured by ourselves and were formerly held by our own troops.

In this connection, when guns, for instance, 10 of them were tied together on each side of a mule and are jolted over the hills for miles, screws usually fall and the guns being loose in some parts were re-fitted, re-designed and re-sold to the tribesmen who further modified them according to their fancy. It was no wonder that the Wankathe in the Northern Chin Hills was noted for its beautiful guns, for the barrels were as bright as silver, the gun-stocks were beautifully shaped, and the paint, varnish, brass-work, and all other appointments were perfect, for the Chin's gun is the most prized possession and nothing is too much trouble if it can decorate or improve his treasure.¹⁰⁵

The Lusei raids and trade worked hand in hand. In a remote society that gives no importance to money economy but adoption of refined method of raids speak volumes. The absence of theft during raids, disappearance of captives from villages, the presence of guns in the houses of even the poorest were evidences that points to a barter of some sort where money had no or need no place. Currency was replaced by captives taken in violent encounters and conflicts which resulted out of the desire for acquisition of slaves. It may seem that slaves were procured as prisoners for the purpose of ransom, which was partly true, as it was one way of earning money. But these *sals* themselves turned out as currency at one point of time. They became labour machines, items of trade, and means of payment of tribute, medium of exchange, and currency in the acquisition of firearms. The trade in slaves was supported by Burma and the tribes served as the hinterland for their procurement. They had to turn to British territories in the plains when *sals* could no longer be easily obtained in the hills. This explains how even the tribes in the interior areas were able to procure goods, valuables and above all, guns from Burma.

This network of slave trade faithfully served the needs of the hill tribes. In this regard Chatterjee writes:

¹⁰⁵ Carey and Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, pp. 222-223.

Violence and commercialization thus occurred together. Commercialization enhanced the value of labor at the same time that it eased access to European firearms. Though official bodies of the time did not gather numerical data on either, it is possible to discern that the monetary value of human “booty” and “securities” for loans was both gendered and rising.¹⁰⁶

The Mizo chiefs needed slaves to work for them and the slaves could be procured from the territory of another chief or from the area controlled by the British. So, they even attacked the plains area and took captives. Lister’s expedition could release 429 captives as slaves. But as many chiefs treated captives well, the British found difficulty in returning them. There was usually a gap between a Mizo raid and the British expedition. By the time the British reach the village of raiders, captives were well-settled and even married. The captives themselves were reluctant to leave the Mizo villages.

Conclusion

The context of society in the 18th and early 19th century created the need of labour substitution in the Lushai Hills. Captives from other places were taken during various raids in which women of young age and children of both sexes were most preferred. It was in the nature of these slaves that there were relatively very few slaves rescued after the Hills were annexed and occupied by the British. These captives form a class known as *Sal*. They were the real slaves of Lushai Hills who could be bought, sold, owned, killed or given as gifts. While they remain in the house of their captors, they performed all labour that made the hill man’s life better. Their importance lies in the fact that they work in the homes, in the jhum fields, in the villages for the community, served in all capacities in war and peace.

These slaves were captured from the hills and plains through raids. Notwithstanding their usefulness, they were relegated to the lowest status performing labour that even commoners and *bois* were not entrusted. They were used as exchange values to substitute the scarcity of money economy. As a matter of fact, the trade in slaves around the hill areas and beyond enabled the hill men to possess items of importance needed in their warlike life as well as the acquisition of the most basic needs like salt, cloth materials and utensils. They were most instrumental in changing the

¹⁰⁶ Indrani Chatterjee, ‘Slavery, Semantics and the Sound of Silence,’ in *Slavery and South Asian History*, p. 292.

history of the hills through their exchange value for acquiring firearms. As they remain longer, they married and bear off springs like any other people while their slave status remained. When children of such captives attained adulthood they remain very much part of the Lusei society. It was in the light of these slave populations who were absorbed within the Lusei society that this chapter is dealing with certain difficulties.

This chapter however, cannot be considered complete on the subject of discussion. For instance, only the more well-known raids are referred to get a rough idea of the number of captives carried into the Lushai Hills, their role in the hill economy, and the status they occupied. In fact, this work is based mainly on random collection of events and incidences. Many areas need betterment. However, it is hoped to serve as a starter for the interest of scholarship on the real system of slavery called *Sal* that existed in the pre-colonial Lushai Hills.