

IN SEARCH  
OF  
**IDENTITY**

HIMARS OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

LAL DENA

**IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY:  
HMARS OF  
NORTH-EAST INDIA**



*By*  
**Lal Dena**

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## FOREWORD

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It is not easy to write the history of the Hmar tribe and for that matter any history of any tribe in North East India. To embrace the full complexity of the North East is a difficult task, if not impossible. This region is a cauldron of ethnic tribes from basically the same descent with every imaginable community claiming distinct and separate identity. It is like a big cake cut up in different sizes by the ravages of time, ineluctable fate, lack of communications, ignorance, language, religion and fanciful but unrealistic political dreams and ideologies. In their search for separate identities independent from each other and their desire to carve a niche for each of themselves, they have increasingly resorted to taking up arms to voice their grievances thereby turning the region into a hub of insurgency.

The Hmars are one of them. They belong to one of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes of the Tibeto-Burman group. Like their kindred tribes they also claim to be one of the progenitors of their group with ancient roots in China from where they migrated through Myanmar to their present abodes in the North East of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The British administration classified them as Old Kukis. But wherever they were and are, they always identified themselves after their respective clan's name and subsequently registered themselves as such under separate tribes in the Indian Constitution. In about 1800s, a good number of those who remained under the suzerainty of the

Lusei chiefs and particularly the Sailos in Mizoram fled northward and migrated to Manipur and the neighbouring areas. Irrespective of their clans, this group in South-West Manipur for the first time started using 'Hmar' as a common name to identify themselves. Hence the term 'Hmar' which literally means 'northerner'. It embraces all the clans who fall under the name 'Old Kuki'.

A book on the hmar tribe is few and far between. The term 'Hmar' itself as mentioned earlier is a recent invention and has yet to be accepted by all the Hmar descent (Old Kukis) as a common nomenclature. The Hmars spread in small batches in five states in North East India and in Bangladesh and Myanmar with little or no voice wherever they are. Therefore, the title of the book chosen by the author, '**In Search of Identity**' is most appropriate. This he explains in detail in Part I of the book. Part II deals with some of the pressing issues and problems being faced in general by the tribal people of North East India with particular reference to those living in Manipur which any person dealing the affairs of North East should read.

The author and I belonged to Pherzawl village in South West Manipur. We were born on the same year, attended our village school and high school together, and later joined the Dhana Manjuri College in Imphal and Guwahati University, Guwahati, both studying the same subject - history. When I joined the Indian Foreign Service in Delhi, he also joined the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi to pursue his M.Phil course and doctoral thesis. Later whenever we met which became infrequent because of physical distance as well as exchanged letters which was more frequent, I incessantly urged and encouraged him to write a book on the Hmars for I believed that he could with justice. He always greeted my request with a smile - neither accepting nor rejecting. Just a smile!

That gave me lingering hope and that hope is now fulfilled after many years in ways much more than my initial expectation.

I thank my nephew Dr Lal Dena for asking me to write a foreword to this book. Many of the historical incidences described in this book happened during our own life time and we have been living witnesses to these events. As such the reader should not wonder even if he or she finds the author's emotional voice louder than his historical pronouncement in some of his accounts.

This book will be an eye-opener to those who would like to know and study the Hmar tribe and the issues and problems being faced by the tribal people in the North East especially those in Manipur state. It is a frank and honest analysis and contains many invaluable materials hitherto unpublished in any book form. I wish the book a great success to match the unflagging spirit of the author.

**L.Keivom**

July 27, 2007  
Delhi

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The present book has grown out of a collection of occasional papers published in some books and presented at regional and national seminars during the past thirty five years. The original source of the texts are as follows: 'Original Home of Hmar' formed a part of 'The Hmar Through the Ages' published in Manipur Past and Present, Ethnoses of Manipur', Vol.III, Edited by N.Sanjaoba Singh, Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1995; 'Social and Political Institutions of Hmar' published in the 'Social and Political Institutions of the Hill People of North East India' by the Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1990; 'The Status of Mizo (Hmar) Women Through the Ages' presented at the national seminar on the 'Role of Women in a Changing Manipur Society' organized by the Department of History, Manipur University, Imphal in collaboration with the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Southeast Asia, Calcutta, 2002; 'The Coming of Christianity' formed part of the article published in the 'Amazing Guidance', Golden Jubilee Souvenir, The Independent Church of India, 1965 and my paper on Dr T. Lunkim's Lecture, Trulock Theological College, Imphal, 2005; 'Leadership Pattern' published in the 'Cultural and Biological Adaptability of Man with Special Reference to North East India', Dibrugarh, 1977; 'Growth and Development of Hmar Literature' at the regional seminar on 'Growth of Literature in Six Major Tribal Dialects' organized by the Writers Forum, Imphal, 2006; 'Hmars and Indo-Japanese Soldiers in Khuga

Valley, 1944 published in 'The Sangai Express' (An English Daily Paper), Imphal, 31 August, 2000; 'Mizo Integration Movement' published in 'Resistance' (An English Weekly Paper), July, 1976; 'Hmar-Dimasa Conflict, 1998-2004, presented at the National Seminar on 'Ethnicity and Land Problems' organized by the Department of History, Manipur University, Imphal in collaboration with the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Kolkatta, 2005; 'Movement for Self-Government' presented at the regional workshop on 'Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Struggle for the Right of Self-Determination' organized by Other Media, New Delhi at Diphupar, Dimapur, Nagaland, 5-7 April, 1994; 'Historical Perspective of the Process of Marginalization: A Study of the Hill Peoples' Experience in Manipur' presented at the seminar on the 'Marginalized Indigenous Hill People in Manipur: Problems and Options' organized by the SIPHRO & ZHRF, Delhi Cells at the India International Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi, 2006; 'Tribalism or Detribalization' published in 'Change and Continuity in the Tribal Society of Manipur', Imphal, 1999; and 'Roots of Alienation of North East India' originally formed a part of my presidential address at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of North East India History Association, Agartala, Tripura, 2002. The paper on 'Hmar-Kuki Conflict, 1959-1960' is unpublished paper and added to fill the chronological gap

As the texts were written and presented on different occasions, the arrangement of the book naturally looks haphazard and at times repetitive. Most of them are reproduced as they were to reflect the mood and the time in which they were originally written. As far as possible, the themes have been arranged in chronological order. Four essays on problems relating to the tribal people in Manipur and North East India are also included in the book because they reflect the state of dilemma and confusion that the Hmar people are also confronted with.



I cannot but express here my deep and profound gratitude to my son, Mr Oliver Intoate who has carefully and neatly typed and arranged the whole text, my nephew John H. Ruolngul, Under Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India who, in spite of his heavy official workload, has been kind enough to go through the manuscript and suggest some editorial changes, my uncle L.Keivom, IFS (Retd) who has made invaluable suggestions and written a foreword to the book and to Shri M.P. Misra, Proprietor, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi for publishing the book in so short a time.

**LAL DENA**

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## Aw, Kan Hmar ram

*Aw kan Hmar ram inthim tlang dum dur,  
I sunga Hmar kan leng;  
I hming hung mawina dingin,  
Nunghak tlangval kan theitawp kan suo,  
I par mawi min suo rawh.*

*Aw Pathien kan ram kan pek che,  
Kan ram lungmawl inthim hi;  
I var mawi chun hung sukvar la,  
Mal mi hung sawmpek rawh.*

*Cachar, Haflong, Aizawl, Manipur,  
Inpumkhata ngirin;  
Ei ram lungmawl indar hi,  
Kei khawm tuma varna tha zawngin,  
Hmatieng ke pen ei tiu.*

*Hnam dang dan thahai la veng ei tah,  
An dan suol thik lovin;  
Inpumkhata ngir tlatin,  
A pawng bik a phai bik um lovin,  
Hmatieng ke pen ei tiu.*

*Dar ang ei lengna ram hring dum duoi,  
Zaitina ei chawi hi;  
Zaitin renga ei chawi lai,  
Pi le puha'n ropui an relna,  
Kan ram hi kan ro hlu.*

## O! Hmarland!

*O! Our Hmarland, dark and verdant hills,  
Abode of Hmar people;  
For thy good name and glory,  
We all tirelessly strive and struggle;  
Reward us with thy bloom.*

*O God, we give our land to Thee,  
Our land, backward and in darkness;  
Let Thy bright light shine over us,  
And bless us, O Lord, we pray.*

*Cachar, Haflong, Aizawl, Manipur,  
Let us stand united,  
Striving to bring together  
Our scattered tribe now lost in darkness,  
Lord, we seek thy wisdom.*

*Let's take what's best from other nations  
Shunning their baneful ways;  
Let's stand firm and united,  
With no one slacking nor falling back,  
Onward marching we go.*

*This is our land, ever green and blue  
The land we sing about,  
The songs of all our praises,  
Where our forefathers ruled in glory,  
Our land, our treasured jewel.*

**Composed by Lalkhum Keivom  
Translated by L.Keivom.**

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**PART-I**  
**IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY**

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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

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The Hmars are one the tribes of North East India belonging to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic group. They are found today in Cachar and North Cachar Hills of Assam and the adjoining states of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura in India and Bangladesh and Myanmar. Colonial writers were confused about the real identity of the Hmars and commonly clubbed them as Kukis. The term Kuki was first used by the Bengalis and later on by the British colonial officials to identify the hill tribes other than the Nagas. Kuki was later on classified into two groups: *Old Kuki* and *New Kuki* in terms of the period of their migration into India. J. Shakespeare in his *Lushai-Kuki Clans* included Hmar in the Old Kuki clans and also used the terms Khawthlang (people who lived in the west) and Khawchhak (people who lived in the east) interchangeably to mean Hmars. J.W. Edgar, a civil officer who accompanied the British column to Tipaimukh on April 3, 1872 reported about the Hmars thus: "*The name Kuki has been given to the tribe by the Bengalis and is not recognized by the hill men themselves and I have never found any trace of a common name for the tribe among them, although they too consider different families belonging to a single group, which is certainly coexistent with what we call Kuki tribe*"(Alexander Mackenzie)

Before the term Hmar came into popular use, they were

known by different clan names. As a matter of fact, their migration and settlements were based on clan considerations. Many Hmar clans had already evolved during their Kabaw-Thantlang-Kale settlements before they entered Mizoram. Crossing the Thantlang and Lentlang ranges, some Hmar clans followed the Rundung (Manipur river) and entered the present state of Mizoram at Champhai. Hmar clans trailed the Run river together with the Raltes (one of the Mizo tribes) and one of their folk songs goes like this: "*Runtui kaw i e, Ralte nu leh, Ralte pa leh, Kan inkawi a*" (We wade through the meandering Rûn river with Ralte men and women).

The two leading Hmar clans who first entered Mizoram were believedly the Lawitlang and Zote clans. Lawipa of Lawitlang clan and Hriler of Zote clan ruled over Champhai and Zote respectively and it was perhaps during the reign of Hriler that the Sikpui festival was celebrated at the old Zote village site where they left the *Sikpui Lung* (a big sacred stone slab used for the celebration of the *Sikpui* festival) which can still be seen at the spot. Wherever the Hmars settled in Mizoram and elsewhere, they named their villages after the name of their clan or sub-clan. Some such villages are, for example, Bapui, Biete, Chawnsim, Darngawn, Keivom, Khawbung, Khawzawl, Lawitlang, Leiri, Neibawm, Ngente, Ngurte, Puilo, Sungte, Thingphun, Tuolte, Thiek, Vankal, Vangsie, Zote, etc. All these villages still exist in Mizoram though some are now deserted.

Being the original settlers of Mizoram, the State still has a large chunk of Hmar population. These can be broadly categorised into two groups: those who have become completely assimilated into the Mizo mainstream; and those who are partially assimilated. The first group are aware of the fact that they are Hmars but are satisfied to consider themselves Mizos. They have forgotten even the Hmar language as well as their cultural idiosyncracies and followed the commonly accepted Mizo pattern. On the other hand,



the partially assimilated Hmars, while identifying themselves as Mizos, are still aware of and to a great extent maintain their distinct identity, traditions, customs and language. They are in fact recognized as one of the scheduled tribes in Mizoram.

When the first political party in Mizoram called the Mizo Union was launched in 1946 with a motive to create Greater Mizoram by integrating all the kindred tribes living astride the borders, the Hmars in Manipur and Cachar were the first to join the movement from outside Mizoram. They boycotted the first general elections of Manipur in 1948 in preference to the proposed integrated 'Mizo Hills District', which however never materialized because of many internal and external factors. This included strong opposition to the movement by the Manipur state as it could unleash a serious chain reactions resulting in complete dismemberment of Manipur. The movement soon dissipated but their dreams did not die. Again, when the Mizo National Front (MNF) launched its independence movement in 1966 to carve out a sovereign 'Greater Mizoram' by integrating all the Mizo inhabited areas under a single administrative unit, the Hmars in and outside Mizoram joined the movement in droves. Keeping this objective in view, the Mizo Integration Council (MIC) was formed in Manipur to strengthen the hands of the MNF leadership in their negotiations with the Government of India. But when the Mizo accord was signed on June 30, 1986, the 'question of Greater Mizoram' became a dead issue. The only redeeming feature of the accord was that the rights and privileges of the minorities in Mizoram as envisaged in the Constitution of India would continue to be preserved and protected, and that their social and economic advancement would be ensured.

Disillusioned with all these hopes and promises, the Hmars outside Mizoram began the search for a separate identity. Soon after the formation of the Mizo Union (Manipur

branch), the Hmar Mongolian Federation was established at Cachar in 1948. In 1953, the Hmar National Congress was formed at Parbung. Then, the Hmar National Union (HNU) was formed at Senvon in 1959 by dissolving all the earlier political parties. The HNU demanded a separate administrative set-up in the form of a District Council covering Manipur, Mizoram, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura and it submitted several memoranda to the Central Government in this connection. So far this demand has not been seriously attended to. In the mean time, young Hmar leaders in Mizoram started political consultations among themselves, and later formed the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) in 1986. This party at once raised the demand for the creation of an Autonomous District Council covering north and northeast Mizoram only. Because of the sloppy, brutal and unimaginative handling of the movement by the concerned authorities, what had started as a peaceful and non-violent movement soon turned into a violent struggle. Talks between the HPC leadership and the government of Mizoram at the ministerial level began in 1993. After several rounds of talks, the Memorandum of Settlement for the formation of the Sinlung Hill Development Council (SHDC) was signed on July 27, 1994.

Soon after signing the Agreement, talks between the state government and the HPC got bogged down in procedural wrangles over the demarcation of the Council's boundary. As a result of both internal divisions within the HPC's leadership and the government's apathy, basic issues relating to the right of self-determination and autonomy have so far not been addressed. Even if the State Assembly recommends scheduling of the demand areas under the Sixth Schedule, this has to be referred to the Central Government as it involves amendment of the Constitution.

Paradoxically the Hmars in Assam, though living under one state, found themselves under different administrative

structures. The Hmars in North Cachar Hills are one of the leading partners of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule whereas the Hmars in the Barak valley of Cachar are just a minority community having no status as scheduled tribes as their brethren in other parts of the neighboring states. Deprived of the safeguards and protections guaranteed by the Constitution, Hmar ethnic groups and other minorities such as Chakma, Gangte, Karbi, Khasi, Kuki, Mizo, Naga (Rongmei and Zemei), Paite, Riang, Simte and Vaiphei and others living in Cachar therefore have been demanding recognition as scheduled tribes for the last sixty years. But there has been no concrete response from the government. Unable to bear the deliberate negligence and discrimination any longer, Hmars in the Barak valley took the initiative and, after forming the Cachar Hill Peoples Federation (CHPF), launched a movement under the leadership of T. Sangkhum.

As the movement gained momentum and subsequently assumed violent forms, negotiations soon followed resulting in the signing of a Memorandum of Settlement between the CHPF and the Government of Assam and the so-called Barak Valley (Hill Tribes) Development Council almost similar to the Sinlung Hills Development Council in Mizoram, was formed on March 13, 1996.

Of all the Hmars living in different parts of North East India, the Hmars in Manipur are perhaps the most advanced and progressive. They are concentrated in Khuga valley (Churachandpur), Tipaimukh, Vangai areas and Jiribam. They are the think tank for other Hmars living in the neighbouring states in politics, church matters and education. On the initiative of the Hmar educated elite through the Hmar Literature Society (HLS), the Hmar language has been included as one of the Major Indian Languages (MIL) for degree courses under Manipur University since 2002.

## 2

### ORIGINAL HOME

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#### 2.1: MEANING OF THE TERM 'HMAR'

On the origin and meaning of the term 'Hmar' there are two theories. The first theory suggests that the term might have originated from the word 'hmar' which means 'north'. Supporters of this theory argue that the ruling Lusei clan used to nickname those who left Mizoram and settled northward as 'Hmars' which means 'northerners' and they themselves gradually came to adopt the name as a common nomenclature. Liangkhaia and other Mizo historians have supported this view. This implies that the term came into use only after the Hmars settled down in Mizoram. In 1904 G.A. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India* formally used the term but spelt it as Mhar.

The second theory which is based on Hmar oral traditions contends that the term was originally derived from 'hmarh' which means "tying of one's hair in a knot on the nape of one's head". According to Hmar tradition, there were once two brothers- Hrumsawm and Tukbemsawm. Because of a sore on the nape of his head during his childhood, Hrumsawm had to tie his hair in a knot on his forehead which he continued till death. After his death, his descendants adopted the same hairstyle. The Luseis call them Pawi but they always call themselves Lai. Majority of this group now live in Chin

state in Myanmar and the rest in different parts of Mizoram particularly in Chhimtuipui District where they have their own separate autonomous district.

Tukbemsawm, the younger brother tied his hair in a knot on the nape of his head and the Hmars who adopted Tukbemsawm's hair-style are believed to be his proginees and were called Hmars. However, the Lusei tribe and other kindred tribes who used the same hairstyle were not called Hmar. Therefore the first theory is much more convincing than the second theory.

Whatever be the truth, this much is clear that the term 'Hmar' as a common nomenclature gained popularity and wider acceptance among the Hmar ethnic group living in different parts of North East India only with the dawn of political consciousness by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, the Hmars' search for identity has been centered on the concept of *Hmarization* encompassing all Hmars living in different parts of North East India and this *Hmarizing* process is an on-going phenomenon till today. The Hmar ethnic group roughly comprises of those clans identified by and clubbed together by Grierson as the "Old Kukies."

## 2.2: ORIGINAL HOME

### Tradition-1: Theory of Jewish connection

The first tradition links the origin of the Hmars to the Israelites. Surprisingly enough, there are some references in Hmar folk songs and culture that tend to support this theory. One of the oldest festivals of the Hmars is called **Sikpui Kût (Winter Festival)** and the opening song called Sikpui Hlapui for this important occasion occupies such a sacred place that the festival could start only after the song was sung with due solemnity and rapt attention. Let us cite the text of the song in Hmar and its English rendering:

*Sikpui inthang kan ur laia,  
 Chang tuipui aw, senma hrili kang intan.  
 Ke ra lâwn a, ka leido aw  
 Sunah sum ang, zânah mei lâwn invâk e.  
 Ân tûr a sa, thlu a ruol aw,  
 In phawsiel le in râl feite zuong thaw ro.  
 Sûnra zûla, ka leido aw,  
 Ke ra lâwn a, meisûm ang lâwn invâk e  
 Sun ra zula, ka leido aw,  
 Laimi sa ang chang tuipuiin lem zova.  
 A varuol aw la ta che,  
 Suonglung chung a tuizuong put kha la ta che.*

**In English:**

*While we are preparing for the Sikpui festival,  
 The big red sea becomes divided.  
 As we march forward fighting our foes.  
 We are being led by a cloud during day  
 And by a pillar of fire during night.  
 Our enemies, O ye folks, are thick with fury,  
 Come out with your shields and spears.  
 Fighting our foes all day, we march along  
 As cloud-fire goes afore.  
 The enemies we fight all day, the big sea  
 Swallowed them like beasts.  
 Collect the quails, and fetch the water  
 That springs out of the rock.*

The *Sikpui Hla* is self-explanatory and vividly refers to the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and the events that followed before and after they crossed the Red Sea. The Hmars continued to celebrate this festival even after they had settled in different parts of North East India and traces of sacred stone slabs used in these celebrations can be seen in Manipur, Mizoram and North-Cachar Hills in Assam till today. This has led some local scholars and even Jewish rabbinical theologians in Israel to believe that the Kuki-Mizo groups might perhaps be one of the lost tribes of

Israel. As a result, more than two thousand Kuki-Mizos from Manipur and Mizoram have already migrated to Israel in recent times.

Though there are no written documents to support the theory of the Jewish connection, there are similarities in the religious sacrificial rites and practices of the pre-Christian Hmars and the Jews in biblical times. For example, the altar of the Hmars in the pre-Christian era had four corners built from virgin stones not shaped by human hands with implements and the priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animal on the floor and corners of the altar. Hmar tradition also maintains that their first known ancestor was called MANMASI. Wherever they moved and settled, they used to say that they were the descendents of Manmasi. Supporters of the first view suggest that Manmasi could perhaps be a corrupted form of Manasse, elder son of Joseph in the Old Testament.

In February 2003, late Isaac L. Hmar (son of the author) and Isaac Thangjom collected about three hundred DNA samples from selected Hmar, Kom, Kuki of Manipur, Huolngo and Zote clans of Mizoram under the author's supervision. The DNA samples were tested at the laboratory of the Jewish Genetic Project, Haifa, Israel. Preliminary results of the test have shown that they were all within normal Tibeto-Burman parameters. However, the finding of the DNA test by the Central Forensic Science Laboratory, Calcutta indicated that a few Kuki-Mizo DNA samples returned the unique haplotype found in the Jewish community in Uzbekistan. As it stands now, the theory of the Jewish connection of the Hmars may be treated as a myth as it cannot stand the test of historical scrutiny. There are yet no references, direct or indirect, to support their migration from the Middle East to China and thence to Myanmar and India.

**Tradition-II: Sinlung Tradition**

The second tradition maintains that the original home of the Hmars was called Sinlung which is frequently mentioned in their traditional songs. For example:

*My motherland, famous Sinlung,  
Home of my ancestors.*

*Out of Sinlung,  
I jumped out like a mithun;  
Innumerable were our encounters,  
The children of men.*

*My ancestors' footsteps were better,  
Sinlung's footsteps were indeed better.*

It is difficult to ascertain the exact location of Sinlung today. A Hmar historian, Hranglien Songate identifies it as Tailing or Silung in Southwest China whereas Rochunga Pudaite is of the view that this Sinlung might have been Sining in Central China. According to the most recent studies, a small township also called Sinlung, situated not very far from Yulong river in Szechuan province, could be the place which is referred to in Hmar folk songs. What is more or less certain and agreed upon by most historians/scholars is that the Hmars originally came from Central China.

Equally controversial is the approximate period during which the Hmars entered China and settled there. If Tradition-I is to be accepted, the Hmars might have entered China from northwest China. Citing Chao Enti's version, Hranglien Songate presumes that the Hmars had already settled in China by the time Shi Huang-Ti (209-207 B.C) established his suzerainty over the greater part of China. He further argues that Hmars must have been one of those peoples who migrated from Central China to South China during the last year of Shi Huang-Ti's reign. From the above-cited songs, it can be inferred that the Hmars were pushed out by a stronger power. The Chin dynasty absorbed many



of the tribes that were already in China and pushed out those who refused to be absorbed. The Hmars were perhaps among those who resisted and were pushed out.

### Tradition-III: Shan Tradition

After Sinlung, the next known settlement of the Hmars was at Shan. There are places both within China and Burma which bear the word 'Shan'. In China, there are Min Shan (North Szechuan), Yunlun Shan (Southwest Szechuan), Liang Shan and Wuhan Shan (Yunan province). Speaking in terms of ethnicity, there are Tai Shans, Lao Shans, Yun Shans, Mau Shans, etc. The Shan referred to in the Hmar traditional songs could perhaps be the Yunlung Shan west of Sinlung mentioned above. Another Hmar traditional song says; '*Kachin, my ancient land; and Himaloi (Himalaya), the land of my forefathers*'. This suggests that the Hmars, after leaving Sinlung, must have moved southward following the Yulung river and settled at Yunlung Shan for some centuries. Later on by crossing over the Mekong river and the Salween river, the Hmars and other kindred tribes then lived among the Mishmi tribes for over a generation. Here Sura, a well-known character and folk hero among the Kuki-Mizo group, married a Mishmi girl called Thaironchong with the help of his two close friends, Devanngul and Devanthang.

From Mishimiland, the Hmars moved westward and settled in Kachin state in Burma. From Kachin they followed the Chindwin river and entered Dimphai (valley of Dimapur). From Dimphai the Hmars moved further west, following the Chindwin river again and finally settled at Kawlphai (Kawl means Burmese; and phai means valley) for several centuries. It appears that many of the Hmar clans and the institution of chieftainship evolved during their settlement in the Kabaw valley. It was said that Luopui of the Thiek clan planted a banyan tree at Khampat, about 50 miles from Kalemio on the road to the border town of Tamu and the main trunk of

this tree survived till March 1952 when it was felled by a hurricane. One of the Hmar traditional songs refers to it as follows:

*On the South Lersi,  
On the North Zingthlo;  
In the center Luopui,  
Luopui planted a banyan tree;  
The hornbills feed on its fruits.*

The above song refers to three important chiefs, namely, Lersi, Zingthlo and Luopui of whom, Luopui appears to be the most powerful and supreme. In this connection, L. Keivom wrote: "So rich was he (Luopui) that he ate only from golden plates. Among his many priced possessions was a very rare and expensive Burmese gong which could produce more than ten descending rhythmic waves when struck. It was said that his servant Kimchal once stole the gong with the intention of selling it. He went from one chief to another chief in the region but nobody dared to buy the gong as they knew that it belonged to Luopui".

Under what circumstances did the Hmars leave Burma - did they abandon it due to famine or in search of greener pastures or were they pushed out by a stronger force? According to L. Keivom, the Hmars might have been forced to leave Burma by the more powerful Shans. After they entered into the present Mizoram, the Hrangchals, one of the leading Hmar clans, are said to have had a large village at Vanlaiphai, according to J. Shakespeare. In the centre of the valley is a large memorial stone with many engravings on it which is said to have been erected in memory of Chonluma, a famous Hrangchal chief of bygone days. According to Hranglien Songate, one of their chiefs Chonhmang migrated as far as Tripura which the Hmars called Rengpui Ram and became a Hindu convert later on, leaving behind his six territorial chiefs, namely, Tusing Faihriem (Northeast at Zampui), Lawipa (Champhai),

Demlukim Hrangkhoh (Northwest at Momrang), Neilal Thiek (South at Sortui), Fiengpuilal Biete (North at Saituol) and Tanhril Saivate (West at Tanhril). Chonhmang, it is said, continued to collect tributes from these chiefs for some years and this fact is corroborated by J.W. Edgar's report of April 3, 1872 which runs thus; "*The Rajah of Tiperrah indeed claims supremacy over the villages west of the Tipai (Tipaimukh), but practically his authority was never acknowledged east of the Chatterchoora range upto which he used to exact a partial and, probably faithful obedience. Neither the Cachar nor the Manipur chief had the slightest authority in the hills south of Tipaimukh, and it is evident from all the early Cachar traditions that they did not claim any*".

### Concluding Remarks

The historicity of Hmar migration either from China or elsewhere to their present habitat cannot be studied in isolation and must therefore be juxtaposed with the general movement of people from inner Asia or mainland China to South East Asia and North East India. From the available sources and traditions, it is quite probable that the Hmars must have lived together with the Chiang tribe, who live in the present day province of Szechuan and the mountainous regions of Kansu and Shensi in China. The Chiang tribe was the ancestor of the Tibeto-Burmans. According to the earliest Burmese inscriptions, the Burmans were in Upper Burma in the 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Before them, the Mon and the Pyus established their kingdoms but did not rule in Kabaw valley and the surrounding regions which were perhaps occupied by Luopui and other Hmar chiefs as mentioned before. Then came the Shan invaders in Upper Burma and came into conflict with the Burman rulers during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They penetrated into the Kabaw valley and occupied several townships like Kale, Khampat, Tamu and Thuangdut. It was from here that the large-scale migration

of Hmars and the other old Kuki tribes started around 99 A.D. according to Hranglien Songate. C.A. Soppit, however, puts it between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century whereas Professor G.H. Luce of Rangoon University, contends that it might have been between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is most probable that the Hmars left Burma before the introduction of Buddhism there.

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# 3

## SOCIO-POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

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### 3.1: Village Administration

The Hmars were once a nomadic tribe and their frequent movements and migrations were solely motivated by economic interest, that is, the search for better cultivable land. In their grim struggle for existence and their constant conflict with other tribes, they must have needed at that stage of their evolution a strong leader who could maintain the cohesiveness of the society and also protect it from external aggressions. Thus, persons who had the capacity to lead the people in their struggle for existence and constant anxiety in times of war, ability to command obedience from others, a certain charisma and readiness on the part of his followers to conform to the rules laid down by him, emerged as chiefs. Such persons who conquered new territories and built new villages were eventually recognized as chiefs (*lal*). There are also instances where 'folk-heroes' who earned a 'name' by heroic deeds: killing wild animals or taking an enemy's head were often portrayed as great leaders.

In each chiefdom, there was a village council. The specific character, composition and methods of functioning of the council deferred from clan to clan or from village to village. The chief was the supreme head of the council. Below the chief were the chief councilor (*muolkil mithra*) and councilors

(*khawnbawl*). In the absence of a chief, the chief councilor took the place of the chief and presided over the meetings. The councilors who were selected by the chief himself were normally a wealthy and influential group of persons, kinsmen or close friends of the chief. They were rewarded with the most fertile *jhum*-land and also exempted from forced labor. Thus, the chiefs and the councilors in a sense constituted a privileged group in a traditional Hmar society, and the village council through which they operated tended to serve their narrow and vested interests.

The village council combined in itself both judicial and administrative powers. It settled disputes and cases, both civil and criminal. Before it heard any dispute, the complainant was under obligation to offer rice-beer (*zu*) to the councilors and if he won the case, the other party was to reimburse his expenditure and was also to give a pig to the village council as *salam* (a kind of fine). The chief was armed with extra-judicial powers, which nobody could question. For instance, if a criminal or adulterer managed to touch the middle post (*sutpui*) of the chief's house, he was safe and anyone continuing to seek revenge would be considered guilty or an enemy of the chief. There could be a public trial of the case. But the chief had the authority not to bring up the case if he thought that the offender's life was likely to be in danger. However, murderers involved in heinous offences could not escape for long because the moment he crossed the premises of the chief's house, the victim's family could take revenge. But the moment the criminal sought protection from the chief, he automatically became the latter's slave. Of course, he could buy his freedom back later on.

The Hmars have elaborate customary laws. The *lal-ship* and *khawnbawl-ship* were hereditary and the right of inheritance went to the youngest son of the family. But certain clans such as the *Leiris*, the *Khawlums* and the *Changsans* give inheritance right to the eldest son. In a family in which

there were no sons, the right of inheritance was to be decided by the kinsmen of that particular family.

The land tenurial system among the Hmars was communal ownership and in support of this claim, Rochunga Pudaite argues that '*the chief and the councilors were merely trustees with the power to see to the rightful use and distribution of land to each homestead for cultivation*'. In 1907, J. Shakespeare, Political Agent, issued boundary papers to all the tribal chiefs. This was usually taken to mean private ownership of land. But it was not and cannot be taken as a *patta*. It simply indicated the boundary and jurisdiction of each chief. As a matter of fact, the land belonged to the people.

Each household was under obligation to pay *busing-sadar* (the practice of paying every year a certain specified quantity of paddy and of surrendering the fore-legs of every animal shot or trapped within the chieftdom) and to render compulsory labor (which involved building or rebuilding the chief's house or any other community works) to a chief. If a villager decided to migrate to another village regardless of the chief's order, his property could be confiscated by the chief. And if he sold 'mithun' or any other cattle to other villagers, some specified portion of the price was to be given to the chief. The right of the chief to these services was in fact the foundation of his political power and his accumulated wealth enabled him to command the respect and loyalty of his own clan or tribe and other clans or tribes. This would appear to suggest that the chief for all practical purposes depended upon the labor and production of his subjects.

During the colonial rule, 1891-1947, the chief and his councilors still constituted, as they did during the pre-colonial period, a privileged group but their authority and power was greatly undermined. This is not to say that their hold over the people was relaxed. It was a colonial strategy to recognize and use them as intermediaries between the people and the



colonial government. The traditional authorities were utilized by the British as their agents for holding and administering the hill territory and the government integrated them into the colonial system by giving them some local administrative responsibilities in the village courts. In so far as traditional laws and customs were concerned the chief assumed dual judicial roles: first as interpreter of customary laws and secondly, as a judge within his chiefdom. The legitimization of only a handful of traditional leaders who constituted a microscopic minority of the population, rendered them negligent of the need to worry much about the support of the people.

Apart from these responsibilities, the chief and his councilors were also assigned the task of collecting hill house tax of Rs. 3 from each household and enforcing the *pothang* system. The traditional leaders were effectively used against their own people and they collaborated with the colonial authorities in exploiting the people by depriving them of the fruits of their labor and production. The moral basis of leadership was thus more or less destroyed and the leaders tended to lose sight of their obligations to society for the privileges they received from the colonial rulers.

### 3.2: Family and Lineage Segments

The basic unit of Hmar society was the family. The family was patriarchal. The head of family was the sole authority in so far as the family and its relations with other families or clans were concerned. He represented the family and its dependent members in any important public meeting. The mode of production and consumption in a family was elementary in the sense that the whole family had a common *jhum* land, worked as a single unit and shared the products jointly. In a Hmar society, there was both conjugal and extended family which normally consisted of male members of a lineage of two to three generations. In such a family

system, the married males moved out to start a separate household only when they had marriageable children. However, the stability of the extended family also depended to a great extent upon the nature of relationship and interaction between the male members of the family.

Theoretically, the parental authority did not end even when the married male members lived in a separate household. There was mutual assistance particularly in economic matters and disputes were normally settled by the senior-most head of the extended family. Even at the death of their father, the set of married brothers continued to live together, and share a production unit. With wives, children and other dependents, and continuing for another generation or more, such an extended family could increase to fifty to seventy members and various lineage segments ultimately emerged as a clan. In fact, there are many patrilineal clans (*pahnām*) and many more lineage segments (*hnam siper*) in Hmar society today. Suffice it to say that these various clans and lineage segments probably emerged after their settlement in Shan state.

### HMAR CLANS AND SUB-CLANS

\*Sub-sub-Clans are given in *italics*

- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. <b>Biete</b>   |                    |
| Betleu            | Tamlo              |
| Chongol/Chungngol | Tamte              |
| Darnei            | Thienglai          |
| Fatlei            | Tlungngurh         |
| Hmunhring         | 2. <b>Changsan</b> |
| Khurbi            | Armei              |
| <i>Lienate</i>    | Chailong/Chaileng  |
| Nampuri           | Hranhnieng         |
| Ngaite            | Hrawte             |
| Ngamlai           | Kellu              |
| Puilo             | Ngawithuom         |
| Sawnlien          | Ngulthuom          |
|                   | Thangngen          |

- Zilchung  
Zilhmang
3. **Chawnthei**  
Hnechawng  
Lamthik  
Luophul  
Neichir
4. **Darngawn**  
Banzang  
*Chawngmunte*  
*Famhoite*  
*Fatlei*  
*Khamchangte*  
*Lamchangte*  
*Sanate*  
*Sinate*  
Faitheng  
Pakhuong  
Hranggul  
Buongpui  
Khelte  
Khuongpuri  
Ruolngul  
Shakum  
*Hauhmaung*  
Kilong  
Shonte  
Tlau
5. **Faihriem**  
Bapuri  
Dulien  
Khawhrang/Khawhreng  
  
Khawkhieng  
Khawlum  
Saihmar  
Saivate  
Seiling  
Sekong  
Thlangnung  
Tuimuol  
Tuollai
- Tusing
6. **Hmarlusei**  
Lamthik  
Luophoul  
Huechawng  
Neichir
7. **Hranghawl**
8. **Khawbung**  
Bunglung  
Fente  
Laising  
Muolphei  
Pangamie  
Pazamte  
Phuntr  
*Siersak*  
*Siertlang*  
Riengsete
9. **Khelte**  
Hmainmawk  
Lutmang  
Singhlu  
Sierchuong  
Thatsing  
Vankeu  
Vohang  
Vohlu  
Zahlei  
Zaucha
10. **Khiengte**  
Chawngte  
Khello  
Khupsung  
Khupthang  
Kumsang  
Muolvum  
Singbel
11. **Khuolhring**  
Chunthang  
Khintung  
Leidir  
Lozum  
Lungen/Lungsen

- Midang  
Milai  
Pailtel  
Rawlsim  
Suokling  
Thlaute
12. **Lawitlang**  
Chawnsim  
Hrangchal  
*Darasung*  
*Laiasung*  
*Sielasung*  
*Tungte*  
Parate  
Sungete  
Suomte  
Tlangte  
Tlawmte  
Varte
13. **Leiri**  
Neingaite  
Pudaite  
Puhnuongte  
Pulamte  
Puruolte  
Tlandar
14. **Lungtau**  
Infimate  
Intoate  
Keivom  
Lungchuong  
*Inbuon*  
*Banzang*  
Mihriemate  
Nungate  
Pakhumate  
Khumthur  
Khumsen  
Pasuolate  
Sielhnam  
Songate  
Sunate
- Theisiekate  
Thlawngate  
Tamhrang
15. **Neitham**  
*(also included under Zote clan)*  
Chawnhning/Chawnhring  
Khawthang  
Maubuk  
Singphun  
Thangleh  
Thangngawk  
Vaithang
16. **Ngente**  
Bawlte  
Chawnghawi  
Dosak  
Dothang/Dothlang  
Kawngte  
Laihring  
Lailo  
Laitui  
Tuolngul/Tuolngun  
Zawngte  
Zawhte
17. **Ngurte**  
Bangran/Bangrang  
Chiluo  
Parate  
Saingur  
Sanate  
*Pusingathla*  
*Saidangathla*  
Traite  
Zawllien
18. **Pautu**  
Fuongzal  
Senlawn  
Singate  
Tluongate
- 19 **Rawite**  
Aite

- Arro  
 Buite  
 Hnungte  
 Pieltu  
 Sawrte  
 Seldo/Sehue  
 20. **Thiek**  
 Amaw  
*Chalhril*  
*Hmunhring*  
 Athu  
 Buhril  
 Chawannel  
 Hekte  
*Chawnghekte*  
*Ralsun*  
 Hmante  
 Hnamte  
 Kellaite  
 Khawzawl  
*Lalun*  
*Laldau*  
*Saibung*  
 Kungate Khangbur  
 Pakhumate  
*Khumsen*  
*Khumthur*  
 Sellate  
 Tamte  
 Thilhran  
 Thilsawng  
 Thluchung  
 Tuolte  
 Tuolawr  
 Tamlo  
 Taite  
 Vankal  
*Khawbuol*  
*Pangote*  
*Pangulte*  
 Zate
21. **Vangsie**  
 Dosil  
 Ivang  
 Theidu/Theiduha  
 Tlukte  
 Vanghawi  
 Zapte
22. **Zote**  
 Buonsuong  
 Chawngghau  
 Chawngvawrtu/  
 Chawngvar  
 Chonkhup  
 Chawngtuol  
 Darkhawlai/Darkhawlal  
 Dawthang  
 Hrangate/Hrangzote  
 Hrongdo  
 Hrangman  
 Hrangsite/Hrangsete  
 Hrangsite  
 Hriler  
 Maubuok  
 Neitham  
*Chawnhnieng*  
*Singphun*  
 Ngaite  
 Parate  
 Pasuolate  
 Pusiate/Pusieate  
 Saiate (Saihman)  
 Tlangte/Tlangate  
 Thangnawk  
 Vaithang

Other Hmar ethnic tribes such as Aimol, Anal, Chiru (Rhem), Chorai, Chothe, Darlong, Kharam, Kom, Kolhren (Koireng), Lamkang, Langrong, etc who had migrated to Manipur, Tripura and parts of Assam in advance of their kindred clansmen (who now identify themselves under a collective name called 'Hmar') are not included in the above chart for want of details and other considerations. Of these, Aimol, Chiru, Chorai, Darlong, Hrangkhawl, Kom, Koren, Langrong and the Hmars lived together at Ruonglevaisuo (Tipaimukh) for a certain period of time and finally dispersed from there.

One interesting feature is that the Hmars began to think more in terms of clans and even their settlement patterns in the present states are primarily determined by clan affinity. True, the Hmar villages today are multi-clan but these multi-clan villages are again subdivided into sections (*veng*) based on kinship. In times of need and danger, the clansmen helped one another and if an individual of a certain clan incurred the wrath of another clansman rightly or wrongly, he would be protected or taken to task by his own clansmen. Thus, this sort of collective responsibility of the clan for the deeds and behavior of its individual members make it a strong force for social order.

### **3.3: Marriage**

The clan and the family did not have much influence in determining the choice of a partner in marriage, because a Hmar could marry almost any girl except his sister. In other words, a Hmar can marry any girl within the same lineage group or outside the clan or tribe. In marriage, therefore, the Hmar society was agamous. The preferred marriage, however, was matrilineal cross-cousin marriage and some people held a prejudice against patrilineal cross-cousin marriage. In a traditional Hmar society, the choice of a mate was a matter of strict parental control. The parents had to

choose a spouse or prevent a marriage. But there was a limitation to this. There were also some instances of marriages initiated by the boy and girl themselves in the teeth of opposition from relatives and this type of marriage was called '*pathien samsui*.' One should not ignore the fact that the Hmar society was an open society where there was free-mixing between men and women. What was very common and rather the institutionalized way of approaching a girl was wooing (*inleng/nunghak-leng*). For instance, the boy, soon after his evening meal, would visit a girl. Boys would sit around a girl gossiping, cracking jokes and discussing topics of common interests till late at night.

When the boy or the boy's parents made their choice, this choice was first made known to the girl's parents. This pre-negotiation stage was a very important period because decision as to whether marriage was possible or not had to be taken. Once this stage was over, the boy's parents would call their kinsmen and here affinal kinsmen played a crucial role in working out the details of the marriage. Some selected kinsmen (*laibung*) and the boy's sisters' husbands (*makpas*) would act as the go-between (*palai*) and go to the girl's parents with a white cloth (*inhon*), which was regarded as an instrument of peace and rice-beer (*zu*) and after the *makpa* served rice beer to the girl's parents and their kinsmen, formal negotiations followed and the bride-price (*nuhmei man*) was decided. The amount of bride-price differed from clan to clan and this bride-price cannot be interpreted as a commercial transaction. The bride-price was normally classified into various shares: (1) *man-pui*-(if received in kind, it consisted of mithun, gong etc.) and this went to the bride's parents; (2) *panghak* (some portion of the bride-price given to the bride's parent's kinsmen); (3) *pusum* (a portion given to the bride's maternal uncle (*pu*)); (4) *nisum* (a portion given to the bride's father's sister); and (5) *zuorman* (a small portion given to the bride's friends and cousins).

The bond of matrimony was extremely loose; a boy seeking divorce should simply give *sekhat* amounting to Rs.40 only which is called *makman* to the girl's parents. If a wife initiated divorce, she had to return the bride-price and this practice of returning the bride-price is called *suminsuo*. The Hmars practiced monogamy and there were very few instances of polygamy. Pre-marital or extra-marital sex was not uncommon. A child born of an unregulated relationship was called *sawn* and the boy was to pay fine called *zawlleiman* to the girl's parents and *salam* (a fine of a pig) to the village council. If he married the girl, he would be exempted from these fines and only had to pay the usual brideprice as fixed by the girl's parents and their kinsmen.

The range of kinship terminology of Hmars, like that of the Lushais (Mizo), was limited to two generations above and two generations below. The whole kinship system of Hmars was based on the male's own lineage. There were broadly two kinship groups: (1) all the male's sisters went out of their lineage and merged with their husband's lineage and these husbands stood in relation to the male as the *makpa* group; and (2) all the male's group stood in relation to the *makpa*-group as the *tarpu* group.

### 3.4: Traditional Religion

The traditional religion which the Hmars practiced can best be characterized as animistic. Lack of consciousness and also the inability to comprehend the objective forces of nature made them develop certain superstitious ways of beliefs and worship. They worshipped some peculiar objects or supernatural beings, which exercised tremendous influence over their behaviors. The mode of worship and sacrifices were determined by the objects to which sacrifices were to be made. There were various complicated methods of sacrifices and the person who could master all these methods eventually emerged as a priest (*thiempu*). The source of the authority



of the priest was the assumption that he could control certain natural phenomena - epidemics, floods, droughts, famines, diseases, etc. all of which loomed large and affected the means of their livelihood and production.

The Hmars believed in the existence of a beneficent and supreme being, whom they called god (*pathien*). Surprisingly enough, almost all their prayers and sacrifices were offered to others and not to the supreme being. In addition to the supreme being, Hmars believed that there were various spirits which were known by different names: (1) *khawchom* (which used to kill domestic animals); (2) *khuvang* (name of a guardian spirit), (3) *zasam* (a dreadful beast which lived in the forest); (4) *phung or khawhring* (which caused sudden dizziness and miserable sickness) and (5) *lasi* (good feminine spirit which blessed the hunters and often married them).

The priest was supposed to know which spirit was causing trouble and illness and what type of sacrifice was necessary. The most important duty of the priest was thus to perform sacrifices for sanctification of the village from the influence of these evil spirits.

Another interesting feature of the Hmar traditional religion was the belief in life after death. It was a popular belief among them that the soul passed through different stages. First, immediately after death, the soul hovered either over the village or in the firmament for some time. The soul of a man who died an unnatural death used to disturb those members of the bereaved family and the people who were involved in the death of such a person and this phenomenal reappearance of the deceased in spirit was called '*thlahrang*'. The dead men's abode (*mithikhuo*) was believed to be underground. The Hmars believed that children's souls found it extremely difficult to adapt to *mithikhuo* and their parents had to prepare special meals

which were placed by the priest on the grave for a fixed period and this rite was called *pakhuo*. In the case of a grown-up soul, the priest performed *thitin* (dead-departing rite) accompanied by a feast and placed colorful clothes, skirts and feathers of birds over the grave and only then, the soul finally entered the *mithikhuo*.

The third stage was *pielral*, which was considered to be the 'abode of bliss.' Only the soul of a *thangsuo*, who performed heroic deeds, for instance by hunting down and killing certain dangerous animals or by cultivating and harvesting a larger than average quantity of rice/paddy and then celebrating the occasion by throwing a feast and killing one or two mithuns, could reach it. Those who were publicly honored with *tonlairang* (special head gear) and *puondum* on the day they organized celebrations to mark the heroic deed, had direct entry to this place. The distinction between man and man, that is, between the slave and his master still persisted and the former continued to serve his master in this spirit world. There was perhaps no prescribed length of period each departed soul had to spend in each of the three stages. It would, however, appear that the soul of the wicked man could not pass beyond the *mithikhuo*, but the souls of a *thangsuo* and those who suffered in life for no fault of theirs were entitled to enter *pielral*.

### 3.5: Economic Activity

The main activity of the Hmars centered around food-production and almost all their festivals were connected with it. The age-old mode of production was shifting-cultivation (*jhumming*), which is still in practice. The village council had a session at the beginning of every year, called *pamrorel*, and opened a certain area of land for cultivation. As discussed, the most fertile part of land was first allotted to the councilors and the rest to the commoners (*vantlang*) by lot. No individual member could claim permanent ownership of land and the land ceased to be his as soon as harvest was over.

The striking feature of Hmar economic activity was community labor (*lawmpui*) and mutual assistance. Various stages of food-production which normally involved community labour are the following: clearing forest/jungle tracts for cultivation; digging and sowing of seeds; weeding, harvesting, thrashing and storing. In all these stages, the Hmars would either join in community labour or help one another. The most popular form of community labour among the Hmars was *butukhuonglawm* which was organized at the time of sowing. There were times when as many as a hundred persons would work together. They would start from the furthest fields and move gradually to other fields one after another. They sang as they sowed and made a festival out of it.

Internally, the economy of the traditional Hmar society was subsistence economy and the production included all locally produced foodstuff (rice, staple yarns, cereal, vegetables) livestock (chicken, cow, mithun) and house-utensils (baskets, tools, posts, etc.). Before the introduction of money economy, production and appropriation involved little profit motive. As indicated above, a certain specified quantity of paddy was given to the chief, the priest, the blacksmith and the village messenger. Thus, the process of distribution or appropriation of products involved channeling upward of products to socially determined allocative centres such as the chief and the priest, etc. In fact, the traditional Hmar society was marked by a constant 'give and take' and the wealth, given and taken, was one of the main instruments of social organization, of the power of the chief, of the bonds of kinship and of relationship in law.

The introduction of money as a medium of exchange had a tremendous impact on the subsistence economy of the Hmars. The British maintained peace and undertook road-construction and as a result, coinage was introduced and tax (hill house tax) was demanded in that medium. To get cash,

they had to grow cash crops such as chilly, cotton, orange, etc. and sell these to merchants in Cachar and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Many Hmar villages, particularly in Tipaimukh area, are situated on both sides of the Barak (Tuiruong) river through which the commodity production was exported. The innocent and simple farmers were entirely at the mercy of the shrewd merchants from Cachar and sold their products according to a rate fixed by the latter.

Unfortunately, no serious thought is given till today as to how these productions can be best utilized to the maximum benefit of the people. Thus, with the introduction of money (a) trade greatly increased, (b) the degree and differentiation by wealth also tremendously increased; (c) indebtedness which was almost unknown in traditional Hmar society became rampant and this made the helpless debtors easy victims of exploitation at the hands of money-lenders; and (d) lastly, the traditional Hmar economy was gradually integrated with the capitalist economy with all its antecedent evils.

In the post-Independence period, with the acceptance of democracy as a form of government, the newly educated group demanded democratization of traditional village government, which meant the abolition of chieftainship, councillorship and their privileges. In 1956, the Manipur Hill Village Authority Act was introduced and the administration of each revenue village was vested in a new village authority with members elected directly by the people on the basis of adult franchise. However, complete abolition of the office of chief is not possible because of its value as a symbol of established authority and the chief, therefore, continues to be the ex-officio chairman of the village authority. The formation of the new council was a step in the right direction. But the Act failed to take into consideration the age-old traditions and customary laws, which need re-evaluation in the context of modern values.

From the point of view of social organization, the most striking characteristics are the formation of various ethnic based voluntary organizations of an extra-territorial kind cutting across not only the clans but also state boundaries. The main *raison d'être* is to foster and promote both religio-cultural and political systems which substituted for the traditional mechanisms of social control.

The involvement of the people in various forms of local government and elections both at the micro-level and macro-level is, no doubt, a good sign of recent development. However, it may be pointed out that the village authorities and the autonomous district councils are not effective agencies through which developmental works or administration of justice can be carried out, because real power or authority is not vested in them. At the national level, the people began to join national political parties, merging their ethnic-domain political parties with the national parties. But the whole tragedy is that their para-political behavior is still restricted mainly to the boundaries of ethnicity, regionalism, linguistic particularism and other primordial considerations.

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