

Ethnographic Report
On
The Hmars of Assam



Conducted by

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Chapter 1

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF HMARS

Introduction - The Hmar:

As to the origin of the name Hmar, of late, there have been many speculations. As the term 'Hmar' literally means 'north' scholars like J. Shakespeare, B.N.Bordoloi, Dr B. Pakem and other believe that, the tribe has taken the name from the position of their entry into Indian territories from the Far- East. They entered in between the Lushai group in the south and the Kuki- Chin group to the Northern part and in Lushai language Hmar means "North" and as they were north of them, they called them Hmars. However, this is unacceptable. The tribe has name long before they entered Indian territories. The tribe belonging to the Lushai-Kuki-Chin group have a generalized way of calling each other by the way they wear their hair. The term "Hmar" is believed to have originated from the term "Hmer" meaning "tying of one's hair in a knot on the nape of one's head. According to Hmar tradition, there were once two brothers, namely, Hrumsawrn and Tukbemsawm. Hrum sawm, the elder one, used to tie his hair in a knot on his forehead because of a sore on the nape of his neck. After his death, all his descendants followed the same hair style and the Pawis, The male members also keep their hair like their female counterparts, tying the hair in a lock, and wearing the lock of tied hair. Those who tie their hair in a lock on the forehead are the *Hrumsawm* /rhum-som/ group who live in South Mizoram, are believed to be the progeny of Hrumsawm. The younger brother, Tukbemsawm, however, tied his hair in a knot on the back of his head and those who tie their lock of hair at the nape (back) of the neck are the *Tukbemsawm* /tuk-bem-som/.The Hmars, who continued Tukbemsawrn's hairstyle, are believed to be the descendants of Tukbemsawm (Songate, 1967). The Hmars are *Tukbemsawm* till the very last part of the last century. Some of the last elderly persons who wear the *Tukbemsawm* passed away during the late 1990s. The Hmar's tradition maintains that the original home of the Hmar is called "Sinlung", though it is difficult to ascertain the exact location of "Sinlung" today.

Several theories have been put forward regarding the origin of the Hmars, but it appears historically evident that the Hmars originally came from Central China. A Hmar historian, H. Songate (1956), proposes that the original home of the Hmars might be the present Tailing or Sinlung in South East China bordering the Shan state of Myanmar. According to Songate (1956), "The Hmars left Sinlung because of the waves of Chinese immigrants and political pressure drove them away to the south. The exact time of departure from Sinlung and the original route they followed is not known to this day. However; traces have been found in poems and legends that they came to the Himalayas, and the great mountains made it impossible for them to continue their southward journey. So, they turned eastward of India from there."

According to Hranglien Songate, the Hmars originally came from a place called Sinking, which may somewhere be in Central China. A certain kind of natural calamity might have compelled them to migrate to the Shan country, from where the Ahoms had also come. They then move towards the north-eastern part of Assam.

The term 'Hmar' had been in use even before the Hmar people settled in Burma. The writer of this book contacted Mr. H.V. Sunga from Burma (now Myanmar) in 1954. According to him when the Hmar people settled in Jaiju of Kawlphai (Upper Burma plain), they reared cattle's, which scattered uncontrollably in the thick forest and eventually became wild animals. In the 9th Century when the Burmese were advancing towards the Upper Burma plains (Kawlphai) for the first time, they found that the land was already occupied by the Hmars. The wild animals which they came across were referred to as 'Hmar Bawngs' (Hmar cows).

It is, therefore, evident that the term 'Hmar' has already been known even before the Hmars settled in Burma. To counter the view stated above, Shakespeare argued that 'Hmar' means 'Northerner'. The Hmars are known by different names in different areas. For instance, in Manipur and in Cachar they are known as 'Old Kukis' or 'Khawthlang'. In Tripura they are known as 'Halams', while in Mizoram they are known as 'Hmars' (Northerners). In Tripura, 'Halam' is also a generic term for the whole of the Old Kuki group. These are the various terms used by the foreign writers in reference to the Hmars.

The Hmars believe Manmasi to be their progenitor, and refer to them as Manmasi- nau (offspring of Manmasi). In a wider sense, they term may also mean human beings. The Hmars revere Manmasi very much, but do not worship him as deity. However, they often invoke his name to tell the world (including animals and birds) of their coming and going, and of their deeds. Pu Hranglien Songate a Hmar Historian of repute mentioned that during earthquake, people often say, “*Zangai, zangai, Manmasi nauhai kan la dam ei*” (Have mercy, we Mnamasi children are still alive). While going to the forest, they will often say, “*Lam sak sul, lam thlang sul lo inkieng ro i.e.,*” Manmasi nau kan hung ei (You the weeds of upside of path and downside of path, beware, we children of Manmasi comes). Before eating, they will take a small portion of the food and throw it away saying, “*Khuo tlaiah, khuo tlaiah, kan Pu Manmasi ta ding khuotlaiah*” (Be satisfied or contented, for our ancestor Manmasi, be satisfied). While clearing or performing cleansing ceremony due to the presence of mal-formed trees or creepers where evil spirit are believed to be present, they cut down those mal-formed trees and creepers saying, “*Kan Pu Manmasi fak zawngna ding i dal a, chungna pathienin a remti nawh, tuhin kan pei ding che a nih*” (You obstruct the means of livelihood of our ancestor Manmasi, it is against the will of god above, so we are removing you). And in the preparation of public paths, the leader of the young people will say to the Chief, “*Kan hung ie, kan hung ie Manmasi nauhai kan hung tah ie*” (We have come, the children of Manmasi has come). The Chief will reply, “*Khawtieng mi'm in na, khuol sie am khuol tha*”. (Where are you from? Are you good guest or bad guests?). Then the leader of the young will say, “*Khuol tha kan nih, Manmasi nauhai kan nih. Khuol hring kan nih, hringna kan hung hawn; malsawmna tinreng kan hawn, Pi-pu malsawma tinreng kan hung hawn*” (We are good people, we are children of Manmasi; We are alive and we bring life; we bring all kinds of blessings, we bring the blessings of our ancestors). The chief then invited them to his house saying, “*Hung lut ro, hung lut ro, Manmasi nauhai hung lut ro*” (Come, enter, children of Manmasi, enter my house). Then they enter the Chief’s house, have drinks of Zu with him and proceed to perform the works of path-making. All these suggest that Manmasi is considered not only a progenitor, but something greater. They continue to call themselves the children of Manmasi till

now. Manmasi has three sons- Miachal, Niachal and Nelachal- and the three are also revered as Manmasi himself. The hair lock of the three is plaited as a carrying rope and are preserved, wrapped safely in a skin parchment. The plaited hair is taken out during annual discussion to assign portions of the forest for cultivation as witness to the decision. The different people of Mongoloid features- Manipuris, Nagas, Arunachalis, Mizo, Chins, Hmars, Kukis and all other tribes are believed to be descended from the three sons of Manmasi. The Hmars are the descendent of the youngest, Nelachal.

Migration into Assam

The strong Sailo emergence in Mizoram forced many of the Hmar people to leave Mizoram and migrate further west and north in waves. Some entered Tripura and others into Meghalaya, and some remained in Assam plains. A letter dated April 10, 1777 written by Chief of Chittagong to the Governor-General of India, the Hon'ble Warren Hastings stated that a man named "Ramoo Kawn" was revolting against the British and assembled large bodies of Kookie men, who lived in the interior parts of the hills. In the report of J.W Edgar, Civil Officer with the Cachar Columns of the Lushai Expedition dated 3th April, 1872, the following lines appear: The name 'Kookie' has been given to the tribe by the Bengalis, and is not recognised by the Hillman themselves; and I have never found any trace of a common name for the tribe among them, although they seem to consider different families as belonging to a single group, which is certainly co-existence with what we call the Kookie tribe. This tribe is again sub-divided by the Kacharis and Bengalis of this district into "old" and "new" with reference to the time at which the people of this district first came in contact with each family of Hillman. The Hmars belong to the "old" Kuki group, as they were the ones who entered into Assam first. The Manmasi Year Book mentions that the first group of Hmars entered Cachar plains in 1609. Subsequent groups were known to have entered Assam in 1680, 1864 and 1851.

They were known to have occupied Silchar area first, but being hill men, they moved to the distant foothills of the Borial ranges. From this area, some groups entered into North Cachar Hills. The earliest known migration into Assam was 1748.

Alexander Mackenzie, *The Kookies entered Cachar in the year 1748*. He furthered said that some 600 of them were in Langting (Maibang) valley in the year 1859, and the “old Kookies” had already entered North Cachar Hills in 1770. It may be noted that here that earlier writers like J.Shakespear referred to the Hmar people as “old Kookies or khawtlang”. Of that group he also stated that there were Khawsak and Khawtlang group and consisted of Hrangkhol, Bete (Beite) and clans like Lawitlang, Thiek, Hrangchal, Lungtau and other sub-tribes of the Hmars. In the *Tribes of Assam*, Pt II, page 23, B N Bordoloi also mentioned that to the Kukis and Lushais, the Hmars were known s Khawtlang which means Westerners. This means that the Hmars came to Assam before the “New Kookies” and the Lushais. The presence of the Hmar people in Assam could be further confirmed by the Report of Mills (1854) and Allen (1859) on the population of North Cachar Hills as follows.

Tribes	Mills (1854)	Allen (1859)
Hills Cacharis	3840	3260
Hojai kacharis	1170	3260
Mikirs	1820	5076
Old Kukis	3335	3709
New Kukis	7575	4763
Aroong Nagas	3505	5885

In Cachar area, the British administration gave special permission for jhum cultivation and the first such permission was issued by Mr. C. R. Phok, the then administration in 1864 for settlement of Saihmar village in Cachar. Saisel village was permitted in 1885 and Tuolpui in 1889. Earlier, under the leadership of Ngaichongsingpa, the Leiri group ascended the ‘Parsen tlang’ and settled in Doiheng village. Later on, in 1820, this group left Doiheng and established Leiri village in North Cachar Hills.

According to the census figures of 1875, the population of North Cachar Hills was-

Nagas	7536
Cacharis	10824
Mikirs	4335
Kukis(old & new)	15080

The coming of the Assam- Bengal Railway in the 1890s was a curse for the Hmar people of the area, as the Railway Contractors exposed them to the habit of taking opium to enhance their stamina. The drug was not only addictive, but it was a silent killer of the poor and ignorant local tribesmen. It made many men and women barren and childless and longevity was reduced drastically. Infant mortality rate was high and in a matter of just 50 years the population of the tribesmen was reduced drastically. Only after 1920, the Hmar tribes parted ways with opium and gradually increased in population.

Even before that time, North Cachar Hills was an excluded area, and administered from outside till the attainment of independence. The British administered the area mainly through the Assam rifles from Nowgong. According to Col. L. W Shakespeare, the first venture into these hills took place in 1841 only. By then a good number of Kuki village were already in existence and there is no mention of any other group of tribes living in the hills. By 1850, a Kuki Levi, 200 strong was formed, and later enlarged. By 1852, it had become too difficult to control the land adequately from Nowgong and therefore, Asaloo in North Cachar was made an administrative station, where a Civil Officer was kept in-charge. To quote him- *The North Cachar was largely peopled by clans of Kukis, a self-reliant sturdy folk, who originally dwelt in the hill country south of Cachar, but who had moved and were still moving North under pressure of the Lushai tribe behind them. They lived under the autocratic rule of their own Rajas and therefore, invariably combined together for any purpose, defensive or*

offensive. For this reason, together with their fighting capacities and weapons (chiefly bows and arrows with which they are expert) they were somewhat feared by the Nagas, who being essentially democratic and obeying no particular chief except when it pleases them to do so, can but rarely combined.

As per 2001 Census record, almost 30 different tribes were living in the district of N.C.Hills with an overall population of 1,28,428. The Dimasas forming the majority with 63, 146 recorded speakers of the language, the population of the Hmars was 14,158 (Deputy Director of Economics and Statistics). According to Manmasi Year Book of 2006-2007, the total number of Hmar houses in N.C.Hills district was 2,459 with total population of 17,234. According to census on Hmar population in the district conducted in 2011, there are 43 Hmar villages with 3,324 houses constituting a total of 20,768 populations. Whereas in Barak Valley, according to census on the Hmar population conducted in 2011, there are 123 villages, 6,336 houses with total population of 44,353. Recent population record of Barak Valley is exclusive of the Hmar sub-tribes like Hrangkhoh, Chorai and Chiru. The present work does not reflect the expressive behaviours of those Hmar sub-tribes who, though retaining their ethnic identity, have been acculturated in various degrees as a result of living in close proximity or in close contact with the 'non-tribal' Sanskritized majority.

The Hmar tribe has gained recognition as one of the Scheduled Tribes as per the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India. The Tribal List of India published in 1951 classed the Hmar as sub-tribe of Lushai along with other sub-tribes in Lushai Hills. The Government of India, in its revision of the List in 1956, declared Hmar as a separate Tribe of India, independent of the Kukis or Lushai Vide Notification Order No. S.R.O. 2477-A, dated 29.10.1956 (Ghosh 1992,117). However till date in Barak Valley zone, the Hmars are not recognized as ST (Hills)

The British Administration themselves considered the Hmar group of tribes useful in so far as their presence being a buffer to the constant raids and invasions for territorial expansions by the Nagas on the side and the Dimasa- Cacharis on the other. In 1853, Lt. H.S Bivar became the first Sub-Assistant on the creation of North

Cachar Hills as sub-Division with its headquarters at Asaloo. He faced a problem with the Naga raiders from the East and Dimasas from the North, and in order to tackle the situation, he proposed to the higher authorities for establishment of more 'Kuki colonies' and strengthening of the existing colonies. In the words of J.B Bhattaacharjee- *According, the Kuki immigration was encouraged and Bivar conducted the settlement of the Kukis. The Kuki had left their original home in Lushai Hills being hard hit by the frequent famines there, and settled themselves in Manipur, some in Cachar, while bulk of them moved on to the North Cachar Hills. The immigrant showed a good deal of enthusiasm to develop their own home, and shortly many Kuki colonies emerged in the district adjoining the Angami Hills being thoroughly colonized by them. These clan colonies had their chiefs, called Rajas, through whom jurisdiction of the government extended to the people. The lands were assigned revenue free for 25 years and soil proved fertile for agriculture. The facilities offered by the government attracted more chiefs from the adjacent district to settle in North Cachar, while others sent their emissaries to collect information about the country. Bivar expected, therefore that the size of the colonists would gradually increase and thereby would contribute to the peace and prosperity of the district. The Kukis were provided with firearms for self-defence and to form themselves into a buffer between the North Cachar and the Angamis. Thus the Hmar group of people settled firmly in Assam.*

Distribution

The Hmars constitute an important ethnic group in the N. C. Hills districts of Assam. They have a sizeable population in Cachar district also. Apart from Assam Hmars live mostly in the hills of south Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts. Although these areas are within different administrative divisions, they are geographically connected. In Manipur, the Hmars reside in the south, especially in the Churachandpur District and its adjoining areas. These areas, except Tuithaphai, are hilly. Tuiruong (Barak), Tuivai and Tuithapui are some of the important rivers flowing through this area. In Mizoram, the Hmars live mostly in the north, especially in the Aizawl District. In Meghalaya, the Hmars live in the Jaintia Hills District and Shillong in Khasi Hills District. In Tripura, the Hmars mostly live in and around Darchawi, a village on the Mizoram – Tripura border.



Physical Character

The general description of the Hmars' physique is recorded by Rochunga Pudaite (Pudaite 1963,32), 'In general, the Hmars have cultural and physical resemblance to the rest of the mountain peoples of northeast India and Burma. They are generally a short and sturdy race of men with goodly development of muscle. Their face is broad and round and their cheek bones are high, broad and prominent. Their eyes are small and their nose flat and short. Though they are of the Mongolian race, their skin is not yellow. It is rather a dark-yellowish-brown'. The Hmars are one of the indigenous ethnic tribes with distinct culture belonging to the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic group of the Sino-Tibeto-Burman family of the Mongolian race. Forming one of the many hill tribes of India, the Hmars are found in North Cachar Hills district and Barak Valley of Assam and "the adjoining States of Manipur, Meghalaya,

Hmar Villages-

Almost every Hmar village is established at the slop of the hills or foothills except some areas of Cachar district where few Hmar houses are found in close proximity to the paddy fields. Unlike some other tribes the Hmar concept of village set up is not clan based. Neither their land holding pattern has any reflection on the village pattern.

In every village the individual land boundaries are well defined but boundaries of jhum field are not properly demarcated . Most of the Hmar villagers used to adopt slash and burn system (shifter) of cultivation , generally it these fields are quite far from the village.

The Hmar don't want to leave their ancestral village and at the same time they want to extend the village beyond a certain limit , as a result villages lands are becoming fragmented into small plots as members increased but the plots of land originally occupied by the fore-fathers remain the same.

A recent development can be noticed in Hmar villages where the young generation are willing to have a separate land for rubber and betel nut plantation. Earlier only after marriage sons raised separate residential arrangement within the parental campus or in a separate land.

In the doorway of Hmar villages memorial stones are erected and set slabs of stone where details of the village in respect of establishment ,organization , area etc. are written. There are common lands in and around every Hmar villages for community uses. There are open spaces in the centre of every village where the villager meet to celebrate certain occasions or decides disputes, if any. Again there is a specified land for 'Church'. In most of the Hmar villages there are community halls for celebration of festivals , meetings and for observing various occasions.

Most of the Hmar people still live in villages .There are only a few town dwellers. Even in towns the semblance of a village is imitated by staying alongside other Tribesmen. A Hmar

village is usually situated on a ridge or hill slope inside the forests. The availability of good and perennial water source is a must. When a new site is selected after divination, the undergrowth is cleared first and the upper canopy of trees is kept to give shades. Later on these are removed by stages. The houses are constructed in rows keeping an open street in the middle, the houses facing each other at the end of the street. Some larger villages have side streets.

Chapter 11

MATERIAL CULTURE

Material culture refers to the physical objects and resources that people use to define their culture. This section of the work deals with the physical and visible objects, artifacts or any concrete things created by the Hmars for the satisfaction of their needs; for the sustenance and perpetuation of their everyday life activities on which they are wholly dependent. Physical objects can include architecture, sculpture, painting, clothing, furniture, quilting, woodworking, metalwork, knitting, weaving and any other forms of arts and crafts. This area of folklore studies concerns the whole realm of human activity that is basically related with "craft", the traditional aspects of how objects are made and used. Handoo (J. Handoo 2000, 14) says, "material culture responds to techniques, skills, recipes and formulas transmitted across the generations and subject to the same forces of conservative tradition and individual variation as verbal art." With a special focus on the objects themselves, this section is concerned with how objects are designed, made, and used, and what they mean to those who make and use them.



The Hmar houses have four to five main posts which are known as *sut*. The Last of them known as the *Chawrsut* is used for keeping and tying sacrificial materials. The floor of the houses is supporting by sufficient props so that the houses can take any amount of weight. The Hmars are sociable people and they gather together for every occasion like birth, marriage, death and the like. One is born into the tribe and dies in the tribe. it follows that each and every person in the community is related in some way or other .The roofing material is a wild cane leaf which usually lasts for several years. Thatched houses also are made where the cane leaf *inhnatak* cannot be collected. Barns, granaries and pig houses are often provided with split bamboo roofing .The bamboo is split in two equal halves; the nodes are removed to allow water to drain. The bamboo splits are arranged upside down and downside up and made to cover the Houses area .Such roof can last for a number of years.

Building materials are collected over a period of a year or two and stored in Dry places to make them well seasoned .The tying materials are mostly cane and bamboo splits. These are also prepared well ahead and stored over the fireplace. Before using them these are properly treated with water. The floor and the walls of bamboo works beautifully plaited to form patterns. Some patterns are *takhat hniphuo*, *thumphuo*, *bawta,bawta keisawi* etc. and are firmly tied on to the supporting frames. Though no nails are used, the houses are quite firm and sturdy, and can withstand the onslaught of even cyclones which are frequent in Hmar inhabited areas. The chief's houses is the largest and in the construction all the villagers are involved.

Construction of a Hmar house:

Houses are constructed on stilts, i.e. in raised platforms. The main posts and side posts are firmly planted on the ground. If the site is a slope, the front will be about three feet from the ground, and the height of the rear portion will depend on the slope of land. Some houses can have a very high rear end. In an even area, the height of the platform may be from 3 to 4 feet above the ground. The habit of constructing houses on raised platforms has been ascribed to be a reminiscence of

the people's settlement in river valleys in the past. Such river valleys are often flooded in summer and the houses are safe from the flood water.

The front porch housed the montar (dheki) and water tubes or firewood on the other side. The chicken coops also are kept here. This portion is protected by an outer hanging door. The second compartment is protected by a sliding door and on entering there is the hearth (fireplace) on one side and the cooking utensils and water tubes on the other side. Over the fireplace is a rack of platforms for drying and preserving things. There is a middle half wall lengthwise and inside the wall are the beds. The opposite side being the sitting and lounge area. The rear end has another platform for storage and for other purposes.

Most of the building materials consist of dressed wood, bamboos and cane works. Supporting props are given for the platform and the plinth is bamboo works over wooden or palm arrangements.

Dress and Ornaments

The Hmars have an impressive number of traditional shawls and garments though they have only a few varieties of traditional shirts. Christianity has also brought about numerous changes in their way of dressing up themselves. The dresses of the Hmar people are simple and hand-woven. The Hmars cultivate two types of cotton for weaving purposes namely, *Pat-uk* or yellowish brown cotton and *Pat-var* or pure white cotton. At an early age, Hmar girls learn the art of yarning, looming and weaving cotton threads out of raw cotton to produce beautiful handloom products through the process called Hmar *Puon Ran*.

In Hmar traditional society, weaving is done mostly by women through loin looms, a traditional form of weaving. Besides transformation of raw cotton to fine yarn, the main art of the womenfolk is weaving and provision of cloths for the entire family. Weaving tradition is handed down from a mother to her daughter. Starting from a simple light cloth to heavy bed cloths like *Puonri* (rug), weaving is done by women alone. The Hmar men use short loin clothes or short dhoti-fashioned loin clothes known as *Dierkei*. The shirts have no button and are tied together with either

sashes or twisted threads. Many prefer to remain naked at the upper portion, and on cold days and during winter; a cloth is just wrapped around the body for warmth. The women also cover themselves with woven clothes just above their bosom and tie it tightly around their body as the upper garment. As the lower garment, loin clothes which extend to the shine are worn. A short mini- skirt called *hmar-am* is worn. Sometimes, women put on blouses as protection during working seasons. (V. L Bapui 2011, 121)

During festival occasions like dancing Sikpui Lam, all performers- male and female- put on their best traditional costumes. The male young performers put on a highly decorated headgear named *Tawmlairang*. This special kind of headgear is made of bird's feathers. Another kind of headgear is also worn which is called *Lukhum* which is made of bamboo. Hmar puon is also worn by the male performers. . Some of the main dresses of the Hmar people are described below-

Tawnlo puon- It is the upper garment of the women.



Tawnlo puon

Thangsuo puon- This cloth is specially designed to be worn by heroes and successful man.



Thangsuo puon

Ngotekher- It is a loin cloth for women. It has black stripes on white background. The vertical stripes are made prominent while the horizontal ones are made to be faded. This is cleverly done while weaving. Technically, this design is called kherlker. Besides this, there are two black very prominent embroidered designs of about three inch size each that horizontally divide the puon into three parts.



Ngotekher



Hmar puon- Is the most common designed of cloth having red and black stripes. It is commonly worn by men and women alike as upper and lower garments. The original Hmar Puon is a simple stripe with no embroidery or intricate designs. The modern weavers have now added a little simple design called *fanghma mu* in the middle of the white stripe. Yet, among the tribe, this reworking and modification with a little design does not seem to undermine the value of the original puon.

Hmar puon

Puon-dum- This is very important and significant cloth of the Hmars at the time of marriage and death.



Puon-dum

Hmar -am it is a special designed loin cloth for women. It extends up to the knee and is worn as a mini-skirt. The well-to-do women usually use this as the lower garment. It is woven in lenbuong/huom design, white weft against black. The white design is horizontal. This puon is also mainly used as dance dress. Sometimes Hmar-Am is udes in full length that extends to the ankles with a slight modification of the design.



Hmar-am

There are many others clothes woven by the Hmar viz *Puonlaisen, Puon Ropui, Thlanlampuon, Koloawnpuon, Bawta, Pasaltha puon, Ramtharpuon* etc. and are worn Hmar women on occasions.

Thlanlampuon this is another full-length puon Hmar women and young ladies wear on mourning day in the society: both in the residence of the bereaved and in the graveyard.



Kolvawnpuon



Puon Ropu



Thangsuopuon zaku



Thlanlampuon

Besides, the Hmar also weave bed clothes which are worn are made havier than the ones used for dresses. *Rakawp*, *Butupuon*, *Kantha*, *Puonri* etc are some of the clothes meant for use as bed clothes. Of these *puonri* or a rug is considered an asset for the family. The Hmar people live mostly in hilly areas which are generally cooler than the low lands, and they need warm clothes. A married woman usually goes back to her parent's house for a week to weave the rug. A special loom is needed for the weaving of the heavy cloth, and requires the participation and help of other weavers. It is quite warm and is a real asset to the family.

Ornaments :

Tawmlairang is a head dress and a decoration worn by renowned hunters and warriors. It is made of the tail feathers of bhimraj (bird of paradise) and a parrot, tied together with cotton thread and beautifully coloured and decorated.

Thival is a bead necklace worn by women. Different size of beads of red ambers is arranged symmetrically, the end part becoming smaller in size and the middle beads being the larger.

Chaupheng is a brass armlet, probably crafted by people of *Rengram* (Tripura). It is worn t the wrist by well-to-do ladies.

Harban is another armlet made of silver worn by women at the inner arm.

Ngaingawn: A long piece of spring made of brass, worn by women as belt.

Chaupheng



Harban



Thival



Ngaingawn





Hmar woman in traditional attire

Apart from the above, they also use other common ornaments. A young man or boy may wear a cornelian bead hung from the lobe of his ear and is known as *Be-suk-tul*. Males may also wear necklaces of beads. Those who can afford may wear earring of carved ivory and silver made from coins. Conch shells and cowrie shells

are also used as decorative ornaments. Some were necklaces of silver or nickel coins provided with ears. The elderly women pierce the lower ear lobes and started with wearing wood pieces at first which later on in changed into a wheel like silver ear ornaments. The lobes become much extended and when the wheels are removed, the lobes hung pendulously.



A hmar Couple in Traditional attire

The man ties their hair in a lock at the nape of the neck in the back. Their hair is parted in the middle. Hair cut is a later development though the idea of hair cut was very much known even at that time. The women part their hair at the centre of the head and the end portion is either plaited into braids or bound in a bundle to form a lock at the back. Sometimes, the, the plaited braids are brought forward and

knotted at the front side above the forehead. For grooming they use combs made from, bamboo and tightly tied together. Women are often expected to possess their own combs.

Art and Craft

Art and craft plays an important role in the life and activity of the Hmar people. As it has mention earlier the main art of the women folk is the production of cotton, weaving and production of clothes for the entire family. The men folk are responsible for the production of bamboo and cane crafts and they produced many different kinds of baskets for various uses ranging from the small thimble to the big baskets for storing rice paddy. Sieves, bushels open and closed baskets etc. They make all the weaving implements, spinning wheels, mortars, pestles, wooden platters, bowls, plates, ladles and spoon etc. They also produced all the tools needed for works as well as for hunting. Pellet bows are used for shooting smaller birds and this is a very effective weapon in the hands of the expert.

Cane and bamboo works are done by men, but some women are equally expert in the craft. Different kinds of baskets and utilities are produced as-

Leikhawr or leikum is a short closed or open basket made with bamboo and cane works. It often forms and unit of measure, especially for rice paddy. When used to measured, one basketful is known a Dan.



clothes are often stored in it. A woman of marriageable age is supposed to weave enough clothes to fill the basket and is intended to be her dowry when she gets married.



Rel

Paikawng is a general term for a carrying basket. It can either be closed or open. Close basket are known as *kawngphui* and are mean for carrying or keeping grains and other small materials. Open basket called *kawngvar* or *kawngvang* are for carrying things of larger materials. Water is carried in bamboo tube with it and fire-wood also are carrying in it. The ladies carry food pakets, dresses, working tools etc to and from the jhums.



Kawngvang

Kawngpghui

Bemkuong is a closed flat basket container. It is provided with a lid of the same bamboo and cane works. It is intended for keeping sewing materials like needles, scissors, thread etc by the women folk. Sometimes, valuable possessions like necklaces, rings and some traditional ornaments also are kept in it.



Bemkuong

Paiper is a flat loin basket made of cane works, used for tying on to the loin during sowing seasons and while fishing.



Paiper

Leidar is a small oval mat with cornered rim for cleaning rice from husk. There are two kinds, one with a special pattern to facilitate movement of rice and husk and is known as *Leidar tak*, the other is for multiple uses, in whatever way it is needed and is known as *Leidar pup*.



Leider

Kawkteis is a small open basket for keeping things, *Kawkpui* is a large open basket for storing cotton, rice paddy and other materials intended to be stored over a long period of time. A sturdy basket, specially plaited for long storage is called *Zeng*.

Pher is a beautifully designed mat made from cane works and used mainly for sleeping. It is kept in the upper loft of the house and well-seasoned. It can last for a long time even generation to generation and is among the prized possession of the family.

Tunatieng or tuntieng is a mat having holes at interval of the plaited bamboo splits. It is mainly for sun drying food items. By way of preservations for off season construction, many varieties of vegetables are sun-dried and preserved.

Buhak is a flat and square closed mat made of bamboo splits and is used for drying of rice paddy over the oven and in sunlight in preparation for husking.

Dawrawn is a very large closed basket and is used extensively during harvest. It is used for carrying grains from the Jhum fields. Besides the above, the

Hmars also manufacture their own waving instrument and parts of the looms like *kawlseke*, *pheioawm*, *satthlau*, *taizel*, *tukdet* or *rennghet*, *hmui*, *suthlam*, *khawthei* etc.

Food and Drinks:

The diet of the Hmar people is very simple. Poor families make do with boiled rice and chutney of chillies. Rice is own production and boiled with out throwing away the water. Vegetable are also mostly cooked by boiling and seasoned with fresh meat or fish, dried meat or fish, fermented pork, soya beans, til, mustard etc. Ash lye is a favourite seasoning agent. In the past, salt was made by boiling salt water collected from sources.

The most common drink is Zu, which is a fermented rice beer. For all occasions Zu is served and enjoyed. In modern times, Zu has largely been replaced by tea which is served without adding milk, cream or sugar. It is preferred to be taken with molasses (gur).



Ngathu Hme

Indigenous Seasoning Items and the Methods of Preparation:

Every Hmar woman possesses a fair knowledge of how to make seasoning agents. Traditionally, women make them for family consumption only but in modern days, they prepare the items in large quantity both for family consumption and for sale in the society.

Ngathu (fermented fish):

Needless to say, the modern Hmar man now totally depends on the abundant availability of fermented fish in open markets. The Hmar has a traditional way of fermenting fish. He catches fresh fish from a river which he either half dries it in the sun or half roasts it in fire. Throwing away the bones, the meat is tightly crammed into a hollow bamboo piece (a bamboo with a node) and is closed with a tight lid with little ash sprinkled in both the extreme ends of the pole. This is kept in the tap (a large hearth made of earth, solidly kneaded like brick within a wooden frame) or on the rap (a raised platform of wood construction hanging just above the hearth used for drying wood, meat or paddy). "This fermenting period generally requires at least seven to eight days" (Dr. V.L Tluonga Bapui).



Ngathu (Fermented fish)



Sathu



As the people are exposed to other cultures and communities, food habits also have changed in the town and cities, but in the village, it has remained largely unchanged. The Hmars are well-known for their hot curries and *changal hme*, a preparation of vegetables with *lye*. In spite of their love for hot curries, they love boiled vegetables equally and sipping soup is a favourite for elderly persons.

Tea has replaced the rice beer which the Hmars used to consume liberally in the past. In modern times, tea is largely brewed for every occasion. It is taken black. After the meals, black tea is invariably served to act as toppings for the meals. Some people used to grow tea plant and prepare green tea leaf by themselves in the past. But now people mostly depend on the tea rolled and produced in factories.

Musical Instrument:

They play a kind of drum called *Khuong* during their tribal dance and song performances. Some of the other musical instruments are *Theihle* (bamboo flute), *Seki* (set of mithun horn), *Darbu* (set of small gongs of different size with different rhythmic sound.), *Ruo Jing/lmg* (guitar made of bamboo; Fig.), *Pheiphit* (a set of three whistle made of bamboo producing different sound.), *Ruo Khuoni* (a guitar like instrument made of bamboo, struck with a stick.). *Darmang* (flat brass gong), *Darkhuong* or *Zamluong* (a big and heavy brass metal gong to give a majestic sound; a gong) *Chawngpereng* (a bamboo pipe instrument), *Rawsem* (flute made of dried hollow gourd and small sized bamboos), *Darbenthek* (cymbals) *Theikhuong* (a big hollow bamboo generally comprising two internodes with a node at the extreme end) *Darlai Paung* (heavy gong of brass metal), *Hna Mut* (Leaf instrument). *Ruo Tawtawrawt* and *Um Perkhuong*.



Zamluong

Many of these musical instruments are generally played by men. "Of these, one of the *Pheiphit* whistles is played by women" (Lalramhnm). *Khuong* is played by women mostly when dances are performed during marriage ceremonies.



Chapter-3

FAMILY AND CLAN TRADITION

Relationship and Kinship terms:

Like all tribal groups, the Hmars consider people of the tribe as their own relations. Terms like *hriemmi*, *mani mi*, *chipui*, *chi le kuong*, *unau*, *laina* etc indicate that people belonging to the tribe are treated as brothers and sisters or relations. A person belong to the tribe is often welcomed, though he or she may be a complete stranger. Such attitudes show the strong bond of brotherhood and that a sense of belonging to one another and deep fraternal bond exist among them. And when it's comes to clans, the relationship is still stronger in a sense that persons belongs to the same clan or sub-tribe are considered as members of the same family. The sub-clans define the families to a still further extent and establish a still closer relationship. The joys, sorrows, achievements, success, failures etc of a clansman are often shared and ridiculously even blames are shared. Such being the case, the Hmars addressed one another to show how they are related. In doing so, the age of the person is invariably taken into consideration. Those who are elder to ego are addressed or referred to appropriately, and failure to do so may label a person as impolite, rude or being disrespectful to others. Those belonging to the same age group also normally refer or address one another as friends and equals, and appropriate terms are used. Only persons younger in age are referred to or addressed by their given names. Some examples of the use of such terms of references or addresses are mentioned below.

Terms of Address: In Hmar, a common term is often used for a number of kinship. Names are used for addressing a younger person. But for honorific purposes, this is preferred to be avoided and addressed using the name of the first child as 'So and so father/ mother/ uncle etc.

Pa is for father, husband's father, wife's father, father's brother (elder to ego), father's cousins (elder to ego), friend's father and any elderly person considered contemporary to own father.

Nu is for mother, husband's mother, wife's mother, mother's sister (elder to ego), other's cousins (elder to ego), friend's mother or any elderly lady considered contemporary to own mother.

Pu is for grandpa (father's father), mother's father, mother brother's (elderly or younger to ego), wife's father's father, wife's mother's father, husband's father's father, husband's mother's father, and any respected elderly male.

Pi is the opposite term for *Pu* and has the same treatment.

U is for elder brother, elder sister, elder cousin (both sexes) and person senior to age to ego.

Palien or *Papui* is for father's elder brother, or any male relation elder to own father. Similarly, the feminine term is *Nulien* for mother's elder sister(s).

Pate is for father's younger brother, and *Nute* is for mother's younger sister. Any person of the same age group and belonging to the same clan may be addressed by this term.

Ni is for father's sister or female cousins, elder or younger to father. Her husband is *Rang* to ego.

Mala is used by a male friend to address a male friend. *Thien* is for females to address female friends. Sometimes, males use *Ruola* or *Ruolapa* to address male friends.

Clan Formation

The Hmars are said to be the tribe with the most families and the largest families are often found among the Hmars. Some large families can have more than twenty members living together under one roof. The Hmar tribe comprises numerous sub-tribes or clans (Hnam in Hmar language). The sub-tribes, clans and sub-clans have originated from family lineages by taking the name of the ancestor. Sometimes the name of prominent person in the lineage replaced the name of the ancestor, and a new clan name is born.

In the Hmar tribe there are hundreds of sub-tribes or clans and sub-clans. The following sub-tribes, clans and sub-clans exist among the Hmar people.

Thiek- (sub-clans) - Amaw (Athu, Chalhril), Buhril, Chawnnel Hekte (Chawnghekte, Ralsunhekte), Hmante, Hnamte, Hrangate, khangbur, khawzawl, (Lalum, Laldau, Saibung, Hekte, killaite, Athu), Kungate, Lalum, Pakhumate (khumsen, khumthur), Ralsun, Saibung, Thlihran, Thluchung, Tuolor (khochung, Khohnuoi, Thilsawng), Tuolte, T̄aite, T̄mate, Zate, Vankal or Vangkal (Pangote, Pangulte, Khawbuol, Faiheng).

Zote- (Buonsung, Chawngchau, Chawngsiekism, Chawngtuol, Chawngvawr, Chuonkhup, Darkhawlai, Hrangate (Hrangdo, Hrangman, Hrangso), Hriler, Ngaiate (Neitham, Chawnhnieng, Naubuk, Singphun, Thangnawk, Vaithang), Parate, Pusiete, Saiate (Saihman), Suonkhupate, Thangsuok, Tlangte, Zawngte).

Vangsie - (Dosil, Invang, Theidu, Tlukte, Vanghawi, Zapte)

Sakachep (Khelma)-Bawmlien, Keiphun, Khawlum, Neibawm, Saithuoi, Sumtinkha, Telengsing, Thingphun, Thirsu/Thiran, Vaichai, Zeite.

Sakum- Hauhman, Hauhnieng, Kilong.

Tlau- Bawlsuok, Thlengngam, Vanchawng, Vantawl.

Rawite- Aite, Arro, Buite, Hmungte, Pieltu, Sawrte, Seldo, Zate.

Pautu- Buongzal, Selawn, Singate, Tluongate

Pang (Pangkhuo)- Bawngkhuoi, Chongnam, Dawn, Khuolreng, Laibur, Lainguk, Laitluong, Leihang, Leisate, Luongngo, Nilai, palang, Palo, Piekpachai, Pipilang, Puolnam, Rama, Reisa, Ruolleng, Seizang, Seken, Serai, Singla, Tera, Vangzang.

Ngurte-Sanate, Chiluo (Pusingathla), Bangran (Saidangathla) T̄aite, Saingur, Zawllien, Parate.

Ngente- Zawngte, Zuote (Zawte) Tuolngen, Laitui, Lailo, Laihring, Dothlang, Dosak, Chalngawng, Chawngghawi, Bawlte, Kawngte.

Lungtau- Betlu, Inbuon, Infimate, Intoate, Keivom, Lungchuong, Mihriemate, Nungate, Pasulate, Sielhnam, Songate, Sunate, Theisiekate, Thlawngate, Tamhrang, Pakhumate.

Leiri- Neingaite, Pudaite, Puhnuongate (Puhnungte), Pulamte, Thlandar.

Lawitlang- Hrangchal- Sielasung, Darasung, Laiasung, Varte, Tlawmte, Parte, Sungte, Tungte, Suomte, Tlangte, Chawnsim, Sielhnam, Hrangtal, Pautu, Pieltu, Khiengte, Khuptong Varte, Rawite, Kawilam, Singate, Tluongate.

Khuolhring- Chunthang, Khintung, Leidir, Lozun, Lungen, Midang, Milai, Parte, Pawlsim, Pieltel, Ruolsiem, Suokling, Thlaute.

Khiengte- Chawngte, khello, khumsung, Khupthang, kumsung, Muolvum, Singbel, Khelte (Hausel, Hmaimawk, Lutmang, Sierchuong, Singhlu, Thatsing, Vangtuol, Vankeu, Vohang, Vohlu, Zahlei, Zaucha.)

Khawbung- Bunglung, Fente, Laising, Muolphei, Pangamte, Pazamte, Phunte (Punte), Siersak, Sierthlang, Riengsete, Vuote.

Kawm- Ngoilu, Hmangte, Karong, khumdon, Leivon, Serto, Telen, Thingpui.

Hmarlusei-Huolngo- Chawnzik, Hnechawng, Lamthik, Luophul, Neichir.

Hrangkhol- Bangkheng (Bapui, Tuoltawk), Chawlka, Chawrai, Dumkar (Tansurai, Thirhlum), Khiangtevai (kawlchawrai), Penatu (Pena), Phirpu, Phuositawng, Simvai, Tuisenvai.

Faihriem-Saihriem- Bapui, Dulien, Khawhreng, Khawlum, khawkieng, khawral, Sihmar, Saivate, Seiling (Feiling), Sakum (Hauhmag, Hauhnieng), Sekawng, Sote, Thanghnieng, Thlangnung, Tuimuol, Tuollai, Tusing.

Darlong- Betlu, Hrangsaman, Invang, Laituihoizang, Pachuai, Puiloi, Raute, Sawngkhar, Thlukte, Vanghrawi.

Darngawn- Pakhuong- Pakhuong (Buongpui, Hranngul, Khelte, Khuongpui, Luhawk), Drangawn, Banzang (Sinate, Sanate, Songhek, Thuondur, Lamchangte, Famhoite, Fatlei, Chawngmunte), Ruolngul, Faiheng, Sakum, Soute, Tlau.

Chothe- Makan (Kakan Lailu, Makanpi, Makante), Marim/Mahrim (Pilien, Rimkung, Rimphuchong, Rimkei-ek) Para (Para, Rakung), Khiyang (Khiyang Inpi, Khiyangte, Yuhlung, Huolpu, Aihung) Thao (Thaokung, Tayu, Rang sai/ Hrang sai, Thaorun)

Chiru- Langkai, Nisatarai, Saithuoi, Tuipai.

Chawte- Chamte, Chawngdang, Chawngfieng, Chawnthik, Halte, Hawnzawng, Lienhna, Suonhawi, Thamam, Tamva.

Chawngthu- khunthil/khumtil/ Khuntil (khunsut/khumsut), Khunthang, Haukawi (Saithleng), Vanchieu (Chingruom, Lhangum/Thlangum, Maluong, Thangsung)

Changsan- Lunkim, Armei, Chailong, Ngawithuom, Ngulthuom, Hranhnieng, Hrawte, Kellu, Zilchung, Zilmang.

Biete - Nampui (10 sub-clans), Ngamlai (4 sub-clans), Lalsim (5 sub-clans) Darnei (3 sub-clans), Thiaite (5 sub-clans), Khurbi, Lienate, Puilo, Tlungur, Tamlo.

Bawm - Bawmzo- Aineh, khawnglawt, Khuolring, Lawnsing, Leihang, Leituk, Palang, Sekhawn, Sezawl, Thangtu, Titilang.

Aimol - Chaita, Chawngawn, Khoichung/Leivom, Laita/ Mangte, Lanu.

Inheritance of Properties

The Hmars society is patriarchal society, and follow the so-called ultimogeniture system of succession and inheritance. But sometimes the eldest and the youngest sons enjoy equal shares in inheritance. In some clans the eldest inherit the family properties. Many clans practice inheritance of the family property by the youngest son, who is to take care of the elderly parents till their death. The succession to chieftainship by the eldest son is not unconventional. In the absence of

a son, the eldest brothers son, preferable the youngest of the brothers, succeeds him. Sometimes, the properties are equally divided amongst the son. Daughters also have right to enjoy their father's property but no share of inheritance is provided for them unless there are some special reasons and needs. There is no joint family system among the Hmars. Brothers often live together for a number of years. It is conventional for the brothers to stay on for a few years after their marriage and to set up a separate home at an opportune time. Unless there is disunity in the family, the whole family helps in setting up the new home of the family to be headed by the male members of the family, beginning from the eldest of the brothers. This usually takes place after two to three children have been born to the couple unless there is special need for early separation from the main house. Even after setting up of a new home, there are many instance of cooperative jhuming or farming where the families share two works together and share the produce in accordance with their needs. It is to the credit of the bride of the family if the family stays together and continues to maintain good relationship even after formal division into separate families. A good wife is the bonding factor of the family and much depend on her relationship with her in-laws. Even after all the brothers have maintained their own individual families, they are still considered as one household in many respects. For any family responsibilities, it is the joint responsibility of the brothers to share in it. Any family rights and rituals weddings and other social obligations, the brothers act and function together for and on behalf of the family. The defending of the family honour and prestige is their collective responsibility and in the matter of suits and affairs involving legal matters, the eldest brother often stand in the place of his father, to sue and to be sued on behalf of the family. All important decisions involving the family also are decided talking all the brothers into confidence. In other word, no major decision is taken by any of the brother without consulting his brothers. In this way, family bond is maintained to a great extent and families with large number of brothers often command respect in the society.

Chapter 4

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The concept of God beliefs related to spirits

The Hmars are originally animists. The only form of religion before the Gospel of Christ was preached among them was Animism. They believe that all things in nature could be animated or possessed by a spirit. The Hmars are religious by nature and religion plays an important role in the social, economic and political life. They believe that a large tree, prop roots of banyan trees, broken tree trunk which are still standing, large rocks or stone, rivers, precipices, forests, animals, birds etc could be possessed by a spirit. Even pythons and reptiles are believed to be among the animated objects. Though the Hmars believe in a supreme god dwelling in heaven above, sacrifices are really offered to worship him. Most of the religious rituals and sacrifices have to do with the spirits who animated the objects of nature.

The Hmars believed that human beings have souls. The souls of the rich and the brave among them and the successful hunter who have bagged many game animals besides killing some species of ferocious animals are believed to inherit *Pielral* which is a paradise. The soul of such persons is to be provided with food and drink. Such successful persons are known as *Thangsuo*. The soul of every dead person is shot by pellets at the entrance of the abode of the dead by *Pu Pawla*. However, the soul of the successful person is not subjected to the ordeal. The soul of the dead is taken care of by *Kulsamnu* who leads them to the village of dead. She is believed to directly lead the soul of the hunters and successful persons to paradise. She has no control over the soul of *Thangsuo* persons, but she cares for them. She also has no control over the soul of the children who died at birth or infancy. The Hmars also known to offer ancestor worship as they believe that their ancestors will be able to bless them. Such worship is known as *Pi-Pu-Rau-Biek*.(Bapui 2011,11-12)

What is noteworthy in this context is, most of the sacrificial and religious related activities are performed by the *thiempu* with the assistance of his *maleberva*

leaving little performance opportunity to the ordinary men and women. "There was a common priest for the whole village. Some clans and even some families had their own priests. The tribe also had a thiempi (priestess) who, however could not perform all the religious rites the male priest was entitled to perform" (Lienchawngtho).

The tribe had a good many complicate forms of worship and animal sacrifice. In almost all these rituals and divinations, the women folk, who otherwise take active part in other non-religious activities, render little participation. Rather than a signifier of deep religious participation, this culturally-determined silence is motivated by the tribe's ideological dogma; a proof that human's behaviour is subject to cultural ideology. Women are not to take active part in all the religious and sacramental matters. This being how women have been oriented into the tribe's religious sphere, silence becomes a very important and significant aspect of the women in religious domain. In all the occasions of thanksgiving and inthawina, thiempu and the seven or more male berva (priest's male assistants) carry the whole lot of work to and in the bawlhmun- carrying and slaughtering the offered animal, carrying rice, wood, water, cauldron, burning fire and other necessary ingredients for the sacrifice, preparing the altar, placing god's portion called safer on the altar or any other major or minor work required for sacrificial ceremonies. (Sielmat Bible College 2010, 45)

The thiempu does the incantations. "Their womenfolk are never given role to play in the sacred ceremonies except in some religious occasions which are considered the prerogative of the women folks. They can simply take the sacrificial meat as and when thanks-giving ceremonies or sacrifices are solemnized inside or nearby individual's hut as their going and taking part in the bawlhmun is unbecoming" (Lienchawngtho).

Ritualistic sacrifices

Hmar people have different forms of worship and ritualistic sacrifices which were performed under the strict supervision of the Priest called Thiempu. The priest

as discussed before played an important role in the religio-cultural life of the people. The priest combines in himself both the qualities of physician and a leader of the orthodox. He used incarnation to cure various diseases and performed all the rituals in the village. As J. Shakespear write, "This is very important and efficacious sacrifice and only can be performed by a certain Wiseman of Khawthlang"

In every village there was at least one Priest "Thiempu" and in some big village there were more than one Priest. They were supposed to be well versed in the art of driving out evil spirits who were attributed to every illness and misfortune. Their endeavours were directed to propitiating the spirits of evil. Sickness and pain of every description were therefore ascribed to these unseen beings, whenever a man fell ill he naturally desired to appease the anger of his supposed oppressor and collect in the exorcist. When the later arrived he leaned over the prostrate figure, felt the pulse and with a very wise look on his face declared that a fowl, dog or pig must be sacrificed to drive out the dream. On the special service and duty the Priest put on a breast plate an ephod a robe broidered coat, a mitre and a girdle.

Christianity and the Hmar culture

Christianity has a far reaching impact on Hmar culture and tradition. The advent of Christianity brought a cultural conflict that affected social transformation. Within a few years of Christianization many Hmar people embraced the new religion. As a result, there occurred misunderstanding between the convert Christian and the ancient traditionalists at certain levels. The traditional lovers blamed the Missionaries for undermining culture and rejecting old values. In contrast, the Missionaries and the new converts felt that most of the cultural traditions of the early Hmar people were profusely connected with old religious practices and considered Zu as unbecoming of Christian living. The newly converted Christians were therefore strongly discouraged to participate and indulge in any of the festivals and cultural ceremonies like Sikpui-Ruoi and other Kuts or cultural activities as they thought such activities would hold them and pull them back to their old pagan ways.

It should be admitted that the Missionaries had some weakness. They thought every ancient culture was devilish with no exception. This was due to their inability to study the meaning and value system behind Hmar cultural behaviours. This led to undermining of ancient cultural features that resulted in misunderstandings. Surprisingly enough, there seems to have been a tendency among the converts to think that anything that was 'Western' was 'good and civilized'. This attitude resulted in the danger of total rejection of all Hmar culture and a copying of Western culture in the name of Christianity.

With almost cent percent Hmar population being converted to Christianity, the various cultural activities were no longer observed in the Hmar society as they were in the days of yore. In fact, traditional cultural dances, today, have become items in the cultural functions and some such occasions only. Thus, slowly and gradually, the importance of Hmar cultural festivals, other social gatherings and amusement lost their importance and has fallen almost in complete disuse. Today, the Christmas festival although of recent origin among the Hmar people, has gained paramount position over the traditional festivals on performance and observance.

With the increase in literacy rate among the Hmar people with their new expanded world-view, there is an increasing opinion that the Hmar cultural heritage should be revived in a refined way and go along with Christianity without compromising the doctrines in the Bible. Today, even the enlightened Church-leaders see no harm in singing traditional songs and observing the traditional cultural festivals and dances if there is no pagan revelry and obeisance to anything connected to old religion. In fact, there is no harm in cultural activities if they are merely done with the spirit of demonstration and not actual indulgence or adherence to the old religion since co-existence and adjustment bring development either in form or in bringing too (both) or partial change due to assimilation and adaptation in different factors according to the demands of time. In the words of Ruolneikhum Pakhounte, "Christianity does not have to destroy unnecessarily people's culture and traditions.....experience among the Hmar people shows that

Christianity grows faster if it flows along the cultural pattern and tradition of the people" (Pakhuongte, 1983:67).

Chapter 5

RITES AND RITUALS

Marriage

The Hmar community is a patriarchal society and is exclusively endogamous, endogamy being preferred. In the past, if a boy marries a girl of another clan or community detested by his family or siblings all other members of his family would not touch her personal belonging and she must possess separate hair oil, comb, spinning wheel etc, as the sub-tribe is endogamous the first preference was given to the daughter of his maternal uncle (Pu) or any marriageable girl of his mother's clan. Communal pride seems to have played a very important role.



Traditionally, there are "three ways of marriage: *Chawngmolak*, *Sawngpui*, and *Inruk*" (H.V Sunga). Whereas according to Lal Dena (Lal Dena 2010), in a traditional Hmar society, there were four types of marriages: *Sawngpuia Innei*, *Chawngmolak*,

Arasi Hnuoia Innei and Intlun. Under *Intlun* marriage, if the girl succeeds in spending even a single night in the house of the boy, irrespective of having or not having any sexual intercourse, they are considered married. If the boy or his parents refuse to accept her and send her away, they are to pay a *hmaimawok man* (fine for disgracing someone) of Rs 500/-. Like wise, if the boy succeeds in hanging his haversack in the house of the girl, irrespective of having or not having any sexual intercourse, he is considered successful. In case of the boy sacrificing himself to the girl for marriage, he is required to stay in the girl's house at least for two consecutive years. Having completed two years' stay, he can evade payment of bride-price.

Hmar Hnam Dan (2001) mentions six ways of marriage including Christian way of marriage: *Swangpuia Thuoi, Chawngmova Lak, Kohran Dana Innei, Inruk, Tlun* and *Makpa Sungkhum.*

Chawngmolakor Chawngmova Lak is a form of marriage that takes place between a small young boy and a small young girl, before the girl reaches maturity. It is the primitive form of child marriage.

The second form of marriage is *Sawngpuia Innei*, perhaps the most respectable form of marriages. This marriage takes place between a matured young man and a matured young woman. This form of marriage requires a certain set of procedures. First, the groom's parents send *palai*, go-between, which mainly is a group consisted of at least three members.

The go-between is the integral part of the business from the beginning till the final marriage. Even after success full marriage, if any misunderstanding takes place between the husband and the wife, the *palai* becomes the first main consultant.

Payment of bride price is a traditional symbolic significance used for sealing a marriage bond. "The bride-price was often very high, especially for Chiefs daughters" (Lalremsiem 1988,76). It has now been regulated from time to time by the community representative.

On the day of marriage, Hmar women play an important customary role. The new bride is followed by the groom's *far le zuorhai* (the sisters and cousin sisters). "In

some cases, the *zuors* smear the groom's party with murky mud or charcoal as a symbolic sign of their hesitation to part with their *zuorpui* (sister)" (H.V Sunga).

Marriage of the third form is called *Inruk lnnei*, which is elopement. *Inruk lnnei* is less respectable as it evades the elaborate custom of sending *palai* and the different series of marriage negotiations and settlement. But it does not escape payment of bride-price which is paid-off after the marriage. After the bride-price is paid, the girl's parents, according to their convenience, solemnize a send-off ceremony for their daughter. On such send-off ceremony day, an animal, generally a pig is killed where the parents invite all their kinsmen to dine the feast. (Bapui 2007, 48).

Three types of engagement:

Engagement can be initiated in three types: from a boy's side, from a girl's side and, mutual engagement with a proper witness. If the marriage negotiation is initiated by the boy's side, the go-between gives the girl's party *Thiradam* as a token of engagement. If the initiation is to spring from the girl's side, there is a system called *Zawlpuonpha* (Hmar Youth Association 2001, 9). If the girl's mother has a special liking for one of the wooers to be her *makpa* (husband of her daughter), after all other group members have left; she would prepare a *zawlpuon* (spreading sheet of cloth signifying sleeping arrangement, generally on the floor) for him. If the boy agrees to the symbolic proposal, he would sleep on that spread sheet for the night. Irrespective of having or not having any sexual intercourse with the girl during the night, it is considered a sign of his acceptance. He is now engaged to the girl. If the boy later breaches his promise and rejects the girl, he is convicted and fined to pay Rs 500/- as *hmaimawk man*. If a boy and a girl mutually want to get engaged, they can swear so in the presence of their respective parents or any other witnesses. *Hmar Hnam Dan* approves such form of engagement and if any of the parties breaches the engagement later, penalty will be paid by the wrong doer.

Divorce :

In Hmar, divorce system is called *in/he dan*. The bond of matrimony is loose. In the case of a girl seeking a divorce, she simply has to persuade her parents to agree to refund the price they had received. This is called *suminsuo*. "In the case of the boy seeking a divorce, he simply makes *mak man* (divorce fee) payment of Rs 500/-" (Hmar Youth Association 2001, 17) to the girl's parents or kinsmen and takes her to her parents' home with her dowry. If the two had separated by mutual agreement called *Peksachang* and *Inthat The* and wish to re-marry, they can do so without making any bride-price payment. In matters of divorce, the existing Customary Law imposes customary penalty on the wrong doer. The husband does not enjoy monopoly power over the wife. In spite of social disapproval, divorce does take place in the society. Widow re-marriage (*pasal nei nawk*) is sanctioned by the tribe and is prevalent among the people. "But, a widow is not supposed to re-marry until and unless she performs *hringinkir*" (Lallawmkung). *Hringinkir* is a feast prepared by the widow's *Tahai* (brothers) in the presence of reliable witnesses or the dead husband's kinsmen for a public recognition that their sister is going back to her biological parents. This customary practice signifies that she is now fit to re-marry. If before arrangement of such public recognition through a feast she happens to fall in love with a man or if she re-marries, she is considered an adulterous. (Hmar Youth Association 2001, 30)

Birth Rites:

"Seven days following the birth, the new born is *Ser-awp*. *Ser-awp* is a custom of confining the baby within the four walls of a room" (Ngulkhumchawng). This customary observance is entrusted to the child's caretaker- either its lactating mother or its grandmother. During these seven *Ser-awp* days, *Sdwlhna* (a bunch of green twigs) is hung in the two exterior sides of the main door with a stem of *aihrielaidd* across the head of the main door. Informant, Ngulkhumchawng informed that *Aihrie* (a plant of tall grass of ginger family) is traditionally believed to have the power to prevent any kind of harmful germs. Hanging of *sdwlhna* and *aihrie* is an indicator that the family observes *ser-awp* and that no visitors or guests are allowed to enter that house. "On the seventh day, inmates of the family observe *umni inkham* (staying

back from all kinds of works including jhum work) as this day is called *lu inmatni*(the day the two sides of the child's skull get joined)" (Mawia Pudaite). As most infants die before or on the seventh day, a new-born child outliving this day is expected to live. On this day, the child's caretaker would with one hand carry the child and in the other hand, would bring a *thingthubawng* (wood-burnt light; a log .burning at one end) and a *patzamte* (a short thread piece) and go out of the house up to *si/phit* (doorstep connecting the lawn and the house). In the doorstep, she would burn the thread piece in the burning log and say out loud,

"*Naute meisentuol Iran in suo ta ie*" or "*Meisen leh tuollran suok ta ie*",
(Lienchawngtho)

(With a burning log, we have stepped out of the house)

This is a rite that indicates the *ser-awp* period is over.

A community ceremony known as *khawduop* is performed every year for all the children born in the same year. This ceremony is observed to ensure sound health to the babies (Bapui 2007, 58). This ceremony requires little preparation like; hanging of a bamboo piece called *tlek* at the end of a long bamboo which is planted at the centre of the selected spot around which small branches of trees and bamboos are temporarily planted. As the ceremony begins, the young men play *rawsem* (a mouthorgan) and mothers, with their child carried on the back or held in their arms, dance as they sing lullabies, "I lull my babe; I lull my babe for a couple of years" (Thiek, 2013, 299).

Death Rites

The Hmars categorize death into five main groups; *Hlamzui Thi* (death at birth or a baby that dies within a short period after its birth, generally, three months of its birth), *Ramte Thi* (death of infant under one year), *Thi Tha* (natural death),iv) *Miṭha Thi* (death of distinguished people) and *Thi Sie* (unnatural death). *Hlamzui Thi* is visited and condoled only by elderly people of the village who themselves prepare the grave and perform the burial service. The dead body is either wrapped with a

cloth or put inside an earthen pot and is buried beneath the house after naming it. Death of this kind is not mourned by the community. No wake is supposed to be observed. Near relatives and even the mother never shed massive tears mourning. *Ramte Thi* too receives the same kind of light community treatment as *Hlamzui Thi*. A set of death rites is called *thinisakhuo*.

Victims of *Thi Tha* and *Miṭha Thi* receive community treatment in the most natural and befitting manner. Funeral service is rendered by the whole community. The village men and women gather together for consolation at the house of the bereaved family. The *tlanglakte* (young lads) of the village under the guidance of their leader are responsible for carrying logs and bamboos required for the burial of the dead. They also collect one cup of rice from each house of the village for the bereaved family. The *tlangvas* (young unmarried men), under the guidance of *Val Upa* dig the grave. They are responsible for performing all the requisites for decent burial of the dead.

All the unnatural deaths resulting from suicide, beast attack, childbirth and other accidents are called *Thi Sie* also known as *Sar Thi*. 'Such unnatural deaths are abhorrent to the society. *Hmar Hnam Dan* (26) proposes that people who die a *Thi Sies* should not be kept for a single night. Death resulting from beast attack, especially tiger attack, is considered the most serious *Sar Thi*. of all forms of unnatural death, a woman's death due to child-birth complications known as *Raiche-a Thi* is the most feared, especially among the Hmar women folk. (Thiek 2013, 300) .

The Hmars have a traditional custom of glorifying certain dead body: the dead body of *Thangsuo*. *Thangsuo* is a man or a woman who has made an extraordinary achievement during his/her lifetime. And the tribe heavily reveres, honours and respects such persons. Such traditional admiration and full appreciation is shown to them both during and after their life. A *thangsuo* is believed to bypass *mithi khuo* (land of the dead) and directly go to *Pielral* (paradise) where their souls do not get engaged in hard toil any more: whereas, the souls of the

commoners go to *mithi khuo* where they still have to toil hard for survival as on the earth. (J. Batlien 2007, 113)

Chapter 6

FESTIVALS AND FOLK SONGS

Festivals celebrated by the Hmars:

The Hmar celebrate a number of festivals where men and women, young and old, gather together, dance, sing and make merriments. The festivals are mainly two kinds. While some are organised by individual families which is called *Inchawng*, the others are organised and celebrate by the entire community, mainly the village itself. Festival organised by individual family “Chawng” means wealthy. The “*inchawng*” festival is a big feast given by a rich person. It is usually connected with a family worship. It can be organised only by the rich and generous people. The most prominent part of any festival is dancing which is known as Lam. (Thiek 2013, 301)

Festivals organized by individual have different names depending on the occasion commemorated. One of them is called *inchawng* (ceremony of a rich man (can be the chief) feeding his villagers and the villagers showing their gratitude by carrying him on a pall). It is usually connected with family worship.

Sikpui Lam

Sikpui Ruoi or Sikpui Lam is the foremost important among the festivals of the Hmar people. In the past, the festival was called SIKPUI LAM, (SIKPUI DANCE) and was never called SIKPUI RUOI. Some writers have contended that the term ‘Sikpui’ was derived from a term ‘Sik’ meaning ‘Harvesting’ and that the festival was celebrated during the harvest seasons. The festival displays features of both agricultural festival and layoff season celebration. In modern days, it is celebrated on the 5th of Dec. It is observed during the winter season when all the field as well as at home is more or less completed and people have time to be engaged in some merry making and rest from works. Sikpui requires at least a fortnight for the dance which normally takes place in the evening till late at night and sometimes it may continue for a longer period. Therefore, it requires some elaborate preparation. It is a festival making peace and all around prosperity. If there is sickness or serious cases of illness or bereavement in the village during the year, it is postponed for the next year. It is

also celebrated when all the people in the community are having enough food supply the previous year. Thus, it is not possible to dance the Sikpui festival every year, and



Sikpui lung (Sikpui Stone)

people eagerly look forward to the time when they will qualify to dance the Sikpui. When it is proposed to be organised people do their best to be at peace and to avoid all sorts of quarrels within the village communities and the families. It is a festival to mark peace, health, success and abundance in the village, and hence when it is organised, it is done with great pomp and splendour, forgetting all past troubles and sufferings.

Before the festival the young people meet the elders of the village to obtain their permission and to favour their blessings. When this is done, they approached

the song leader called *Zaipu*. On his part, the chief also summons his council of elders and conferred with them. If all parties agrees. Two pairs of young men and women are appointed *Lawmlaisa*. It is their duty to extend invitation to one and all in the village to dance the *Sikpui*. The *Zaipu*, on their part, call together the young men and women and practice singing the songs for the festival. The drums are mended and a ceremony known as *Khuongtuibur* is performed, in which a horn of a bison is tied to the biggest drum and *Zu* is poured over it. This is done to bless the drums for best performances during the festival.

For the venue, a flat land is chosen. In absence of a suitable flat land, a plain area is prepared, cleaned and consecrated. In the middle of the venue, *Hringtlir* is constructed. A large tree is usually planted and around it seats are erected for the song leader, his assistants, the old and the infirm of the village to take their seat.

Dress during festivals

The men and women are dressed in their finest clothes. *Hmar puon* is usually used by the men. Distinguished persons put on distinctive clothes to show their achievements are bravery as well as success in life. They wear the plumes of *Vakul*, a bird of paradise as headdress along with *Tawmlairang* to tell their success in hunting etc. the leader of the dance group will held a long sword upright and will move it sideways as he dances. The men and the women are alternately positioned as they dance.

The women put on *Lung-um* clothes and decorate their arms with *Harban* and *Chaupheng*. They tie their loins with sashes and put on the best ornaments of stringed beads as necklaces, and they put on their best clothes for the dances.

The dancers are alternately placed, the man leading and followed by the woman and so on. The song leaders and the drummers are stationed in the middle and the dancers encircle them while dancing.

The first dance is usually performed by the children of the village and is called *Durte Lam*.

During *Sikpui*, a number of dances are performed and are known by the names of *Thlawran Lam*, *Lamtluong Lam*, *Ketek Lam*, *Anranlai Lam*, *Simsak Lam*, and *Tinna Lam*. All these dances are also performed around the song leader and drummers. All the people join in the singing of the songs. The tempo and repetitions of songs are regulated by the song leaders and the drummers. On the tenth night *Lamlaitan* is performed and new dance forms like *Simsak* and *Palsawp* are introduced. Prior to *Lamlaitan*, these two dances are forbidden to be performed. *Zu* is plentifully provided to the dancers and the two new dances are danced with high spirits.

Dances:

The Hmars have various kinds and forms of dances, the following are some of the prominent dances forms.



Pheiphit Lam: This dance may also be called the Pipe dance because it is performed to the accompaniment of playing of small bamboo flutes (pipes) of different sizes and length to produce different pitches of sound.

Hranglam: This is an ancient victory dance. It is performed in honour of successful warriors and great hunters.



Hranglam

Butu Khuonglam: This is a dance performed as dancers sow the seeds of rice in the *jhums*.



Butu Khuonglam

Fahrel-Tawk-Lam: It may also be called the pestle dance. The performers dance between and across one or more pairs of horizontally positioned pestles which are held by two or more persons at each end. These are continuously raised and lowered twice in a regular rhythm, the pestles being parted and brought together while doing so. The dancers step in and out of the parted pestles to the rhythm of the tempo.



Fahrel-Tawk-Lam (Bamboo Dance)

Vaituksi: This is a war dance and is performed during big festivals. Each of the dancers carries a shield in his left hand and a sword in his right.

Lal Lam or Vai Lam: This is a royal dance accorded to the Chief. It resembles the dances of the people of the plains and hence the name *Vai Lam*.

Feitung Tawl Lam: This is a peculiar dance performed during *Sa-in-ei* as the hunter's dance.

Dar Lam: This is a common dance. It is most elaborate and is performed with orchestral music. It is performed to the accompaniment of a set of gongs of different sizes called *Dar-bu*, *Rawsem* and *Chawngpereng*. *Theihle* is the flute made from Bamboo, *Rawsem* is a reed instrument made with gourd and bamboo tubes, *Chawngpereng* is another bamboo pipe instrument. Dar Lam is usually performed during threshing of rice paddy.

Folk Songs of the Hmars:

The earliest known Folk songs must have begun quite early in their history. The people are in the habit of observing important occasions, festivals and celebration of successes by distinguished persons. In all such festivities, there are dancing and singing of folk songs invariably. One of the earliest folk song is that of *Sikpui Lam* song which bears resemblance with the Biblical account of the crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel as they came up from Egypt on their way to the land of Canaan the circumstances leading to the coincidence is not known, but the folk song spells out in clear terms as follows-

Sikpui inthang kan ur laia
Chang tuipei aw senma hrili kang intan,
Ka ra lawn a, ka leido aw,
Sunah sum ang, zana mei lawn invak e;
An tur a sa, thlu a ruol aw
In phaw siel le in ral feite zuong thow ro
Sun razul a ka leido aw
ka ra lawn a, mei sum ang lawn invak e
Sun ra zul a, ka leido aw,
Laimi sa ang chang tuipeiin lem zova,
A varuol aw la ta che
Suonglung changa tui zuong put kha la ta che.

[As we made preparations for celebration of Sikpui

Dance, the famed red Sea

stopped flowing. When we fought the enemies on foot,

we were led by cloud by

day and fire by night. we were angry and in one accord

take up your shield and

spears. All day long we fought our enemies, led by cloud

and fair. The enemies

have been swallowed by the Red Sea. Take the birds.

Drink the water that issues

forth from the rock].

Folk Songs composed after settling in NE India :

After the Hmars entered modern Mizoram, they settled the Champhai region. There were great kings ruling over large villages. In course of time, enmity occurred in between great and well-known Chiefs leading to the clan wars. The clan wars were said to be perpetrated by two brave young men named Hrangkhup and Thawnglai, and is recalled in a song-

Tiena raw khuo an sieng a, khaw Sinlungah,

Antuk antha um naw ro, kan khuo a nih;

Tiena raw khuo ansieng a, khaw Zielungah

Hrangkhup le Thawnglai in laitha lo siem;

..... laitha tire awnthing lerah

Hlangchawi lo lam, vatin lu bing ang lo khai

[At Singlung village, people were told not to kill each other or make war on others

as they were all of one village. But at Zielung village, Hrangkhup and Thawnglai

made enemies of one another after they observed an owl dancing around a mole

which it had killed and kept on a branch of a tree. And thereby war and head hunting began].

During the period many folk songs were born, and among the well-known are the *PumaZai* and other songs which are popularly sung during different dances.

Some of such folk songs for dances are *Bathu Khuong Lawm, Lam Lam, Lam Changruong, Sikpui Lam, Khiengthar Lam, Zawntui Lam, Mauleng Lam, Liendang Lam, Hrang lam, Dar Lam, Naupang Lam etc.*

Among Hmar there are plenty of modern composition of folk songs, love songs, nature songs and songs pertaining to God. Many inspired poets have composed beautiful verses which are given tunes and sung popularly. That the Hmars are a singing people are shown by the fact that wherever there are social gatherings, songs are sung in groups and by special performers. Be it celebrations or bereavements, the Hmars can sing continuously for hours together to the beating of drums and gongs. The traditional dances have been replaced by swaying walks around and clapping of hands. All festivities and gatherings of the community invariably call for songs to be sung. It may even be said that without singing the Hmar people cannot meet together. Such is their fondness for singing. And it is no wonder how they have come to have such a large number of compositions in their native language. It is only their love for singing which has promoted such a huge collection of folk songs, incantations, and worship and fellowship songs.

Chapter 7

HMAR TRADITIONAL SPORTS

Games and Sport:

There are a number of indigenous games and sports. The most significance are as follows:-

Pawi Inkap (Pawi shooting)

Pawi is a large bean like seed of *Entada-scandens* or *Entada-punsoetha*. This is very interesting game of the girls. There are many different kind of Pawi-inkap. It is played between two teams.

Pawi-Inhnawk

This is another type of Pawi shooting. It is an interesting game of boys and is played between two teams.

Lamving (Peg top)

It is another interesting game of boys. The instrument is made of pawi bean which is perforated at the centre in which a stick is tightly inserted for a handle. It is spinned round through the handle with a string. It is played between two teams. All the players have one Lamving each. The object is to dislodge the spinning Lamving in an attempt to knock out all the Lamving of the opponents.

Ṭau Uo Vava

This is a children's pastime. It is the calling or invocation of the Ṭau spirit. They put some ash at one place and assemble together at another place. They then sing "Ṭau uo va va" with eyes closed. While they sing they believed that the Ṭau spirit will co end left a foot mark on the ash.

Inbuon

Inbuon is one of the interesting indigenous sports of the Hmars. *Inbuon* (wrestling) of two types; *Inher* (turning opposite through a staff); *Insun* (Pushing opposite through a staff); *Inkei* (tug of war) etc. Other interesting games are *vawkpui innawr* (pig fighting) and *Insik* (pushing by the head). This is mithun fighting. From the very early days, they are also familiar with Shot -put Javelin-throw, High jump and long jump, pole-vault etc.

Chapter 8

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

The Hmar language is grouped by the Linguists to be in the Lushai-kuki-Chin family of the tibeto-Burman group of languages. The language has lots of affinity with sister languages like Mizo, Kom, etc. Like all other languages of the family, it must have undergone lots of changes through the centuries of its existence. Even in modern times, it is constantly undergoing changes in pronunciation, intonation and addition of new words in the ever changing environment that it is exposed to.

According to some historian Hmars had written literature and alphabets which was written on skin parchment. But due to the carelessness of the keeper who dried it in the sun, a dog came along and carried the skin away. Another tradition maintains that the skin roll was carried along their route of migration. But while negotiating a big river with strong current, the skin roll and other valuable belongings of the migrating people, was carried away by the river. Yet another tradition added that the skin roll was picked up by the people living in the plain areas and they become literate and they become literate while the Hmars remained illiterate till the early twentieth century.

Oral Literature:

The Hmar language is rich in oral literature, especially folk songs and traditional songs. In fact most of their ancient history is traced from the folk songs and oral literature. The Hmars are fond of singing and dancing. For every occasion, achievement, bereavement, success, failure, worship and puja, they will compose songs and dance to the tune. Tradition says that in the beginning, they do not know what to sing about. Once the Lushai group bagged a wild mithun in hunting, and celebrated the successes in dancing. While the young men and women were holding hands and swaying, enjoying themselves, they sang a very simple song for the whole night-

Heta tangin kha kha a lang a, Khata tangin hei hi a lang...

[That is seen from here, this is seen from there....]

Since then people started to compose and sing to certain tunes. Another simple song that may show their movement while dancing in group is –

Khawnghma pal an er an tih, An er nawk ta nawh an tih etc

[A fencing post made of kh wood is bending out. It is no longer bending out they say]

Likewise, as they look to nature and the world around them, they were filled with awe and people gets inspired to compose songs on the spur of the moment. There was Thuilal, the chief of the Ngente hills; his wife name was Pi Chawngmuok, also known popularly as Pi Hmuoki. She was one of the greatest composers. She composed many songs, and people were so worried that she will compose all the songs possible and the new generations will not have any more song to compose about. So, they decided to bury her alive with a supply of water and food for seven days.

The Hmar are rich in folklores. There are many folk tales which are handed down by words of mouth. As these are not kept in written form, many tales have changed here and there in the smaller and finer details. The Hmars therefore, have a saying that the tales known by even siblings differ. However, though there may be slight differences in details, the story remains. Some of these are linked to their history of migration, and as such they may also be of ancient and recent times. All the same, most of the stories are hundreds of years old and are preserved only by words of mouth.

Script used:

The first ever written form the language is perhaps found in the Linguistic Survey of India, done by G.A. Grierson in 1900. He recorded it as Hmar language. The first publication in the Hmar language came out in 1907. It was the gospel of mark, translated by a Missionary with the help of two local Hmar speakers. By the time the gospel of Jesus Christ came to the Hmar area in Manipur, the Mizo language was the sole written language. But with the advent of Christianity, there was need to have scriptures and hymns in the Hmar language. Subsequently, hymn books, primers and other reading materials came out in Hmar. The alphabet adopted was a-aw-b-ch-d-e-f-ng-h-i-j-k-l-m-n-o-p-r-s-t-ṭ-u-v-z. It has 6 vowel sounds (a=aa; aw=o; e=a; i=ee; o=ou; u=oo) and 19 consonant sounds. There is one peculiar 'tri' represented by ṭ. Two cluster consonants are ch and ng. There are aspirated sounds like hl, hm, hn, kh, ngh, ph, th hr, etc of which some are nasal. Diacritic marks '^' are used for long vowel sounds. In recent years there are suggestions to change some of the sound representing alphabets, but so far no change has been accepted and is not likely to be accepted.

Evolution of literature:

Hmar is a a standard language , many books have been written in the language. The Hmar language has not undergone much change regarding usages and pronunciation over the years. The language has been developed to such an extent that it is now used as a medium of instruction in the Primary Schools both in Assam and Manipur. And in both the states, the language is taught as a subject up to the Degree level under the Assam and Manipur Central Universities.

In the State of Assam, the Hmar language was introduced in Cachar as medium of instruction in the Primary Schools from 1969 vide Govt. Letter No EMI.82/67/199 dated Shillong, the 25th March, 1969. In North Cachar hills it was introduced from the session 1984-85 as permitted by the Autonomous Council. Subsequently, the Board of Secondary Education, Assam, has granted permission for introduction of the Hmar language as a language paper in the HSLC Examinations vide No SEBA/AB/HMAR/2007/01 dated 23.8.2007. The Assam Higher Secondary Council followed suit, and allowed the introduction of the language vide ASHC/ACA/CURR.SYLL/01/96/94 dated 3.1.2008. Consequent upon this, the Assam university, Silchar has allowed introduction of the language as MIL for the TDC classes from the year 2010 vide No AUD-56/2009-10/2004 dated 23.7.2010.

Vocabulary Of Hmar Language:

1. Numerical 1 to 100

SL. No	English	Hmar	SL. No	English	Hmar
1	One	Pakhat	51	Fifty one	Sawmnga Pakaht
2	Two	Pahni	52	Fifty two	Sawmnga Pahni
3	Three	Pathum	53	Fifty three	Sawmnga Pathum
4	Four	Pali	54	Fifty four	Sawmnga Pali
5	Five	Panga	55	Fifty five	Sawmnga Panga

6	Six	Paruk	56	Fifty six	Sawmnga Paruk
7	Seven	Pasari	57	Fifty seven	Sawmnga Pasari
8	Eight	Pariet	58	Fifty eight	Sawmnga Pariet
9	Nine	Pakuo	59	Fifty nine	Sawmnga Pakuo
10	Ten	Sawm	60	Sixty	Sawmruk
11	Eleven	Sawmpakhat	61	Sixty one	Sawmruk Pakhat
12	Twelve	Sawmpahni	62	Sixty two	Sawmruk Pahni
13	Thirteen	Sawmpathum	63	Sixty three	Sawmruk Pathum
14	Fourteen	Sawmpali	64	Sixty four	Sawmruk Pali
15	Fifteen	Sawmpanga	65	Sixty five	Sawmruk Panga
16	Sixteen	Sawmparuk	66	Sixty six	Sawmruk Paruk
17	Seventeen	Sawmpasari	67	Sixty seven	Sawmruk Pasari
18	Eighteen	Sawmpariet	68	Sixty eight	Sawmruk Pariet
19	Nineteen	Swawmpakuo	69	Sixty nine	Sawmruk Pakuo
20	Twenty	Sawmhni	70	Seventy	Sawmsari
21	Twenty one	Sawmhni Pakhat	71	Seventy one	Sawmsari Pakhat
22	Twenty two	Sawmhni Pahni	72	Seventy two	Sawmsari Pahni
23	Twenty three	Sawmhni Pathum	73	Seventy three	Sawmsari Pathum
24	Twenty four	Sawmhni Pali	74	Seventy four	Sawmsari Pali
25	Twenty five	Sawmhni Panga	75	Seventy five	Sawmsari Panga
26	Twenty six	Sawmhni Paruk	76	Seventy six	Sawmsari Paruk
27	Twenty	Sawmhni Pasari	77	Seventy seven	Sawmsari Pasari

	seven				
28	Twenty eight	Sawmhni Pariet	78	Seventy eight	Sawmsari Pariet
29	Twenty nine	Sawmhni Pakuo	79	Seventy nine	Sawmsari Pakuo
30	Thirty	Sawmthum	80	Eighty	Sawmriet
31	Thirty one	Sawmthum Pakhat	81	Eighty one	Sawmriet Pakhat
32	Thirty two	Sawmthum Pahni	82	Eighty two	Sawmriet Pahni
33	Thirty three	Sawmthum Pathum	83	Eighty three	Sawmriet Pathum
34	Thirty four	Sawmthum Pali	84	Eighty four	Sawmriet Pali
35	Thirty five	Sawmthum Panga	85	Eighty five	Sawmriet Panga
36	Thirty six	Sawmthum Paruk	86	Eighty six	Sawmriet Paruk
37	Thirty seven	Sawmthum Pasari	87	Eighty seven	Sawmriet Pasari
38	Thirty eight	Sawmthum Pariet	88	Eighty eight	Sawmriet Pariet
39	Thirty nine	Sawmthum Pakuo	89	Eighty nine	Sawmriet Pakuo
40	Forty	Sawmli	90	Ninety	Sawmkuo
41	Forty one	Sawmli Pakhat	91	Ninety one	Sawmkuo Pakhat
42	Forty two	Sawmli Pahni	92	Ninety two	Sawmkuo Pahni
43	Forty three	Sawmli Pathum	93	Ninety three	Sawmkuo Pathum
44	Forty four	Sawmli Pali	94	Ninety four	Sawmkuo Pali
45	Forty five	Sawmli Panga	95	Ninety five	Sawmkuo Panga
46	Forty six	Sawmli Paruk	96	Ninety six	Sawmkuo Paruk
47	Forty seven	Sawmli Pasari	97	Ninety seven	Sawmkuo

					Pasari
48	Forty eight	Sawmli Pariet	98	Ninety eight	Sawmkuo Pariet
49	Forty nine	Sawmli Pakuo	99	Ninety nine	Sawmkuo Pakuo
50	Fifty	Sawmnga	100	One hundred	Za

2. Alphabet

Vowels

A	aw	e	i	o	u
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Consonants

B	CH	D	F	G	NG
H	J	K	L	M	N
P	R	S	T	Ṭ	V
Z					

3. Days in a week in Hmar Language:

English	Hmar
Sunday	Chawlni/ Pathienni
Monday	Thawṭanni
Tuesday	Thawleni
Wednesday	Nilaini
Thursday	Ningani
Friday	Zirtawpni
Saturday	Inrinni

4. Timing of a day

SL No.	English	In Hmar Language
1	Morning	Zingtieng
2	Afternoon	Chawhning
3	Evening	Zantieng
4	Mid night	Zanṭhang
5	Night	Zan
6	Day	Sun
7	Early Morning	Zing in hma

5. Months in a year in Hmar Language:

English	Hmar
January	Tuolbuol
February	Thlavul
March	Thlatau
April	Thlatun
May	Thlaphur
June	Thlado
July	Thlahmur
August	Thlazing
September	Thlaram
October	Changer
November	Thlaphal
December	Mimtukthla

6. Seasons in Hmar Language:

SL. No.	English	Hmar	Remark
1	Summer	Nipui	June to September(Equinox)
2	Autumn	Favang Hun	September to December
3	Spring	Fur	March to June(Solstice)
4	Winter	Thlasik	December to March

7. Directions in Hmar Language:

Sl No.	English	Hmar
1	East	Saktieng
2	West	Khawthlang
3	North	Hmar
4	South	Simtieng
5	Up	Chung
6	Down	Hnuoi
7	Right	Changtieng
8	Left	Vawitieng

8. Some colours in Hmar Language:

English	Hmar
Violet	Dum Pawl
Indigo	Tingdum
Red	Sen, Rawng sen

Green	Hring, Hna hring rawng
Blue	Apawl, Van rawng
Yellow	Eng, Rawng eng
Orange	Serthlum hmin rawng
Black	Hang, Dum
White	Var, Ngo
Golden	Rangkachak rawng
Silver	Tangka ruo rawng
Pink	Sen dang
Brown	Asen da

9. Kinship in Hmar Language:

SL. No.	English	In Hmar Language
1	Father	Pa
2	Mother	Nu
3	Elder brother	U Pa
4	Younger brother	Sang Pa
5	Elder sister	U Nu
6	Younger sister	Sang Nu
7	Elder brother's wife	U Nu
8	Elder brother's son	Nau Pa
9	Elder brother's daughter	Nau Nu
10	Younger brother's wife	SangNu
11	Elder sister's husband	Upa

12	Younger sister's husband	Tupa
13	Husband	Pasal (Nuhmeinei)
14	Wife	Nuhmei (Pasal Neita)
15	Son	Naupasal
16	Daughter	Nanuhmei
17	Father's father	Pu
18	Father's mother	Pi
19	Father's elder brother	Palien
20	Father's younger brother	Pate
21	Father's elder sister	Ni
22	Father's younger sister's husband	Makpa
23	Father's younger sister	Ni
24	Mother's father	Pu
25	Mother's mother	Pi
26	Mother's elder brother's wife	Pi
27	Mother's younger brother's wife	Pite
28	Mother's elder sister's husband	Palien
29	Son's son	Tupa
30	Son's daughter	Tunu
31	Daughter's son	Tupa
32	Daughter's daughter	Tunu
33	Father-in-law	Tarpu
34	Mother-in-law	Tarpi
35	Son-in-law	Makpa
36	Daughter-in-law	Monu
37	Wife's elder sister	Nulien
38	Wife's younger sister	Nute
39	Husband's father	Tarpu Pa
40	Husband's mother	Tarpi Nu
41	Grand father	Pu

42	Grand mother	Pi
43	Grand son	Atupa
44	Grand daughter	Tunu

Chapter 9

SOCIO ECONOMIC LIFE

Occupation:

The main occupation of the Hmar people is that of Jhum cultivation, which traditionally involves cultivation along the hill slopes after annual clearing of the forest land within their domain. Those who are exempted from the occupation of cultivation are blacksmiths, priests, chiefs and village criers called *Tlangsams*. Each and every household donates rice in exchange of their service to the community. However, Christianity has paved the way for Pastors and Evangelists, completely wiping away the pagan occupation of priesthood. There are a few shopkeepers, who run their business during their spare time after agriculture work . At present, a good number of Hmars are occupied in government jobs.

Nevertheless, modern education and conversion to Christianity has little effect on their method of cultivation. Even today, their method of cultivation is primitive in nature because jhumming is the only possible method at their disposal.



A Hmar woman working in the jhum field

The jhum cultivation begins with selection of land for cultivation, the cultivator selects a tract of land where he would cultivate . The season for clearing the jungle for Jhum begins in the month of January. The cultivator wil clear all trees, bamboos, plants, weeds and shrubs that grow within the area of selection. As the felled greeneries dry out, they are burnt. The land is then ready for sowing as the soil becomes fertile due to the presence of ashes in the form of fertilizers.

The villagers mostly work together in cooperation throughout the cultivation process. Such a social cooperation during the seed sowing process takes the form of a sing-song-work-along activity called *Bu Tu Khuonglam*. One of the cultivators takes the role of the drummer, while others sing along as they sow the seeds.

Thing ka tuk, thingah ka thlak;

Lung ka tuk, lungah ka thlak.

Ka chung khuongruo a sur pha leh

Ama'n khurbi zawng de ni.

(I saw on a wood,if I hit a wood;

I saw on the rock, if I hit a rock.

Let it seek a hole for itself

When the rain falls from a bove.)

A jhum land is cultivable only for a year. As such, a cultivator necessarily goes out in search of another land the following year, and the used land is left tiehind as fallow.

The Hmars also cultivate two types of cotton by clearing the jungle; *Pat-uk* or yellowish brown cotton and *Pat-var* or pure white cotton. *Pat-var* is sometimes died black with *Tingdum*, and the dyeing process is called *Tingdum Thlak*. Every Hmar girl is supposed to have gained the knowledge and skill in spinning, weaving, designing and the whole lot process of making a handloom product. A Hmar girl is expected to have the ability to produce sufficient clothes for a family of five members. The male members, on the other hand are required to supply the tools and instruments for spinning and weaving such as *Patdin*, *Hmui*, *Tliem*, *Khawthei* and *Tinbu*.

Weaving is an important household industry in every Hmar family. Every Hmar women is an expert weaver and most of the domestic requirements for clothes are met from the family looms. They weave attractively and design clothes (PUON). Formerly, they grew cotton from which yams were spun. But, nowadays, in most cases yarns are purchased from the market.

Besides weaving, manufacturing of cane and bamboo goods required for domestic use is also another important cottage industry of the Hmar. Carpentry and black smithy are the two other trades followed by the Hmar. Some Hmar are also engaged in services and business.

The following are some of the agriculture implements mostly used by the Hmars at the agriculture field.



Chemtuthlaw or hlo thlo na



Tuthlaw tak



Hrei



Hakun



Chempai kolrok

Hmar women in domestic activities

The father, being the head of a house, represents the family in all public meetings, directs the family affairs, and provides food for the householders. The mother's chief duty is to raise the children and look after the household. She prepares meals for the entire family, tends the chickens and the domestic animals, fetches water from the village pond and sometimes brings firewood from the jungle. From childhood, a Hmar girl child plays a role that is subordinate to boys. As soon as she is capable of helping her mother at work, she helps

her in carrying water or wood, spinning, weaving and some needle works. Even after marriage, she is expected to engage totally in domestic works like fetching water and wood, pounding grain and looking after children. In villages, daughters at the age of 8/10 already learn the art of cooking from their mothers. By the time they reach marriageable age, they become expert in preparing traditional food items. The Hmar society is a free society where girls and boys have total freedom to work together in jhum-lands and mix together in society. No matter how late she keeps awake at night, she is expected to get up early in the morning. A late rising practice brings disgrace to her fame. It is considered the foremost duty of a woman to get everything ready before sunrise. It is her responsibility to fill up every *theikhuong* (bamboo used as water container) with water and to husk rice by pounding. For the whole day, she spends her time at Jhum- field in weeding the grass along with men. Besides weeding grass, she prepares food for them, collects vegetables from the jhum to take home for the family. In the evening, she walks the weary way home with collected vegetables and foods for pigs along with men's attire and dao smeared with dirt, while men walk back home freely or carrying log of wood or a bundle of bamboos. But despite being purely patriarchal, there are no strict customary laws that govern or control the womenfolk, though virtues like chastity, obedience and laborious personality are revered for women.

The average Hmar house is built on stilts and consists of four parts: *sawngka* (the open porch), *sumphuk* (the enclosed veranda), *in sung* (the main room) and *namthlak* (*namthlak* is the downhill side of the house, raised about one foot above the main floor). The mother, with the accompaniment of other female members of the house, husks paddy in the *sumphuk*. She piles up her collected stack of firewood in one corner of the *sumphuk*. In addition to these, she performs other household activities like making of handicrafts, ginning, spinning and weaving in this enclosed veranda. She has baskets hung in the *sumphuk's* wall in which her fowls lay eggs and hatch. On the downhill side of the wall, she keeps a chicken coop which is supported by wooden posts and connected from the ground by a ladder for the fowls to climb.

Community Field Work:

Community field work are often organized during sowing, weeding and harvesting seasons. This is a way of lending a helping hand to the needy. Huge amount of works can be done on such occasions.

Apart from this, the young men and women form a kind of co-operative group for helping each other. They work by turn on the fields of the participating members.

Another way is to invite a group of people to help out. Such invitations are willingly accepted and the person helped out in his difficulties. In such cases, the host is expected to treat them with a dish of meat in the evening.



A woman weaving traditional shawl

Pottery was one of the major productive work carried out by the Hmar women for the domestic requirements. They produced different kinds of pots required for cooking, storing , making local wine etc.

When a village site was selected, great importance was attached to the availability of *Bepil khur* (potter pit). For iron works, it was the responsible of *Thirsu*, the village blacksmith who was paid for his work usually in terms of rice at the end of the year.



Paiper (Basket for carrying fish)

Hunting :

The Hmars are expert hunters. They hunt using bows and arrows, spears and latter on guns. They hunt animals and birds mainly for supplementing their diet. There are on animal or birds that they may not eat. In other words, they are no restrictions of what to eat, and depends on the person who eats. As such, the Hmars are actively engaged in hunting, fishing and trapping to beg animals and birds. The trade may be considered as one of the food gathering habits of the people. Game animals are mostly hunted by tracking. Almost all male are expert in tracking. By looking at paw prints they can analyse the time that the animal has made the track, the nature and speed of the animal etc. Fish tracks are actively pursued and the animal is stalked carefully and killed with arrow, spear of gun. Sometimes, community hunts are organized in which a big party will surround a certain area of the forest and driving the animals towards a certain area where expert hunters are stationed. An expert hunter who is exceedingly successful in hunting is knows as a *Ramvachal*. Such person is accompanied by younger person with a view to learn the hunting techniques and as helpers in case of hunting ferocious animals. The person who touches the animal first after its death is called

Sake mantu, and is rewarded with a limb of the animals. A hunter who has bagged ferocious animals like tiger, bear, elephant and other dangerous rogue animals are called *Pasaltha*. In all cases of successful hunting, the Chief is entitled to one forelimb of the animal. The neck is cut off and given to the maternal uncle of the hunter. The front rib cage is for the sister of the hunter. The fleshes lining the inner vertebral column are meant for kinsman and clansmen. The meat is cut in small lumps and distributed to the families of the village. This is called *Sa-Khaw-thek*. The rest of the meat is cooked and eaten in a community feast by the villagers. One of the hind limb is the share of the hunter. If the animal has been killed with a gun belonging to some other, one for limb is given to the owner of the gun as reward

When a hunter has been successful, he will announce his success with the singing or chanting of *Hlado* which are songs of triumph and heroic deeds. From the songs, whoever is at hearing distance, will know the species of animals bagged in hunting. *Hlado* is also sung by other hunters and elderly persons when the hunting party arrived at the village. This is perhaps reminiscence of their own past days when they had bagged animals in hunting. Some of these victory songs are reproduced below-

Chunnu'n ie a tir che maw uai hnianga,

Riah ram va tuan chu ie;

Kei chu ei, dung dawnah khan lengin

Hranghlei mi hmuak u law,

[Mother sent me and I ventured into the forest, I want there and Met with success. So, welcome me as a brave hunter].

Zuksiel ie, aki thom riet

Thangkim rul bang avialna maw;

Chhaitu ie, chung muvanlai

Thangvanah hramin a leng na maw.

[I have bagged a sambar deer whose antler has eight forks and twisted like a snake. The eagle spreads its wings in the sky and called aloud when it happened.]

Vawmkhuoi ie, huk dur dur lai

Tlanga sawlthing a thiek agai ie;

Vala'n ie, ka that nin ie, ka khuo ie

Sawilung herna che maw.

[A huge bear was on a tree, making much commotion and breaking branches, I have killed it, Let all my village people consider this, and change their opinion about me].

Vala'n ie lunggphang lo ten

Lentupui hlim ka rawn fang ie;

Nghovar ie, tu vul lo ie, hahta ie,

Kallai ka lo thlo ie.

[Unafraid I went up and down the dark forest, I stopped a wild Boar having big white tusks, not fed by anyone, I his step].

Similarly, there are Hlado for different kinds of animals like elephant, tiger, antelope, barking deer etc. the victory songs are sung mainly to announce success, to challenge others, to intimidate foes, and to take pride and express their sense of arrogance to others in the village community. Most of the songs are originated from the chin group of people who are known to be more ferocious than the other group of tribes. The language is still preserved in the form of these victory songs. Even for bringing home the head of a foe or a human whom he had slain in head-hunting trip, there are victory songs. A hlado for human head is-

Arsie ie, thlapa chawllaw, ranvawn arkhuon iue,

Zanthim ie, zing hman se law, lei chu ie,

Rimnampa ka tlun ie.

[It was early dawn, the moon was dark and only stars were visible,

It was cock's crows, very dark, people may be afraid, but I have returned

With the head of the smelling one (enemy).]



Selei or Meipum



Fei



Fei (especially used for killing elephant)



Pheikei (Bow)



Changkol

Traps

Trap setting is another useful way of bagging wild animals. There are different types of traps suited for different animals and birds. There are traps for smaller larger animals, different kinds of birds and other denizens of the forest. It may not be possible to describe the traps and detail, but the Hmars are expert in ingenious inseting traps for all kinds of animals and birds. For larger and even ferocious animals like tiger, bear, etc the traps are *bil*, *kar phel*, *phelpui*, *kharkhup*, *vawmtlak*, *kawlpui* etc. For smaller game animals' *zawngtlak*, *changkawl*, *ringawk*, *sakhi chang*, *sazuk*, *chang*, *mankhawng*, ect are set. For small animals like squirrels, rats etc, the traps are *mazu chang*, *changkawl*, *ring-awk*, *kharkhup* etc. For birds' *be-ai*, *belawng*, *vaichang*, *vatechang*, *lanchang*, *thangthleng*, etc are set. Some of these are set on the ground, while others are set on fruit trees frequented by the birds.

Fishing:

Fishing is done by *len deng* (throwing nets), *ngakuoi* (angline), *ngawi daw* and *rusuk*. The Hmar nets are fashioned to open in circles and weights are fitted at close intervals at the hem. The centre has a place for joining it with a rope. The fisherman ties the end of the rope to his wrist and arranged the net in his two hands so as to open in circle when it is thrown. As the net is pulled in, the pocket-like fold provide at the hem caught the fish. *Ngawi* is constructed by damming the river and allowing the water to escape through some small openings, while the dam will be leading the fish towards the bank where they are caught. *Rusuk* is mild poisoning just to stun the fish and to catch those which have been stunned. The Hmar people mostly use barks of creepers like *Hmangrawl* (acacia pinata?) *ruchaw* (acacia oxyphylla or milltia pachycarpa), and *Ruteng* (gardenia companuleta), and barks of big trees like *kamatek* (albizzia procera, alizzia stipulate) etc. They are crushed and mixed with the river water. As the river flows carrying the mild poison, the fish of the river are stunned and some panic and float at the surface. These are easily caught. Excessive use of the poison is not encouraged as it may adversely affect the health, and also it may lead to killing of other denizens of the river. The most successful way is the setting up to of *Ngawi* which require the participation of the entire village community. And it is erected in big rivers. In smaller rivers, a similar method or a lesser dam is also made, draining the river on a side and putting up a bamboo basket to collect the fish following with the current.



Bom(Fishing trap)

The fish cough are smoked and preserved. Sometime some of the fish are cleaned and roasted and putrefied to be used as seasoning for cooking at later times. The Hmars has a habit of eating some small species of moss eating fish whole after boiling with some leaves like that of pumpkin vines.



Suohaw

Plants used for fish poisoning

"Asen-Kamatrak" (Hmar), a tall, subdeciduous tree, up to 25 m Commonly found in jungles and also found alongwith roadsides is used to catch fish . The bark of the tree is dried and grinded into powder is used as fish poison to catch fish easily.

Chapter 10

POLITICAL LIFE AND TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION

Political Life:

The present political structure of in a Hmar society is a mixture of traditional and modern elements. They are governed by Two tyre political system – Autonomous councils and State Government in addition to their traditional administrative set up headed by a Gaonburha. In some areas a government appointed Gaonbura is made responsible for reporting all important happenings in the village. He, however is not allowed to decide any local disputes.

The Hmar have age-old systematic social institution which is still respected and maintaining among the tribes. Such traditions are still respected and some major elements are still practised. Form instance, after the country has attained independence, the system of administration has changed. But in Hmar village, the institution of Gaonbura as the successor of the office of the Lal is still considered hereditary in many village. Also in village administration and function, much of the old practices are still followed. Some prominent traditions may be studied briefly as follows.

The Village Administration:

All Hmar villages have a system of administration in place. Among the Hmars, each village is an independent state ruled by its own *lal* or chief. The Chief of *Lal* is at the head of administration. All that is within the village bounds belongs to the village chief. He enjoys the rightful authority to call upon the people to furnish him with everything he needs. In practice, however, he administers the village on the advice of the elders of the village council.

The following officials work to discharge different functions under him and are appointed by him.

Pachawng, Siehmang, Upa or Khawnbawl :- There are three or more Hmar elders to help the Chief to carry out his administration over the village. This group of Elders are known by different names in different places. However their function and privileges are the same. They are advisers to the Chief, decision makers in disputes and criminals cases, and representatives of the people. A wise Chief usually selects his council members from among

different clans dwelling in the village. They are selected according to their talents, merits and wisdom. As such, they represent all the clans within the village. Criminal justice is dispensed with the help of the Elders, and they are entitled to share the *Salam* exacted as fines on offenders. They are allotted the best plots for cultivation after the Chief has selected his own site of cultivation. They are exempted from payment of the annual levy of grain to the Chief. They are respected and their wisdom and wise counsel is instrument in the overall progress and prosperity of the village. A village which has a wise and considerate Chief assisted by able Councillors thrive well and are the envy of others. Peace and good will reign and people are encouraged to pursue paths of development. The villagers are free to speak to them of their concern or any proposal that they may have concerning the village.

Tlangva:-He is the village crier, which means he makes known every wish and decisions of the Chief or his Council to the village by proclaiming through oral pronouncements. He usually goes from the top of the village to the bottom, all the while shouting and announcing, conveying the decision of the Chief and his council. He is at the beck and call the chief. He prepares the animal fines imposed on offenders for the Chief and his Council.

Thirsu (Blacksmith):- In every village, there is a village blacksmith. He is responsible for the making and repairing of all the agricultural tools and implements of the villagers. He is entitled to a small basketful of rice paddy from each family in the village. He is also helped during the weeding season, when he is kept busy at the village smithy.

Val Upa (Youth Leaders):- The Chief and his Council of Elders appoint the Val Upas from among the able-bodied and having quality of good leadership. They are the ones who are responsible for maintaining good character and courtesy in the village. They teach and inspired the young people to be hard working, to be selfless and to be helpful to the aged, the widow and the needy. The young people are responsible for the disposal of the dead, for making and maintaining cleanliness in the paths and in the village vicinity. They are the ones who practices *tlawmngaina* and inspires others to cultivate that the trait of mindset which results in the wilful performance of hard works within and outside the village.

Thiempu:- He is the village Priest, and occupy a position of respect in the village. Even the Chief may consulted him for his advice sometimes. He is also the village doctor in the sense that all illness is referred to him for cure. He offers puja on behalf of the villagers divines the causes of illness and prescribed the appropriate puja offering. The office of

Thiempu is not appointed, but heredity. This is because of the fact that the priest has to teach his son or any near relation to be priest after him.

Zawlbuk / Buonzawl:

This is an institution which certainly deserves mention in any village administration. It is the bachelor's dormitory, a large house where all young men who have attained puberty are expected to spend the time at night. This is also known as Buonzawl. Even the pre teen are recruited to provide firewood for the Buonzawl. This is the first school for learning every skill and knowledge from the art of wooing a girl to marital skills and skill of hunting ferocious animals. The older members impart practical skills in bamboo works, wood works, cane works, metal works and in preparation of traps and hunting materials. This is a place for the younger member to learn discipline respect to one older in age and to enjoy wrestling bouts. Often the travellers and guests are engaged in friendly wrestling bouts in the Buonzawl, and that is how the place acquired its name (buon=wrestle, zawl=arena). There is also an advantage when the young men of the village are in one place. In the event of a ferocious animal coming for the cattle's or pig in the village, or in the event of an incursion by enemies, or in the event of natural and man-made calamities, accidents and incidents requiring immediate gathering and action, the young people, being housed in one place, could take immediate measures required under the leadership of Val Upas.

Functions of zawlbuk

As a training centre

Mr H.L Malsawma said "*Zawlbuk* was the training centre for the young boys. Young men and *Val Upa* trained them in the art of hunting, wrestling and obedience to elders and the acts of courage". He also said that the boys acquired the art of singing and dancing from *Zawlbuk*. The young men were trained for war also (Sociology of the Mizo, Pg 60).

Zawlbuk was the training centre for the inculcation of discipline. It was here that the spirits of *Tlawmngaina* was inculcated and developed in the young mind.

As information Centre

Current affairs and happenings are intimated to the leaders of *Zawlbuk* and the village elders would give necessary guidance and instructions. Errands were received and sent out through *Zawlbuk*.

As a centre of learning

Customary laws, Social Discipline, Morals Laws, Social Practices and Usages were taught here by village Authorities or Elders who were-versed in these matters.

Zawlbuk as a watch-tower

The inmates of Zawlbuk should be readily available at times of any eventuality. They were the Sentinels of the village. They should be readily available at times of natural calamities like cyclonic storms, earthquake, wild fire, or when a sick person or dead body is to be carried to another village or when a wild beast attacks domestic animals or when someone met with accident.

They were responsible for helping the sick, the needy, the bereaved and for digging graves.

Chapter 11

ETHNO MEDICINE

Ethno medicine is a study or comparison of the traditional medicine practiced by various ethnic groups, and especially by indigenous peoples. The word *ethno medicine* is sometimes used as a synonym for *traditional medicine*. Like any other tribes the, various plants used as ethno medicines and the procedure of preparation is transmitted through oral tradition. Hmars are totally dependent on plants for their survival. These traditional people has recognized and used several species of plants for their food, fibres, shelter, medicine etc.

Medicinal plants used by the Hmars :

The following are some of the medicinal plants used by the Hmar in different context according to their utilities and function. Ethno medicinal plants with their name of family, vernacular name and utilization in ethno medicine are given below-

"Thiengdawlung" (*Abutilon bidentatum Hochs*) is a herbs or undershrubs more or less covered with down. It is ommon, along forest margins and roadside. In case of ear ailment the bark of the plant is crushed and applied the juice of the bark in the ear to secrete pus.



"Hlorimsle" (*Ageratum conyzoides*) is herb found abundantly in road sides and waste places. Paste of the leaves is applied externally on the place of cuts, insect bite and also applied on itching place.



"Chawngpereng" (*Alstonia scholaris*) is a evergreen tree . , 15-20 m tall, with grayish bark. Latex of its stem is locally applied over the disease part of the skin. Leaf juice is taken in syringe and applied inside the body against snake bite to inactive poison.



"Tar-hna" (*Ambrosia artemisiaefolia*) is a small shrub, up to 2 m cultivated in house complex and also found in jungles. Leaf juice is applied over forehead to get relief from headache



"Sitaphol" (*Annona squamosa*) is a small tree or large shrub. Its leaves are crushed with water in the mortar and made paste. It is applied on boils and wounds for 4-5 days.







"Pelteka" (*Ardisia crispa*) is a large shrubs or small tree. Some leaves boiled in one bucket of water and is taken bath in case of measles and itching also.



"Zonpui" (*Bauhinia acuminata*), grows along the edges of secondary forest and also under cultivation.

One teaspoonful juice extract from leaves mixed with water is given orally in early morning daily to cure asthma.



<p>"Marui" (<i>Calamintha gracilis</i> Ber) is herbs, annual or perennial. Leaves are boiled in water for 10 minutes and then, juice is taken orally once a day for 3-4 days to cure gas problem.</p>	
<p>"Akanhna" (<i>Calotropis procera</i>) is a shrub. Latex of the stem is applied on abscess (a localized collection of pus in the tissues of the body, often accompanied by swelling and inflammation and frequently caused by bacteria.) and it is used till the ailment is cured.</p>	
<p>"Thingpui" (<i>Camellia sinensis</i>), is a large Shrubs or small trees, usually cultivated and sometimes found in wild. Leaves made into paste and it is applied over the burning place .</p>	
<p>"Dadu" (<i>Cassia alata</i>), Shrubs erect, branching usually at the base, downy. Leaves Paste of the leaves is applied daily on body for relief from itching problem.</p>	

"Kokchahmpchai" (*Chenopodium album*), An annual ascending herb. Common, in moist and shady places.

Leaves are cooked and it is eaten as a remedy for stomach problems it is cured.



"Samtawkte" (*Solanum torvum*Sol) is a shrubs erect, upto 4 m high. Grows abundantly on waste place and Jhuming areas. Fruits of the plant are crushed and paste is applied locally on abscess.



"Thiobuong" (*Chmmolaena odorata*) is a shrubs grows wild on waste and barren places, and road sides.

Paste made from pounded fresh leaves with water and applied locally on cutting spot to stop the bleeding.



"Anphui" (*Clerodendrum glandulosum*) is a shrubs grows as wild along the edges of forest and cultivated in their village complex and jhum areas. Juice extracted from leaves after heating is used against high blood pressure. Fresh juice is given twice a day till the pressure is normal.



"Hnathap" (*Croton caudatus* Geiseler) is a small herb grows wild on forest floor and abandoned Jhum land. Its leaves are pounded in the mortar and leaf juice is taken. It is very effective for cancer. It is also useful for piles and sinus.



"Hlangkawm" (*Dioscorea bulbifera*) is a climber grows wild, climbing on woody trees. The ash obtained by burning of tender leaves mixed with water is taken orally once a day for one week to cure goitre problem.



"Ram-Lakuithei" (*Ophiopogon wallichinus*) is scapigerous herb. It grows occasionally, in shady and moist places. Prickle of the leaves is used when the boil has suppured.



"Hnathlum" (*Elaeagnus latifolia*) is a herb found cultivated condition in different parts of NC hills. Some leaves are cooked with slight salt and it is taken twice daily for 3-4 days as a remedy for diarrhoea.



"Vaakhrui" (*Thunbergia grandiflora*) is a climber grows wild in forest area . Juice obtained from its nob is applied locally on eyes for conjunctivities.



"Intoparvar" (*Erythrina arborescens* Roxb) is a tree used by the Hmar people when they assume that the patient is attacked by some evil spirits. They prepare garland with the leaves of this plant or they keep some leaves in their hands to protect from evil spirits.



"Sizo" (*Eurya acuminata*) is a large shrubs or trees about 5 to 12 m tall commonly found in jungle. Its leaves are cooked with chicken and it is taken for 4-5 days to cure stomach troubles.



"Phaiphinhna" (*Evolvulus nummularius*) is a herbs common, in muddy places and water bodies. Its leaves are crushed with little drops of water In the mortar and made paste. It is applied locally around fresh cuts and wounds to reduce pain and also for antiseptic action.



"Sohle-kung" (*Ficus hispida*) is a medium sized tree .A Paste prepared from tender stem and leaves is boiled in water and taken for gargle to cure toothache problem. Boiled stem and leaf juice is also applied externally on cuts and abscess.



"Ram-Aithing" (*Zingiber cassumunar Roxb*) is a herbs found common in wild condition.

Jjuice extract from rhizome is taken orally twice daily to get relief from cough.



Plants used for Animal

"Thaete" (*Symplocos cochinchinensis*) is a dense tree found in jungle areas. Paste of the leaves of the tree is applied in the body of animals when they are attacked by small insects.

"Antram" in Hmar (*Brassica campestris*) is a herb cultivated mainly in plain areas. Its seeds are crushed with water in a mortar and it is applied once a day for 2-3 days on wounds in the body of animals.

"Parte" (*Butea monospeima*) is a moderate sized tree found mainly in downhill area. Its root is grinded to paste with water and it is applied on wounds in the body of animals.

"Naganja" (*Cannabis sativa*) it is a aromatic herb found along the roadside. Juice of the leaves is given to animals orally daily in the morning for a short period to remove weakness.

"Intuo" (*Erythrina stricta* Roxb). Common, in the hilly forest and occasionally in the plain areas also. Juice of its leaf is applied once a day in the body of animals for one week to get relief from small worm.

"Mutmaleng" (*Jatropha curcas*), is a common shrubs

Latex of the stem of the tree is applied locally for few days on wounds of animals.

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Showing basic information of the Hmar villages where survey has been conducted of NC Hills district

Sl. No	Name of the Villages	Name of the Developmental Block	Name of police station	Name of the Subdivision
1	Muolhoi	ITDP, Harangajao Block	Haflong	Haflong
2	Huonveng	ITDP, Harangajao Block	Haflong	Haflong
3	Saron	Jatinga Valley Development Block	Mahur	Haflong
4	Mahur Garden	Jatinga Valley Development Block	Mahur	Haflong
5	New Zoar	Jatinga Valley Development Block	Mahur	Haflong
6	Hebron	Jatinga Valley Development Block	Mahur	Haflong
7	Tuolpui	Jatinga Valley Development Block	Mahur	Haflong
8	Retzawl	SHC Jatinga	Haflong	Haflong
9	Hmunthazao	Harangazao	Harangazao	Haflong
10	Mahur Kanan	Jatinga Valley Development Block	Mahur	Mahur

PHOTOGRAPHS

Hmar Life and culture



Traditional Hmar house



Hmar Village



Inside of a Hmar Kitchen



Church in a Hmar Village

The Hmar People



An Elderly Hmar couple



An old man in a Hmar village



Leisure time for the children Children playing

Agriculture activities



Hmar woman carrying firewood from forest



Hmar women working in jhum field-Jatinga

Economic activities of the Hmar

A Hmar women selling different varieties of local vegetables in the Mahur market





A woman weaving a traditional shawl

Cultural activities



Gathering for a Dance



Playing Music



The group leader



Preparing for Butukhuong lam



During our field survey with the villagers in Tuolpui