

THE LUSHAI IN TRIPURA; A CASE STUDY

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The term “ Lushai “ in the correct transliteration of the term ‘Lusei’ who were the dominant tribes in the present Mizoram when the British intervened into the then Lushai Hills. To the outsider, the term Lushia in Tripura is almost synonymous with the dweller of the Jampui Hills in the eastern boundary of Tripura. The History of the Lushai in Tripura covers atleast a span of two centuries. However, As much as their Lushai brethren in other parts of India. The Lushai of Tripura have been experiencing changes and facing influences both from internal and external factors in their own context. Major migration of the Lushai from Mizoram had taken place atleast four times ,but when did the first two phase of migration took place were still not ascertained till date. How ever the third and fourth migration took place in about 1900 and 1910 under the leadership of two Sailo Chiefs, Rajabahadur Dokhuma Sailo and Raja Hrangvunga Sailo respectively. Linguistically, the Lushai belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and Racially, They belong to the Mongoloid racial stock. In Tripura they are 5,384 person (as per 2011 census). Their Culture is akin to the Mizos. Lushia mostly reside in Jampui Hills area of Tripura. They are an integral part of Tripuras Culture landscape, Particularly in the Jmapui Hills area of North Tripura District. They are also known as Mizo and belong to the Kuki – Chin group of tribes.

The Lushai were the last of the Mizo tribes to migrate to India specifically to the Lushia Hills.. the Lushai peole have a rich Culture heritage with their own distinct language, Customs and tradition, They are known for their expertise in Jhum Cultivation, hunting and orange Prodiuction. The Lushia language also known as Mizo, is a Tibeto-Burman language. It has a unique script based on the Roman alphabet, developed. The Lushai people have a relatively high literacy rate compared to other tribes in Tripura. Many Lushai individuals are employed in government jobsand other economic Status.The Lushai People in Tripura are a smaller community compared to other staes like Mizoram and Manipur.

Tripura is a historic place of Tribal of Kingdom since 14th Century keeping in view of tribal dominated state. All together 19 Tribal Communities settled in all district of Tripura. The Lushais in Tripura mainly focus on the Social well being and healthy environment among themselves.

Social Institution of the Lushais

The traditional social institutions of the Lushai centred aroynd the Village. Everything that they did to organize themselves in society was in the context of the village. Here, we shall look into some of the more prominent social institution of the Lushai.

Family; Family was the backbone of the society for the Lushia. The family was patriarchal and the rule of descent wasstrictly based on the male line.The youngest son was the proper heir in the family,but other male children also had a share I the family property. Women were not given any claim in the family property except for a small share at the time of marriage which they took as a form of dowry.

Zawlbuk; Zawlbuk , the “bachelor dormitory” was a place of discipline and learning for every bachelor in the Village. The origin of Zawlbuk is not known but may be traced back to China. Such kind of practice was also found among the tribes in south East Asia, south China and also among the Nagas. All the bachelors in the Community and soliditary among the bachelors. Whenever there was danger, they would act swiftly and in unity Zawlbuk was also a Place of education for the bachelors and Children(boys) where they were taught various teachings, manners and etiquettes. It was also a recreational centre for the unmarried and married men. Moreover, it also served as an inn for male visitors from other villages. Today, as Zawlbuk is no more prevalent, we may say that Young Mizo Association (YMA) is taking the role of safeguarding the culture and organizing the young men and women accordingly. Lushai in Tripura are under the YMA imbrella with their own group Called Tripura group Young Mizo Association which under the General Headquarters in Aizawl. There are around 21 branches under Tripura Group YMA.

Bawih; “Bawihship or Slavery” was another prominent social institution in the society. A person who surrendered himself/ herself to the Chief for any reason automatically became that chief’s bawih”. Three catagories of “bawih” may be identified- “Inpuichhung bawih”, when a person took refuge in the chiefs house due to proverty, “Chemsen bawih”, when a person, after committing a crime, took refuge in the chief’s house to escape revenge; and “tukluh bawih”, when a person from the enemy’s party in a war or fued surrendered himself to the chief. According to Zairemthanga, Raja Hrangvunga was the first among the Lushai Chiefs to free slaves. He started to free his slaves in 1908 and in the year 1909 he freed all his 120 slaves.

Marriage; Marriage was an important institution , noy only for the marrying boy and girl, but also for the beginning of a new network of relationships between the two families. Through the bride –price received, the bride’s family strengthened their relationship with members of their own clan. Members of the ruling class rarely married was outwardly condemned and considered a social crime. Adultery was a social taboo punishable by death in the traditional society.

Economic Condition ; Most of the tribes of Tripura had been practicing Jhoom cultivation in the past. As the population was less and land was abundant., it did not create much difficulty. However the kings of Tripura since mediaval period encouraged the Bengali speaking population to settle down in Tripura for different reasons;one important reason for the king to encourage the migration of the Bengalis was to increase the revenue. The Tribals practicing Jhoom cultivation were constantly on move from place to place. It is difficult to tax shifting population, similarly in Jhoom Cultivation, there was hardly any Surplus, which canbe taxed. It was easier to keep record of the people and land undewr cultivation is also more , part of which can be collected on the form of tax. Insurgency is the main problem in all districts in Tripura for economic settlement of Tribal youths. Tribal youth are innocent, simple and hard workers. They are susceptible to sentiment. At present, evil forces are very active to mislead the cfeative potentialities of Tribal youth towards destructive insurgency. As it was mentioned Economically, The Lushai in Tripura were living from hand to mouth. Jhum Cultivation was their source of living, As time pass by People started getting education from the Government School introduced in the Villages and became educated, there are now many families who are identified as “Kamding”(Govt Employee) that makes the economic condition easier and better among the Lushai tribes in Tripura.

It all started when Raja Hrangvunga experimented of growing orange, Jackfruit and Mango in his Garden in 1917.Others followed suit and within a few decades Jampui Hill was full of orange gardens. In 1954 under the leadership of Mr Lalngova they established Jampui Orange Grower Co-operative Society till Today this Society exist and name it “The Jampui Farmer Associoation” who take all the responsible role concerning the agriculture and plantation system.Many government invets their money making Orange Garden, Coffee and Tea Cultivation and also Eracanut Cultivation.

Education; The Development of Human Resource has been recognized as one of the strategies of economic growth of the country. Youth of today are the citizens of tomorrow. So the future of the country is determined to a large extend by what the youth learn in their formative years. Education more particularly is a major aspect that effect socio-economic development of a country at its grass root level.

Among the Lushai Systematic education is first introduced by the first Christian, In 1917 the Thado-Kuki Pioneer Mission started School in four villages at Jmapui Hill where the Lushais of Tripura lived in, The four villages are Behliangchhip, Tlangsang, Phuldungsei and Leithum.In 1922, Middle English School was started by the Christian Mission under the leadership of Nghakluaia, one of the students from this school, Khawtinkhuma, later on became the firstperson to get MA degree among all the Mizo people. Today, three School run by Church Mission in Jampui hill namely ; St Thomas English Medium School run by Jampui Sakhon Baptist Association in Vanghmun, Blue Mount English Medium Scholl run by Salvation Army in Behliangchhip and Sevent Day Adventist Training academy run by Seventh Day AdventisT Church in Tlangsang continue to be the schools most sought after.Many student Studying in these Schools have become important and responsible citizens in and outside the state. As already mentioned, education began with the advent of Christianity. However, Christianity isnot the sole factor for the education of the Lushai in Tripura. The government of Tripura gave them a Middle English School in 1946 where student couls study upto 7th standard. This was upgraded to Junior School in 1957 and to High School in 1968. The School has had attracted many students from the adjoining Mizoram state. Today this School has been gain upgraded into a Higher Secondary School, Apart from this, The government has established another Higher Secondary School in Sabual, Tlangsang , Hmunpui and Hmawngchuan and Vanghmun. The remaining four Villages were given Junior Basic School with good facilities.. These Government Schools along with the Church-run schools plays an important role and they were the backbone of the education for the Lushai in Tripura. However , some well-to-do parents also send their children to other places in the state and outside the state and even abroad seeking for better quality of education. Lushai student from Tripura after completion of class ten mainly continue their higher studies to Shillong, Aizawl, Agaratla and Guahati. Majority student opt for Arts streams while only handful of them are eligible to go for Science stream, this is because of the absence of good science teachers in their schools and the absence of facilities like Science laboratory greatly which effect the career of many students.The problem could be solved with the negotiation between the government school authorities, guardians and representatives of the people.

Conclusion

The history of Lushai in Tripura covered a time span of atleast two to three centuriues. However , due to lack of written records, it is difficult to ascertain names, places and dates. After moving back and forth in different parts of Tripura, They have permanently settled in Jmapui Hills for the last 100 years or so, As they are geographically separated from Tripura mainland, Their culture has not been much assimilated like other tribes, Because of Christianity and early introduction to education, they remain by far the most developed and educated people amang thr tribal tribes in Tripura. As of now the Hill(Jampui Hill) is one of the most attractive hills for the Tourist traveling in Tripura, it beutification , healthy environment and cleanliness attracts people from and outside the state. The people living there maintain peace and friendliness, and helping each other in terms of need. The government of Tripura also promotes in Tourism , it introduce Paragliding, private homestay and parks within the local area.

NOTES & REFERENCES

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4. With much hesitation I use the term 'Slavery' here. The practice of 'bawi' among the Lushais is not similar to the practice of slavery on other part of the world. According to T.H.Lewin as quoted by Dr Sangkima 'bawi. Is a term in their (Mizo) dialect which betokens of person who had lost the right of individual freedom of action, but in all other respects the word 'slave' would be inapplicable.
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8. According to zaihmingthanga, Tlawmngaihna is a voluntary self-sacrificial act based upon the Christian principle of loving another, ' Jesus the light of the World' in contextual Theological Education, ed by James Massey (ISPCK; DELHI, 1993), However , Tlawmngaina had been already found in Mizo Society long before the advent of Christianity.