

*Culture and folklore of*  
**MIZORAM**

B. LALTHANGLIANA



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**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA**

of the gun as payment for the use of the gun. That is why, though the animal killed in a chase had four legs, only two or three persons could receive the 'Sa bawp man' as a due.

- No. 1 - Portion of the man who shot the animal.
- No. 2 - *Sachhiah*, given to the chief as tax or tribute.
- No. 3 - Payment for use of borrowed gun or 'Sa bawp man.'
- No. 4 - Both the hind legs are 'Sa bawp man.'

### Washing and Cleaning the Entrails

When they hunted in a group and an animal was shot and killed, the man who shot the animal selected and assigned some old, aged and elderly persons in the group to wash, rinse and clean the belly, bowels, guts, innards, viscera and intestines of the dead animal. The number of persons chosen for the task generally depended on the size of the animal killed in the hunt.

The Mizo measurement of an animal was the 'sum.' One 'sum' equals one fists of a man. The girt of the chest of such animals as the pig, tiger and bear etc. are measured in this way. When measuring the girt of an elephant's chest, two thumbs' length is added to the ordinary 'sum.'

If the animal killed was four sums (four fists), four elderly persons were picked and singled out to wash and clean the entrails. For an animal of five sums (pronounced – sumz), five were assigned. The four or five persons who washed and cleaned the entrails, divided the viscera equally among themselves. They prepared and set apart an extra share of the entrails which was given to the man who shot the animal.

First of all, the Blacksmith's rib meat (*Thirdeng sa nak*) was set aside to be given to the blacksmith as a due by those who were successful in a hunt or in trapping animals (See chapter 2, regarding 'Thirdeng'). Next, the ears and its adjacent parts were set aside. According to Mizo custom, the one who shot the

animal gives an ear and its adjacent parts to someone as a mark of lifelong friendship. The rest of the carcass was cut and divided among all those who took part in the chase.

The elderly ones in the group divided the meat into shares or portions. They would all take a stick each and sharpen one end to a point. Each of them spread a large leaf on the ground and drove the pointed end of their sticks in the ground till they were embedded in the ground near each leaf. First of all, the choice meat was divided, next the not so good meat was divided, and last of all, the bones and the hide were cut into pieces and divided equally. They would skewer their pieces of meat on the pointed rod or stick. The man who shot the animal and those who had got the shoulder or hind leg and also those who washed and cleaned the entrails were included and entitled to receive a share of the 'vantlang sa.'

The words 'animal killed in a hunt' included and applied to those on which a due, tax or tribute (sachhiah) had been fixed or ordained. The Sachhiah was given to the chief and blacksmith. Among those animals, the smallest was the barking deer. Among the larger and more dangerous animals which were hunted, such as the bear, the elephant, the wild gayal, the tiger and the rhinoceros etc., the binturong or Malayan cat-bear (*Arctictis binturong*) was the smallest. The binturong is known to the Mizo as Zamphu. It is a carnivorous mammal with a prehensile tail and tufted ears. It lives in the trees (arboreal) and moves about at night (nocturnal). Generally, the following birds and beasts which were regarded as small game were exempted from the Sachhiah tax or tribute. They were the pheasant, jungle fowl, porcupine, leopard, golden cat (*Felis temmincki*) and the wolf.

When they returned to the village, the ones who got the hind legs (Sa bawp man) and those who washed the entrails were bound to contribute a pot of *zu* and take it to the house of the man who shot the animal. There they would sing and dance, and rejoice and celebrate the successful hunt. If they did not have any *zu*, they had to buy a pot of *zu* and contribute for it.

When the Pasaltha died, they erected fencing posts round his grave and stretched ropes between the posts. They took all the heads of animals from the walls of the verandah and suspended and hung them all on the ropes. It signified that it was the grave of a great hunter. They regarded it as extremely grand.

The Mizo of yore were religiously strict and punctilious about the 'sa aih' ceremony performed over a tiger killed in a hunt or chase. Their opinion, notion, thinking and view of the tiger was remarkable and extraordinary. In Mizo the tiger is known as 'sakei.' When they spoke about the tiger they never uttered or mentioned its real name, because it was inauspicious to do so. They would use substitute words such as 'sapui or sakawl.' They regarded the tiger as a 'Khuavang' (a guardian spirit), and they believed that it was all-knowing. They believed that a tiger knew about the sins and faults of the persons so much that it was felt that even the sin of adultery committed by the person was known to the tiger. They believed that a tiger would not attack, maul or bite an ordinary person who had not committed great or venal sins. So when a person was attacked, mauled or bitten by a tiger, they believed implicitly that, that person had committed adultery. He would never feel easy at heart in her mind unless she had confessed her sin to her infant. And the woman would not feel easy who could not comprehend anything. That is why, in such a situation, a Mizo woman would whisper in the ear of her baby, "I committed adultery." It was the only way in which she could set her troubled, guilty mind at ease.

It was not often that a hunting party shot or killed a tiger. They only did so when it was necessary for them to defend themselves in an inevitable situation. And they would never say, "I shot and killed it." They would say, "It was struck by a thunderbolt which was moving horizontally," in order to minimize the fact.

Among the Mizo using understatements and minimizing the

fact is regarded as a virtue – a form of *Tlawmngaihna*. To them it is an indication of self-restraint and humility. Foreigners fail to understand this and regard it as falsehood, fibbing or untruth.

The understatement to cover the truth, “It was struck by a thunderbolt moving horizontally,” was used because it was taboo to kill a tiger. This understatement was also used by our ancestors when they killed a rhinoceros. They believed that the spirit of the dead rhino was following them to do them harm. To fool or deceive the spirit, on their way home, they would split a bamboo tree that was still standing and put a cross piece between the split halves to form a doorway. All those who were in the hunting party would go through the improved bamboo doorway and the last man would strike the cross piece with his knife, so that the split halves of bamboo which were kept apart by the cross piece would come together again, and the door would be closed forever. The spirit of the rhino would be baffled and at a loss, and would not be able to follow them!

When they killed a tiger, they would never be puffed up about it. They would conceal and hide the fact without disclosing it; and they would also leave the carcass untouched and never take it home. The Lai (Pawi) clans who are the descendants of Mizo regarded the tigers as their brothers and sisters. When a tiger was killed they mourned its death. The Lai also have this saying to boot, “The tiger never bites, seizes or devours the Lai (Pawi).”

As time went on, their ideas and notions about the tiger changed gradually. Because the tigers used to prey upon their domestic animals and even seized and devoured them in their villages and under their houses, they began to kill tigers without reluctance, or dread. They set ‘Kar traps’ which released spears or pointed bamboos, or fired a gun to kill the tiger. When a tiger killed a cow or any other domestic animal which belonged to a Pasaltha, he would wait and watch over the

dead animal, and shoot and kill the tiger when it came to eat the remains of its kill.

When a tiger became a nuisance and a manace for the village, they set 'Fal' traps which crushed the tiger beneath heavy logs. No matter what the reason was for killing the tiger; and no matter what ways and means they used to kill it; whenever a tiger was killed, they performed a 'sa aih' ceremony over it without fail. And since it was difficult, exacting and burdensome to perform the ceremony it was generally the responsibility of the chief. The ceremony was called 'sapui vui' (the disposing of a dead tiger).

To perform the 'sa aih' ceremony over the dead tiger, the chief would kill a mithun, a pig, a goat and a dog. Killing only a mithun for the ceremony was also permissible. Like in the case of other wild animals, the 'sa aih' ceremony could be performed the day after the tiger was killed or it could be postponed indefinitely. If the ceremony was performed the day after it was killed, they erected wooden X-es in front of the chief's house and put the carcass on them, making it stand upright. If it was performed much later, the hide or skin of the tiger was stuffed with branches and twigs and sewn into its original form. The stuffed animal was made to stand upright in front of the chief's house.

On the eve of the 'sa aih' ceremony of a tiger, the man who shot it and the person who helped him to kill it were not allowed to sleep. It was compulsory for them to keep up the whole night. On the day of ceremony no one was allowed to go to their jhooms or into the jungle. And if it was really necessary for a woman to fetch water from the spring or water hole, some of the men followed her to guard and protect her from harm. Our ancestors believed that on the day of the 'sa aih' ceremony, tigers were wont to or made it a rule of attacking and mauling anyone who went into the jungle; so they were very careful and circumspect. In the chief's house a large gong was sounded at appropriate or sufficient intervals.