

THE CAMERA AS WITNESS

A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India

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This shop served as a retail outlet for diverse industrial goods – from textiles to dyes to metal pots – and, in addition, acted as a collection point of local produce – beeswax. A competitor, Sriram, experimented with another approach. He tried to lure customers to his shop by giving them something of a price list:

For one Rupee we will give the following:

Thirteen (13) pounds of salt, or

Eight (8) pounds of iron,

Clothes for an adult,

Nine (9) skeins of scarlet wool yarn.

For a Rupee and two annas, we can give you:

A diagonally woven cloth (*bawh tah puau*) big enough to wrap around.

For 12 annas we can give you the following:

A white cloth (*bawh tah var*) big enough to make a shirt.

For eight annas, we can give you the following:

Cloth for a turban, two fathoms long when cut lengthwise.⁴⁷

Announcements by retailers soon became commonplace. But the advertisement below was of quite a different order (Box ‘A Very Profitable Business’). Here a wildlife dealer offered enormous sums for rare animals, to be delivered to him in Rangamati or Silchar. How exactly Mizos were supposed to negotiate the jungle trails with an adult rhinoceros or tiger in tow was not completely clear, but the prices Mr Krummel was willing to pay for these animals certainly were beyond the wildest Mizo imagination.

To place a Rs. 3,000/- offer for a rhino in context, 10 years later Mizo men returning from over a year’s overseas war service would be elated to receive Rs. 1,000/- in return for their dangerous mission. Mr Krummel’s prices were also far higher than those of the Mizoram authorities for killing dangerous animals. In 1898,

Whosoever kills a tiger or a bear, and displays the head to the BorSap (superintendent), will receive a cash reward. If the hunted tiger is a full-grown one, he will be rewarded Rs. 25/-, if the hunted tiger is a cub, he will receive Rs. 12/50. And if a person shoots a full-grown bear, he will receive Rs. 10/-, and then if the prey is a bear-cub he will receive Rs. 5/-. Then, if he shoots any other wild-animal, money will not be given to him.⁴⁹

A Very Profitable Business

Friends, here is a way for you to earn a great deal of money, if you can. But let me first say a few words of introduction. In the plains and in *Sap Ram* [Europe] they make things to entertain, as well as gardens. And in those gardens they put exotic animals. I am one of those people who collect animals for such things. Since most of those animals have now died, I am on the lookout for others, and I am telling all of you:

I need six **GAYALS** and they should be like this:

All white below the knee and black everywhere else. The horns not round, but branching out straight, like the big horns of the big gayals of old. As for the price, I will pay Rs. 70/- for each. I want three females and one male.

As for wild animals, I also want the following:

RHINOS,

DEER,

TIGERS,

LEOPARDS,

WILD DOGS,

BEARS,

LEMURS.

You should capture all of them unhurt. If you think you have anything that I want, do write to the students of the southern Missionaries. Since I do not know Mizo, the students of the missionaries are my intermediaries.

For a live **RHINOCEROS**, and an adult one, I am willing to pay Rs. 3000/- or Rs. 4000/-. There is also a price for Rhino calves.

If many of you come together you will be able to capture all these animals. I also require not a few but a large number of smaller animals. If you are going to bring any of these animals to me, you must first inform the southern missionaries. We will then make contact by telegram and he will inform you what to do. If you come from the South, I myself will meet you at Ramate [Rangamati in the Chittagong Hill Tracts] and I will give you the right price straight away. I will also pay you 12 annas per day for all the trouble you take of bringing it. If you are from the north, I will make the same arrangements and pay you at Hringchar [Silchar in Cachar]. My name is **THEODOR KRUMMEL SAP**. My address is 21 Park Lane, Calcutta. I do not know the Zo language, so if you want to send me a letter, do send it to the students of the Lunglei missionaries.⁴⁸

In 1906, the authorities paid Rs. 20/- for a killed tiger and Rs. 3/- or Rs. 4/- for a leopard or wild dog (dhole).⁵⁰ Such incentives turned hunting into a commercial activity – and a fulltime livelihood for some:

Dokhara's village moved to Samang Tlang, and there are a number of elephants and rhinos. However, since these days we are forbidden to hunt elephants, rhinos are the animals hunted. It is like hunting a big elephant in the days of old. They usually sell the horn to the Matu [a group closely related to the Lai or Pawi], a good horn can fetch Rs. 70/-. This year about nine have been hunted. Initially, Lusheis from Dokhara's village would not hunt rhinos, saying that it was not auspicious, and it was the Lakhers [Mara] who would always hunt them and then earn a lot of money. The Lusheis became envious of the money thus earned and so they began to hunt rhinos. So not just Dokhara's village but all those south of Lunglei, close to the Lakher lands, make it their main job.⁵¹

Mizos soon became accustomed to the market economy. Currency circulated widely and shops and outdoor markets became part of everyday life (Figures 8.11 and 8.12).

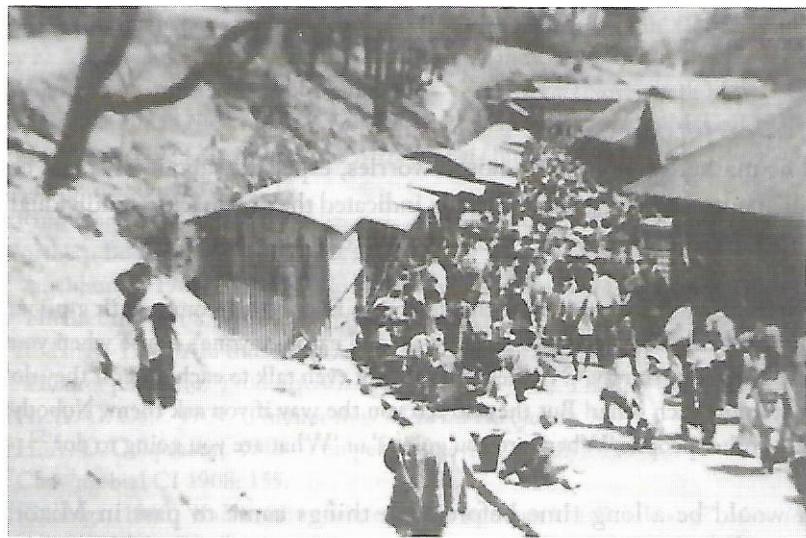


Figure 8.11: Market day in Dawrpui (The Bazaar), the commercial centre of Aizawl, in the 1920s.