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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to situate colonialism and European ethnographic practices in the process of Mizo history making in the second half of nineteen century Lushai Hills. Until the appointment of T.H Lewin [Thangliana] (1839-1916) as Deputy Commissioner of Hill Tract, the British had little knowledge on the details of the Mizos and their cultural history. He was appointed to confront the problem of how to come to terms with the Mizo (Lushai and Shendu) chiefs who were constantly "hostile" to the British. Lewin early career in India was describe by himself in his ethnographic text "A fly on the Wheel or How I helped to Govern India" published in 1885. The work of T.H Lewin has been described extensively in Mizo literary circles—mostly his contributions toward the Mizo society in a straightforward manner. He has been often portrayed as a paternalist figure of Mizo society. One of the main objectives of this paper is to inject further discussion and debate on his European background and his love for the Mizo people in the course of colonial territorial-making in North East India.

Key Words: Knowledge, Colonial, Ethnography, Tribe, Lushai, European, Paternalist

The main objective of this paper is to situate colonialism and European ethnographic practices in the process of Mizo history making in the second half of nineteenth century Lushai Hills. Colonial interest in the North East India and Burma brought closer inspections to the Lushai Hills through various political negotiations and ethnographic interests. A good amount of ethnographic or archival materials (i.e individual diaries, census, photographs, cartography, folklore, populations, customs, administrative reports, ethnographic book etc) had been

generated and produced throughout their association with the Mizos. Particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century, Lushai Hills becomes – what *Nicholas Dirks* refers as "ethnographic state" which implies— "the colonized subject was first and foremost a body' to be known and controlled". (Dirks, 2011, 193) *Nicholas Dirks* articulated that colonial conquest was depended not just upon superior military and economic power, but also upon the 'power of knowledge'. (Dirks, 1992, 3) To be able to rule effectively, the ruler must know the

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culture, history, attitude and social condition of the ruled. administrators. ethnographers, ethnologists, geographers, philologists, linguists, folklorists and anthropologists from England were appointed to collect data on Indian populations and collected enormous archival materials on Indian society. A number of scholarly or otherwise institutions/associations set up in India catered the need of colonial agenda or European scholarly curiosity on 'other' culture. The plurality of Indian culture was perplexing without any systematic study on Indian society. According to Dr. Abhik Ghosh;

"At this time very little was known about the communities that resided in India and thus descriptive work was very much required that filled in the lacunae. In Victorian England, at that time, forms of classical evolutionism and diffusionism were very much in vogue and thus many of the anthropologists followed, consciously or sub-consciously, the theoretical regimes under which they existed. These theoretical ideas supported the spread of British rule and agreed with the subjugation of the natives. A political economy of support thus existed between the subject's non-stated aims and its activities". (Ghosh, 2016)

Anglo-Burmese war ended up with the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. It ushered the beginning of the British rule over the Assam, latter on declared the kingdom of Tripura and Manipur as their protected state and get hold of of Arakan and Tenasserim. Colonial commercial interests never end – lurking every corners in search of economic and political exploitation. Thus, it was not co-incident that they expanded their commercial interest into the surrounding foot hills occupied by the numerous tribal groups. Direct confrontation with the tribes cannot be avoided that within a very short time, hill people insurgencies reached a boiling point. The Mizos were not exception in this confrontation. In order to protect from the Mizo infiltrations colonial government in Assam, Manipur, Bengal, Sylhet, Burma and Tripura needs to generate knowledge on the Mizos (along with their cognate groups) who continuously attacked colonial subjects in British protectorate state. It is in this political background that the colonial writing on Mizo cultural history emerged.

Several writings which appeared in colonial texts before the second half of 19th century were not written based on closer inspections. Francis Buchanan, Father Sangermano, John Rawlins and John Macrae and others made an attempt to understand the Mizo culture history. The process of gathering information at that time seems very indirect - at the best erratic and incomplete. This is mainly because the British surveyors were still perplexed about the profile of the different people inhabiting a vast hilly region adjacent to colonial empire in India and Myanmar. One writer follows another writer without any efforts to inspect further details. Direct access to Mizo

society was limited apart from political negotiation and communication barrier. The only mode of gathering information was either from escape captive slaves or rumour spread through neighbouring dwellers. In this critical situation as well as in the colonial mindset - generating knowledge on the Mizos was crucial. The attitudes of European scholarship at that time also play a role. For instance, it was very usual that "tribals", "savage", and "criminal raiders" were singled out in colonial texts at that time. This is typical of the way the vast majority of the Britishers in India and Myanmar describe their experiences which were echoed in many European scholarship at that time.

Politically, the first Anglo-Burmese War in 1824 taught a new lesson to the Britishers who had little knowledge on the hills people. "Nation", "ethnicity", or "tribe" in Myanmar and India's frontier at that time was extremely diverse and confusing in terms of language, politic culture or otherwise. Nevertheless the British were ill-informed about the highland people at that time. A wrong formula could easily spoil the colonial interest. This was also the time when the Lushai and their cognate groups in India and Burma made their series of attack to colonial protectorate state in all direction. The Lushai warfare being based on conducting sudden attack, plunder and retreat back to their inaccessible hill terrain even before the British could trace them. In the process of identification, ethnography played a very big role in

ascertaining geo-location, racial background, language, religion and custom which was considered primarily as a good method of generating knowledge on the Lushai and Shendu.

Until the appointment of T.H Lewin [Thangliana] (1839-1916) as Deputy Commissioner of Hill Tract, the British had little knowledge on the details of the Mizos and their culture. TH Lewin was appointed to confront the problem of how to come to terms with the Mizo (Lusei and Mara) chiefs who were constantly "hostile" to the British. Lewin early career in India was describe by himself in his ethnographic text "A fly on the Wheel or How I helped to Govern India" published in 1885. (Lewin, 1885) John Whitehead in his book "Thangliena: the Life of T.H Lewin (1992)" offer us a very rare glimpse of T.H Lewin entire career in India. (Whitehead, 1992) He analyzed how Lewin in India fought for military promotion, so that he could come to Chittagong Hill Tracts and eventually end up in Burma. His personal intention was to secure permanent post in Burma than India. Whitehead reminds us that it is important to re-read T.H Lewin at an individual level, a colonial ethnographer as well as part of his mission to achieve colonial agenda in India.

The work of T.H Lewin has been described (if not analytical) extensively in Mizo literary circles –mostly his contributions toward the Mizo society in a straightforward manner. He has been often portrayed as a father figure of Mizo

society. One of the main objectives of this paper is to inject further discussion and debate on his European background and his love for the Mizo people in the course of colonial territorial- making in North East India.

It all started with when he was posted in Chittagong Hill Tract in 1864. T.H Lewin was determined to reach both the Lushai and Shendu in their remote hilly settlement. Since "Lushai", "Pois", "Chin" and "Shendu" were the last tribal group in North East India and surrounding present Burma to be subdued, it would be a great opportunities for his career and his personal ambition as part of colonial interest. This is proven by the political climate at this time at the North East India and Bengal.

T.H Lewin had a very tough time in his early career in British India. He came to India as a subaltern soldier with lots of high ambitions and careers. Unfortunately, things do not always go according to plan for some reasons. Same situation also happened to him that at one time the Governor General of Bengal wrote to him that he was unfit to rule the district. He and his subordinate were even accused of taking bribe which upset him so badly. (Lewin, 1885, p.202) Through his ethnographic texts, we can see that he was frustrated several times. Therefore he has to prove himself that he was a capable administrator in his job. His only chance perhaps was to contact and pursue the most "fearsome tribes" in Chittagong Hill Tracts to obey the rules and regulations

expected by the colonial government. When he was about to venture into the hills in the year 1865, he wrote to his mother that "if i am lucky, this expedition may do me good and get me a name". (Whitehead, 1992, p.138). His personal ambition never ends- even sometimes made a very quick decision. Despite his busy schedule in Chittagong Hill Tracts to pacify the hill tribes, he went back to Calcutta to pass his exam for captaincy in 1865. (Lewin, 1885, p.204)

He returned to Chittagong in 1865 with more ambitious mind. According to him he was "determined as far possible". (Lewin, 1885, p. 204). His ambition to reach the "Shendu" tribes [Mara in modern appellation] were growing stronger, perhaps the term "Shendu" could be a key word for him to win a price. His progress was quite slow eventually disappointed the colonial higher authorities based at Bengal at that time. It is understandable that- on part of the British officials - dealing with the "fearsome savage tribes" demands British officer who was highly experienced and knowledgeable person to cut the amount of time and expenditures. Little training as well as inexperience person could harm the colonial interest in India and Burma.

Unable to make visible differences, the British higher authority of Bengal offered him a chance to move away from Chittagong to other districts of Bengal which will be much easier to govern practically. But he was determined and refused profoundly as he wrote "*i had no*"

desire to be transferred from Chittagong to any other district...". (Lewin, 1885, p.211). He knew very well that chances were growing thinner and thinner. His interest right from the beginning was Burma but not Chittagong Hill Tracts. He believed that Burma could open a new door for him. Unfortunately, he did not receive any proper responses from higher authority. Out of frustration, he complained the British bureaucratic system as hard for him to get a promotion without a "channel of patronage and promotion". (Lewin, 1885, p.211)

While reading his texts, one can observe that T.H Lewin was a young angry man, fighting for promotion in the British bureaucratic system - but had little chance -caught up in a web of the hills tribes of Chittagong Hill Tracts. He did not hide his desire of promotion and credits evidently portrayed in his ethnographic texts. When he got frustrated he never spare anyone including higher authorities of Bengal, - calling them "Bengali Baboos", Rani Kalindi (a Chakma Chieftainess in Chittagong Hill Tract) or even Mary Winchester, sometime even in sarcastic tones. For instance, he commented Mary Winchester character as follow "Mary Winchester was a struckup conceited little half-caste woman, and i am sorry i had her down here, but her mother wished it". (Whitehead, 1992, p. 383). We definitely find racist tone in his remark in modern day trend. When his action was complained by a Chakma Chieftainess Rani Kalindi to higher authorities, his response was equally sarcastic.

As soon as he returned to Chittagong, he began to explore various parts of Chittagong plain and hill areas contacting one tribe from another tribe. The higher authorities of colonial India insisted him to make friend with the hill tribes so as to save financial burden. In the process of his attempts to make friend with the tribes, he even dressed up in tribal costume whenever he visited tribal villages, perhaps to win the heart of the hill tribes. Apparently, he enjoyed his time with the tribes of Chittagong of Bengal, though sometimes the tribal culture was beyond his tolerations of his 'Englishness' or his 'Scottishness'. For instance, when he visited Kumi [Khumi in modern appellation] village, a special dog meat was prepared for his dinner which upset him so badly. It was indeed courtesy on part of Khumi, but he complained that "one tribe, however, the Kumi [Khumi], were unattractive, and i declined to remain a night in their village, being disgusted by the sight of a half-skinned dog...".(Lewin, 1885, p.207) It is understandable for a European with different food habits landed on the wrong place. Culture shock could have happened several times considering the time period. Different regional food culture, adaptability, availability and regional norms also need to be taken into consideration especially when you wanted to make friends with tribals. On the contrary to his European prejudice - in 1866 he and his friend got lost in the jungle for a number of days. Out of hunger, he even insisted to eat his friend's pet dog

who accompanied them to the Mara expedition.

The British at that time rushed to know the "unknown regions" inhabited by "pois" [Lai], "Lushais" [Lusei] and "Shendus" [Mara]. It all comes under the responsibility of T.H Lewin. Generating knowledge was crucial insisted by higher authorities, as he noted "i collected with avidity all the stories i could hear of the wild tribes, the Kukis, Shendus [Mara], Mrungs [Mrochah/Miria] and others, who dwelt on our borders....". (Lewin, 1885, p.221) Unlike earlier ethnographers, what is interesting thing about him is that he complained the veracity of secondary informants, "they [informant] spoke with bated breath, recounting fables evidently unworthy of credence". (Lewin, 1885, pp.221-222) Apparently, T.H Lewin was determined to get firsthand knowledge. Relying on secondary sources troubled him so much in getting the real information as he complained as follow;

"I devoted all my spare time to acquiring the different languages and dialects spoken in my district, being strongly impressed with the idea that no true justice can be done through an interpreter and the only key to the thought and customs of the people lies through their language". (Lewin, 1885, p.363)

With all his enthusiasm despite his little experiences among the hill tribes, T.H Lewin started his first expedition on the 14th November of 1865 towards

southern Mizoram of Mara inhabited areas. His intention (according to him) was to explore and understand the Mara (known as Shendus at that time) whom he had little knowledge about. He was determined to cross the hilly jungle even up to China. His determination was in fact influenced by his predecessor Harry Verelst who "belief that inland trade routes to China might be found through the hills of Chittagong". (Chul Ro, 2007, p.88) Little chance as it might be, he begins his journey with two native servants and six policemen. (Lewin, 1885, p.226). First he reached Miria/Mrochah (Mrung) village and stay there for a while. On 14th of December, 1865, T.H Lewin reached "Kyaw Chief Teynwey" village. He portrayed himself as being so much honoured by the villagers in colonial tones. (Lewin, 1885, pp.247-248) as he wrote- "i was evidently regarded with much curiosity as European being, I found, an unknown animal in those parts". In this village, TH Lewin had a chance to meet Shendu [Mara] chief "accompanied by four Shendu women". (Lewin, 1885, p.249) The Shendu women offered him Tobacco water [Tuibur] which Lewin has sarcastically commented "filthy stuff into my mouth". (Lewin, 1885, p.250). It is very usual that T.H Lewin disapproved whatever he found unacceptable in his own European taste. It is understandable that majority of his works were targeted to his co-Europeans than the Mizos.

Much more surprising thing about T.H Lewin' account in his early expedition is censorship of personal name. For instance,

one of his friends appears in his book as "Major M____", (Lewin, 1885, p.256-277), sometimes just "M". He also mentioned some other names as J___and Y____. (Lewin, 1885, p.290). Why he wished to censor their names is untraceable. When he contacted Shendus [Mara] in Chittagong hill tracts, he wrote-"i had eaten with them; laughed, drunk, and smoked in their company; we were friends, in facts, and they had more to gain than to lose by our safe conduct".(Lewin, 1885, p.279). But his confidence proved to be a failure especially when he attempted to reach further "Shendu" [Mara) land.

He was blindly determined to go to Shendu country [Mara land] despite too much risk. He wrote; "my object was to reach the Blue Mountain, marked as such on the Government maps, in a territory describe as "unsurveyed and unknown" but inhabited by a race called Shendu". On 5th January, 1865 he and major M_____, started their expedition towards Mara land. They cut their way through dense jungle following Koladan river [Chhim Tuipui] from Chittagong Hill Tract toward southern Lushai Hills. When they were about to enter the hill region, suddenly they met 400 Mara war party of whom he had never encountered before. The situation was so intense that he and his team need to be retreated into the jungle as quickly as possible before the situations turns ugly. He barely escapes wandering in the jungle for many days without food and water. Out of hunger and

thirst, he even proposed to eat his colleague Major M___'s pet dog who accompanied the mission. Therefore, his mission to Mara land was a total failure. In latter part of his career, he never renewed or discuss about his interest on expedition towards the Mara land. He wrote his experiences, "that chapter....was closed". (Lewin, 1885, p.279)

After he managed to reach Chittagong, he came to know that the Government of India had appointed him to become Superintendent of hill tribes in Chittagong Hill Tracts against his long time wishes to be in Burma. The post in Burma at that time was permanent whereas his post in Chittagong was temporary. (Lewin, 1885, p.290) He turned his attention toward the Lushai who were equally "savages" and "hostile" known by the British at that time. Until the year 1867, Lewin relationships with the Lushais were mostly political and diplomatic in character. He was busy setting up many frontier police posts in his area mainly to protect the British subjects from Lushai incursions. His early sources of information on the Mizos were mostly related to Rothangpuia, the Chief of Tlabung (Demagiri) in south Lushai Hills. Rothangpuia was already submissive, since he had already tasted punishment of the British as his village was burnt by Major Raban in 1861. (Lewin, 1885, p.288)

Like his predecessor Francis Buchanan, T.H Lewin soon realised that local vernacular was crucial in understanding the "tribal" identity as well as their cultural history. Although he speaks Bengali, Hindi and later he learned Burmese language, he was still ignorant of hill tribe's languages. He knew very well that learning language was crucial. In his early encounter with the tribe, he wrote "the Tipra and Lushai languages were quite distinct, and difficult to acquire".(Lewin, 1885, p.363). When he visited Kassalong, he had a chance to interact with some Lushais for the first time. Kassalong was a frontier market where many Lushais used to come down either to sell their hills products or purchase plain products. He wrote "I embraced every opportunity of becoming better acquainted with the Lushai....and learn all I could concerning their language and customs". (Lewin, 1885, p.364)

Lewin became more and more acquaintance with the inhabitants of Chittagong Hill Tracts. Whenever he visited hill villages in and around Chittagong Hill Tracts, he interviewed the people and collected information as much as he could. Based on his field work among the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts, his first book "Wild Races of South-Eastern India" was published in 1870. (Lewin, 1870) Part-III in this book focused primarily on Mizo group living in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The culture and customs of "the Kumi, Mroos, Khyengs, Bungeese, Pankhos, The Lhooshai or Kukies, The Shendus or Lakhers" are discussed extensively in 19th century anthropological style. Sometimes he was generous while describing the Mizo people whom he had encountered since he portrayed himself as the paternalist of the hill tribes. On some other occasion as being influenced by 19th century ethnography, he was often trapped in his background as a colonizer who loved to write about strange customs generally extracted from their neighbouring informants. For instance, Lewin wrote: "among the Lhoosai it is customary for a young warrior to eat a piece of the liver of the first man he kills; this, it is said, strengthens the heart and gives courage". (Lewin, 1870, p.269) This text never appears in other colonial writing proven that Lewin occasionally embellished his text with hearsays.

As a political agent to the government of India, his duty was to enquire the nature of Lushai "raids" as well as to find solution to stop Lushai's incursion into British territories. His informant (Adupah) was a former captive slave of Rothangpuia. He requested Rothangpuia to release his captive slave and then used it as informant. At the same time, Lewin collected folklore, proverbs and sample of tribal language. Hill Proverbs of the Chittagong Hill Tracts was published by the British authority at Calcutta in 1873. (Lewin, 1873) He knew that hill tribes were so much attached to their customs, belief system, manners, folklores, proverbs and taboos which governed their daily lives. It was impossible to make friend or even subdued without understanding the cultural system of the hill tribes.

He was in fact a fast learner. When he came back to Mizoram on part of the Lushai Expedition in 1871-1872, he was able to converse with the Mizos in their tongue. During his tenure in Lushai expedition of 1871-1872, he continued his collection of Mizo language as he wrote;

"my experience during the campaign had added greatly to my knowledge of the Lushai language, and i occupied my leisure in preparing a hand-book of dialogues in that tongue, with a large vocabulary, which was afterward printed and published by Government".(Lewin, 1885, p.443).

The book which he mentioned is "Progressive Colloquial Exercise in the Lushai Dialect of the "Dzo" or Kuki Language with Vocabularies and Popular Tales (Notated)" which was published in 1874. (Lewin, 1874) During the Lushai Expedition of 1871-1872, he was already popular among the Mizos as he was known as "Thangliena" [Thangliana]. Thus, T.H Lewin was the first person who not only learned the Mizo language intensively, but also showed deep interest in the Mizo custom and ceremonies. To be able to conduct negotiations with the Mizo Chiefs, he found it necessary to study the Mizo customs to which they made frequent reference. As a cultural relativist, language and folklore becomes a tool of generating knowledge on the Mizo culture and history rather than mere chronicling of the Mizo past. His ethnographic texts become a guide book among the colonial ethnographers in latter period. Nevertheless he was the most consulted persons on the matter of Lushai hills and Chittagong hill tribes by British authorities in India. Even before the Lushai Expedition of 1871-1872, he was requested by the higher authorities of Bengal to prepare monograph and other necessary reports eventually followed by long interview on the matter of the Lushais. When he visited Lord Maya at Calcutta, he promised him a reward with proper recognition of his credibility in the form of promotion if he succeeded to the Lushais. This probably makes him to determine more about his ambitions. His own texts reflect that his determination as part of colonial agenda coupled by his desired of promotions. His long time wishes was never among the Lushais, but the tribes of Burma. Unfortunately, his dream was torn apart when Lord Maya was assassinated at Port Blair, Andaman & Nicobar Islands while T.H Lewin was frantic to pursue his career in the Lushai Expedition of 1871-1872.

Although Lewin was an employee of British's India, he did not necessarily limit himself in the colonial's priorities. He did very well on his part of the colonial agenda, despite the fact that his personal interest on Mizo culture also appears so obvious beyond what high authority in India expected him to do so. His personal letters to his mother and his official reports submitted to the British authority show that he was so compassionate about the hill tribes. His affectionate feeling toward the Mizos was growing larger and larger

especially after he was posted at Demagiri [Tlabung]. During his tenure in Chittagong hill tracts and Mizoram, he always had mix emotions in his approach, sometimes contradictorily. In his first monograph "Wild Races of South-Eastern India", he used the words "wild races" as the title of the book which appears to be Eurocentric phrases in modern academic terms. On the contrary, he wrote this sentence;

"I have, nevertheless, found among all wild and so-called barbarous races... they [inhabitant of Chittagong Hill Tracts] are very much the same as other people; there is not much difference, indeed, between human nature all the world over - they love and hate, eat and drink, live and die, in much the same, and often in a far more natural and sensible manner than we of the civilized races, who hold ourselves so loftily aloof in our fancied intellectual and moral superiority. (Lewin, 1870, pp.3-4)

According to him, the Mizos were not "barbarous race" but "wild races". However, "wild race" and "barbarous races" often appears in 19th century European ethnographic texts as identical, though he portrayed it in a contradictory

manner. Sometimes he expressed himself a romantic-paternalist for the hill people of Chittagong Hill Tracts or Lushai hills. On the other hand, his personal ambition especially his long time fight for promotion and recognition in the colonial beaurocratic system also appears to be playing an important part. Nevertheless, many of the ethnographic texts published in the colonial world were carried out under the direct order of the higher authorities of British's India rather than independent research works.

What is interesting thing about Lewin is his constant expression of frustration in his texts with sarcastic tones further reveals his personal prejudices even towards his co-Europeans. He never hides his emotion especially after 1870. Despite the above criticisms, T.H Lewin did a number of good works since he is the first European who closely observed the Mizo culture and a pioneer in introducing the Mizos and their kin groups to the outside world. It is up to future scholars to investigate whether T.H Lewin was a truly romantic- paternalist on behalf of Mizo society or a man of twist and turn or even a lone wolf struggling to survive in British's India who constantly uses hill tribes as 'bait'.

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