

Zakhuaia writes about an incident narrated by a Gurkha, who was chowkidar of a bungalow which stood at a distance of about of 400 ft from the lake, about how the dragon used to take the poultry at night. The chowkidar was initially afraid to confirm the incidents, but after repeated losses he decided to ambush the dragon and shoot it. But when the dragon appeared, he dared not shoot it because it was too long – while its head was inside the chicken coop, part of its tail was still inside the lake.

Belief in the connection between the Dragon and spirits of the dead :

Due to the above claims and other lores about it, Rih Dil came to be called the city of demons. The Mizos already held the belief that demons had the power to cause illness and even death to humans. This belief may also be a reason for them to presume Rih Dil as an abode for spirits mentioned in the opening paragraph. It is no wonder then that the inverted reflections of the trunks of trees in the water were considered to be the fencing of the city of the dead and known as *Mitthi Pal*.

It is this mythical link of the lake and the spirits of the departed souls that continues to fascinate and fire the imagination of Mizos, for, as with many other cultures, they too highly value the notion of immortality in one form or another in a dimension that may be inexplicable to man. Rih Dil can be said to represent this concept and one which Mizos cannot disown for it is associated with nostalgia and longing for the afterlife. It thus continues to be visited by Mizos by the hundreds every year.

Endnote

Zakhuaia, author of *Rih Lipui*, was chowkidar of Rih (PWD) Bungalow for about 25 years from 1964 and had the opportunity to observe and study Rih Lake and the myths connected with it.

Reference

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Mizos and the After-life

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In philosophy, our subject would be termed 'Doctrine of Immortality of the Soul'ⁱ but, in layman's terms, it may be explained as 'a belief that the soul cannot die'. Most cultures believe that the soul or spirit lives on even after the earthly body has perished.

Root of Mizo Belief:

The Mizo belief in the immortality of the soul goes back a long way, much before recorded history. Somewhere around the year 1935 a priest (Sadawt) Hangpuia stated, "Our knowledge about the immortality of the soul is evident from the story of Tlingi and Ngama."ⁱⁱ According to Hangpuia, this story is the origin of Mimkut, which is one of the oldest of Mizo festivals and may also be the source of the Mizo belief in the immortality of the soul.

Rih Dil (Rih Lake):

The importance of *Rih Dil* in Mizo culture and belief is not only due to its physical beauty but also because of

the belief that all the spirits of the dead pass through this lake on their way to the next life.

Belief in *Mitthi Khua* and *Pialral*:

The above can be translated as Village or Abode of the Dead and Beyond River Pial or Paradise. Perhaps due to the reasons highlighted earlier, the belief that the souls of the dead would gather at some place also became prevalent. The quality of life at such a place (*Mitthi Khua*) was considered to be inferior to this life.

In the year 1893, Rev. G.O. Newport presented a paper 'Mission work among the Lushais' at the Missionary Conference in Bangalore. The content of the paper belonged to Mr.J.H.Lorrain (called 'Pu Buanga' by the Mizos) who was a pioneer missionary of their land. What he wrote about the Mizo belief was:

"Two places or conditions are held to exist after death. One of these is called *Pialral* and corresponds to our heaven. The other is called

Mitthi Khua, but it seems doubtful whether this is simply a place of ordinary existence for those who are not good enough for heaven, or whether it corresponds to our hell. A big river 'Pial' flows between these two places, and no one can pass over it from one place to the other. Mighty hunters, great warriors go to *Pialral*, where they live at ease with no trouble of any kind. They hunt and enjoy themselves. No women can go over there, but small children of both sexes who died before they left their mother's breast, they enter in and reside there".ⁱⁱⁱ

When someone dies, the soul/spirit immediately proceeds towards *Mitthi Khua*. During this part of the journey, they are filled with great sorrow and nostalgia for their former life on earth. After sometime, they arrive at a place called '*Hringlang Tlang*'—a place from where mortals can be viewed. Here, their nostalgia and longing become unbearable and they weep and shed copious tears. Just beyond *Hringlang Tlang*, grows the beautiful mystical flower called '*Hawilopar*'—the flower that does not look back. The departed spirits then pick the flower, after which they lose all desire to turn back. Further off lies a fountain called '*Lunglohtui*' whose water helps not only to make them lose all their desire for earthly existence but also their yearning for previous life disappear. Their yearnings are then believed to be focused only on the place lying ahead—*Mitthi Khua*.

They then proceed undisturbed towards *Mitthi Khua* until they reach its entrance where they are accosted by a massive individual called Pawla, holding a pellet-bow in his hand with pellets believed to be as big as eggs. He would interrogate the newcomers and if dissatisfied with their answers regarding their eligibility, such as having the highest social accreditation or being an outstanding game hunter, Pawla would volley shots of massive pellets from his bow. The effect of a hit from his bow was said to cause an injury lasting three years.

However, the socially accredited persons and renowned hunters were not questioned or harmed. They were allowed to pass through into *Pialral*, ceremoniously riding on the deer they killed during their lifetime. Babies were also permitted to pass unhindered.

It is said that the non-privileged ones, in their fear of Pawla, would hesitate to approach him but they would be dragged out of their hiding place by Pawla's wife Sanu so that they could be shot at by her husband. When someone dies suddenly and unexpectedly, Sanu is held responsible. The following song reflects this:

*What if Sanu had not decided to take you by the arm,
My darling baby, clear the way,
And let them pass right through.*^{iv}

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- Lalmama, *Mizo Titi*, p.9,10

Endnote

- ⁱ W.S.Sahakian and M.L.Sahakian, *Ideas of the Great Philosophers*, New York, Barns & Noble 1966 p.108
- ⁱⁱ Pu J.F.Laldailovan in1978 wrote about this in *Thu Ngaihnaom Bu*.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Rev.G.O.Newport, "Mission Work Among the Lushais", *Harvest Field*, February 1894
- ^{iv} Zawla, K., *Mizo Pi Pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin*, 5th edition, Gosen Press, Aizawl, 1989, p 43-44.

