

AN OBSERVATION OF A LUSHAI RITUALS IN CHIN STATE, BURMA.

The second Quaterly Meeting of the Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church of Burma, decided that the Board should send visitors to the Churches in Falam Township in Chin State, North-west Burma. As it was my responsibility, to work out, I look<sup>e</sup>for<sup>y</sup> some volunteers, and with Elders, Khuanghluna and Zairema and Miss Chawngzami, a prominent singer, we four toured to Falam Township which lied at 70 miles distant from Kalemyo, where my office located.

On the 26th November, 1980, in the early morning, we left Kalemyo for Falam and reached that town in the evening safe and sound. We spent a few days in Falam stimulating the Christians for missionary zeal, we delivered some sermons. We attended the Youth and Women Society meetings and encouraged them.

We carried on our journey to village by village, crossing many mountains and rivers, and hills. We walked. No cars at all. The people in every village warmly welcome us, and hold the meetings in the church. Afterwards we held discussions on mission and evangelism. In that way we visit more than 20 villages (churches) within forty days. Eighty percent of the people in that township are Christians. We therefore found that in some villages, animism and its practice still remained. On the other hand, it was a good chance to us for enjoyment of the practice of animistic ceremonies and rituals, feasts etc. We ~~hope~~ hoped that the people in that township if the churches enthusiastically try to win others for Christ. within a few years. Those who still believed in animism are mostly over fifty years of age.

Chins (Falam and Lushai) in that township were evangelised first by the American Baptists who worked since 1897. The Carsons arrived at Haka, the capital of Chin Hills, in that year, and they began their evangelizational work. Mrs. Carson was so disappointed, she persuaded her husband to turn back to Rangoon. The Holy Spirit encouraged her thru Mr. Carson, and abandoned returning back to Mission Headquarters in Rangoon. Indegenous evangelists assisted them, and when they returned to the United States, thousands of Chins have become Christians. The thing that evangelised the heathens was the Spiritual revival occurred in Mizoram in 1946. It spread to Chin Hills and it made thousands convert. Mass conversion happened in the villages. By 1950 many churches had been planted in almost every village in Falam Township. Carsons' dream came true. The Christian Church in Chin Hills is celebrating her centenary Jubilee by 1997. Before that time, the Churches owe to evangelise the unreached people in the Hills, especially in the South. 60% of the population are Christians. 40% of the population urgently need the salvation of God. The present population of the Chin State is 360,000. (Chin State is one of the States in Burma). In the southern part of the State, all the people except the Matu-Chins are all animists. The Gospel is not preached yet in almost 300 villages in the South.

The Hualngos (those who remained Mizos in Chin Hills) in the village of Hmawngkawn told me that the primitive Lushais (Mizos in Burma) thought that the world in which they lived was full of evil spirits, and those who influenced by evil spirits were ascribed all the diseases and sufferings which affect mankind. They believed that the hills, trees, streams, were inhabited by various spirits and demons known as "huai". Evil spirit inhabited a piece of land was known as Ramhuai which literally may mean "spirit of the land". Spirit inhabited the water is known as Tui-huai. You may call the spirit of the land "jungle demon" and Tuihuai "water demon", because the terms are used as synonym for "huai", demon.

Ramhuai (jungle-demon) is not visible entities and consequently could not be killed. They are so numerous in quantity, known as "legion". By chance, in a trance, some people saw them but no challenge should be made. They were believed to be of varying shapes, some resembling human beings, ~~etc~~ other grotesque, and huge in size, in comparison with man. Some had curly hair, or eyes ~~in~~ set in vertical line down the centre of the ~~bow~~. Some were believed to have <sup>s</sup>masive bosom hanging ludicrously downwards or to have only one leg. However we learned that if anyone alleged he had, his story was usually discounted and he himself considered not too nice to know. I was told by a woman in the village called Selawn which we have crossed on the other day, that her mother-in-law was harmed by the demon after wrestling ~~xi~~ with her. The old woman returned home bleeding in her face. She said that whenever she (mother-in-law) tried to become a Christian, the demon attacked so when she went out for searching for firewood in the jungle. The old woman was about 50 years of age. They asked me to baptise her as she had become a Christian, but I advised her to be baptised when their circle pastor visit their church.

These jungle demons were thought to covet men's properties, and therefore, they wanted to take the lives of the people. Lushai animists believed to have the power of capturing the souls of men, and to have agents everywhere in the jungle. Therefore people in the jungle were to be careful in their words and deeds. And there are many classes in the evil spirits. One of them is known as Khawhring, a frightful one. They are supposed to take possession of certain persons and wild boars. When a person was <sup>sa</sup>possessed by that spirit, she or he suffered pain in his belly and that made him roll about on the ground. Through him the spirit would say, "I am such and such, I want this and that". Therefore nobody like to be possessed by a Khawhring spirit because, it was shameful and disgraceful. There were exorcists who could cure them, but in their absence, the oldest <sup>m</sup>member of the spirit-possessed family would act as an exorcist.

These kind of spirits are likely <sup>to</sup> 'evil eye' in English. They are also believed to bewitch food and spoil it. A Lushai, therefore, is about to eat his food he throws a pinch of all different kinds on one side for the Khawhring spirits with the words "chhuak a" meaning "be gone". The literal meaning of the word chhuaka is ambiguous, and its origin is obscure.

There is one more spirit <sup>known</sup> ~~as~~ "phu'ng", and those possessed by that, ~~xx~~ are known "phung zawl", which might mean 'epileptic'. Their appearance is ~~\*~~ thought "black and large", who had the power of inculcating madness, causing fits and epileptics. They are regarded as females and sometimes spoken of as "phungpui". (Sometimes the word, phung means blackness.) Because, when Lushais say Zawhphung, they mean "black cat", and "kel phung", for "black goat. In the case of children are said to be caused ~~ed~~ by "chawm", it is regarded as female like 'phung'.

And, I learned that many people in, that village, including some Christians are still in fear of the evil spirit (HMUI THLA), ghost or apparition. Many Christians especially women do not dare to go to a cemetery at night. Lushais, before they become Christians, maintained that every living creature has ghost, and often claimed that they had seen the ghosts. Especially when bad or cruel people, at their death-bed, disturbed people and animals in their <sup>i</sup> sleep, it ~~a~~ was held. After the death of such a man, his or her ghost may continue to do mischief. The "thla" of anyone may do this. after its possessor's death/, even when it has troubled no one during his lifetime. McCall described 'hmuithla' as the forerunner of death, who would hover round the house, where death was ~~first~~ fast approaching and who could sometimes give out early noises not usually heard.

One more which children and some adult did not dare to confront, is known as "Pheichham", a one-legged evil spirit. The footprint of that ~~spirit~~ ~~spirit~~ spirit is said to be seen sometimes in the sand of lonely forest-streams. McCall describes it as a provocative, willing reward but at a price, often of a sinister nature, in his book entitled "Lushai Crystalis". Literally the name Pheichham means 'lack of foot'. Therefore, it is sometimes called "phei khat", meaning "One legged one".

There are a few more HuaiAs like Maimi, the hypnotiser or troubler during sleep, "Tau Meichherchhi, a kind of will-of-the-wisp; "Rawt", the Frightener, Tau Luhik, the Skinner of heads; "Khawmu" the human kidnapper; "Dengsuri, the Demon that throws stones at people. Dengsuri is thought to be a female.

(When I was a little boy, we sometimes ran away from the cemetery when we found that kind of demon. ~~XXX~~ She tried to stone <sup>us</sup> and we were so frightened. Usually, the cemetery locates at the edge of the village. Some oldmen told me that they saw many Taumeichherchhi spirits were appearing on the hills near the village. However they no longer see that kind of spirit ~~x~~ who lighten the hills at night when they become Christians.

Good spirits were not forgotten and sacrifices were offered to them to gain their favour. Today, in our Mission field, in Southern Chin State, in Matupi and Mindat Townships, Poor Dhais still believe in Evil-spirit; they therefore offered many kinds of sacrifices and spent their money and have no~~x~~ clothings. They spent all of their money to buy wild boars and mithans, goat or pig for offering. When they are ill, they think that evil-spirit caused it, and they offered sacrifice for <sup>sacrifice.</sup> healing. Before they cut down the trees for their farm they offered <sup>sacrifice.</sup> Before they sow the seed they did sacrifice. Before they clear up their paddy-field, they offered sacrifices to spirits to gain more rice. In this way they offered many times to spirits in a year, and they have no money to buy even their clothes. There are almost 180 villages which do that sacrifice. They do need Christ.

On the next day, we stopped at the village called ~~Krite~~ Phunte and spent two days. Fortunately a hunter got a ~~wild~~ wild tiger and made a great feast as he is not a Christian. Also he offered sacrifice to the spirit he believed <sup>d</sup>.

The sacrifice was usually ~~observed~~ observed in the evening on the main part just outside the entrance of the village. A small pig was killed, cooked and eaten on the spot by the priests and elders of the village. Some parts of the animal were offered, to the spirits. Ashes were sprinkled on the road and smoothed down overnight and in the morning the success or failure of the sacrifice was gauged. by the footprints which appeared there. Eventhough no one really know to whom the sacrifice was offered, it is guessed to LASI. Rev. Liangkhaia, author of Mizo Chanchin, mentioned that every Lushai animist individually used to offer "Lasi Khal"

The sacrifice was offered to evil as well as to good spirits, and here we learn that sacrifice connected hunting is concerned with good spirits. (Bhudists in Burma regard and maintain that there are good~~d~~ and evil spirits. They call the spirit "nut".) The first and foremost good spirit is "Pathian", who is so kind, honest, patient and generous. It was regarded that all the blessings and providence come from him. Sacrifice offered to Pathian was a token of source of blessings. ~~Exhax~~ .

When they got into trouble, they said, "there is God, he will be kind to us". They trust God that they <sup>did</sup> not know well, ~~and but never offered sacrifice.~~

On that evening, people who participated the feast drank, sang, and then danced. Sometimes fighting happened. Also they beat drums. It was a happy and joyous function. Two little pigs were killed on that day. Sacrifices to good spirits (Lasi and Chung) were also offered to please them. It is believed that sunshine and rain come from them. We cannot prove that Chung is member of 'Pathian' family. Also a red cock was sacrificed to the spirit called Vansen which means "red sky". The purpose is to please the spirit who can send blessings from the sky. They wished more blessings to get, indeed. "Hnuaipui" literally meaning "the Great Beaneath", a sort of sacrifice, was offered to good spirit underneath the earth so that they may get blessings from each of the ten layers of the earth. This formulate their belief that there are ten layers in the earth. ~~The~~ The head and other extremities of the animal was buried deeply in the earth. The flesh must be eaten up, in three days; after that any thing which left must be thrown away. One thing we have to notice is that old Lushais did not worship that red-sky. J. Shakespear said, "The Lushai do not worship the sun ~~or~~ of the moon or any other forces of nature, though when wishing to emphasize a statement they frequently say, 'if what I say is not true, may the sun and the moon dessert me'". (Christianity and Lushai People by C.L.Hminga, p. 42.)

Also we learn about one more sacrifice called "Ai". It is necessary for a hunter to sacrifice a domestic animal (a dog or a pig or a fowl) for his performance of such ceremony. The purpose was that the hunter may gain power over the spirits of the wild animals which he had killed in hunting or the enemies he had killed in fighting and he might protected from evil consequences, after his death, at the Mitthikhua, Deadmen's Village, . The Rev. J.M.Llyod, the then missionary to Mizoram, in his book, "On Every High Hill", mentioned that old Lushais believed that some human beings can transform to tigers. (Page 13). Rev. C.L.Hminga explained that the prayer for blessings in killing man and the Ai ceremony performed over slain men or beasts is to ensure power over them. (Christianity and the Lushai People p. 64.). "The Lushais have a superstition that if the head of a man slain in battle falls into the hands of his enemy, the man himself become the slave of the victor in the next world; and consequently they will make any effort to carry of their dead and wounded, or to conceal them till the enemy has retired. On the other hand, they spare no pains, and often fear no danger in the endeavour to obtain the heads of their

enemies" (Ibid. p/65).

In olden day, Lushais maintained that every dead went to the Mitthikhua, and only those who had done the requirements for entrance to "Pialral"; a heavenly place of life beyond grave. They are known as "Thangchhuah". To bear that name, he will have to give a feast to the public, and will kill seven wild animals such as elephant, bear, wild bison, stag, barking deer, wild bear and man. Additionally he will have to kill king cobra, an eagle called "Muvanlai" and a flying lemur. A person may kill more than one hundred animals. But unless he kills one of different kind mentioned above, he cannot be regarded as THANGCHHUAH.

Lushais believed that the soul or spirit leaves the body at death but lingers for about three months in or around the house. It was, therefore necessary to offer food to the "spirit" during that period of time. After that the spirit or ghost leaves this world for another one, Mitthikhua. The road to Mitthi khua passes through Rih Lake, the only lake in Chin State. (There is a beautiful village at the bank of the lake, called Rihkhawdar). No one can evade passing through this lake. Then the road leads to a hill called Hringlangtlang. From the top of this hill, the travelling spirit looks back and sees very clearly the world he had left. This make him home-sick, and he longs to return. But he has to continue his journey looking back now and then until he comes to a clear mountain stream on the banks of which bloom beautiful flowers. The stream is called Lunglohtui and the flowers "Hawilopar". Hawilopar literally means "looking back no more flowers". Lunglohtui means "feelingless water". The spirit plucks Hawilopar and puts them in his hair and then the desire to look back is gone. He drinks Lunglohtui and all fond memories of his past life fade away. Therefore he can proceed his way smoothly. However there is a man called Pu Pawla, a satan, at the entrance to Mitthikhua. The road goes right in front of his house which no one can passed unnoticed for there is a big stone which rocks in front of his house. Should Pu Pawla not be on the look-out, the noise of the rocking stone should announces the arrival. of the strangers and he comes out with a mighty bow in hand clay bullets as big as eggs. Each heat leaves a fostering wound which last for three years and the scar remain for a similar period (three years). Only the Thangchhuah title holders, children under one year, and men those who have had success in the court of venus. Dr. C. L. Hminga comments, saying, "It is difficult to account for this belief unless we take the difficulty of accomplishing the requirement as a good reason for regarding it as an extra-ordinary achievement like the "Thangchhuah". (Christianity and the

Lushai People, P. 62).

Pialral, the spirit world, is held to be existed beyond the river Pial,. According to some sources, the roads to Mitthikhua and Pialral divides at Pu Pawla's house. Those who are not wounded by Pu Pawla go to Pialral, and the rest go to Mitthikhua. Life in Pialral is so luxurious, there is plenty of food and fruits, and no work to do. But life in the village of the dead, is dull and colourless, a shadowy existence likely ~~xxwith~~ the Hebrew Sheol.

The victorious man, Thangchhuah enters Pialral smoothly. King cobras, eagles, bears, wild bisons and all other wild beasts he had killed, protected him and Pu Vana cannot ~~killxxix~~ harm.

T.C. Hodgson mentions that those who goes to Mitthikhua died again after their wounds and scars are healed and are born as butterflies; then they died for a third time and reappear as dew on the ground; but those who get to Pialral never return and there is no possibility of their having a reincarnation. (Christianity and the Lushai People, p.69). ~~Some~~ Some Lushais consider Pu Pawla as a porter and punisher of the wicked one.

On the first day of December we held an evangelistic meeting, and stayed there a week. There was a heathen family and the head of the family, an animist brought me to a Thangchhuah feast which was prepared by his fellow animist. There are a few animist families in that village!. We missed the first part of the feast, 'Inchhe siam' and Sedawichhun feasts but ~~enjoyed~~ watched the second part. It was started with Mitthirawp Lam, and it reminds me that I have seen that feast when I was 7 years of age, in 1951. Mitthirawplam is a feast and dance in honor of the spirits of a man's encestors. Since much wood is required, for cooking, enough meat and rice, to feed a whole village; young people and the host of the ceremony paid much price. A he-gaot and a sow were killed, for the contribution of labour. This preparation for the great feast is called "Sa Thing Zar", the actual feast ~~tak~~ place, and it last <sup>ed</sup> four days. The first day was INCHHESIAM NI similar to that of the previous feast. The second day was Zupui Ni, for 'zu' was drunk not only by the living but also by the effigies of the dead relatives, including the progenator of the clan are also made to drink with the living. Images were made of all deceased relations attired in finest clothes strapped on a square bamboo platform with railings called Khuanghlang. The centre was placed

on a tall pole. An effigy supposed to represent the progenitor of the clan called Thlahpa.

The third day was Ruai Ni meaning "Feast Day". A bull mithan and two boars were killed for the feast in the same manner as Sedawichhun. A cup of zu and slices of mithan liver were placed before the images as an ~~off~~ offering. In the evening, a dance, in honor of the dead, took place in front of the house, of the person who is giving the feast. The platform with the effigies of the dead was taken out of the house and ~~set~~ down where the ceremonial dance ~~was took~~ place. The oldest living member of the clan then came slowly from his house bringing with him a gourd full of "zu" gave each effigy in turn a little zu; muttering some thing as he did so. He arranged his tour so as to reach his own father's last, and, when he has muttered his charm and given it zu, he dashed the gourd down on the ground, and bursting into tears he rushed into his house when he must not come out for a month.

The platform bearing effigies was then lifted up and carried about village street with dancing and shouting. This carrying about the effigies is supposed to be pleasing to the spirits of ancestors who were no doubt regarded as able to influence them for good or bad. At least one ~~xxx~~ real human skull was used for making effigies! The last day of the feast resembled the last day of the Chawng Feast. Then the images were taken down from the platform, and Arthlahual was performed. It required to kill some fowls <sup>for</sup> ~~the~~ some people who remained at the host's house.

One more and most popular feast which included in the Thangchhuah Feast is KHUANGCHAWI. It is the greatest one among the five feasts of Thangchhuah. Every man wanted to do this feast before they become Christians. But only a few people could do that. It is not impossible to do ~~th~~ that because it ~~caused much~~ cost much money and animals. Two bull mithan, a cow mithan and a boar were firstly killed. It took four days. Firewood was collected three months prior to the actual feast. A mithan and a goat was killed for the entertainment of the firewood collectors. House was repaired and a platform similar to the one used Mitthirawplam was made on the first day. The second day was as the Chawng Feast; the third day was Ruai Ni, Feast Day, and animals were killed. A hundred pots of zu were brought. In the afternoon, a dance called Thingdim, was performed between the houses of the one who gave feast and the houses <sup>and</sup> ~~between~~ ~~the houses~~ of his closest friends. It was with song but with the rhythm of gongs and



drums. Then in the early evening, the Khuangchawi family and some of elders of the village came to take their seats on the platform. Then ~~in~~ the platform was lifted up by people helping at ~~the~~ the feast. It is a custom for the giver of the feast to throw down from the platform some treasure such as clothes, brasspots, necklaces, money and oven-guns for the people to scramble for. That was the climax of the feast. The fourth day was Chawndo Ni, but the Zawlbuk-boys were given "sabebeh", food, mixture of rice and meat. The fifth day was the last day, and feasting and drinking continued all the day ~~long~~ and night. The rewards to the dancers were ~~not~~ given in that evening. The Giver of the great feast was honored by the ~~pe~~ people, and was able to bear the name THANGCHHUAH. Those who could do this feast twice or more are to be given the greater name Zazawhzo, and they could build a summer house called Zau.

This is the highest achievement in the non-Christian Lushai community. A few Lushais (Hualngos) in Burma often observed this animistic sacrifices, feasts and ceremonies. As Christianity is going so strong, only some old men and women maintain this cult, animism. And animism among the Lushais and Chins is so shallow, the preaching of the Gospel was so easy to accept. However, in the southern part of the Chin Hills (now Chin State) thousands of people are unreached, animists. It is the challenge to ~~of~~ the evangelical Christians.

Animism among the Lushai and Chin people is not rooted in a deep philosophy, it is easy to renounce it. Western missionaries entered Burma and tried to win the people for Christ, with indigenous evangelists and pastors, thru schools, hospitals and orphanage. But, the converts from Buddhism and Islam, Hinduism etc. are only about 10% of all Christians. 90% of believers are tribals (Karen, Kachin, Chin, Shan, ~~and~~ Kayah, Lahu, Wa, Lushai, Pa-o, Palaung etc.) Within 50 years, almost all the Lushais became Christians. Almost half of the total Christians in Burma are Karen and Kachins.

Some factors ~~that~~ made Lushais Christian are as follow:-

(1) The Concept of Pathian: They believed that there is a good spirit, Pathian who is kind and generous, patient, honest. Whenever they need ~~he~~ help, they called upon him. But they did not worship him, and their knowledge of Pathian is very little. When the Missionaries told about God and His Love, they accepted God, Jehovah, without hesitation.

(2) Life after death:- Old Lushais believed that every body has a spi-

rit that is immortal. They therefore offered some food to the dead about three months after his death. They buried the clothes, knife and axe etc. with the dead. Also they maintained that the spirit or soul goes to the Mitthikhua, Village of the Dead. When they were told about life after death, the Eternal Life, they totally believed and accepted the Gospel. They think that the life in Mitthikhua was so dull and lonely. But when they heard about the eternal Heaven, they believed in God, who would take them to His City He made for them.

(3) New Life in Christ: There was not much teaching in animism among the people. during their heathen life. When they were told about the new life in Christ, peace, joy, and happiness, their thought and life was transformed from the old to the new one. They were bounded by Satan, but now they has been set free from his bondage and fear of evil spirit. They renounced orgy, fornication, fighting, quarrelling and speaking nonsense etc. They are hard-working people, but they have now found peace and rest in the loving arms of Jesus, who once died for them.

4) The belief of Pialral:- Those who could bear the name ~~Kixi~~ Thangchuhah, little children, men who have had succeeded in the court of venus etc. entered the Pialral, the better place rather than the world they lived. Most people could not get there. But, in Christianity, Heaven is for all, those who believed in Jesus, and no fee or price to pay. Jesus paid it all. Therefore, in comparision of the two teachings, Christianity is, in all facts, so superior, they willingly accepted it. And the belief in the existence of Pialral~~xi~~ made them easy to accept the Gospel.

Calvary is graeter<sup>more</sup> than Hringlang Tlang, and Jesus, the Living Water, is <sup>more</sup> precious than Lungloh Tu.

Christianity is the heart and centre of their life and the Beginning of their intelectual and spiritual growth. Once Satan ruled over them, but today, Christ has reigned over them. There were once no peace in their life. Head-hunting, invasion and fighting filled their life, but now they rest in peace and joy of Jesus. They have found Christ, Lord of Lords and King of Kings.