

Tribes of Mizoram, Culture, Population, Major Tribes, Schemes

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Tribes of Mizoram are at the heart of the state's identity and way of life. The population is largely made up of **Scheduled Tribes**, each with its own unique **culture, traditions, language, and customs**. These tribes share a strong sense of **community, unity, and respect for tradition**, which is reflected in their daily lives. Despite modernization, they have successfully preserved their **rich heritage and social values**, making Mizoram one of the most culturally vibrant states in India.

Tribes of Mizoram

- **Mizoram** is a tribal-dominated state located in the southern part of **Northeast India**, known for its rich cultural diversity and strong community traditions. According to the **2011 Census**, the state had a population of about **10.97 lakh**, out of which nearly **94.43% (10.36 lakh people)** belong to **Scheduled Tribes (STs)**.
- The tribal population in Mizoram has shown significant growth, with a **23.45% increase between 2001 and 2011**. The state officially recognizes **15 different tribal communities**, reflecting its diverse ethnic composition.

- Among these, the **Lushai (Mizo) tribe** is the largest, making up around **70.9%** of the total tribal population. The **Chakma tribe** is the second largest group, contributing about **9.35%**. Other important tribes like **Pawi (Lai), Lakher (Mara), Kuki, and Hmar** together form a considerable share of the population.
- Religion plays an important role in the lives of people in Mizoram. A large majority of the tribal population, about **90.07%**, follow **Christianity**. **Buddhism** is the second most practiced religion (around **8.78%**), mainly followed by the **Chakma community**.
- The tribes of Mizoram can broadly be divided into **Mizo tribes and non-Mizo tribes**. The term “**Mizo**” comes from two words – “*mi*” (*people*) and “*zo*” (*hill or highland*), which together mean “**people of the hills**” or “**highlanders**.”
- However, the word “Mizo” is not limited to a single tribe. It is a **collective or umbrella term** used for groups that share **similar culture, traditions, and historical background**. In this way, it acts as a **unifying identity** for many tribes in the state.
- Over time, some smaller sub-tribes have gradually **merged into larger groups**, adopting their customs, language, and way of life. As a result, a few tribes have **lost their separate identities**.
- Some of the major tribes in Mizoram today include **Mizo (Lushai), Pawi (Lai), Lakher (Mara), and Chakma**, each contributing to the state’s unique cultural richness and heritage.
- Mizoram does not have any officially recognized **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**.

Major Tribes of Mizoram

Major Tribes of Mizoram play a vital role in shaping the state’s **culture and identity**. The population is largely made up of **Scheduled Tribes**, each with distinct **traditions, languages, and social practices**. Prominent groups like the **Lushai (Mizo), Pawi (Lai), Lakher (Mara), and Chakma** are discussed below, highlighting their key features and cultural significance. Some of the Major Tribes of Mizoram are discussed below:

1. Lushai Tribe

- The **Lushai Tribe** (also called **Lusei**) is the **largest Mizo tribe**, mainly found in **Aizawl** and **Lunglei** districts of **Mizoram**.
- The term “**Lushai**” is a British-adopted version of the original “**Lusei**”.
- They migrated from **Myanmar** during the **17th-18th century** along with other **Mizo sub-tribes**.
- Society was clan-based with **6 chief clans** and **10 commoner clans**; the **Sailo clan** dominated and held **hereditary chieftainship**.
- The **Duhlian dialect** became the **lingua franca** of Mizos and belongs to the **Kuki-Chin group** of the **Tibeto-Burman family**.
- **British colonial rule (1890s)** and **Christian missionaries** brought major changes, leading to widespread **conversion to Christianity by the 1930s**.
- Traditional practices like **Zu (rice beer)**, **Zawlbuk**, and **animal sacrifice** declined; replaced by **tea, modern education, and YMA (Young Mizo Association)**.
- The family system is **patrilocal** and **patrilineal**, with **ultimogeniture** (youngest son inherits), later partly replaced by **primogeniture** under British rule.
- **Women traditionally had no inheritance rights**, but later **legal reforms** allowed them property rights.

- **Marriage** involves **bride-price (formerly mithun, now cash)** and is now conducted under **Christian rites**.
- **Agriculture (jhum/shifting cultivation)** is the main occupation, though **economic diversification** is increasing.
- The **Mautam famine (1959)** led to **insurgency (1966)** by the **Mizo National Front**, ending with the **1986 Peace Accord**.
- **Village grouping during insurgency** disrupted traditional **social harmony** and changed community structures.
- The tribe has a high **literacy rate (95.6%)**, though **higher education levels remain low**.

2. Pawi Tribe

- The **Pawi (Lai) Tribe** forms about **5% of Mizoram's population (51,406)** as per the **2011 Census**.
- They are mainly concentrated in **Lawngtlai District** and around **Phawngpui (Blue Mountain)**, with many also in **Chin State (Myanmar)**.
- **Lawngtlai town** is the seat of the **Pawi (Lai) Autonomous District Council**.
- Almost all Pawis are **Christians (99.28%)**, with a high **literacy rate (91.6%)**.
- Villages are located on **hilltops (2500-4000 ft)** with a **moderate climate**.
- They have **four main dialects: Khuofo, Thantlang (Mizoram) and Halkha (Haka), Laizo (Myanmar)** under the **Tibeto-Burman language family**.
- Originally **no script**, later written using **Roman script** by **Christian missionaries**.
- Many Pawis now speak **Duhlian (Mizo dialect)** due to **missionary influence and education**.
- **The Church (Biakin)** is the central institution; **pastors and elders** are key leaders.
- Traditional dances like **Rawkha Tlak** and **Chawnglaizawn** declined but are now being **revived**.
- Society follows **monogamy, patrilocal residence, and patrilineal descent**.
- Traditionally, **the eldest son inherited property**, but now **property is shared**, including with **daughters**.
- The economy is based on **land and forest**, mainly **jhum (shifting) cultivation**.
- Land is **community-owned**, and the **village council allocates plots annually**.

3. Lakher Tribe

- The **Lakher (Mara) Tribe** is a **Scheduled Tribe** mainly inhabiting the **Mara Autonomous District Council (Mizoram)**, with populations also in **Chin State** and **Rakhine State (Myanmar)**.
- The name **"Mara"** replaced **"Lakher"** officially in **1978**; earlier names included **Shendu, Zho, Tlosai, Khongzai**.
- As per **2011 Census**, population is **42,855 (4.13%)** of Mizoram.
- The region has **50 villages** and **59 village councils**, with **Saiha** as the capital.
- They belong to the **Kuki-Chin group** of the **Tibeto-Burman family** and are believed to have migrated from **Southern China via Tibet and Myanmar** in the **17th century**.
- Major **sub-groups: Tlosaih-Siaha, Zyhno, Hawthai, Chapi, Vytu**, each with distinct **dialects**; **Tlosai-Siaha dialect** acts as **lingua franca**.
- **Literacy rate** is **81.93%**, and **Mara language** is used as **medium of instruction (up to class VI)**.

- Before **British rule**, there was frequent **inter-village conflict**; British rule (till **1924**) brought **peace, end of slavery, and economic changes**.
- Post-independence, the **chief's power declined**, and modern **administrative councils** were established.
- Society is **rural**, with strong **kinship ties** and **community cooperation**.
- The family system is **nuclear**, with **patrilocal residence** and **patrilineal descent**; **father is head**.
- **Inheritance** follows **primogeniture (eldest son inherits)**, though the **youngest son gets a share**.
- With **Christianity (introduced 1907, fully adopted by 1959)**, major changes occurred: decline of **raiding, superstitions, and traditional hierarchy**.
- Adoption of **Western lifestyle and values**, while still retaining some **traditional customs**.

4. Chakma Tribe

- The **Chakma Tribe (Changma)** is the **second largest Scheduled Tribe in Mizoram (9.35%)**.
- They are mainly settled in the **south-western and western parts of Mizoram**, bordering **Tripura** and **Bangladesh**.
- They have an **Autonomous District Council (since 1972)** under the **Sixth Schedule**, headquartered at **Kamalanagar (Chawngte)**.
- The Chakmas migrated from the **Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh)** and belong to the **Tibeto-Burman group** (ethnically), though linguistically different.
- Their language, **Chakma (Changma Vaj/Kodha)**, belongs to the **Indo-Aryan (Southeastern Bengali branch)**, showing a shift from original roots.
- They primarily follow **Theravada Buddhism**, mixed with **Hindu elements** (e.g., worship of **Lakshmi**) and **traditional practices**.
- Each village has a **Buddhist temple (Kaang)**, and **monks (Bhikhus)** lead religious ceremonies.
- Despite Buddhism, **animal sacrifice** is practiced to appease **spirits causing illness**.
- Society is divided into **clans (gojas)** and **sub-clans (guttis)** with strict **endogamy** (no marriage within the same clan).
- **Marriage (Chumulong)** is arranged, involves **bride-price (now symbolic)**, and is performed by **Buddhist priests**.
- **Polygyny** is allowed but rare; **remarriage** and **elopement (with fines)** are accepted.
- Family structure includes **nuclear and extended families**, with growing preference for **nuclear families**.
- The majority live in **rural areas (only 0.8% urban)**, indicating **low development levels**.
- Main occupation is **agriculture (shifting + semi-permanent cultivation)** with **no individual land ownership**.
- Some have moved to **labor and white-collar jobs**, but most remain in **farming due to limited opportunities**.
- The **literacy rate is low (45.3%)**, with **male 56.2%** and **female 33.6%**, the **lowest among Mizoram tribes**.

Constitutional Safeguards for the Tribes of Mizoram

- **Strong Constitutional Protection:** The tribes of Mizoram are safeguarded by special provisions in the **Indian Constitution**, which help protect their **culture, land, and traditional way of life** while supporting their overall development.
- **Article 371G – Protection of Traditions and Land:** This provision ensures that laws made by Parliament on matters like **religious practices, social customs, customary laws, and land ownership** do not automatically apply to Mizoram. Such laws can only be implemented if the **Mizoram Legislative Assembly agrees**, thereby preserving the unique identity of the tribal communities.
- **Sixth Schedule – Self-Governance (Article 244):** Under this provision, **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** are established to give tribes the power to **govern themselves at the local level**. In Mizoram, important councils include the **Lai, Mara, and Chakma Autonomous District Councils**.
- **Powers of Autonomous District Councils:** These councils have the authority to make decisions on important local matters such as:
 - **Land use and management**
 - **Shifting cultivation (jhum)**
 - **Forest resources (excluding reserved forests)**
 - **Marriage, divorce, and inheritance laws**
 - **Social customs and traditions**
- This ensures that decisions are made according to **local needs and customs**.
- **Traditional Justice System:** The councils can also set up **village courts** to settle disputes among local people based on **customary laws and practices**, making justice more accessible and culturally relevant.
- **Financial Independence (District Funds):** Each Autonomous District Council maintains its own **District Fund**, where it collects revenue from sources like **taxes, land fees, and markets**. This helps in carrying out **local development activities independently**.
- **Control Over Trade and Money Lending:** The councils can regulate **trading activities and money-lending by outsiders** to prevent exploitation of tribal communities and ensure **fair economic practices**.
- **Protection of Identity and Culture:** Overall, these provisions help protect the **distinct identity, traditions, and community systems** of the tribes, ensuring that modernization does not harm their cultural roots.

Key Government Schemes for Tribal Empowerment

- **Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan** – This scheme focuses on holistic development of tribal villages by improving infrastructure, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities, covering around 63,000 villages and benefiting over 5 crore tribal people.
- **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** – Provides quality residential education to tribal students from Class VI to XII, with modern facilities aimed at improving academic performance, skill development, and access to higher education.
- **Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)** – Targets Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) by improving road connectivity, housing, electrification, healthcare, and basic services in remote tribal regions.
- **National Overseas Scholarship for ST Students** – Enables meritorious tribal students to pursue higher education abroad, promoting global exposure and academic excellence.

- **Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs)** – Promotes research, documentation, and preservation of tribal culture, traditions, and languages while supporting policy development.
- **Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST)** – Ensures coordinated efforts across ministries for tribal welfare, focusing on filling gaps in education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **National Fellowship for ST Students** – Provides financial assistance for higher education and research through a transparent digital system, encouraging advanced studies among tribal students.
- **National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC)** – Offers concessional financial support to tribal individuals for self-employment and income-generating activities.
- **Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India (TRIFED)** – Promotes tribal products through marketing platforms, supporting artisans and creating sustainable livelihood opportunities.
- **Aadi Mahotsav and Cultural Initiatives** – Organizes cultural festivals to showcase tribal heritage, promote handicrafts, and generate economic opportunities through cultural promotion.
- **Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY)** – Aims to develop tribal-majority villages by providing basic infrastructure such as roads, drinking water, and housing.
- **National Health Mission (NHM) – Tribal Focus** – Strengthens healthcare services in tribal areas, addressing major health issues and improving access to medical facilities.

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