

## Mizo Patrilineal Kinship System

**Introduction - A Brief History:** The Mizos are an ethnic group native to north-eastern India, western Burma and eastern Bangladesh. They are one of the groups of Tibeto-Burman branch of Indo-Mongoloid race. The early history of the Mizos virtually based on legends, traditions, customs and beliefs. There is common belief among the Mizos that their ancestors emigrated from a place called "Chhinlung" which seems to be some where in the southern China. The early Mizo society was a simple tribal society which had no known contact with her neighboring civilizations until the eighteen century.

### **Patrilineal Kinship System:**

The Mizo society was strictly patriarchal and patrilineal with a well defined culture of its own. This system of practice could be seen from their various traditions and cultural practice. Some of the highlighted points are as follows:

***Authority:*** In a traditional Mizo society, the father was the head who was all in all over all his family affairs. The power and authority of the father over his children young or adult, was often almost unlimited.

***Status of Woman:*** In a Mizo family in the past, a woman had no right either in a family or society. As a matter of fact, she belonged in body and mind, from her birth till death, to her father and brother and to her husband after her marriage. Woman does not have any legal claim on the family property except a small share at the time of marriage which she carried with her as a form of dowry. Thus, among the Mizos women enjoyed a very low status. The low status of women had been made clearly by the popular sayings: '*old fences and women can always be replaced*'; '*woman and crap have no religion*'; '*the wisdom of woman does not extend beyond the village spring water.*'

***Marriage:*** Marriage among the Mizo was not merely a contract between man and woman to cohabit and procreate. It is a very important socio-religious rite that meant a rearrangement of a network of relationships between the two groups brought together by a marriage bond. In Mizo marriage, the groom has to pay the bride-price which was negotiated between the parties through representatives or mediator sent from the boy's side. The bride price was distributed among the members of the clan chosen by the girl's parents for the occasion. This reaffirmed the relations that had already existed there or might create new relations through it.

***Residence:*** Residence among the Mizos is patrilocal residence. After wedding the girl along with few of her properties as a kind of dowry, moves into the boy's home to be the new family member. Since then, the girl's residence is shifted permanently from her natal residence to her conjugal residence.

***Inheritance:*** The rule of inheritance or succession among the Mizo is ultimogeniture, in which the youngest son (fatlum) inherits the father's property, although other male children also had a share in the family property. The fatlum stays with his aged parents and took care of them in their old age. However, if the father does not find his youngest son capable of performing the assigned obligatory duties as fatlum he can execute a will transferring his properties to his other son(s). In Mizo society a woman customarily cannot inherit property. Even in the absence of a male child, a daughter could not claim, as a matter of right, the family property, but would normally go to the nearest relatives.

***Descent:*** Among the Mizos, there is a clear distinction between kinship by descent and kinship by marriage, although kinship is reckoned and recognized on both lines. As a patrilineal society, the rule of descent is strictly based on the male line only. In traditional system, a woman was recognized, even after marriage, by her patri-clan name. Thus, all the children acquired membership in their father's clan group.

***Division of responsibilities in works:*** As soon as the male child was born, he was blessed with the skills in war and hunting which fall outside the domestic domain; and a female child was blessed with physical beauty and skills in domestic works. With the primitive nature of the society, the domestic domain and the outside domain were clearly demarcated and the division of labor strictly followed sex division. The duties of the womenfolk largely fell within the domestic domain.

***The Zawlbuk Institution:*** The institution of 'Zawlbuk' (a bachelors' dormitory) plays a significant role in the formation of gender among the Mizos. The Zawlbuk residents were entirely of young men, typically of above 15 years of age, properly titled '*tlangval*'. In the evening they were accompanied by boys, generally of age between 6 and 15, whose responsibility was to collect firewood for the Zawlbuk. Even though, the boys were restricted from participating in the main activities of the *tlangval*, they were allowed to play around and join in their merrymaking. The zawlbuk was a centre of village education, defense, discipline and development. It was strictly a social institution where all forms of arts and crafts, physical training, and moral education were taught and learned. It was the place where a boy learns all the necessary skills and behavior in order to be a man.

**Conclusion:** The Mizo traditional society has experienced change and modification in various ways due to change of traditional leadership structure, modernization, emergence of cash economy, educational attainment, etc. One of the apparent changes that take place is traditional rule of succession to family property, it has assumed significant change in actual practice in recent times; and it is no longer the exclusive monopoly of youngest male child to acquire the right to inherit family property. The emergence of educational advancement of the women leads to the improvement of the status and condition of the female in the family and in the society as well. However, the practice of the patriarchal system may no longer exist strictly but the patrilineal kinship system is still prevalently practice.