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The Last Stand of Three Brothers: Power, Resistance, and Colonial Encounters in the Southern Lushai Hills

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Abstract

This article investigates the resistance efforts of the Chinzah clan of the Lai tribe, particularly Chief Dokulha and his two brothers, against British colonial expansion in the southern region of the Lushai Hills. Focusing on the interplay between indigenous spatial conceptualisations and colonial territorial ambitions, it explores how the Lai tribe navigated colonial domination through adaptive resistance strategies. Dokulha's oscillation between defiance and strategic compliance underscores the multifaceted nature of indigenous agencies, encompassing overt confrontations, narrative deception, and cultural preservation. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from Foucault's power–knowledge relations, Bhabha's colonial mimicry, and Fanon's colonial trauma, this article elucidates the epistemic, cultural, and psychological dimensions of resistance. The decline of Chinzah authority, culminating in Dokulha's imprisonment at Kala Pani, highlights the complex costs of resisting colonial power, while demonstrating the resilience of indigenous governance systems through community support and strategic adaptation.

Keywords: Indigenous Resistance, Chinzah Clan, Lushai Hills, Dokulha, Power-Knowledge Relations, Colonial Mimicry

Introduction

The Lushai Hills and the Chin Hills were "unknown territories," appearing as undefined spatial voids on colonial maps, though encircled by British power. These areas represented cartographic gaps in the colonial mapping power between Burma (now Myanmar) and British India, which the British sought to fill. The British

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Indian government aimed to create a favourable environment for white plantation societies in the periphery of the Lushai Hills: the northern foothills of the Lushia Hills in the Cachar region of Colonial Assam, and the western foothills of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Along the banks of the Karnafuli River, white planters established extensive tea plantations, effectively displacing the indigenous hill tribes, or else disrespecting their indigenous geo-body, particularly the Lushais and powerful southern tribes, whose influence had extended from the Chin Hills to the Chittagong Hill Tracts and across the Kaladan River.

Simultaneously, the British pursued an imperialist agenda to complete their scientific mapping projects without leaving blank spaces. During the second half of the 19th century, amid intense competition in various scientific fields among Western colonial powers, leaving 'unknown space' on British Empire maps was considered intolerable. Following the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885) and the subsequent collapse of Burmese crown power, the British accelerated their surveys and occupation of these regions. However, it is significant to note that occupation, surveying, and map making had already commenced in the 1870s, with the Lushai Expedition in1871-72. The British colonial project began in the Lushai Hills in1871-72 by subjugating Lushai chiefs, primarily in the central and northern portions of the region. This process was concluded in 1898 when the area was formally constituted as a district under British administration. This article examines the confrontations between the British and Lai chiefs in the southern Lushai Hills.

The complex interplay between Indigenous spatial conceptualisation and colonial territorial demarcation significantly shaped the modern history of the Chin Hills and Lushai Hills; the latter falls in India. Before British colonial intervention, these areas constituted an unquestioned geographical space in which Lai (known as Chin in Burma) and other indigenous tribes moved freely. The indigenous understanding of territory differed fundamentally from that of modern nation-state boundaries. Rather than viewing the Lushai Hills and Chin Hills as discrete entities, local people conceived of them as singular integrated spaces. This conceptualisation was deeply embedded in their collective memory and epistemological framework. Territorial conflicts centre primarily on relationships between the chief's domains, with clan expansion occurring through the establishment of new settlements and chiefdoms by descendants. The introduction of modern educational systems brought new conceptual frameworks of migration, settlement, and spatial organization that challenged the centuries-old ecology of ideas of statecraft, protocols, and spatial understanding.

In examining the dialectic of colonialism and indigenous responses to colonial intervention and expansion, this study focuses on Chief Dokulha's resistance as a compelling case study. While existing scholarships have extensively documented Lalnu Ropuiliani's resistance in the Lushai Hills, Dokulha's complex engagement with colonialism offers unique insights into the nuances of indigenous political

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resistance. His responses oscillated between physical opposition and strategic accommodation, revealing the sophisticated ways local leaders navigated colonial domination. This paper explores how indigenous systems have adapted when confronted with overwhelming colonial power. Dokulha's case illuminates the multifaceted nature of indigenous tribal resistance encompassing both overt defiance and tactical compliance. Through this analytical lens, we can better understand the mechanisms of colonial control and the complexity of indigenous political agencies.

The pre-colonial political landscape of the Lai tribe in the Chin and Lushai Hills was characterized by an intricate network of royal clans and territorial expansions. The Zathang clan, with its power base in Halkha (Chin Hills), extended its influence into the Lushai Hills through settlements in Sangau, Vawmbuk, Lungzarhtum, Archhuang, and Tialdawnglung, while the Hlawncheu clan from Falam established control over Sangau, Lawngtlai, Bungtlang, and Saikah. The Hlawnchhing clan, originating from the Leisen circle, notably expanded westward to become the Hlychho ruling clan of the Mara tribe through invitation, whereas the Khenglawt clan maintained influence from the Halkha circle into the Lushai Hills. Among these, the Chinzah clan emerged as particularly powerful, establishing dual power centres in Thangtlang and Lungzarh circles, with extensive territorial reach into the southern Lushai Hills, demonstrating the sophisticated political organization that transcended later colonial boundaries.[1]

The Chinzah's Power in the Southern Lushai Hills (1870-1890): Band of Three Brothers

Dokulha, a descendant of the prestigious Chinzah clan, was the middle son of chief Taihmunga of Cherhlun village in the Hnahthial district, Mizoram. Taihmunga had established his chiefdom after migrating westward across the Kaladan River from the ancestral settlements of Lungzarh and Khuafo villages in the Chin Hills. Over time, Cherhlun grew into a large village with around 700-800 households. Following the traditional pattern of political expansion, Dokulha and his brothers— Hausata, the eldest, and Vantura, the youngest — embarked on establishing their domains under the mentorship of their maternal uncle, Zahuata, the influential chief Thlantlang in the Chin Hills. Around 1868, they left their father's village, holding hundreds of households with them. This familial (clan power) migration and the founding of new settlements exemplified the typical pattern of political expansion among the Lai ruling clans, where chiefs' sons established new settlements to extend their clan's influence.[2]

Three brothers, led by Hausata, initially established a temporary settlement in the Vartek range (1868-71) before relocating to Kulhhrulh in 1872. A decade later, in

[1] Z. Hengmang, *Lai Hnam Tobul (2nd ed.),* (Lawngtlai: Pawi District Council, 1987), 26-48.
[2] S. R. Chinzah, *Khuafo Hnam Chhuina,* (Aizawl: New Millennium Computer Center, 2003), 25-28.

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1882, they founded Lungtian village, where Hausata assumed the position of chief. During the arrangement of Hausata's marriage to the daughter of Zahuata, the Thantlang chief, the brothers faced the challenge of assembling an appropriate bride price befitting their royal status.[3] In 1882, to acquire the necessary bride price, they organised raids on the Tuikuk (Bru) and Tlanglau tribes residing in the foothills near Demagiri. The captured slaves were subsequently presented as part of the bride price to Zahuata, successfully facilitating a marriage alliance.

A significant incident occurred during one of the slave-raiding expeditions. The raiding party, led by the three brothers, encountered hostility from Lalcheuva's men, who launched an attack while taunting them with the phrase "*Pawi ral anlo kal*." In response to this provocation, the brothers launched a retaliatory attack on Thangluah Village, where Lalcheuva served as the chief. This raiding party, comprising 250-300 warriors, including warriors given by Chief Zahuata, resulted in 29 fatalities, 7 wounded, and the capture of 92 slaves, along with the seizure of valuable property.[4]

Following the customary protocol and pattern of political expansion of the Lai tribe, Dokulha moved out of Lungtian Village in 1887. Accompanied by twenty (20) lower-rank households and a contingent of warriors, he established Fungkak village and assumed the role of chief. By 1892, the settlement doubled to 40 households.[5]

The Second Inning of Territorial Expansion Policy of the British in the Lushai and Chin Hills (1888-1894)

The riverbank of the Karnafuli River and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have served as hunting grounds for animals, slaves, and other forms of raids by the tribal chiefs of the Lushai for Hills centuries for centuries. However, this traditional space began to be challenged by the British around the 1840s when tea gardens were established in the CHT, effectively creating a new frontier. Between 1860 and 1890, there was a rapid expansion of tea plantations in this region, leading to increasingly frequent confrontations with chiefs from the Lushai Hills and the British administration. The majority hunting zone became the territory of British colonial power, and communities living in this zone became the claimed subjects of the British. The two sides approached territorial claims differently — the British relied on survey and mapping science, while the chiefs of the Lushai Hills-based their claims on tradition and long-established social-ecological equilibrium.

[3] Jangkhongam Doungel, *Lai Chieftainship and Its Impact in Politics (2nd ed.),* (2012: repr., Meerut: Balaji publication, 2121), 67.
[4] Shendoo Raid on the Chittagong hill, Oct 1888, File No. 88, Foreign Department External A, National Archives of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India. 8. & A.S. Reid, Chin-Lushai land, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2008), 38.
[5] Hrekunga, "Lai Lal Hmingthang Dokulha," in *Mifirte Sulhnu,* (Lawngtlai: Art & Culture Department, LADC, 2008), 116.

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Ultimately, "might is right" prevailed.

The British Indian government, concerned about the safety of their British planters and estates, reviewed the existing frontiers intending to expand further into the Lushai Hills, particularly in the southern region, and further extend towards the Chin Hills. Seasonal raids from the Lushai Hills, including the infamous "three brothers' raid" in Demagiri in 1882, prompted the British Indian government to reassess the frontier. In January 1888, during the favourable season for military expeditions and surveys, the British dispatched two parties. The first party, led by Lieutenant J. F. Steward, of the 1st Battalion, Leinster Regiment, was tasked with surveying the area from Rangamati to Belisurri. The second party, led by Lieutenant J. Mc. D. Baird, of the 2nd Battalion, Derbyshire Regiment was assigned to survey from the Karnafulli River (Khawthlang Tuipui) to Demagiri (Tlabung) and continue to the Uiphum range. Both parties are rendezvous along the Rang Khyong River.[6]

The period from November to March was favourable for both military expeditions and surveys into the uncharted territories of the Lushai Hills and Chin Hills, and, coincidentally, for the chiefs of the Lushai Hills to conduct raids in the foothills. As both the British survey party and the raiding party of the three brothers pursued their respective objectives, they accidentally encountered each other in the Saichal Range near Belaisuri, approximately 18 km from Rangamati. On the morning of February 3, 1888, the team of three brothers ambushed Lieutenant Stewart's party. In this attack, Lieutenant Stewart, Corporal McCormick; Private Owen; and one sepoy were killed in action, while the remaining members fled.[7] The three brothers celebrating their victory amputated fallen British soldiers and kept their heads as trophies. They also seized various weapons, including three Snider rifles, two Martini-Henry rifles, Lieutenant Stewart's double-barrel gun, and a pistol, along with personal effects.[8] In response, the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division was determined to discipline the Shendus (Chinzah Lais). This led to the Punitive Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889, which proved to be a watershed moment in the colonial expansion.

The South Lushai Hills Under British Paramountcy

The Punitive Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90

The British launched the Punitive Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90 (commonly

[6] Lt. Col. J. Shakespeare, "Lushai reminiscences" in the *Assam Review*, Vols. 1 and II. A.S. Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land Including a Description of the Various Expeditions into the Chin-Lushai Hills and the Final Annexation of the Country,* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1893), 39-40.
[7] Memorandum showing the manner in which we came to occupy the North Lushai Hills, and the reason for their being regarded as British India, File No. 143, Legal position of the Government of India in the Chin and Lushai Hills, July 1985, Foreign Department, External A, National Archive of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 51.
[8] Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land Including a Description of the Various Expeditions into the Chin-Lushai Hills and the Final Annexation of the Country*, 39-40.

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known as the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90) with four primary objectives: to punish three brothers for Lieutenant Stewart's murder; to stop tribal raids on tea plantations and British settlements and subjects along its frontier; to construct a road toward the Shendu (Lai) territory; and to establish a garrisoned advanced post. Colonel F.V.G. Tregear and Colonel R.G. Woodthorpe led the expedition. Initially constrained by an official telegram on March 3, 1889, which suspended punitive actions, the expedition received permission on March 12, 1889, and two columns that departed on March 13 and 14, 1889, proceeded toward Lungtian (Hausata's village). During this time, Captain Shakespeare received local intelligence from Darbili village, revealing that Hausata died and Lieutenant Stewart's gun was buried alongside him.

Despite the challenging terrain along the Lungsen range, the two columns united at Mat Dung on March 17, 1889. On the same day, crossing the Kolodyne River followed a strenuous climb despite initial misdirection by guides, at 3 PM. On March 20, 1889, the column finally reached Hausata village. Upon hearing two warning shots and observing smoke signals, they encountered an evacuated village.[9] Guided by Darbili informants, they located Hausata's grave in front of the chief residence. The excavation revealed the chief's body adorned in ceremonial robes and turbans, accompanied by weapons, a powder flask, and provisions for the afterlife. Most significantly, Lieutenant Stewart's double-barrel gun was recovered beneath the corpse. The expedition concluded with the destruction of both Hausata and Zahuata's villages before the column returned to the Matdung camp. While the expedition achieved its immediate objective of recovering Stewart's weapons and destroying the villages, Dokulha, one of the primary targets, remained large.[10]

The Downfall of Chinzah's Power: The Fall of Vantura (1891)

The establishment of the British administration in the South Lushai Hills in April 1891[11] marked a significant transformation in the region's indigenous political structure, particularly affecting the dominant Chinzah ruling clan. The destruction of Hausata and Zahuata's villages during the Chin-Lushai Expedition

[9] From Dr. Lyall, Esq., Commissioner of the Chittagong division to The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, (No. 492HT-VI, dated Chittagong, the 5th May 1889), October 1889, File No.40, Foreign Department, External A, National Archive of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 33.

[10] From Dr. Lyall, Esq., Commissioner of the Chittagong division to The Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, (No. 492 HT-VI, dated Chittagong, the 5th May 1889), October 1889, File No.40, Foreign Department, External A, National Archive of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 33.

[11] Historical notes on the question of the jurisdiction of the British Government in the Chittagong and South Lushai Hill tracts, File No. 135, Legal position of the Government of India in the Chin and Lushai Hills. Proposed application of the provisions of Statute 33 Vict., Cap. 3, Section 1, to those districts. July 1985, Foreign Department, External A, National Archive of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 42.

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fundamentally altered the internal political dynamics of the region. Before the British intervention of 1889-90, the Chinzah triumvirate of brothers maintained a robust political network, receiving tributes from numerous satellite villages led by lesser chiefs. Their influence has extended to many Mara tribal settlements, particularly in the Chhimtuipui area. After Hausata died in 1889, Vantura became the chief of Lungtian Village. However, the power structure began to erode. For example, Thawngliana, the lesser chief of the Serkawr village in the Mara tribe, ceased paying the customary tribute to the Chinzah brothers after Hausata's death.

Chief Vantura, enraged by this refusal, retaliated by kidnapping two villagers, Phangia and Laila, who were working in their fields at Serkawr. This disproportionate response to the village's inability to pay tribute tax led the Mara people to organize a retaliatory ambush, resulting in Vantura's fatal wounding on November 22, 1891.[12] This incident marked a crucial turning point in the region's power dynamics, further weakening the once-dominant Chinzah influence in the wake of the British colonial expansion.

When Warriors Bowed: The Twilight of Chinzah Rule

The transformation of political authority in South Lushai Hills reached a critical juncture with Dokulha's defiance of British colonial power. Initially acknowledging British supremacy, Dokulha sought permission from the colonial administration to execute the two Maras in retaliation for his brother's death. This request itself demonstrated shifting power dynamics, as traditional chiefs felt compelled to seek approval from British authorities before carrying out customary acts of retribution. When the request was denied, the Dokulha defied colonial authority and chose to follow traditional tribal customs over colonial dictates. He led a raid in Serkawr village, resulting in the deaths of two British mara subjects: Vaikhama and Kamchunga. In a display of traditional warrior culture, Dokulha and his men beheaded their victims and carried their heads back to their villages as trophies. This incident marked a pivotal moment in the decline of Chinzah's authority.[13] Disregarding British orders, Dokulha turned what would have been considered a legitimate act of tribal justice into a criminal offence under colonial law. The British administration's classification of the killings as murders, rather than tribal warfare, demonstrated the fundamental shift in regional power structures - the Chinzah chiefs were no longer autonomous rulers but subjects bound by colonial law. This episode vividly illustrates the conflict between traditional tribal governance and colonial authority. It shows how the British administration's establishment as the supreme authority in the region effectively transformed Chinzah leaders from independent rulers to subordinate subjects,

[12] B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Lal Ropuite (Vol. I),* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1987), 111.
[13] From W.B. Oldham, Esq., Commissioner of the Chittagong Division to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, (No. 740-L., Dated Chittagong, the 26th April 1892), File No. 123, Legal position of the Government of India in the Chin and Lushai Hills, July 1895, Foreign Department, External A, National Archive of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 35.

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marking the definitive end of their traditional autonomy.

The First Imprisonment of Dokulha in British Colonial Jail (1892-1896)

The capture of Chief Dokulha on February 15, 1892, marked a pivotal moment in the British colonial consolidation in the South Lushai Hills. Under R. Sneyd Hutchinson's leadership, British forces conducted a complex operation through challenging terrain to apprehend the chief, culminating in a pre-dawn raid that initially failed when Dokulha escaped into the jungle. During the raid, Hutchinson discovered significant evidence, including Lieutenant Stewart's prismatic compass and empty revolver cases - remnants of the Chin-Lushai Expedition.[14] Through negotiations with captives, Dokulha eventually surrendered on February 18, 1892.

In his statement to Captain Shakespeare on 20 February 1892, Dokulha justified his actions through tribal custom, explaining that killing enemies was necessary to provide his deceased brother Vantura with "slaves in the Dead Men's Village."[15]

> "*Thawngliana's (Serkawr chief) men shot my brother Vantura. If I did not kill some men, my brother's spirit would have no slaves in the 'Dead Men's Village.' Therefore, I went to shoot two men from Thawngliana's village. We met some men of Boite Thilkara's village and mistook them for Thawngliana's men, so we shot at them*." [16]

Shakespeare acknowledged the complexities of the case, noting that the killings occurred before the formal British administration in the region. Consequently, the matter was reclassified as a political issue, acknowledging the transitional phase between tribal autonomy and colonial authority.[17] However, Dokulha was sentenced to imprisonment and transferred to Hazaribagh Jail.[18] During his transfer from Lunglei to Chittagong, Dokulha attempted to near Demagiri, overpowering his guards. An alarm raised by one of the guards thwarted the attempt. His detention destabilized the region, prompting widespread panic and appeals for his release from the local communities. This episode exemplifies a complex transition from tribal autonomy to colonial governance. Dokulha's capture not only

[14] Robert Reid, *The Lushai Hills (2nd ed.),* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1978) & From W.B. Oldham, Esq., Commissioner of the Chittagong Division to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 35.
[15] From the commissioner of the Chittagong Division to the secretary to the government of Bengal, Dated Rangamati, the 18th September 1893,
[16] Legal position of the Government of India in the Chin and Lushai Hills, July 1895, File No. 125, Foreign Department, External A, National Archive of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 37.
[17] Lalthangliana, "Dokulha", 107-108.
[18] From H.J.S. Cotton, Esq., Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial, Political and Appointment Departments, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 122, Legal position of the Government of India in the Chin and Lushai Hills, July 1895, File No. 125, Foreign Department, External A, National Archive of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India.

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represented his fall but also symbolized the broader dismantling of the traditional Chinzah authority. This transformation highlights the fundamental tension between indigenous justice systems and imposed colonial legal frameworks, marking a decisive shift in regional power dynamics as the British administration superseded the established tribal governance structures. This case illustrates how colonial expansion systematically dismantled indigenous power structures, replacing traditional authority systems with colonial governance, which often failed to accommodate local customs and cultural practices.

A significant turning point in Dokulha's imprisonment occurred during Shakespeare's annual visit to Fungkah Village on February 17, 1895. The village, established and previously ruled by Dokulha, welcomed Shakespeare with a ceremonial reception that proved influential in changing the colonial administrator's perspective of the imprisoned chief. During this visit, the villagers unanimously expressed loyalty to the Dokulha, rejecting any alternative leadership. They promised complete compliance with the Superintendent's regulations in exchange for their chief release. This demonstration of widespread support prompted Shakespeare to reassess Dokulha's influence in the southern region.

On February 19, 1895, Shakespeare petitioned the Chittagong Commissioner for Dokulha's release. The proposal was tied to British disarmament policy, which began in the early 1890s as part of colonial efforts to pacify the region. Shakespeare suggested exchanging Dokulha's freedom for 40-50 firearms from the village. This arrangement aligned with broader British efforts to reduce armed resistance on the hills, which had already resulted in the confiscation of hundreds of firearms across various villages. [19] Upon receiving approval from the Chittagong authorities, Shakespeare dispatched Subedar Mahana to inform Fungkah Village of the conditions. The village demonstrated its commitment to securing Dokulha's release by fulfilling all requirements on February 6, 1896. They not only surrendered the requested firearms but also provided 50 men for labour services in Lunglei, as stipulated by colonial authorities. Following these developments and reaching a consensus with the Bengal Chief Secretary, Dokulha was finally released on February 12, 1896, marking the end of his four-year imprisonment.[20] This episode illustrates the complex interplay between colonial authority, indigenous leadership, and community solidarity in the South Lushai Hills in the late nineteenth century.

The Second Imprisonment of Dokulha: Exile at Kala Paani Jail

After being released from the Chittagong jail, Dokulha ascended to the chieftainship of the Fungkah and Lungtian villages, as both his brothers were no longer alive. He meticulously prepared for the prestigious *Khuangchawi* feast, a traditional celebration that commemorates significant achievements. The importance of the feast was demonstrated by its widespread attendance, not only

[19] Doungel, *Lai Chieftainship and its impact in politics,* 101.
[20] Lalthangliana, "Dokulha", 109-110.

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from Dokulha's villages but also from nearby villages. The celebration served multiple purposes: first, it publicly affirmed Dokulha's position as chief, demonstrated his ability to fulfil traditional obligations, and reinforced social bonds between communities; second, through *Khuangchawi*, he effectively established his legacy as the successor of the band of three brothers and pride of the Chinzah clan's power.[21]

The aftermath of this grand feast was quite murky; Zaliana was upset by the unauthorized killing of his bison by Dokulha for his *Khuangchawi* feast. Therefore, he sought redress by filing a formal complaint with Drake Brockmen, the Sub-Divisional Officer (Lunglei). His accusation not only killed his bison but also alleged that Dokulha was responsible for the disappearance and presumed death of a Muslim fakir. In response, British authorities responded swiftly to these allegations. They deployed a police sub-inspector with 24 officers to Fungkah village and summoned four (4) villagers for questioning, yet the initial inquiry yielded no substantial evidence of the fakir's disappearance. Dokulha himself denied involvement in the fakir's missing case. However, the investigation took a controversial turn when authorities subjected Dokulha to severe punishment and pressure, ultimately forcing him to provide a written confession under the threat of execution.[22]

In May 1901, Dokulha was transported to Aizawl with heavy security. The journey was marked by three dramatic incidents: first, a diversion at Ramlaitui village due to Dokulha's claimed leg pain; second, an escape attempt during which Dokulha bit one of the labourers; and third, another attempt near the Hmuifang cliff where he tried to kill a carrier by kicking against the cliff wall. In June 1901, Shakespeare reviewed reports from Brockman and Bhawan Singh and he subsequently summoned three (3) individuals — Saitulha, Hranghaia, and Vakkama — from Fungkah village. Due to insufficient evidence, with no eyewitnesses or tangible proof, and considering Dokulha's persistent claims of innocence regarding Fakir's disappearance, Shakespear decided to commute the initial death sentence to imprisonment in Chittagong jail. Initially confined to Chittagong jail, he maintained contact with relatives who visited him during his imprisonment. Dokulha requested his visitors to send him a rice beer with a knife concealed within the delivery. His relatives complied with this request and successfully smuggled the items into prison. The situation escalated dramatically when Dokulha used the smuggled weapon to launch a fatal on a jail warder, prompting authorities to immediately transfer him to the more secure and remote Kala Pani (the Cellular Jail) in Andaman.[23] In there he met Hlawncheuva, an inmate from Hnahthial

[21] S.R. Chinzah, *Thlahtute Chanchin,* (Lawngtlai: A.C. Press, 1998), 76.
[22] Lalthangliana, "Dokulha", 112.
[23] Lalthangliana, "Dokulha", 114.

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village, who had been convicted of murdering an interpreter in 1892.[24] Over time, Hlawncheuva received a reduction in his sentence.[25] However, Dokulha remained in Andaman and no archival sources were unclassified/available to trace the exact date and circumstances of his death.[26]

Reading Resistance: A Theoretical Framework of Indigenous Anti-Colonial Movements

The historiography of tribal resistance movements in the Southern Lushai Hills necessitates a fundamental methodological recalibration that transcends traditional analytical frameworks. No doubt, the empirical historical narrative is very pertinent, but moving further beyond those traditional approaches — though they offer valuable insights—is proving insufficient in fully capturing the nuanced complexities of Indigenous responses to colonialism. Drawing from Clifford Geertz's anthropological methodology of "thick description," scholars must adopt a more sophisticated analytical lens that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of tribal societies and their resistance strategies. This approach becomes particularly crucial when confronting the inherent biases embedded within colonial archives, including British official reports and ethnographic studies, which often obscure Indigenous perspectives through their colonial prejudices. The methodological challenges are further compounded by the predominantly oral nature of indigenous knowledge systems, which were marginalized by colonial textual sources. Contemporary scholars must therefore employ innovative approaches that bridge the gap between oral and written histories while actively engaging with indigenous knowledge systems. This necessitates a constant adjustment of historical perspective to capture the multiplicity of Indigenous experiences, ranging from overt military confrontation to subtle forms of resistance. By identifying native agency and the sophistication of tribal social and political institutions, scholars can study decolonizing historical narratives and elaborate a more nuanced understanding of tribal resistance movements in colonial contexts.

Huge changes occurred in the southern Lushai Hills, particularly between 1889 and 1891, marked by an unprecedented wave of colonial interventions that surpassed the earlier Lushai Expedition (1870-71) in scale and impact. This colonial incursion simultaneously impacted the Chin Hills and triggered profound structural changes in the local political and social institutions. One of the significant points was the response of the Chinzah clan, whose hegemonic position in the region's political hierarchy was facing unprecedented challenges. Interestingly, the hidden

[24] Report on the administration of the south Lushai hills for the year 1893-94, (No. 520L, Dated 4th June 1894), File No. 219-225, Foreign Department, External-A, National Archives of India, Government of India, New Delhi, India, 6.
[25] Doungel, *Lai Chieftainship and Its Impact in Politics*, 107-108.
[26] Liantluanga Chinzah, *Senhri Par (1st ed.),* (Lawngtlai: Lai Autonomous District Council, n.d.), 4.

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complex power struggle between the traditional administrative system and the colonial imposition of a power structure is reflected in the raids and counterattacks between Chief Vantura and the Chief of Serkawr village. When analyzed through Giddens' theoretical framework of ontological security, Vantura's retaliatory actions—particularly the kidnapping of two Serkawr villagers after the village stopped paying customary tribute—reveal the complex dynamics of maintaining power in a rapidly changing political landscape. The incident involving the death of Chief Vantura demonstrates that the indigenous raiding and headhunting tradition could no longer remain in the realm of "culture" but instead shifted into the realm of "savages". The British-Western ideas of "civilization" and ordered society began to intervene in the "unknown society" of the southern Lushai Hills and eventually led to the fragmentation of the existing political system and social and cultural dynamics. These encounters challenge linear colonial narratives that defined such conflicts as mere manifestations of tribal brutalities, such as headhunting. Instead, these events can be interpreted as strategic responses to the erosion of established power structures and attempts to maintain ontological security during rapid socio-political change. The destabilization of indigenous political systems and ecological equilibrium by British imperialism thus created a complex matrix of resistance and adaptation, wherein traditional practices of authority assertion collided with emerging colonial power structures. While the historical context establishes the backdrop of colonial intervention, understanding indigenous resistance requires examining multiple theoretical frameworks that illuminate different aspects of the anti-colonial struggle.

Power-Knowledge Relations in Indigenous Resistance

The systematic deployment of deception by tribal chiefs and their subjects against colonial powers presents a compelling case study of what Foucault terms "resistance to power-knowledge relations." In the context of colonial expansion into tribal territories, as evidenced by the cases of Dokulha and the Lai Tribe, deception emerged not merely as a defensive strategy but as a sophisticated form of counter-power that directly challenged colonial epistemological frameworks. This resistance manifested through the deliberate withholding of information and the construction of alternative narratives that served to protect Indigenous autonomy and knowledge systems. The colonial apparatus, with its emphasis on documentation, mapping, and categorization, represents what Foucault would identify as a regime of truth—a system that produces, regulates, and circulates statements as truth claims. However, the tribal response to this power-knowledge nexus reveals a nuanced understanding of how knowledge functions as an instrument of power.

When tribal chiefs, like Dokulha, chose to withhold information or present conflicting narratives to the colonial authorities, they effectively disrupted the colonial project of surveillance, information gathering and territorial expansion. This practice is consistent with Foucault's claim that power relations are repressive

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and productive, producing new forms of resistance and counter-discourse. The case of the Muslim fakir and Dokulha particularly illuminates how tribal communities employed what Foucault would term "tactical polyvalence of discourse." The collective silence of villagers and Dokulha's initial denials represent not simply lies but a strategic deployment of discourse that challenged colonial authority's claim to absolute truth. His confession, which was eventually forced under threat of execution shows the violent intersection of power and knowledge in colonial contexts, in which truth does not become an objective reality but rather the product of power relations. This dynamic exemplifies Foucault's argument that truth is not outside power or lacking in power; rather, it is produced and sustained by multiple forms of constraint and inducement.

The case of Chinzah Lai's attack is particularly revealing because it presents two distinct narratives that serve different purposes in the power-knowledge dynamic: The first narrative is a sort of ‘accidental encounter’ narrative, which describes the ambush on the survey party near the Karnafuli River as an unplanned confrontation. This portrayal minimizes political intent and potentially avoids colonial retribution by framing the incident as an unfortunate event rather than an organized crime. The second version is a ‘social obligation’ narrative that highlights Hausata's social and cultural obligations, as well as his promises to his father-in-law, Zahuata. It tries to justify the action as a part of resolving a domestic dispute motivated by Hausata’s love for his wife and the indigenous belief system surrounding power and objects. The multiple narratives surrounding Chinzah Lai's attack illustrate how indigenous communities maintained alternative epistemological frameworks that resisted colonial truth claims. By justifying actions through Indigenous belief systems—such as the Lai community's notions of dominance in the afterlife—they created a counter-discourse that undermined the hegemonic colonial narrative. This resistance through alternative knowledge systems demonstrates how power relations are not merely vertical impositions but complex networks of competing truth claims and forms of knowledge. The multiplicity of narratives served as a protective mechanism, making it difficult for colonial powers to construct a clear case for punitive action or to fully understand and thus control the social dynamics at play. This ambiguity maintained spaces of autonomy within the colonial system.

Ultimately, this case illustrates how indigenous communities, such as the Lushai and Chin Hills tribes, used narrative strategies to deceive and maintain their systems of meaning and authority while operating under colonial rule. The persistence of multiple narratives represents both a practical strategy of resistance and an assertion of epistemic sovereignty. While Foucault's framework helps us understand the epistemic dimensions of resistance, Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry reveals how indigenous leaders navigated between compliance and defiance.

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Colonial Mimicry and Cultural Ambivalence

The case of Dokulha exemplifies Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry through his complex navigation of British colonial power structures in the aftermath of his brothers' deaths. Initially, Dokulha demonstrated classic colonial mimicry by adopting a submissive posture and attempting to work within colonial legal frameworks. This was evident in his formal request to the British authorities for permission to exact traditional revenge - a striking example of how colonial subjects attempted to reconcile Indigenous practices with colonial governance. His careful adherence to colonial protocols while seeking sanction for a traditional practice demonstrates what Bhabha terms "almost the same, but not quite" - the fundamental characteristic of colonial mimicry. The transformation in Dokulha's behaviour following the rejection of his request reveals the inherent ambivalence in colonial mimicry. Denied the right to seek justice through colonial channels, he reverted to traditional practices, culminating in the attack on the village of Serkawr and the ritual beheading of its victims. This violent shift from compliance to defiance illustrates Bhabha's concept of mimicry, which carries the seeds of menace. Dokulha's statement, “If I did not kill some men, my brother's spirit would have no slaves in the 'Dead Men's Village,'” particularly illuminates this tension - it represents a complete rejection of colonial values in favour of indigenous spiritual beliefs, demonstrating how mimicry can rapidly transform into resistance.

The case ultimately discloses the complex hybridity of colonial subject formation through Dokulha's vacillation between colonial compliance and indigenous resistance. His early attempt to legitimize revenge through colonial channels, followed by his violent rejection of colonial authority, demonstrates what Bhabha describes as the destabilizing effect of colonial mimicry. The ritual decapitation and trophy-taking, performed after attempting to work within colonial systems, represents not just a rejection of colonial authority but an assertion of indigenous cultural practices that the colonial system sought to suppress. This case study thus provides a powerful example of how colonial mimicry functions as both a survival strategy and a source of potential subversion, revealing the inherent instability of colonial authority and the agency of colonial subjects in navigating imposed power structures. Beyond the strategic dimensions of resistance, colonial rule had profound psychological impacts on indigenous leadership, particularly visible in the transformation of traditional chieftainship.

Psychological Impact of Colonial Rule on Indigenous Leadership (Chieftainship)

The colonial encounter had a profound impact on Dokulha's life and psychological state, as evidenced by two significant incidents in 1892 and 1901. Dokulha's experience draws on Fanon's theoretical framework on colonial trauma and illustrates the deep psychological wounds caused by colonial subjugation. The systematic dismantling of Chinzah power through British punitive expeditions - from the destruction of Hausata village to the devastation of Thantlang chiefdom -

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created both personal and collective trauma. This was particularly evident in the 1892 incident in which Dokulha's misguided vengeance against the village of Serkawr led to his capture and imprisonment, highlighting the destructive impact of colonial rule on indigenous justice systems. In the case of a Muslim fakir who disappeared from the Dokulha territorial region in 1901, the psychological disorders of minor indigenous chiefs of this region were subject to direct and indirect colonial pressures. Dokulha's erratic behaviour during his transport to Aizawl - including feigned injuries, attempted escapes, and violent outbursts - demonstrates what psychologists identify as manifestations of severe colonial trauma. His actions, marked by dramatic shifts between compliance and resistance, reflect the internal conflicts faced by Indigenous leaders forced to navigate between traditional authority and colonial subordination. The physical restraints used during his transport - bound hands and feet, multiple guards - symbolize the significant restrictions placed on indigenous leadership under colonial rule. The psychological and leadership trauma that Dokulha experienced manifested itself in multiple dimensions: personal trauma through loss of power and status, collective trauma through witnessing community subjugation, and cultural trauma through the interruption of traditional systems of governance. His challenges primarily on fundamental disagreement between maintaining traditional authority and adapting to colonial constraints. This case study reveals how colonial authorities' perception of Indigenous leaders' "erratic" behaviour often masked more profound psychological and socio-political resistance to colonial domination. Dokulha's experience exemplifies the complex interplay between personal psychological trauma and broader socio-political resistance within the context of colonial rule.

Adaptive Resistance and Decline of Chinzah Authority

The examination of Dokulha's case through multiple theoretical lenses - Foucault's power-knowledge relations, Bhabha's colonial mimicry, and Fanon's colonial trauma - reveals how indigenous resistance operated simultaneously at epistemic, cultural, and psychological levels. This multifaceted resistance culminated in what we might term "adaptive resistance strategies. Dokulha's response to colonial pressure demonstrates sophisticated indigenous leadership adaptation through what scholars term "adaptive resistance." His strategic distribution of chieftainships among his sons across multiple villages (Bualpui, Rulkual, Lungtian, Tuipang, and Fungkah) created a resilient network of traditional authority. Somehow, this approach safeguarded the crucial elements of the Lai socio-political system while developing new organizational structures that remained unaffected by colonial intervention. The maintenance of local tribute collection systems, particularly evident in Tumirha's role in supervising tribute collections from Matupi to Akyab, demonstrates how the community maintained the traditional power structures of southern Lushai Hills through strategic territorial expansion.

The strength of Dokulha's leadership is particularly evident in the community's

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response to his imprisonment, exemplifying what James Scott terms "everyday forms of resistance." The villagers' petition to Shakespeare and their extraordinary offer of 40 guns demonstrate how Indigenous leadership derived legitimacy primarily from community support rather than colonial recognition. This collective decision of this community to intervene in the colonial attempts to appoint new chiefs demonstrates the serious bonding between Indigenous leadership and community agency in preserving traditional power structures. The community's resistance highlights how indigenous governance systems maintained legitimacy through popular support even under colonial pressure. However, the power of the band of three brothers who represented the Chinzah authority of the southern part of Lushai Hills gradually declined. This deterioration began with Dokulha's imprisonment in Chittagong and reached its climax when he was transported to the Andaman Cellular Jail.

Conclusion

The case of the southern part of the Lushai Hills shows how indigenous resistance to colonialism operated across multiple, interconnected dimensions. Foucault's framework exposes how indigenous leaders achieve epistemic sovereignty through strategic narrative control. When we examine this case through Bhabha's mimicry theory, we see that it illuminates the complex ways in which chiefs like Dokulha navigated between colonial loyalty and indigenous authority. The theoretical insights into colonial trauma, which Frank Fanon portrays in his writings, help to explain the psychological changes of the Indigenous leadership of the Chinzah chiefdom under colonial pressure. The continued decline of Chinzah authority, which ended with Dokulha's imprisonment at the Kala Pani, reflects not simply a defeat of Indigenous resistance but rather the complex costs associated with sustaining various forms of resistance to the destruction of colonial power. The continuous mass support from the southern Lushai Hills and the strategic diffusion of authority among Dokulha's sons demonstrate how Indigenous governance systems adapted to colonial pressure while maintaining core cultural values and power structures. This theoretical framework for understanding indigenous resistance goes beyond the simple binary of collaboration versus resistance. Instead, it reveals a sophisticated interplay of power, knowledge, culture, and psychology in anti-colonial struggles. The Southern Lushai Hills case thus provides valuable insights for understanding indigenous resistance movements in colonial contexts.

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