

Socio-Economic Conditions of the Border areas of India-Myanmar: A Case Study of Thingsai Village of Mizoram

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Abstract

The present study assesses the socioeconomic circumstances of those who live in Mizoram's border region of Thingsai Village. Ethnic features, cultural customs, livelihood patterns, cross-border commerce between Mizoram and Myanmar, migration, and the effects of these variables on the socioeconomic development of the border people are all given special emphasis. The chapter also examines how people residing near the international border have been influenced by India and Myanmar's close proximity and historical links. There are strong historical, cultural, religious, and geographical linkages between India and Myanmar. Centuries of interpersonal contact, cultural exchanges, and common customs have reinforced the two nations' friendship. The relationship between the two countries has been strengthened by centuries of people-to-people interactions, cultural exchanges, and shared traditions. As the birthplace of Buddhism, India holds special significance for the people of Myanmar, many of whom undertake pilgrimages to Buddhist sacred sites in India. Furthermore, the geographical proximity of the two countries has facilitated continuous social and economic interactions across the border.

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Introduction

India and Myanmar share a land boundary of over 1,600 kilometres and a maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. The long-standing relationship between the two countries is also reflected in the presence of a substantial population of Indian origin in Myanmar. Within this broader context, Mizoram occupies a strategically important position in India's relations with Myanmar. The state shares an international border of approximately 404 kilometres with Myanmar to the east and south, and a border of about 306 kilometres with Bangladesh to the west.

The geographical location of Mizoram is of considerable significance. Characterized by rugged north-south-oriented mountain ranges, deep river valleys, and dense forests, the state presents a unique physical environment. Its remote and difficult terrain has historically influenced patterns of settlement, communication, transportation, and economic development. The international boundaries have also divided various Mizo tribes and their related ethnic groups, many of whom continue to maintain social, cultural, and familial ties across the border.

The frontier region gained strategic and geopolitical importance during periods of insurgency in Northeast India. Owing to its inaccessible terrain and the presence of several tri-junction points, including Mizoram-Tripura-Assam, Mizoram-Manipur-Assam, Mizoram-Bangladesh-Tripura, and Mizoram-Myanmar-Bangladesh, the region became an important area of political and security concern. While the India-Myanmar border remained relatively peaceful until the mid-1960s, the rise of the Mizo insurgency and political movements among the Chin people in Myanmar contributed to increased instability in the border areas. The border between Mizoram and Myanmar is marked by several rivers, including the Tiau, Tuisa, and Boinu, which are tributaries of the Kaladan River system. These rivers drain the eastern hills of Mizoram and flow southward through Myanmar into the Bay of Bengal. Despite the existence of an international boundary, the people living on either side of the border remain closely connected through shared ethnicity, language, culture, and history. Many families have relatives across the border,

maintain matrimonial relationships, and participate in various forms of social and economic exchange.

These cross-border interactions continue to play an important role in shaping the socio-economic conditions of the frontier regions. Trade, migration, cultural exchanges, and kinship networks contribute significantly to the livelihoods and development of border communities. Therefore, understanding the geographical and geopolitical context of the India–Myanmar border is essential for analysing the socio-economic realities of the people living in the frontier areas of Mizoram.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the demographic characteristics and population structure of Thingsai Village.
2. To assess the educational status, occupational structure, and income levels of the households in the village.
3. To analyze the livelihood patterns of the people with special reference to agriculture, crop cultivation, and livestock rearing.
4. To study the social and cultural characteristics of the village, including language, religion, food habits, marriage patterns, and dress.

Methodology

The methods used for the present study include household schedules through which preliminary data on socio-economic background of each household was collected. For collecting household data, simple random sampling technique was used. The data collected includes family member's name, age, sex, education, family size, monthly income, migration, means of livelihood, livestock, service sector, assets, types of house, social structure, culture and custom and trans-border trade between Mizoram and Myanmar.

Population and Sampling: Simple random sampling technique was used for the present study. 152 households (32.97%) consists of the sample.

Table1: Distribution of Sample

Area	Thingsai
Total household	461
Household study	152
Simple random sampling of 30%	32.97%

Review of related literature

Chatterjee (1985) ^[1] mention that when the Chin-Lushai expedition took place in 1889–1890, that the British Army took possession of the Chin Hills. But the Chin Hills district's precise location was unknown to the Myanmar government. A border commission was established in 1893–1894 by the Chief Commissioner of Myanmar to define the Manipur Chin hills boundary. Throughout the winter of that year, Carey and Porteous worked on the project, eventually demarcating the line that is today known as the international border between India and Myanmar.

Prasad (1987) ^[2] states that prior to the British colonization of the region, Mizoram's history is unclear. Since the Chin Hills of Myanmar are the same location from which Mizos came to the current region, they had close ties to the tribes residing there. In addition, they shared linguistic, ethnographic, and cultural traits with the tribes residing in those regions.

Singh (1994) ^[3] mention that the border line begins at the intersection of India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar at Keokradong. Following the Rengtlang, the border travels to the Varunglui's source before coming together with Kolachaung (Sakullui/Sekulhlui), which rises from the north on the side of Dumzotlang. The river Wabling flows eastward and meets the Kheimu stream before joining the Boinu (Kolodyne) river. From there, it flows along the middle of the Boinu (Kolodyne) river until it intersects with the Tiau.

Barua (1995) ^[4] states that the population has racial and cultural affinities with those who reside across the border. Despite being separated by a boundary line, they were unable to completely break the previous connection. Many people have their own families. There are many married people. Economic transactions are also conducted.

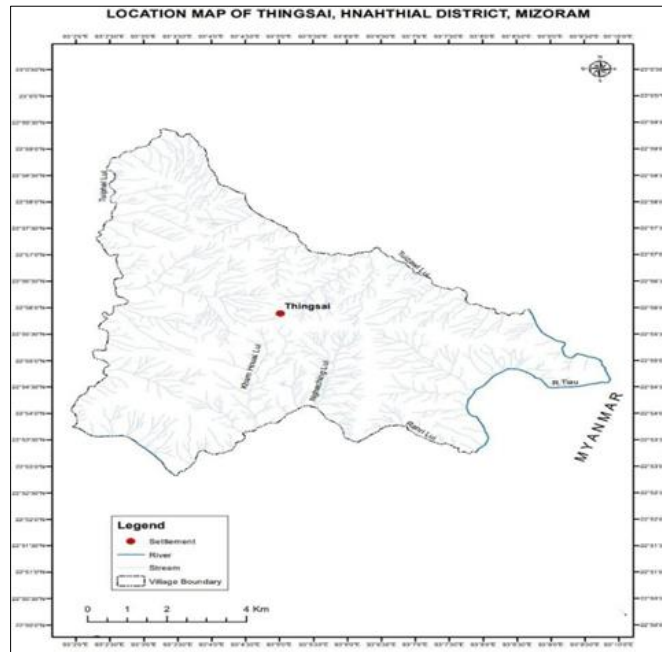
Tirtha (1996) ^[5] states that it is 960 kilometres long. The boundary between India and Myanmar, which essentially follows the watershed of the Brahmaputra and Irrawaddy river systems from where the Himalayan mountains finish southward, was very recently established. The boundary runs through a hilly region populated by a number of indigenous tribes, including the Nagas and Mizos. These tribesmen, who are distinct from the Brahmaputra Valley's plains people in terms of culture, language, and race, have demonstrated a high degree of independence from both Indian and Burmese authorities and occasionally used Burmese territory as a staging area for anti-Indian activities, which were frequently supported by communist guerrillas in Myanmar. As has been mentioned, the Indian government gave in to political pressure and established the state of Nagaland in 1963 as a cultural and political "homeland" for the border regions the Nagas, and the centrally administered territory of Mizoram in 1972.

Findings and analysis

1. Population Structure

The latitude 22°92' and longitude 93°08' are the geocoordinate of the Thingsai village. Thingsai has an elevation 1174 meters (3857 ft) from the mean sea level.

Thingsai is a large village located in Hnahtial district of Mizoram having a total of 461 families. Thingsai village has a total population of 2241 of which 1111 are males while 1130 are females as per the population census 2011. The sex ratio of Thingsai village is 1017 which is higher than Mizoram state average of 976. Thingsai has a higher literacy rate as compared to Mizoram. In 2011 census, the literacy rate of Thingsai was 96.38% as compared to 91.33% of Mizoram. The nearest village in the Myanmar side is Bungkhua which is 26 km from Thingsai.



Public Health Centre at Thingsai
High School at Thingsai



Fig 1: Map of Thingsai at Myanmar border

1. Educational level

Table 4.3 indicates that out of 152 households in Thingsai village, with regard to education, 40.1% had completed

secondary level of education, 30.3% completed middle level of education, 26.3% graduated while only 3.3% completed primary level of education.

Table 2: Educational background of Thingsai Village

Educational level	Thingsai	
	N	%
Uneducated	0	0
Primary	5	3.3%
Middle	46	30.3%
Secondary	61	40.1%
Higher Sec	0	0.0%
Graduate	40	26.3%
Post Graduate	0	0.0%
Total	152	100%

2. Occupational Structure

Occupational structure refers to the number of workers who are engaged in different types of economic ventures. In the eastern border of Mizoram viz. Thingsai village, about 38% of the households were farmer and majority (58.9%) of households are found to be daily labourer respectively. In

Thingsai village, while 16% were unemployed, 13% were daily labourer and the rest of the households are working as merchants, mistiri, carpenters, teachers, working in police department, and drivers and the remaining small percentage worked as village council, tower maintainer, reverend, pig farmer, pensioner, and army.

Table 3: Occupational Structure of Thingsai Village

Type of occupation	Thingsai	
	N	%
No occupation	25	16.4
Assam Rifle Porter		
Army	1	0.7
Baker		
Carpenter	7	4.6
Cement Mistiri	1	0.7
Civil pensioner		
Commercial vehicle		
Daily labourer	21	13.8
Driver	3	2.0
Electrician		
Farmer	58	38.2
Fisherman		
JCB Operator		
M.A.P	2	1.3
Meat shop		
Mechanic		
Merchant	10	6.6
Mistiri	8	5.3
Car rental		
Car workshop		
Pensioner	1	0.7
Peon		
Pharmacy		
PHE		
Pig Farmer	1	0.7
Police	3	2.0
Poultry Farmer	2	1.3
Private Teacher		
Restaurant		
Reverend	1	0.7
Tailor	2	1.3
Tea stall		
Teacher	4	2.6
Tourism		
Tower maintenance	1	0.7
Two wheeler workshop		
Vendor		
Village council	1	0.7
Wholesale shop		
Total	152	100

3. Income level

Thingsai village have an income that falls within the category of ₹14499 or less. Just 4.1% of the families' income falls into the `46000-149999 category, whereas 15% of the households' income falls into the `14500-45999 range.

Table 4: Income Level of Thingsai Village

Annual Income of Households	Thingsai	
	N	%
14499 and below	124	81%
14500-45999	23	15%
46000-149999	5	4.1%
150000-2000000	0	0
Total	152	100%

4. Cultivation of crops

With respect to cultivation of crops, in the eastern border of Mizoram viz. Thingsai village, 44.1% of families did not cultivate any crops, 31.6% of all households cultivated both rice and vegetables, 17.8% of all households cultivated just

vegetables, and the remaining households cultivated fruits, rice, and tea.

Table 5: Cultivation of crops

Crops	Thingsai	
	N	%
No Cultivation	67	44.1
Coffee	0	0
Corn	0	0
Fruits	4	2.6
Rice	1	0.7
Rice, Vegetables	48	31.6
Teak	0	0
Vegetables only	27	17.8
Vegetables, Fruits	4	2.6
Vegetables, Tea	1	0.7
Total	152	100

5. Types of Livestock

Regarding the different types of livestock raising as shown in table 4.10, in the eastern part of Mizoram which border

Myanmar about 39.5% of the households in Thingsai village were involved in poultry farming, 34.9% do not involve in any livestock rearing, 11.2% were involved in both piggery and poultry farming, 6.6% involved in piggery, 2.6% were involved in dog breeding farms, 2.0% were involved in both dog breeding farms and poultry farming, and only 1.3% were engaged in rearing goat. Nonetheless, 0.7% of all households engaged in cattle and poultry. The remaining 0.7% households' practices both in piggery and dog breeding farm.

Table 6: Types of Livestock

Type	Thingsai	
	N	%
No livestock	53	34.9
Cattle, Poultry	1	0.7
Dog	4	2.6
Goat	2	1.3
Piggery	10	6.6
Piggery, Dog	1	0.7
Piggery, goat	0	0
Piggery, Poultry	17	11.2
Piggery, Poultry, Dog	1	0.7
Poultry	60	39.5
Poultry, Dog	3	2.0
Total	152	100

6. Marital status of the case study villages

The table presents the marital status of respondents in

Table 8: Languages Spoken

Languages	Thingsai	
	N	%
Arakan		
Bru		
Bru, Lushai		
Burmese	2	1.3
Chakma		
Falam		
Hawthai		
Lai	22	14
Lai, Kawl, Lushai	3	2.1
Lai, Lushai	31	20.4
Leisen, Lushai	1	0.7
Lushai	88	57.9
Lushai, English	1	0.7
Lushai, English, Kawl	1	0.7
Lushai, Falam		
Lushai, Hindi	1	0.7
Lushai, Lai, Kawl, Malay, Chinese, English	1	0.7
Lushai, Leisen	1	0.7
Lushai, Pailte		
Mara		
Mara, Lushai		
Mok		
Rakhain		
Tedim		
Vuangtu		
Total	152	100

8. Religion practiced by households of case study villages

In pertinent to religion practiced by households of the four villages viz. Thingsai, Zokhawthar, Zochachhuah and Lungbun villages of Mizoram which border Myanmar, the

Thingsai village. The data reveal that 88.8 percent of the respondents are married, indicating that marriage is a common social institution within the village. The findings further show that most marriages take place within the same tribe or community, reflecting the prevalence of endogamous marriage practices among the residents. Only 3.3 percent of the respondents reported being married to individuals from other tribes, suggesting that inter-tribal marriages are relatively uncommon in the village. This pattern highlights the continued importance of tribal identity and cultural traditions in shaping marital relationships in Thingsai village.

Table 7: Marital Status of Thingsai residents

Marriage Status	Thingsai	
	N	%
Total married	135	88.8
Married to same tribe	130	85.5

7. Language spoken in the case study villages

With reference to language spoken by the respondents it can be seen from table 4.25 that in Thingsai village, 57.9% of the households use Lushai, 20.4% can use both Lai and Lushai, 14% use only Lai, 2.1% can speak Lai, Lushai, kawl, 0.7% use Lai, Kawl, Lushai, and another 0.7% use Lushai, English, Kawl and the remaining households uses Lushai, Leisen, Lai, Kawl, Malay, Chinese, English

table shows that out of 152 households, 99.3 % of the households residing in Thingsai village are christians, while only 0.7% belong to other religion.

Table 9: Religious Practices

Type of religion	Thingsai	
	N	%
Christian	151	99.3
Other	1	0.7
Zochachhuah		
Buddhist		
Lobo		
Muslim		
Total	152	100

9. Food habit of people in the case study villages

The table presents the food consumption patterns of households in Thingsai village. The findings indicate that rice serves as the principal staple food for the majority of the population. The dietary habits of the villagers mainly consist of rice, vegetables, and meat, which together form the basic components of daily meals. The data reveal that 78.9 percent of the households consume a combination of rice, vegetables, and meat. Meanwhile, 19.1 percent of the households rely primarily on rice and vegetables and do not consume meat products. A very small proportion of respondents (0.7 percent) reported consuming only vegetables and meat. These results suggest that a mixed diet comprising rice, vegetables, and meat is the most common food habit among the residents of Thingsai village. Mizo cuisine generally uses fewer spices compared to many other Indian cuisines and commonly includes meat products as an important source of nutrition.

Table 10: Food Habits of Thingsai village

Type of food items	Thingsai	
	N	%
Beef		
Chicken		
Mizo chaw		
Other	1	0.7
Pork		
Pork, Beef		
Pork, Chicken		
Rice, Vegetables	29	19.1
Rice, vegetables,meat	120	78.9
Vegetables	1	0.7
Vegetables, Egg		
Vegetables, Fish		
Vegetables, Meat	1	0.7
Vegetables, Pork		
Total	152	100

10. Type of dress

The table shows the clothing preferences of households in Thingsai village. The findings reveal that traditional Mizo attire remains the dominant form of dress among the villagers, with 95.4 percent of households reporting the use of Mizo clothing. In contrast, only 0.7 percent of households preferred western-style clothing. The results indicate a strong adherence to traditional cultural practices and reflect the continued importance of Mizo identity and heritage in the everyday lives of the residents. The predominance of traditional attire suggests that cultural values and customs continue to play a significant role in shaping the lifestyle of the people of Thingsai village.

Table 11: Dress styles of Thingsai village

Dress/Style	Thingsai	
	N	%
Mizo	145	95.4
Western	1	0.7
Others	6	3.9
Mara		
Total	152	100

Conclusion

The study of Thingsai village reveals that its socio-economic characteristics are strongly influenced by its geographical location near the India–Myanmar border. The village is characterized by a predominantly rural economy, with agriculture serving as the primary source of livelihood for a significant proportion of households. Jhum cultivation, crop farming, and livestock rearing continue to play an important role in sustaining the local economy.

The social and cultural life of the village reflects a strong adherence to traditional Mizo values. Most marriages take place within the same tribe, Christianity is the overwhelmingly dominant religion, and Mizo attire remains the preferred form of dress among the majority of households. The use of the Lushai language is widespread, demonstrating the continued importance of ethnic identity and cultural heritage. Food habits are largely based on rice, vegetables, and meat, which constitute the staple diet of most households.

The study further highlights the significance of the India–Myanmar border in shaping the socio-economic environment of Thingsai. Historical, cultural, and kinship ties with communities across the border continue to influence local interactions and livelihoods. Overall, the findings indicate that while Thingsai village has maintained its cultural identity and achieved a high level of literacy, there remains a need for enhanced economic opportunities, improved infrastructure, and greater utilization of its strategic border location to promote sustainable socio-economic development.

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