

Indigenous Knowledge on Musical Instruments of Mizo Tribe

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Abstract

Indigenous Knowledge refers to a distinct body of knowledge that encompasses the information held by a certain community or culture. It may also be referred to as indigenous knowledge, traditional knowledge, and local knowledge. Traditionally, indigenous knowledge has been transmitted orally from one generation to the next, since it was difficult or perhaps impossible to document throughout ancient times. It serves as the primary foundation or reference for indigenous farming methods, food preparation, and several other activities aimed at preserving and perpetuating the traditions of a certain culture or civilization. Cultural factors have a significant impact on the use of indigenous knowledge. The vast majority of indigenous knowledge has been eliminated as a result of the intrusion of advanced technological knowledge. To save traditional knowledge, it is necessary to chronicle and preserve the ancient and valuable literature. Recording indigenous knowledge is necessary to address Intellectual Property Rights concerns. The current research focuses only on the indigenous knowledge of musical instruments belonging to the Mizo people. This talk will discuss the production of Mizo musical instruments and the role of libraries in recording and conserving the indigenous knowledge of the Mizo people.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Mizo, Musical Instruments

Introduction

Indigenous knowledge is crucial since it confers advantages to the indigenous people who have had and lived with it. Indigenous people globally face on-going challenges in preserving their rights, traditions, and knowledge. Indigenous people see the land as the fundamental basis of their existence, bestowed upon them by a divine entity, which sustains, nurtures, and imparts wisdom. Indigenous knowledge is seen as the primary method of generating revenue and sustaining their livelihoods via activities such as food production and resource management (Gorjestani, 2000).

Indigenous People

Indigenous people are those who inhabited a territory prior to its colonization by external cultures and who see themselves as distinct from the present ruling society in their territories. Indigenous peoples are civilizations and groups that have significant cultural importance.

The majority of the population residing in Mizoram consists of Scheduled Tribes, often referred to as Mizo, denoting 'the highlanders'. The Mizo people are mostly composed of three well-known tribes: the Kukis, Pawis, and Lakhers. The majority of Mizos communicate using their own dialects. The Mizo people have designated Mizo Tawng and English as their official languages (Lalhluna, 2013;

Lalthangliana, 2013). Due to the absence of a native script, the Mizo people use the Roman alphabet. The etymology of the term 'Mizo' remains unknown. Music and dance play a significant role in Mizo cultural life, being closely linked to several festivals. The Mizos possess an exceptional aptitude for music and are sometimes referred to as the 'Song bird of the East.' Their festivals were marked by the inclusion of energetic music, captivating melodies, and dynamic dances (Lodrick, 2019).

Understanding Indigenous Knowledge

Local and indigenous knowledge primarily refers to the knowledge that a specific society or culture possesses regarding the skills and practices that have been developed through their ancestral knowledge and extensive history of interacting with their natural environment. Having local knowledge is helpful when making decisions on the fundamental aspects of sustaining one's daily lifestyle. Acquiring this information is crucial for the preservation of their language, ceremonial practices, resource use, and engagement with other societies (UNESCO, 2019).

Mizo Musical Instruments

The Mizo people have had several types of musical instruments from ancient times, however the exact period of their inception remains unknown. The musical instruments of Mizo have a simplistic nature. Mizo musical instruments may be categorized into three main groups: percussion instruments, pipe instruments, and string instruments.

1. Percussion or Striking Instruments

Percussions refer to a wide range of musical instruments that produces sound when beating the instrument with either hand or with stick or any other objects.

- **Khuang (Drum):** Khuang (Drum) is made from hollow tree and both of the sides are wrapped with animal skin. It has different sizes and different names are given in accordance to their sizes. The big khuang is known as Khuangpui (Big Drum), the middle khuang is known as Khuanglai and the small khuang is known as Khuangte (Little Drum). The little drum which is made in a longer size comparing to the original size is known as Kawlkhuang. In Mizo social and religious life Khuang are considered to be the most important musical instrument and it is the most traditional musical instrument which is popularly used in the Mizo society. In every church service, it can be said that khuang is a must in their religious function.
- **Dar (Gong):** Another musical instrument of Mizo is Dar (Gong) which is made from brass in different sizes having different names such as Darkhuang, Darbu, Darmang.
- **Darkhuang:** Darkhuang is the biggest gong which considered one of the most valuable musical instruments which is played on all the Mizo society occasion. Before, it was sometimes used as a means of trade instead of money and can also be used as the price of the daughter.
- **Darbu:** Darbu is made up of three different brass-gongs which are of different sizes and it produces three musical notes which can be played by three experts. One expert person can play the gong by himself. When this type of musical instrument is to be played by one person, the one who is playing tied the gongs on both sides of his body with rope and he hung one gong with his left hand in which the gong produces three different rhythmic notes by beating the gong side by side. The gong is most popularly used on Mizo traditional dance called Khuallam and can be also used in other traditional dances.

- **Darmang:** The smallest type of gong is called Darmang. It is to be played with other gongs and is used for keeping the timing in different traditional dances.
- **Bengbung:** Bengbung is played by girls. It is made up of flat wooden bar which produces three musical notations. Its design has some similarities with Xylophone.
- **Talhkhuang:** Talhkhuang is a much bigger musical instrument in comparison to Bengbung. In the process of making Talhkhuang three wooden pieces were carved out. It is played with a wooden hammer. In the olden times, when the village chief put up a memorial stone this instrument was played. It was also believed that this musical instrument is never taken inside the house of the Mizos in the olden times.
- **Seki:** Seki is made from the horn of the local Mithun (Sial). The two hollow horns are beaten together for maintain timing in Mizo traditional dances. It is commonly used on the different types of group dances of the Mizo people.

2. Pipe Instruments

It refers to a kind of instrument that involves blowing with pursed lips on the hollow surface of the instrument to produce a sound.

- **Rawchhem:** Rawchhem is similar with that of the Scottish "Bagpiper". This type of musical instrument is formed when nine small bamboo pipes of different sizes and lengths which are then inserted to the dried pumpkin. One of the pipes should be used as a mouth piece. Small portions of the pipes are struck out which can produce sound when the instrument is blown. This musical instrument is played when the musician blows in to the mouth piece, and when he started controlling the holes with his fingers, he can then produce various musical notes.
- **Tumphit:** Tumphit is made out of three small bamboos which are of different sizes and length which are tied together with a string. The upper part of the small bamboo is then cut open in order to create different notes at each tube at different lengths. The use of this type of musical instrument was during ritual ceremonies.
- **Mautawtawrawt:** Tawtawrawt is called as a Bamboo trumpet. In order to make this trumpet bamboo tubes are cut into different sizes. The smaller bamboo tube is then inserted to the bigger tube and so on. The last tube was then made on the size of a forefinger which is made in order to blow the trumpet. The whole length of the tube can be more than five feet.
- **Phenglawng:** It is a kind of flute which is made from bamboo. Three holes were made on a piece of bamboo which thus produces three different sounds.
- **Buhchangkhung:** This is a flute that is made out of reed or a paddy stalk and it is generally played by girls.
- **Hnahtum:** When the Mizo boys produce interesting sound by just blowing folded leaves, they called it Hnahtum.

3. String Instruments

Strings are musical instruments having wired objects that produces sound when picked upon.

- **Tingtang:** Tingtang is a Mizo guitar which is similar to that of fiddle or violin but it has only one string. In order to make this kind of guitar a bamboo shaft is fixed in the gourd in order to carry the string.
- **Lemlawi:** Lemlawi is an instrument which is made from small pieces of bamboo. The string is then made from a small portion of the bamboo. The sound produced by the string is controlled by the

mouth.

- **Tuim Dar:** This instrument is also made out of bamboo having three strings which produces different sounds. From the outer part of the bamboo a cane like strings are bend out. It is played like that of a guitar.

Conclusion

Given its significant role in the cultural activities of Mizo society, music naturally became an integral part of most religious and cultural celebrations. Music had a vital role in several occasions, such as weddings, successful hunting celebrations, and big village gatherings, where singing songs and performing music were essential components. The Mizos' passion for music has been ingrained in their culture, and even with the arrival of Christianity, their devotion to song still remains prevalent in the world of worship. Church programs have always emphasized the act of worship via singing, accompanied by appropriate music, as a basic means of expressing belief in God.

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