

**CONFESSIONAL VOICE IN SELECT MIZO POETRY**

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## **Chapter- 1:**

### **Introduction**

#### 1.1 To begin with

The style of writing confessional poetry is associated with American poets such as Robert Lowell, W. D. Snodgrass, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Theodore Roethke, and John Berryman whose works are highly personal account of their life. It has emerged during the late 1950s and early 1960s. It has mostly been explained as poetry of personal experience or feelings. It deals with the subject matter which had not been dealt openly in the previous poetry. It is a highly influential school of poetry and has a significant impact on American poetry thereafter. The confessional poets started writing their own kind of poetry without paying much attention to the style which has already existed.

As quoted by Gill, Ted Hughes points to the importance of confession in writing poetry, “The real mystery is this strange need. Why can’t we just hide it and shut up? Why do we have to blab? Why do human beings need to confess? Maybe, if you don’t have that secret confession, you don’t have a poem – don’t even have a story. Don’t even have a writer.” (67) So, taking this quotation into consideration, every poet is basically a confessional. All poets are living in their works, or at least breathing behind their works in one way or the other, therefore they make their works personal on accounts of their life. However, confessional poetry distinguishes itself from other genres. It has its own nature and characteristics. As the term itself faces the

difficulty of digging out a definition for itself, it creates some kinds of problems in its usage.

The effort to introduce the term ‘confessional poetry’ raises the question, “is ‘confessional poetry’ a relevant term to Mizo poetry?” To answer this question, it is necessary to know the nature and characteristics of Mizo poetry.

## 1.2 Mizo Folk Song

Folk song is the backbone of ethnographic research. It helps a person in getting to know the culture of the primitive societies. It also helps in finding the identity of a person, of a race, and of an ethnic group. The true identity of an ethnic group or a particular race lies much in the culture and tradition of the primitive age. Therefore, ethnographic research depends much on folk literature. Mizo folk literature too plays an essential part in recording historical activities. It tells stories that are immensely significant to Mizo artistic and psychic life.

Mizo folk song is mainly composed in couplet, triplet and quatrain. Many historians and writers trace back the primitive age in order to find out the first song by doing a thorough research, yet the results or what they claimed to be the first song are all different. Also, the time when the primitive people began to compose songs could not be clearly stated. So, it is not easy to ascertain the first song and the exact period when they began having songs. Therefore, stating the first song is still like a mirage and putting Mizo folk song in a chronological order became one of the hardest tasks due to lack of written records.

### 1.3 Nature and characteristics of Mizo folk song

Mizo folk songs have subjectivity as one of its most significant natures. It plays the role of a vehicle of the song-composers to carry what they wanted to express, dispose, and pour forth. It is a venture into the poet's life, thought and feeling. For instance, *Hlado* (Chant of a warrior to celebrate his victory over enemies) and *Bawhhla* (a chant performed by a hunter when slaying wild animals) are all about the victory of a warrior or a hunter where he boasted his heroic deeds. They loved to put their deeds, their emotions, their pains and sorrows, and their thoughts into their songs.

In the broadest and easiest sense, Mizo folk song can be distinguished into three categories- *tlarhnih zai* (Couplet), *tlarthum zai* (Triplet), and *tlarli zai* (Quatrain). Yet, regarding of or basing on its names and themes, the category could be expanded to more lists. One certain characteristic is that each stanza is complete in its own, meaning thereby that, they are hardly divided up into stanzas. One song generally contains one stanza. Even if it is divided up into stanzas, one stanza is wholly and completely distinguished from the following stanza in its theme.

Mizo folk songs bear different names and have different themes. Thanmawia writes in *Mizo Poetry*,

The Mizos are fortunate enough in having a traditional way of classification of their folk songs, and accordingly the Mizo folk songs may be classified as follows: Songs bearing names of individuals; Songs named after modulation of the voice, Cradle songs, Invocations and Incantations. A study of their folk songs

on the basis of the indigenous system of classification shows that the Mizos are having about one hundred different types of songs. (41)

All *zai*<sup>1</sup> which bear the names of individuals do not always bear the names of the composers. For instance, the one who composed all the songs of *Darlenglehi Zai* is not Darlenglehi, but a blind man, Lalkhawdina. She herself never composed a song though this particular song was named after her. She was a good-looking and well-figured widow. Her nurtured character and beauty was talked about a lot. Lalkhawdina, though blind, really longed to be able to see her, so he used to court her. He then started composing songs for her and also about her. All these songs were called *Darlenglehi zai*.

Some folk song bears the name of villages. One of the appropriate exemplars is *Tlangkhaw zai*. It came into existence when the Mizo forefathers resided in Tlangkhua before they crossed Tiau river. According to hearsay, Luaisiali and Saingova of Tlangkhua had an intimate relationship. They made a vow to spend one whole day together. But, Luaisiali's parents prevented her from doing so by sending her away to their field. Then, Saingova sang in melancholy, *Tlang khuaah Saingo ka kual reng e/ Siali feh kirin ka ring lo ve*. (I, Saingo hover around *Tlangkhua*/ I do not think she will return).

It is said that from the above song, *Tlangkhaw zai* appeared. Even without external evidence, it is sufficiently reliable from the internal evidence of its lyrics that this *zai* had begun when they resided in Tlangkhua.

“Simplicity is one of the main traits of Mizo folk songs; they are characterized by simplicity of musical and poetical devices, and marked by the absence of embellishment,” (66) states Lalremruati in her article “Oral tradition: Nature and Characteristics of Mizo Folk Songs”. Mizo folk songs are simple and easy to understand, and there is straightforwardness in its use of language and figures of speech.

Next to the simplicity of its language comes its simple tune. The tune mainly circles around a few musical notes which means that it can be sung lazily without having to give much effort. Lalremruati writes in regard of this tune,

Most of the Mizo folk songs mainly circles around three to four musical notes.

Thanmawia writes, ‘One of the musical instrument songs called *Dar hla* consists of only three notes... The earlier tunes are simply constructed in a very straightforward character, having the note of mostly ‘d’ ‘r’ and ‘m’” (66).

Regarding the tune of Mizo folk songs, Thanmawia states in *Mizo HlaHlui*, “Even though there are numbers of folk songs, there exist merely hundreds of them if categorized it based on its tune.” (7) The meaning is that, when one composed a song with a beautiful and melodious tune, others including the composer himself would compose other songs using that same tune. So, it, therefore, shows that within one single *zai*, there are usually a number of songs, and there can also be more than one composer.

#### 1.4 Major themes in Mizo folk song

Love, nature, patriotism, and boasting of one's heroic deeds are the major themes of Mizo folk songs. *Hlado* (a chant performed by hunters when slaying wild animals) and *Bawhhla* (chant of the brave warriors to celebrate their victory over the dead body of the victim/enemy) are all about boasting of one's heroic action. Nevertheless, among the major themes, love is the principal theme, so would be worth taking into account, first of all.

##### 1.4.1 Love

John Donne has rightly been reckoned "a poet of love". Shakespeare's love for his friend and the dark lady persists throughout his sonnets. Love always plays a vital role in literature. Being the centre of relationships and the reason behind every sacrifice which dwells in every man, it can be constructive as well as destructive. It is indeed a thing that often overwhelms and dominates men. It can bloom beautifully and even last for a life span of time; on the other hand, it can turn into hatred and bring destruction to human. And, poetry plays a vital role as a means of transportation, a vehicle of love since the primeval era till today. In *Hrangchhawni zai*, Hrangchhawni talks about the over-whelming nature of love that dominates her life using her artistic talent as a means of transportation,

*A tuarah thangte ka zuau em ni?*

*Dawrkai sahbawn rimtuiin zotui thiangah;*

*Di zunleng kan tleng, a fai thei lo.*



*A sawi hian sawi suh, ka lung min len,  
A ko kal u, Laldang khua chhan pualhrang val,  
A ngaiin Hrangchhawni them reng mai.*

[Am I a little bit weak?/ With fragrant soap and Zo pure water/ I try to rinse off the charm of my beloved, it cannot be cleansed// How lonely it makes me feel/ Will someone please go and call him/ Hrangchhawni is just lying down longing for him]

Love is what drags Laltheri into the chasm. She was possessed by a strong love for Chalthanga, *hnamchawm*<sup>2</sup> even though it was against the will of Sailo royal family and the society of that time. She chose to love him till the royal family had to get rid of him. When Chalthanga died a terrible death by a brutal order of her brothers, she ran about as a woman possessed, tore off her clothes and sang her love for him that she would not die of starving but of longing to be with her one and only love,

*Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu;  
Ka di thangdanga zalna mah, chhimhlei tual daiah.*

*Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu;  
Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.*

[I will not clothe myself, mother/ Even my lover lies dead beneath the cold earth// Will I not die of hunger, mother/ It'll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for Sailo princess]

As Thanmawia rightly states in *Mizo Poetry*, “Laltheri’s songs brought a great change in the domestic and social status of Mizo women.... The whole content of the song reflects her love for Chalthanga and her condemnation for the cruel deed more than her grief at the great loss.” (43)

Darpawngi, who could be called a woman of adversity, too, was not an exception to love. When she was deserted by Thanglianpuia, she sang about her lost love with this sentimental song, *Tluang hluana chham ang zal min ti maw!/ Chuti Liandang lung her zun leng ka ngaih chu/ Rual ang ka hring zo lo ve*. [Did you all just accuse me of lazily sleeping all the time/ I cannot bear the loss of my love/ That I am as good as dead]. She said that she could not do any work due to the pain caused by the loss of her lover, and that she was as good as dead without the presence of her lover.

Lianchhiari, daughter of Vanhnuaithanga, chief of Thangluah too fell for a man by the name of Chawngfianga who was a *hnamchawm*. Despite of his low dignity, her parents did not object their relationship and approved him to be their son-in-law. Then, he sent a messenger accordingly. But his messenger turned out to be interposed-enemies. Though Lianchhiari’s parents agreed to accept anything he could afford for the bride price, the messenger delivered a wrong message to Chawngfianga that if he did not leave the village immediately, he would probably be killed for he had angered their chief. He thus fled the village immediately for his life. So, Lianchhiari sent a bird as her emissary in her pensive loneliness. She sang, “*Kawl rawna huivate, biahthu hrilh thiam che maw/ Suihlungleng ka tah hi/ Nemte ’n va hril rawh maw*”, [You, wood

pigeon of skyline, if you know how to speak human language/ Tell him softly that/ I weep in deep loneliness].

Love is the dominating theme in Mizo folk song. It constitutes the principal theme in folk songs as it has been in other literature also. There are around hundred *zai* in Mizo folk songs. The theme of love has been flowing through in almost all the *zai*.

#### 1.4.2 Nature

Nature has been one of the main sources of composing songs ever since poetry existed. In the primeval era, as Wordsworth opined, their life was very close to nature. It was a time when they did not have any technology to utilise. So, much of their scale and superstitions depend on nature. For example, very soon after sunsets, Mizo used to have dinner. It was very common for men to woo a lady after having dinner. The first crowing of a rooster was called '*thutmuan ar*', which signifies around 8 o'clock, to tell them that it was still early. The second time a rooster crows, they call it '*leng hawn ar*' or '*leng hnawtchhuak ar*', that is, around nine to ten pm, which mean for them that it was time to go home. When a rooster crows for the third time at night, it tells them that it was midnight. So, anything that happened signifies their dependence on nature.

For instance, Hrangchhawni pleaded with a rooster to hold its crows, "*Keimah iang sulnghaki leng an ni/ Tuipui raltiang pathlawi val an lo leng e/ Bawhar, pau mai lo la leng tin nan*" [They are left alone persons just like me/ These overseas widowers came over to my place/ You, rooster, please hold your crowing], because she wanted to keep the company of her wooers a little longer. She also expressed the power of nature in her other song, "*Kan inthen nan em ni ruai ruai a/ A lo kiu e zo awitu*

*siahthing zarah/ Lawmlai min then tur a lo ni e*”, [Is it that to make us part our ways/  
A cicada sings on the branch of a tree/ To make us part our way]. She assumed the  
singing of a cicada as a signal for her and her lover to part their ways.

Nature has always been the inspiration of their poetic talent. It has always been  
an essential part of their life. They carefully observe nature’s minute changes and live  
their life accordingly.

#### 1.4.3 Patriotism

During the chieftainship, Mizo were living in different villages. During that  
time, brotherhood of being one race is out of their thinking. Oftentimes, they fought  
each other due to different reasons. But still, although they never thought of fighting to  
unite one another, they had patriotic feeling for their own village and clan, and their  
patriotic feeling is not to be considered inferior to that of nation or country.

There were numerous brave warriors treasured truly by villagers. They were  
highly appreciated that numerous songs were also composed in praise of their heroic  
deeds and how the entire village felt secure in their presence. One *Thawmvunga Zai*  
reads,

*Chhim an lo lian ang a, hmar an lo lian ang a,*

*Ka u Lalthawmvung, chhim an lo lian ngai lo ve,*

*Hmar an lo lian ngai lo ve;*

*Hlunchhung keimahni.*

[The south will become greater, the north will become greater/ Brother Lalthawmvung, the south will never become greater/ The north will never become greater/ The real lasting clan will surely be us]

There is one brave warrior who is also a chief named Tuchhingpa. He is good at hunting too. His villagers felt so secure and were so proud of him that they thought even when he dies; Pawla<sup>3</sup> would also be scared of him. Therefore, they compose one song in praise of his bravery, “*Tuchhingpa, zing khaw vanzawl i thlen chuan/ Pawla kawtah chengrang kau ang che/ Hnam len la, sat dai rawh*”, [Tuchhingpa, when you reach the porch of city of dead/ Pull the trigger of your gun on that porch of Pawla/ Hold out your sword, and chop him down]. Everyone except a good warrior or hunter were afraid of dying because of Pawla, because it is believed that he will shoot all souls with his catapult; the injury or the pain is also believed to last for many years. The above cited song shows how much a brave warrior was exalted during those days.

Another instance worth considering is *Lallula Zopui Zai*. Lallula was a chief and a brave warrior as well. Moreover, he was also good at composing songs. He had three *zai* namely, *Zopui Zai*, *Thlanrawn rawt*, and *Darlung zai*. In his *Zopui zai*, he expressed his strong patriotic feeling for his people and his village, and his intention to protect his chieftainship, “*Tlan zai rel lo, keimah Hratdanga/ Zathum rual hnu ka dal zel ang e*”, [I, Hratdanga, who never runs away/ Will stay behind all of the warriors]. He called himself “Hratdanga” which apparently means the one who is addicted to fight in a battle.

#### 1.4.4 Boasting of one's heroic deeds

Boasting of one's heroic deeds is mostly seen in *hlado* and *bawh hla*. It is assumed to be emerged during 1400-1500 AD. They are both a warrior's chant. The former is chanted when a warrior killed wild animals, and the later, when a warrior killed an enemy. All *hlado* and *bawh hla* are about boasting of one's heroic deeds and victory over the killing of wild animals or enemies. Furthermore, chanting *hlado* and *bawh hla* is a way to show-off one's extra-ordinary skill or greatness.

Another factor to consider is that, they boast of their heroic deeds and proudly say their names over the dead body of what and/or whom they killed because they had to tame the souls of wild animals they killed or claim the ownership over the souls of enemy they killed in order to make sure the souls of the killed serve them in life after death. Their life was in a state of flux; there was no stability or security because of the wild animals near them and also because of intra-racial conflict that happened very often between clans or villages. So, they had to boast of their superiority, bravery, and heroic deeds in order to shoo away their enemies or the like, and in turn to comfort themselves.

#### 1.5 Folk songs in the late nineteenth century

The late nineteenth century plays a crucial role in the development of Mizo folk songs. During this era, their religion, or rather, their ritual practices became more precise than before; the chieftainship or the society improved a bit; and furthermore, literature became more improved. There are numerous female poets in Mizo folk songs, and most of them came to appear during these years. In some other parts of the

world, women were barred from writing in the early periods. Even in western literature, one can come to know from the study of George Eliot's curtailed side of truth that women's writing was not taken seriously during Victorian era. Mary Ann Evans had her pseudonym 'George Eliot' in order to escape the stereotype of women only writing light-hearted romances.

In the Elizabethan era, William Shakespeare came to prominence in English literature whose works are still popular worldwide and whose name has been immortalised till today. But, if we read Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, wherein she writes about the story of Judith, the imagined sister of William Shakespeare, who died by her own hands in a piteous manner.

Judith wanted to enter the stage to earn some honour and fame. But, she was deprived of the opportunity by her parents. They "told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers" (61), while her brother, Shakespeare had all time to study "Latin- Ovid, Virgil, and Horace – and the elements of grammar and logic." (61). It is apparently clear, by a mere supposition, that during the Elizabethan period, till twentieth century (a time when this book was written), women were not supposed to act or perform on stage. The condition of life for a woman was to stay at home doing household things and mind only to cater for the family. Womanhood was restricted to the kitchen and the household chores.

Woolf created, as published in [litcharts.com/lit](http://litcharts.com/lit),

... her to show how a woman with talent equal to Shakespeare would not, because of the structure of society, be able to achieve the same success.

Judith's life is fraught with tragedy – first pressured by her family into an early marriage; she must escape to London to free herself to pursue art, but is turned away with scorn from every theatre she approaches. She becomes pregnant, which makes a life of writing impossible, and she eventually kills herself.”

([www.litcharts.com/lit/n.pag](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/n.pag))

A look at gender issues shows that Mizo women possessed a very low status in Mizo society during bygone years. They were seldom treated at par with men. They were simply taken for granted that even their sufferings were thought to be neglected and ignored. Yet, they were not hindered to compose a song, nor their songs be treated as petty or lightly. Rather, they were valued and esteemed not only by the whole village, but also by their neighbouring villages to where their songs spread. So, Mizo women might possess a very low status and they might never be treated as human, but when it comes to composing songs, there were not such a vast gap between man and woman, no partiality between man and woman since Mizo people were always impartially fond of singing. That may be the reason why there were numerous female poets in Mizo folk songs.

Mizo folk songs bearing the names of female which prevailed during the late nineteenth century are- *Darmani zai*, *Aikhiangi zai*, *Thanghniangi zai*, *Thangnunnemi zai*, *Laltheri zai*, *Lianchhiari zai*, *Saikuti zai*, *Chhingpuii zai*, *Lalchhungi zai*, *Rualchhingvungi zai*, *Darlenglehi zai*, and *Darpawngi zai*. There were eight female poets during this time except Darmani, Thangnunnemi, Chhingpuii, and Darlenglehi who simply bore the names of it but not the composers.



The late nineteenth century saw a crucial development of Mizo life and society. During these times, their religion and ritual practices had more certitude, the chieftainships and the society too, improved a lot. Their way of living and cultivation also took a big leap, and their communications too, became more standardised. Most importantly, literature had grown numerous. It seems like every village had its own song-composers and almost everywhere a new song emerged spontaneously in numbers. This era had brought improved nature and characteristics to literature.

### 1.6 Impact of Colonisation

After British colonisation, to state more precisely, after the coming of Christian missionaries, literature became more well-defined and definite because of the efforts given by the missionaries. They made alphabets, established schools, and taught while preaching in order to educate and civilise them. Literature, therefore, made a big change. For instance, the original similes and metaphors were changed because of the influence of new religion.

Despite the change literature had undergone, colonisation proved to be the origin of Mizo literature regarding written records. Before colonisation, literature undeniably existed; but, nothing could be recorded in a written form for there was no alphabet. All their songs and tales were passed on to next generation orally, so could there be no certainty.

Liangkhaia recorded that on January, 11<sup>th</sup>, 1894, the first missionaries, FW Savidge and JH Lorrain came to Mizoram; DE Jones on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1897; and Edwin Rowlands in December, 1899. These missionaries gave painstaking efforts to lead

them away from their barbarian attitude. From time to time, Christianity lengthened and widened its realm.

The birth of a new religion marked the birth of a new type of songs that has a distinctive characteristic, that is, satirical song. *Puma zai*, which was used as a satire on the new religion, broke out initially, as stated by Liangkhaia, in Zawngin village. It became very popular when the chief of Zawngin celebrated it with a grand feast. Later, it was called *Tlanglam zai*, because when they sang *Puma zai*, all who gathered used to dance in the field while singing that song.

For instance, the first Christians used to collect rice on every Sunday. The unbelievers laughed and mocked at this activity, then composed songs, “*Immanuela a tam em ni/ Chawlhni tlaia in buh tham khawn zozai hi/ Ei seng hian kei zawng ka ring nem le*”, [Does Emmanuel starve/ All the rice you have collected on every Sunday evening/ I do not think he will be able to eat them all].

Just as the life of the Mizos cannot be separated from music, the life of the Mizos and alcohol had strong connections that each and every family had a pot of rice beer. They celebrated their festivals and special occasions with a bundle of beer/ale. But, when the Christian missionaries came and spread a new religion, the newly converted Christians were not allowed to drink alcohol. So, they drank tea instead of alcohol. The unbelievers then sang, “*Tin zu leh tin zu a dang mang e/ Nangni tin zu luar bawn thingpui hnahthel ro/ Tirhkoh mei bula'n a dawt kuang kuang*”, [So different is red drink and red drink/ Your alcohol, reddened with dry tea leaf/ Short-tailed Apostle sucks and gulps it].

Besides *Puma zai*, there was also a song called *Kaihlek zai* which was apparently composed by the new converts to covertly sing their traditional or love songs and unbelievers as well to satirize the new religion. The new converts were so restricted that they were not allowed to sing their traditional songs and even the same tune of their traditional songs. If they were caught singing that song, they must not escape punishment. The punishment could be banishment from the church. A transgressor was punished according to his or her transgression. But, being humans, they could not always control their emotions and desires. The more the restriction, the stronger was the attraction. Then, *Kaihlek zai* broke out.

Mizo folk song may only be written in couplet, triplet and quatrain, but, it seems to appear greater and richer than the contemporary poetry after having an in-depth analysis, particularly when considering candour in dealing with personal feelings such as anger, dissatisfaction, confession of one's love or sorrows, in boldness and straightforwardness, and the like. Besides this, it can be assumed that the characteristics of confessional poetry and post-colonialism are more precise and certain than in the contemporary period. Be it boasting or confession, there is more frankness and freedom compared to contemporary age.

### 1.7 Post-Colonial Era: The Confluence of traditional songs and translated songs

Post-colonial era, which is from the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, can be considered the blending period of the old and the new in Mizo literature particularly in poetry. When twentieth century comes, almost all the Mizos were converted to Christian. This new religion has much been influenced by the

foreign songs in its use of metaphors and similes, and the language chosen to compose songs.

### 1.7.1 *Lengkhawm Zai*, Confluence of Western songs and Mizo traditional songs

The first Christians were confined totally into the rules and restrictions which the missionaries made in the beginning. But it lasted only for a while. When the third spiritual revival which was considered the prominent revival ever occurred in Mizoram, the Christians could not suppress their real nature, that is, suppressing oneself to sing without the beat of a drum and sing only the foreign songs which had quite a different tune comparing to the Mizo songs and that did not fit to arouse the sentiment of the Mizo people; there was a renaissance among the Mizos.

The new songs with all the tunes actually could not arouse their emotions nor could it quench their thirst. Their sentiment lay in the tunes of their old songs. Then, either by the end of the 1919 or beginning of the 1920, *Lengkhawm Zai* came into the light of Mizo literature. In its characteristic and wordings, it has much a resemblance of English songs but its tune is very similar to the pre-colonial songs. So, it is a confused mixture of two different songs, that is, the new and the old songs.

Thanmawia writes in *Mizo Poetry*, “Just after the great Revival of 1919 broke out; three great Mizo poets appeared which soon turned the Mizo Christian songs to the traditional way. The founder and fore-runner of this movement was Patea (1894-1950).” (79) His first song is “Ka ropuina tur leh ka himna hmun”,

*Ka ropuina tur leh ka himna hmun,*

*Ral hlauhawm leh titna awm lo chu;*

*Thlaler atang hianin ka hmu rinin,*

*Chu hmun hlun chuan min tuam vel vangin. (1-4)*

[There lies my land safe and glorious/ Where fear no longer exists/ With eyes of faith now I see from this desert/ For that eternal place owns me now]

(Trans. *Mizo Poetry*)

And his second song “Aw, Lalpa Davida leh a Thlah Arsi”, *Ka lawmna tui-finriat angin a liam a/ Thihlui kamah zaiin i hming ka fak ang*” (3-4), [The joy in my heart now expands like the sea/ Someday, beyond Jordan, I’ll magnify Thee]

(Trans. *Mizo Poetry*)

The above two cited poems have some English metaphors and similes which were never used in the pre-colonial era – *thlaler* (desert), *tui-finriat* (ocean or sea), and *luikam* (bank of river). Patea still used these metaphor and simile but the tunes are much closer to the traditional tune. So, in these two songs, as is the case with all other *Lengkhawm zai*, Western hymnal, or European, and Mizo traditional way of composing songs are merging together.

### 1.7.2 Retrieving Poetic Diction in *Lengkhawm Zai*

The early Christian songs, that is, the translated ones rarely had poetic diction because the missionaries were not familiar with Mizo poetic language. Even when the first converts composed songs of their own, they never used poetic language for they were influenced and guided by the missionaries and using poetic language in their hymns was considered paganism. As written by Thanmawia,

Reviewing the Christian poetry, Rev. Liangkhaia remarked that the missionaries used the common language for their hymns because they were not acquainted with the Mizo poetic diction. The early converts, on the other hand, considered common language the best way to praise God, as poetical words would suit the pagantic poetry.” (78)

But the wording of *Lengkhawm zai* contains some poetical words which is why they were considered not to fit to be included in the first published *Kristian Hlabu*. A glance at Patea’s song “Dam lai thil zawng kan ngaihtuahin” will be worth mentioning,

*Thuro angin thlawkin leng ila,*

*Damlai khawvel kalsanin;*

*Kanaan thing zarah chawl turin,*

*Buaina ram pelin ka leng ang.*<sup>4</sup>

[What will it be to fly like a dove/ Leaving this life on earth/ To rest on that tree of restful Canaan/ I shall wander ‘yond this weary land] (Trans. *Mizo Poetry*, 81).

Saihnuna (1896-1949) also composed a song like this, “*Kan tlang ram thing rihnim lerah lelte a kiu/ Thal favang tlai ni a tla eng riai hian/ Ka nghah Pialral ram mawi min ngaihtir*”<sup>5</sup>, [The sweet songs of cicadas of the trees/ And the splendid of this autumnal sunset/ Arouse my love for the beautiful heaven] (Trans. *Mizo Poetry*).

These song-composers did not reject the metaphors and similes which they got from the missionaries, but they brought back poetic language which best suited their

emotions and sentimentality; and the tunes were much nearer to the traditional one than the western songs.

### 1.8 The Modern Period

The Modern Period marks a lot of change and development in Mizo poetry. A large number of poetry emerges during this period. The social change due to globalisation and scientific development paves the way for the improvement of literature. The western standard of living very much influences the way of life of Mizo people. Men have grown more for the admiration of the white men and their way of living, and unfortunately less for their traditional standard of living. The moment they start admiring the Western life, they start devaluing their own way of living. This rapid change and self-depreciation brings discontentment and agony to many poets of this period which, as a result, recur in the literature of this period.

The Mizo people living in the urban ghettos and remote area were much perturbed by the complex selves and self-consciousness. They thought of their own traditional way of living as low-class, and uncivilised. They also thought if they did not follow the Western standard of living, they would not be able to attain a standardised life. In that perplexing and confusing period, Rokunga, a regional poet writes in “Mizo Kan Ni Kan Hmel a Tha”,

*Mizo kan ni kan hmel a tha.*

*Kan tum a sang bawk si;*

*Kan rilru pawh a sang e,*

*Kan hming a thang bawk si. (1-4)*

[We are Mizo, we are beautiful/ Our aim is high/ And our mind-set is high/  
Our name has become famous]

With the above song, Rokunga has successfully planted a seed of self-appreciation in the minds of Mizo people. The Mizo people who already lost the love of being Mizo have once and again felt proud to be Mizo. They could find beauty in themselves and appreciate their tradition and culture. They could treasure and value the things about themselves which had been ignored and devalued for decades. There are innumerable poems that talk about the beauty of the land and the people.

Many of the Modern poets try to recall the past. They try to aware the people the need to reclaim their own past, which the colonising power devalued and saw as a pre-civilised limbo, through their poetry. The colonising power considered the nation's past as a historical void. Poets of the modern period try to rebuild the love for the tradition and culture of the past in the minds of the people. Therefore, there emerge many patriotic songs during this period.

During this period also, there emerges a sense of unity among the widespread *Zo hnahtlak*<sup>6</sup>. The European colonisation led to the emergence of border between India and Myanmar without the consent or participation of the communities. Henceforth, *Zo hnahtlak* living inside Mizoram and those who still resides in Myanmar were made subject to conflicting foreign issue. The border made between two countries by the colonisers set the descendants of Mizo apart. Moreover, some of them also moved to different States or Countries. So, there need to be something to unite them together at least in hearts. This sense of the need to reunite together in



hearts repeatedly struck the minds and hearts of many poets of this period. Therefore, many poems that talk about unity or the striking need to reunite one another have emerged during this period.

### 1.9 Contemporary Period

One thing the contemporary period has marked is that poetry serves mainly for the burning needs to give vent and less for the sake of art. It serves mainly as a vehicle of the poets and a venture into the self rather than an attempt to earn literary fame and dignity. The contemporary period is much resembled, regarding poetry, to pre-colonial era, that is, folk songs, in having subjectivity as its chief characteristic, especially among young poets. With development and progress in life come disturbances, distractions, frustrations, dissatisfactions, and distortions which many of the young poets had to tackle in their life. So, many of the young poets use writing poetry as a therapy, just as Anne Sexton has done so in her poetry.

The period marks a sharp and clear departure from the compromise and stability of the previous age. Men become sceptical in outlook because they have moved from blind faith to rational thinking. This change of outlook is caused by the growth of restless desire to probe and question. As social and individual development and progress in technology have given birth to the spirit of competition, they become more prone to anxious and self-conscious. This self-consciousness and anxiety make them want to deal with personal experience and feeling. It seems like they have taken things very personally and seriously.

They have less hesitation to frankly and boldly put their emotions and feelings in the form of poetry. They do not care for the language they used. All they care about is to vent their tortured psyche, sufferings, and thirst, be it mental or physical or emotional. Freely venting out the self matters the most, and to be able to relieve themselves from their own bondage matters too. As subjectivity has been the chief characteristic, nothing is too personal to be the source or subject of their poetry. Poetry becomes the vehicle to expose the self of the poets.

## End Notes:

1. *Zai/Hlabu* : Equivalent to a book of songs in which all songs have the same tune.
2. *Hnamchawm* : The term *hnamchawm* is, equivalent to ‘commoner’, used to call persons/members of marginalised community.
3. *Pawla* : *The BritAm Pocket Dictionary of Mizo* describes it as, “the name of a mythical gate keeper to *pialral*.” (*Pialral* has been explained in chapter 3 end notes.) *Pawla* was believed to be shooting all the souls who enter the porch of *pialral* with his catapult except a brave warrior or hunter, or those who can perform *thangchhuah* during their lifetime on earth. (The term ‘*thangchhuah*’ is explained in detail in chapter 4)
4. Thanmawia, R.L. *Mizo Poetry*. Aizawl: Din Din Heaven, 1998. pp. 81.
5. Thanmawia, R.L. *Mizo Poetry*. Aizawl: Din Din Heaven, 1998. pp. 91.
6. *Zohnahthlak* : All the descendants of Mizo or Zo are called *Zohnahthlak* or *Zo hnahthlak*. There are many clans among Mizo people or Zo people but all of them are brothers and sisters rooting from one race. The Mizo people were believed to be coming out from *Chhinlung* which is believed to be a big cave. *The BritAm Pocket Dictionary of Mizo* has explained the term as “a mythical rock from beneath which the progenitors of the Mizo tribe are believed to have issued.” There is no certainty about *Chhinlung* and its location till today.

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## Chapter- 2:

### Confessional Poetry

#### 2.1 A brief historical background and origin

Confessional poetry is a style of American poetry having its origin from one of the Christian denominations, Roman Catholic, which is based on the personal life of the poet. Before exploring the indications of this genre, it would be better to look back to the origin of confession. During Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church had a place called 'Confessional' where the priest had stayed to hear every time a confessant had something to confess about his sins or vows to God. It was one of the Roman seven sacraments and was "determined to be of 'divine origin and necessary for one's spiritual salvation" (Gill, 5). So, confession was one of the necessary religious practices in the pre-Reformation period.

Foucault views,

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile. (61-2)

From the above quotation, confession, in its early practice is determined to be one of the rituals. Peter Brooks, citing the importance of confession, says, “Confession... has become in Western culture a crucial mode of self-examination; from the time of early Romantics to the present day, confession has become a dominant mode of self-expression.” (Gill, 6)

Confessional, in its earliest Roman context, was a religious practice which was considered necessary for the members of Roman Catholic Churches. There was a place called ‘Confessional’ in every Catholic Church wherein a priest would stay to listen to people whenever they came to confess. When a confessant came and confessed the sins he or she committed or the guilt he or she felt, a confessor, that is, a priest would pray on behalf of the sinners, then, all sins was believed to be cleansed away by the blood of Jesus. Therefore, it was not a mere religious practice but a must for an individual for his or her spiritual health, wealth, belief, and the likes. As cited by Gill,

In the pre-Reformation period, the Christian Church in Western Europe was Roman. Of vital importance in this period to the shape of confession – as a religious practice and thereby as the source in this period and later of legal authority – is the fourth Lateran Council. This, for the first time, prescribed annual confession and penance for the faithful, making it a condition for admission to Easter communion. During the fifteenth century, monthly or more frequent confession was introduced. An understanding of penance as both palliative and reformatory in its effects also became more widespread during this time. (5)

From the origin, it would be clear to provide that “Confessional” was a place where a confessant and a confessor met, while a confessant told a confessor his personal agonies or sufferings, and the confessor in a state of understanding. Taking this context, Rosenthal used it to label the poetry of certain poets like- Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and W.D. Snodgrass who overtly tell their confessor, that is, their reader about their adversity, agony, and dissatisfaction in life. So, confessional poetry is a place where a confessant (poet) and a confessor (reader) meet. A confessant confesses all his or her personal anguish and tortured psyche to his or her heart’s content, and a confessor silently listens and sympathises with him, or rather, sometimes, empathizes with him.

Chaudhary in her book *The Poetry of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das* writes,

The word “Confessional” poetry emerged with the publication, of Robert Lowell’s immensely influential *Life Studies*, in 1958. . . Professor M.L. Rosenthal was one of the earliest critics/reviewers to “invent” this ascription in his book *The New Poets* (1967). . . This ascription to the work of not only Robert Lowell but also to that of Theodore Roethke, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, W.D. Snodgrass has “stuck”, for it is a convenient marker for a certain kind of a poem. (1-2)

Theodore Reik’s 1961 *The Compulsion to Confess* exemplifies an increasing anxiety in this period to comprehend powerful unconscious forces, such as the ‘urge for expression’, which threatened to ‘shape the destiny of us all’ (Gill, 6). Therefore, confessional poetry is poetry of self-revelation, self-purgation, self-scrutiny, self-

exposure, and self-examination in order to feel, as the words of Ted Hughes, relief. They pour out all their feelings of suffocations, personal anguish and tortured psyche while seeking a new identity. They have felt the need, an urge to reclaim what has been lost or suppressed in their lives which is closely related to Fanon's idea of 'the need to reclaim the past'. Writes Chaudhary,

Notwithstanding their individualities, all confessional poets share certain common characteristics –viz., obsession with suffering haunting sense of guilt arising from pride and sensuality, unhealthy family relations, sad details of married life or broken marriages, dissatisfaction with social bindings and norms, disillusionment with the material world, choking pains of loneliness, and deep sense of frustration pushing them towards self-annihilation. (v)

Gregory in her essay "Plath, Sexton, Berryman, Lowell, Ginsberg and the gendered poetics of the 'real'" writes,

Confessional poetry came to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s in the work of Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman and Allen Ginsberg, . . . The mode transforms and comments upon the 'impersonal' poetics of the modernists who immediately preceded the confessionals....Their work has deeply influenced much poetry since, opening up the possibility of moments of personal 'sharing' in the work of poets in every mode. At the same time, it has been looked down upon, for being too 'real' – as an outpouring of unedited data from the world of experience (a



view indicated in the frequent linkage of the adjective ‘mere’ with the noun ‘confessionalism’). And it has been disparaged as too feminine. (33)

## 2.2 Meanings and Definitions

Confessional work is most likely described and explained as the work where the author records or recounts his or her life in a direct and colloquial manner to the readers. Most of the time, it makes use of first person narration which is often presented as an on-going diaries or letters. The term has been defined by well-known and distinguished writers.

Gill defines the term as follows:

Confession . . . is not a means of expressing the irrepressible truth of prior lived experience, but a ritualized technique for producing truth. Confessional writing is poetic not mimetic, it constructs rather than reflects some pre-textual truth. It is not the free expression of the self but an effect of an ordered regime by which the self begins to conceive of itself as individual, responsible, culpable and thereby confessional. (4)

Phillips describes confessional writing as ““an expression of personality, not an escape from it’, as ‘therapeutic and/or purgative’, suggests that ‘there are no barriers of subject matter’ and ‘no barriers between the reader and poet’, and insists finally that it displays ‘moral courage’” (16-7). This assertion of Phillips ‘is still a commonly held view’.

Supporting the above description of confessional writing as ‘therapeutic’, Suzette Henke, as quoted by Gill, terms it ‘scriptotherapy’ saying, “a term which implies the need, and delivery, of a cure” (7).

Lerner has suggested, as quoted by Gill, that “the characteristics of confession are factual accuracy of remembering, self-centeredness, self-abasement expressed in clichés” (7).

Gregory in her article *Confessing the body: Plath, Sexton, Berryman, Lowell, Ginsberg and the gendered poetics of the ‘real’* states:

To begin with a brief definition: confessional poetry draws on the poet’s autobiography and is usually set in the first person. It makes a claim to forego personae and to represent an account of the poet’s own feelings and circumstances, often by reference to names and scenarios linked to the poet. The work dwells on experience generally prohibited expression by social convention: mental illness, intra-familial conflicts and resentments, childhood traumas, sexual transgressions and intimate feelings about one’s body are its frequent concerns. The transgression involved in naming the forbidden gives rise to the term ‘confession’, which, via its religious, psychoanalytic and legal associations, summons up ideas of sin, mental breakdown and criminality.

(34)

M.L. Rosenthal, in “Poetry as Confession”, cites “Confessional poetry is said to feature an autobiographical voice which speaks with ‘uncompromising honesty’

about taboo subjects including the author's 'private humiliations and sufferings'" (154).

According to Irving Howe in "The Plath Celebration: A Portrait Dissent", as quoted by Butscher, "A confessional poem would seem to be one in which the writer speaks to the reader, telling him, without the mediating presence of imagined event or persona, something about his life," (233).

Deirdre Heddon writes,

...as Foucault suggests, confession is a technique through which 'truth' is both produced and maintained, 'Truth telling' is the very condition upon which the confession rests. As Jessie Givner states, 'the very etymological traces of the word confession (confessus, meaning 'incontrovertible, certain, beyond doubt') suggest that absolute truth is the basis of the ritual'." (140)

In "*Confessional Writing and the Twentieth-Century Literary Imagination*", Sherwin poses her observation on the term,

The term, with all of the implications of the legal and religious discourses in which it is imbedded, maps some misleading associations onto the poet as well. In both its legal and its religious manifestations, the act of confession is a verbal admission of guilt, but despite the fact that many confessional poems are indeed based on real and traumatic experiences, the poets did not write to absolve themselves of guilt; only infrequently do they concern themselves with the topic of guilt at all. In fact, while the term implies both religious and psychological catharsis through the act of

confessing, confessional writing is paradoxically characterized by a resistance to the kind of resolution and personal transformation offered by catharsis. (25)

From the very beginnings, confession tends to self-expression, self-examination, self-scrutiny, and self-revelation in order to achieve some relief or to regain one's own identity while putting them into an artistic form of poetry. Therefore, confessional poets or writers tend to unveil his or her personal experience including a bitter or unflattering life-story, and convey their inner most feelings without hesitation or shame and put them into an artistic form of poetry. So, reading their work is like reading their memoirs or autobiography.

However, it is not always autobiographical truth telling. George has quoted one of the typical confessional poets, Anne Sexton's words that say,

Poetic truth is not necessarily autobiographical. It is truth that goes beyond the immediate self, another life. I don't adhere to literal facts all the time; I make them up whenever needed.... I would alter any word, attitude, image or persona for the sake of a poem.... I believe I am many people. When I am writing a poem, I feel I am the person who should have written it.... When I wrote about the farmer's wife, I lived in my mind in Illinois; when I had the illegitimate child, I nursed it – in my mind - and gave it back and traded life. When I gave my lover back to his wife, in my mind, I grieved and saw how ethereal and unnecessary I had been. When I was Christ, I felt like Christ. My arms hurt, I desperately wanted to pull them in off the cross. When I was

taken down off the cross and buried alive, I sought solutions; I hoped they were Christian solutions.” (89)

Taking the above quotation of Sexton’s statement into consideration provides a wider perception to the term. Besides recounting one’s experiences and events of life, the poet sometimes creates or invents imaginary persona and situation in order to reveal the innermost feelings. However, the creation or invention of imaginary persona or situation is carefully and specially planned to pour forth their innermost sufferings, agony, disturbance, and the like.

## 2.3 Famous Confessional Poets

### 2.3.1 Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston in 1932. She graduated from Smith College and went on to Cambridge University on a Fulbright scholarship, where she met and later married Ted Hughes. She began writing poetry as a child and wrote stories from her mid-teens as is written in the preface of *The Bell Jar*. In her lifetime, she published only one volume of poetry, *The Colossus*. A collection of prose, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* and a poetry collection, *Ariel* are published posthumously after she committed suicide.

She is one of the best-known female poets in the twentieth century. Her poetry was initially seen to be amateurish and was overshadowed by the powerful poetry of her husband, Ted Hughes. However, after her death, her work was re-examined, particularly by feminist critics, who drew attention to the command of her language, to the expressions of rage and outrage that run through her writing and to the way in

which her work can be seen as illustrating many of the contradictions and dilemmas faced by women struggling for self-realization while attempting to conform to social expectations. Her direct and colloquial have its own artistic beauty and very much attracts and mesmerise the attentions of feminist critics. While some critics read into Plath's work the story of a damaged individual whose death was the end of a long flirtation with the idea of dying, others saw her as an everywoman, whose poetry narrated the pain of being a woman struggling to live up to impossible standards of womanliness.

She is credited with advancing the genre of confessional poetry and is best known for the published collections *The Colossus* and *Ariel*. These collections became emblematic of what we know as confessional poetry today. Her first published volume of poetry *The Colossus* displays an overriding preoccupation with estrangement, motherhood, and fragmentation in contemporary society. Her poetry expresses the traumatic experiences she had undergone and the anger, despair, frustration and longing for death which she felt as a result of that.

As a first-born child, she had great attachment to her parents, and her grandparents too were very fond of her. When her family expected the birth of a new baby, she was left to the affectionate care of her grandparents. She, then, being a sensitive child, felt immensely alienated that she took this circumstance as a betrayal. She could not reconcile herself to be accustomed to the new situation. This circumstance constantly gave her a sense of insecure, separateness, and loneliness, a sense which consequently became an integral feature of her poetry. Thus, the "I" of Plath met its birth in the genre of confessional poetry. She said, "As from a star I saw,

coldly and soberly, the separateness of everything. I felt the wall of my skin: I am I. That stone is stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over. (Chaudhary, 12)

The birth of her brother unexpectedly gave birth to “the other world” and her world, which she lovingly enjoyed as the centre of everything, started fading away. She felt an urge to reclaim her identity as though she lost them all. As she was emotionally and mentally perturbed, she felt that even her parents and grandparents too developed a little coldness in their love for her. So she possessed hatred for her brother. She said, “I hated babies. I who for two and a half years had been the centre of a tender universe felt the axis wrench and a polar chill immobilize my bones. I would be a bystander, a museum mammoth. Babies! (12)

Yet, haply, she redeemed and retained the position of being the apple of her father’s eyes. She indeed did so many things to get this fascination. In her entire life, she was greatly proud of her father, and he remained the centre of almost all the activities of her life. When Plath was only nine years old, her father died. The untimely demise of her father “created a great chasm in her mental equipoise.” She took the death of her father as a kind of betrayal and she could not reconcile the conflict. She became mentally disturbed at the death of her beloved father, and henceforth, due to her churning heart, she made her grieving mother sign to promise never to marry again. As being extremely attached to her father, her poetry has been said to contain some elements of Oedipus complex. Chaudhary, commenting on this attitude, cites,

“Sylvia plath was so attached to her father that she considered him to be her God. She was extremely angry and irritated at the injustice of God who had so cruelly taken away her father an assured rock-like protection against all the fears of the world. She took a solemn-vow never to ‘speak to God again’ (13)

Not only this, her father’s decease brought financial conundrums to the family. Her mother had to support the young children and the old parents. The problem became more critical that she had to sell off her fine Winthrop house and move to a modest dwelling. This economic problem deepened Plath’s emotional insecurity. If not for scholarships from various sources, Plath would not be able to continue her college and University. As quoted by Chaudhary, Jane, one of her close Cambridge classmates, reveals this fact thus,

She did not much talk and seem to think about literature and writers, about ‘art’ in short, as she did about the business side of things. The names and editorial leanings of magazines made up a large part of what she had to say whenever she talked about modern poetry... (14)

She was forced by the situation to take part-time job so that would she be able to pursue her further studies. All these hardships and obstacles were the result of her father’s untimely death. As some people often say, in education there is nothing better than adversity; the adversities she faced in her previous life made her so determined and hard-working. She says, “After all, I wasn’t crippled in any way, I just studied too hard, I didn’t know when to stop.” (15)



From her childhood to her adulthood, she was emotionally and mentally dissatisfied with her life. This emotional and mental disorder made her blame her being a woman; she thought that being a woman was the main obstacle in her life journey for independent destiny and freedom, and to be born as a woman was her awful tragedy. This wrong feeling complicated her decision whom to marry. She, as extremely attached to her father and being unsatisfied to feel her father's love and adoration, she went for someone who could resemble her father and be able to give peace to her shattered broken pieces of heart. She met Ted Hughes who was also a confessional writer. In the first three years of their marriage she could not conceive a baby. She was haunted by the fear of not being able to enjoy motherhood and the fear of losing her husband in case she failed to conceive. After three years, fortunately, she did conceive a baby. Now she began to fear about the coming child that she might miscarry or it may be a deformed baby.

For a very few years, happiness covered up her life. She had two lovely children, and her husband brought a fine new house. But then again, she lost her youth-looks due to aging, and she was afraid she might lose her husband to some other attractive woman. Fate has its own course and her imaginary fears turned out to be a reality. Ted Hughes left her for another woman, Asia Guttman Wevill, the wife of a Canadian poet, David Wevill. She was in utter despair and totally unhinged by the separation from her husband. She became so depressed and hopeless that she tried to end her life three times.

This can be evidenced in her poem "Lady Lazarus", "I have done it again/ One year in every ten/ I manage it" (1-3). At the age of ten, she almost died of drowning in

a pond. She says “The first time it happened I was ten/ It was an accident.” (35-36). When she reached twenty, she ate so many pills in order to end her life out of depression, she locked herself inside her room and was lying in her bed as good as dead for three days. When she was found out, worms were already found on her body. But fortunately, they saved her back to life. “The second time I meant/ To last it out and not come back at all/ I rocked shut.” (37-39).

Chaudhary remarks, “The circumstances in Sylvia Plath’s life, from time to time, left an indelible imprint on her poetic genius. Like John Keats, she passed from one tragedy to another as if Nature were testing her patience and courage.” (46)

She frankly tells us she had a desire to commit suicide through her poem. Her constant obsession with suicide has been justified in this line – “I guess you could say I’ve a call” (48). At the age of thirty, she attempted her third time-suicide: “This is number three/ What a trash/ To annihilate each decade” (22-24). This time too, she was saved by doctors. Yet, her life-saver proved only an enemy to a person who so eagerly yearned to die. Then on February, 11, 1963, she finally succeeded in committing suicide. She was the first poet to win a Pulitzer Prize posthumously.

### 2.3.2 Anne Sexton

Anne Sexton was born in Newton, Massachusetts on November 9, 1928. Her original name was Anne Harvey. Her poetry is clearly tied to her own psychiatric treatment and is noted for its confessional intensity. As the daughter of a successful businessman, her childhood was materially comfortable. But, her relationship with her parents was like the other side of a coin. It was mentally and emotionally abusive. At a

very young age, she was married to Alfred Sexton II and had two children, the first child in 1953 and the second in 1955.

Sexton had suffered from post-partum depression right after she gave birth to her first child and was admitted to a neuropsychiatric hospital. Henceforth, she continued struggling with depression for the rest of her life. She then committed suicide at the age of 46.

She was encouraged to write poetry by her psychiatrist in order to relief her psychiatric disorder and depression. So, she started writing poetry at the suggestion of her psychiatrist. Her works were appreciated and praised by her analyst, and that encouraged her more to continue writing. She mainly wrote about her psychiatric struggles and terrible experience. Eventually, her first book, *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, a collection of her poems was published in 1960. Commenting on *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*, James Dickey wrote, "...of madness and near-madness, of the pathetic, well-meaning, necessarily tentative and perilous attempts at cure, and of the patient's slow coming back into the human associations and responsibilities which the old, previous self still demands." ([www.poetryfoundation.n.pag](http://www.poetryfoundation.n.pag))

James Dickey has accused her of writing autobiography rather than poetry. He wrote, as quoted in Sherwin, "Anne Sexton's poems so obviously come out of deep, painful sections of the author's life that one's literary opinions scarcely seem to matter; one feels tempted to drop them furtively into the nearest ashcan, rather than be caught with them in the presence of so much naked suffering." (27) As her poetry is mostly a recount of her life, James Dickey's vitriolic attack on her work is

understandable on the one hand. But on the other hand, it does not mean that her works do not have artistic beauty.

Her worse childhood experience with her parents and her post-partum depression after giving birth to her children seem to make her write poems more real. It is also apparent that her lack of mental and psychiatric stability makes her write them in a colloquial manner. Nevertheless, her choice and arrangement of language in her own way has a beautiful rhyme of its own which, as a result, makes her one kind of a uniquely significant poet.

As her own words evidence that she did not ‘adhere to literal facts all the time’, sometimes, she created another life with another situation. Her signature poem, “Her Kind” is narrated through a series of images that define the life of a woman which is liable to be misunderstood. She created “a woman like” the witch that is not “a woman” (7), “a woman like” the distressed housewife “that is misunderstood” (14), and “a woman like” the persecuted “that is not ashamed to die” (21). While the speaker ‘morphs from one identity to the other in order to feel accepted by society’, using of the phrase “A woman like that” three times shows ‘a generalized spectrum of women who have felt detached from society’. Therefore, the three identities are perhaps purposely created to carry out the psychiatric disturbances of the poet.

Sherwin writes,

From the start, Sexton’s “confessionalism” was the focus of much of the criticism of her poetry. As Rosenthal’s definition illustrates, confessionalism is as much a subject matter as a methodology and

confessional poetry abounds in instances of mental illness, self-destruction, and the deterioration of family relationships. Some of Sexton's critics lauded her for her courage in confronting these topics while others disparaged her for writing about such "unpoetic" subjects. (26)

Tamar R. Lehrich also writes in his essay "To Bedlam and Part Way Back: Anne Sexton, Her Therapy Tapes, and the Meaning of Privacy",

Poetry came to represent a form of resistance for Sexton, a challenge both to the traditional literary canon and to traditional gender norms and values. The story of Sexton's rise as a poet reflects and symbolizes the expansion of women's consciousness and the growth of the women's movement. Like Sexton, most white, middle-class women of the 1950s grew up inundated by the glorification of "feminine" roles. . . She, along with such women as Maxine Kumin, Sylvia Plath, and Adrienne Rich, 64 turned to writing as a forum for free expression. Reflecting upon the significance of her first poetry class, Sexton said, "The most important aspect of that class was that I felt I belonged somewhere .... I found I belonged to the poets, that I was real there, and I had [the feeling], 'These are my people.'" (UCLA, 179)

She did not deny the fact that she was much influenced by Snodgrass' work. Even though she started writing her own kind of poetry which recounts her madness at the suggestion of her psychiatrist, in a direct and colloquial manner, she accepted being influenced by his "Heart's Needle".

In an interview with Patricia Marx, Sexton discussed Snodgrass's influence: "If anything influenced me it was W. D. Snodgrass' *Heart's Needle*.... It so changed me, and undoubtedly it must have influenced my poetry. At the same time everyone said, 'You can't write this way. It's too personal; it's confessional; you can't write this, Anne,' and everyone was discouraging me. But then I saw Snodgrass doing what I was doing, and it kind of gave me permission." ([www.poetryfoundation.n.pag](http://www.poetryfoundation.n.pag))

Her works are enormously popular yet mostly misread. They have been considered a rather documentary, not a poetry. However, Erica Jong assessed her 'poetic significance and contended that her artistry was seriously overlooked',

She is an important poet not only because of her courage in dealing with previously forbidden subjects, but because she can make the language sing. Of what does [her] artistry consist? Not just of her skill in writing traditional poems... But by artistry, I mean something more subtle than the ability to write formal poems. I mean the artist's sense of where her inspiration lies... There are many poets of great talent who never take that talent anywhere... They write poems which any number of people might have written. When Anne Sexton is at the top of her form, she writes a poem which no one else could have written."([www.poetryfoundation.n.pag](http://www.poetryfoundation.n.pag))

Sherwin writes, "Maxine Kumin, Sexton's best friend, thought Sexton an 'intensely private individual'. She claims that 'the strict Puritan hiding inside her suffered and grieved over the label of 'confessional poet'." (33) Sexton strongly

argued against the association of confessionalism and autobiography. She tried to disassociate herself from the term ‘confessional poets’. She asserted in her interview with Barbara Kevles, “In ‘The Double Image’, the poem about my mother’s death from cancer and the loss of my daughter, I don’t mention that I had another child. Each poem has its own truth ... But then, poetic truth is not necessarily autobiographical truth. It is truth that goes beyond the immediate self.” (33)

After her attempts to disassociate herself from the negative implications of the term ‘confessionalism’ do not work out as she insisted, in her last statement, Sexton said, “At one time I hated being called a confessional and denied it, but *mea culpa*. Now I say that I’m the *only* confessional poet?” (35) The term ‘confessional poet’ is actually imposed upon them against their will and choice, and eventually they were made to accept being one.

### 2.3.3 Kamala Das

‘Kamala Das’ is the *non de plume* or pseudonym. Her real name is MadhaviKutty. She was born on March, 31<sup>st</sup>, 1934 at Punnayarkulam in the coastal region of Malabar in Kerala. It is important to note that she hails from a very orthodox and conservative family because her poems are most unorthodox and almost revolutionary as compared to the environment and atmosphere in which she grew up.

She was married at the age of fifteen to Madhava Das, and this marriage proves a total failure. She was influenced much in writing by her mother, a well-known Malayali poet, and her maternal uncle, Narayan Menon, a prominent writer; knowing this, her husband did never deprive her of writing them. But, her marriage to a man

who believes in sex as a matter of routine made her completely dissatisfied and discontented in life. On the contrary, she believed in marriage as an emotional and spiritual bond. She was not satisfied emotionally and mentally due to her husband's coldness. And this failure of marriage compelled her to enter into extra-marital affair. Even in her extra-marital affair, she did not find the real satisfaction which she desperately desired for. Hence, as a result of this failure in her love-making life, she boldly and frankly has written all this unflattering experience in her works.

Commenting on Kamala Das' works, RamjiLall cites, " Her poetry is generally called confessional poetry because it is a record of her personal experiences, chiefly in the sphere of marriage and sex, though it certainly has a wider range and includes a few other aspects of her life too" (*Indo-Anglian Poetry*, 1). Her famous works include: "Summer in Calcutta" (1965), "The Descendants" (1967), "The Old Playhouse and Other poems" (1973), "Stranger Time" (1973), "My Story" (in prose in 1975), and some essays- "I Studied All Men", "What Women Expect out of Marriage and What They Get", "Why Not More than One Husband?", and "I Have Lived Beautifully".

Arranged marriage is very common in Indian society. She knew that her mother did not marry her father out of love. She says, "My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched." (Chaudhary, 33) In lieu of caressing her father with love, her mother rather feared her husband, and served him as though she was his slave. Sensing the condition and situation of this marriage bondage, she had a strong desire to marry a man who would be able to bring her all comforts. But all her dreams shattered when she married Mr. Das, a lustful person who failed to give her emotional satisfaction, love and care. He had a long experience



of sexual enjoyment with his maidservants and other attractive women so far before Kamala Das entered his house in Mumbai. She was only fifteen, and her mind was full of hopes and desires. That period was supposed to be the blooming period. She desired to marry a loving rich man, a Zamindar and to live in the city of Calcutta. She hoped that her husband would provide her all comforts. But she had to write what she expected and what she got in her marital life:

I expected him to take me in his arms and stroke my face my hair, my hands, and whisper loving words. I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be, and my mother. I wanted conversations, Companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms, the loveliness of my love.... (36)

She felt like she was just a sex-slave to her husband. He was a much older busy man. He hardly had time for her. During day time, he was away for his job; and at night, thick files kept him busy; and after that came bed time, he acted so wild on bed without even a little consideration for his wife. She asked for love, but what she got was a husband who did not give her what she has been searching for, who performed the sexual act with her in the crudest possible manner. She writes, "...he is everyman/ Who wants a woman" (An Introduction, 44&45). She expected him to hug her when he got back from work, smiled at her as she prepared dinner for him. But what she got from him was: "At night he was like a chieftain who collected the taxes due to him from his vassal, simply and without exhilaration. All the Parijata that I wove in my curly hair was wasted. The taking was brutal and brief." (36)

Her “Introduction” tells us that just like Sylvia Plath; she cursed her being born a woman. When she was only fifteen, her parents married her off for she was considered a grown-up lady because of some changes on her body. She became tall, her limbs swelled, and hair sprouted in one or two parts of her body. . “I was child, and later they/Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs /Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair” (24-26). If only she was not a woman, a typical Indian woman, she would not have to go through all these unexpected sufferings. She wore a shirt and her brother’s trousers, she even cut her hair short pretending to be a man in order to ignore or avoid her womanliness. “Then ... I wore a shirt and my/Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored/My womanliness” (33-35). But her ‘so-called advisers’ advised her not to pretend to be a split personality suffering from a psychological disorder, and not to become a nymphomaniac. They urged her to be a typical Indian housewife doing some embroidery or cooking and also to keep quarrelling with the servants.

Dress in sarees, be girl  
 Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,  
 Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,  
 Belong, cried the categorizers. (35-38)

Many critics have analysed Das as a “confessional” poet writing in the tradition of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Denise Levertov. But while writing this kind of poetry, Kamala Das is unaware of the existing confessional genre. She had no knowledge of Sylvia Plath and the like. Perhaps, she had the “need”, the ‘strange need’ which Hughes points to emphasise the significance of confession to literature, to

write what her tortured psyche suffered, and confessed her dissatisfaction in her marital life in order to achieve relief in one way or the other. She herself said when Merrily Weisbord eagerly came from Canada to have an interview with her,

“...having watched mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, great-aunt suffer with a silence that did not protect them at all, I determined to write honestly. All the pain unexpressed and all the sad stories left untold made me write recklessly and in protest.” (Weisbord, 25)

While reading her poetry, our concentrations may be swayed by feminist writings, because, her way of writing poetry is much similar to how a feminist would write, and much of her work concern about women’s private life and against male domination. Some scholars also have found powerful feminist images in her poetry. As cited by Merrily, Poet Balan Chullikkad calls her “the first feminist emotional revolutionary of our time” (12). When asked to collaborate on a book of feminism, she says, “I did not want to deny being one and confuse her. I was ready to play the role. When I play a role I grow into it” (40). Yet, she is better known as a confessional writer than a feminist writer.

Kamala Das is bilingual. In her works she mostly uses English language. It seems like some people criticize her for using the language which is not her mother-tongue. But she boldly answers them in her poem “An Introduction”,

Don’t write in English, they said, English is  
 Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave  
 Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in  
 Any language I like? The language I speak,  
 Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses  
 All mine, mine alone. (7-13)

Straightforwardness and boldness is her forte after all. After reading these lines who would dare to further request her to stop writing in English? Without beating round the bushes she just frankly goes to the point, and without any guilty feeling, she tells them to leave her alone for every language she speaks becomes her own language. She further says, “It voices my joys, my longings, my/ Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions” (16-18).

The persona of her poem “The Sunshine Cat” describes her sexual intercourse with her husband and other men, and she expresses her disillusionment with all of them. “they said each of /Them, I do not love, I cannot love, it is not /In my nature to love, but I can be kind to you.” (8-10). She does not suffer from sexual addiction nor is she after a mere sex when she sleeps with other men. When she got married, she is still very young; she expects to receive love and tender care from her husband. But what she receives is not what she expected; instead he made her feel like she was raped from the very first night of their marriage. So, she, in craving for love, looks for a man who could satisfy her hunger and thirst as though she is a prostitute. But,

They let her slide from pegs of sanity into  
 A bed made soft with tears, and she lay there weeping,  
 For sleep had lost its use. I shall build walls with tears,

She said, walls to shut me in. (11-14)

When she was a child, she used to receive love and tender care from her grandmother as can be seen from her “My Grandmother’s House”. But now, her grandmother passed away, and her house too lost all its warmth, “That woman died/The house withdrew into silence, snakes moved/among books” (2-4). She really longs to go there and turn back the time. Even though, her grandmother who tenderly loves her is not there anymore, and the house do not look the same, she still “think(s) of going/There, to peer through blind eyes of windows or/Just listen to the frozen air” (6-8).

The above lines depict that she is hungry and thirsty in love not in sex. She wants to be loved tenderly as much as she loves her husband. She is against male domination of Indian society. Many Indian women would be probably against it, but they do not have the guts to protest against it publicly. Kamala Das, unlike other typical Indian women, frankly and courageously writes all her dislikes in her works. And this candour and straightforwardness make her one of the worldly known confessional poets. She closes her “My Grandmother’s House” with these lines: “I who have lost/ My way and beg now at strangers' doors to/ Receive love, at least in small change?” (14-16)

#### 2.4 Nature and characteristics

Confessional poetry, like other literary genres has its own nature and characteristics. First of all, confessional poetry is personal. It is wholly basing upon the life of a poet. All men have one or two skeletons in their closet. Confessional poets

expose that embarrassing secrets of their life in their poems, which is why they are often mistaken for mentally sick people. They are present everywhere in their works in one form or the other, and their confessions appear to be very direct. The private experiences of the poet play a significant role in confessional poetry. Agony, sufferings, sorrows, and disturbances are all personal as regards the confessional poets.

Reading the poems becomes reading the poets' life story. Confessional poets have a strange need to unveil the unpleasant side of their life and they courageously laid bare their heart to their readers. Their poems tell the chaotic experiences of their life directly. Their confession is so direct that, after going through their poems; the readers can feel the same feelings on their own pulses. They may not always use the "I" but they do not look for an escape or a resort to hide their identity. Straightforwardness and directness matters a lot in the way every confessional poet confesses in their poems.

It is "a new and highly influential school of poetry and the emergence of a broader cultural moment, one in which nothing was too personal or too private to represent explicitly or to foreground self-consciously as a potential context of the author's own life." (Sherwin, 1)

Secondly, another important characteristic to be noted is that confessional poetry is like purgatory. In accordance with the beliefs of Roman Catholic, purgatory is the place where all sins, ignorance and blemishes would be cleansed away by an eternal fire, so that one may enter the kingdom of eternity. Therefore, it is not only

purgation of one's sins, but a step to enter the whole perfectness. Chaudhary remarks, "The act of writing confessional poetry implies not only a desire for self-purgation, but also, a desire for transmuting one's traumatic experiences into something creative, a work of art and a poem." (4)

Plath found joy and was much relieved every time she finished writing poems. Her life was almost always in a state of turmoil, and that gave her suicidal attitude. However, apart from her "oft-repeated death-wish" and "frequent changing of mood", she found peace and pleasure in writing poetry. Chaudhary writes: "For her, writing poetry was essential to give her peace, as creative pleasure could only substitute, the ongoing conflict between the pull of life on one hand, mysteries of death on the other. She felt really happy when she could articulate her tensions in verse." (26). She writes in her "Little Fugue":

I survive the while,  
 Arranging my morning.  
 These are my fingers, this my baby.  
 The clouds are a marriage dress, of that pallor. (49-52)

Anne Sexton, too, was advised to use writing poetry as a therapy for her mental disorders by her psychologist. After having articulated all their worries and sorrows, they find some kind of relief and joy over their creative works.

While exposing and unmasking their bitter sorrows in their poems, they look forward to transmute their chaotic and traumatic experiences. They intensely desire to redefine and refine themselves in order to reclaim what has been lost due to critical

circumstances. Redefinition and refinement of the self is as much important as communication to social animals. They desperately seek for a new identity while stripping off their veil. After all, confessional poetry has rightly been said a psychic striptease. They eagerly look for something to transmute their chaotic and traumatic experiences.

Confessional poetry is also self-justification. Confessional poets have the need to re-identify themselves, the need which is closely related to Fanon's idea of the need to reclaim the past. They feel an intense longing to justify themselves in one way or the other.

Be it the past, confessional poets never get away from their terrible experience. Their past horrible experience keeps haunting them. Even though they look forward to transmute their traumatic experience, they cannot pass over it. Therefore, sometimes they can be seen as persons who love to be haunted or who love being tortured, thereby put them in their songs. For example, Kamala Das cried out, as quoted in Weisbord,

... Rob me, destiny, if you must,  
 Rob me of my sustenance, but do not, I beg  
 Of you, do not take away my thirst ... (5)

She begged of destiny not to take away her thirst for she was obsessed with thirst. She wanted to remain a tortured woman, and the reason for such an obsession is very difficult to state.



Plath had been much disturbed by this obsession, but hers was an obsession with suicide that she had attempted it three times. She was also immensely haunted by ceaseless fear. Chaudhary writes, “Her life had been a long series of fears, which she experienced at different stages.” (16) First it was “fear of barrenness”, then, “fear of losing the love of her husband Ted Hughes”. After these began “fear about the coming child”, and then, fear of losing “her husband to some other attractive woman”. “Destiny had its own course and the imaginary fears turned out to be a reality” (17). She finally lost her husband to another woman. She could never set herself free from fear and an obsession with suicide.

Confessional poets are often mistaken as mentally sick persons for being too real, too direct and too honest. On the other hand, it is not because of their mental illness but because of their guts that they expose their secrets which everyone else would always want to hide. As for Thomas Macaulay, “Perhaps, no person can be a poet, or can even enjoy poetry without a certain unsoundness of mind.” Robert Burton too remarks, “All poets are mad.” And, Plath’s ex-husband, Ted Hughes too states, “The real mystery is this strange need. Why can’t we just hide it and shut up? Why do we have to blab? Why do human beings need to confess? Maybe, if you don’t have that secret confession you don’t have a poem – don’t even have a story. Don’t even have a writer.” (Gill, 67) The above three quotations would suffice to prove that all poets have some kind of madness; and confessional poets seem worse because of their directness in self-revelation.

Confessional poets do have mental sufferings, and they lay out that sufferings and suffocations on their poems. At an age of 20, Robert Lowell had a fight with his father and left home, a rebellion that had serious consequences for his life and his poetry. This conflict remains unresolved even in his second volume, *Lord Weary's Castle*, and the theme of rebellion still remains dominant. According to Staples in *Robert Lowell: The First Twenty Years*, the poet appears so horrified by the spectacle of contemporary chaos that he can scarcely bring himself to comment on it in realistic terms. The conflicts and rebellion he underwent in his adolescent period linger on and keep haunting him that, it cannot be traded away even till he wrote his second volume. It can easily be seen like a tower in the valley.

Sylvia Plath had undergone a traumatic experience at the time of the expected birth of her brother for she was left to her grandparents. The untimely death of her father created a great chaos in her mental equipoise. She took these two incidents as a betrayal. Even her marriage life was destroyed by her unceasing fear. All this mental sufferings of Plath permeates her literary works.

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<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/w-d-snodgrass/>

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## Chapter- 3:

### Pre-Colonial Era

The title of this chapter simply indicates the olden days when the colonization of British did not much intrude on their life, society, and way of living; and all literature during that time are grouped into folk literature. It is also called oral literature because most of them were passed on to generations orally because they did not know how to read and write during that time. British colonization actually happened in the later part of the period covered in this chapter; however, it did not change the social life, outlook of the people, and literature.

As has already been talked about in the first chapter, Mizo were quite fond of singing. As a result, they composed innumerable songs whenever they felt the need to but with little variety of tunes. But, due to absence of written record at the time, it is believed that many of their songs probably vanished away. Kiangte comments,

The Mizos are justifiably well known as a singing tribe. Their musical tradition, unlike that of some other tribes of the country, is well developed in several ways. Mizo historian K. Zawla has said that among the pre-literate people of the world, the Mizos are likely to be the richest in songs. Another writer once remarked that ‘if the possession of a large volume of songs is to be used as the criterion of measuring the civilisation of a people, the Mizos would, without any dissent, be counted as one.’ (v)

During this time, as their life was quite free from disturbances of outsiders, their literature is all about their own lives based on their simple daily routine. Their imagination too was narrowed to what they could see with their eyes, or else, life after death. There was no in-between apart from what they could see and how they could imagine what life after death would be. Hence, there is rarely complex composition in their songs. Simplicity is the main characteristic that governs their songs. All their songs were composed out of their real life situation, and, that is exactly what makes them real, emotional, and honest in dealing with the problems they faced in their journey, their longings and desires, and their imaginations.

As illiterate as they were, the status of women was not much enviable. They were rather more likely considered to be same as white domestic animals. For example, men have always held a better status and share in the society, in the case of marriage, divorce and inheritance. In earlier Mizo society, a widow had occupied a very low status mostly because of the underestimation of women in the society. Women were deprived of having freedom to have their way. It seems like they were not treated as human being. They were underestimated and their words being considered not to be taken seriously. Therefore, a family dominated and administered by a woman, that is, a widow had always been looked down upon. They could not occupy the central part of the village. Rather, they had to live on the outskirts of the village. Being the daughter of a widow was one of the hardest things to deal with. One of the Mizo sayings evidences this, “An ordinary daughter of a family governed by a father is far better than the well-mannered daughter of a widow.”

However, when it comes to composing a song, it was the other way around. Women were never hindered to compose a song, nor their songs be considered to be less appreciated than songs composed by men. In some other culture, there were times when women were not supposed to write or read. This concept can easily be proved from considering why Mary Ann Evans had to hide her womanliness under the pseudonym 'George Eliot', which has already been stated in the first chapter.

A look at gender issues may show that Mizo women held a very low status in Mizo society in the pre-colonial era. They were never treated at par with men. They were simply taken for granted. Their voice and even their sufferings were always neglected and ignored, and many a time, rejected. Yet, they were not deprived of the opportunity to compose a song. And their songs were never treated as petty or lightly despite of all gender issues. Rather, they were valued and esteemed not only by the whole village, but also by their neighbouring villages. In short, when it comes to literature, poetry in particular, there was no gender bias in the pre-colonial era.

So, in the society of Mizo, women might possess a very low status and they might seldom be treated as human, but, in the realm of literature, there was not such marginalisation between man and woman, no partiality between man and woman since Mizo people were always so fond of singing. This may be the reason why there were numerous female poets in Mizo folksong. From confessional perspective, women sound more direct and honest in their expression than men. Their candour in dealing with hardships and sufferings they faced in their life has been artistically expressed in their songs.

### 3.1 *Laltheri Zai*

#### 3.1.1 A brief introduction to the life of Laltheri

Her real name is Lalchawngpuii, daughter of one of the most famous Sailo chiefs by the name of Lalsavunga. An exact date of birth is unknown, yet as assumed by some historians; it may be around the late 1830s. She had three brothers and two sisters. Her ancestors were well-known for their bravery and courage; and so, she and her siblings bore a semblance of their ancestors.

She was a good-looking and tall woman with good and kindly nature. Even though she was just a woman, she had possessed some male character regarding being bold and stubborn. Says Zawla, “Due to the decease of her father, Lalsavunga at Darlawng range, the family moved to Saitual in the year 1842, with the brother, Vanhnuailiana” (265) At Ruallung, her interesting story began.

#### 3.1.2 Her strong love for Chalthanga and her unruliness nature towards her brothers

Laltheri’s love for Chalthanga is worth taking into account. She was not supposed to mingle with *hnamchawm*. She was nurtured and taught in a royal Sailo chief’s family. Yet, she madly fell in love with Chalthanga, a *hnamchawm tlangval*<sup>1</sup>. During those times, it was strictly prohibited to have an affair for the chief’s family with *hnamchawm*. But, Laltheri, being bold and stubborn enough, did not give importance to those rules. She just hanged around with him very often with no intention to hide it from public.



Pachauu retells her love story, "...so madly in love was Laltheri with Chalthanga that she would follow him wherever he went, and she would even block his path even as he set off for the jhum" (59). Even though Chalthanga did not dare to reciprocate her love for him, "Laltheri was adamant in her pursuit of Chalthanga and so he too found it difficult to resist her charms and eventually they both fell in love with each other" (59). Many a times, she was rebuked and warned by her family, but to no avail. Laltheri loved and favoured Chalthanga a lot that she never wanted to have rice beer and meat without Chalthanga. And, if she could not find him, or he was not around her, she would send someone to look for and bring him to her.

Soon after, their love became the talk of the village. Some of their elders could not bear their relationship, and Laltheri's brothers were, too, filled with anger. During those days, as mentioned earlier, if a *hnamchawm tlangval* made love with the chief's daughter, it was a fatal mistake that would lead to death sentence for punishment. To that rule, there was no one to stand against it.

Such a vast gap was laid between *hnamchawm* and the royal family. When Chalthanga overheard that there was a dangerous plot against him, he told her that if they continued on having shown their love openly, it could cost his life. But, Laltheri did not listen to him. She comforted him saying that he would be safe if he just stuck with her. She was a princess. No one would dare to harm him because she too belonged to the royal family and she would be able to protect him from the law laid by her family.

She loved him without restraint and was obsessed with him. She would wait for him when he was on his way to the jhum, and stop him for a while just to be with him. Even when she was about to have rice beer and meat, she never wanted to eat and drink without him. Her love and obsession blindfolded her to see that there could actually be a fatal plot against him. She was too obsessed with him to look beyond her love. Therefore, her love and obsession dragged him on the road of death; he then died pathetically in the middle of a jungle.

### 3.1.3 A woman of mourning in the most unusual way

The reasons behind Laltheri's courage and boldness would also be worth taking into account. As has already been mentioned before, bravery, a distinguished daring character, and arrogance are in her blood. Her siblings too were well known for their bravery; for instance, one of her brothers was called 'Thawmvung Huaisena', which means 'Thawmvunga the brave'. And herein lay the fact that she had quite a family, blood line to resemble. Besides this, she was not an ordinary person but the daughter of a famous chief. All the rules and regulations were laid by her family so that they could be called the owner of the rules. No one dared to mess with the chief's family. As a matter of fact, even if she violated the rules, her protection would be her family anyway. Apparently, it could be obvious that knowing this fact made her bold and courageous.

Furthermore, she possessed some masculine character. She had the gut to repudiate the rules that say the Sailo royal's family was not supposed to mingle with *hnamchawm*. That is the reason why she openly loved Chalthanga with no holds

barred. The more their love increased, the more their foes became angry. Eventually, Chalthanga had to flee from their village for his own safety.

Laltheri's arrogant brothers hired one man named Lamhawia to kill Chalthanga. On hearing this plot against him, Chalthanga ran away for his life. He did not dare to procrastinate even a little time to run to Laltheri, who promised to save him from any harm. Fortunately, Chalthanga could safely leave the village. Nonetheless, while he was sleeping in the midst of the jungle, Lamhawia came upon him and caught him. He tried to run, but Lamhawia told him that Laltheri was looking for him for feasting and drinking, and that she sent him to look for him. At the mention of Laltheri, Chalthanga got ensnared. So, after reconciliation, both of them decided to drink rice beer and rest for a while before going back to the village. While they were drinking, Lamhawia struck him down from the back and killed him. He cut his head and went back to the village.

The beautiful Sailo princess met a sad fate when her lover was beheaded. While she was looking for Chalthanga, her lover actually died a tragic death in the midst of a jungle. She was suddenly hit by the death of her lover. Now, his head was hung on *sahlam*<sup>2</sup>. Chalthanga's head being hung on *sahlam* show that the royal family thought of the tragedy as honour killing. She could not bear the sight of her lover's head being hung pathetically. She dashed out to the jungle in a frenzy to look for her lover's body. She brought her *puan thulkhung*<sup>3</sup> to swathe his cold dead body. After having buried him, she came back to the village and started mourning. She did neither want to eat nor clothe herself.

Pachuaau retells,

As soon as she heard the news, Laltheri threw away the clothes that she was wearing and ran about like a woman possessed. She ran about the village in a state of nakedness and the villagers would gaze at her in amazement and would wonder in trepidation as to whether she had lost her sanity. After this she refused to wear any clothes and very soon she refused to eat any food. Her mother would cajole her by saying, “My dear, please wear your clothes, it does not become you to behave in this manner.” (60)

However, she refused to listen to her mother. Laltheri’s life became topsy-turvy. She wanted to show her family that what they did was wrong, cruel, and brutal. She wanted to prove them wrong. She wanted to make them regret. So, she chose to mourn the death of her lover in the most unusual way. She revolted openly against her family by tearing apart her clothes and exposing her naked body. She sang in response to her mother’s pleas,

*Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu,*

*Ka di thangdanga zalna mah chhimhlei tual daiah.*

*Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu,*

*Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.*

[I will not clothe myself, mother/ Even my lover lies dead beneath the earth// Will I not die of hunger, mother/ It’ll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for Sailo princess]

### 3.1.4 A wrathful woman

The demise of Chalthanga caused a great wrath to Laltheri that she was full of anger towards her family who gave order, and also towards the one who killed her lover. In lieu of living a normal life, she chose to lament over her loss and composed a number of mournful songs. Before the tragic loss of her lover, Laltheri was never known as a song-composer. It is that tragic moment when a distinguished female poet was born out of Laltheri.

When Kamala Das was asked about her painstaking efforts in life and about her lustful husband who does not satisfy her emotional and mental hunger, and thirst in love, she tells Weisbord, “Poetry came oozing out like blood out of injuries. How could I have written so much of poetry if he hadn’t made me cry? All the anguish, you weed something out of it” (16), and so for Laltheri. Her adversity paves the way for her songs. Had she not lost her lover in a very tragic way, she might never have a song, and we might never have her name erected in Mizo folksong.

When they killed Chalthanga, Laltheri’s brothers thought they ended their defamation and humiliation once and for all, yet it became worse. It was not the end for Laltheri at all. Instead, it was just a starting point for her to show that her love for Chalthanga was real, and that it was not at all weak to be ended by the cruel deeds of her brothers. Even after Chalthanga’s life was ended, her love still remained. Not only remaining but also became stronger. The darker the world, the brighter her love shone. The demise of her lover aroused her poetic talent which had long been in a deep slumber. And she used this awakened talent as her armour to show her brothers that

she would not be subjugated, and that she would fight them back till her last breath. She chose to struggle for change instead of remaining a slave to the royal boundaries and bondage.

She charged against her brothers in full of anger, “*Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga/ Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu*” [Why don’t you kill me instead/ My unnatural death would rather permeate the whole world]. She angrily countered her perpetrators that why they did not kill her instead if they had to stop their relationship, because the unnatural death of the princess would surely make history out of it.

Laltheri was pregnant with Chalthanga’s child before the tragedy happened. She gave birth to a lovely baby boy. When her son learned to walk, she used to let him hold a knife, chop a pumpkin, and told him to find out the one who killed his father and avenge his father as soon as he became a man. When Lamhawia heard this, he ran away for fear of getting killed. But at a very young age, her son died. She could hardly bear the loss of her lover and her son. Thanmawia writes in *Mizo HlaHlui*, “Unfortunately, her son dies; her life then turns into melancholy and loneliness after her only comfort passed away” (240).

Commenting on Laltheri’s rebellious nature towards her brothers, Rinpui writes, “She refused to talk to her brothers and even refused to pay a visit to her eldest brother, Lalphunga on his dying bed as she could not forgive their unforgiving act. Lalphunga regretted his unkind action and thereafter sent out a message saying that a Sailo could freely date and marry other clans” (188).

Her songs are called *Hlingvawm Zai*. According to Thanmawia, the period in which she composed all her songs is a short period of time, between 1840 to 1845. She would be remembered for her courage to break down the wall that stood between the royal family and *hnamchawm* which was built up by Sailo chiefs. Her fearless reaction against her family and the society of that time drew all her brothers and other chiefs together to alter the rules that they should not do the same mistake to anyone thereafter. Therefore, she, the most remarkable princess, paved the way for freedom for all Mizo young adults.

When she was rebuked, her love did not let her tend to back off an inch; when she became the talk of the village and the one who brought her family's defamation, she was blinded by her obsession with him; even when her lover was beheaded, she did not feel totally defeated at all. Instead, she tore off her clothes to show that she finally freed herself from all the barriers her brothers imposed upon her and was ready to fight back. Then, she was getting back on her feet again stronger and fought against the brutal action of her brothers. She picked up all the pieces of her life torn by the pride of her brothers and came back stronger to conquer. She took her humiliation as a rod to break down the wall built up by Sailo chiefs that bind up love, let her love to fill up the wide gap between Sailo clan and other clan. While destructing the rules of Sailo chiefs, her wrath also reconstructed the Sailo marriage institution which afterwards brought joy to many Mizo young adults.

Because of her reaction against her family, one of the unwritten laws that say the daughter of the chief was not supposed to mingle with or marry *hnamchawm*, was altered and moderated, that they should not strictly follow this rule. After she got over

the pain, Laltheri, as stubborn as she was, fell in love with the man who was also *hnamchawm*. But this time, her family did not dare to protest against her remembering her former reaction. She got married to him and lived happily ever after.

### 3.1.5 Her *Hlingvawm Zai*: Voice of a wounded woman's rage

For Thomas Hardy, a wounded vanity of a lady is more dangerous than a lion. Laltheri's rage was dangerous enough to subjugate her powerful Sailo brothers who were considered the most powerful chiefs and considered invincible during their times. In the first place, her brothers thought they could put her under their control, so they thwarted her from doing things her way. But in the long run, Laltheri proved herself to be more powerful and persistent in her struggling for change. Her painstaking effort to vanquish the Sailo pride and the walls which stood between the Sailo royal family and *hnamchawm* diminished the wide gap, and her strong love for Chalthanga bridged over the chasm and filled up the void. While fighting for her love for Chalthanga, she voiced for *hnamchawm* and for equality.

The voice of Kamala Das tells her dissatisfaction in marriage, candour in dealing with sex, and tortured psyche. Sylvia Plath's voice speaks of her fear of facing the world which gives her obsession with suicide, self-depreciation, Oedipus complex towards her deceased father, and condemnation for his untimely death. John Keat's voice tells of his sensuousness; William Wordsworth's voice shouts his deep love for nature; Charles Dickens voices his dislike for the contemporary spoilt society of his time; through Thomas Hardy's voice we can feel his pessimism; an Indian novelist, Mulk Raj Anand's voice fights for equality for those untouchables. On the other hand,



Laltheri's voice is a wounded woman's rage. She boldly sang her anger, "*Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga/ Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu*" [Why don't you kill me instead/ My unnatural death would rather float in the air].

When her man was beheaded, she was full of anger, and her rage made her wanting to struggle till she won over her brothers. Soon after Chalthanga's tragic death, Lalphunga, Laltheri's brother too died. Before he died, he sent a message to his dear sister pleading her to visit him as he was on his dying bed. But, she did not even want to bother to pay a visit to him. The princess said, "Why did he kill his brother-in-law? It is illegitimate. I shall not go." (Sailo, 44-45). They were not married, yet Laltheri addressed Chalthanga as a brother-in-law to her siblings apparently as to make them feel guiltier about the way they had treated him. Consequently, Lalphunga, filled with remorse sent out a message saying that there would not be such a death penalty even if a *hnamchawm* ever make love with Sailo princess thereafter.

When Sylvia Plath was brought back to life in her third attempt of committing suicide, the doctor who brought her back to life became her enemy. Her doctor's best to save her seemed the cruellest act of behaviour to Plath. She remarks in her poem "Lady Lazarus":

And there is a charge, a very large charge

For a word or a touch

Or a bit of blood.

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.

So, so, Herr Doctor.

So, Herr enemy. (61-66)

The doctor would probably thought of being a life-saver for Plath, yet Plath did not think in the same way. Correspondingly, Laltheri's brothers ordered a death warrant of Chalthanga in order to save her from further infamy as well as to keep their royalty intact. But, unfortunately, they had failed to prewise what this cruel deed would bring to their sister. She sang, "*Awi ka nu e tum tawk lungdi Chaltuaia ka chan e/ Tap tap tang e, Saikhaw nihliap Ruallung zodaiah*" [Oh! mother, I have lost the man of my perfect match/ I will but weep and weep here in the high land of Ruallung].

Her brothers kept them apart for they belonged to far different worlds, but Laltheri considered him to be the only man of her equal status. They thought they got rid of Chalthanga for her good. But her reaction towards their hoodwinking deeds proved that they were totally wrong. Her reaction showed that they pursued a wrong notion. When Kamala Das was advised not to use English language in her writings, she furiously answered them in her poem "An Introduction":

Why not leave

Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak,

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses

All mine, mine alone. . . . It voices my joys, my longings, my

Hopes (8-17).

Laltheri's rage could not be abated with anything till she sang it out all. She even dared to insult their wicked deeds, that they were such cowards to face their enemies but had got a little courage to kill her lover. She scorned them, mocked at their wicked deeds, and sang their cowardice with contempt and full conviction:

*Bawmzo ral mah dar ang chhai ngam lo,*

*Bel zu kungah ka di chhawnthang chawng sa iang sat e.*

*Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga,*

*Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu.*

[Them that dare not to face the enemies of Bawmzo/ Yet, they chop my lover's body as though it was a meat of feast// Why don't you kill me instead/ My unnatural death would rather permeate the world]

RamjiLall writes in his book *Indo-Anglian Poetry* at the section of "Part-III Kamala Das", "The confessional poets, beginning with the American Robert Lowell, have a capacity for relentless self-analysis; and the tone, in which they write, strikes the reader as perfectly sincere." (19) Laltheri's songs, called *Hlingvawm Zai* are the songs of protest and it 'surely has a cathartic effect on the reader. There is a very strong cathartic power' in her songs which can make the readers feel her wrath and spirit of vengeance in their own heart. When she was desperately down at the loss of her lover, her mother tried to soothe her pain for she could not bear the sight of seeing her daughter lamenting and mourning in bitter sorrow, but Laltheri replied, "*Ka chun leh zua suihlung in mawl lua e/ Kan sumtualah Thangdang thlunglu hawihte'n in tar*

le” [How thoughtless are you, mother and father/ Displaying the head of my beloved on our court yard].

Commenting on Laltheri’s admirable trait, Thanmawia remarks in *Chuailo I*, “She uses her humiliation as a rod to strike down the wall, which brings groan to Mizo young adults, not to be built up again forever.” (149) She removed her skin after skin from over her tortured psyche in her songs, and in the manner of confessional poets, it has been an effort to remove the mask which covers the poet’s actual face.

At times, she hopefully thought his soul would like to visit her and his child. Whenever she was offered a rice beer, she would ask for Chalthanga’s share too. She was still conscious for his spirit that she still refused to drink rice beer or eat meat without him. She would still spare some food and rice beer for this soul. After she gave birth to a child, she was filled with joy blended with sorrow. That confluence of the two opposite feelings haunted her. She sang piteously, “*Lungduh lakah hraite han chawi ila/ Kara thlak loh a riang tur hi ka ngai ngam lo ve*” [Though a baby was born out of love/ I can’t imagine how pitiable it would be being raised by a single parent].

The Mizo forefathers believed that when someone died, his soul would go to *pialra*<sup>4</sup>. But before he entered that place, his soul would be roaming around. The grieving family used to have *thlaichhiah*<sup>5</sup> for the soul. They used to believe that the soul would be hovering around them for some time that it would visit their house too. Laltheri, too, thought the soul of Chalthanga would like to visit his child and hug him tenderly. So, she sang her reverie,

*Thlohmu lengin Chhippui kan dai a vel,*

*Ka tawnmangah Thangdang rauthlain run a vel e.*

*Rauthla lengin kan run khuai ang a vel,*

*Fangfa lo chu ka nu, chhunrawl a belin hun u.*

[A hawk hovers around our courtyard/ My beloved's soul too hovers around our house in my dreams// His soul hovers around like a bee/ With no food, mother, give him a pot full of food]

She was still so conscious about his soul. She was afraid his soul might be starving somewhere because she feared that he might still be scared to eat the food she spared for him for he died a terrific death. So, she asked her mother to give him food aplenty. Nonetheless, she feared his soul would still be afraid of her cruel brothers who did their best to sever them forever. She thought of him roaming around their house on one hand, and feared his soul would still be terrified at the brutal killing on the other. So she sang, "*Hmara lenbuang va tinrengin a par an tlan/ Chalthang rauthla'n run in hlam sawm a vel ngam lo ve/ A hraite chawi awih lai nuam ve maw*" [All kinds of birds eat the fruits of our trees/ But Chalthanga's soul dares not to come near our house/ Does he long to cuddle his child].

All her songs cannot be put in a written book due to absence of record. *Laltheri Zai* contains about thirty songs. All her songs are songs of, as has already mentioned before, protest. She strongly protested against her cruel brothers. She openly mourned the demise of her lover, and was lamenting over her loss with no limits. And because

of her courageous reaction towards the wrong deeds imposed upon her by her Sailo brothers, the wide gap between Sailo chiefs and *hnamchawm* had been vanquished.

“*I must let my mind striptease/ I must extrude/ Autobiography*” (94-96) says Kamala Das in her poem “Composition” for she has an intense need to let her “mind striptease” so as to sigh out all her suffocating breath. Laltheri, a wounded woman, too had felt the need to express all her anguish, tortured psyche, and extreme anger; so, she did great.

### 3.1.6 The love queen who voices for *hnamchawm*

Performance texts, like written texts, are capable of complex engagements with the matter of experience, with the problematics of memory and its potential representation, with the intricate relationships between lived life and its telling (Gill, 137). Laltheri’s confessional voice began right after a terrible tragedy happened. Before that, she was never known as a song-composer. Pondering over her terrible tragedy would make the readers to know that she was responsible for her loss, because if she had obediently followed the words of her brothers when they rebuked and thwarted her from dating Chalthanga, Chalthanga would not have died that way, and she would not have to mourn his death in an unusual way.

A daughter of Lalsavunga, a great Sailo chief, Laltheri, born with a silver spoon in her mouth, was such a stubborn and bold woman. She was as arrogant as her brothers. Even though she was thwarted by her family to date Chalthanga, *hnamchawm tlangval*, she dared to break the code of her family. She chose Chalthanga to be her lover of all men. Not only this, she openly dated him with no

holds barred which put her lover's life into danger. Chalthanga told her not to show the love openly; still Laltheri pushed aside his suggestion saying that she would protect and save him from any harm. At last, she conceived Chalthanga's baby.

She was tall, beautiful and friendly; furthermore, she was the daughter of a proud Sailo chief. Therefore, as written by Rinpuii, "As a princess, Laltheri could easily win the hearts of many eligible bachelors..." (187). She was supposed to marry the son of a Sailo chief, or a man who was eligible to rule over a village. "...but she chose to be with a commoner thus breaking the code of her Sailo family" (187). Not only dating him, she also conceived his child, which is the worst degradation for the royal family. The talk about their love-making permeated throughout the entire community, and that provoked the rage of her arrogant Sailo brothers at the extent of ordering someone to kill Chalthanga.

Laltheri did neither stoop nor yield over the death of her lover. The more her brutal brothers showed their disapproval of her unbiased love for Chalthanga, the more she became fierce. She 'was not just a victim but also an active participant who struggled for change.' "The Sailo brothers considered the death as 'honour killing'" (187). But for Laltheri, it was a vital incident in her life that changed her from a woman of love into a woman of wrath, from a woman of friendliness into a woman of grief-stricken avenger. Her mourning had no boundaries, no ends, and no limits just as she loved him with no holds barred. She chose to lie naked on the cold floor than to clothe her body, sing mournful songs than to eat, act as though she was a possessed woman to furiously protest against her arrogant brothers than to live the Sailo princess' life in peace, and listen to her wrathful heart than to yield to her brothers'

brutal action to show her weakness. She was determined to wreak vengeance on the person who killed Chalthanga. She sang with full conviction, “*Ka chun leh zua suihlung in mawl lua e/ Kan sumtualah Thangdang thlunglu hawihte’n in tar le*” [How thoughtless are you, mother and father/ Displaying the head of my beloved on our court yard].

As written by Rinpuii:

We cannot simply blame Laltheri’s brothers for disapproving their love affair; firstly she was Sailo, and secondly, she was a princess. The brothers wanted to keep up the Sailo royalty intact.

It is worth mentioning that princesses were highly respected. They had the status of modern celebrity. They were treated as V.I.Ps having many followers while traveling and they were warmly welcomed wherever they went. They were offered *zufang*<sup>6</sup> special rice beer and special tea. They hardly socialized with the common people. They had only few friends and hung out mostly with *upa*<sup>7</sup>’s daughters. But unlike those typical princesses, Laltheri wanted to be emancipated from all these kinds of treatments... (188-189).

All the chiefs wanted to maintain a vast distance from *hnamchawm*. They needed to be so different from others. But, as cited above, unlike those proud typical chiefs’ daughters, Laltheri wanted to erase all those kinds of margins, desired to be free so as to live normally and equally with *hnamchawm*, and insisted on breaking ‘the barrier of the Sailo marriage institution’. She had a strong intent to fill up the entire gap between her place as a princess and *hnamchawm* by leading her life in her own



way with no heed to the words of her brothers. She was widely reckoned to be married to an eligible man who would be fit enough to rule over a village just like her brothers. But, she pushed aside all these expectations and chose to date Chalthanga.

As quoted by Gill, Howell writes, “It is as often an ego show as a revelation; the virus of the ‘I – Did – It – My – Way/I – Gotta – Be – Me’ strain afflicts the larger number of such acts, particularly in the performance art area which presents amateurish staging techniques and mini-personalities as often as original methods and subjects.” (139). Laltheri’s strong desire to do it her way also afflicted her future.

Chalthanga’s demise made her stripped off her clothes and walked around naked on the streets. She looked miser and dirty day by day as she did not maintain her physical appearance. Out of sympathy, her mother asked her to clothe herself and eat at least some food. But Laltheri replied her with a sad song:

*Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu,*

*Ka di thangdanga zalna mah, chhimhlei tual daiah.*

*Chhun rawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu,*

*Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.*

[I will not clothe myself, mother/ Even my lover lies dead beneath the earth//

Will I not die of hunger, mother/ It’ll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for

Sailo princess]

As time goes by, the pain which was inflicted upon her was also gone day by day. After she got over with her mourning, she dated another guy who was also

*hnamchawm*. Her previous tragic loss did not prevent her from wanting to date *hnamchawm*. Rather, she seemed determined to break the code of her proud Sailo brothers from the beginning. But this time, her brothers did not dare to thwart her. She was married to this man.

Once and again, she chose to be with none other than *hnamchawm tlangval*, and this shows that she had no intention to obey her brothers and to marry a man of her family's level, a man who would suit her dignity; and simultaneously shows that she was determined to stand for *hnamchawm* by choosing to humble her lifestyle to their equals. The consequence of her reaction towards her brothers is very worth-remembering, and this very consequence is the thing which immortalizes Laltheri's name so long as Mizo exists in the world especially for young adults. Her reaction made her brother sent out a message on his dying bed not to commit the same thing which they just did it to Laltheri, not to strictly impose a rule which says a Sailo princess must not date or marry *hnamchawm tlangval*.

Had she not been so stubborn and courageous, as arrogant as her brothers, to protest against them, or rather had she not been disobedient to her brothers, the wall which had been built up with strong foundation that brings tears to many young adults would still be the same till today.

Rinpuii has also written in praise of her love, "Laltheri did not care the status of her partner as she was humble and kind. When it came to love she forgot her own identity as Sailo princess." (190). Being the daughter of a chief, she was supposed to make friends with the elder's daughters only. Yet, this too, she just pushed aside and

preferred a normal life to the so called Sailo royal life. She possessed a strong love for *hnamchawm* and yearning to live like them. As soon as she heard the news of Chalthanga's death, she "threw away the clothes that she was wearing and she ran about like a woman possessed. She ran about the village in a state of nakedness" (Pachauau, 60).

She mourned the death of her lover without wearing any clothe; lay on the floor and on the streets naked. No one would ever dare to do like this for anyone. Some people might suggest she would have gone totally mad; nonetheless, she could still compose heart-touching and anger-provoking songs at this time, proving that she did all these things in her conscious mind. Her strong love for Chalthanga framed her whole life and clouded her mind. And it so happened that after she got over the pain, she married a man who was also none other than *hnamchawm*; therefore, she deserved to be labelled 'the love queen' who stood for 'love' and '*hnamchawm*' till her last breath.

### 3.2 *DarpawngiZai*

#### 3.2.1 A brief introduction to the life of Darpawngi

Darpawngi belonged to the 1840s. But, unlike Laltheri, she had nothing to be proud of since she was born. She was none other than *hnamchawm*. As a child, she had to live at their chief, Lalchema's house as a slave because, as history records, she did not want to live with her step-mother. At her teens, she moved in to another chief by the name of Lalkhuma, who was the son of a famous Sailo chief, Vuta. Lalkhuma's son, Lalbuta fell in love with her and married her. But, his parents could not accept

her to be the bride of Sailo chief because she was a *hnamchawm*. So, they divorced her for the sake of their son. As she had to stay apart from Lalbuta's family, she moved back to Lalchema's house.

In the later part of her life, she had to stick with another chief, named Thawmpawnga, again as a slave, which means, she had been a slave to three chiefs during her lifetime. She had nothing to boast of in material things during her whole life. But, she had quite a talent. As mentioned in the first chapter, Mizo were very fond of singing and admired a good song-composer, a good singer, and a good dancer. Darpawngi, though a slave in her entire life, had these three admirable talents. Because of her talent, she had been travelling to different villages oftentimes, and became very famous.

Her songs are classified into three- *Thlek Zual Zai* (or *Thlek Zai*), *Lusun Zai*, and *Thinrim Zai*, meaning thereby that she had three different *hlabu*<sup>8</sup>. Zawla writes, "Because there was no one else who could compose a song in *Thlek Zual zai*, *Lusun zai*, and *Thinrim zai*, she had been considered to be the best song-composer of Zoram" (Zoram means Mizoram) (305). For her, all the incidents of her life and whatever happened around her became the source and subject of her songs, and nothing was too personal nor too slightly to compose a song for.

### 3.2.2 *Darpawngi Zai* as a portrait gallery

*Darpawngi Zai* has been serving as self-revealing *hlabu*. She revealed her real self so much as to say reading her songs becomes reading her life story. It is like a

portrait gallery of the life of Darpawngi which has a triangular shape wherein each *zai* has played the role of a wall that has a mural of her memoir painted on it.

### 3.2.2.1 A woman of no fixed abode

Because of her adversity and her talent, she had to move on from one place to another as though she had no fixed abode, she travelled a lot too. When she was divorced by Lalbuta's parents, she had to move back to Laisawral chief, called Lalchema, the house she had been living as a child, as to disappear from the life of Lalbuta. Her talent, too, led her to moving on to another village from time to time. While she moved around not because of her choice but because of what had befallen upon her, she had become the talk of the village. As a result, she had the need to justify herself, then, she sang in *Thlek Zual Zai*,

*Khua tin a chhiar min ti rêng lo û,  
Saiṭhuamipa'n tlangnuam nihliap min zâr e;  
Ṭuankham kawltu ka chawi reng lo ve.*

*Tùm ang vuai i, hai ang tar nâ i,  
Keimah Vanhnuaithangnû khua tin sel i;  
Ka zai puan ang chul lovin.*

[Stop criticising me as a wanderer/ Saithuami pa has spread his umbrella above me/ I am not lazily holding an excuse// Though as old as an oak tree and mango tree/ Is me who has been criticised badly by everyone/ My songs will not wither away]

When she lived in Thentlang, she courageously fought against their chief, a widow who belonged to Zadeng clan, because of her injustice. Darpawngi and the chief's elder both claimed ownership upon a kid, a baby goat. The chief then told them to leash their goat in the field. Then, they would unleash a baby goat saying that it would surely approach its dear mother. So, they did as ordered by their chief. A baby goat approached Darpawngi's goat as soon as it was unleashed and sucked its breast. Still, the chief gave a baby goat to her elder.

After a short while, the chief's elder had slayed a baby goat because he found it problematic to keep away a baby goat from its real mother. Darpawngi's goat used to wail the whole night without sleeping from that day onwards. During those days, there was no one who dared to fight against their chief. But, Darpawngi, a courageous woman, chose to fight against their chief and to leave the village instead of stooping to the injustice. In her *Thinrim Zai*,

*Chhimtlang ka liam dawn e,*

*Chhimtlang ka liam dawn e,*

*Khuazanghinnu 'n biahthu tum thing;*

*Laiah i tan lo ve.*

[I am going to leave/ I am going to leave/ You do not let justice/ Be done in your land]

Thanmawia remarks in *Chuailo I*, "Instead of being an obedient citizen by accepting the judgement made by a ruler who took justice on the stride and tamed the greedy ones, she chose to be victimized by all the villagers as '*Pemthuli*'<sup>9</sup> (148).

### 3.2.2.2 An abject lover who lazed around

Darpawngi was a very unfortunate woman whose course of love was full of obstacles. Right after she was divorced by Lalbuta's parents, she had to move back to Lalchema's house. Here in this village, there was a man by the name of Thanglianpuia who sincerely loved her. When she was pregnant with his child, he just ignored her just because she was a slave, and because he did not want to be the husband of the chief's slave, fearing that it would only be labourious. That rejection really hurt Darpawngi. She neither wanted to eat food nor wanted to take care of her physical appearance. She did not even have any will to work. Rather, she composed songs in her pensive loneliness.

After sometime, she met another man named Daipawla. They both loved each other, and finally got married. But, just like Thanglianpuia, after they had a daughter, he too left her for the same reason. All this luckless romance of hers made her compose songs, as follows,

*Tuanṭul lovin kâwltu kan chawi e,  
Liandâng pâr anga ṭha kan ngaih vang;  
Kan tuar e, chung turni ang.*

*Chûn leh zuain hal lo û,  
In hrai ṭhuami a tlu ruai e, tlangrelah;  
Thanchhingpa di ai a rui e.*

[I am simply holding a hoe without working/ It's only because I'm pining for the love of my life/ I am suffering, as the scorching sun// Mother and father,

please do not scold me/ Your dear child is falling down at the rumours/ She has been a love-lorn sick]

She justified for her lethargic activity. Even when she was holding a hoe to work in the field, she could not do anything for she was still pining for the love she had lost. She also knew that she had been criticised a lot for lazing around. So, she challenge forcibly against all those criticism, “*Thang hluana chhâm ang zâl min ti maw/ Chuti Liandâng lungher zûnleng ka ngaih chu/ Rua ang ka hring zo lo ve*”, [Did you all just accuse me of lazily sleeping all the time/ I cannot bear the loss of my love/ That I am as good as dead].

She could not get over Daipawla. In her distress, she was advised by some villagers to put oil on her lover’s hair, which was believed to help the person to forget those he/she wanted to forget. So, Darpawngi was looking for a chance to put oil on his hair. Luckily, on one fine day, Darpawngi met him on his siesta. So, she oiled his hair in his deep slumber. But, when he woke up, some people told him what Darpawngi did to him. As soon as he heard it, he washed his hair thoroughly to wash away the oil. However, Darpawngi could, somehow, get over him.

After she gave birth to a baby girl she had with Daipawla, she named her Lalremi. According to Mizo customary law, when married couple divorce, or if a child is born to a single mother, *sawn man*<sup>10</sup> is or has to be paid by the father of a child, then the child automatically belongs to the father. So, Daipawla snatched away Lalremi from her.



Her life was full of sorrow and loneliness. At times, she realized the reason why Daipawla and Thanglianpuia left her, and why she could not hold onto her child. Because of this critical circumstance, she said,

I, a wretched woman will surely die at the house of the chief. When I'm getting old, I will not be able to please our chief. Even in times of sickness, I will just lie on the floor without having anyone to sympathize with me and nurse me. How so pathetic my life would be! The only reason why no one wants to marry me is that they do not want to be the husband of the chief's slave who will only have to work laboriously. They rather do not dare to marry me. And my children too belong to their father; I will not be able to keep them. It will be better to have one to be mine alone, so that will we live together. And even in my old days, my child will be the one to nurse me with love. It may not be possible for me to be free from this slavery. The only way for me to prosper is the very highest humiliation ever for a woman, which is to bear an illegitimate child (Zawla, 347-348).

Once and again, Darpawngi had to woo the same man who rejected her, Daipawla because of her despair. She composed a song about this second wooing, "*Pûkpui angin ka hmu thim ruai e/ Lalrempa rûn ram ang ka fan leh/ Kan nun puan ang hlui lo ve*", [I have seen it as dark as a big cave/ When I have visited again the house of Lalremi's father/ Our love story seems to linger on]. It seems like she had recorded every little detail about her in her songs.

### 3.2.2.3 A Woman of Mourning and Grief

Her first son whom she had with Thanglianpuia died not long after he was born. That was when she started composing her *Lusun Zai* in mourning of the demise of her dear children. According to *Mizo Hla Hlui*, she had lost three of her dear children. Her *Lusun Zai* permeated the entire Mizoram, and those parents who also lost their child used to cry while singing or listening to her songs. According to Zawla, her *Lusun Zai* have been called ‘*hla mittui titla*’ (songs that provoke tears), therefore, they did not dare to sing at a place where they drink rice beer for the fear of crying in sorrow. Her *lusun zai* is a work that comes from a deep wound, and a work heavily loaded with sorrows and miseries. She sang, “*Awmlai lengin tlang tin dung rawn zui/ Vanduai rûnah ser ang châm nâ e/ Ka tuai chawnban a kai e*”, [Death has visited all hills and valleys/ It makes a stay at the house of miser/ It then holds my child’s hands].

She portrayed herself as a miser who could not save her baby from the cold hands of death. When she imagined her dead child to hang around alone in *mitthi khua*<sup>11</sup> without a mother, she sang in deep worry, “*Ka awihlai, ka puaklai vekha/ Lungrâwn a liam zo ve zing phûlah/ ‘Ka chûn ka ngai’ ti ve maw*”, [The one I cuddle, and carry on my back/ He passes away now/ Would he say, “I miss my mom”]. She could not tolerate the decease of her baby, and imagining her baby to live in *mitthi khua* without a mother just stabbed the core of her heart.

When she was at the second time of wooing Daipawla with a secret plan to get pregnant again, she was successful with her plan. She named her Thlangtladiaii. And, she already planned to tell him in case Daipawla tried to snatch away her baby again,

that there were other men involved too, therefore, there could be no one to claim himself to be the father of the baby, because, it would be none other than *falak*<sup>12</sup>. But still, Daipawla took away her baby by force. So, at her loss, she pleaded Liannawna, a Circle-interpreter, who resided in Aizawl with her *Thlekzual Zai* to help her get back her child,

*Ka hrai ramlai ang ka chang zo lo ve,  
Sappui chhâwn thiam Liandâng zu bia i;  
Tawng tin lei ang theitu.*

*Tawng tin lei ang theitu,  
Phunchawng zara kûlva rêng nen hian;  
Liandâng an in iang reng e.*

[As I cannot have my child/ Let me consult the man who can talk to the White men/ Who is fluent in every language// Who is fluent in every language/ A king drongo on the branch of *phunchawng*/ And Liannawna are just alike]

She, in despair, tried to plead with Liannawna, a Circle Interpreter to help her get back her child from Daipawla with her melancholic song. She compared him to a king drongo that sat proudly and highly on the branch of a tree named *Phunchawng*<sup>13</sup>. She continued to express her sorrow, “*Ka tap ruai ruai, sappui daikâwmah/ Ka hrai puan ang ka chan a hneh chuan/ Kawrpui ziañial fêng nâng e*”, [I only wail and wail, on the porch of the white men/ If I am to lose my baby/ I would not call myself a mother].

During this time of round, Mizoram was already under the colonisation of the British. Darpawngi was reported to work as daily wagger at the place occupied by the colonisers. When Liannawna heard about pitiful story and the above mentioned sorrowful songs of hers, he willingly helped her get back her daughter, Thlangladiiai. But when she reached the age of ten, she too passed away.

Hearing her sad story, one chief named Thawmpawnga sympathised with her a lot, and he asked her to live at his house. There lived a man called Chawngbawnga, who was also a slave to Thawmpawnga. Sharing the same sad fate and worse condition made them fell in love with each other, and got married. After they got married, they moved out of the chief's house working hard to earn a living. They regularly sent the money they earned to Thawmpawnga; so, Thawmpawnga, being content with them, declared that they were no more slaves but his children.

They were filled with happiness. When they had a child, they named him, in remembrance of their freedom from slavery, 'Bawihbanga' which means 'Freeman'. But, soon after he was born, he, too, died. There was no role for pleasure to play in her life anymore. All these lamentations of hers made her a woman of mourning and grief. Verily, she liked to slay death that took away her dear children,

*Kawla awmlai lungmawl a lian e,*

*Chu ka thin chu, tinkim dawn hlei lo;*

*Chawngsa iang sah nuam ing e.*

*Ka riang mang e, vanpui chung chhinah,*

*Chinlai chhuahtlang an dailung rawnah;*

*Khuarei ngaiin ka tap e.*

[And oh, death! The big proud death/ My churning heart cannot think of anything else/ Than to chop it like *chawngsa*<sup>14</sup>// I am so lost and lorn under this firmament/ I bewail on the porch of the village/ Waiting earnestly for time to heal]

She personified death as her big enemy which she could not win over. There was nothing else she could do than to cry for her loss, and then to put her cries in her poetical works. She further said, “*Virthli lengin phunbung a her tliak/ Kan cho loh kawla awmlai lengin/ Ka tuai chawnban a kai e*”, [A strong wind has broken down a fig tree/ An undefeatable death too/ Has held my baby’s hands]. A fig tree is supposed to be the toughest and strongest tree of all kinds of trees. But, it also has one thing which it cannot stand against, that is a strong wind. Just as a strong wind has broken down a fig tree, her baby’s life was ended by death.

She continued to express her earnest desire to have wings to hover around the clouds so as to search for her child. She then composed a song to express her desire to fly up above in order to find solace and perhaps her lost child too. She uttered, “*A va chan nuam ing e, chung pualhrang/ Tlang tin fang i lunglenin*”, [I wish I could become a bird/ I would fly over each and every hill in my loneliness].

She had to wait for time to heal her injured heart. But it seems the wait could not be over. She then cried, “*Ka riang mang e, vanpui chung chhinah/ Chinlai chhuahtlang an dailung rawnah/ Khuarei ngaiin ka tap e*”, [I am so lost and lorn under this firmament/ On the porch of our dear relatives/ I cry waiting for time to heal]. As she could not get over the loss of her dear child, she cried helplessly waiting for time to heal her broken heart.

She called out the name of her dear son as though she was trying to wake him from the grave he was laid, “*Bawihbangpui, hai ang lo thang la*”, [O my child, wake up from your deep slumber], but to no avail. She was just a woman, a condemned woman badly criticised by others, who lamented and sought for solution to fill the void left by her son’s death.

### 3.2.3 Confluence of Anger and Self-pity in her *Thinrim Zai*

When, in Thentlang village, she encountered a terrible injustice of their chief, she was filled with anger. She could no longer have any respect for their chief, who was a widow. She could not just sit back and stare at the injustice done upon her. She could not take any vengeful action accordingly; therefore, she cried out against their chief and expostulated about her anger saying that she would revolt against their chief openly,

*Keimah Chhimtlangthangnu,*

*Keimah Chhimtlangthangnu,*

*Khua lian chalngeng intai angin;*

*Dengpui, ka tai dawn che.*

[I, mother of Chhimtlangthangi/ I, mother of Chhimtlangthangi/ Will fight against you/ As big buffaloes brawl]

She chose to fight against their fraudulent chief instead of remaining as slave to injustice. She chose to struggle for change. When she saw her goat crying for its baby, she compared it her life. Out of empathy, she sang, “*Ai! Ka lengkel, ka lengkel/*

*Keimah iangin hrai a ngai e/ Nau ang a tahna*”, [Ay, my goat, my dear goat/ For missing her kid a lot just like me/ Can’t stop crying and wailing]

### 3.2.4 *Darpawngi Zai* – A ‘One Woman’s Autobiography’

The songs of Darpawngi- *Thlek Zai* or *Thlekzual Zai*, *Thinrim Zai*, and *Lusun Zai* are like autobiography of Darpawngi. They are like three diaries where the owner has kept a daily record of events and experiences regularly. She may not have tended to sing what had happened in her life so far, but she extruded them in her songs probably in order to feel relief. Rousseau asserts, “I have displayed myself as I was, as vile and despicable when my behaviour was such, as good, generous and noble when it was so,” (17) Darpawngi too displayed herself as she was, and the incidents as it was.

In her songs, Darpawngi portrayed herself as a woman who faced conundrums which are not the mundane problems, and that made her bold and straightforward in her expression. As recorded by Thanmawia in his *Mizo Hla Hlui*, she had been married to three husbands, Lalbuta, Daipawla, and Chawngbawnga; divorced by Lalbuta and Daipawla; abandoned by Thanglianpuia right after she conceived a baby, mourning three of her children’s death, and justice was denied upon her. Lalbiakliana records that she had a non-Mizo husband. Commenting on this affair, he writes, “Her adversity made her roam to every nook and corner, if pondering over her situation closely and carefully, she was so pitiful that she just had to stick with this man. It was her adversity that compelled her to do so, not a loose character or capriciousness.” (183)

Commenting on Kamala Das' extra-marital affair, RamjiLall writes, "It was the failure of her marriage that compelled her to enter into extra-marital sexual relationships in search of the kind which her husband had failed to give her." (1) If Lalbiakliana's record about Darpawngi having a non-Mizo husband be true, though it is contradicted by other writers, it would obviously be her critical circumstance and adversity that compelled her to enter into that marriage. She was likely to be, as commented by Thanmawia, "born with the identity of the chief's slave, and a fellow slave for her better half being written in her fate" (*Chuailo I*, 146), such a wretched woman was Darpawngi who led a life full of misery.

Not only that, she was also looked down upon and ill-treated by all the villagers instead of pitying her. She honestly sang about this, "*Keimah Vanhnuaithangi khua tin sel*", [I, Vanhnuaithangi, who is defamed by everyone on earth]. She gave herself a name 'Vanhnuaithangi' which means a person who is famous under the sky. The reason of giving her a name like this would be taken into account as she was very much aware of all the bad talks against her. Therefore, in a very sarcastic manner, she called herself a woman who became notorious for her bad character under the sky. She displayed her life as oppressed and suppressed. Her songs mostly deal with her personal anguish and most of her songs give ample evidence to her painstaking efforts with life.

When she was in a relationship with Thanglianpuia, the couple used to help each other in their work, and most of the time they would spend their times together. One night when they were out to have rice beer, he asked her to walk home together for he wanted to take a walk with her from the place where some villagers drank rice



beer, but, she refused him. Out of anger Thanglianpuia started ignoring her for a few days. Darpawngi really regretted for refusing him that night, and she could not bear her loneliness which was caused by the negligence of Thanglianpuia. So, she expressed her remorse in this song, “*Zan mu ka chhing lo ve, rilthangah/ Thlawr vung vung bel lianpui zu vangin/ Ka chan e, Diliana*”, [I could not sleep in the middle of the night/ Because I was more inclined to the brewing wine/ I have lost him].

The above song seems to tell of her as a woman who loved to drink more than anything else, a woman who would not want to trade her chance of drinking rice beer with anything. After sometime, she found herself with a child of Thanglianpuia. But, Thanglianpuia did not want to marry her, not because he did not love her but because he did not want to be the husband of the chief’s slave who would only have to work laboriously. He tried to avoid her so would Darpawngi not see him again. Darpawngi missed him the more, she was pacing here and there just like a dirty fool person. She said, “... *Liandang lung her zunleng ka ngaih chu/ Rua ang ka hring zo lo ve*” [I cannot bear the loss of my love/ That I am as good as dead].

Her songs mostly deal with her luckless romance in love, grief-stricken demise of children, and rage. Her melancholic separation from her first husband, Lalbuta can be seen in her *Thlekzual Zai*. When she was married to Lalbuta, son of their village chief, she was deeply loved by her husband, but not by his family. His family could not approve her to be the bride of the chief for she hailed from *hnamchawm*, who had to live separately from her family as a slave. Hence, Lalbuta’s family’s disapproval estranged them to sever forever. Then, she left the village and moved to Rullam village. Lalbuta missed her so much that he used to cry for her. She was compelled to

leave the village so as to separate them in full success. When she heard that Lalbuta used to cry because of her, she sympathized with him and sang their misfortune, “*Mi zun ngai lo, keimahni zun ngai/ A tap ruai ruai thin e nichhunah*”, [Being nostalgic for the allure of our lost-love/ Lalbuta used to weep every day].

Her *Lusun Zai* has emerged right after she lost her first child. She had her first child from Thanglianpuia. Even though she was left alone by Thanglianpuia, she still had a child to assuage her loneliness. But, that child of hers too left her to worsen her misfortune. She personalized death that took away her child and poured out her anger upon it, “*Ka tuai chawnban a kai Manghauva’n/ Suanglung tih lo ngunhnam chawing e/ Zunfeiin sial ang chhun nang i*”, [*Manghauva*<sup>15</sup> takes my baby’s hands/ Let me hold the pike that could pierce through a rock/ And stab him as a gayal].

Then, lastly but not the least, came *Darpawngi Thinrim Zai* which is like a tick of the clock. *Darpawngi Thinrim Zai* plays a vital role as regards to her confessional voice. Among the three, this one speaks loudest as a confessional poetry. It emerged right after Darpawngi encountered with Zadeng chief in Thentlang village who was regarded as a despotic chief. It contains not only her extreme anger against their chief but also her strong desire to overthrow the unfair regime. It tells of her fury and self-sympathy as in:

*Khiangvawn rai ka rah e,*

*Khiangvawn rai ka rah e,*

*Ka leng kelin sumtual zawlah;*

*A chun a hai lo ve.*

[I am such a down-and-out loser/ Such a down-and-out loser/ My baby goat does not mistake/ Its mother on the field]

Here she compared her goat to her hapless life, and she sympathized with it. She was then filled with fierce that she could not have reverence for their chief anymore. She could not tolerate her dirty politics. She might be stereotyped as a mere nonentity who wandered about as a poor orphan, who her fellow villagers thought nurtured in a ghetto environment; yet, she had the courage to confess her wrath against their chief in the most possible offensive manner, “*Dengpui ‘ka var’ i ti e/ I vangkhua chung siar zatin/ Pawlin ka ring lo ve*”, [Dengpui, you think you are just/ I don’t think your villagers would/ Be as much as the stars].

She boldly warned their fraudulent chief that the inhabitants of her village would surely decrease in numbers because of her unjust rule. She thought the power of their chief too would surely subside due to the loss of her villagers in numbers. In the early days of Mizo society, they had a firm belief that a village ruled over by a good chief was believed to increase more and more, whereas a village ruled over by a despotic chief would decrease in numbers because inhabitants used to migrate to other village. Even though a *hnamchawm* had no right to involve in the chief’s government, they could emigrate to another village.

Without the chief’s consent, no one could emigrate to other village; they therefore used to move out at night. Such migration of any inhabitant was the most shameful thing for a chief. Darpawngi, being bold enough, did not simply migrate but attacked their chief with a song in the most offensive way. Even though she was just a

mere nonentity, she was daring enough to fight for whatever is wrong. Just like Laltheri, she was ready to struggle for change.

Reading her songs becomes reading her life. It more than makes her readers empathize with her as she empathized with her goat that had lost its baby. Rarely, she provided an optimistic point of view to her life. Lalthangliana writes commenting on her sorrowful life, “Darpawngi’s whole span of time is in a state of flux, that it can be said that she is one of those who suffers the most untold sufferings” (53). She did not hide her feelings and personal experiences. Rather, she had given vent to it. She had unveiled and was displaying her personal experiences, and that made her a confessional poet. The readers are provided a door to enter an old forlorn triangular room which has a mural of her picture on each wall while reading her poetical works.

Certainly, there is seldom a chance to read of her happy moment when reading her songs. Truth to say, her life was indeed sorrowful. And that sorrowful life became the subject of her songs. She was not ostracized but marginalized, not deserted but denied, not alone but lonely, not an outlaw but made living in a remote corner of a particular place, not convicted but victimized. If compared to Hardy’s heroines, her misfortune cannot be considered to be less severe. She might be a mere nonentity during her lifetime, but her songs speak too loud to be pushed aside. As forthright utterance is her forte, she unveiled her excruciating story and thirst; revealed her secret thoughts and feelings; and therefore provided a spectacle for the readers into her private life without any sense of shame and guilt. No doubt, she sang her songs just like confessional poets who do not tend to persuade us but take their readers into their confidence.

### 3.3 *Lianchhiari Zai*

#### 3.3.1 A brief introduction to the life of Lianchhiari

Lianchhiari was the daughter of Vanhnuaithanga, chief of Thangluah clan. She was a beautiful young damsel, good-hearted, sociable and modest. She was deeply in love with a man by the name of Chawngfianga, who belonged to *hnamchawm* of the same village. Unlike other Sailo chiefs, her parents did not object their relationship. But, an emissary of Chawngfianga, being jealous of him, successfully upset the apple cart of their plan to get married, and eventually, their story had to be told in the other way round.

#### 3.3.2 An autobiographical voice of humiliations in *Lianchhiari Zai*

There was a big banyan tree in the middle of their jhoom. Lianchhiari's father, wanting to get rid of that tree, declared a promise that anyone who could cut down the tree by himself within a day could have his daughter for a wife. As soon as Lianchhiari heard about it, she instantly suggested Chawngfianga to her father knowing his capability. As expected, Chawngfianga cut down the tree within a very short span of time. With much content, Lianchhiari's father went home leaving his daughter and her lover alone behind. The two enjoyed the rest of the day in the jhoom. How the couple spent the rest of the day became much talked of afterwards.

Not only this, when Vanhnuaithanga was about to perform *khuangchawi*<sup>16</sup>, one of their ritual practices which could be performed by only those of great wealth. A night before the day of *khuangchawi* is called *thingfar zan*, when all young men and women gathered together at a house of the family who is going to perform

*khuangchawi*, and would sing some songs and *chai*<sup>17</sup> the whole night. At that night just before the day of *khuangchawi*, while all the young men and women of their village gather together, sang, and *chai* at Vanhnuaithanga's house, Lianchhiari and her beloved were caught making love at their *sumhmun*<sup>18</sup>.

Very soon after, that embarrassing incident of their love making spread throughout and became the talk of the entire village which prominently degraded the royalty and honour of her father. Lianchhiar, in deep remorse, sang,

*Kan va tih luattukah,*

*Lengi'n ka zir sual e!*

*Ka pa, Vanhnuaithang tur;*

*A than ni bang kir e.*

[Alas! the immoral actions/ Of mine, the princess/ Have caused my father's royalty and honour/ Reverse like the sun setting]

*Khuangchawi* was the greatest achievement during those times. Only some people with great possession could achieve it. Even all the chiefs could not achieve it because it requires a lot of material and domestic wealth. Just when her father was on the edge of magnificence and glory, her immoral behaviour damaged all of it. Her father's royalty and honour had been superseded by her humiliating action.

### 3.3.3 Her songs after her estrangement from Chawngfianga

As their intimate relationship got public, they decided to get married to make the degradation of the chief's family less severe. So, Chawngfianga sent his most

trusted man as the emissary. The name of this person has been recorded as Mangmuaia by some writers, and Thura by some other writers. Unfortunately, the emissary turned out to be their enemy who cruelly spoiled their plan of getting married. When he went to Lianchhiari's house, he was warmly welcome by the royal family saying that they would accept anything they (Chawngfianga's family) could afford as bride's price.

Nonetheless, when he returned to Chawngfianga's house, he told them a whole lot of different thing opposed to what they (Lianchhiari's parent) warmly tell him to convey. He was overwhelmed with jealousy that he could not bear to witness Chawngfianga, a man of his level to marry a beautiful princess. Pachuau retells this incident like this,

Thura then realized, much to his surprise, that the chief was very amenable to the alliance. And alas, he was unable to overcome his jealousy! As soon as it dawned upon him that Chawngfianga was most likely to get married to the beautiful Lianchhiari, he began to seek every possible manner in which to thwart the alliance, So he went back to Chawngfianga's family and narrated the event in a manner that was totally contrary and exaggerated by declaring, "Lianchhiari's family have requested you to bring them a cat with horns." (52)

He 'cunningly managed to convey everything in a conflicting manner' to both the family. So, he successfully made Chawngfianga and his family to believe that if they did not move out from the village, the family of the chief would take actions

upon them. As a result, hastily, Chawngfianga and his family fled their village on the same night, without even dare to prove what they heard from him was right or wrong.

When Lianchhiari heard about the secret migration of Chawngfianga and his family to another village, she melancholically composed,

*Hmawng ang i pem tur hian,*

*Hrui ang min zawt lo ve,*

*Kei chuan phal lem ang maw;*

*Tuah tirh e, ka lungdi.*

[You did not even bother/ To ask of my opinion/ I would surely not let you leave/ O my one and only man]

As she did not have time to stop her lover and to right what had been wrongly done, she could do nothing than to sing of her sad feeling. After her lover left, she was filled with loneliness and pensiveness. She could do nothing but to visit their empty house every now and then, she sang,

*Hmawng ang i pem hnu an,*

*I run ram ang ka fang,*

*Senhri pual hmul ang thlau;*

*Lum lang an runah e.*

[After you have left me all alone/ I could only visit your empty house/ Being betrayed and left alone/ All I could do is just lying down on the floor]



As she could not have him back, she pathetically asked a wood pigeon for help, “*Kawlawna huivate, biahthu hrilh thiam che maw/ Suihlungleng ka tah hi/ Nemte’n va hril rawh maw*”, [You, wood pigeon of skyline, if you know how to speak human language/ Tell him softly that/ I weep in deep loneliness]. In the story of Mizo myth titled *Zawlpala leh Tualvungi*, there was a wood pigeon that could sing beautifully and lovely as human which was sent to call Tualvungi. Referring to this wood pigeon, Lianchhiari desperately turned to this special creature to let it carry her message to Chawngfianga.

Just like Laltheri, Lianchhiari too was never known as a song-composer until she had encountered this problem. She did not have many songs. But all her songs talked about her remorse and deep loneliness. They are candid dealt with honesty and straight-forwardness. They come from a painful portion of the poet.

### 3.4 *Hrangchhawni Zai*

#### 3.4.1 A brief introduction to Hrangchhawni’s life

Hrangchhawni belonged to the 1890s. Just like Darpawngi, she had quite a talent of composing songs, singing, and dancing. Thanmawia writes in *Mizo HlaHlui*, “For her good talent of dancing outshined her talent of composing songs and singing, she was well-known as *lamthiam Hrangchhawni* (291). *Lamthiam Hrangchhawni* means ‘Hrangchhawni, the good dancer’. Besides that, she was a very beautiful lady with friendliness in nature.

Because of her talent in dancing, she was widely known throughout Mizoram in a very short period of time. Akin to Darpawngi, she travelled around to different

villages a lot because of her talent. She had one *hlabu*, and in her *hlabu*, there are 69 songs, as recorded in *Mizo Hla Hlui*.

One day, a small group of *pathlawi* (widower) came to look for her house. When they found it, they went to pay a visit to her house. Hrangchhawni warmly welcomed them and at once composed a song for them, “*Keimah iang sulnghak i leng an ni/ Tuipui raltiang pathlawi val an lo leng e/ Bawhar, pau mai lo la leng tin nan*” [They are left alone persons just like me/ These overseas widowers came over to my place/ You, rooster, please hold your crowing]. Here, she displayed her life as left alone while comparing it to her visitors because her visitors were all widowers who were left alone by their dear wives. As they all shared the same situation of being left alone, she pleaded with a rooster not to crow for a while.

In the early days of Mizo, as there was no clock to count the time, their life and count of time was totally dependent of nature. In the evening after sunset, men, including married ones also, used to pay a visit to the house of young woman. That is one of Mizo traditions. Crowing of a cock late in the evening was called *leng hawn arkhuan* or *leng hnawt chhuak arkhuan*, which was considered a signal for men to go back home.

#### 3.4.2 A self-portrait in *Hrangchhawni Zai*

Self-portrait in a humiliating and embarrassing manner is one of the major traits in confessional poetry. In her songs, Hrangchhawni had portrayed herself in many ways that flaunt her as a woman of no character, of no self-discipline, and of no

good behaviour. Her self-portrait is a work so evidently laden with the traits of confessional poetry.

#### 3.4.2.1 A woman who loved drinking

Just as the early life of Mizo was hard to separate it from music, their social life and rice beer had strong connections. Each and every family had a pot of rice beer. They could not celebrate their festivals and special occasions without a bundle of rice beer. Even their ritual practices were done and performed with a bundle of rice beer. They could not spend their days of mourning without rice beer. Even when a baby was born, it must be welcomed with rice beer. So, in their life, both in social and religious practice, rice beer played a significant role; as it was one of their rituals.

But, women were not supposed to love drinking. If they were offered on special occasions, they were expected to politely reject it. Even if they got to drink, they were not supposed to drink as much and often as men. Women who loved to drink, or who used to drink till they were drunk were considered to be women of loose control. However, in spite of this societal norm, Hrangchhawni once portrayed herself as a woman who loved to drink rice beer, as bellows, “*Hei ang run riang ruanga zu awm lo/ I tangka cheng Rothangpuia lentir la/ Ka zawnng ruai ruai na’ng e zu awmna*”, [How come there is no rice beer in this house/ Give me your money/ I would dash out in search of the place where rice beer is].

#### 3.4.2.2 A lover with no holds barred

In the society of Mizo, young men including married men used to go to girls’ house wooing a girl or lady of the house every night. As a patriarchal society, men

were supposed to pick any woman they liked. But, women were not expected to do the same. The life of women was limited to a small circle of life. Even when they had a particular man in mind, they never dared to make it public. In that kind of world, Hrangchhawni, once and again composed a song that unmasked her longing to be with a man of her choice, “*A sawi hian sawi suh ka lung min len/ A ko kal u, Laldang khua chhan pualhrang val/ A ngaiin Hrangchhawni them reng mai*”, [How lonely it makes me feel/ Will someone please go and call him/ Hrangchhawni is just lying down longing for him].

#### 3.4.2.3 A woman who chose to sin against God

In the late nineteenth century, Christian missionaries came to Mizoram to preach gospel. Soon after their arrival, Christianity was reaped in the minds of a few Mizo people. They were made aware of heaven and hell, sin and repentance. The early converts were strictly governed by the missionaries and fellow Mizo converts as well. Many of the things they used to do in their day to day life were considered to be sinning against God. If they sinned, they needed to repent and asked for forgiveness to God Almighty.

In *Hrangchhawni Zai*, we have seen this, “*Vawiin chuan Lalpa min ngaidam rawh/ Vanram kawngkhar chabi ka hloh ta si a/ Khawvel parmawiin mi hip ta zawk e*”, [Today, forgive me, O Lord/ For I have lost the key of Heaven/ I am more inclined to worldly pleasures].

There was no record of Hrangchhawni being converted to Christian; so, apparently, she composed the above song to satirise the newly accepted religious

belief, apart from unveiling her misbehaviour. Whatever the case is, what matters is her careless nature towards the teachings of religion in dealing with honesty. Her candour in dealing with what goes around her life is worth taking into consideration. She had no reservation in working with her poetic talent.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, numbers of Mizo were already converted to Christian. The early converts were quite strict and conservative in their newly accepted belief that governed all their perspectives of life. Their lives had been limited to a very small circle with lots of restriction. However, Hrangchhawni did not let such limitations or restrictions cloud her mind, and how she perceived about life. She had led an enough daring character and quality to freely and frankly convey what was burning in her heart in her songs.

#### 3.4.2.4 An immoral woman

Lastly, but not the least, Hrangchhawni, once and again, portrayed herself as a woman who lost all control when she spent her time with her supposedly lover in the absence of her family. She revealed, “*Run chhung thim ruaiah zalen kan awi/ Ka chun mu se chaltuai zai rawh lenchawm nen/ A thlei hian lunglen i thlei dun ang*”, [We enjoy our freedom in a dark house/ Let my mother sleep and let’s sing together darling/ And make love].

She was asking her lover to wait till her family went to sleep so that they could spend time together alone in the absence of her family. It is the revelation of her private time with her lover, a revelation of a secret wish of a young woman.

### 3.4.3 Unmasking her needs, dreams, and expectations

Hrangchhawni was one kind of a woman who did not hesitate to let her emotions speak. As a human, she too had a dream of having a relationship with the man she chose; as a woman, she too had the need to feel secure and loved; and, as an emotional being, she too had to vent her emotions out. Most of Mizo women did not have the gut to let their mental and emotional needs spoken, because, especially during that era, as already mentioned before, the freedom and will of women was limited and restricted.

On the other hand, Hrangchhawni used her talent as an open window to vent her needs. She sang,

*Ai tlang zolurin min dang lo la,*

*Kawlngo angin ka leng dawn saw hmar tlangah;*

*Lung tiawi mi u ka tawng mah na.*

*Lunglenin kawltu ka chawi zo lo,*

*Tualvung koh thiam chungleng huiva ka ngai e;*

*Tuanpui loh Chalthianga leng auvin.*

[Do not, please, stop me/ I would fly around as an eagle/ Just so I would be able to meet the man of my dreams// Out of pensive mood, I wasn't able to hold a hoe/ O! I really need that wood pigeon which is capable of calling *Tualvung*<sup>19</sup>/ To call the man of my dreams who dwells far away]

Even in the modern world where women are provided freedom and equal rights as men, they are still restricted by some norms in their hearts. A woman is more likely to stick with household chores. A woman to be considered as good in character and nature is not supposed to talk freely about sex. Hrangchhawni lived in the period when Mizos were very conservative as a whole. Women of her contemporary were strictly not supposed to talk freely about their dreams. They were restricted even not to indulge in gatherings of menfolk without being called or invited. They had to abide by many restrictions. Nevertheless, Hrangchhawni, being bold enough dared to sing of her desire to have sex with the man of her dreams.

She further revealed her dreams openly, “*Laikhumah di chhai a rem si lo/ Chhai rel ila, khawzo thingsiri hnuaiah/ Silhpuan tualrawtin tuar nang e*”, [It ain't convenient to play with my lover in bed/ Wish we could at least play under a tree/ I would surely make love with him without any hesitation]. Hrangchhawni presented herself as a woman of no restrictions. She had no reservations in dealing with her womanly dreams and expectations. She openly displayed herself as she was.

## End Notes:

1. *Hnamchawm tlangval* : A commoner young man. The term *hnamchawm*, equivalent to ‘commoner’ is used to call persons/members of marginalised community.
2. *Sahlam* : A post/tree erected at the entrance of a village to hang the head of an enemy killed.
3. *Puan thulkhung* : A clothe of high value that women kept away in a *thul* basket for special occasion only. *Thul* is a basket used for storing clothes.
4. *Pialral* : An imaginary paradise especially of pre-Christian world which is equivalent to heaven. *Lushai-English Dictionary* explains as “the Lushai Paradise, the further side of the Pial River.”
5. *Thlaichhiah* : A food offered for a dead person. Whenever a family member died, the family used to offer some food the spirit of the dead person so that he or she will not be in hunger.
6. *Zufang* : A kind of rice beer.
7. *Upa* : Elder, Chief’s elder.
8. *Hlabu* : In its early use, it is used for a group of songs that have the same tune.
9. *Pemthuli* : A name given to a person of no fixed abode, who often changes his or her dwelling place, in the most possible offensive manner.
10. *Sawn man* : A fine payable by the father of a child born to a single mother, if he refuses to marry the mother.



11. *Mitthi khua* : City of the dead. Mizo people used to believe that all the souls except who achieve(s) or successfully perform(s) *thangchhuah* would live in *mitthi khua*. *Thangchhuah* has been explained in detail in the fourth chapter.
12. *Falak* : Used to call a child born to a single mother with no man to be accused of as a father because she sleeps with more than one man.
13. *Phunchawng* : The name of a tree. *The BritAm Pocket Dictionary of Mizo* explains it as “a thorny species of the cotton tree (*bombax insigne*).”
14. *Chawngsa* : Meat of feast. *Chawng* or *chawngchen* is the name of a feast which is one of the significant steps in Mizo ritual practices, a feast which is usually celebrated with meat and a bundle of rice beer.
15. *Manghauva* : A name given to death when personalised it. According to the belief of Mizo forefathers, there was an evil spirit of death by the name of Manghauva, who used to take human’s life. He was believed to demand hundred lives every day. If anyone dies without having fatal disease or accident or the like, they used to say it is *zachhamlak*, meaning that Manghauva took his or her life in order to complete the number expected for a day.
16. *Khuangchawi* : The greatest achievement which could be performed or achieved by only people of great possession. It is the greatest achievement in the

social ladder which was believed to be mostly effective in the life after death.

17. *Chai* : One of Mizo cultural dances where men and women stand alternately, meaning that a man will stand between two women and vice versa, making a circle and dance together following the same steps.
18. *Sumhmun* : *The BritAm Pocket Dictionary of Mizo* has explained *sumhmun* as ‘the front veranda/porch of a Mizo house where a large wooden *sum* is usually fixed; threshold of a Mizo house; porch, veranda.’ *Sum* is a large mortar which was usually made of wood to pound rice in.
19. Wood pigeon...*Tualvung* : Tualvungi was the heroine of one of the Mizo folk tales. There were two young lovers, Tualvungi and Zawlpala who loved each other very much. Unfortunately, Tualvungi was snatched away from her lover by Phuntiha, who was believed to be a non-Mizo powerful and wealthy man. When Zawlpala died of severe loneliness, a wood pigeon was sent to call Tualvungi. This particular wood pigeon could speak and sing lovely in human language.

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## Chapter- 4:

### Post-Colonial Era

When the second decade of the twentieth century turned, majority of the Mizo population converted to Christian. Since then, there has been a big leap, in composing songs, from the traditional way to the new style. As already mentioned in the first chapter, Mizo traditional songs are simple in its tune, theme, message, and style. Commenting on Mizo traditional songs, Thanmawia writes in *Lung Min Lentu*,

Before the British invasion at the end of the nineteenth century, the land of Mizo was like an island no one had ever visited or explored. The psyche and behaviour of the inhabitants was also just as simple as their local woven clothe, it did not have much variety in colour; and their songs were like an evident flower in the midst of a forest, standing alone on its own. (123)

Though the always-mentioned trait of the Mizo is being the lover of singing and music, they had only a few musical instrument and *hlabu* in numbers. As the lovers of singing and music but with lack of variety in tunes, they had only around hundred tunes while they had many songs in numbers. When a new song with a beautiful tune was composed, they used to compose other songs using that same tune. Therefore, many songs were clubbed together under the same tune. But, when the Christian missionaries translated their songs into Mizo, each song had a different tune; therefore such a variety apparently very much attracted their attention and amazed them as well.

In the earlier part of Christianity in Mizoram, the missionaries and the early Mizo converts as well strictly banished many of Mizo traditional ways of living. As always mentioned, the life of Mizo and rice beer had a real strong connection to the extent that they could not even do or perform their traditional religious rites without a bundle of rice beer. However, the missionaries strictly prohibited this practice. Whenever they gathered together in any occasion, they could not spend their gatherings without singing songs along with drums. This too, considering it to be connected with a thing of paganism, drums were banished from the practice of Christian praising or worshipping God.

The life of the early Christian converts was bounded by a whole lot of restrictions that they were not even allowed to sing their traditional songs because it was also considered to be transgression against Christian belief. So, as a matter of fact, being Christians was almost likely making oneself to live in a barrier. No doubt, they were amazed by the rich variety of translated songs and they really appreciated them; yet their sentiments could not always be satisfied with such strange songs from foreign land.

With the turning of the second decade of the twentieth century, there occurred three outstanding revivals among the early Christians. When the third revival which was considered the prominent revival ever broke out in Mizoram, the early converts could not suppress their real nature anymore, they could not suppress themselves to sing without the beat of a drum. And singing only the foreign songs which had quite different tunes did fail to arouse their sentiments; as a result, there was a renaissance among the Mizos. The translated songs actually could neither arouse their emotions

nor could it quench their thirst. Their sentiments laid in the tunes of their traditional songs. Then, by the end of the year 1919 or by the beginning of the year 1920, *Lengkhawm Zai*<sup>1</sup> came into the light of the Mizo Christians world. In its use of figures of speech and style, it still resembled those translated but its tune was very similar to the pre-Christian songs.

The translated songs rarely had poetic diction because the missionaries were not familiar with Mizo poetic language. Even when the early converts composed songs of their own, they never used poetic language for the use of poetic language in hymns was considered paganism. As quoted by Thanmawia, “Reviewing the Christian poetry, Rev. Liangkhaia remarked that the missionaries used the common language for their hymns because they were not acquainted with the Mizo poetic diction. The early converts, on the other hand, considered common language the best way to praise God, as poetical words would suit the pagantic poetry.” (*Mizo Poetry*, 78) But the wordings of *Lengkhawm zai* contained some poetical words which was why they were considered not to fit to be included in the first published *Kristian Hlabu*. They were compiled in a book entitled *Mizo Kristian Hla Thar Bu* which means Mizo Christian New Song Book.

#### 4.1 *Lengkhawm Zai*

The early converts were made aware of life after death in a much better version than that of the pre-Christian view and showed a much better and civilised life on earth. The pre-Christian view of paradise, that is, *pialral* was likely to be a place only for those who could successfully achieve *thangchhuah*<sup>2</sup>. *Thangchhuah* had played a

significant role in the social ladder which was believed to be highly effective in after death also. Malsawmdawngliana writes, “Bisecting of the binary words ‘Thang’ and ‘Chhuah’ testify the true meaning of Thangchhuah as suggested by K.Zawla. According to him ‘Thang’ stands for ‘fame’ and ‘Chhuah’ stands for ‘accomplished’ in combination of the two he put it as ‘Thangkim’ which means ‘all famous’. (133)

There are two kinds of *thangchhuah*, *ram lama thangchhuah* and *in lama thangchhuah*. Both *thangchhuah* were very difficult to achieve. The former *thangchhuah* could be or to be achieved in the forest or outside the village from hunting, from killing all the particular necessary animals; and the latter from performing all the required steps at home or inside the village that cost a lot of possession. The former one required outstanding skills in hunting, so only skilled hunters who were fortunate enough to kill all the necessary animals could achieve it. And, the latter required a lot of wealth and possession because they had to offer a series of feasts with bundles of rice beer in almost all the steps to *thangchhuah*, meaning thereby that to achieve and earn the title, one must possess sufficient wealth. Therefore, those laymen who were not endowed with great possession, or those who were not fortunate enough to kill all the particular necessary animals, there could be nothing good to hope for in life after death.

But, that concept of life after death was shattered and superseded by a much better version. While the pre-Christian *pialral* could only be earned with outstanding quality or possession, there was no need of such earthly quality or possession to enter and rest eternally in Christian version of *pialral* anymore. According to the teachings of Christianity, to enter heaven, one only needs to believe in Christ. Christianity

served a much better and interesting concept of life after death at their table which annihilated the past concept of *pialral* or heaven. Their new perspectives of life after death and their constant adversity consequently made them long more for heaven.

#### 4.1.1 Confession of one's adversity

Confessional poetry is about unveiling one's adversity and misfortune in order to feel relief or to sigh away some wound at least even for a moment or to deliver personal agony. For a confessional poet, writing serves as a therapy which is why Henke terms it as 'scriptotherapy'. Likewise, the authors of *Lengkhawm zai* repeatedly talked about their sufferings and anguish, because nothing ever remained the same after a confession. It came from serious and painful portions of the authors' life, and of the authors' view of life. While expressing their personal anguish, they simultaneously talked about the hardships and sorrows which others could relate. They were telling stories that are immensely significant to the malaise of their contemporaries.

##### 4.1.1.1 Patea

Born in 1894, Patea lived an unhealthy life as a child. He was called 'Patea' which means 'a small or little man' because of his physical weakness and unhealthy life. His nickname 'Patea' overshadowed his real name 'Zaliana' very soon that it (Patea) became his official name. He was reportedly the first person to compose *lengkhawm zai*. Lalthangliana writes in his article 'Patea leh a Hlate', "When Patea was about to compose a song, he used to groan while at home, and slipped away to a solitary place." (5)



For him, worldly treasure had lost its meaning. He did not leave room for the desire of worldly pleasure as his only focus was to have a celestial happiness. His perception of the world offered him only sorrows and tears. For him, the world is replete with despair and pain. In that sorrowful moment, he said in “Rumin Ka Nghak Ram Ropui Chu”,

*Aw, nang ka lenna ram lungmawl,  
I tlang chungah rethei fate ar ang kan vai.*

*...Lei pangpar hlim lai ni a chuai,  
Khuarei hmutiang ngaih a na e;  
Lung lem ka nei lo khawvelah,  
Rethei nau ang ka tap. (5-12)*

[O, you, the place where I live/ We, the children of the poor are down and out on your mountain// The blooming period of the earth fades away/ Reminiscing about the past is painful/ I cannot think of anything/ I, the poor, is crying like a child]

The world’s known confessional poet, Anne Sexton says, as quoted by George,

Poetic truth is not necessarily autobiographical. It is truth that goes beyond the immediate self, another life. I don’t adhere to literal facts all the time; I make them up whenever needed.... I would alter any word, attitude, image or persona for the sake of a poem. As Yeats said, “I have lived many lives; I have been a slave and a prince. Many a beloved has sat upon my knee,

and I have sat upon the knee of many a beloved. Everything that has been shall be again.”... I believe I am many people. When I am writing a poem, I feel I am the person who should have written it.... When I wrote about the farmer’s wife, I lived in my mind in Illinois; when I had the illegitimate child, I nursed it – in my mind – and gave it back and traded life. When I gave my lover back to his wife, in my mind, I grieved and saw how ethereal and unnecessary I had been. When I was Christ, I felt like Christ. My arms hurt; I desperately wanted to pull them in off the cross. When I was taken down off the cross and buried alive, I sought solutions; I hoped they were Christian solutions. (89)

What a confessional poet writes is not always about them, it is not always about what they themselves experience in real life. It does not always have to be about them, nor about self-experience. What matters is how deep they can dive into the made-up story or the story of others, and how bold and straightforward they could pour out in their works. Patea, well-known for his talent, was often asked by others to compose songs of sufferings and miseries they underwent in life. Very similar to Sexton when she said that she nursed her illegitimate child in her mind when she wrote about that kind of story, Patea, too, felt like a grieving mother who lost her dear son. Then, imagining himself in a grief, he composed,

*Thlafam ka ngai nau ang ka tap,*

*Min hnemtu an awm lo;*

*Zarva ianga hlim lai kha,*

*Hmuh ni awm leh ang maw?<sup>3</sup>*

[I cry like a baby missing my dear dead son/ There's no one who can console me/ Will I ever be able to have it back/ Those days when we were happy like a free bird]

#### 4.1.1.2 RL Kamlala

One of the first three poets of *lengkhawm zai*, RL Kamlala was born in the year 1902. Being an educated person who graduated from Middle English which was the highest standard in his times, he was a teacher at school from 1923 till the year 1933 brought a radical change in his life. In 1933<sup>4</sup>, he was reportedly believed to have had some kind of psychological disorder because of the vigorous work of the Holy Spirit in him. He voluntarily resigned from his work and behaved in a strange manner. As a result, the government officials caught and jailed him for his queer behaviour.

However, no matter what others accused him of being a mentally abnormal person, he was quite sure of what had happened to him and what he did. What exactly happened to him was just an opposite of the ill-judgement done to him by others. When Kamala Das was advised not to use English for writing by many of her relatives and friends because the language was not her mother-tongue, she asked them to leave her alone,

Why not leave  
 Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,  
 Every one of you? Why not let me speak in  
 Any language I like? The language I speak,  
 Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses

All mine, mine alone.(8-13)

She boldly claimed the right to use any language she likes. Similarly, Kamlala, too, in a tone of self-assertion and self-defending manner as well, he said, “*Mi sawi an tam, mi rel an tam mang e/ Hnam tin naufa zaleng chhing tur ka ni/ Min dang zo hlei lo vang.* (1-3). [Many are criticising me, and many speak ill of me/ But I was born to surpass everyone/ No one will thwart me from doing so].

He further went on to openly convey his disregard to the matter,

*‘Suihlung a mawl’ tihin ram tin,*

*Duh leh thang luai luai rawh i;*

*Khua lian valin an hai lem lo,*

*Ka vui ngai lo Lalkhumpa (16-19)*

[Let this talk ‘He has gone mad’/ Be spread to every nook and corner/ Big men with big hearts do not misjudge it/ I, Lalkhumpa, never get annoyed]

He knew and heard of all those criticism of him being mad and crazy, yet he did not listen to any of it. He knew that he was accused of becoming mad, he knew that he was victimized and that verbal assault went viral. Nonetheless, he did not mind about what or how people thought of him and talked of him so long as he was sane. He seemed to rather become indifferent and arrogant to those charges against him all the more.

After the third revival broke out in 1919, revival constantly happened at its pace at different places and different times in Mizoram. Nevertheless, there was also a

time when the people were not much enthusiastic in praising God at intervals. They could not be keen as mustard all the time. This fading of their singing in praise of God was reflected in many of Kamlala's songs. He could not bring himself to understand their lack of enthusiasm in praising God by singing and dancing. He felt sorry for Christ, his dearly accepted Saviour, and at times, he disliked the sporadic enthusiasm his fellow Christians possessed for their Saviour. One of his songs entitled "Lei Hmun Tin a lo Reh" goes,

*Van nunna kawng a reh,*

*Hremhmun a lawm ta e,*

*Setana lallukhum*

*Tunah a vul mek e. (2<sup>nd</sup> stanza)*

[Stairway to heaven is still and silent/ Hell is rejoicing/ The crown of Satan/ Is now blooming]

He was well known as a 'man of sorrow' in life and in his poems. Commenting on this particular trait, Siamkima writes, "For him, his life on earth was full of sorrows, it was perfectly appropriate to laden with the phrase 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.'" (80) In "Ka Buaina Ram Thlalerah Hian", he expressed his weariness,

*Ka ngai lo vang ka khawvel nun,*

*A buatsaih ram ka thlen hun chuan.*

*Leiah riangin hmun nei lovin,*

*Thlaler hrehawm hrut vel ila. (11-14)*

[I will not miss my life on earth anymore/ When I reach the place He prepared for me// I am a poor wayfarer having no home/ Wandering on this unpleasant desert]

He portrayed the world as a miserable and unpleasant desert in the above quotation. He knew that he would leave the ‘unpleasant desert’ where he poorly wandered around and would reach his eternal home someday, and he boldly expressed that he would never miss his life on earth anymore when he reaches his eternal home.

In “Buaina Reng Reng a Awm Ngai Lo”, he said,

*Lungngaihna leh hrehawmin min bawm,*

*Buainaten tui lian angin min len;*

*... Leiah hmun nuam ka tan vang na,*

*Hrehawm tuara ka tahna chauh.*(5-10)

[Sorrows and adversities surround me/ Troubles whirl me around like a flood/  
There is no comfy place for me/ But to make me cry toiling in miseries]

As aforementioned, he was rightly called ‘a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief’ whose pleasure could not be found on earth, but to earn only in life after death. On the other hand, Thanmawia argues against this statement saying, “Just as black colour tells the whiteness of the colour white, Kamlala seemed to portray worldly miseries so that people could picture and taste how delightful and pleasant heaven would be.... A close perusal of his poems proves that his life was full of happiness, and joy seems to surround and dwell in his environment all the time” (*Chuaiilo I*, 163). The above statement of Thanmawia might be true in real life; yet the voice of his

works speaks the other way round. According to his voice, he was a man who expressed his sorrows, grief, disappointment, and melancholic feeling in his songs without a single trace of hesitation.

In “Enchimloh Immanuel (Lamentation of Mary)”, he imagined himself as Mary, mother of Jesus, who lamented and mourned the crucifixion and death of her dear son. He pictured himself as Mary who eye-witnessed her son’s crucifixion; he cried out in vain,

*En teh mipui pung khawm saw*

*Min tuarpui nge hmel min ma?*

*An au ri a va mak em*

*Kei zawnng ka tuar zo lo ve! (5-8)*

[Look at those people who gather/ Are they mourning with me or mocking at me?/ How cruel is the sound of their shouts/ I could not tolerate it!]

The power of confessional poetry lies in the expression, and that power has something powerful to make us feel their pain in our own pulse. While reading Plath’s “Lady Lazarus”, one could feel how ‘dying is an art’. While reading Das’s “Introduction”, one could feel the weight of her anger and dissatisfaction on his own shoulder. Here, Kamlala, while presenting himself as Mary and pouring out the pain a mother could feel while eye-witnessing her son’s crucifixion and death, he undoubtedly makes the readers feel the same pain weighing them to tears.

#### 4.1.1.3 Saihnuna

Saihnuna was born in the year 1896. When his father, Pazika, chief of Thiak village died in the year 1927, N.E. Perry, Deputy Commissioner, appointed him to be the chief of Leng village in substitute of his late father. He was well-known for his verses, and believed to be having written around hundred songs. As a chief, he received lots of respect, honour, and blessings from others. He did not face much afflictions or miseries in his life, and yet, in most of his songs, he seemed to be the one who oftentimes cried in sorrows, and who seldom had a joyful moment in life.

Kamala Das has shown a picture of herself as a woman who possesses, as Weisbord states, a “vulnerable longing for someone to love, ‘like alms looking for a begging bowl’,” and a “wild hunger ‘to take in with greed like a forest fire that consumes all that comes’” her way (5). A seemingly woman of unquenchable thirst who frequently runs about in search of solace and escape is a picture of hers which her poetry serves at our table. But, she still cries out, “Rob me, destiny, if you must/ Rob me of my sustenance, but do not, I beg/ Of you, do not take away my thirst” (5).

A woman who feels strangled by the indifferent sexual relationship with her husband, who is emotionally unsatisfied, and who feels unkempt and unloved is how the readers of her poetry could probably assume her to be. But in her letter to Weisbord, she writes, “Although miserably inadequate as the traditional Indian wife, I loved him more than all and wanted his arms around me whenever I felt insecure. Now I feel that I am rudderless. Even boatless. I shall have to swim. The question that



comes up often since his death is: Where are you swimming to? Is it worth the swim?" (8).

Akin to this, Saihnuna, too, even though he hardly had undergone a life of toil, he looked a seemingly prone to wander and cry in vain. Much of his works contain lamentation over death, and an incessant longing to escape the world of toil. Even when he was asked, or rather requested by others to write for their misfortune and despair, he had never done it until and unless he could deeply put himself in their shoes. He never wanted to write anything unless he could feel it in his bones. In, "He Lei Hi Chatuan Ram a Tling Lo", he said,

*He lei hi chatuan ram a tling lo,*

*Lungngaia tahna a ni maw, Lalpa?*

*Lawmnaten mual an liam ta e,*

*Hlimna par a chuai. (1-4)*

[This world is not an eternal place/ It's just a place where we cry in sorrow,  
Lord/ Joy is passing away/ Happiness fading away]

He knew that this world is not his home and it is not even a perpetual place. He portrayed it as a place where joy and happiness are fading away and a place where there is nothing good but to cry. In "Thihna Jordan Kamah Lungngaihin", he pictured a world of dark where death and sorrow overrule all the good things, "*Thihna Jordan kamah lungngaihin thla a zar/ Buaina chhum a zing, khua a thim e Lalpa*" (1-2) [On the bank of Jordan of death, sorrow has spread its wings/ A cloud of commotion is spreading, and it's getting dark Lord]. And in "Awmkhawharin Lung a Leng e", he

said, “*Lawma kan len hun tur ngaiin/ Tapin kan rum khawvelah hian*” (9-10)  
[Longing for a time when we can be joyful/ We are crying in this world]

A confessional poet may sometimes need to resort to create an appropriate circumstance in his or her imagination so as to resolve a difficult situation or to confront the psychological disturbances or to vent one’s churning heart. Saihnuna too may have invented appropriate incidents to be in despair but he put the pains in his bones and felt it on his pulse while writing his songs so as to feel exactly as if he personally experienced it; by doing so, he therefore touched the core of the hearts of others.

#### 4.1.1.4 Taivela, “Ka Tan Ni leh Thla Reng a Eng Tawh Lo”

Being an orphan at a very young age due to untimely death of his parents and becoming a complete blind, Taivela had to face a lot of psychological disturbances apart from physical poverty. “Ka Tan Ni leh Thla Reng a Eng Tawh Lo” is believed to be written soon after he became blind. Thanmawia stated in his *Zinkawng Rapthlak Zawhtute*, “Mrs. Seizingi, 86 years old, who was one of his (Taivela) next of kins who used to call him ‘My grandfather Taivela’ told me that he composed this song soon after he became blind just when he was mentally and emotionally feeling lonely and lost.” (31)

He started it with this line, “*Ka tan ni leh thla reng a eng tawh lo,*” (1) [The sun and the moon do not shine for me anymore] which tells his exact pitiful condition on earth. It would not be easy to lead a life of orphan and complete blindness. This problematic life probably made him long more for heaven where there would be no

more of sickness, blindness, toil and poverty. In lines four to six, he expressed his longing to be with his Saviour, “*Chhandamtu tak chu ka va ngai em aw/ I khawngaihna thahruiin min kai la/ Chhandam fate lenna hmun mawiah chuan*” (4-6), [How I wish I could be with my Saviour/ Hold my hand with Your Grace/ And lead me to the beautiful place of Your children].

Regarding the loss of his eyesight, he was reportedly to have blamed his misbehaviour. According to *Zinkawng Rapthlak Zawhtute*, when they were residing in Rabung village, in 1917, he went to Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram with some of his friends. During those days, those who went to Aizawl for shopping used to steal some items from stores. When Taivela and his friends were at a shop where people of Rabung village mostly shopped, he exclaimed, lying for fun, “Ah! there! My lost umbrella is up there.” Even the owner told him to take it without any complaint. He therefore took it with him.

On their way back home to Rabung village, his eyesight became obscure and vague; and then he totally lost his sight from time to time. As there was nothing happened to his eyes or to him physically that could cause blindness, he had no other option than to blame his misbehaviour for his loss of sight.

In lines seven to nine, he said, “*Van kawthlerah khian Beramno aw chuan/ ‘Ka fa lo kal rawh, i sual rit tak nen/ Ka lo chhawk ang che,’ tiin min ko ve.*” [On the porch of heaven, the voice of the Lamb/ Calls for me saying, “Come my son, with your sinful burden/ I will take over your load.”] Because he blamed his mischievous action to be the cause of his blindness, he was assumed to have been not only facing physical and emotional sufferings but also suffering spiritual poverty and guilty.

Therefore, he desperately longed to meet Jesus, his Saviour into whom he would commend his entire burden and then to be cleansed away from all of his guilt.

#### 4.1.1.5 Hleia

Apart from being paralysed in his boyhood, Rianghleia, well known as Hleia, had lost one of his eyesight. When he was barely 40 years of age, he became completely blind. In many of his lines in his verses, he expressed his despair and discomfort. He composed “Ka Va Ngai Em Lal Ram Ropui” around 1934 when the Mizo Christian converts were much interested in the second coming of Jesus Christ. Mizo Christians were very much expecting it to come very soon because their life on earth was nothing to stay comfortable with.

Among all the Mizo Christians who eagerly waited for Christ to come, he was believed to be the most eager person to wish for it to come very soon because of his physical disability. He said “*Ka va ngai em Lal ram ropui,*” (1) [How I long for the majestic land of my Lord] and in line nine, “*A cham rei ngei ka Lal ram tiam,*” [The promised land of my Lord is taking so long] expressing his intense longing for Christ to come.

He continued to tell of his pitiful condition on earth. During this time, not all of the Mizos were converted to Christian. Those who could picture or dream about the biblical promised land of Jesus Christ which had been conveyed to them by the Christian Missionaries and then by the early Mizo converts as well were still less in numbers. Moreover, for a Christian, there could be no better counsellor other than Jesus himself, so did to Hleia. He said,

*Lal zawnge zawnge hnenah Lalpa,  
 Ka lungngaihna ka sawi thei lo;  
 Mi zawnge zawnge hnenah Lalpa,  
 Ka ngaih che ka hril thei lo. (13-16)*

[To all of the chiefs, Lord/ I cannot tell all of my worries/ And to all the people, Lord/ I cannot tell how I long for You]

He poured out his sorrows and inner sufferings to his Saviour which he could not or would not want to tell others. The above four lines show that he had a burning need to reveal his misfortune on earth which made him long more for heaven. They are his confession, confession of his secret but intense desire he made to Jesus just as a confessant would do to a confessor so as to relieve one's burden or churning heart.

In his “Ka Nghakhlel Zion Khawpui Thar”, he portrayed the geographical world as a place which is fully clouded with sorrows, “*Chungtiangah lengin thla an zar/ Natna leh lungngaihnaten*” (9-10), [Sickness and sorrows are spreading/ Their wings above us], and “*Damlai khawvel hi thlir teh u/ Lungngaih chhum a zing fo thin*” (13-14), [Look at the world of the living beings/ It is filled with cloud of sorrows]. It can be easily assumed how difficult it would be to live a life of luxury. As his life was clouded with misfortune, some of his lines too are replete with the portrait of his sorrowful life on earth.

#### 4.1.1.6 Laibata Hrahsel and his “Aw Lalpa, Lungngaiin Ka Khat Thin”

Laibata Hrahsel spent his whole life as a Christian missionary till death. He did not have much work to mention but his “Aw Lalpa, Lungngaiin Ka Khat Thin” is well

known till today. It is a song where he talked about his misery which apparently comes out of his self-sympathy. When he was alone on his mission field, he was suffering from severe diarrhoea and dysentery. He was fatigued by his illness but there was no one to take care of him. At that moment he cried out his agony in this song.

*Aw Lalpa, lungngaiin ka khat thin,  
Vanduainaten min hual vel a;  
Tah leh rumna thlalerah hian,  
Mittui nen ka rawn zawng ve a che.  
Aw ka Lalpa, ka mangan zawng zawng hi,  
I kutah ka kawltir a che; (1-6)*

[O Lord, my life has been filled with sorrow/ Misfortunes are surrounding me/  
In this desert of wailing and groaning/ I come searching for You with tears/ O  
Lord, all my perplexity/ I commend into Your hand]

Being severely sick and having no one to take care of him, he was feeling so lost and forlorn in the foreign land. There was nothing he could do but to cry out to his Lord conveying his mishap and sad condition. His helpless condition made him compare the world to a desert of crying in vain, and groaning and moaning in despair. He was desperately in need of “an ever-present help in trouble”, so he sought for his Lord with tears to commend all of his complications into his hand.

He further asked his heavenly father to comfort and console him, “*Nang, lungngai fate hnemtu chuan/ Kei pawh min lo hnem ve ang che*” (7-8) [You, comforter of the worrying children/ Comfort me in this trouble]. He knew that his God is “an

ever-present help in trouble” whom he could commend all his worries and sickness to, and after commending all of his troubles into his hand, he still continued to delineate his pathetic state in order to cry out all of his self-sympathy,

*Aw Lalpa, ka lungngaihna hnemtu,*

*Nang lo chu laina ka nei lo;*

*Tu hnen dang nge ka rawn pan ang?*

*Nang chauh ka hmangaitu i ni e. (9-12)*

[O Lord, my comforter in misery/ I do not have anyone besides You/ Who else could I turn to/ You are the only one who loves me]

His poor heart-breaking state of illness and despondency made him cry out to his Lord, and his helpless cries which he put it in art became one of the most sung among *lengkhawm zai*.

#### 4.1.2 *Lengkhawm Zai*, an escape mechanism

Confessional poetry is often used as an escape mechanism, and that escape mechanism functions as therapy. *Lengkhawm zai* has subjectivity as its chief characteristic. It is a venture into the poet’s desire and emotions. It serves as a vehicle to carry out what is burning inside the poet’s mind, and to transport the poet to an imaginary realm. Therefore, it has been utilized as an escape mechanism by the poets to help them escape the physical world, through imagination, which is unpleasant and discomfort for them.

One of the major themes in *Lengkhawm zai* is the poets' pang of longing to escape the world, and then to reach heaven. Focussing on their afflictions and miseries makes them want to escape the world they live in, and out of helplessness, they sometimes imagine themselves entering an eternal realm of their Saviour, leaving all their mishap behind. They have an intense feeling that they are just poor wayfaring strangers in this world with no permanent homes, no possessions, and no stability. As a result, they possess quite a strong desire to be with their Saviour and also to leave their worldly sufferings. Therefore, they constantly tell their desire to reach heaven.

One of African-American Folksongs titled 'Poor Wayfaring Stranger' would probably be taken into account for comparison with this theme of escapism.

*I am a poor wayfaring stranger,  
 Wandering through this world of woe,  
 And there's no sickness, no toil or danger  
 In that bright land to which I go.  
 ... I'll soon be free from every trial,  
 My body asleep in the old graveyard.  
 I'll drop the cross of self denial,  
 And enter on my great reward. (1-12)*

The authors of *lengkhawm zai* feel as desperate as the poor African-Americans who were enslaved and who underwent the restraints which the colonizers had been imposing upon them. The only way out of their distress and miseries, they think, is to flee from the 'world of woe' and to reach their eternal home where 'there's no



sickness, no toil or danger’, and where they could be dancing in delight and celestial laughter. Puna, his full name Phunthanga (1880-1942) has put his cry in “Hunte an Kiam Zel a Lei Hlimna a Ral Thin”,

*Lalpa, lo leng la aw, ni ropui rawn thlen la,*

*Rethei faten an lei hrehawm kalsan an duh.*

*Aw, Eden thar nuamah chuan min hruai tawh la,*

*Lungngai taka inthente kha leng za ila,*

*Kan lawm a kim ang a, kan fak zel ang che,*

*Khawvel hi kan ngai lo nang e, i ramah chuan. (3-8)*

[Lord, how we wish You could come, and bring Your day to us/ The poor children long to leave their world of toil real bad/ O that we wish You could take us to the pleasant New Eden/ All the loved and dear ones who separate in sorrows would meet together/ Our joys would be complete, then we would continue to sing Your praise/ We would never miss this painful world, in Your land]

Speaking as a representative of all Mizo Christians who eagerly waited for the world of toil they lived in to end, he expressed his passionate desire to flee to heaven where all the dear and near ones would be meeting together again to never depart from one another, where there would be no more toiling nor sickness, and where they could have complete joy and happiness with their Saviour by their side. He also proclaimed that they would never miss the world which was cruel to them when they reach their heavenly home.

Saihnuna too, in his “He lei hi chatuan ram a tling lo” expressed his fervent yearning to escape the world and then reach heaven. “*Aw, ka ngai par tin vulna ram nuam/ Chul lo tur Lal Nunnema siamah chuan,*” (9-10), [O, I long for the place where all flowers bloom/ That the Lamb created never to grow dim] which tells of his strong passion to reach as soon as possible. He then continued to reveal his wish to arrive,

*Beramno ram Zion ka thlen chuan,  
Lungduh ka thenna reng ka ngai lovang;  
Hmangaih khawpui, hnam tin, chhung tin  
Lawmna kimah chuan. (13-16)*

[When I reach the land of the Lamb, Zion/ I would never miss the world where I depart from the beloved/ In that city of love, where every race, every family/ Could enjoy a complete joy]

Another remarkable theme in *lengkhawm zai* is death and its consequences. Death is an oft-repeated theme. The teachings of Christianity provide a place where all the souls would meet again and stay together forever after death, that is, heaven. It is a place the Christians believed and hoped to be full of desirably good things they could dream of. Hence, the authors of *lengkhawm zai* focussed on and portrayed the sad and woeful consequences of death and then their dream land.

Reading *lengkhawm zai* with the perspective of portraying one’s terrible experience and intense desire to escape the woeful world would make us aware of how the authors vent the dark side of their perception of life into their works.

#### 4.1.3 Portrayal of the sacrifice of Christ in *Lengkhawm Zai*

What the authors of *lengkhawm zai* served at our table about the sacrifice of Christ is not simply a portrayal, but partaking it to one's experience. Their portrayal is like a mural which is convincing enough to take their readers into their confidence. They not only retold the story, but they also provided a clear picture as though they themselves witnessed it when it happened. The portrait they provide is so sharp to the extent that when they cried or screamed in despair, it became audible; when they shed tears, their tears became visible. They sowed the same feelings of theirs in the readers' mind.

Sherwin writes, "As Lowell put it, 'You leave out a lot and emphasize this and not that. Your actual experience is a complete flux. I've invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem was something invented'" (34). This 'something invented' could become so powerful to make the readers to feel the same thing on their own pulse. The authors of *lengkhawm zai* too, sometimes invented a scene, a scene they personally experienced, that could melt the readers' hearts, or at least, to aware them of the sufferings and painful rejection which Christ persevered on earth. One fine example to this statement is Chhawna's "Aw, Kalvari Thing Chungah Chuan",

*Aw, Kalvari thing chungah chuan,*

*Ka Hreng ropui a au;*

*Jerusalem, Kanan ram zawnz zawnz,*

*In Lal a ni lo'm ni?*

... *Puanzar ropui a lo thler a,*  
*Lungpui lo khi chat chu,*  
*Hmangaih Pathiana thinlungah chuan,*  
*Eng angin na ang maw! (1-14)*

[Oh, on the old rugged wood of Calvary/ My dear great King cried with a loud voice/ All of you from Jerusalem and Canaan/ Is He not your King?//... The great curtain (of the temple) being torn/ And the rock splits/ In the heart of the loving God/ How painful it would be!]

Here, the author created a scene of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ which the readers could clearly picture it in their imagination while possessing a sense of trepidation. He compared tearing of the temple's curtain and splitting of the rock to the pain that God, the father of Jesus Christ (according to the Holy Bible) must be bearing at that time. He explained the scene so visibly that the readers could literally be able to think of how painful it would be.

Patea, too, created another picture of this incident in "Zan Lungngaihthlak, Zion Pindan Chhungah". He said,

*Jerusalem kulh pawn lamah chuanin,*  
*'Zawlnei thih dan a ni lo' an ti;*  
*Mahse, en teh, Kalvari kawng lam saw,*  
*Mipui zingah ka Lalpa ka hmu.*

*En teh, Kalvari a thleng takngial dawn,*

*Engtin nge maw ka tih tak ang le!*

*Aw ka Lal, i lo kir leh tawh lo'ng maw?*

*I hmun tur chu Kalvari a ni. (9-16)*

[Beyond the city wall of Jerusalem/ Is not a place where a prophet should die, they say/ But, look yonder, on the road to Calvary/ I see my Lord in the midst of angry people// Behold, He almost reaches the cursed Calvary/ What am I gonna do!/ Oh, my Lord, will You not draw back?/ Your end will be Calvary.]

Britanica.com explains Calvary like this,

Golgotha, (Aramaic: “Skull”) also called Calvary, (from Latin calva: “bald head,” or “skull”), skull-shaped hill in Jerusalem, the site of Jesus’ crucifixion. It is referred to in all four Gospels. The hill of execution was outside the city walls of Jerusalem, apparently near a road and not far from the sepulchre where Jesus was buried. Its exact location is uncertain, but most scholars prefer either the spot now covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or a hillock called Gordon’s Calvary just north of the Damascus Gate. ([www.britannica.com/n.pag](http://www.britannica.com/n.pag))

Patea cried out in vain as if he was physically there when Jesus was crucified. He could not bear the sight of his dearly accepted Lord to be condemned and crucified. He strongly believed Jesus was a Saint, and completely accepted him as his saviour. He strongly suggested that the place called Calvary was not a place where he

(Jesus) should die; and being crucified was also not how he should die. So, he cried out helplessly for him.

Sherwin writes,

Confessional poems draw from the poet's actual experiences, and the authors make no attempt to disguise the autobiographical elements; indeed, their use of proper names, places, incidents, and other specific details of their lives indicates that authenticity is an important effect of the poems. But Sexton's insistence that autobiographical truth is not always poetic truth serves as a warning not to confuse the poet's voice with the poet's persona. She explains: "I don't adhere to literal facts all the time. Concrete examples give verisimilitude. I want the reader to feel, 'Yes, yes, that's the way it is.' ... I would alter any word, attitude, image or persona for the sake of a poem." According to this system, real experience subordinates itself to the fictional setting of the poem, and is used to illustrate, not constitute, its poetic truth.

(34)

Taking the above quotation into account, as a matter of fact, Chhawna and Patea did not witness the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They were just made aware of and given the knowledge of it by the missionaries, and from the Holy Bible. Nevertheless, they both created scenes, utilizing their imagination, where they witnessed the scene. And, by their creation, they provided a capacity to their readers to witness the same scene and to feel the same anguish.

#### 4.2 Hrawva's "Rairah tea" and "Khuanu Leng Chawi"

Hrawva was born in the year 1893 and died in 1956 at the age of 62. When he was at a very young age, his mother passed away. Not long after the untimely death of his mother, his father too passed away. Two of his poems titled "Rairah tea Hla" and "Khuanu Leng Chawi" read an autobiographical note of his worst experience as a child under the shadow of an imaginary poor orphan, who is apparently himself. In "Rairah tea Hla", "*Rairah riang te khuarei ar ang a vaih nan/ Dan rual loh kawla awmlaiin/ A chun banah a kai e.* (16-18), [For a lone child to feel lost and forlorn/ An unstoppable death/ Hold his dear mother's hands].

He was too young to understand the sad situation. During daytime, he was playing with his friends living a normal life like all other children as it should be. But, when he came home, the first thing he did was looking for his mother who was nowhere to be found. At night, he was utterly in need of his mother all the more. "*Chun tawng lovin run in chhungan a vai e/ A chun zalna laikhum chulin/ 'Khaw'nge ka chun?' a ti e*" (28-30), [He was at lost being unable to find his mother/ In a pensive mood, he just lay down on his mother's bed/ Asking "Where is my mama?"]

He was crying and asking for his mother without understanding the meaning of death. He was then consoled by his father, aunt and other family members to make him believe that she would come home soon. While waiting for his mother to come home, he fell asleep. In the morning, as soon as he woke up, the first thing his family heard from him was the same question, "Where is my mother?" Then, they would make another excuse saying that his mother was on a trip, and she would come home

soon. But, there could not be a day when he could have his mother's love to embrace him again.

Not long after the demise of his mother, his father, too passed away, leaving his poor son behind. "*Tu'n nge hnem ang rairah chun ngai tlei lo chu/ Kian rel lo kawla awmlaiin/ A zua tui ang a la e*"(67-69), [Who could there be to take care of a motherless boy/ A merciless death that never turns away/ Cruelly took away his father]. This time, too, he was still too young to understand the true meaning of death. But then again, after a while, he started looking for his father. When he was told not to ask for his parents anymore because they were gone for good leaving him behind, he said,

*Kei zawnng ka pi, thinlai reng a dam lo ve,*

*Lunglohtui ralah ka chunnu'n;*

*"Bawihthe ka ngai," a ti ang.*

*Hmuah zai rel i ka ni, chhuahtlang lam rawnah,*

*Ka chun leh zua bawihthe ngaiin,*

*Zing zin an cham rei lo vang. (82-87)*

[Grandma, it's really hard to get over it/ I believed my mother would say beyond the blues/ "I miss my dear son."/ Come, aunty, let us wait for them at the porch/ My mother and father would come back/ Soon from where they travel]

There was nothing he could do to make his parents come back alive. He was taken care of by his elder brother. He spent most of his time besides the Welsh



Missionaries. Perhaps, he was attacked for spending his time with the foreigners, he says in a manner of self-defence, “*Sappui nun chan lungkhamin min sel lo u/ Rairah nghilhna a awm maw tiin/ Lenrual lungduh ka pel e.*” (10-12) [Do not accuse me of being obliged to British’s way of living/ It was out of hoping to be able to forget the pitiable condition of mine/ That I had to overpass my kind of people].

He justified the reason why he hanged around with the missionaries. He did so only for the hope of being able to forget his pathetic condition. However, the pain of losing both of his parents still haunted him whenever he saw some children caressed by their fathers, he imagined that the soul of his parents would not be able to tolerate the sight of their child living a lonesome life, “*Hria se an thinlai damin ka ring lo ve/ An hrai riang mi chawi lai karah/ Zua ngaia kan leng liai hi*” (19-21), [Would they know, they would be broken-hearted/ To have a sight at their child, amongst the embraced/ Living lonely longing for a father]. He was hoping against hope that his parents would come back alive, but all in vain.

#### 4.3 Contemporary Period: Confessing the inner pain and silent cry

Contemporary period covers the period from the later part of the Twentieth century to the present. As George writes, “Poets are among the few whom our culture still invests with a ritual function. We ask them to speak the unspeakable for us, and when they do, we are capable of effecting a violently negative transference,” (xiii), the poets of the contemporary period ‘speak the unspeakable’ till we have ‘a violently negative transference’.

#### 4.3.1 Roliana Ralte's "Jerusalem Tharah"

The author of this song, Roliana Ralte was born on March 1, 1951 and died on December 20, 2003 at the age of 52. Though he was not born blind, when he was fourteen years of age, his left eye was damaged in an accident, then, he became half blind. He was gifted with talents of composing songs and of singing.

He composed "Jerusalem Tharah" in the year 1979. The thing that pressures him to write this song is not his own blindness, but physical disabilities he had seen in others. Around this time of year, he was staying in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, and used to attend church service at Mission Veng Church. There was an old blind man who could barely walk with his stick but never missed a single church service in spite of his blindness. When he saw that old blind man, it made him long more for heaven where there will be no more disabilities. So, he composed this song.

He started it by stating his yearning for the New Jerusalem<sup>5</sup>, "*Hetah mitdelin leng mah ila/ Khawvel par mawite hmu lo mah ila*" (1-2) [Though we may grope our way blindly here/ And, cannot see the beautiful blossoms of the world], he looked forward to heaven where blindness would not bother them anymore, "*Min Chhandamtu hnen kan thlen hunah chuan/ Mitdel kan awm tawh lo'ng, Jerusalem tharah*" (3-4) [When we reach the place where our Saviour dwells/ There will be no more blind, in the New Jerusalem], saying that even though they had to struggle physical blindness on earth, they will be free from it when they reach heaven.

He mentioned not only blindness but also other physical disabilities. He spoke for all who are fighting with any kind of disabilities in life. There may be no cure to

be hoped for on this earth for persons with disabilities, but in heaven, everything will be the other way round. No sickness would bother them anymore. Therefore, he, looking forward to and focusing more on heaven rather than on their physical handicap, dreamt of heaven, and then displayed how beautiful life will be in heaven.

*Famkim lovin awm rih mah ila*

*Kan hmel ni aiin a eng dawn si;*

*Kal hmasate nen kan intawk khawm ang,*

*Famkim lohna khawvel kan ngai tawh ngai lo vang. (17-20)*

[Though we live here imperfectly/ Our face will be brighter than sun/ We will meet with those who go before us/ We will never miss this world of imperfection]

He used this particular song to console himself and also all other persons with disabilities. He not only revealed the hardships they confronted on earth for being disabled, but also shouted about the glorious life they will eternally possess with their Saviour by their side.

#### 4.3.2 Register of melancholy in Zirsangzela Hnamte's poems

Zirsangzela Hnamte was born on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1952. From his childhood, he was a shy and reticent person. He always preferred to spend his time alone and to not involve much in public gatherings, yet because of his talent in singing, composing songs, and playing musical instruments, he had many friends and was oftentimes invited to perform on stage. Nonetheless, he was a loner.

As he loved spending his time alone and was a loner, a sense of loneliness was his faithful companion which made him indulge in melancholy. Melancholy is what strikes Hnamte as is the case with confessional poets. He portrayed himself as a melancholic poet who loved to reveal his pessimistic viewpoint of life in many of his works. In “Ainawni”, he talked about his sad feeling caused by the age gap between him and a beautiful young girl he met,

*Tuah, vau vul mawite-u;*

*Rualte'n vanglai tawng bik che u,*

*Ka pian a hma lua kei zawng;*

*Tleitir sakhmel ainawn par iang,*

*Vul lai, ka vul ve lo e- Ainawni. (3-7)*

[Beautiful blossoms of *tuah* and *vau*/ You meet when both of you are in full bloom/ But for me, I was born too early/ When this beautiful young damsel/ Is at her peak of beauty, I am already past my heyday- Ainawni]

*Ainawn* is, as defined in *The Britam Pocket Dictionary of Mizo*, “a species of the wild cardamom which produces flowers.” (9). As the flower it bore is quite beautiful, the term ‘*ainawn*’ or ‘*ainawni*’ becomes one of the poetical terms used to call a beautiful young woman. When Hnamte coincidentally saw that beautiful young girl, the sweet glance of her instantly reminded him of his being too old to woo her. He himself had written right under the poem in his collection of poetry entitled *Zirsangzela Hlate* that she was too young to be chased after, and he therefore wrote this poem to make him at least feel at ease.

Hnamte had also portrayed many of the dark side of the life of Mizo and of human life as well. Just as Plath speaks in her “Mirror” on behalf of a mirror, “I am not cruel, only truthful” (4), Hnamte introduced the nature of mirror in “Darthlalang” as “*Thu dik tantu, huaisenna thuam famkim sinin/ Roreltu dik i lo ni e*” (4-5) [A truthful, clothed with complete equipment of courage/ You are a ruler of justice]. The speaker of the poem is speaking to a mirror. He praises the admirable nature of a mirror and then a beautiful life of other creatures that live their life as they were created with full contentment, while lamenting on the hypocrisy of human life.

While other creatures are living their life just as they are, humans are desperately in need of a mirror to look more beautiful or more attractive than they actually are by putting on some cosmetics, by setting their hair, and the like. Thinking of this hypocritical life humans have been living, he lamented on the pathetic life of human. Said he,

*Hrilin sawi thiam ve mai teh se*

*Engtin hril ang maw hringnun hi;*

*... Siamtu kut chhuak duh tawk lova*

*Bum hmang kan lo chang leh thin hi. (11-15)*

[May they also be able to speak/ How would they talk about human life/ ...

For being dissatisfied with the works of God/ We become deceitful and hypocrite]

The title of the poem “Darthlalang” simply means mirror. He had written right under the poem in his collection of poems *Zirsangzela Hlate*,

I think about how human beings cannot have contentment and satisfaction in this world, and how selfish we are that we do not hesitate to lie if we think it will be for our benefit. Then, I also think about an admirable nature of a mirror that clearly shows us our defect and ugliness without discriminating anyone who stand before it, which is unlike human beings who willingly show goodness to their favoured ones, and never hesitate to go on to over-exaggerate them, and, I think we, the human beings have many things to learn from a mirror that is courageous to tell only the truth. I therefore write this poem. (43)

The unbiased and truthful mirror reminds him of the hypocrisy of human life. According to him, mirror is unchanging and static, while on the other hand, humans get involved and indulged much in worldly materials and artificial appearance; mirror is truthful whereas humans are deceitful and bias. His pessimistic perception of human life made him lament on the ugly truth about it. In his “Phengphe Nunnem”, he revealed his cry for human life,

*Phengphe nunnem leh zaidam,*  
*Vahkhuai, tho leh hmiripa'n;*  
*Par zu dawn za thlir changin,*  
*Hring nun hi ka tahpui thin. (13-16)*

[When I watch a mild and gentle butterfly/ A bee, a fly and an ant/ Sucking a nectar together/ I use to cry for life]

Melancholy is an oft-repeated theme in Hnamte's poetry. He enjoyed watching a beautiful life led by nature. But, as it simultaneously reminded him of the ugly truth about human life, he seemed unable to get himself off the hook from being melancholic. In his "Zonunmawi", he screamed calling for *zonunmawi*<sup>5</sup> which he thought to be fading away, "*Zo nun, aw nun mawi/ Liam lovin la cham rih hram rawh aw*" (8-9) [Life of Zo, O beautiful life/ Please do not fade away and stay with us]. *Zonunmawi* that has made the life of Mizo beautiful and peaceful in the early days of Mizo is conceived in the poet's mind as fading away. So, he pathetically called for it to come back and stay with them.

Reading the poetry of Hnamte with the perspective of melancholy in mind would surely aware the readers of his pessimism and lamentation on human life. It does not only aware but also takes them into his pessimistic viewpoint of life. In his conception, other creatures know how to live together while humans are filled with selfishness and self-centredness. This conception of two opposite lives is a remarkable theme in Hnamte's poetry which makes him melancholic and confessional.

#### 4.3.3 A quest for the purpose of life in "Kan Damchhan"

"Kan Damchhan" is written by Lalduhzuala which is replete with questions on the purpose of life. It is a heart-touching song where the poet is despondently in search of his life's purpose. Setting aside the religious teachings on life's purpose, it poses a rhetorical question on the purpose of the creation of man.

*Eng dawn ang maw hmanah khuanu hian,*

*Hringnun hi a duan lai khan;*

*Hraileng awmhlei dung a thul em ni,*

*Hringnun hi a lo duan le (1-4)*

[What would god think/ When he created life/ Was he like a naughty child who plays around/ Why did he design life]

He starts with a question as to why god created life. He has a repeating doubt like ‘was god mistakenly creating it like a naughty child who plays around with his toys and then makes something out of it without any proper plan or purpose’. He further asks,

*Aw, engan nge maw khuanu hian,*

*Hringnun hi a lo duan le?*

*Thamral leh mai tur hian em ni le,*

*Duh vang reengin kan piang si lo. (4-8)*

[O, why did god/ Create life?/ Is it just for letting it vanish away/ We are not born out of our choice]

He laments the very creation of life. He is searching whether there is a proper plan for life. He finds no purpose and no meaning at all. He sees life to be simply existed, and then vanishes for nothing. Therefore, he poses a question that would not be an easy one to answer on the reason why god created it if it is to let it fade away for nothing. He finds nothing special or joyful or worthy about life. He finds no beauty in it. So, ‘if life has no meaning, then why created it’ is his probe to the creator. No one is born because of one’s own choice to be born is one of universal truths. We have no choice in birth, no choice in choosing the parents or family to be born. We cannot



choose the colour of our skin, the figure, the height; there is nothing we can choose when it comes to being born. He says,

*Mim ang piangin sial ang kan sei lian,*

*Hai ang tara fam ralin;*

*Aw, damchhan hi nei tak ang i maw,*

*He khawvel sual kulhpuiah. (9-12)*

[Like a corn, we are born and growing/ Growing old and then die/ O, do we have a purpose/ In this sinful world]

He asks repeatedly about life's purpose, but finds no answer. He thinks that we are born and growing old, and then die. In the meantime, according to him, life has done or received nothing glorious or beautiful. Moreover, the place where life is created and designed is a world of sin and woe. A purposeless life locating in a sinful world is no greater than a mistake. In the last four lines, he continues his question,

*Khawi lamah tuan rel tak ang i maw,*

*Hringnun hi a ral hunin;*

*An sawi pialral hi awm tak ang maw?*

*Tah chuan engtin zel ni maw? (13-16)*

[Where would I wander around/ When life meets its end/ Is the so-called heaven for real?/ How would life be there?]

There is no certainty in what makes the author pose this kind of question in his song because the poet denies answering it, but, one certain thing is that “Kan

Damchhan' came out of a deep wound. A confessional poet does not owe anyone to tell the story behind his or her artistic work just because he or she is categorised as confessional. Commenting on how the claim to autobiographical truth-telling was imposed not chosen, Sherwin cites, "...the confessional label must be explored not as a product of the author's desire to be read autobiographically, but of the reader's desire to attribute truth claims to their poetry." (9) Everyone is subject to walk through the valley of cries in life. This song, which contains difficult questions that push aside the religious teachings and belief on life, is certainly written from the valley of cries.

The author not only makes the readers to question life's purpose with the same kind of unique perception, but also makes them feel some weight on their shoulder after going through the song. The author's perception of life is unique in the sense that anyone who wanders on the road of chaos and cries would obviously asks the same question, but not everyone dares or has the gut to put it in art.

#### 4.3.4 Poetry of Thanmawia written after the occurrence of unforeseen circumstances

Thanmawia is the first to get doctoral degree in the area of Mizo poetry. He has a large number of literary works. Unfortunately, his life was struck by a vital disease, that is, cancer. While he was taken good care of by his dear wife, his wife too had suffered from the same disease. After a short while, she died of cancer. He therefore has to mourn for the death of his wife while fighting for his life against cancer. That is when confessional aspects can be traced in his poems.

#### 4.3.4.1 His sincere plead with God from his sickbed

A godly man, who has long been serving as Church elder, always finds his way to focus on good things even in his darkest hour. He is able to bring himself to find blessings that sometimes come in worse disguise. As he is a man of literature, he has written a number of essays and poems even while fighting against cancer. One of his published books during the dark phase of his life is entitled *Thim Zinga Eng* which means a light in the dark. Ninety five per cent of his works talks about hope in despair, encouragement in gloom, and blessings in rain while the other five per cent is like the other side of a coin. Into that small amount of his works, he pours forth his secret wounds, silent cries, and serious plea for remedy to God. In the first quatrain of his “Damna Vaukam”, he talks about the healing works done by Jesus while he was physically living on earth. The second to fourth quatrain speaks about the healing of a blind man at Bethsaida, which has been retold in “The Gospel According to Mark”, chapter 8, verses 22-25, from *The Holy Bible*, that reads,

<sup>22</sup>They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. <sup>23</sup>He took the blind man by the hand and held him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?”

<sup>24</sup>He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.”

<sup>25</sup>Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. (567)

These verses remind him of Jesus the healer who never ignores anyone who goes to him for the healing. He therefore begs of God like a beggar to heal him too,

*Kei pawh mitdel ang ka ni,*

*Nat leh harsatnaten min bawm,*

*Ka Lal Isu lo hnai leh rawh.*

*Min kaiin, min hruai rawh aw.(17-20)*

[I am also like a blind man/ Surrounded by illness and adversity/ My Lord Jesus, nearer to me/ Hold my hand, and guide me]

In *Thim Zinga Eng*, a collection of his essays and poems published after the grief-stricken disease has hit him, he writes in a parenthesis right under this poem, “I have written it when I was completely fatigued by the treatment,” (290). He further pleads with Jesus,

*“Tuite in dai kai lai pawhin,*

*Ka awm zel ang,” titu khan,*

*Ruam thuk ber ka zawh lai pawhin,*

*Min chelh tlat la, min kai zel la. (21-24)*

[You who said, “When you pass through the waters/ I will be with you”/ When I walk through the valley of chasm/ Hold on to me, lead my way]

“When you pass through the waters/ I shall be with you” is a biblical reference taken from the book of “Isaiah” 43:2 from *The Holy Bible*. When his body was fighting hard till it was at its worst condition by the treatment of cancer, the poet who

is a church elder and a godly man who could always find a way to suppress and hide his silent cries and secret wounds even in his darkest hour cannot help but to reveal his cry for help.

In “Kan Leng Dun Thin”, he portrays the world as “*Nat leh vanduinat hi/ Chhumpui angin a zing thin a*” (5-6) [Pain and misfortune/ Hovers around like clouds]. When he reaches the climax of physical weakness, and darkness clouds his view, he portrays the world as a place clouded by pain and misfortune. As he has suffered from throat cancer, specifically nasopharyngeal cancer, he has to suffer from the many side effects of radio-therapy. For instance, as in his words,

One Saturday morning, I could not hear any sounds. Our local market is located near our house; the sounds of that busy place can be heard from our house every Saturday morning. The chopping sound of butchers is quite loud that it is unignorable. But, that morning, I could neither hear any sound, nor even the sounds of my family.

I got up from bed wondering why it was so quiet, but when i looked out, I saw a large crowd thronged the place, but I still could not hear their sounds. That is exactly when I realised I have lost my hearing, I was worried, and felt so lonely as well. (163)

This sense of loneliness is evidenced in his other essays “Krismas Awmze Nei Lo Chu” from the same book *Thim Zinga Eng*, “From the very first time this serious illness strikes me, I am a kind of person who does not want to focus on the dark consequences it will bring but only on the bright side, a kind of person who wants to

focus only on God's grace and guidance. But, now, I am filled with self-pity" (166). As a devout church elder, he always loves going to church, singing God's praise, and dancing in praising Him. But, his pathetic and weak physical condition does not permit him to do so after the deadly disease hits him. As he can barely talk, singing is way too far for him to hope for. So, in "Lalte Lal", he reveals his strong desire to sing for God in his pensive mood. In the first two lines, he talks about the second coming of Jesus Christ, "*Ka Lalpa a lo kir leh hma chuan/ He kawngah hian ka kal zel ang*" [Until my Lord has returned/ I will walk on this road]. The words 'this road' may connote his journey with cancer that prevents him from many of the things he so loves to do.

He compares his sick life which has been restricted a lot by cancer to the narrow gate or road Jesus Christ mentioned which has been retold in the two Gospels according to Matthew and Luke<sup>7</sup>. To enter through the narrow gate which leads to life, according to the teachings of Jesus Christ, one has to walk on the narrow road. Likewise, Thanmawia comforts himself that one day, his Saviour will return, and he will happily feel His love embracing him. He further proclaims,

*Lalpa a lo kal leh hun chuanin,*

*Hlimin ka tho vang, lawmin ka pan ang;*

*Ka fak ang, hlim takin,*

*Ka chawimawi anga ring takin; (9-14)*

[When the Lord has come again/ I will rise up and approach him joyfully/ I will praise him, blissfully/ I will sing his praise with a loud voice]

He has written a short note under this poem in a parenthesis, "... I cannot sing anymore because of radio-therapy. Be it the Church or *zaikhawmna*<sup>7</sup> or the house of a grieving family, I used to lip-sync, and it saddens me a lot. I have put 'I will sing his praise with a loud voice' because of this depressed spirit that is haunting me." (294) He cannot hope to sing as loud and much as he wishes in this life, but, he knows deep in his heart that he will be able to sing with a loud voice when he is in his Saviour's embrace. So, this poem confesses his desire to reach heaven, as is the case with the authors of *Lengkhawm Zai*.

#### 4.3.4.2 The voice caused by the death of his dear wife

As mentioned earlier, his wife who used to nurse and take good care of him was also diagnosed as having cancer. When his wife died, he is still fighting against cancer. The scar and void left by the loss of his dear wife make him confess his deep wounds. In "Ka Chau Zo Ta", he says, "*Ka phal lo va/ Ka tap a/ I ding si lo!*" (7-9), [I don't want to let go/ I cry/ Yet you do not stop!]. He reveals how hard he tries to not let go of her hands, but he cannot stop her from leaving him.

In "Rauthlaleng", he questions his wife for leaving him. The need to sort out the reason that is churning in his heart has compelled him to question his dead wife. He is somehow filled with anger. He questions in a rather bold manner, "*Min ngai lo iang i liam a*" (5), [You pass away as though you do not miss me], "*I thla a chawl thei ang maw?*" (9), [Will your spirit be able to rest?], and "*Min ngai lo ten i leng ang maw?/ Hlimlai i chheu thei ang maw?/ Hlim zai i vawr thei ang maw?*" (11-13), [Will you roam about without missing me?/ Chase after happiness?/ And sing happily?].

Thinking about how the spirit of his wife would hover around and dance delightedly while he blindly gropes for her presence, makes him possess a sense of anger towards her.

In “I Tel Lo Chuan”, he talks about how helpless he is without his beloved wife. He reveals that he has no strength, no beauty, and no goodness in him without her. Even beauty has lost its meaning. So, he confesses solemnly,

*Phur hunah ka nguai a,*

*Tawng hunah ka ngawi a,*

*Hlim zingah ka hnim a,*

*Zai hunah ka tap a,*

*I zun ngaiin. (11-15)*

[I am sad when it's time to be excited/ Silent when it's time to talk/ Gloomy amongst the happy ones/ And cry when it's time to sing/ Because of longing for you]

When his eldest daughter got married, one of the happiest moments in life to everyone makes him search desperately for her who has already gone for good. When night falls and crowds take leave, a disturbing thought strikes him harder, so, he feels compelled to write a poem “Khawiah Nge I Awm Tak Le?” asking “Where are you now?”. Just as Das revealed her oft-repeated question for her dead husband to Weisbord, “Where are you swimming to? Is it worth the swim?” (Weisbord, 8), Thanmawia too asks his dead wife that where she is when the family is celebrating one of the biggest moments in life.



It seems like every moment and occasion makes him long more for the presence of his wife. When his birthday comes too after her death, a sense of desolation strikes him. He knows it is a time to be happy and feel blessed. But, things have change. He knows he is supposed to be happily singing of his gratefulness, but he cannot do so. In his “Tu Nge Hlim Thei Ang?” he reveals his pathetic life,

*Zan reh hi a bengchhen a,*

*Chhun lam hlim thawm*

*A reh tlat si chuan*

*Hlimna a bihruk a,*

*Rimawi a inthup tlat si chuan,*

*Tu nge zai thei ang?*

*Tu nge hlim thei ang?(15-21)*

[When the silence of night is noisy/ And the happy sounds of day time/ Be silent and still/ When happiness hides/ And music hides itself/ Who can sing?/ Who can be happy?]

Sylvia Plath was immensely haunted by a sense of insecurity and unquenchable thirst because of the untimely death of her father. She expressed in anger in “Daddy”, “Daddy, I have had to kill you/ You died before I had time” (6-7). She was barely nine years old when her father died. She was angered by her father’s death for she was still too young, and she did not have enough time spent with him. Because of her father’s untimely death, she, a nine year old girl had to struggle a lot. She then said, “I never could talk to you/ The tongue stuck in my jaw” (24-25). Similarly, the death of his

wife creates a great void in Thanmawia's mental equipoise which deprives him of being himself anymore without his wife. When happiness hides its face away from him and the soothing music also hides itself from him, and when the silence of night becomes loud and noisy and the happy sound of day time is kept silent, he reveals that there is nothing to be happy for in his life anymore, without the presence of his dear wife.

#### 4.3.5 A shattered hope in "Hraitea Hla"

The poet of "Hraitea hla" is one of the most unfortunate ones, who is the living proof to prove that no one is born out of their own will, by the name of Denish Lalmalsawma Vuangtu. He is one of the Mizo young writer-poets of the Twenty-first Century. He has published his first book titled *Panlai Nun leh Vangkhawpui* which contains his unflattering memoir.

He could not have the memory of the divorce of his parents for he was still in his infancy. When he was barely one year old, her mother had to leave him in the care of his old grandparents, because there was no place for him in his step father's house. He writes, "My stepfather used to beat me despite the fact that I was only some months old. When my mother got in the way to protect me, she too got beaten up by him." (2) So, he was left alone by his mother. In his poem "Hraitea Hla", he writes,

*Awmlai hrang hlei lo chun hrang chuan e;*

*Awihlai, Duatlai hnutiang a chhawn e.*

*... Enchimloh Hraite-an;*

*A chunnunnem au ding zo lo ve. (5-9)*

[Not because of death but because of a mother's need/ She left her dear son alone/ The dear beloved child/ Could not stop her mother]

As in his words, "Thinking about how she (his mother) abandoned me and her behaviour as a mother, she is the most dishonourable mother of all mothers." (1) The memory he has of his father too is not any better. "My father was a drunkard and a real pain in the neck for the society. The talk of the town about him is that there is nothing good in him to talk about." (1) Such is the terrible memory of his parents that lingers in his mind.

Right after his mother left him at his grandmother's house for good, she never came back for him. His relationship with his parents is very thin to the extent to make him say, "I am the child of my mother and father, the only blood relative I have is me." (2) In spite of such a bad memory he has with his parents, he cannot stop waiting for his mother to come back for him; he cannot help needing a mother's love to caress him. His grandparents and aunt try to console him,

*Hraite, phang hlah, na dawng le kan um,*

*Nangmah lam dingin a rak kir lai;*

*Na 'Nu' chu a rak kir than lai.*

*'Maurua ianga thar tuai Hraite-an,*

*Lo haw se a ti e;*

*A chunnu relhbo tawh hnu chu. (17-22)*

[Child, don't worry, your family is here with you/ To come and take you with her/ Your mother would come back/ A child who sprouts like a bamboo/ Wishes she would come home/ His mother who already run away for good]

The condition is not better than the two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir from Samuel Beckett's drama, *Waiting for Godot* who wait for someone that does not show up till the end. These tramps are waiting for someone named Godot who they believe to save them from their poor condition. They are tired of endless waiting but still they dare not stop doing it. Akin to that, the poet, too, was waiting for his mother to come back for him one day even though he was not certain whether she would come, "*Hnutiang hawi zai rel lo chun liami/ Duatlai hnutiang chhawntu/ Lung dam nan Hraite-an a nghak e*" (27-29), [To console himself, a child waits for/ A run away mother who does not tend to turn back/ Who abandons her dear son]

However, even when he was hospitalised for a major surgery at a very young age, his mother did not come to take care of him. He therefore realised that there is nothing he could do to make her come back to him. All of his longing to feel his mother's love was in vain. So, he decided to let her go and stop waiting for her. "*Chunnu kir tiang rel lo hrai tawnah/ Hraite lungzur van zawlan a zam/ Thinlung zurin chunnu thlah ta e*" (30-32), [She does not bother to come back to her poor son / The child's down heartedness reaches the sky/ With a heart so doomed, he bids her goodbye]

He consoles himself by saying that, "*Hraite, chun leh zua ngaihlai bang tawh i/ Chun leh zua pi leh pu tangan*" (51-52), [Child, stop waiting for your mother and

father/ Cling on to your grandma and grandpa who are your mom and dad]. He is talking to himself under a thin veil of an imaginary persona. Even though the poet has used second person narration, the boy is presumably the poet himself as the story is evidenced in his essay “Panlai Nun leh Vangkhawpui”.

#### 4.3.6 The voice within a series of *Zaikung Thar*

*Zaikung Thar* is the name of a series of books that contain a collection of poetry written by the twenty-first century young Mizo poets published by Mizo Poetry Society. As already mentioned in the first chapter, the twenty-first century Mizo poetry has subjectivity as one of its remarkable characteristics. It is a venture into the self rather than to earn literary fame. Poetry serves as a vehicle to transport the innermost feelings of the poets, or as a spell to transmute the poets’ chaotic mind into something remarkable.

##### 4.3.6.1 The “me” or the “I” impulse

The young poets of *Zaikung Thar*, particularly speaking, have hunger or thirst to vent the self. The prominent feature that urges these young poets to write poems is the need to identify oneself. As George quotes the words of Sexton, “It was not a planned thing to come into English poetry, which I didn’t even know – I was just writing, and what I was writing was what I was feeling, and that’s what I needed to write” (92), the Twenty-first Century Mizo young poets write what they feel and what they need to write. This need is an almost irresistible impulse to put their thought in black and white.

For instance, Lalrinzuali Ralte expresses many kinds of her wish in her “Wish”, “I wish for a name/ I wish for hunger/ but not for fame.” (7-9) She boldly expresses how she wishes to have a name and hunger. The last line of the quotation cited above proves that the reason for her writing a poem is not an attempt to earn fame, but simply to identify her wish. Kamala Das too reveals this kind of need or hunger she has long possessed in her “Introduction”,

... It is I who drink lonely  
 ... It is I who laugh, it is I who make love  
 And then, feel shame, it is I who lie dying  
 With a rattle in my throat. I am sinner,  
 I am saint. I am the beloved and the  
 Betrayed. I have no joys that are not yours, no  
 Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I. (54-61)

The above quotation of seven lines is replete with many kinds of Das’s “I”. Direct expression with the use of “I” has a significant role in confessional poetry. It is as important as blood to life. Sexton too has many kinds of “I” that can be traced in her works. As quoted by George, she says,

As Yeats said, “I have lived many lives, I have been a slave and a prince. Many a beloved has sat upon my knee, and I have sat upon the knee of many a beloved. Everything that has been shall be again.” ... I believe I am many people. When I am writing a poem, I feel I am the person who should have written it.” (89)

Another remarkable thing to be noted is identity crisis suffered by youngsters. There seems to be a clash between how the poet sees himself or herself and how others around them see him or her, and that is the point what makes them hold the need to re-identify themselves solely according to their own views. As evidenced in Das's "Introduction", when she writes in English, her criticisers tell her not to write in English, but, she argues, "Why not leave/ Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins/ Every one of you?" (8-10). She goes further to explain what it is like for her to write in English, "It voices my joys, my longings, my/ Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing/ Is to crows or roaring to the lions" (16-18).

Anita V.L. Nunmawii talks about how others tell her about her in "Perhaps", "They said I am too young/ to choose the path I want" (1-2). After a few lines, she writes, "Now they say I am too old/ to change the path I'm walking" (5-6). So, there seems to be a missing gap between the "too young" and "too old" for her to choose the path she wants in life. The same perplexing problem imposed upon Das by others who are apparently adults is displayed in "Introduction", "I was child, and later they/ Told me I grew (24-25).

Just as Das has bravely replied her criticisers as, "The language I speak/ Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses/ All mine, mine alone" (11-13), and in the last line of the poem, boldly proclaims, "I too call myself I" (61), Nunmawii starts questioning those who always try to involve in her life and judge her on their own basis without any hesitation,

Who are they-

to judge me by my age?

to judge me by my looks?

to judge me by my attitudes? (9-12)

She cannot tolerate the many “dos and don’ts” imposed upon her against her will, and she does not want to be a person designed or programmed by others. She also does not want to confine herself to the version created by others. She has an urge to produce her own version for herself and to redefine her ways. She then concludes the poem with these lines that show that she has no intention to simply live her life as others want her to do, and, that she too has a reliable ground to justify herself,

Life is not what they think or see,

They know not what it is- to live like me.

Perhaps they wouldn’t call me:

“Queer, rude, or rebellious,”

If they grew up like me. (13-17)

#### 4.3.6.2 Confession of one’s traumatic psyche

The contemporary Mizo young poets are likely to possess obsession with portrayal of one’s traumatic experiences in life. Just as Plath cannot free herself from suicidal attitude, and Sexton and Das cannot leave their psychic disturbances; these young poets have great attachment to their traumatic psyche. When the mind itself is indulged in melancholia and chaotic experience, and society has no room for them to



speak or behave as they wish, poetry becomes the only place where they can pour forth their psychic disturbances and emotional dissatisfaction.

One fine example of this portrayal of one's traumatic mind is "Keimah" written by Ramlawt Dinpuia. Dinpuia writes, "*he nun hi a ipik em a/ he hmun hi a zau lutuk a/ he hunah hian chan ka nei si lo*" (8-10), [this life is so suffocated/ this place is too vast/ and yet I do not own a share in this time]. He shares how suffocated his life is living in a very wide place without having owned anything. In the first two lines of the poem, he reveals how he still dwells in the painful moment even when life throws at him a beautiful moment to remember, "*rose par mawina theihnghilh thakin/ a hlingin mi chhunna hliam ka buaipui a*", (1-2), [till I bring myself to forget the beauty of a rose/ I am busy with the pain of a prick by its thorn], and "*beiseina ni thlarah pawh sar zam ka la hmu a*", (5), [even in the rays of hope I still see *sar zam*<sup>8</sup>]. The above three lines taken from "Keimah" proves how fast he gets stuck to his terrible experience.

In his other poem entitled "I Keu Hmain", he portrays himself as, "*Fur khuain a sawisak hnu...*" (8), [Badly tortured by monsoon season]. The poet is asking for his silent listener, probably a young woman, not to easily pass by and turn over to the page offered by other men. He asks, "*Phek dang i keu hmain/ He pheh hi uluk takin chhiar la*" (1-2), [Before you turn over the page/ Read this page thoroughly]. He then justifies the ugliness of the words, which is apparently his life, as "*Mittui hmanga ziah he thawnthu hi/ Chikin, chhut ve ta che*" (3-4), [This story written with tears/ Ponder carefully, and try to figure it out]. In the last quatrain, he reveals the blending of sorrow and hope in his life,

*Mahse a thumal tin hi en la,  
 Tlar kara manganna leh beiseina  
 Hruizen ang maia inphiar zawm chiat hi  
 Hmuh hmaihin en kan lul suh aw... (9-12)*

[But look at every single word/ Sorrow and hope in between every line/ That are closely knitted like a rope/ Please do not miss this part and pass over]

Sorrow and hope closely knitted together like a rope indicates his life. While trying to define himself, he is also justifying his life. He justifies the reason why it is not well and finely written. And, while justifying his not so attractive life, he is asking his silent listener to comprehend his pages and searching for a remedy. Confession of one's agony and torturing psyche is, whether visibly in the expression or not, always followed by a search for remedy.

Another instance can be taken out from "Grief" written by Jenny Hnamte. Hnamte is presenting her troubled soul in this poem, "My heart grieves like anything/ I'm lost and pricked in my reins" (9-10), and how this troubled soul cannot be still within her even "When the song turns to a night" (15). She cries, "It's such a dense heavy load/ And such a long winding road" (19-20). She further reveals how hopeless it is for her to make it through her pain and grief even in the eyes of others, "They say I won't make it through/ As with a sword in my bones" (21-22). With a feeling of hopeless in her mind, she then turns to the last person to comprehend her troubled heart in the last section of this poem,

You know, you see, there's no veil,  
I pray you please comprehend;  
You had been a human once,  
Many times, been in my shoes.  
They had turned their backs on you,  
Like they spit on my Violet;  
Lord Jesus, you'd been like me,  
Here in my Gethsemane! (25-32)

The word 'Gethsemane' is a biblical place. It is explained by [britanica.com](http://britanica.com) as follows,

Gethsemane, garden across the Kidron Valley on the Mount of Olives (Hebrew *Har ha-Zetim*), a mile-long ridge paralleling the eastern part of Jerusalem, where Jesus is said to have prayed on the night of his arrest before his Crucifixion. The name Gethsemane (Hebrew *gat shemanim*, "oil press") suggests that the garden was a grove of olive trees in which was located an oil press. ([www.britannica.com/n.pag](http://www.britannica.com/n.pag))

Jesus Christ was believed to have prayed all night long before he was arrested to be crucified. His heart was believed to experience the heaviest load. Jenny here considers herself to be imprisoned in Gethsemane with 'a dense heavy load' and a tortured soul. She therefore asks Jesus who was once a human who experienced the same rejection, and who was once in Gethsemane to comprehend her troubled life on earth.

#### 4.3.6.3 Theme of death

Death is another remarkable theme in a series of *Zaikung Thar* as it is the prominent theme in Sexton's poetry and Plath's oft-repeated theme. Das too is oftentimes haunted by the consequences of death. George states, "Sexton did, in some respects, connect the sources of poetic inspiration with death." (xiii). Plath has written in "The Colossus", "I crawl like an ant in mourning" (12). As has already been mentioned she is angered by the untimely death of her father. Apart from her strong attachment to her parents, the reason behind her anger towards the death of her father is that, the family has faced financial problem right after her father died. Even though she was just a nine year old girl, she had to put forth a concerted effort to support her education and the family as well. So, she could not get over the grief left by her father's decease. And, it became one of the subjects of her poems. She then explained her toil of suffering as "My hours are married to shadow" (28).

Lalnunthari has poured out how death cruelly takes away her better half in "Departed Soul", "Alas! The cruel hand of death took away/ Mine true better half, oh against my will" (1-2). Out of sadness, she looks for a reason in her sorrowful mourning why her 'true better half' has to die. She asks, "Did I by chance enrage heaven above?" (3). She tries to figure out the reason and helplessly comes to one question that asks 'Is it because she enrages God?' It is against her will that her 'better half' passes away, so she says, "It's hard to bear the pain, my dame" (7). She tells her readers how painful it is to tolerate the loss of her lover.

Akima too discloses the disappointment left by the death of his dear one in his poem titled “I’ve Tried”. The poem reads,

After heaven took you away,  
 I’ve looked at the sky and tried to talk  
 to you.  
 I’ve tried to feel you in the wind,  
 I’ve tried to hear your voice in the rain.  
 I’ve tried to see your face in the moon,  
 But all the things I’ve tried,  
 They brought me nothing but disappointment. (1-8)

He tells that after the death of his dear one, he has tried his best to have a glance at once again, to talk, to feel, and to hear the voice of the deceased by looking up the sky, and listening to the wind and the rain, but try as he may, he cannot have anything of it other than disappointment.

Remruatfela has also talked about death and the complications it brings upon to human beings in his poem “Thihna”. He talks about how death spares no one irrespectively of age, character or anything else to be sorted and figured out by human beings. Everyone will die someday against his/her will as was the case with those whom it (death) had already taken away. He writes, “*Eng tika ral tur nge ni ang a/ Ral tate ral hun hi/ Hunbi dik a ni ang maw*” (6-8), [When is the right time to die/ Is the time of those departed/ Be the right time for them to part]. He poses a question as to when or which particular time will be the right time to part or to die.

He continues to question that who will be able to know how to ascertain the accurate fact about when someone is going to die. This is a perplexing problem death leaves in the minds of human. Even though no one knows about the how and the when of one's death, it is pretty clear that all living beings will die. So, in the last part of his poem, he offers a remedy for the pain death imposes upon human and an answer to all these perplexing problems,

*Hun ruattu hun siam*

*A thlen hun chuan*

*Thihna avanga natna hi*

*A awm leh tawh ngai lo vang. (30-33)*

[When the time scheduled by the maker of time/ Comes to us/ The pain inflicted by death/ Will never turn up again]

The last four lines cited above can be assumed to mean that death is painful only for the living, the left behind. A cure for the pain it inflicts upon the living beings can be achieved or earned only by the dead or after death. And, there is no cure or relief to all the perplexing questions and pains inflicted by death which he has posed in the previous lines.

## End Notes:

1. *Lengkhawm zai* : It is a term coined for the new genre of poetical works which emerges during the first phase of Christian era with a soft, melancholic, and sentimental tune, a tune which is very similar to the traditional tune, that is, folk song.
2. *Thangchhuah* : *The Britam Pocket Dictionary of Mizo* defines it as, “to fulfil, complete, finish, carry out anything that should/must be done in order to go (or go up) to *Pialral* or Paradis; a title given to a man who distinguished himself by giving a certain number of public feast or by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, which is regarded a stairway to *Pialral*.”
3. Lalthangliana, B., “Patea leh a Hlate”. *Mizo Hla leh a Phuahtute*. Lallianzuala, R., and B. Lalthangliana, Published by Hrangbana College, Aizawl: RTM Press, 1989, 8.
4. RL Thanmawia “RL Kamlala leh a Hlate”. *Mizo Hla leh a Phuahtute*. Hrangbana College, Aizawl: RTM Press, 1989, 36.
5. New Jerusalem : Another name for heaven which has a biblical reference in the Book of Revelation.
6. *Zonunmawi* : A beautiful, decent, and desired life of Mizo which is characterised by altruism, philanthropy, diligence, respect for others, especially the old ones, and the like.
7. Refer Matthew 7:13-14 or Luke 13:24 in *The Holy Bible*.

8. *Zaikhawm* : A term used to sing together in a group basically while sitting. It specifically denotes a programme, formally or informally, made after church service is over for whoever wants to take part in.
9. *Sar zam* : *Sar zam* or *sarzam* is literally circumzenithal arc or circumzenith arc, which is also known as upside-down rainbow. It has connotations to Mizo forefathers which are opposed to the beautiful appearance of it. According to the belief of Mizo forefathers, when it appears, it is believed to be having a tragic death sign. There is a firm belief that there will be someone to die a tragic death caused by accident.



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## **Chapter- 5:**

### **Conclusion**

Confessional poetry is mostly reflective of the poet's personal life. It is best explained as autobiographical poetry. It is a style of American poetry having its origin from one of the Christian denominations, Roman Catholic, which is mostly based on the personal life of a poet. As in the words of Sherwin, nothing is too personal or too private to lay down their hurt psyche, emotional tortures, mental disturbances, humiliation and troubled soul to artistic form of poetry. It's the poet's way of articulating terrible experiences and tortured feelings, and way of working through traumatic experiences or anxiety. Nothing is too bold or too frank to communicate their innermost feelings.

The poet may sometimes create or invent objective correlatives, imaginary persona, or incidents in order to transmute their emotional sufferings and tortures. The artistic work may not always be autobiographical truth. Even so, when it does not serve as autobiographical truth telling, the story of another life created still sounds personal, because it is not simply creating but taking it to one's experience. It has been called a "psychic striptease", because "the poet explores his soul and articulates his feelings in the form of poetry, which gives him aesthetic pleasure." (Chaudhary, 2)

There is a high price to pay for being a confessional or writing confessional poems, because their artistic works are mostly read and analysed as autobiographical truth than as an art. The term itself 'confessional poet' is also imposed upon them

against their desire. The critics have enthusiastically drawn themselves into the poet's private sufferings and sorrows. The readers' choice to impose autobiographical truth-telling upon the poet can sometime map some misleading association onto the poet. Even Sherwin writes to state the problem posed by the term,

...despite the fact that many confessional poems are indeed based on real and traumatic experiences, the poets did not write to absolve themselves of guilt; only infrequently do they concern themselves with the topic of guilt at all. In fact, while the term implies both religious and psychological catharsis through the act of confessing, confessional writing is paradoxically characterized by a resistance to the kind of resolution and personal transformation offered by catharsis. (25)

The confessional poets are autobiographical most of the time but not all the time. Sherwin quotes Sexton's explanation on her own work, "It is true that I am an autobiographical poet most of the time, or at least so I lead my readers to believe." (34) Sexton continues her discourse, "Facts are very unimportant things, there to make you believe in the emotional content in a poem ... I can feel any feeling, and write about it. I don't have to be autobiographical." (35) Nevertheless, the readers and the critics are prone to see the author in the character of the works.

There is also a great joy or some sort of relief in it as well, for in being able to harness one's talent, one is able to penetrate even the deepest parts of the hearts of others. In surpassing the barricade that usually imprisons a suffering soul, one is able to heal or soothe the pain of others. Being able to articulate what is felt deeply and

seriously in the form of poetry is one gift from up above. Sylvia Plath finds joy and relief in writing poems. For Kamala Das, it is her faithful companion. And, Sexton too uses it as a psycho-therapy.

What is most important for a confessional poet is personal experience and individual existence. “Louise Glück, an American poet whose willingness to confront the horrible, the difficult, and the painful resulted in a body of work characterized by insight and a severe lyricism” ([www.britannica.com/n.pag](http://www.britannica.com/n.pag)) was recently awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. She has artistically made ‘individual existence universal’. The confessional poets take everything personally and express them in the same manner. While expressing the self in the form of poetry, they universalise their personal experience and individual existence.

### 5.1 Voice of the four females of the past

As it has already been remarked in the third chapters, even though women were, in the past, seldom treated at par with men in their daily life, there was no partiality in respect of composing songs because of their immense fondness to singing. Apart from the great attachment Mizo people had to singing, women confronted severe hardships. The hardships and negligence they had to tackle in life pushed them to pour forth their sufferings in their songs. The scars and ignominy of theirs entered in their poetical works where they gave full expression to their emotional and psychological disturbances which gives them a qualifying degree to be called confessional poets.

Laltheri, Darpawngi, Lianchhiari, and Hrangchhawni had no inhibitions or reservations in putting their personal agonies or shame in their poetical works. They unhesitatingly pour out their innermost feelings and discontentment. Roethke attempts to reveal the naked truth about himself in “Open House”,

My secrets cry aloud.  
 I have no need for tongue.  
 My heart keeps open house,  
 My doors are widely swung.  
 ... My truths are all foreknown,  
 This anguish self-revealed.  
 I'm naked to the bone,  
 With nakedness my shield.(1-10)

The four women of the past too keep their heart and secret open through their poetical works. They lay bare their soul and the naked truth about themselves where anguish is an essential part of that truth.

#### 5.1.1 Their self-portrait

The self-portrayal of these four women is worth taking into account. The self-portrait is a work so evidently laden with the traits of confessional poetry. Laltheri, being the daughter of the most arrogant Sailo chief, Lalsavunga, portrayed herself as a woman of mourning in the most unusual way and a wrathful woman after the demise of her lover, Chalthanga. For instance, “*Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu/ Ka di thangdanga zalna mah chhimhlei tual daiah*”, [I will not clothe myself, mother/ Even

my lover lies dead beneath the earth] proves that she mourned Chalthanga without clothing her body.

There was nothing much special about her during the first phase of her life except that she was a princess. But, all that changed when she, a princess, fell deeply in love with Chalthanga, a *hnamchawm*, and when the royal family ordered for her lover to be put to death. A rather loving princess was transformed. She did the unspeakable. She mocked at their wicked deed saying, “*Bawmzo ral mah dar ang chhai ngam lo/ Bel zu kungah ka di chhawnthang chawng sa iang sat e*” [Them that dare not to face the enemies of Bawmzo/ Yet, they chop my lover’s body as if it was a meat of feast]. She further charged against them, “*Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga*” [Why don’t you kill me instead?]. She revolted openly against the royalty and the society of that time, not through blood and fire, but through her song.

Her song is called *Hlingvawm Zai*. It is a ‘one woman’s autobiography’ that contains a one wounded woman’s rage. Her confessions are personal and intense. They are direct and laden with rage, candid yet bold; they are strong, laden with true feelings and emotions such as one could get from one’s own experience.

Another princess named Lianchhiari portrayed herself as a destroyer of the royalty and nobility of her family. She was a beautiful young damsel, good-hearted, sociable and modest. She too, like Laltheri, fell deeply in love with a *hnamchawm* by the name of Chawngfianga. Unlike Sailo chiefs, her parents did not object their relationship. But, when they were caught making love at the house of the chief, and that embarrassing moment of their love making spread throughout and became the talk of the whole village which prominently degraded the royalty and honour of her father,

a princess became the one who brought humiliation and destruction to the royal family. She could only bring herself to sing of her immoral action and how that action caused her father's royalty and honour to go backward, just when he was about to complete the highest degree in the social ladder of that time which was also believed to be immensely effective in the life after death.

On the other hand, Darpawngi and Hrangchhawni belonged to *hnamchawm*. They did not have material wealth or dignity to boast of. But, both were gifted with talents. They were good at composing songs, singing, and dancing. Both of them were gifted with these three admirable traits. Because of their talents, they had to move on from one place to another. Therefore, their talent itself put them at a disadvantage of being accused. Many times, they had been called *pemthuli*, an offensive term given to those who keep changing their dwelling place. So, both of them portrayed themselves as a woman of no fixed abode, a woman who loved drinking rice beer, and a woman who lazed around.

As Darpawngi had many issues and challenges to confront, she sometimes portrayed herself as an abject lover who lazed around when she was left alone by her lovers just because of her slavery; as a woman of mourning and grief because of the loss of her dear children, it has been recorded that she had mourned the death of three of her children; and as a rebellious woman who did not hesitate to rebel against their chief when justice denied her. Her poetical works are like a portrait gallery which shows all the nuances of her picture. She has three *zai*, *Thlek Zai* or *Thlek Zual Zai*, *Lusun Zai*, and *Thinrim Zai*. Each of them is like a wall of a triangular shape room where each wall has painted a mural depicting her life.



Hrangchhawni had no reservations in portraying her image in her songs. She gave vent to her personal feeling with no hesitation. She had portrayed herself in many ways that flaunt her as a woman of no character, of no self-discipline, and of no good behaviour. Sometimes, she portrayed herself as a woman who loved with no holds barred and a woman who did not mind to sin against God and to go beyond the societal norms in order to quench her thirst and satisfy her needs. She had no inhibitions to unmask her womanly sexual needs and expectations.

#### 5.1.2 Their voice: Bold and intense

Of Sylvia Plath, Chaudhary writes, “She wrote when the emotion was so intense that it gushed out to express itself. Sylvia Plath wrote when it was difficult to control intense and passionate feelings. She wrote in a compulsive mood as her hot lava of creativity seized her.” (51) It is the same for these four women. Even after many decades have passed, readers can still feel their anger and discontentment in their bones while reading their songs. Their voice ‘surely has a cathartic effect on the reader. There is a very strong cathartic power which can make the readers possess the same spirit.

When their Zadeng chief who was a widow made her judgement according to her biased nature, Darpawngi was ready to fight against their chief despite her ignorable identity. Said she out of extreme anger, *Khua lian chalngeng intai angin/ Dengpui, ka tai dawn che*” [I will fight against you/ As big buffaloes brawl], and “*Khuazanghinnu’n biahthu tum thing/ Laiah i tan lo ve*” [You do not let justice/ Be done in your land]. She went on to boldly and intensely criticise her, “*Dengpui, ‘ka*

*var' i ti e/ I vangkhua chung siar zatin/ Pawlin ka ring lo ve*" [Dengpui, you claimed yourself to be a just chief/ I do not think your villagers would increase/ As much as the stars above]. If the villagers decreased in numbers as they moved away to another village, it could harm the honour and royalty of the chief. As has already been stated in the third chapter, no inhabitant could leave the village without their chief's permission; but they could move out secretly in the middle of the night. If any villager did so, it was considered to be the most shameful thing for a chief. So, Darpawngi's charge against their chief that her villagers would surely decrease in number is a thing not to be taken lightly for.

Regarding Laltheri, when her family plotted against and ordered for her lover, Chalthanga to be put to death in order to keep their royalty intact, she was rather transformed. The heroic action they thought to keep her subjugated and under control rather aroused her real nature, and she became victorious upon them. She said against her perpetrators, "*Bawmzo ral mah dar ang chhai ngam lo/ Bel zu kungah ka di chhawnthang chawng sa iang sat e*" [Them that dare not to face the enemies of Bawmzo/ Yet, they chop my lover's body as though it was a meat of feast]. She hid none but revealed all of her anger. She further countered, "*Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga/ Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu*" [Why don't you kill me instead/ My unnatural death would rather permeate the world]. What the royal family thought an honour killing was in fact the cruellest murder for Latheri. She scorned them, mocked at their wicked deeds, and sang their cowardice with contempt and full conviction.

Hrangchhawni boldly sang of her sinful deeds against God, “*Vawiin chuan Lalpa min ngaidam rawh/ Vanram kawngkhar chabi ka hloh ta si a/ Khawvel parmawiin mi hip ta zawk e*” [Today, forgive me, O Lord/ For I have lost the key of Heaven/ I am more attracted to worldly pleasures]. She was one kind of a woman who did not hesitate to let her emotions speak. Being bold enough, she dared to sing of her desire to have sex with the man of her dreams, “*Laikhumah di chhai a rem si lo/ Chhai rel ila, khawzo thingsiri hnuaiah/ Silhpuan tualrawtin tuar nang e*” [It ain’t convenient to play with my lover in bed/ Wish we could at least date under a tree/ I would make love with him without any hesitation]. Most of Mizo traditional and typical women would prefer to suppress their innermost womanly and sexual feeling than to let it out. On the other hand, Hrangchhawni used her talent as an open window to vent her needs, therefore, pictured herself as the most inadequate woman to be the traditional Mizo woman.

Lianchhiari too did not hesitate to present her shameful deeds and remorse artistically in her song. She sang of the humiliations she had brought to the royal family,

*Kan va tih luattukah,*

*Lengi’n ka zir sual e!*

*Ka pa, Vanhnuaithang tur;*

*A than ni bang kir e.*

[Alas! the immoral actions/ Of mine, the princess/ Have caused my father’s royalty and honour/ Reverse like the sun setting]

Her immoral action, for being caught in the act, was already much talked of throughout their village, but putting it in the form of art was a whole lot of different thing. It came out when that embarrassing moment was still stirring up in her head and haunting her peace.

Just as Kamala Das's lines from "Composition" read, "I must let my mind striptease/I must extrude/Autobiography" (94-96), the voice of these four daring women has come out, as in the words of Chaudhary, "when the emotion was so intense that it gushed out to express itself" (51). They are still fresh and lively as a flowing water so as to be able to inculcate what was burning inside them in the minds of their readers.

## 5.2 Confessional aspects in *Lengkhawm Zai*

*Lengkhawm zai* is all about pouring forth one's adversity, one's psychic tortures, one's traumatic experiences, and one's innermost thought in a poetical work which has a soft, melancholic and sentimental tune. They repeatedly talk about personal anguish and psychic tortures. Sufferings have been an essential part of them. There is a vigorous expression of individualistic torment. For example, Laibata Hrahsel has depicted his pathetic condition, "*Aw Lalpa, lungngaiin ka khat thin/Vanduainaten min hual vel a*" (1-2), [O Lord, my life has been filled with sorrow/Misfortunes are surrounding me], describing his life as full of sorrows and misfortunes. And, the world is just, "*Lungngaia tahna*" [A place to cry in sorrow] even to Saihnuna. He goes further to complain in "He Lei Hi Chatuan Ram a Tling

Lo”, “*Lawmnaten mual an liam ta e/ Hlimna par a chuai*” (3-4), [Joy is passing away/ Happiness fading away].

It has also served as a shield and a therapy. As it often serves as an escape mechanism, the authors of *lengkhawm zai* often dwell in their imagination to escape the real world and then to enter the realm of heaven. The poet’s compelling desire to escape the world and to reach heaven is what characterises *lengkhawm zai*. While expressing their compelling desire to reach heaven, they picture the world as cruel and painful.

What the authors of *lengkhawm zai* write is not always about them, it is not always about what they personally experienced because many a times, they were asked or requested by others to compose some songs for them. But, none of them did either without partaking the pain and sufferings to one’s own or until and unless they could feel it in their bones. Deirdre Heddon writes in “Personal performance: the resistant confessions of Bobby Baker”, “If, as Foucault suggests, confession is a technique through which ‘truth’ is both produced and maintained, then the very operation of the confessional mode affords the opportunity for counter-discursive stories, the forging of other truth, other possible lives.” (139)

Confessional poetry is not always autobiographical truth-telling. The poets are not always autobiographical. There are many times when the truth about themselves is finely decorated with artistic creation of a chain of events. Sherwin poses a problem in the relationship of confessional poets to autobiography,

The confessional poets undoubtedly used autobiographical details, and in many cases the personae closely resemble the poets. However, to assume that the first person voice is “intended without question to point to the author himself,” as Rosenthal’s definition and as the label of “confessional” direct one to do, is to ignore the author’s stated intentions. Without exception, the confessional poets despised and resisted the label of “confessional,” and all argued that their work was only nominally autobiographical. (7)

Even Brain states the problem of how projecting the poet’s image on his or her works can be problematic and dangerous in her article “Dangerous confessions: The problem of reading Sylvia Plath biographically”, “Such a practice suggests, before the book is even opened, that the contents are not fiction or poetry, but memoir or autobiography: the authoritative tale of Sylvia Plath by Sylvia Plath.” (11) She goes on to affirm her statement, “...she sometimes creates speakers and characters who don’t share her sex, or whose sexes are at least uncertain.” (13)

Just as Whitman writes, as quoted by Chaudhary, “I am the man, I suffered, I was there,” (49), and Sexton states, “I believe I am many people. When I am writing a poem, I feel I am the person who should have written it,” (George, 89), the authors of *lengkhawm zai* too, put themselves in the shoes of those who requested them till they could feel they were the one who should have written it.

Most of the confessional poets frequently deal with death and its consequences. They sound like they are unable to get past the traumatic effect. Death is a prominent theme in Sexton’s poetry and an oft-repeated theme in Plath’s. *Lengkhawm Zai* too

has death and its consequences as one of its major themes. When death strikes them, they could do nothing but to sing a requiem to ease their pain. Focussing on death and its consequential sorrows make them instantly focus on heaven where they hoped they could meet together again. Just as Gluck boldly reveals, “At the end of my suffering/ there was a door/... that which you call death,” (1-3) in her “The Wild Iris”, the authors of *lengkhawm zai* know that at the end of their suffering, death is awaiting. They hope to meet all their dear ones who died on the other side of the door of death.

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton have possessed suicidal attitude. Sexton writes, “I, who chose two times/ to kill myself,” (12-13) in “The Double Image”, and “Death was simpler than I’d thought/... I let the witches take away my guilty soul/ I pretended I was dead/until the white men pumped the poison out” (23- 27). And for Plath, in “Lady Lazarus”, “Dying/Is an art,” (43-44) because she has, “...done it again/One year in every ten,” (1-2),and, “This is Number Three/ What a trash/ To annihilate each decade” (22-24), stating that she has attempted suicide for three times even though the first one was accidental. The authors of *lengkhawm zai* too picture themselves as the ones who have lost all their desire to live in the world of toil. Focussing on their adversary makes them view the world as cruel and flimsy. They are clouded with sorrows and atrocities.

Portrayal of the sacrifice of Christ, specifically speaking, crucifixion of Jesus Christ has also been served at the readers’ table by the authors of *lengkhawm zai*. This is, no doubt, far from their experience as it happened a thousand years before they were born. However, as already been remarked in the previous chapter, the portrait they provided is not a mere conception. It is a clear picture which is convincing

enough to take the readers into their confidence. Their means of expression is so direct and intense to enable them to inculcate the burning pain caused by the crucifixion of Christ in the minds of the readers.

They have taken the story very personally and expressed them in the same manner. For instance, Chhawna writes, “*Ka hreng ropui a au*” (2), [My dear great King cried with a loud voice] in “Aw, Kalvari Thing Chungah Chuan”. His words are candid yet bold, strong and intense. It is not a mere retelling of the story, but presentation of a clear picture as though he himself has physically experienced the scene. By making use of his talent, he brings back the past and breathes into it a sense of presence so as to convincingly portray a clear picture.

### 5.3 Materialisation of autobiographical self in “Rairahtea”, “Khuanu Leng Chawi”, and “Hraitea Hla”

“Rairahtea” and “Khuanu Leng Chawi” are written by Hrawva and “Hraitea Hla” by Denish Lalmalsawma Vuangtu. All of them are poems that tell a sad story of an orphan, and the orphans in these poems are presumably Hrawva and Vuangtu themselves. Hrawva became an orphan at a very young age because of the decease of his parents when he was still too young to understand the meaning and to have the forethought about the consequences of death, whereas Vuangtu’s parents separated and left him at the care of his grandparents when he was barely one year of age. He was still in his infancy when that terrible incident happened to him that he could not even have the detailed memory of his parents’ divorce.



In “Rairahtea”, the poet has used second person narration as a means to unveil his worst experience as a child. When the lifeless body of his mother was put in a coffin, he did not know she would be gone for good for he was still too young to understand the meaning of death. Soon after her cold body was carried away, he started looking for his mother in her absence. Every time he was asking for his mother, his father used to console him. But, to pour more fuel into the fire of his misfortune, the only parent he had left was also taken away from him not long after the death of his mother.

Unlike the narrative style of “Rairahtea”, “Khuanu Leng Chawi” has the speaker who openly calls himself “I”. What the “I” does mean to a confessional poet is like blood to a life. The more the expression is bold and intense, the greater it becomes strong and persuasive. Kamala Das quite often makes use of it. She writes in her “Introduction”,

Who are you, I ask each and everyone,  
 The answer is, it is I. Anywhere and,  
 Everywhere, I see the one who calls himself I  
 ... I have no joys that are not yours, no  
 Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I.” (50-61)

The “I” strain has bound up the works of confessional poets. Hrawva’s speaker in “Khuanu Leng Chawi”, the “I” has started the poem with a tone that is kind of boastful, telling his readers that he was an orphan brought up by God himself. He declares, “*Sheksipiara Khuanu leng chawi an ti e/ Kei lo liama Khuanu leng chawi/*

*Chun chawi loh val tlei lian hi*" (4-6), [They say Shakespeare was brought up by God/ It is I who was brought up by God/ Growing up without a mother]. He boldly challenges the idea that Shakespeare was brought up and taken care of by God himself, if that be true, he challenges, there is no doubt that he (Hrawva) would be a better exemplar to the context because he has grown up without his parents.

There is also an attempt to self-explanation or re-identification of the self which is one of the major characteristics of confessional poetry. Mark the following lines, "*Sappui nun chan lungkhamin min sel lo u/ Rairah nghilhna a awm maw tiin/ Lenrual lungduh ka pel e.*" (10-12), [Do not accuse me of being obliged to British's way of living/ It was out of hoping to be able to forget the pitiable condition of mine/ That I had to overpass my kind of people]. Hrawva was reportedly to be in the care of his older brother, Makthanga who became the Deputy Commissioner and then the chief of Aizawl city. He had a chance to study from different institutions outside Mizoram with the help of his brother. He also had a chance to study under the teachings of the Christian missionaries at Serkawn for he had been living with his brother. The line "*Sappui nun chan lungkhamin min sel lo u*" [Do not accuse me of being obliged to British's way of living] is believed to be pour forth due to the aforementioned chance of his. Siamkima Khawlhing comments on the poem, "The poem of Hrawva is neither a mere conception nor blabbering of one's dream, but a revelation of personal experience (poetry of experience)." (180)

Coming to "Hraitea Hla", the poet has written in a parenthesis right under this poem that it is influenced by Hrawva's "Rairahtea". Just as "Rairahtea" is revealing the story of the poet under a thin veil, "Hraitea Hla" too is using second person

narration. It is replete with unflattering memoir of a young boy who is supposedly to be the poet himself. The speaker of the poem is narrating how an innocent infant became an orphan. He is analysing the reason why that innocent infant had to be left alone by his parents in the care of his old grandparents while the parents are still breathing fine.

He writes, "*Awmlai hrang hlei lo chun hrang chuan e/ Awihlai, Duatlai hnutiang a chhawn e* (5-6) [Not because of death but because of a mother's need/ She left her dear son alone] This is evidenced in his confessional prose writing entitled "Panlai Nun leh Vangkawpui", "Thinking about how she (his mother) abandoned me and her behaviour as a mother, she is the most dishonourable mother of all mothers." (1). And yet, he does not want to deny the fact that she, a run-away mother, is his mother in spite of all her shortcomings and disgraceful deed upon her son, nothing can destroy or alter the fact. In her friendly conversation with Merrily Weisbord, Kamala Das too has revealed her yearning for the presence of her dead husband while her poems speak the other way around, "The question that comes up so often since his death is: Where are you swimming to? Is it worth the swim?" (8).

Therefore, the second persons in "Rairahtea" and "Hraitea Hla" are really worth taking into consideration. Utilisation of second person narration as a veil in the two poems is not thick enough to hide the identity of the boys. As Das reveals to Weisbord, "All the grief inflicted upon me by my husband paid dividends.... Poetry came oozing out like blood out of injuries. How could I have written so much of poetry if he hadn't made me cry? All the anguish, you weed something out of it." (16) Hrawva and Vuangtu too, if they had not undergone such a misery, they would not be

able to have written this kind of poems so persuasive and intense. Their personal anguish turns into raw material and reliable ground upon which they could build a house of memoir. These two poems ‘came oozing out like blood out of injuries’.

#### 5.4 Voice of the blind

There are three blind poets selected in this thesis namely Taivela, Hleia, and Roliana Ralte. As their eye-sight was blindfolded and darkness ruled over them, their poetical works are characterised by portraying the world as dark. Their personal sufferings and anguish have played an essential role that characterise their works. Taivela presents it as the place where the sun and the moon do not shine anymore. They also talk about their pathetic condition on earth, expressing their sorrows and sufferings which blindness inflicted upon them. Hleia presents the world as the place where sickness and sorrows spread their wings all over, and a place which is filled with cloud of sorrows saying in a pensive mood, “*Lungngaih chhum a zing fo thin*” [It is filled with cloud of sorrows].

There is also a voice that talks about their desire to enter the realm of heaven. Their physical dark life pushes them to long more for heaven where they hope they will be free from all kinds of physical disabilities. Hleia reveals his strong desire to enter heaven, “*Ka va ngai em Lal ram ropui*” [How I long for the majestic land of my Lord]. There is no more hope left for them to be cured in this world, they cannot keep themselves from repeatedly talking about their intense desire to enter their eternal home where there will be no more sickness, no toil of sufferings, and no physical disabilities. Taivela also says, “*Chhandamtu tak chu ka va ngai em ve aw*” [How I

wish I could be with my Saviour], revealing his intense longing to be healed from his blindness. This intense desire to fly away from this woeful world is another remarkable feature which characterises their artistic works.

Their hopeless condition on earth makes them look forward to meeting their Saviour who they think will grant them full recovery from earthly disease. Roliana Ralte looks beyond the world of disabilities, and focus on the New Jerusalem. He looks further to a place where no sickness and no toil of darkness can bother them anymore; he therefore portrays that beautiful land where everyone will share the light of Jesus Christ. He writes, “*Famkim lovin awm rih mah ila/ Kan hmel ni aiin a eng dawn si*” [Though we live here imperfectly/ Our face will be brighter than the sun], and “*Min Chhandamtu hnen kan thlen hunah chuan/ Mitdel kan awm tawh lo’ng, Jerusalem tharah*” [When we reach the place where our Saviour dwells/ There will be no more blind, in the New Jerusalem]. He is telling that even though they are struggling on earth, they will be free from all kinds of physical disabilities in heaven.

The three blind poets mentioned above seem to be compelled to confess their adversity and misery of life in the form of poetry, to reveal their uttermost desire to reach heaven in order to be completely healed, and to focus on the beauty of heaven. Their pathetic condition compels them to write poems.

### 5.5 Confessional strain in the contemporary period

Sylvia Plath has written in her *Letters Home*, “I write only because/ There is a voice with in me/ That will not be still.” (35) This strain can be traced in the personal anguish of the poets of the contemporary period. Poetry has subjectivity as one of its

most significant characteristics as it was in the pre-colonial era. One thing the contemporary period has marked is that poetry serves for the burning needs to give vent not for the sake of art. It serves mainly as a vehicle of the poets and a venture into the self rather than an attempt to earn literary fame and dignity. Just as the above lines of Plath tell, they write only because there is a voice within them that will not be still.

Melancholy is what strikes the author of confessional poetry. Confessional poets often get themselves indulged in melancholy not because they find pleasure in it but because they have ‘the desperate attempt to escape from torturing memories’. This impulse can easily be traced in the contemporary poets. For instance, Zirsangzela Hnamte in his “Phengphe Nunnem” reveals his oft-repeated cry for human life,

*Phengphe nunnem leh zaidam,*

*Vahkhuai, tho leh hmiripa'n;*

*Par zu dawn za thlir changin,*

*Hring nun hi ka tahpui thin. (13-16)*

[When I watch a mild and gentle butterfly/  
A bee, a fly, and an ant/  
Sucking a nectar together/  
I use to cry for life]

Watching different kinds of nature living a beautiful life together without disturbing each other and one another makes him cry for the life of human, instead of making him feel good. The beautiful life of nature reminds him of the ugly truth about human life. Therefore, the above lines show that Hnamte is much indulged in and focussing on the dark side of human life on earth. He laments on the hypocrisy of human life and portrays many of the dark sides of human life on earth, and

particularly of the life of Mizo. According to him, the life of Mizo which was once beautified and embellished with *zonunmawi*, a beautiful, decent, and admirable life, is now void of it. The haunting melancholia that dominates the poems of Hnamte is worth consideration.

Obsession with portrayal of one's troubled soul, personal inability to fit in the society, agony, and pessimistic view point of life has strained the contemporary poetry. Most of the contemporary young poets write for the sake of a voice within them that cannot be still. And, by doing so, they care more for the transportation or transformation of a voice within them that cannot be ignored, and care less for the poetical or artistical norms. They seem to reject the doctrine of "art for art's sake" and build a new literary theory of "art for life's sake". This newly built theory makes them write their own kind of poems where they give more importance to expressing the self than the old poetic style. Sexton started writing her own kind of poems 'at the suggestion of her therapist'. As Sherwin cites, Sexton says, "Any poem is therapy. The art of writing is therapy. You don't solve problems in writing. They're still there. I've heard psychiatrists say, 'See, you've forgiven your father in your poem.' But I haven't forgiven my father, I just wrote that I did." (21)

"The Wild Iris" written by Louise Glück read,

to find a voice:

from the center of my life came

a great fountain, deep blue

shadows on azure seawater. (20-23)

Similarly to Glück's verses cited above, the young poets of the Twenty-first Century Mizo Poetry find a source, 'a great fountain' within them, from the centre of their individual life. For instance, Dinpuia has talked about himself as "*he nun hi a ipik em a*" (8), [this life is so suffocated] in "Keimah", and in "I Keu Hmain", "*Fur khuain a sawisak hnu*" (8), [Badly tortured by monsoon season]. A badly tortured life would obviously not look perfect or attractive.

They often portray themselves as being obsessed with portraying their personal anguish in order to feel relief. Nunmawii writes in "A Plead to the Gods", "My heart feels the pain and can rest no more," (15). They seem to get stuck in their sorrows, and they also seem not to be willing to trade their thirst and hunger for anything. Lalrinzuali Ralte writes, "I wish for hunger" (8) in her poem "Wish". They seem to be craving for more hunger and thirst. There is an attempt to reveal the naked truth about the self, and agony is an essential part of that truth.

Many of the Twenty-first Century Mizo young poets are questioning about life, the creation of life, and the purpose of life. Focusing on personal heavy loads makes them view the world as suffocating, frustrating, and cruel; and life as meaningless. There is a transition from blind faith to rational thinking during this period. The young writers do not accept anything blindly but become sceptical. This change of outlook is caused by a restless desire to probe and question. Their rational thinking and crave for logical fact seem to rather disquiet their mind. It seems like they have taken things



very personally. Their failures in the complexity of life have resulted in frustration and anxiety. This tendency recurs in their poetical works.

Being much disturbed by this perplexing concept of life, Lalduhzuala writes a poem “Kan Damchhan” which is replete with his questions on life. It is a poem of interrogation. He observes life as created for nothing and then fading away for nothing. He not only doubts the creation of life, but also doubts life after death. If life has no purpose and there is no certainty in life after death, then why created life is his repeated question to the Creator that urges him to write “Kan Damchhan”.

Identity crisis is another problem faced by the writer of contemporary period. While trying to re-identify the self through the power of poetry, they have felt the need to ascertain something about themselves and the things that happen around them. Chaudhary quotes the words of Whitman that exclaims, “I am the man, I suffered, I was there.” (49) Similarly, the “I” or the “me” impulse has penetrated the heads of the contemporary young poets. The burning need to justify oneself urges him/her to write poems in order to either reclaim what has been lost or claim a new identity. They crave for a name as expressed by Lalrinzuali Ralte in “Wish”, “I wish for a name,” (7). They want to redefine their life in their own version. For instance, Nunmawii writes in her “Perhaps”,

Life is not what they think or see,  
 They know not what it is- to live like me.  
 Perhaps they wouldn't call me:  
 “Queer, rude, or rebellious,”

If they grew up like me. (13-17)

She argues that life is not always the way it looks, and to live like her is not that easy. She therefore justifies that she has been criticised as “queer, rude, or rebellious” is only because of misunderstanding. The problems and hardships they have faced in their life become the subject of their poems which in turn make their confessional voice irresistibly and unignorablely audible. Chaudhary writes, “Confessional poetry is not so much a revelation of intimate personal details, as is commonly understood; rather it is a serious endeavour to redefine human identity.” (3) They deal with the need to redefine their identity and justify themselves.

The voice of the contemporary period is also characterised by the inner turbulent and chaotic experience of the poets. They are prone to reside in their past terrible experience. Another lines from Glück’s “The Wild Iris” would be very appropriate to describe the terrible life led by these poets, “It is terrible to survive/ as consciousness/ buried in the dark earth” (8-10). The consciousness of the contemporary poets seems to be ‘buried in the dark earth’ so they cannot see the light. For example, Thanmawia uses the meaningless purpose of his life after the death of his dear wife the subject of his poem “I Tel Lo Chuan”,

*Phur hunah ka nguai a,*

*Tawng hunah ka ngawi a,*

*Hlim zingah ka hnim a,*

*Zai hunah ka tap a. (11-10)*

[I am sad when it's time to be excited/ Silent when it's time to talk/ Gloomy amongst the happy ones/ And cry when it's time to sing]

The above four lines portray Thanmawia as the one whose consciousness and meaning of life is 'buried in the dark earth' besides his wife's dead body. Dinpuia too reveals how strong he indulges in his past terrible experience in "Keimah", "*beiseina ni thlarah pawh sar zam ka la hmu a*" (5), [even in the rays of hope I still see *sar zam*]. Even when life shows him good things to hope for, he is too clouded with sorrow and pain that he still has to focus on the other side of it. Their voice generally centres round the personal failure, psychological disturbance, traumatic experience, and the like.

Another recurring theme in the contemporary poetry is inner conflict. The contemporary poets are haunted by a recurring inner conflict. For example, Jenny Hnamte talks about her inner turbulence in "Grief", "My soul pants after the brook/ I fall as falling I sigh" (9-10), and "I wander through this cold night/ My soul disquiets within me" (14-15). The inner conflict of the poets sometimes dominates their poems as is the case with Sexton,

I am alone here in my own mind.

There is no map

and there is no road.

It is one of a kind

just as yours is"

The poets of the contemporary period have been lost in their own mind. They have been alone in the middle of nowhere in their own mind with “no map and there is no road”. The mind itself is the place where they have lost their way. It is the internal force that attacks them severely. Das writes in her poem “Introduction”, “He did not beat me/ But my sad woman-body felt so beaten (29-30). She does not deny the fact that her husband never beats her physically, but her unsatisfied emotional needs as a woman compelled her to feel so beaten. Das does not talk about physical torture but the emotional torture which is inflicted upon her by her husband. Likewise, the contemporary Mizo young poets too sometimes have “felt so beaten”. Many a times, they feel like persons of no importance to the world, a mere nonentity. Their confessional voice is, whether quite visibly or not, somehow autobiographical and associated with purgation. Therefore, it would be quite appropriate to take Henke’s definition of confessional poetry as ‘scriptotherapy’ into consideration upon the contemporary young poets, because for most of them, ‘any poem is therapy’.

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[https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/9796.Robert\\_Burton](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/9796.Robert_Burton)

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<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/open-house-2/>

## Bio-Data

### Personal Profile

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### Education: Schooling

1. Master of Arts in Mizo from Mizoram University
2. Master of Arts in English from Annamalai University
3. Master of Philosophy in Mizo from Mizoram University

### Activity

#### *International Seminar*

(i) *An Autobiographical Voice of Humiliations in Lianchhiari Zai* in a Two-Day **International Seminar Commemorating the Birth Centenary of L. Biakliana** (1918-1941) at Saitual, 2018

#### *National Seminar*

(i) *Darpawngi Zai: A Portrait Gallery* at **Mizo Literary Festival cum National Seminar**, 2018

(ii) *Mizo Folksong at a Glance* in a Three Day National Seminar on **Writing in Mizo Manuscripts**, 2017

(iii) *Aspects of Post-colonialism in Rokunga's Poetry* at National Seminar on **Tribal Society, Language and Literature of Northeast India**, 2015

(iv) *A Self-portrait in Kamala Das' Introduction* at UGC Sponsored National Seminar on **Confessional Poetry in English: Current Trends**, 2012



### **State Seminar**

- (i) *Re-reading Laltheri Zai in the Light of Confessional Poetry* at a One Day State Level Seminar on **Re-Reading of Mizo Literature with Special Reference to Under-Graduate Course, 2017**

### **Papers/ Books Published**

(i) *Mizo Confessional Poetry: A Close Perusal of Darpawngi Zai* in Mizo Studies (A Quarterly Refereed Journal), Vol.II No.3, January-March, 2013

(ii) *Post-colonial View on Mizo Literature* in Mizo Studies (A Quarterly Refereed Journal), Vol.II No.3, July-Sept., 2013

(iii) *On Reading of Rokunga's Poetry with Post Colonial Perspective* in Mizo Studies (A Quarterly Refereed Journal), Vol.III No.1, 2014

(iv) *Laltheri: The Love Queen* in Mizo Studies (A Quarterly Refereed Journal), Vol.IV No.3, 2015

(v) *'A Mak A Na' Chik taka Thlirna (Critique of 'A Mak A Na')* in Mizo Studies (A Quarterly Refereed Journal), Vol.VI No.4, 2017

(vi) *Mizo Folk Song at a Glance* in Mizo Studies (A Quarterly Refereed Journal), Vol.VII No.1, 2018

(vii) *Re-reading Laltheri Zai in the Light of Confessional Poetry* in Re-Reading of Mizo Literature (Under-Graduate Course), 2017 & <https://mizoramimages.com/rereading-of-laltheri-zai-in-the-light-of-confessional-poetry/>

### **Experience**

(i) Guest Faculty in Mizo Department, Mizoram University from August 2014- July 2018 & August 2019- September 2020

(ii) Assistant Professor in Mizo Department, Mizoram Christian College from 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020 till date

(iii) Seminars/Workshops:

#### **Chief Organiser**

- (a) One week International Webinar on Mizo Identity, 2020

***Chairperson***

- (a) Aizawl Book Fair cum Literary Festival, McDonald Hill, (Sahitya Akademi sponsored), 2017
- (b) Third Poetry Festival for Young Mizo Poets, Pachhunga University (Sahitya Akademi sponsored), 2019

***Co-ordinator***

- (a) Poetry Reading and Writing, Archives Hall, Aizawl (Art & Culture sponsored in collaboration with Mizo Poetry Society), 2019
- (b) Webinar on International *Zofa* Poetry Festival, 2020

***Speaker/ Participant***

- (a) **All India Writers' Meet** organised by Sahitya Akademi at Pachhunga University College, 2018
- (b) Two Day **Workshop on Poetry Reading and Writing** organised by Mizo Poetry Society, 2019
- (c) **Third Poetry Festival for Young Mizo Poets** sponsored by Sahitya Akademi, 2019
- (d) **Literary Festival**, organised by the Department of English, ICFAI University, 2019
- (e) Seminar on **Biate and Their Language** organised by Sahitya Akademi and Mizo Academy of Letters, 2018
- (f) **Second Poetry Festival for Young Mizo Poets** sponsored by Sahitya Akademi, 2018
- (g) **National Seminar on Prose Writing**, 2017
- (h) **National Seminar on Creative Writings**, 2016
- (i) **First Poetry Festival for Young Mizo Poets** organised by Sahitya Akademi, 2016
- (j) **Ralte Language Symposium** organised by Sahitya Akademi & NECOL, Eastern Region, 2012
- (i) **Literary Criticism in Mizo Literature** organised by Department of Mizo, Govt. Khawzawl College, 2020

**PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE**

NAME OF CANDIDATE : LALHLIMPUII

DEGREE : DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT : MIZO

TITLE OF THESIS : CONFESSIONAL VOICE IN SELECT MIZO POETRY

*DATE OF ADMISSION* : 13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2017

APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL:

1. DRC: 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

2. BOS : 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

3. SCHOOL BOARD : 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2017

MZU REGISTRATION NO. : 753 OF 2003-04

Ph. D REGISTRATION NO. & DATE : MZU/Ph.D./1069 of 06.11.2017