

**SELECTED MIZO FOLKTALES AND SONGS:  
AN ECOCRITICAL READING**

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ECOCRITICAL READING

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# **DECLARATION**

**Mizoram University**

**June, 2012**

**I , Josephine L. B. Zuali hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the result of the work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis for the award of any degree to me or to anybody else to the best of my knowledge, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University or Institute.**

**This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.**

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**C E R T I F I C A T E**

**This is to certify that “Selected Mizo Folktales and Songs: An Ecocritical Reading” written by Josephine L. B. Zuali has been written under my supervision.**

**She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the M. Phil regulations of Mizoram University. The dissertation is the result of her own investigation. Neither the dissertation as a whole nor any part of it was submitted to any other University for any research degree.**

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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism is the critical approach used to study the manner in which the physical environment has been conceptualized and ideologically appropriated in various cultural and literary contexts and the implications of this conceptualization for the natural environment, especially as to its degradation in this modernized world. It is the environmentally oriented study of literature and the arts and undertakes to study the relationship between humans, literature and the physical environment, both natural and built. So it can be said that ecocriticism emerged as the critical study of the relationship between people and their environment or their place in it. There is no distinctive method or approach in ecocriticism and this body of critical enquiry has diversified to incorporate different literatures, cultures and their physical environments in many parts of the world. Clark mentions that the potential force of ecocriticism is that of being more than just another subset of literary criticism situated within its institutional borders. Rather, it is a type of criticism engaged with literary analysis and with issues that involve “matters of science, morality, politics and aesthetics” (8).

The reason why discourses of the physical environment seem more crucial than they previously did during the first half of the twentieth century is because the environment became front-page news during the last third of the twentieth century. With the increasing occurrences of environmental disasters, both natural and man-made and the growing incidence of cases wherein human tampering and pollution of the natural environment has resulted in harm and even death for both humans and nonhumans, issues and concerns about the natural environment began to occupy a prominent place in the public consciousness in the West which then spread all over the world. In the year 1989, Time magazine even chose ‘The endangered earth’ as the person of the year. The literary criticism or critical orthodoxy of the 1980s and even the 1990s harboured the view that the representation of nature in literature was merely as a false consciousness which evaded real political issues and acted as an ideological screen. During the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when many types of emancipatory movements such as feminism emerged in the West, there was also a growing consciousness about environmental issues and their representation in nature. Rachel Carson’s seminal work *The Silent Spring* (1962) had managed to stir the conscience of Americans and even influenced changes in government policy.



The first wave ecocritics concerned themselves with the genres of nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness and environmental literature and for them, the environment was the natural environment. They considered the natural and the human realms as separate entities and sought to protect the natural environment by protecting it from the detrimental influence of culture. They attempted to do so by means of political action. There was a romantic attitude towards the natural environment, that is, the natural environment was perceived as something which is separate and over there, as opposed to the realm of culture and human habitation. The first wave ecocritics resisted anthropocentrism, which is the human-centered assumption that things have value only in relation to humans. They sometimes went so far as to eliminate human figures from the imagined worlds they dealt with such as in the works of nature writing by Henry David Thoreau. The second wave ecocritics focused on issues of environmental justice and consider the environment as comprising of both natural and urban landscapes. Since then, ecocriticism has diversified and has been applied in the context of various literary texts and cultures across the world.

Cheryll Glotfelty has argued in the article, "The Strong Green Thread," that while in most literary theories "the world" is synonymous with society, in an ecological form of literary theory, namely, ecocriticism, the notion of the world is expanded to include the entire biosphere. This leads us to question how literature functions within the ecosystem and how a given textual representation of nature affects our way of treating nature (Selvamony, Nirmaldasan et al 4). The Western thought as a legacy of post-enlightenment humanism is considered to have caused much destruction to the natural environment, leading to the depletion of natural resources. Such kinds of literature as nature writing, environmental non-fiction and wilderness literature have been written with the purpose of fostering a change in the assumptions about the natural environment. Also, many works of literature have reflected and depicted the degradation of the natural environment. In the context of Mizo literature which has existed in the written form for just over a hundred and fifteen years, works that consciously reflect ecological awareness of degradation and depletion of natural resources are very hard to come by. As far back as the history of Mizo oral tradition can be traced, the oldest extant forms consist of the folktales and the folksongs. It is seen that in the folk songs in particular, the songwriters have referred to all the objects and happenings that they could observe in their natural surroundings. This included the natural or nonhuman objects in their surrounding environment which they incorporated into their songs to

be used mainly as similes. Such poetic devices continue to be used in the contemporary songs of the present day as will be seen in the course of this study.

This research aims to study the representations of nature and to what extent ecocriticism can be applied to study the relationship between humans, literature and their physical environment in selected Mizo folktales and contemporary community and love songs. Folktales such as *Chawngchilhi*, *Chawngtinleri*, *Kungawrhi*, *Mauruangi*, *Ngaiteii*, *Rimenhawihi*, *Sichangneii* have been selected for study. These folktales which largely depict the lives of women have been selected. This is to acquire a richer understanding of the history, culture and society of the pre-Christian, patriarchal, traditional Mizo society and the structures that could have influenced their assumptions, attitudes, perceptions, values and interests regarding the natural environment and their treatment of it. Kate Rigby has said, "Culture constructs the prism through which we know nature" (154). Therefore, a study of the Mizo history and culture could be of help in understanding their perceptions and conceptions about nature. The selected contemporary songs comprise of *Hla lenglawng* (community songs) and *Lengzem hla* (love songs) by songwriters P. S. Chawngthu (1922-2005), Vankhama (1906-1970), and Zirsangzela Hnamte (1952-2002). Such songs have been chosen to study the representation of nature in the songs. Also, since the Mizos are largely regarded as a singing tribe and songs are a very important cultural component of the Mizos, the songs will be studied against the background of Mizo culture and history in the post-Christian era in the twentieth century to observe as to whether changes in the Mizo attitude towards the natural environment from the pre-Christian to the post-Christian period can be assessed in this manner.

The Mizo society is a patriarchal one with a rich cultural trove of folktales, myths, legends, and songs that are reflective of, and are rich in representations of their close relationship with nature. It will be seen that their oral tradition places a great emphasis on nature as an important part of their lives due to their close proximity to nature. The Mizo people were believed to have migrated to their land, Mizoram through a long migratory trail spanning several centuries. It is difficult to trace the history and cultures of the Mizos due to their semi-nomadic life, the consequent absence of a settled form of cultural and social establishment, and the lack of interaction with other cultures prevented the creation of permanent markers or monuments which led to the absence of historical accounts and records documenting their history, origin, culture and migratory trail to their present and permanent land, Mizoram. The available accounts of

Mizo history were obtained principally by means of conjectures and speculations by British administrators, historians and scholars based on personal interviews, study of the extant traditions and cultural practices that were still in practice as witnessed by them, and the study of their oral traditions, songs and tales. As a result, the early history of the Mizos is shrouded in myths and legends.

The Mizos are considered to be of Mongoloid race and part of the Tibeto-Burman family. Easy According to B. Lalthangliana in his book *Mizo Chanchin (A Short Account & Reference of Mizo History)* (2009), the Mizos were believed to have migrated from Kansu province in between the north-western region of China and the north-eastern region of Tibet to the Kabaw valley in Burma around 800-850 A. D. From there they gradually moved eastwards towards the Chin hills around 1200 A. D till they finally entered the present day Mizoram around 1700 A. D. Other historians and scholars too, have made attempts to trace the history of the migration of the Mizo people from the east with slight variations as to the dates of migration. The time spent in Khampat is regarded as one of the glorious periods in Mizo history and during this time the Mizos were said to be in good terms with the Burmans.

B. Lalthangliana is of the opinion that the departure from Khampat was because of the invasion by a stronger enemy, namely, the Shans. Mangkhosat Kipgen says that if the Shans were involved in the expulsion of the Zo, it is not recorded. But at the time time, he contends that after dwelling for a fairly long period in the plains of Burma, famine in itself would probably not have been a strong enough reason to justify migrating to the hills en masse (Kipgen 43). Attempts have been made to come up with a rational explanation and a Burmese priest of Mandalay gave the following explanation, which is itself a legend, to Pu Thangvunga, a Mizo historian who went there to in 1941 to trace the origin and migration of the Mizos:

The ancestors of the Mizos came from Shanghai, sent out by a Chinese King to be followers of his son who was to establish himself. But without following the prince, they cast lots according to which they proceeded in two groups, one group towards the south-west and the other to the south. How long they spent (sic.) between Shanghai and Burma is not known, but the one in 1941 was counted as the 47<sup>th</sup> generation. When the group came to Burma the Burmese said, "The Chinlu are coming." (Chin is abbreviated form

for Chinese, and 'lu' means 'people' in Burmese). It is believed that "Chinlu" came to be known as "Chhinlung" in the course of time. (Kipgen 34)

Coming as it did from a neutral informant, it could be taken as a credible piece of information but it has no explanation for the belief long held by the Mizo people that their origin was from a Khul or cave, which the Mizos call Chhinlung. One explanation links the cave with the covering hole to a passage in the Great Wall of China. On the other hand, Rochunga Pudaite has suggested that Chhinlung could have been Chin Lung, a Chinese prince rather than a covering stone. The prince is said to have revolted against his father Shih Huangti of the Chin dynasty. They were the ones who built the Great Wall in 228 B.C. The prince is believed to have first established himself somewhere in the Himalayan Mountains from where he migrated down to the present Shan State of Burma and the Mizos were believed to have been his subjects (Kipgen 34).

With the passing of time, the traditional Mizo society had a very well organized structure of village administration and polity with the village Chief as the administrative and supreme head and father figure whose word was the law. Each village was ruled over by its own Chief and most of the Chiefs belonged to the Sailo clan which had managed to establish itself as the ruling family before the British took over the administration of the land (Parry 1). The traditional Mizo society can be considered as anthropocentric. Their indigenous faith held a very important place in their lives and it may be safe to say that it dictated the way they lived for every aspect of their lives was linked to their beliefs and values in one way or another. The ultimate reward for the Mizo was the attainment of a place in pialral (paradise) in the afterlife where they would no longer have to work but where there would always be abundance of food grain and meat. However, to attain such a place was no mean task for it involved the hunting and slaughtering of several animals and only men could achieve such an ideal. The men who were able to secure a place for themselves in paradise were given the thangchhuah status<sup>1</sup>.

The thangchhuah status was the highest status a man could hope to achieve in the Mizo society and a thangchhuah pa (thangchhuah man) was highly respected in the society. It was believed that besides securing a place for himself in paradise, he would be able to take his wife along with him as he entered paradise. Those who could not secure a place for themselves in paradise had no choice but to go to Mitthi Khua (the land of the dead) and on the way, a much-

feared man called Paula would wait for them at the crossroads where he would pelt them with pellets, the wounds of which would take three years to heal. The land of the dead was considered to be a place which similar to life in the village but of a much lower order and therefore, less desirable. Protection from enemies and survival in a rugged terrain unfavourable for cultivation, were among the most important concerns of the Mizo village community in the pre-Christian days, and it may be seen that they incorporate nature into their culture as something that is to be conquered, tamed, overpowered if survival is to be taken into consideration and those among the men who were able to assert their supremacy over nature were honoured and revered in the society.

Living in small communities, the Mizos depended upon their natural surroundings for their sustenance because of which there was a certain sense of fear, coupled with a certain sense of awe and respect. However, since survival and protection are important factors to be taken into consideration and man was regarded as being solely of prime importance in the village community, the concerns of man triumph over that of nature or the natural surroundings. Taking such factors into consideration, the selected Mizo folktales and songs will be assessed for what they reveal about the assumptions and perceptions of the traditional Mizo society with regard to the natural environment, and whether this representation is linked with their treatment of the natural environment in real life. The first known account of the effect of place or the environment on the psyche of the Mizo people can be traced to their migration from the Kabaw valley to the rugged highlands of the Chin Hills which was composed of steep hills and deep gorges.

When they migrated further westwards and entered Mizoram which was a hilly region with hills and mountains running in the north-south direction with most of the terrain covered by dense forests containing wild animals and this natural environment too probably had a profound effect upon them. Forests constitute the dominant feature of the environment and economy of the state and according to the Forest Survey of India, State of Forest Report 2003, 87.42% of the total geographical area of Mizoram is covered by forests. However, due to “shifting cultivation, uncontrolled fires, unregulated fellings and land allotment to individuals” two-third of the said area has already been degraded.” According to the same report, the state of Mizoram ranks first, followed by the Andaman and Nicobar islands and then Nagaland among all the states and Union Territories of India in terms of the percentage of forest cover in comparison to the entire

geographical area (Environment and Forest Department). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the forest and all the activities associated with it occupies a very significant place in the literary expression of the Mizos. In the songs the landscape appreciation and identification with one's place or land involves the imagery of the forests growing tall on the mountains, and in the folktales the forests pose the threat of malevolent as well as benevolent spirits, wild animals and the presence of enemies.

The selected Mizo community songs and love songs that are rich in the nature imagery and which use nature images as a means of expression will be studied in order to try and come to an understanding of the Mizo cultural assumptions and perceptions regarding the natural environment in the modern times. Since the manner of portrayal and depiction of nature imagery in the contemporary songs is found to be commonly employed by most of the songwriters, and since such poetic use of language as the one used in songs is largely borrowed from the convention used in the folk songs. It may be safe to assume that such nature imagery have become a cultural component to some extent. In this case, they can also be considered as providing a sense of identity. Based on such observations as these, the Mizo community songs and love songs of the present times will be analyzed to see how they are reflective of the attitude and assumptions of the contemporary Mizo society towards the natural environment, and where such songs stand in the face of the degradation and attrition of the natural environment of Mizoram.

In many ways, ecocriticism can be regarded as the assessment of the cultural attitude towards the environment as reflected in literature and the attempt to develop a moral code and an ethics that would lead to a widespread concern and care for the natural environment and all the nonhuman beings in it involves the attempt to rectify attitudes and actions that may have helped accelerate the destruction of natural resources. This would also involve the development of the type of consciousness by which people would understand their accountability in the ongoing process of environmental destruction. The current study is not so much a prescription or the proffering of a solution in the form of advocating for a change in ethics and moral values to encompass the natural environment and all creatures in it, but an attempt to seek the problem of cultural attitude towards the natural environment by pointing to the factors that could potentially be seen as contributing to a complacent attitude towards environmental destruction in Mizoram.

This is in keeping with what Timothy Clark (11) has said about ecocriticism, which is that, “Ecocriticism evolved primarily to address local and easily identifiable outrages and injustices—the destruction of wilderness, the effects of aggressive systems of agriculture on a bioregion and its inhabitants, etc.”

Christa Grewe-Volpp argues for a mediating position in the application of ecocriticism to a reevaluation of nature in literary analysis as that which lies between the understanding of nature as “both a physical-material entity as well as a “social player” actively involved in the dynamics of cultural constructions.” The notion that there is balance in nature when all species remain in their place in an environment in which everything is interconnected and interdependent has been brought into question since the 1950s from when the unpredictability within ecosystems has been emphasized such that terms like “predictability, uniformity, cooperation, stability, and certainty” are increasingly giving way to terms like “individualism, competition, a blur of continuous change, and probability” (qtd. in Gersdorf and Mayer 72). The land, or more generally, a place, subtly or explicitly influences the psyche and the actual behavior of individual which lends the idea to the conception of nature as a cultural construction. This opens up the conception of nature to include human expectations as well as cultural socialization beyond its physical-material existence. Nature writer Barry Lopez has proposed that the human idea of a geographical region is shaped by three aspects, namely, “what one knows, what one imagines, and how one is disposed” (Ibid 78).

Since conceptions of nature have been culturally constructed, this involves individual and collective “mechanisms of perception” which allows for the possibility of the existence of various ways of approaching the nonhuman world. Representing nature as an autonomous force rather than merely an object is a choice made on the basis of individual and cultural notions and this involves taking into consideration, “scientific research and the ecological understanding of the relevance of an interdependent net of living organisms.” It also implies a willingness to do away with traditional conceptions that regard human separateness and superiority as givens. Volpp believes that the depiction of nature as “an active agent or as a passive object” is reflective of cultural ideas about “the self, about a community, and – in a larger context – even about a nation.” Particularly, metaphors reveal “specific patterns of perception and their ideological connotations.” In this area, ecofeminists have pointed out “the misogynist implications in the

representation of nature as female, as “virgin land” or “mother nature.” They also question the ideological function of the depiction of motherhood in patriarchal Western societies as associated with notions of “an always caring and nurturing femininity.” Also, nature regarded as “mother” has been taken as affirming its function as a cornucopia which can be exploited or depleted (Ibid 80).

In the case of America, Annette Kolodny has deemed the act of regarding the land as virgin territory as a male projection. She believes that such projections do not really reveal much about the land and fail to do justice to women who are a part of patriarchal societies. Instead, they reveal physical, erotic, spiritual and emotional needs which engender aggressive violence and feelings of guilt which are a matter of choice. Metaphors of nature are never neutral and innocent however, they reflect ideas which then produce social and cultural action. Representations of the natural environment such as that of the consideration of the forest as the home of Satan in Puritanism or as the sublime in American Transcendentalism, besides revealing knowledge of natural phenomena or the lack of it, also reveal ideological standpoints reflecting and influencing the ways in which we deal with our natural environment. Therefore, the kind of ecocriticism which regards nature as an autonomous, active force which is out there acting as a social player as well can function as an important analytical tool for interpreting literary texts which represent the relationship of humans to their natural environment. An ecocritical discourse that emphasizes upon interdependence is capable of demonstrating the close connection between humans and culture in this contemporary context of mounting environmental problems.

Consequently, an ecocritical analysis that takes all these criteria into consideration will not only be able to define the ecologically sensitive texts by nature writers like Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, etc. but will also reveal new aspects in texts which are not “green” in the ecological sense but which nevertheless, deals with the human-nonhuman relationship which takes into account the existence of nature as the unmediated flux which is out there as well as the nature of its cultural construction. Cheryl Glotfelty has suggested that ecocriticism will “transform the world” like the feminist and multi-ethnic movements have done. She advocates the view that ecocritics will “be influential in mandating important policy changes in the canon, the curriculum, and university policy” which will influence students to think seriously about ecological issues and values (Glotfelty and Fromm xxiv-xxv).



**END NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 447. *Thang-chhuah*, n. the title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear the *thangchhuah puan*, which see. The possession of this title is regarded by the Lushais as a passport to *pialral* or paradise. *thangchhuah puan*, n. the name of a cloth worn as a mark of distinction by one who has the coveted title of *thangchhuah*, which see.(sic.) The wife and children of such a man are also entitled to wear this cloth.

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CHAPTER II

NATURE AND THE TRADITIONAL

MIZO SOCIETY

## CHAPTER II

### NATURE AND THE TRADITIONAL MIZO SOCIETY

This chapter first provides an overview of the traditional Mizo life to provide the framework within which the role of nature will be studied in the selected folktales. The well known anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871) defines culture as, “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd. in Kipgen 5). The old Mizo society of the pre-Christian period, that is, prior to 1894, was a patriarchal construct and such a system of patriarchy was perhaps necessitated by the concerns of safety and survival, what with constant threat of war from other clans, the need for protection from wild animals and the struggle for survival in a difficult terrain where cultivation of crops was carried out for sustenance with much struggle and hardship, using a system of cultivation that was damaging to the richness of the soil. The practice of this method of cultivation which continues to be used till today for want of better, more sustainable and cost-effective methods of cultivation is found to have a tremendously negative impact upon the biodiversity and the natural environment of Mizoram.

Since their migration from the Chin Hills in Burma from the Kabaw valley, the forests and the rough terrain unfavourable for cultivation was found to have a profound effect upon the psyche of the Mizos and hereby, we have the first known account of the effect of place or the natural environment upon the psyche of the Mizo people. Scholars like Mangkhosat Kipgen and B. Lalthangliana hold this view. The social value structures governing the old Mizo society were anthropocentric<sup>1</sup>. Since survival in terms of having enough provisions for sustenance and in terms of protection from enemies, wild animals, and malevolent spirits were considered to be of utmost importance in the old Mizo society, men were held in high regard for the structure of the society was a male construct. This ensured that the responsibility fell upon the males to fulfill their role of protecting the society in all the above mentioned aspects. Fulfillment of the male responsibilities in the society resulted in rich rewards of respect and recognition whereas the female role of being confined mainly to the household to take care of the family did not provide scope for fame, glory, and a status of respect in society.

The importance of safety and survival for the old Mizo society is seen when one traces the development of their culture during their long migratory trail to present day Mizoram. In the opinion of B. Lalthangliana as noted in his book *Mizo Chanchin (A Short Account & Easy Reference of Mizo History)* (2009), it is not known as to whether the Mizos practiced religion during their stay in the *Kabaw* valley. When they migrated to the rugged and inhospitable terrain of the Chin Hills somewhere between the Than Hills and the Run river, they probably did not practice any religion on account of the struggle for survival in such harsh conditions. When they migrated closer towards Mizoram and stayed in the Len Hill and the Tiau River, it was probably during this time that they began practicing religion or rather, attempted to practice some form of indigenous faith that was practiced by their ancestors. This conjecture has been made based on the knowledge about the first religious songs that were composed during this period. It was probably during the time of their stay in the Chin Hills that the Mizos began organizing themselves clan-wise to choose Chiefs from among the stronger and braver men to rule over them and to ensure their protection from their enemy, namely the Pawi or Pawih tribe.

Since the traditional Mizo society regarded the protection and survival of the village community as the most important concerns of the village, the social structures and value systems were formed so as to provide incentive and motivation for the men of the village community to willingly participate in the act of protecting and taking care of the village. In this regard, men were given the agency which enabled them to assert their courage and supremacy over the things they perceived to be a threat to their sense of courage, fearlessness and power. In the village community, men were supreme in all matters and took great care to see to it that they asserted their power over women. One way in which this was shown was the manner in which the married men refrained from showing affection to their wives for fear of being branded as hen-pecked husbands, which was considered to be a great disgrace. This was one way, among many others, by which the men asserted their supremacy over women. It can be said that the men symbolically assert supremacy over the forest which symbolized the threat from the enemies, wild animals and evil spirits capable of inflicting illnesses through the process of burning the fields to prepare it for jhoom cultivation. Since only men could become priests, it was left to men, that is, the priests, to perform ceremonies and to preside over sacrifices to pacify and appease the evil spirits greatly feared in the old Mizo society.

The Mizos had a well-organized system of polity at the village level under the rule and guidance of a council of elders which was presided over by the Lal or Chief. They helped enforce the well-established system of customary laws and practices which applied to all the villagers. When the British administrators arrived, they used these traditional institutions as the basis upon which they formulated measures and methods of governing the Mizos, only making minor changes in them. Before the beginning of British administration in Mizoram, the Sailos had established themselves as the principal chiefs in the northern and central areas of Mizoram except for a number of Pawi, Mara and Fanai chiefs ruling in the south. The zawlbuk or male dormitory system was introduced in the first place as a requirement for defence and protection. Matters concerning the defense of the village and enemy raids were planned in this space. It was located at the centre of the village usually close to the Chief's house and it was the cultural, communal and educational centre of the village, always available to render service whenever the need arose.

The chief was the titular head of the Zawlbuk and he left the administration in the hands of the Val Upa (senior men) who were chosen on the basis of their industriousness, courage and success as a hunter and wisdom in dealing with others. The inmates were taught useful arts and handicrafts, sports and wrestling, singing and dancing, discipline and the mores of the society. N. Chatterji, in recognizing this aspect, has described it as, "the crucible wherein the Mizo youth, the marginal man was shaped into the responsible adult member of their society" (Kipgen 63). If this was so, then education for girls in the traditional Mizo society was at home and as a result, men and women were enculturated separately in different manners from a young age. This led to the compartmentalization of social responsibilities and personal capabilities. Consequently, the men were trained to regard themselves as protectors and providers who provided meat by hunting. The traditional Mizo society had livestock in the form of pigs, goats, chickens, cows and mithuns but these were rarely killed except for rituals and in the event of honouring the kill acquired during a hunt. A ceremony was held on this occasion called sa ai<sup>2</sup> on the event of which the livestock were killed for a feast. This enabled the development of a conception or worldview which consolidated the men as providers of meat and brave hunters who confronted nature.

The status of women in Mizo society in the old days was in the form of subtle discrimination. According to Kipgen, the patriarchal ideology that set tlawmngaihna<sup>3</sup> as an ideal or as the defining code of the Mizo cultural life instituted it as the norm which for the women

was inculcated in them through training provided by their mothers at home. All the household work done by the young women was done in the spirit of *tlawmngaihna*. The Mizo conception of a girl or young woman who was ‘*tlawmngai*’ was fulfilled by the diligent manner in which a young woman did all the work that was expected of her by the society (81-82). The difference between the fulfillment of the moral and ethical code of *tlawmngaihna* that was expected of men from that of women was that of its institution as a norm in the life of women. All that a *tlawmngai* young woman was expected to do and the good reputation and respect that came with it was geared towards the acquiring of a good husband. If she was fortunate enough, she would marry a man who would attain the *thangchhuah* status, which would ensure a place for her in paradise where she would live a life of leisure and peace. This idea of paradise was all the more desirable for to attain a husband, she was required to live a life of constant physical exertion from morning till night doing household chores.

The institution of *thangchhuah* which enabled the man who achieved the status to attain a status of respect in society and to secure a place in paradise could only be attempted by men, the majority of whom will attempt to attain such a status by killing the required number of wild animals and in the course of which attempt, numerous varieties of animals which are not required for the achievement will be killed as well. In a way, this can be considered as the assertion of supremacy of the male ego in the old Mizo society. In the Mizo culture, a man who exhibited prowess and skill at hunting and warfare and who embodied the Mizo ethical code of *tlawmngaihna* was known as a *pasaltha* which literally means, ‘a good husband’ but which is a word used to refer to brave and selfless warriors who were ever ready to render their services to the society without fear and hesitation. The word *pasaltha* is used to denote a brave and courageous person who was industrious, who exhibited prowess at hunting and warfare and whose integrity of character was observable in living out the ethical code of *tlawmngaihna*. Such persons were honoured by being proffered rice beer from the *no pui* or Mizo special mug during special feasts and celebrations as a mark of honour.

*Tlawmngaihna* as exhibited by men was held in high regard and esteem. It is a word that defies a simple description of it owing to its manifestation in selfless action in varying contexts. N. E. Parry has made an observation that in villages where there are male dormitories, the people are “better disciplined, more industrious and keener hunters than in villages where there are none” (Thanmawia Poetry 9). This implies that there were villages which were not under the



influence of the *Zawlbuk* system. One wonders as to whether this could have a bearing upon the manner in which men and women were enculturated in such a setting for as has been observed earlier, the formation of the male worldview in the traditional Mizo society is deeply linked to their education at the *Zawlbuk* or male dormitory and educational institution.

The cleared jhoom fields were under constant threat from enemies and wild animals for being at a closer proximity to the border, that is, the surrounding expanse of the dense forests. Weeding in the jhoom fields was done following a system of helping each other in turns. This process of helping each other was called *Lawm* and it required the formation a *Lawm rual*<sup>4</sup>. Young men and women would invite each other to help out in weeding the fields and would work together to weed each member of the *Lawm rual* group's jhoom in turn on different days. The presence of men had the double advantage of providing protection and what was believed to be the stronger man power which would quicken the weeding process much needed for the productive growth of the crops.

In the semi-nomadic, pre-Christian Mizo society, their economy was based on agriculture which involved the clearing of forests for jhoom cultivation. This practice largely dictated that the migration pattern of the entire village elsewhere on account of the gradual loss of productivity of the land which usually took four to seven years to happen. There were also other reasons for migration which included the outbreak of an epidemic, superstitious fears and the fear of invasion and the consequent attempt to join other villages more powerful than their own or to proceed onto safer areas, among others. Festivals were a very important part of their culture and traditions and the practice of jhoom cultivation is the principle source of all their festivals. Since their life and means of sustenance relied on the productivity of the soil to a great extent, the Mizos developed respect for the land and invoked the blessings of the soil to be kind to them by being fertile and productive as they sowed seeds and worked on it (*Lawmsanga* 260).

J. Shakespear (61) has spoken about the indigenous faith of the Mizos a one wherein they worshipped an almighty spirit called *Pathian* (God) who is the benevolent creator of everything but who is not concerned with the lives of men. He says, "Far more important to the average man are the numerous *Huai* or demons, who inhabit every stream, mountain, and forest, and to whom every illness and misfortune is attributed. The *puithiam* (priest) is supposed to know what demon is causing the trouble and what form of sacrifice will appease him, and a *Lushai*'s whole life is spent in propitiating these spirits." Although many believe that the Mizos regarded the earth or

the land as sacred, at the same time, it may be said that they also regarded it with a great measure of fear coupled with respect. This was because the forest was for them, the realm which contained wild animals and evil spirits and was the quarters from which an attack or raid by enemies was possible. Hence, the pasaltha (brave warriors) were much admired and respected in society for their bravery and courage in taking on the role of protectors of the village. Therefore, the cultural attitude towards nature or the natural environment which was regarded with respect also includes an element of fear seen as something to be conquered when one takes the Mizo cultural construct of brave warriors and the institution of the thangchhuah status into consideration.

The forest in the Mizo psyche was perceived as the abode of dangerous wild animals. It was also seen as a space that must be cleared, conquered, and subdued for cultivation when the need arose. Since the pre-modern Mizo society followed an agricultural mode of economy in which they practiced jhooming or shifting cultivation, whenever land used by a village for cultivation would become unproductive after some years as mentioned earlier, the entire village would shift base to leave the land fallow. The semi-nomadic mode of existence of the Mizos necessitated the clearing of vast covers of deep forest area. Therefore, the forest was perceived as space that was to be conquered, cleared, and humanized for the survival of the members of the village. Also, since it was regarded as the abode of wild and dangerous animals as well as benevolent and malevolent spirits, it was seen as a space inspiring awe, fear, and wonder. Physical conquering of fear of the forest is brought about by the act of clearing of forest cover and burning of vast tracts of forest area for the purposes of shifting cultivation. Meanwhile, the sublimation of this fear also occurs by means of the myth of Lasi Zawl<sup>5</sup> which enables the male hunter to view the forest as containing benevolent spirits in the female form as benefactors who aid brave men in killing and conquering wild animals.

Since the Lasis<sup>6</sup> (fairies or benevolent spirits) who have authority over all the animals of the forest are considered to be women and since men in the traditional Mizo society have the upper hand over women, this confers power over animals to the brave men. These supernatural beings, Lasis, considered as female have been associated, in their relation to the humans, with emotions and feelings which are categories that patriarchal societies usually relegate to the realm of the feminine as the inferior component of dualisms that it promotes and perpetrates. The

relations and interactions between humans and the Lasis were through attraction or love, mutual or otherwise. As a result, the forest which is the home of Lasis and wild animals might have been perceived as being under the control or rule of man. In this manner, fear of the forest would have been sublimated.

If a man attained the favour of a Lasi or if a Lasi fell in love with him, he would be presented with any number of animals as game for his pleasure. The spirit would guide him in his hunts and bring animals to him for easy target. Such men with extraordinary abilities to hunt and kill animals were called Lasi Zawl which means a man on friendly terms with a Lasi or one who has gained the favour of the Lasis. As with other cultures, the oral tradition of folktales and folk songs helped in transmitting the customs and values of the traditional Mizo society to the succeeding generations. Stories of a lighter nature were told by mothers to their children before going to bed while at the male dormitory tales of a purposeful nature were told by the elders as well as accounts of their own hunting experiences. Such stories were thus passed on by word of mouth from one generation to another. In this manner a rich cultural heritage of oral tradition developed over time. As has been mentioned earlier in Chapter I, there is no single and definite method of ecocritical analysis of the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment. There are however, various radical movements that have emerged within the ambit of ecocritical studies such as ecofeminism, deep ecology, and social ecology<sup>7</sup>.

A brief reading of ecofeminism is required here to put into perspective the study of the selected folktales that will follow, all of which contain key female characters. Ecofeminism is the English version of the term Ecofeminisme first coined by the French Feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to represent women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution so to ensure the survival of humans on the planet, which would involve the formation of new relations between men and women, humans and nature. In helping expand the notion of ethics further to encompass even the natural environment and thus enriching our understanding of the ways in which oppressions function, ecofeminism has helped enrich ecofeminism and even feminism and Ynestra King has even gone to the extent of calling it "the third wave of the women's movement" (Clark 111). Ecofeminism as an academic discourse developed during the mid to late 1980s and has diversified such that it now encompasses the study of various other

cultures and environmental contexts. In *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (1996), David Pepper wrote about ecofeminism saying that:

Ecofeminists unite in a central belief in the essential convergence between women and nature. This is, first, because their biological make-up inevitably associates women, more than men, with the natural functions of reproduction and nurturing. Second, women and nature have in common that they are exploited by men, both economically and in being objectified and politically marginalised. (106)

Although this has been said in connection to the Western world, we can find connections with the Mizo context as well. In speaking about universal female subordination Sherry B. Ortner has stated that the relegation of women to the secondary status in society in comparison to men is a “true universal” and is a “pan-cultural fact” (5). However, cultural conceptions and symbolizations of women differ across individual cultures and are found to be mutually contradictory as well. In different cultures we find culturally particular ways in which women are regarded and treated in society and this in turn, varies across different periods in the history of particular cultural traditions.

In the essay, “Toward an Ecological Feminism and a Feminist Ecology,” Ynestra King has said that the ultimate goal of the ecology movement is to heal the alienation between human and nonhuman nature and that there is a need for ecologists to understand the role they have to play in ending the domination over women because a central reason for the oppression of women is owing to patriarchal society’s ideology of associating her with a despised nature (List 70). Ecocriticism may help enrich the study of Mizo culture and the cultural attitude towards the environment as can be understood from a study of the given folktales, for the traditional Mizo society as already emphasized is basically a patriarchal construct. From a study of the folktales we may arrive at the understanding that the male patriarchal society holds supremacy over land as represented by the forest where time and again, he goes to assert his supremacy by attempting to gain prowess and skill at hunting with rich rewards of respect and honour in society as well as a place secured for him in *pialral* (paradise) as incentive. It is the men folk who undertake the hard and difficult task of slashing and burning the jhoom to prepare it for jhoom cultivation. This act of slashing and burning of the jhoom can be seen as an assertion of supremacy. In the village community, men ruled over the village with the father-figure, the Chief, at the helm of affairs

and his council of elders helping him in village administration. The male dormitory or the *Zawlbuk* was unquestionably the most powerful institution in the village. Even at home, men were at the helm of affairs and inheritance and ownership of property was only accorded to the male members of the family.

Therefore, in the traditional Mizo society, the woman was silent, passive, submissive and obedient to the male authority in all aspects of life. No matter how tiresome her duties and role in the family life were, her work merited no rewards or accolades in the eyes of the patriarchal traditional society except for the opportunity of acquiring a good husband if she was industrious or beautiful. Her commodification culminated in the bride price her family would receive at the time of marriage.

### **A study of selected Mizo Folktales:**

An ecocritical study of the selected Mizo folktales, namely, *Chawngchilhi*, *Chawngtinleri*, *Kungawrhi*, *Mauruangi*, *Ngaiteii*, *Rimenhawihi* and *Sichangneii* will be carried out undertaken here based on the Mizo cultural context. An ecofeminist analysis will be included to enrich the understanding since the traditional Mizo society is a patriarchal construct. Summarized translations of the selected tales have been annexed in this dissertation.

### **Kungawrhi**

This folktale is reflective of the male worldview of the traditional Mizo society which had been inculcated in the male mind from a young age through the institution of the male dormitory or *Zawlbuk* where every boy was taught to fear and respect the word of male elders. Social roles were created for both the sexes and there was no possibility for deviation from the norm because the enculturation from a young age into the separate gender roles coupled with the looming fear of constant threats posed by wild animals and enemies in which men were the key protectors.

In the *Kungawrhi* folktale, when a Keimi (a tiger-man: categorized under tales of metamorphosis in folkloristic studies), fell in love with Kungawrhi and wanted her for a wife so he came up with a plan to win her over but was thwarted by the brave Phawthira. In the old Mizo

society, according to custom, a young man would first court and then ask for the hand of his chosen partner. The decision to accept the offer rested upon the consent of the girl and her parents and if they agreed, then the bride price was settled. The established system of courting in the traditional Mizo society was such that after dinner in the evening, young men, divorcees, widowers and even young married men would go to the house of any girl they desired or merely wished to visit and court her, conversing with her while she would be busy weaving or cooking fodder for the livestock. She was compelled by custom to entertain any male guest or guests who decided to court her by engaging with them in polite conversation.

Phawthira, as protagonist of the tale, exemplifies the qualities of courage, resilience, and *tlawmngaihna*. When he answered the challenge posed by Kungawrhi's father to rescue his daughter, he basically responded to the call of distress of an elder person, who also happened to be the village Chief. This is borne out by the fact that throughout the entire ordeal of the rescue, not once did he show an inclination towards exhibiting his love for or desire for Kungawrhi. Instead, he constantly showed his courage, resilience and skills first, when he dared to hide in the tiger-man house upon Kungawrhi's insistence, then while they were being chased by him in tiger form wherein Phawthira lay in wait among the reeds to ambush and kill it. After doing so, he managed to scare away the spirits with the brave tone of his voice and when Kungawrhi was taken away by the *khuavang* (benevolent spirits) while he was asleep on account of his brother Hrangchala's cowardly tone of voice, he bravely went to the village of the spirits to bring her back. Even when Hrangchala, in a fit of jealousy, cut the thick woody creeper that connected the world of the spirits to the real world so that Phawthira would not be able to get out, Phawthira in order to claim the reward of earning the title of *pasaltha* and the associated prestige and honour, still exhibited courage and resilience in the face of danger. Courage and perseverance were rewarded in the end with victory and the spoils, that is, victory over the enemy who was the tiger-man and the spoils in the form of the beautiful Kungawrhi. As it happened, Phawthira managed to escape and went on to interrupt the celebration of the *thangchhuah* feast of Hrangchala only to kill him. Hrangchala, who was the embodiment of cowardice right from the beginning of their rescue mission, met with a humiliating end when his selfish and cowardly actions were exposed.

In the tale we see Kungawrhi's safety was threatened by her marriage to someone who is half-human, half-animal but whose defining feature is his ability to turn into a tiger upon will. This being borders on the supernatural but since he lives in the village as part of human society, the fact that he is half-animal represents a transgression of the border that separates the humans from the dangers posed by all that the forest contains. Therefore he is seen as the enemy capable of killing humans at will which thus calls for the action of rescuing the victim and of killing him in the process. When Phawthira and Hrangchala arrive at the tiger-man's house on their mission of rescue, Kungawrhi hid them inside a rolled mat on a shelf above the fireplace. On the day Kungawrhi and the two rescuers escaped, the tiger man came back home only to find the door locked. In his rage, he proceeded to carry out his threat of killing Kungawrhi. The non-human side of his nature was portrayed as volatile, uncontrollable and instinctual for the transformation here appeared to have occurred as soon as he became angry, and after his transformation into a tiger, he immediately began chasing his wife and her rescuers until he located them from a distance.

It was clarified earlier that in the traditional Mizo setup of the village system, there was the village at the core which was surrounded by the jhoom fields at whose borders lay the dense forests which were the zones of the dangerous, the strange, the fearful and the unknown. The jhoom fields therefore served as a buffer zone for the village to shield it from the influence of the forest. This factor could have been a contributing factor to the idea behind the rescuers' use of seeds of fire, water, thorns and stones to keep the tiger away for a short while during which they made attempts to outrun him. When the fire seed was thrown, fire spread over a distance as long as the distance between the jhooms and the village itself, which delayed the tiger in his pursuit for he was forced to make a detour around the fire. This was also repeated with the other seeds till he kept gaining on them again. Then Phawthira summoned up his courage and in the true spirit of *tlawmngaihna*, waited for the tiger in ambush and killed it.

When the threat of the first danger subsided with the death of the tiger, they were still in the forest and since it was late they decided to rest for the night. But the forest threw up a new source of threat from the *khuavang* (spirits) the form of a question addressed to those who were sleeping among the reeds to reveal their identity. This went on all night and the resilient and courageous Phawthira, who had chosen to keep awake all night to keep watch over the others,

patiently answered the questioning of the spirits every time they asked him the same question. He would answer in a brave tone saying that the ones sleeping among the reeds were Phawthira and Hrangchala who bravely killed a tiger, and upon hearing this, the spirits would remark in fascination that it was the voice of a brave one and would immediately retreat in fear. However, they would return and continue to ask the same questions all over again. Brave as Phawthira was it may be observed here that he was rather cautious in his handling of the spirits which reflects the attitude of the traditional Mizo towards the unknown, namely, the spirits whom they believed inhabited nature in the form of rocks, rivers, certain trees and so on. In this particular folktale, the spirits were found to be living in a village under the reeds which was revealed when Phawthira, in his attempts at rescuing Kungawrhi, uprooted the reeds where the spirits had disappeared with her.

Phawthira patiently answered the same questions addressed to him by the spirits and did not attempt to attack them, for the Mizos believed in the existence of benevolent and malevolent spirits, and took care not to interfere with the habitats or interests of the spirits lest harm befalls them. Whenever a person fell sick they would offer sacrifices of appeasement to the spirits. An instance of this is seen in this tale when Kungawrhi's father offered several sacrifices to appease the spirits after his daughter fell ill. Courage and resourcefulness in times of danger was held in high esteem among the Mizos. This was exhibited by Phawthira during the process of planning the ambush and the subsequent killing of the tiger-man. It was also manifested in its highest form when he threatened to destroy the village of the spirits. His bravery was shown in its highest form in this act of declaring war upon the supernatural beings for the sake of rescuing a young woman. Through the tale we can observe how cowardice and selfishness on the part of Hrangchala always endangered the position of those around him. This was evident when Hrangchala's tears, falling from their place of hiding inside Kungawrhi's house, caused the tiger-man to be highly suspicious of his wife and thus making it more difficult for them to escape.

Kungawrhi is seen as passive and without a voice. When her father declared that he would give her hand in marriage to any man who could heal her, she meekly obeyed without protest. On the way to her husband's village, when he had instructed her to hold onto his tail as he helped her swim across the flooded river, there was no sign of protest from her side. At her husband's house, she is seen as fitting into the traditional role of a caretaker who provided for



her husband's needs such as that of making food and of weaving cloth for him. She did not have the courage nor strength to escape from her husband and required the strength, skills and courage from the men who helped rescue her. When Hrangchala, with his cunning, cut off the thick wooden creeper leading out of the village of the spirits, Kungawrhi did not have the courage to raise her voice in protest. Even when they returned to the safety of the village she did not have the courage to tell the truth and meekly submitted to marry Hrangchala.

### **SICHANGNEII**

Women in the Mizo folktales are either portrayed as being beautiful or ugly. The folktales appear to have been intended to function as instructions in part besides being a source of entertainment and storytelling. Most of the characters usually embody the qualities that the society holds in great regard or embody the opposing qualities which help bring to light the importance of maintaining a healthy society. Thus they appear to be intended as instructive stories as well. However, folktales also reflect the worldview of a society, which reveal their aspirations, desires, fears and their social values. The portrayal of women in the folktales places them within the confines of an ideal image. This entailed the possession of qualities such as beauty, industriousness, passivity and a caring nature. In other words, they were groomed from a young age to become good wives or caretakers capable of taking good care of their husbands who in turn, would ensure her safety and protection.

In this folktale, the divorcee had captured a beautiful supernatural being whom he wanted to marry and proceeded to do so by removing her wings along with the long feathers of her tail. Unable to fly, she had no other option but to marry him. In this manner, the supernatural being became humanized and without her wings, she was transformed into an ordinary woman. Once, she turns into a woman she fulfills her role of becoming a submissive wife and their marriage takes on the semblance of a normal one. They had seven sons which, in the traditional Mizo society, was a matter of pride and joy for the parents for this denotes the availability of extra hands for work and protection from enemies. In the extant Mizo folktales that were composed in the traditional Mizo patriarchal society, we find what appears to be the ideal image of women. Such a woman had beauty, was passive and obedient and had no agency or a voice of her own.

The ideal woman was the silenced woman. There were many sayings that have been handed down by oral tradition which are reflective of the conception of the old Mizo society that considers that women should be passive and silent. Major A. G. McCall who was in charge of the Lushai Hills for many years has said, "There is little in the Lushai background to disclose the sense of any great chivalry towards women. Without any ambiguity Lushai has been, and still is, a country for men before it is one for women, or even children. But where better placed Lushais spare their women the bondage common to the majority, the women retain their charm and grace well into the late years. But the attitude of old Lushai (sic) is betrayed by an old saying on a par with our own sentiment of old---"A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be." Old Lushai (sic) says, "Crab's meat is not counted as meat as women's word is not counted as word, bad wife and bad fence can be changed. But unthreatened wife and unthreatened grass of the fields are both unbearable" (26).

One day Sichangneii persuaded the youngest among her children, Tlumtea, to tell her the location of her wings. While the father was away at the jhoom field, Tlumtea revealed that whenever it was their father's turn to stay back at home to mind the children while their mother was working in the jhoom, he would take out wings and feathers and let them play with it. Sichangneii immediately asked him for the location. The elder brothers refused to disclose the location knowing that their father had warned them that if their mother ever came to know about it, they would lose her. Tlumtea, still too young to participate in his mother's subjugation which was devised by their father, revealed the hiding place. When Sichangneii had earlier asked her older sons where the wings and feathers were hidden, none of them wanted to disobey their father. In the Zawlbuk, the boys were taught to obey and respect the words and commands of their elders and this could only have resulted in a worldview that regarded the words and sayings of women as inferior to that of men. Women were seen as not concerned with matters of importance, such as that of safeguarding and protection of the village. On a general note, men had the choice and the agency to transcend their status. They could become pasaltha and attain the thangchhuah status. The women could transcend their status only by means of marriage to a wealthy man or one who could achieve the thangchhuah status.

Thus, the importance of beauty in a woman which could ensure that she get a good husband. But beauty is not something one can simply choose to have by will. Beauty becomes a

focus of the male gaze and for the girl's father or family for that matter, beauty was objectified. In other words, a beautiful woman could fetch a large dowry from a wealthy man for the male members of the family. She could enter paradise only through marriage. The ultimate pinnacle towards which the society aspired was achievable only through the agency of man. As a result, women were seen only as care-givers and their work was seen as having no greater objective and purpose than that of caring for their families. Tlumtea who had not been indoctrinated into the patriarchal ideology yet, was the one who showed their mother the location of the said objects. She then took the wings and the feathers from the shelf above the fireplace, put them on and flew away. Here, the wings can be taken to represent freedom. Only Tlumtea told her that she looked beautiful in it. Without them she was an ordinary woman but with them, she became a supernatural being. This could signify that a woman who dared refuse to comply with the wishes of her husband could no longer fit within the society. In a sense, this folktale could be intended to teach that ordinary women did not disobey their husbands.

After Sichangneii had gone back to heaven, her son Entheia (One capable of spotting or seeing) located her in heaven and Kaptheia (One capable of shooting well) shot an arrow which caught her attention, She then took them up into heaven only to put them all in constant danger because of their uncle who was jealous of them. The mention of their uncle's attempt to kill them by burning the jhoom wherein they were having lunch, illustrates the widespread destruction of forests for jhoom cultivation in the traditional society. As is done in jhoom cultivation, their jealous uncle is described as going to the bottom of the jhoom, meaning the bottom of a hill, in order to start the burning process by which he hoped to kill the brothers. They escaped only because of their own extraordinary prowess. They made one of their brothers dig a hole in the ground large enough to hold all of them and then made one brother cover up the hole. Thus they escaped the raging fire of the jhoom.

After Sichangneii sent her children back to earth for fear of their safety against the machinations of her brother who hated them enough to kill them, they set traps on seven hills as per the instruction of their mother and in this manner were able to catch many animals. The traditional Mizos had many varieties of traps with which they caught animals of various kinds. The trapping of animals has been described as an achievement. Tlumtea outperformed all his brothers when he outwitted and trapped a *Chawmnu* (an evil spirit or demon), who secured her

own release by giving him many gifts including young women as wives for all the brothers. This signifies a commodification of women for the young women are distributed among the brothers.

## NGAITEII

The folktale *Ngaiteii* can be interpreted as a portrayal of the subjugation of women in the Mizo patriarchal society wherein they had no voice. This tale helps portray the patricentric character of the Mizo society. The protagonist Ngaiteii had disobeyed her grandmother's warning which was to refrain from uttering a cry of shock upon seeing what was in the pool. Old women or grandmothers are portrayed in the folk tales as wise women possessing traditional wisdom and conventional knowhow. Such a perception is inherently patriarchal for in this manner, women are considered as wise and sensible only after they prove to be physically weak and are, in most cases, a burden on their families rather than of much help. It is notable that in the Mizo folk tales, old women are depicted as possessing words of wisdom and in-depth knowledge about things and occurrences. Though it is understood that in the traditional Mizo society, old people are respected, however, the fact that a wise old woman character is to be found in several folktales shows this character to be a patriarchal construct that helps consolidate the structure of patriarchy which assigns agency and potential for achieving the highest status and position of honour only to the men.

In folk tales where old women appear such as in this particular tale, their words of advice, which prove to be correct and wise, are not necessarily considered as qualities deserving of respect and honour in the society. In fact, they are projected as somewhat strange characters having the uncanny ability to have knowledge in matters concerning strange events and occurrences. So the characterization of such individuals as wise and as possessing knowledge is undercut by their portrayal as somewhat strange characters having knowledge beyond that which is possessed by the rest of the society. This in turn seems to suggest their knowledge as bordering on the supernatural which subtly implicates them as possessing the qualities of *dawithiam* (witches) who were perceived with no small measure of suspicion in the traditional Mizo society.

When Ngaitei's grandmother had wisely instructed her to refrain from uttering a cry of shock upon seeing what was in the pool at the bottom of their jhoom field where Ngaitei's father

had drowned, she was so amazed by the sight that she forgot to pay heed to her grandmother's warning and uttered a cry of shock and amazement. Immediately, her father's spirit living in the pool heard her cry and took her underneath. This occurrence reflects the patriarchal mindset of the traditional Mizo society in which there were sayings which negated the importance of the words of women and stressed upon the words of the male, that is, the father as the final and most important word within the community. It is significant to note that the Chief of a village was considered as the father of the village for his task was that of looking after the interests of the villagers especially in terms of sustenance and protection from danger. In this tale, we find that Ngaitei's father's word was always the last word and was always obeyed for it involved the safety of the village. This was because the safety and protection of the village lay in the hands of the men who were under the guidance of the Chief and his council of elders. Therefore, when Ngaitei and her grandmother refused to follow up her father's request that she return to his house soon, he proceeded to send a flood that threatened to submerge the village. When she disobeyed her father's word, it proved to be a compromise upon the safety of the village. The villagers attempted to appease the father's angry spirit and threw down the material possessions of Ngaitei one by one but to no avail. Finally they had to throw Ngaitei into the waters since the village was about to be submerged. It was only then that the waters calmed down.

The place where the threat to the village began to occur, that is the pool, lies on the edge of the jhoom field. This is significant for it is close to the zone of danger which is the unknown expanse of the forest containing wild animals and the potential threat of enemies that prove to be an ever-present threat. This tale portrays nature, in the form of the water body, as an unconquerable force that constantly proves to be a threat to the safety of the village and illustrates the necessity of obeying the instructions of the men who are in charge of the safety of the village.

## **CHAWNGCHILHI**

The role of women in the traditional Mizo society as already established was as caretakers who took care of the home, the livestock and as extra hands in cultivation. The ideal image of a woman was that of a passive, industrious caretaker who took care of the house, the

livestock and the jhoom field, provided meals for the family, wove and mended the cloth worn by the men folk and who ensured that the family were never in want of drinking water, husked rice, wood for fire. She would sit down in the late evening to spin yarn or to weave cloth for the family. At home, she would be in charge of cooking and preparing the meals which mainly consisted of rice and other vegetables grown in the jhoom fields. With regard to cultivation, men were seen as the stronger work force without whose help and protection it was difficult to cultivate the jhoom fields. In this folktale, we find Chawngchilhi and her sister working at the jhoom field without the assistance of any man. Since the jhoom is perceived as an area closer to the dangers posed by the forests, the absence of men to assist the two sisters gave way to Chawngchilhi's unnatural relationship with the snake which compromises upon the safety of the village in the form of the snakes that Chawngchilhi eventually gives birth to. All the snakes are killed by her father except for one which manages to escape and which ultimately brings destruction to the village by causing a massive earthquake to occur at the end of the tale.

Chawngchilhi's unnatural relationship with a creature from the wild, that is, the snake which is an animal often hunted by the men of the village, is an act of disobedience and defiance of the rules of the patriarchal society. Therefore, her father's rage upon finding out about the relationship is understandable. Also, the snake is considered as an animal to be hunted down and this necessitates its killing by the father. Chawngchilhi and her snake lover are killed by her father. When one of the snakes which had managed to escape the wrath of Chawngchilhi's father grew big with time, it proved to be a danger to the entire village for it would take their livestock as well as the children of the village for sustenance. Nobody in the village knew of its whereabouts except for an old woman. This old woman offered to tell them of its hideout in exchange for better parts of the meat to be received by her if they managed to kill it. When the villagers managed to cut off as much of the snake as they could after realizing the impossibility of attempting to kill the snake whose length was impossible to fathom, they gave the head to the old lady. This proved lucky for her as it could not be cooked even after hours of boiling after which she threw it out in disgust. An earthquake soon occurred destroying the houses of the entire village for having consumed the snake meat. Only the house of the old woman was spared. Even in this tale, it may be seen that the old woman is portrayed as a wise woman who possesses knowledge of things that no one else knows about.

## CHAWNGTINLERI

Among all the material possessions which the Mizo people brought from outside Mizoram, which included amber beads, necklaces, earrings and gongs, it was the gun which was their most prized possession. This could be accounted for by the fact that the gun was the sole material possession which could ensure the realization of their main ambition of entry into paradise. The gun added considerably to their prowess at hunting and warfare, thereby, making it a prized possession of the greatest value in the traditional Mizo society. In the traditional Mizo society, as women were subservient to men in the family and even in matters concerning marriage, the ultimate decision rested in hands of the father of the family or in his absence, the brothers or other male members of the family. In this folktale, Chawngtinleri's brother Lianchea could not resist the offer of wealth, fame and honour offered to him by the *lasis* (benevolent spirits or fairies of the forest) in exchange for the hand of his sister in marriage to their king. He finally gave his consent to let his sister be married to their king, much to his regret later. However, once the decision had been made there was no turning back.

Since the ultimate aim of men in the Mizo society was to gain honour and to secure a place in paradise by means of attaining the *thangchhuah* status, the offer of the spirits was irresistible they promised to provide him with abundant harvests as well as prowess at hunting and warfare, which could ensure a comfortable life of respect in his village as long as he lived, as well as a comfortable life in the afterlife. This shows the importance and attraction that the *thangchhuah* status held in the psyche of the Mizo male wherein he is willing to give up the woman he has been protecting all this while, that is, his sister Chawngtinleri. He regrets his decision but once the decision has been made it is of no use for even when he frantically searches for his sister, he cannot find her. Ultimately, the benevolent spirits took pity on him and allowed his sister to pay him a visit every now and then.

Since the ultimate aim of men is to attain the *thangchhuah* status, hunting turns out to be a passion for all young men in the village. This necessitates the hunting of wild animals in the forests in their attempt to kill the required amount of animals to achieve the *thangchhuah* status. In the process many other wild animals are killed as well. Since the *thangchhuah* status is connected to their culture and value system, the killing of such animals required for attaining that status is considered as a socio-cultural norm, and is not considered a frivolous or cruel act. The

myth of Chawngtinleri gradually evolved to represent her as queen of all animals and brave hunters vied to gain her favour for a successful hunt.

## MAURUANGI

In the traditional Mizo society, young women in particular, were expected to uphold the values of *tlawmngaihna*. In this regard Mauruangi is portrayed as the ideal type of young woman for she is hard-working, kind-hearted, obedient, and never gave her opinion or voiced her dissent even when mistreated. She represents the silenced woman who is considered to be the ideal woman in the patriarchal society and spoken of as a beautiful young woman. Mauruangi's mother was also portrayed as a loyal and faithful woman who obeyed her husband's every wish. On the other hand, Mauruangi's step-mother is negatively portrayed as one who seduced Mauruangi's father into marrying her. While the step-mother is portrayed thus, Mauruangi's father is not portrayed in a negative light despite the fact that he was unfaithful to his wife and ultimately killed her. Instead, he is portrayed as the victim, that is, as a hen-pecked husband.

When Mauruangi's step-mother plotted to kill Mauruangi's mother who had turned into a dolphin, she instructed her husband to call for a community fishing session so as to trap and kill it. They ultimately succeeded in killing the dolphin which had been feeding Mauruangi with food that made her healthy and pretty despite the fact that the step-mother had been starving her feeding her with grain husks only. When Mauruangi buried the heart of the dolphin (her mother), it grew into a *phunchawng* tree (thornless variety of cotton tree) whose nectar proved to be a source of sustenance for Mauruangi. When the stepmother found out the secret behind her renewed health she instructed her husband to cut down the tree.

In the tale, Mauruangi's fortunes changed on a chance meeting with the servants of a wealthy Raja who become so impressed with her kindness and beauty that they asked her to become their queen. When she finally marries the Raja, her jealous stepmother called her home on the pretext of preparing a feast in her honour, and killed her by pouring boiling water over her. A serow revived her back to life and she became his servant until the day the Raja's servants found her and took her back to their kingdom. In the meanwhile, Bingtaii, step sister of Mauruangi, who was living in the Raja's palace and impersonating Mauruangi, killed herself by



mistake and the tale ends happily with the ideal woman Mauruangi living happily ever after with her husband. Here Mauruangi's final happy fortune rests on the agency of the male again. Her own goodness did not bring her happiness rather, it was brought about with her marriage to a man who was a good provider and protector.

## **RIMENHAWIHI**

Before the British arrived and opened up Mizoram to outside influence, trade in the Mizo traditional society was by the barter system only. This folktale makes mention of a Raja, an outsider, who is seen as the enemy and who proves to be a threat to the safety of Rimenhawih. She is pregnant and develops a craving for the *kumchiripar* flower. Her husband decides to go looking for it and tells her to remain indoors and not to go anywhere during his absence. When the husband goes away, the safety net of the woman, Rimenhawih is taken away and she is vulnerable to being captured by the enemies, that is, the servants of the Raja in this case. Since she liked to take her bath, she disobeyed her husband's command and often took her bath at the river. One day, a strand of her long lustrous hair is swallowed by a fish which in turn is eventually caught by the Raja's servants. This tale portrays disobedience to the male command as inviting danger and compromising one's own safety.

This tale also projects that security for women exists only within the confines of the home. Also, the description of Rimenhawih as pregnant helps to illustrate the role of woman as one of child-bearing, and the potential of men as being capable of fulfilling the wishes of women, which projects the ultimate desire of women as that of marrying a brave and courageous man who is ready to fulfill her desires, and who can protect and save her from danger. This is shown by the manner in which Rimenhawih's husband bravely rescues her from the Raja as soon as he returned home and found her missing. Whereas for the men, their ultimate desire to attain the *pasaltha* and *thangchhuah* status can only be fulfilled by one's own actions or agency. Hereby we find the stark contrast between men and women in the traditional Mizo society where women's desires are fulfilled by men while men are capable of fulfilling their own desires.

Nature in the form of the river which flows near the village and through forests, then into the plains, proves to be a source of threat in its role as a link between the safety of the village and

the outside world containing wild animals and the enemies. It would therefore be safe to assume that in the traditional Mizo society the forest was perceived as a space to be converted into cultivable land, a space that was both the testing ground for Mizo men to prove their mettle at hunting and that which enabled men to achieve the ultimate societal status of *thangchhuah*. It was also borderline space which contained the fearful and the unknown in the form of wild animals, benevolent and antagonistic spirits and enemies bent upon invasion. The women were confined to the physical space of the village and the *jhoom* fields while the men were challenged and encouraged to move beyond these borders with the achievement of glory, honour in society and a place in paradise as incentives for excelling in warfare and in hunting. It may also be observed that the practice of regulating distribution of land for cultivation by the Chief of a village, exhibits an ethic of care. This practice of the land allotment aimed to provide sufficient sustenance for the entire village but never in excess. Therefore, this regulation appears to be in the interest of the village rather than the expression of an ethic of care on the part of the Chief of the village.

The tales contain interesting projections of nature in relation to the Mizos in their daily engagement for survival. Their old way of life creates a large space wherein the dynamics of nature and its agencies are played out with man. It appears to be a relationship that calls for co-existence but which in reality, contains an ever present undercurrent of potential for conflict and wary respect for the unknown, which the Mizos have to live with. Hence, this explains the key role of nature in their scheme of things—their socio-economic and entire value structures are in reality grounded in nature and its agencies. Though anthropocentric, the tales also reveal the old life as equally encompassing aspects of the non-human and nature as well.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Timothy Clark. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 3. Here I take the concept of anthropocentrism to mean how Timothy Clark has defined it, that is, as “any stance, perception or conception that takes the human as centre or norm. An ‘anthropocentric’ view of the natural world thus sees it entirely in relation to the human, for instance as a resource for economic use, or as the expression of certain social or cultural values—so even an aesthetics of landscape appreciation can be anthropocentric.”

<sup>2</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 396. Sa ‘ai, (-aih), v. to perform a ceremony in order to get the spirit of an animal killed in hunting into one’s power after death, and also to protect oneself from evil consequences during this life.

<sup>3</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 513. Tlawmngaina/ tlawmngaih: the noun form of tlawmngai, v. 1. To be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent (refusing help); to be loth to lose one’s good reputation, prestige, etc; to be too proud or self-respecting to give in, etc. 2. To persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything. 3. To put one’s own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping up one’s prestige, etc. or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another, etc. 4. To do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one’s own inclinations. 5. To refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered. 6. To not like to refuse a request; to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others. 7. To act pluckily or show a brave front. (Also used as adj. and adv. )

<sup>4</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 288. Lawm-rual, n. a party of people engaged in helping one another—especially in field work. Lawm, v. to assist a person in any kind of work or occupation in exchange for similar assistance received or to be received.

<sup>5</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 286. Lasi Zawl, n. a man who has received a sign in a dream from **Lasi**, the Spirit of Hunting, and has thenceforward become such a skilled hunter that he is looks upon as being possessed of that Spirit. v. to be possessed by **Lasi**.

<sup>6</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 286. La-si, n. 1. the fabled creator of animals. 2. the spirit which presides over hunting.

<sup>7</sup> Deep ecology is a fundamental rejection of the dualistic view which holds humans and nature as separate. It calls for the development of a conception according to which humans are a part of the natural environment. Social ecology aims to eliminate hierarchy and patriarchy in order to create an anarchist-communist society. For further details, see Pepper, David. 17- p.33.

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**CHAPTER III**

**SELECTED MIZO COMMUNITY SONGS**

**AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

### CHAPTER III

#### SELECTED MIZO COMMUNITY SONGS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Mizos, as a people, are noted for their love of music and singing which is an important component of their culture. In 1933, a Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) missionary Frank Raper wrote about the Mizo people as such, “The Lushais love singing. Many villages have splendid choirs” (qtd. in Hminga 152). Hubert Zapf explains the ethical aim of ecocriticism as the revision of an anthropocentric cultural value system which would necessarily involve recognition of “the dignity and independent value of nonhuman nature,” and more than this, to turn nonhuman nature into a source of cultural values in some respects (Gersdorf and Mayer 52). Similarly, in the Mizo context we find an aesthetic of portrayal of the landscape of Mizoram at work in the contemporary love songs and community songs.

To a large extent, the depiction of landscape and the natural environment in the contemporary secular Mizo songs is seen as following the patterns of the poetic diction and the poetic metaphors and imagery that have been passed down from the folk songs of the traditional society. These have been taken and reproduced with slight changes and variations. Yet what is evident also is the development of an aesthetic of landscape portrayal in the image of the land as one composed of rolling hills, mountains and valleys where dense forests grow and where various beautiful and mesmerizing formations of clouds can be observed. This image also includes the jhoom fields where shifting cultivation is practiced, as an image that induces feelings of nostalgia and longing for an old way of life, in particular for people living in the urban areas. This aesthetics of landscape portrayal and appreciation however, does not appear to take into consideration the degradation of the natural environment on account of this practice.

In this manner, this image of ‘place’ has largely been considered as part of the Mizo cultural imagery and inextricably linked to their sense of identity for identification with the preparation of land for shifting cultivation played an important role in the life and culture of the traditional Mizo society. Since Mizo cultural identity cannot be separated from their traditional culture even to this day, and since shifting cultivation, the only form of cultivation that was practiced by the traditional Mizos, is an important aspect of their culture, having a powerful

influence on many of their customs and traditions, it is seen that this image of the jhoom field continues to have a powerful influence upon the Mizo psyche.

In *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (2005), Lawrence Buell is of the opinion that ecocriticism has emerged within and against the human modification of the natural environment. This has happened since antiquity but was greatly accelerated by the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century, when the word environment first came into use as an English noun. Since then, it has become a marker for the pace and effect of transformation upon man-made and natural environment as well as for the stability of a locale and the assumption of belonging to it. Place is a term of value which cannot be theorized properly without confronting its fragility. This includes the question of whether place as traditionally understood means anything anymore at a time when at this point in time, there are few places in the world left untouched by the influence of “translocal – ultimately global – forces.” This includes the state of Mizoram where global forces gradually came about by means of British colonization which brought about the setting up of the British administrative rule in Mizoram at the latter end of the nineteenth century, thereby ushering in the era of modernization in Mizoram. The concept of place points towards environmental materiality, social perception or construction, and toward individual affect or bond, thus making it a rich area for ecocriticism (62-63). This sense of identification with ‘place’ real and imagined, will be seen to occupy a key role in the songs dealt with both in this chapter as well as in the following chapter.

Buell contends that genres and texts can be considered as “ecosystems,” not just because a text can be defined as a discursive “environment”, but in the much broader sense of the text as helping to reproduce “sociohistorical environments” in the stylized form. He holds that a text’s environmental unconscious is more deeply embedded even more so than its “political unconscious” to the extent that “the where of existence precedes the what of social practice” (Buell 44). Taking up the geographical categories of space and place, he qualifies the simplistic conception of the two as simple antonyms. Instead, he describes place as entailing a spatial location and container of some sort. He says,

“space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction, whereas place is “space to which meaning has been ascribed.” Places are “centers of felt value”,



“discrete if ‘elastic’ areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify.” Each place is also “inseparable from the concrete region in which it is found” and defined by physical markers as well as social consensus. So we speak of place-attachment rather than of space-attachment. We dream of a “place” rather than a “space” for me or for us, although by the same token we may crave “space” or elbow room for meditation or leisure to fill. “A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered.” Those who feel a stake in their community think of it as their place. My residence is “my place” rather than “my space,” unlike how an unfamiliar hotel room would feel. Place is associatively thick, space thin, except for sublime “spaces” set apart as “sacred” and therefore both infinitely resonant and at one remove from the quotidian idiosyncratic intimacies that go with “place.” (63)

The land of Mizoram as conceptualized as a place by the modern Mizo poets is usually defined in terms of physical markers, that is, the hills and the mountains covered with forests and various formations of clouds as well as the jhoom fields. Social consensus as to this conception is proved by the lack of an alternative representation in the secular Mizo songs. This led to a proliferation in the number and forms of displacement worldwide. People migrate or remain in places where they languish as involuntary exiles awaiting the right of return. A case in point could be the large numbers of Tibetan refugees worldwide. In such circumstances, story and song are often vital to the retention of place-sense under such conditions. In the Mizo context we find that the representation of the land and natural environment of Mizoram in an aesthetic manner has largely come about with the advent of modernity in the twentieth century, leading to the displacement of many individuals who left the land for reasons of pursuing higher education or for better work prospects. Among such individuals have emerged many poets whose aesthetic sensibility has largely been influenced by a view of the land as a place which is observed from a distance and which view incorporates such aspects as the forested hills and mountains, the different varieties of cloud formations, and the jhoom fields as previously mentioned.

When the Mizos first arrived in the land which is now Mizoram, the land was seen as a wilderness that proved to be a threat in the form of wild animals and the known and unknown spirits inhabiting the forests as well as a place where survival had to be fought for in terms of practicing the shifting system of cultivation with no visible or practical alternative to be opted

for. After the advent of Christianity in the twentieth century and the resulting modernization process, there is a perceivable shift in perception towards the land and the environment as can be seen in literature and in the Mizo songs in particular in this case. The land came to be seen and appreciated for its aesthetic beauty in the aspect of a view from afar. To the land was ascribed the capability of awakening feelings of nostalgia. However, this aesthetic view of the land of Mizoram as seen in the songs does not appear to incorporate the awareness about the jhooming or shifting system of cultivation as a practice that has led to widespread destruction of forests and the natural environment in general. Instead, the view or image of the fields of jhoom is regarded as providing a sense of nostalgia for a way of life on the part of the modern, urbanized Mizo man.

Since the practice of jhooming cultivation in Mizoram has stood the test of ages, although at a considerable loss and degradation of the natural environment, the conception of the jhoom land as one of the focal points for nostalgia for the man of the city, and as providing a sense of identity to the villagers practicing this method of cultivation can be understood as ultimately leading to an understanding that incorporates shifting cultivation as a part of cultural identity. Therefore, although with education emerges the understanding of such a method of cultivation as destructive to the natural environment and all the living beings in it, this ecological awareness appears to have been tempered to a certain extent, by the inclusion of this image of jhooming into the poet's identification with the land of Mizoram, as evident in the Mizo contemporary songs.

Buell makes a telling point when he warns against the adverse effects of taking a good thing, such as place-attachment and stewardship, too far. For they can manifest in, "maladaptive sedentariness, inordinate hankering to recover the world we have lost, xenophobic stigmatization of outsiders and wanderers" (68). Manifestation of xenophobic stigmatization of outsiders exists in the Mizo society to a certain extent too, in their attitude towards outsiders, that is, people considered as '*Vai*'<sup>1</sup>, meaning outsider, from the neighbouring plains and from other parts of India, who differ from the Mizos, among other things, in physical features. This place consciousness and bonding though spoken in the context of the western world can also be applied in the case of the traditional Mizo society with life lived in the villages. In the traditional Mizo society, villages were surrounded by the jhoom fields while beyond that lay the forests considered as the place containing the fearful as well as the unknown. With modernization,

place-attachment had come to look more like an archipelago than as concentric circles. The workplace increasingly lies outside the home and in extreme cases, even a country or a hemisphere away which required breadwinners to stay away from their families for a long time. Other dispersed places proliferate, such as the childhood home that one no longer lives near, homes of relatives or friends whom one often visits and a second home or other getaway places for the affluent. In the Mizo context, this archipelago can be taken to be places of work as well as places where one goes to pursue higher education.

Buell is of the opinion that one can become attached to places by the power of imaging alone. At the same time, he is also aware that this attachment to place can be induced by versions of a real place or even by places that are utterly fictitious, that is, the inventions and creations of writers. The intensity of such “storied or imaged places” to induce a sense of loyalty and longing is not lessened by the fact of the imaginer not having been there. Whatever the case may be, it will be seen that the concept of place-attachment is apparent in Mizo Community songs by Vankhama, P. S. Chawngthu, and Zirsangzela Hnamte.

‘Place’ as conceived of in the minds of people exists only after people have imagined it. The imaginative structures create a sense of place which can have the positive effect of fostering an ethic of care that includes people, places, the natural environment and all that it contains. The community songs selected for study in this chapter exhibit the anthropocentric view of the natural world, in that, it sees nature as a resource for economic use. Since the beginning of history, a sense of place has been important to humans. This sense of place, whether of the home, land, or country, has functioned to provide a sense of identity to people. This relationship between land and identity is integral and its influence permeates the inheritance of all social groups. Each culture forms its own myths and legends which both establish and confirm the links of the inhabitants with their environment.

The songs can prove to be vehicles for a change in consciousness for the consolidation of the image of the land as covered by forests. But this view may be problematized by the presence of images of the jhoom in the Mizo songs where feelings of nostalgia are brought about by such images. The poet’s general sense of things is that of the consciousness of an observer who is engaged with the landscape as a place where a deep sense of connection with the natural elements was developed. This sense of connection or consciousness of link to the land was only realized with distancing in space and time, that is, with the poet leaving his land, his place for

work or for higher studies. In the Mizo context, the kind of community songs dealing with nature and especially those that deal with nostalgia for places emerged during the latter half of the twentieth century. Such songs or poems can be said to be responses to modernization in some ways. This is on account of the fact that the composition of such types of songs appears to have been activated by the physical act of displacement from one's home or land, on the part of the poet, for purposes of studies, work, or travel. This is an inevitable consequence of the modernization process ushered in by colonization which consequently resulted in the formation of forces that propelled the capitalistic enterprise and which in turn, has today consolidated the process of globalization.

The Mizo Community Songs refer to a geographically specific landscape which grips the imagination of the poet and infuses in him a sense of nostalgia and longing for a past that has gone by. These are songs engendered by a geographical landscape. The land of Mizoram with rolling clouds on hills that run in the north-south direction, deep valleys, its pleasant weather and the sheer magnificence of the awe-inspiring view from the mountain-tops afford a view of the play of lights, haze and clouds in the horizon above the spread of mountains. Although the beauty of the natural environment of Mizoram may not be documented nor expressed in all its resplendent glory in the Mizo songs, some of the accounts about the land of Mizoram as written by the British administrators proved that the natural beauty of Mizoram as seen during the years of the British administration in India, was indeed a pleasant sight to behold. J. M. Lloyd says of the winter season in Mizoram that, "It is a rare pleasure to look down from the mountain tops especially on a winter morning when the sun is bright and the white mist swirls about like driven snow in the valleys" (R. L. Thanmawia Mizo Poetry 3).

Lt. Woodhorpe, a British military officer who took part in the Lushai Expedition of 1889 described a scenery he saw in Mizoram as follows:

When the mist did not trouble us in the early morning the scenery was magnificent. On both sides of the mist lay in (sic) the valleys like a sea of softest wool, stretching far away for miles, marking out its spur and ravine on the mountain side like little islands, while currents of air below dashed the mist against the steep, outrunning spurs, like mimic breakers against some bold headlands. The hills extended far away to the west, rising range, purple and blue, till the sun appearing above the bluff mass of the Surtlang lighted

up the mountain sides with most brilliant tints of orange and green and changed the cold blue of the cloudy sea beneath, into all the varied and delicate tints of mother of pearls, while over all hung the canopy of clear lilac and gold of the morning sky. Such a scene requires a much more eloquent pen than mine to do justice to it, or even to convey any idea of its exceeding beauty. (R. L. Thanmawia Mizo Poetry 3,4)

This is a reference to the charming *romei* (dreamy haze) which enshrouds the tops of the mountains during spring which is the dry season in Mizoram. The poet Awithangpa (1885-1965) may be considered as the last traditional songwriter while Hrawva (1893-1956) may be considered as the first modern songwriter. Siamkima Khawlhiring (1938-1992) considered Hrawva as the “Father of Mizo poetry” (104). These two songwriters extensively used nature similes in their compositions. It is notable that Hrawva is one of the first two graduates in the history of the Mizos. He finished his graduate studies from St. Paul’s College, Calcutta where he composed most of his songs during the years 1920-24 (105). Disregarding the dictates of the church, Hrawva used the traditional verse form for composing songs and in this manner he brought about the fusion of traditional and new verse forms (105).

The years from 1920 to 1950 were very important in the development of Mizo literature. Owing to decolonization, radical changes took place, political boundaries were changed and redrawn, and many countries attained independence. Many Mizo writers regard it as the golden age of Mizo literature. Christianity and education brought about by the Christian missionaries, and the administrative changes brought about by the advent of the British administration resulted in the eradication of fears concerning evil spirits and other superstitious fears as well as the cessation of inter-clan and inter-village wars and raids. R. L. Thanmawia (110) says of this period that the land was fertile and that the people were self-sufficient and economically prosperous. The first Mizo novels were written during this time. Another important milestone for the development of Mizo poetry was the Serkawn Concert. In 1903, the two pioneer missionaries, J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge established the Serkawn Middle English School. In 1930, a young missionary H. W. Carter took over the administration of the school and began organizing annual Concerts which involved the composition of songs by the school teachers and the recitation or singing of such by the students, the enacting of drama and the display of different kinds of traditional and western music. C. Z. Zawna, one of the teachers and organizers

of such concerts has said that the main aim of such concerts was “the popularization of secularism in poetry.”

This follows from the first emergence of secularism in songs in the form of the *Kaihlek Hla* after the Christian influence had largely repressed the secular form of songs in the Mizo culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. This Serkawn Concert is notable for having introduced a sense and awareness of the natural beauty of Mizoram in Mizo poetry. This enabled the emergence of stirrings of patriotic feelings. R. L. Thanmawia gives credit to the poet-songwriter Liandala (1901–1980) for sowing the seeds of patriotism or love for the land and being the first songwriter to depict the natural beauty of Mizoram into Mizo poetry and songs (111). Among the major themes of songs of the Serkawn Concert were the life of students, relationship between friends and lovers, nature and nostalgia for the land. The songs praise the beauty of such things in nature as the flowers, mountains, river-valleys, the hornbills in mid-flight, the gibbon apes and the wind. The aesthetic beauty of the landscape as depicted in the Community songs or more precisely, nature songs, serve as a symbolic cultural function of nostalgia for a land. Such a feeling of nostalgia and longing which resulted in a conceptual creation of the land as a place of aesthetic beauty but was necessitated by the need to leave the land for higher studies, mostly to Shillong and even Calcutta. This sense of attachment to the land through nature images in the songs provides a sense of being embedded and grounded in one’s own environment or the place which one is best acquainted with.

As mentioned earlier, singing is a very vital and important component of Mizo culture pervading all structures of their cultural life. To understand the significance of songs in Mizo culture one has to be acquainted with the concept of *Lunglen*. This could be described as longing or nostalgia, yet no one word suffices to bring out the meaning that the word denotes. J. H. Lorrain described it in the verb and the noun forms in his *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (1940). He described it as:

Lung’ leng, (--len), v. to have the heart go out with thoughts or feelings of devotion, love, tenderness, sentiment, longing, emotion, etc; to have tender thoughts or feelings; to be moved to tender thoughts or feelings; to have tender thoughts come to the mind; to be in a devotional frame of mind; to experience warm devotional feelings; to have the imagination stirred or seized; to be pensive, or thoughtfully sad; to muse or ponder with

tender longings; to muse or ponder over the past or future; to be homesick; to be love sick; to indulge in daydreams; to have the heart respond to any emotional appeal. adj. sentimental (as song); mournful, plaintive, devotional (as hymns which produce yearning longings for heaven, etc.) The noun form is 'lunglen'. (Lorrain 302)

The Mizo folk songs and their old beliefs continued to have an immense impact upon Mizo secular songs as well as on the Christian songs. With regard to the early Christian hymns, they were direct translations of hymns in the English language by the missionaries who were not aware of the existence of a certain form of poetic diction and tune in the songs of Mizo culture. The Christian songs or hymns that were eventually composed by Mizo songwriters themselves resembled the folk songs in manner of poetic diction, symbolic and metaphoric use of language, expression of feelings and thoughts such as that of love, suffering, happiness, sorrow, etc. Such poets often referred to heaven as 'pialral' and the river Jordan as *Rih Dil (Rih Lake)* (R. L. Thanmawia Mizo Poetry 51).

Languages are culturally coded symbol systems and the songs studied here too, which purport to be realistic cannot avoid being heavily mediated refractions of the world in which the composers live in. In looking at the context of Mizo community songs which are realistic and nostalgic descriptions and reminiscences of the land of Mizoram which the songwriter or poet recalls and imagines in his position as one who has left his homeland, in order to pursue higher studies elsewhere, we realize that such descriptions are culturally inflected. Appreciation of nature in the form of flowers, of the panoramic view afforded, the sprawling expanse of mountains covered with forests which are in turn enshrouded by a dreamy *romei*<sup>2</sup> (haze) or *tiauchhum* (hazy mist), and the clear streams and rivers in the valleys have always given aesthetic pleasure to the Mizos who depict such natural formations in their songs. However, such contemporary depictions of aesthetic beauty appear to be manifested only in the songs of the post-Christian period while at the same time, it is clear that such songs were developed from the traditional folk songs. Mizos folk songs were composed in a poetic language different from the common language used in daily life. In their poetic expressions, they used many metaphors and similes in comparing their situations, thoughts, and emotions to events, occurrences, living beings and non-living natural things or structures.

The major themes of songs of the pre-Christian period were about war, hunting, jhooming cultivation, the emotions involved in the relationship between men and women, and the customary cultural practices of everyday living. This also included the invocations and incantations meant to be sung by priests for various events. Elements of satirical and folk ballads are found in these poems and it was during this period that the Mizos began to classify their songs. It could have been possible that the Mizos had not taken patriotism as a theme in their early songs or poems perhaps due to their instability with regard to their semi-nomadic settlement in a village which was the consequence of having to practice the jhooming method of cultivation. This as already denoted, further necessitated shifting after a number of years by which time the productivity of the land would be depleted, which called for shifting of entire villages in search of fertile land.

### **Study of the Community Songs**

The selected Mizo community songs by three modern songwriters to be studied here are as follows. P. S. Chawngthu's songs such as *Par Mawi Tin Bawm* (Surrounded by all kinds of beautiful flowers), *Nauban Par* (The orchid) and *Thal Favang Ni* (A dry autumn day); those of Vankhama's songs *Ka Hmun Inpui* (My place my home), *Rimawi Ram* (Land of music), *Khawtlang Lunglen* (A general sense of nostalgia or longing), *Tlaizawng Par* (The wild cherry blossom) and the songs, *Phengphe Nunnem* (Gentle butterfly), *Sulhnu leh Lunglen* (Places once frequented and the feeling of nostalgia or longing), *Luah Loh Run* (Abandoned hut) by Zirsangzela Hnamte. They will be studied for the ways in which they help promote a cultural imagery which provides a sense of identification to one's land and which thereby induces a sense of rootedness. But this in turn, is undermined by an undercurrent of complacency which prevents the change in the status quo of cultural assumptions, conceptions and perceptions regarding nature or the natural environment. The translations of the selected community songs have been included in the annexure of this dissertation.

### **P. S. Chawngthu (1922-2005)**



***Par Mawi Tin Bawm (Surrounded by all kinds of beautiful flowers)***

In *Nghilh Lohna Par (Mizo Devotional, Melancholic and Love Songs)* (1999), P. S. Chawngthu speaks of his native land Mizoram as a place which is covered by all kinds of beautiful flowers. The high hills of the songwriter's land swarming with myriads of flowers and where the pleasant breeze blows, is a place where he and his friends used to sing songs with joy accompanied by the music of the guitar. In the beautiful valleys where he lived out the days of his youth with friends, small and tender leaves were in bloom and sunflowers and orchids beautify the place. He recalls the time of his youth with longing and nostalgia for a remembered past. His imagination is stirred and he recalls the place, the home of his youth. He recalls going for walks in the fading sunset and remembers the land as a place wherein grew trees and bamboo grass, and where steep precipices could be sighted amidst the hazy clouds. This nostalgia and longing for the past life that has gone by is in tandem with the poet's philosophy of life in which he conceives of human life as divided into three components, that is, the past life filled with happy and joyous moments, the present life filled with pain and misery, and the future life to which we look with hope in anticipation of the fulfillment of our wishes and desires.

During the time of composition of this song in particular, P. S. Chawngthu (Nghilh Lohna Par 43-44) had been hospitalized at Durtlang Synod Hospital at Durtlang village not far from Aizawl for a period of six months. At the time there were many good singers among the nurses working at the hospital. The young men and women of Durtlang village appreciated music and enjoyed singing and often came to the hill where the hospital was located in order to play the guitar and to sing together. The year was 1956. From a young age, he had always known that the hill where the hospital was situated used to be covered with derhken (marigold) flowers. Since many buildings came up when the hospital was constructed, the number of flowers growing in that place had been reduced considerably. Beyond the compound of the hospital there was the virgin forest all around where large numbers of birds could be found. In the south-west there was a steep cliff where wild sunflowers grew. On high trees one could find many varieties of orchids. At a distance one could see the hills of Reiek which were resplendent on account of the glorious rays of the setting sun falling on the sunflowers on the sides of the cliffs at Durtlang village. The sound of the grass swaying in the wind and the meandering roads that led down the

hills towards the valleys were some of the things that greatly moved him. He believed that such sights could prove to have a healing effect on the sick patients.

It can be seen from the writer's account of the reasons behind his composition, that he was moved by the beauty of his natural surroundings to compose a song. It is clear that he feels an attachment to this land which offers him relief and a great sense of aesthetic pleasure on account of its beauty. However, this appreciation of the land which is that of aesthetic appreciation of the panoramic view of the hills and valleys from the top of hill does not appear to move beyond aesthetic appreciation to an ecological awareness. Such awareness takes into account the linkage between humans and the natural environment and the effects of human settlement upon the land, and their interaction with it. He feels a sense of nostalgia for the days of his youth filled with happy memories and this awakens his appreciation for the natural beauty. This appreciation is grounded in the images which have been registered in his mind, comprising of hills and mountains, valleys, formations of clouds, the forests and the flowers which he sees everywhere.

### ***Nauban Par (The orchid )***

The songwriter appreciates the aesthetic beauty of the nauban (orchid) which catch his imagination and captivate him. In his explanation of how the song had been composed, P. S. Chawngthu (Ibid 66) said that in the year 1955 he was admitted to Durtlang hospital due to a grave illness. He was bedridden for three months and when he got better, he would roam about the surroundings of the hospital. One evening, he saw an orchid blossom on the trunk of a large tree which was growing beside a road. When he looked up, he thought the thick cluster of orchid blossoms was very beautiful. It caught his attention and captured his thoughts. He then thought to himself that if such a flower was plucked and placed on the hair of a beautiful young woman, it had the potential of adding greatly to her charm and beauty. But at the same time, he was aware of the fact that if the beautiful orchid flower was plucked, it would wilt in no time. Since it was a growing so beautifully on the forked trunk of the tree, he wished for its life on the tree trunk to be prolonged indefinitely so that it could shine beautifully to delight people's hearts forever.

However, the songwriter realizes that this is only wishful thinking and that the flower cannot bloom forever. Therefore, he can do nothing but indulge in wishful thinking. Later on, when living in Guwahati, he remembered this incident and composed the song. The writer begins with an account of the visual treat that the orchid offers him. The flower is young and tender and it blooms with a subtle beauty on the branch of a tree. He believes that if such flowers as these were placed on the hair of young women, his town will be beautified beyond compare. In the Mizo cultural mindset, flowers are appreciated and yet they are considered as things to be plucked. The writer then begins to address the orchid directly, wishing for its days of blooming to increase so that it blooms throughout the year, surpassing all other flowers in beauty and in longevity. He describes the flower as hanging high above on the tree. He also wishes for it to be a source of comfort to his heart during the times when he feels lonely and forlorn. He concludes by directly addressing the flower, telling it that the sight of its bloom gives him great pleasure. It is seen here that nature gives him a sense of pleasure resulting from aesthetic appreciation. His sense of identification with his land and his sense of longing for his land is connected to the aesthetic appreciation of the natural beauty of the land. In this song, this is represented by the flowers which he considers as something to be plucked to further beautify a maiden. One can trace here an attitude towards nature which is that of viewing the human use of nature as a given and which does not take into consideration the human destruction of the natural environment. However, at the same time there is a discernable appreciation of the beauty of the flower in its natural state but which may be considered part of the image the poet has of the natural environment of his land, Mizoram which induces in him a sense of longing and nostalgia

***Thal Favang Ni (An autumnal day)***

This song was composed at Guwahati in 1959. In the notes to this song P. S. Chawngthu (Ibid 70) recounts the manner of composition of these verses. The poet says that earlier, he did not have any appreciation and admiration for the details of nature in his native land owing to his taking them for granted, since he was born and brought up there. The splendor of the sights provided by the sun, the moon, the weather, the atmosphere and the land in general did not affect him in any way. The animated movements and spectacular formations of clouds over and about the mountains, such as the romei (dreamy haze) did not move him nor did it appeal to his

imagination. But when he grew up and became an adult, he left Mizoram to live in various other cities.

The songwriter talks of places where he could no longer see mountains and the forests, places where all things are man-made, with an artificial beauty intended to look beautiful. In such places where he stayed for many years, he began to realize the value of the natural beauty of Mizoram and to appreciate it. According to him, when by means of the grace of God he returned to Mizoram after a gap of many years, he experienced the rainy season, the dry autumn season, the winter and summer seasons in his homeland all over again. Consequently, a sort of epiphany dawned on him and he thereby came into the full realization of the beauty in his homeland. He started seeing nature in a different light. He discovered the beauty in the horizon that was reddened by the setting sun on an autumn evening. The beautiful moonlight as well as the dreamy haze that gently spread about the mountains caught his attention anew and mesmerized him.

He attributes this new-found appreciation for the natural beauty created by God, to the many years of his youth spent in big cities where everything was man-made and therefore in his opinion, artificial. This experience of separation from his homeland touched his heart and produced a change of heart towards the land he had left behind. He ponders over the beauty of the forests and the land especially at night when everything would glisten by the light of the moon after rain had washed over the entire scene. In his opinion, none of the creations of “artificial beauty” of the cities which had been fashioned by wiser and more intellectually and technologically advanced nations matched the natural beauty of Mizoram. The writer came to a realization of the value of the natural beauty of Mizoram and began to develop a concern for it as he contemplated the change that would come in time with progress. He holds the belief that he would never be able to put in words or in song, the beauty which he began to newly appreciate, coupled with a sense of identification with the land as his home, which inextricably became a part of his identity which he valued dearly. But perhaps, he had been overwhelmed by the immensity of this discovery for he confessed that, despite his awareness of his inability at expressing his feelings for the beauty of the land of Mizoram in words or in song, he went ahead to compose this song anyway.

The writer sets the scene in the autumn season. The days of working at the jhoom and the process of weeding are over and so the implements used for working in the fields have been kept aside. The rainy season passes by, giving way to the dry season when the skies become clear much to the joy of the Mizo people. This dry season bestows happiness upon the land mainly because all the processes of cultivation have been completed on account of which the people can rest before the crops are finally ready for harvesting. The image of the land of Mizoram is associated and connected with the shifting or jhoom method of cultivation. This image of the jhoom field can be understood as being etched in the memory of the Mizos as far back as Mizo history can be traced. The writer's appreciation of, and sense of nostalgia for his past life and for the land of Mizoram, with which he feels a sense of strong connection, includes the image of the jhoom fields. This image has become a part of Mizo culture and their conception of the land which promoted a feeling of indifference or perhaps ignorance, towards the destruction of the land by shifting cultivation. He romanticizes the land of Mizoram as that which requires protection and preservation but at the same time, this act of romanticizing the land includes the image of the cultivated land which inevitably figures as a part of the landscape but which ironically enough, promotes a destruction of the land.

The songwriter wishes for the sun to shine over the land with a soft light in order to create a deep sense of nostalgia and longing for the past. Here, he appears to hope for the development of a sense of nostalgia and longing for the past probably with the intention of preserving the natural beauty of Mizoram against the forces of change which will gradually arrive with modernization. Such a kind of feeling is understandable given the fact that he had spent the better years of his youth in many big cities where he developed an appreciation for the pristine natural beauty at home. When he thinks about the dreamy haze that spreads over and around the hills and the mountains along with the spreading light of the moon, he wishes to enjoy and celebrate the spectacle with his beloved. The image of the hills and mountains and the dreamy haze enveloping them is a sight which he associates with his land and his home and this image provides him with a sense of identity and rootedness to a location. The horizon tinged by the reddish light of the setting sun is a beautiful sight to the poet. He implores time to remain still and to refrain from moving away so that this beautiful autumn day will always remain.

## **Vankhama (1906-1970)**

### ***Ka Hmun Inpui (My place my home)***

In this poem, Vankhama speaks about his land and his home, Mizoram. He recalls the natural beauty of the place where he spent his childhood and which gave him much comfort and a sense of peace. In the first stanza, the bawngva bird descends on the hill which is his place, his home and his land. Vankhama does not talk about one place in particular but about the entire land of Mizoram where the hills are all aligned in the south-north direction. The pleasant land of Mizoram is where he was born and raised, where he grew up and where he feels safe and sound. Whenever he wanders away from it, he feels desolate and forlorn. Many a time, he had spoken badly of it but he wishes for its reputation to be enhanced.

In the second stanza, he directly addresses the land telling it that though it already shines with an indescribable glory, he will still speak of its glory. The forest and all that it contains gives him solace, that is, all sights and sounds within its confines, the beautiful call of the birds, the various kinds of flowers such as the chhawkhlei (the rhododendron), senhri (a red orchid) and nauban (any tree-orchid), the lelen (a species of iris) and others. The beautiful chawnpui (the jharul tree), dawngral (a jointed creeping plant), and luahmur (cassia tree) that herald the onset of the monsoon, Vangpui (acacia) and thingse (chestnut tree) that cover the hills, and all beautiful flowers are praised by him. The writer is aware of the beauty and the cyclical pattern of nature and this can be seen in his depiction of the tuahpui which is a tree with bright scarlet blossoms that announces the season for clearing of the land for cultivation, which begins during the summer season. Here again we can see that the image of the practice of shifting cultivation is part and parcel of the Mizo psyche.

The forest gives him solace and peace of mind. Contrary to the pre-Christian times during which the forest was seen as a dangerous zone containing wild animals, spirits, and enemies, when it comes to the post-Christian times there was no longer any need to fear the forest. The danger of provoking the spirits was out of the question with the conversion to a Christian belief system that did away with superstitious beliefs of the old ways. The modernization process that began with the annexure of Mizoram under the rule of the British also caused a disruption in the tightly-knit socio-cultural, religious, and political system of the Mizos, owing to which inter-clan

wars as well as many superstitious practices were no longer practiced. In such a context, there was no longer any need to hunt animals for glory and for attaining a place at pialral (paradise) which was now replaced by the Christian heaven. In the traditional society, the idea of paradise perhaps appeared to be close at hand for the physical practice of hunting leading up to the attainment of the thangchhuah status was an everyday reality. On the other hand, in the modern context, the idea of attainment of a Christian heaven is by means of faith and no longer a physical endeavour. This could possibly have contributed to the view that the Christian heaven is a place which is far away in the distant unforeseeable future which could possibly have fostered a distancing from the natural environment. Therefore, there was no longer any need to regard the forest as a space that inspired fear and awe and which should be encountered with caution. The forest came to be appreciated for the aesthetic beauty it provided.

In the third stanza, the writer considers trees and bamboo as the wealth of Mizoram. Amidst the cool soothing breeze that spreads the fragrance of the flowers, the pleasant climate of the land does not bother anyone. He imagines his spirit as floating out from his body to roam about and to imagine his place, his home where he grew up from infancy to the full bloom of youth, akin to a mithun. Comparison to a mithun is in the form of a simile to compare the vitality of his youth to that of a mithun. Many of the metaphors and imageries of the folk songs of the traditional Mizo society had an impact upon those of the contemporary songs. The mithun was a very important animal in the traditional Mizo society for it denoted wealth and in accordance with the Mizo customary laws and practices, was given as the bride price in marriage. He wishes to spend all the days of his life in the embrace of his land till he dies and becomes as cold as hail. Reference to the embrace is the use of anthropomorphism to represent the land like a person capable of embracing. In ascribing human quality to the land, it becomes a projection as well as an extension of the desire or wish of the songwriter to feel a deeper connection to it for it is similar to a mother-figure embrace.

The last stanza appears to be intended as a message of warning to the new generation of youth to nurture and take care of nature. Vankhama calls upon the wiser youth of today to take note of our place, our land whose resources should be used frugally, carefully, and wisely. The trees and bamboo of the land and the new saplings must be handled with care. He advises the Mizos to refrain from the mindless cutting of trees and slashing of shrubs, trees, and bushes along the sides of the road and says that in doing so, we are only announcing and proclaiming

our foolishness. He concludes by giving an example for the Mizos to follow. Tiny drops of water create an ocean and in the same manner, in the future we will depend on what we conserve now. He says, "Let us preserve what we have for the future generations." This call for conservation conceives of the land and the natural resources as things that are to be protected and preserved. At the same time, this protection and preservation of land is for the purpose of human use, that is, for the future generations. The expansion of the human sense of identity to include all forms of life, sentient or otherwise, exhibits the development of an ecological frame of mind. Here though, the songwriter's call for conservation is an important and significant call to inspire the checking of indiscriminate destruction of the environment that takes into account its utility and value for human use and consumption. But, it stops short of embracing an ethic of care and inclusivity to identify with one's surrounding environment and all that it is found to contain. In ecocritical studies of criticism, conservation for the sake of human use is not seen as amounting to an ethic of care.

### ***Rimawi Ram (Land of music)***

Vankhama can be said to exhibit proto-ecological knowledge and environmentalist commitment. In his poems, we may notice his awareness about the sequence of seasons and the natural life-cycle of natural beings. In this poem, Vankhama gives the ultimate tribute to the natural beauty of his land, Mizoram by calling it 'The land of music'. Music here refers to the sounds made by the birds and insects in a land clad with green forests where the dew collects to form a clear stream of running water. He does not describe an area in particular but speaks for the entire land. The first stanza begins with a picturesque description of the land of Mizoram covered by dense green forests where varieties of birds and cicadas sing to entertain the land with the pleasant sound of their music. It is a land where the dew collects to form clear streams. The opening image gives the impression of a land where nature untouched by man exists in its pristine glory.

His awareness of the cyclical component of nature changing through different seasons is exhibited in his depiction of the change in the trees with the coming of spring and the rainy season. Spring or the dry season is described as bringing about the change in trees in which old



leaves wither to give way for fresh new buds to sprout. At the same time, the beautiful and mesmerizing image of the dreamy haze surrounding the mountain tops awakes in him a feeling of nostalgia or longing. He becomes *lungleng* (nostalgic) and his thoughts and feelings are moved, his imagination is stirred and this awakens in him nostalgia for the past. He goes on to describe how the branches of the trees bloom in the clear air of the rainy season. These images of fresh new buds sprouting and the blossoming of trees give the impression of the cyclical nature of death, growth and constant renewal of nature over different seasons. This is the place where birds like the *vahui* (wood pigeon) and many varieties of cicada like *rengchal* (a cicada), *ngirtling* (a cicada with a shrill voice) and *lelte* (a cicada) sing.

In the chorus the writer describes the land as a place of purity where the singing of birds can be heard all day long. According to him, the fragrance of the flowers of trees such as the *Herhse* (the iron-wood tree), *khiang* (the chilauni tree) and others restores his sense of wellbeing. The land had a restorative value to him. This impression of regeneration experienced by him reinforces the image of the cyclical renewal of blossoms of the trees in the first stanza and this gives an impression of the land and the writer as one in experiencing renewal in the land. The feeling of longing and nostalgia experienced by him on seeing the dreamy haze is further strengthened when he visits the old *jhoom* fields. This suggests that such images of the land that were etched in his memory were initially experienced at the *jhoom* fields where he worked. Here, the idea that the *jhoom* field is most likely the place from which he observed the pristine natural beauty is ironic for *jhoom* system of cultivation is unsustainable and requires the burning and clearing of vast tracts of forest land before cultivation can commence. This image of the *jhoom* land undercuts the image of the land of Mizoram as containing natural beauty in its pristine and untouched state. Hereby, it is observed time and time again, that the conception of the natural environment and the appreciation of the natural beauty of Mizoram as depicted in songs under study includes the image of the *jhoom* land as evoking longing and nostalgia for one's land, but which image does not appear to take into consideration nor portrays alarm or lamentation of the method of cultivation that depletes the productivity of the soil.

In the second stanza, the songwriter begins by giving an anthropomorphic quality to the horizon which he describes as saddened by the dispersal of the birds that sang all day long. In ascribing the human quality of sadness onto the horizon he anthropomorphizes the natural environment. The landscape, the land, the environment functions to provide him with a sense of

identity and bestows upon him the idea of familiarity. This ascribing of human quality may appear to reveal the expansion of human consciousness to include nature or the natural environment as his equal, but taking into consideration the function of the landscape as a provider of pleasure on account of the aesthetic pleasure it provides coupled with the emotional state of mind of the composer. However, new songs are heard from other varieties of birds such as the losul (a cicada) and the kawrnuleng (another type of cicada) that came out in the night to entertain humans. The cyclical nature of the natural environment is reinforced here again on a smaller scale in depicting the passage from day to night. The darkness descends and the mountains resound with the singing of the cricket. The singing of the katchat (leaf insect) can be heard to accompany the drums. The forest at night time is a beautiful sight to the poet for he describes it as being bathed in the soft and tender rays of the moon. The bat and the owl come out at night. Then when night is over the early morning bird chinrang is seen to be singing from the branch of a tree while the rengchal (cicada) adds to the song from amidst the trees of the forests.

R. L. Thanmawia (Hla Thu 25) is of the opinion that the new generation of youth cannot understand the description of the beauty and awe-inspiring magnificence of the land of Mizoram prior to the accelerated deforestation and degradation that has occurred with modernization. He asserts that the *Rimawi Ram* (Land of Music) of Vankhama is not merely a land fabricated and fashioned by the poet's fertile imagination but was hitherto, indeed a land of the music of nature. He asserts that the Mizos have made a liar out of Vankhama for the land of music that he speaks about is no longer in existence, having been destroyed to a great extent. But he calls upon the new generation to re-build this land so that others may refer to it again as a land of music.

### ***Khawtlang Lunglen* (Nostalgia)**

In this poem, Vankhama gives expression to his experience of the feeling of Lunglen or longing and nostalgia that seizes upon his imagination. The first stanza begins with a description of this *Khawtlang Lunglen*<sup>3</sup>. He says that when others have a sense of longing, it is usually about being in love and longing to be with one's beloved who has captivated the heart. In describing their situation, they would compare themselves to "chhawl ang uai"<sup>4</sup> (the wilting branches of trees which have been cut off). This identification with nonhuman nature is only at the

metaphoric level. Whenever the songwriter took to pondering over feelings of nostalgia or longing that he experiences, he could not ascribe it to any reason in particular. He recognizes this feeling to be composed of pensive broodings and reflections regarding the past and confesses that it permeates the depths of his heart. The chorus depicts a day in the normal life of a village in the traditional Mizo society. It begins with a description of the sun shining in the heavens and gives a pictorial depiction of the pengleng (a bird resembling the swallow or swift) birds arriving and flying about in the skies. Those who are supposed to collect the harvest leave the village and the village street is shaded by their shadows in flight. The old and the young spend time in the neighbourhood, in the immediate outskirts of the village. The noises emerging from the cotton gin is echoed by a chicken laying an egg. A young man who is overwhelmed with feelings of nostalgia plays the leaf instrument. The tukhumvilik bird (the black-crested yellow bulbul) happily disappears into the horizon while the vaiva (hill mynah) sings of its loneliness.

In the last stanza, the writer goes about describing the visual panorama in front of him. He sees a mountain in the horizon which is covered with a misty haze. He wishes to climb on the north side of the mountain and to explore it. The fact that he has been there before is clear in the following description where he talks about the thangrei and the nihawi (sunflowers) that droop while lying in wait. The tlangsam (a shrub with lavender-coloured blossoms) spread in their full bloom atop the mountain while the gentle sun surrounds it with a soft light. This view of the mountains in the distance is representative of the image of the land that is usually depicted in the contemporary songs. This romanticized image of the natural beauty of Mizoram in the form of its social construction by the Mizo songwriters promotes an image of pristine natural beauty.

### ***Tlaizawng Par (Cherry blossom)***

In this song, Vankhama describes his sighting of the Tlaizawng flower or the wild cherry tree. This tree was known to have been imported into Mizoram by the missionaries. It was a very beautiful tree that blossomed only during winter. The writer's aesthetic appreciation of the beautiful flowers of this tree translates into something akin to the recognition and awareness of the transience of nature. He begins the song saying that winter has come again by describing it as "The time of the birth of the king". This refers to the birth of Jesus, the son of God and the Saviour of man according to the Christian faith. Reference made to the Christian religion also highlights the fact of the transformation of Mizo culture and society through the influence of

Christianity. The syncretization wrought by the immersion of Christianity into the Mizo culture is signified both by the subject of the song, the cherry blossom as well as by reference to the birth of the king.

The writer says the flower begins to sprout and bloom again at the time of the birth of the king, that is, during Christmas time. Here we perceive the stirrings of an ecological consciousness for he says that the flowers are fed by sunlight and the clear dew of the night. As a result, the flower blooms beautifully day after day. The poet compares its beauty to that of a young woman and anthropomorphizing the flower, gives it the human quality of beauty. This shows his appreciation and regard for the flower which he has deemed as his equal through this comparison. He compliments the flower as though he was speaking to a human, offering to call it *Vulmawi* (One that blooms beautifully). But here he dawns into a realization of the transience of the beautiful flower and mentions that he wishes it were possible for it to bloom all year long. He concludes this stanza with an expression of hope for it to become a *Chuailopar* (Flower that never wilts or fades away).

In the next stanza, he describes the manner in which the cherry blossom beautifies his town with its charming beauty. He addresses the unknown readers, calling upon them to take a look at his beautiful town. From the enthusiastic manner in which he begins his description of the cherry tree that has beautified his town, it is evident that he is beaming with pride on account of the beauty of its flowers. Bees and butterflies swarm around its branches and birds flit from one flower to another throughout the day as they all come to drink its nectar. He wants it to bloom all year long without wilting and declares that he will never get tired of seeing this flower which ceaselessly glorifies its maker. The writer concludes this stanza by asking if the spirits use the tree as their dwelling place.

In the third stanza, the writer laments the transience of the cherry blossoms saying that their life-span is too short. He is aware of the fact that with the arrival of a new moon in the following year, the wind will blow away the flowers and they will wilt and fade. He implores it to bloom again in the coming year. Here again, as before, he is aware of the cyclical nature of the seasons that bring about changes in nature. He concludes by wondering why mother nature made beautiful things only to let them fade away. He is resigned to his fate of having to accept the changing seasons and the fading of beautiful things in nature as a necessary part of this change. Yet at the same time, this makes him reflect and ponder as to why beautiful things have to fade

and this appears to instill in him a will to try and protect nature and all the beauty it holds except when it was inevitable in a case such as the present one. In this song we find an aesthetic appreciation of nature in the form of the aesthetic appreciation of flowers.

### ***Zirsangzela (1952-2002)***

According to Zirsangzela in *Zirsangzela Hnamte Hlate* (2002), until the year 1975, he had not taken the composition of his songs too seriously. He however, later began taking great care in composing the lyrics and the tune to see if they were well-coordinated. He considers the method of impromptu composition of songs as expressions of the thoughts and emotions of the daily lived experiences of the songwriters in the traditional Mizo society as a practice which is very difficult to emulate. He believes that such a practice necessitates the use of a common tune to which different songs are attuned. This had been the case with the old Mizo songs, examples of which are Awithangpa's songs and Saikuti's songs. Such songs use the tune for all verses which simplifies the process of composition. As a result, it was relatively easy to compose new verses in comparison to the contemporary Mizo songs in which each song has its own tune.

Although the majority of his songs deal with relationships between young men and women and nature, the poet believes that nostalgic thoughts about the past and contemplation of the future invoke feelings of longing and nostalgia which are considered as feelings possessed in abundance by poets or songwriters and which help engender feelings of inspiration (vii-viii).

### **Phengphe Nunnem (Gentle butterfly)**

The songwriter speaks in praise of the butterflies that fly about near his home. He is moved by the beauty of the butterflies that fly about and glide in the wide skies. They drink nectar from every flower from morning till evening and appear to have no place to call home. Moved by this sight, his imagination is stirred and hence, he begins to imagine what it would be like to live life like the butterflies. To be able to fly and to feed on the bright scarlet blossoms of the fartuah tree for lunch, leaving the evils of the world behind seems to be a pleasing prospect for the writer. At this point, he starts to address one butterfly in particular, telling it that whenever he would look upon it under the searing heat of the sun, he is filled with happiness. He goes on to praise the beauty of the variegated designs on its body which is beautiful amongst the

flowers. He even addresses it as, “Mild and gentle butterfly”. At times when he sees the mild and gentle butterfly, the bees, token insects feeding on the nectar together, he cries when he thinks about how humans live their lives.

He concludes the song by telling the butterfly to visit him again for he cries along with the flowers in longing for the presence of the butterfly. Here, he anthropomorphizes the flowers, in ascribing the human quality of longing and the misery that this engenders onto these flowers. It is clear that that the butterflies have a deep impact upon his thoughts for he states in the conclusion of the poem that he is miserable in their absence. In a sense, the surroundings of his home appear to be incomplete in the absence of the flowers. Also, he identifies with the flowers who along with him, long for the presence of the butterflies. In this poem, the poet exhibits a sense of lament for the ways in which humans live their lives when he observes the manner in which the butterflies and other insects feed on the nectar together. He portrays nature in the form of insects in this poem as that which contains harmony in contrast to the greed and disharmony in practice by humans.

### **Sulhnu leh Lunglen (Nostalgia for old haunts)**

The songwriter reminisces about the past and the memories of happy times which have left him with feelings of nostalgia and longing. At the beginning of the song, he tells that this longing increases in intensity when he contemplates all things that he experienced in the past and which he could recollect in his memory. He thinks about the dense forests where the lel birds sing in groups in the afternoon and the calm rivers where he bathed with friends. In the chorus he expresses his wish that on days that his longing increases, he wishes to climb the hills to remain under the shade of the green forests and to listen to the beautiful music of sounds of nature which have not been accompanied by the sounds of the guitar. But he is aware that this longing can only translate into wishful thinking.

In the second stanza, he remembers the beautiful young woman whom he and his friends used to court. He calls her Aitenawni to compare her beauty with that of the flower which he admires. He thinks about the place where he and his friends would happily court Aitenawni while holding the flowers and playing with and feeding the birds. The zozam flower

(amaranthus) also bloomed in that place. In the third stanza, he describes the natural beauty of the place where he used to live. He mentions that the hills where he used to live are of good repute. Over there, the dreamy haze spreads about the hills in a beautiful manner in the dry season and on days that they roamed about, the birds would serenade the fields that have now faded in glory. This could refer to the use of the land for jhooming which necessitates the cutting down of trees and burning up of all vegetation which therefore gave the appearance of having faded from its previous pristine state. He wonders if the land ever gave a thought to him as he is doing at present, that is, during the process of his composition. The poet portrays a romanticized view of a pristine nature composed of hills and forests, clear running streams and the beautiful sounds to be heard in nature.

In the last stanza he realizes that he cannot speak enough about this longing for the times when he and friends lived and did things together. He wonders if those among his friends who have died and crossed the Rih Lake think about him too and if they did so, he wanted to know how they would handle this sense of longing or lunglen because it has such an overwhelming effect upon him that he cannot seem to get over it. This reference to the Rih Lake which in the old Mizo life was considered as the river crossed by all the dead on their way to the land of the dead or to paradise. The use of this concept in traditional poetry appears to be metaphorical for in traditional belief, the Rih Lake had to be crossed by the departed on their way to life beyond. The writer seems to have borrowed this image from the traditional songs. This shows the influence of the poetic diction of the traditional Mizo songs on contemporary songs.

### ***Luah Loh Run (The deserted hut)***

In the month of October of 1978, the songwriter had gone on a visit to Champhai village. There along the way he saw a hut which appeared to have been abandoned for a long time. When he contemplated this hut as lived in and filled with happy people in earlier days but now abandoned and lonesome without any occupants, he was moved and began thinking about the hut. After this incident, he went back to his studies and was preoccupied, because of which he refrained from composing songs but he could not get the thought of this lonesome and deserted hut out of his mind. Therefore, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, 1979, he composed this song in Aizawl with a feeling of nostalgia and longing (Hnamte 53). The songwriter sees an abandoned hut during his

travels and imagines a happier time in the past during which the hut was occupied by humans and there was life in it. This act of contemplation induces feelings of longing and nostalgia in him and after the passage of many months this feeling of nostalgia still remained which prompted the songwriter into composing this song. In the first stanza he describes a panoramic view encompassing the hills in the far-East and the dreamy haze or the formation of clouds that enshrouds and envelops such hills. On the hills are to be found dense forests among which there is an abandoned hut that draws the poet's attention. The hut is covered in part by the soft leaves and branches of the surrounding trees.

In the second stanza, he describes the loneliness of the hut by speaking of the manner in which people return to their homes late at night where they light fires in the hearth. The songwriter draws a contrasting picture here for he describes the hut as a dreary and lonesome place where the sound of crying of infants can no longer be heard. The mention of the sound of crying infants implies family life, productivity, and the continuance of the family lineage and tradition which is ensured by means of the production of offspring. In happier times, the young man who courted the young woman would happily recline on the floor of the house like the king of demons when he went to court her at her home. This practice of courting among the young men and women was a traditional custom of the old Mizo society. About the house there could be heard the sounds of boiling food prepared for the pigs, and crowing cocks. But for the abandoned hut, the hearth will never be warmed by fire again and the writer describes the fire as being as cold as hail. Also, the writer describes the desolation of the abandoned hut by mentioning that the hut no longer sees days in which the door is moved or opened.

In the fourth stanza the poet Zirsangzela then wonders as to the reason for the abandonment of the hut. He wonders if it was because of the decision made by the residents to separate, or move to other hills or villages, due to inevitable necessity because of which the hut gave up on holding a family together. In the last stanza, the writer compares the abandoned hut to a hive that has been abandoned by bees and says that he has met a similar fate of being abandoned by his close companions. He feels that while he and his companions were happily living their lives together, they decided to move away to far and distant places without appearing to miss him or to think about him. In the song, we find that the image of an abandoned hut in the midst of a forest induces feelings, in the writer, of nostalgia and longing for a past way of life



that would have been felt by the hut and this resulted in a profound contemplation of the manner in which the hut would have been lived in. The image of the hut situated in the pristine natural environment represented in the form of the dense forest as well as the formation of clouds atop the hill where this forest is to be found fills the writer with a sense of longing and nostalgia. The fact that he can contemplate and experience feelings of nostalgia for a way of life in an uninhabited and abandoned hut and compare this to his situation of being abandoned by friends who have moved away to live in other places, is grounded in the situation of this experience in a land, that is his land, containing a natural environment in its pristine state.

### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). Dictionary of the Lushai Language. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 539. Vai, n. a foreigner, foreigners (excluding Europeans, and latterly the better known neighbouring tribes as well).

<sup>2</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). Dictionary of the Lushai Language. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 391: romei, n. haze. (Same as khawmei.) Also, romei = (n) khawmei. Romei is used in both colloquial language and in songs. In the traditional Mizo society, the Chiefs would collect the bones of their relatives and store them. Such bones were considered to be very valuable. In order to be able to collect the bones, when a member of the Chief's family died, they would smoke and heat the covered coffin. The smoke that emanates and floats from away from the coffin is known as "romei." Some believe that the khawmei clouds which float like such clouds from the coffin came to be known as "romei."

<sup>3</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). Dictionary of the Lushai Language. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 260. Khaw-tlang lung-len, n. pensive reflections regarding one's childhood, etc.; pensive broodings regarding the past. v. to reflect pensively over the past; to brood pensively over the past.

<sup>4</sup> R. L. Thanmawia. Hla Thu Dictionary (A Dictionary of Poetic Terms). )1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2004. Aizawl: R. L. Thanmawia: Aizawl, 2006) 69: "Chhawl ang uai" is an adjective used to denote someone who is saddened and downcast, unhappy, with no energy, and weak with longing and nostalgia. Chhawl signifies the broken branch of a tree or the leaves of a tree. When a chhawl is broken off from a tree, it wilts within no time and can never get back its vitality. This quality of a chhawl was used to define someone who is filled with longing and nostalgia and feels saddened and weakened by it.

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**CHAPTER IV**

**NATURE, WOMEN AND THE**

**ENVIRONMENT IN THE SELECTED**

**MIZO LOVE SONGS**

**CHAPTER IV**

**NATURE, WOMEN, AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

**IN THE SELECTED MIZO LOVE SONGS**

The Mizos are known as a “singing tribe” because unlike some other tribes, their musical tradition was well-developed even before the arrival of Christianity, and the resulting exposure to western music which changed their musical traditions with the introduction of a variety of musical instruments and songs. Most of the songs reflect a deep attachment to the land and reveal the concrete life experiences of the poets or songwriters as well. Mangkhosat Kipgen describes the importance of song in the Mizo life in his account of the subject of Mizo folk poetry:

The poetry reveals the thoughts, emotions and actions in a simple style. Whether the event be the making of war or the making of peace, whether it be victory or defeat, success or failure, whether there is experience of joy or sorrow, happiness or anger, love or hatred, contentment or disappointment, the Zo gives expression to it in song. Objects of beauty or those which inspired fear or wonder were also the subjects of lyrics. No event or place of importance exist (sic) that does not have at least one song commemorating it.... No other tribe in the northeastern region has so extensive a transmitted record of its heritage as that represented by the Zo folk-songs and poetry.”

(94)

According to Kipgen (95-96) the origin of Mizo folk songs dates back to the time around 1500 A. D when the Mizos were living on the Lentlang range which was situated in the western area of the Chin Hills between the ‘Run’ and ‘Tiau’ rivers. This was around the time they lived in Seipui khur, Suaipui, Khawkawk, Sanzawl villages. The Mizo traditional songs can roughly be divided into two categories which pertain to the time of living in the Chin Hills and the time after they had arrived in Mizoram. While they were in the Chin Hills, Pi Hmuaki of the Ngente clan was the most popular poetess during that period. Many types of songs were produced during that period which included children’s songs and lullabies. After moving westwards and arriving in

Mizoram, the Mizos improved upon the songs which had already been composed and added verses to them. The songs were more developed in tune and content and the largest number among these were love songs composed by men and women. It is remarkable that a large proportion of these love songs was composed by women.

Kipgen believed that the Mizos were conscious about the power of song “as a means of communication”. He said:

The Zo songs were intended to arouse an emotional response from those for whom they were composed --- whether through songs of flattery or contempt they aroused passions of anger, jealousy and even enmity leading to war. The wars between the Siakeng and Kawlni families of the Ralte clan, while they lived in the Chin Hills, and a conflict referred to as the war between the North and the South, were in part due to scornful songs directed by one side against the other (104).

R. L. Thanmawia is of the opinion that the importance of music and songs in the Mizo cultural life is evident in the manner in which it is seen to play an important role in the conversion of the Mizos from their indigenous religion to Christianity. The early Christian songs which came out at the beginning of the twentieth century consisted of translations from English and other languages into the colloquial language of the Mizo people (Mizo Poetry 65). He has said of the revivals that whenever they occurred, “... they were full of thirst – a thirst for song” (78). The waves of spiritual revivals have played an important part in the conversion of almost the entire population of Mizoram into Christians by the end of the twentieth century. Revivals occurred in the years 1906, 1913, 1919, and 1935. At the time of the first two revivals, the tunes for the songs were taken from English or Khasi songs and even when the Mizos harmonized the songs themselves, there was no originality. Mizo historians like Rev. Liangkhaia (1884-1979) has said that the prosaic language was used in the translation of songs because the missionaries were not acquainted with the Mizo poetic language. This led the newly converted Mizos to believe that prosaic language was most suitable for use in praising God through songs. As a result, the rich and evocative poetic language that was used in the composition of the traditional Mizo poetry was considered as heathen and was therefore forbidden by the early Christian church.

R. L. Thanmawia has discussed the evolution of Mizo songs in the course of the twentieth century in his work *Mizo Poetry* (1998). When the great revival occurred in 1919, this brought about the indigenization of the Christian worship of God. Soon after, Mizo songwriters began composing songs using the Mizo poetic language or diction. In such songs of the Patea Age of Mizo poetry (1920-37) was commonly found the awareness of surrounding enemies as well as the use of the image of flowers to compare it to characteristics of God or that of the person's state of happiness (77-91). The Mizo poetic diction or language and the "traditional thought form" is still in use in modern Mizo poetry or songs. Western and Christian ideas and thought came to have an influence upon the Mizo mindset by means of Christian literature. The expression of this could be seen in the use of western and Christian symbolisms in Mizo poetry (212). The songs of the Patea Age saw the syncretization of the traditional and western ideas. Western hymns were seen to influence their poetic imagery and verse form. The traditional use of couplets and triplets as the form for composing songs was no longer in use. However, the poetic diction and the tunes of the traditional forms still remained. The songwriters of the Patea Age used Biblical symbols, metaphors and allusions while the songwriters of the contemporary age, Christian and secular, used the direct form of expression. The following period called the Golden Age of Poetry (1920-1950) is preoccupied with agrarian or rural life. The songwriters of this period drew their inspiration from jhumming, hunting, fishing and trapping.

Mizo songs have played a very important role in the development of Mizo society and its transition from the traditional Mizo society to the post-Christian society during the course of the twentieth century. The confrontation and clashes between the traditional Mizo culture and religion and the influence of the new Christian religion as well as the emergence of a syncretized form of Mizo Christian religion or contextual Christology is best exemplified by the development of various types of songs in the course of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> This shows the Mizo songs to be a very important cultural component. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the early stages of the development and spread of Mizo Christianity, one of the most visible markers of differentiation of Mizo Christians from the rest of the community was that they were not allowed to sing the traditional Mizo songs composed in the Mizo poetic diction and tune. This had been ingrained into their cultural make-up and had a compelling effect upon their psyche. They were made to sing Christian songs of praise which had been translated into prosaic language from the English hymns and songs, owing to the lack of awareness on the part of the

missionaries as to the existence of a tradition of poetic language and diction for the Mizo songs. Therefore, when the Puma Zai, which was the new poetic movement composed of secular songs, was popularized in 1908, many of the new converts were drawn to such songs (Lalpekhlua '99). The chiefs of the villages upon realizing the effect of the Puma Zai as a useful tool of subverting the influence of Christianity, sought to do all that was in their power to promote such songs.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, when a relatively large section of the Mizo population had by now converted to Christianity, the *Kaihlek Hla* (songs of diversion or deflection) came into prominence as a subversive form against the strict dictates of the church forbidding the singing of secular Mizo songs. This involved the youth in particular, who craved to find the means of expression for the natural passions of youth such as the expression of feelings through love songs which could not find a place within the strict confines of the rules of the church. The *Kaihlek* songs which were love songs were composed using the tune of the Christian songs so that the church leaders would not be able to discern any difference when they heard it from a distance.

There are two types of *Kaihlek* songs. The first type which was in prominence during the second and third decades of the twentieth century was considered as a profanity by the church. The tune and the language of the sacred hymns were used as love songs where references to God were replaced with references to the beloved or the young woman. The second type of *Kaihlek* songs used only the tunes of the sacred hymns and replaced the words with exchanges of “messages of love” between the sexes and is therefore secular in nature (Thanmawia Mizo Poetry 102-103). The second type of *Kaihlek* songs can be taken to be the source or the origin of the contemporary Mizo love songs to some extent. Although the early Mizo Christian Church forbade the singing of love songs and traditional Mizo songs, branding them as heathen, from the beginning of the twentieth century there was always an undercurrent of the desire to sing the Mizo love songs. Since such songs employed the kind of diction which was different from colloquial language, it was able to invoke and stir feelings of nostalgia or longing which was considered as “the “emotional” element in their nature” according to Kipgen (250). This emotional element encompasses all that could be perceived in the surroundings of a person, which for the Mizo living in Mizoram would have to be the sight of the panoramic expanse of the hills and the forests, the play of clouds under the light of the sun and the echoes of birds and insects that could be heard from such places.



The use of similes comparing the feelings and emotions of the songwriters to elements in their natural environment is a literary convention in songwriting that has been passed on from the old songs of the traditional society and which helps portray the traditional Mizos and their connection to nature. At the same time, its continued existence in the contemporary Mizo songs, as well as the staying power and unchangeability of the poetic diction and literary conventions shows that their cultural psyche in relation to the natural environment has not undergone any drastic change. As a result, there has been an absence of the creation of a variety of completely new symbols, tropes, and imagery.

The stock images referred to restrict the poetic imagery of the songs for they limit the variety of poetic expression. In the same vein, the portrayal of women in contemporary Mizo love songs are also portrayed through the use of stock imagery as will be seen through the selected songs. In the love songs, the woman or the beloved of the poet is commonly portrayed as possessing charms that captivate the poet and leave him in a state of misery. Since feelings of nostalgia and longing is considered to be the basic foundation of Mizo songs that give it a sense of appeal, one can observe that the expression of love for the beloved as well as for the land is usually based upon the premise of separation from both. In terms of love for the beloved, distance is portrayed in the form of physical distance or emotional distance, in the sense that the poet expresses his love and longing for a woman who does not know of his love, or who has not reciprocated his feelings of love, nor shown any affection for him. In terms of love for the land, as has been found in the community songs, the poet's separation from his land, Mizoram for further studies or work induces feelings of longing and nostalgia and produces a deep sense of identification with his land.

This unchanging use of cultural imagery can be considered as reflective of the society as a patriarchal construct in some ways. The position of Mizo women in the pre-Christian, traditional patriarchal Mizo society and in the contemporary post-Christian patriarchal Mizo society has remained the same at the very basic level. Although with Christianity, education and modernization, the position and role of women have improved tremendously, such improvements have been seen only in socio-economic terms. It has been the case that the Mizo cultural values have undergone transformations with the introduction of the Christian faith, but continue to remain the same in reality, owing to the indigenization of the Christian faith. The patriarchal

system of the old Mizo society that prevented women from attaining status of any kind outside the home still remains unchanged for women of the present day Mizo society in the political and religious spheres. The attainment of positions of political leadership by men appears to be considered as a given in the present society. In religious matters, the highest office in the Church administration which is that of being ordained as a Church minister appears to be impossible for women. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the cultural imagery as commonly used and presented in the love songs composed by the Mizo songwriters today still remains unchanged since the old days as denoted earlier.

### **Study of the selected Mizo Love Songs**

The selected songs like *Par Thing Ang Vul leh Rawh* (Bloom again like a flower), *Tawnmang Mawl Mai A Lo Ni* (An empty dream), *Chuailopari* (Woman with lasting beauty) and *Bei nge sei run dung?* (Which is more lasting—hope or the Run river?) by P. S. Chawngthu, *Chhuak Lo Zawk Se Vawiin Ni Chu* (I wish the sun does not come out today), *Zawlkhawhermawii* (The beauty of aizawl town), *Tawnmang Emaw/ Luah Loh Lung Di* (Was it a dream/ One I cannot have), and *Awmkhawhar Lenkawl Ka Han Thlir A* (Looking at the horizon in loneliness) by Vankhama and Zirsangzela Hnamte's songs *Kar Hla Di* (My beloved far away from me), *Ka Ring Lo Che* (I cannot believe this of you), and *Ainawni* (One who is the ainawn flower) will be studied in the light of ecocriticism to see the implications of the use of nature images in expressing one's emotions, as reflecting the cultural attitude towards the natural environment. The translated love songs have been attached as an annexure in this dissertation.

### **P. S. Chawngthu (1922-2005)**

#### **Par thing ang vul leh rawh (Bloom again like a flower)**

The songwriter has parted ways with his beloved but cannot stop longing for her. Therefore, he expresses his feelings of longing in this poem in which he tells her to “Bloom again like a beautiful flower” for him. This means that he wants her to come into his life again and for their love to be renewed. In using the metaphor of a blooming flower to describe the

revival of their love, we can know that he considers their love to be so beautiful as to merit comparison with a flower. This is the use of the image of the flower as the main simile.

In the first stanza, he ponders over the years that have gone by and the things that now belong to the past. He compares the dissipation of the loving words exchanged between him and his beloved to the misty clouds surrounding the hills of Mizoram. He mentions that such loving words are revived anew in his heart. We can see that he keeps comparing their relationship with the natural beauty of his homeland, Mizoram. Since Mizoram is situated in a hilly region, the consciousness of the physical terrain comprising of hills is etched in the minds of the songwriters. However, in this love song we do not find any sense of deeper ecological awareness in terms of sensitivity towards the interconnection between the humans, animals and living and nonliving beings in the natural environment.

In the chorus he asserts that those days of the past will never grow old if only they could exchange sweet words of love again and to laugh together again like infants. He asks his beloved to bloom once more like a flower for him, that is, to come into his life again so that their love can be renewed like a beautiful flower. In the second stanza, we find him alone one evening at twilight. He was immersed in thoughts about all that had happened between him and his beloved. Knowing that he will never cease to long for his beloved, he finds it difficult to bear the burden of this scar that remains in his heart, that is, the scar of a love that has slipped away. His mind is troubled and he cannot fall asleep. The beloved or the young woman is portrayed as having such power and hold over him that the pain and burden of longing for her remains like a scar etched in his heart. He wallows in misery for he and his beloved have parted ways and it appears as though the young woman is the one who has left him for the poet says that he will never cease to long for her.

In the last stanza, he asks her to bestow upon him a heart that has not changed towards him as well as softly spoken words of love like soft flowing water. He compares these to a flower that gives joy. He concludes the poem by saying that if she decides to return to him, the heaviness in his heart, which is like the land overgrown with green growth during monsoon, will disappear. Also, his burdened heart which he compares to the misty clouds of Mizoram that gather about the mountain tops or the valleys will become clear again. Here too, we notice the comparison of his situation as well as his feelings and emotions with natural phenomena in the

natural environment. The young woman is shown to be cruel to a certain extent for captivating the poet with her charms only to leave him in the end, for the poet implores her to bestow upon him “A heart that has not changed.” He compares his heart to the green growth of his land, Mizoram. The green growth during monsoon is projected as something of an impediment and that which needs to be cleared. At the same time, the poet is hopeful that when the green growth is cleared then the misty clouds of Mizoram will disappear which also appears to suggest that he considers the clouds as something of an impediment to his happiness or peace of mind. Nevertheless, such comparisons could be taken to mean that the land and the natural environment have a profound impact upon his consciousness and he uses the images to express his emotions and feelings.

P. S. Chawngthu has written about the process of composition of his songs in *Nghilh Lohna Par (Mizo devotional, melancholic and love songs)* (1999). This song was composed one foggy morning in 1941 during the monsoon season. The fog had surrounded the city of Aizawl. It was around 10 am in the morning and the streets were muddy on account of the rain. The writer had been standing at the back of his house near the reservoir or pond of water from where he could observe the hills of Reiek village from a distance. He could see the thick clouds cover up the hills due to which they could barely be seen. A thought occurred to him that when the sun comes out it will disperse the thick and heavy clouds and this fact amazed him. He wondered where such thick clouds would go after their dispersal by the sun to give way to a clear horizon. The lyrics of a song that he knows came to his mind at this point of time, “As for me this heart of mine which is covered with dense growth like the land during the rainy season will soon be clear like the clouds (Zochhum) of Mizoram that disperse”<sup>2</sup> (4).

This song composition took place at a time when the person he was courting had gone away. In his loneliness and longing for her, he would go to visit other girls he knew and would spend his time joking and laughing with them. But when he returned home, he would be filled with a sense of loneliness and longing for the woman he was courting. Sometimes, he would imagine that if he ever saw her again, he would see her like a flower blooming from the bud and then he would be filled with immense joy and happiness. Since he had not seen her for a long time, he was filled with longing and this longing brought forth lines of song lyrics in his mind. He ran inside the house and began writing down whatever came into his mind. In the process the

words and sentences were all disconnected at first and it was only later that he got to arrange both tune and lyrics of the song in their proper order.

The composition of the song is grounded on the inspiration which was the feeling of nostalgia and longing experienced by the songwriter. In the case of P. S. Chawngthu, this feeling of nostalgia or longing is connected to the Mizo love songs which is often triggered or activated by the viewing of his natural surroundings which consisted of the hills of Reiek and the clouds surrounding it. It was this view which gave him a profound sense of longing as well as hope for his reunion with the young woman whom he is in love with. In this manner, it can be seen that his emotions, thoughts and feelings are influenced by his natural surroundings.

### **Tawnmang Mawl Mai A Lo Ni (An empty dream)**

The songwriter is away from his beloved. He misses her and longs for her presence. But when it appeared as though they were finally together, he woke up only to realize that it was only an empty dream. In the first stanza, it is late at night and he is all alone without anyone to comfort him. In the darkness of his home, he lies down with a heavy heart upon the bed. His love for his beloved is so strong that it keeps him awake at night. In the chorus he mentions that he and his beloved are in each other's arms as if wrestling each other and are laughing together in joy. But he suddenly wakes up only to find that it was only an empty dream. This reference to wrestling points to the use of a traditional Mizo simile. This use is anachronistic but since the contemporary Mizo songs have inherited the use of traditional poetic devices and images, they are still used in the songs. This exhibits the strength of the traditional culture.

In the second stanza, he is afraid to think about the fact that he and his beloved are in different places now. He wonders if he will meet her again after a year. The fear of losing her is palpable in his tone. This was a time when communication was difficult and so his fear is justified because there was a possibility that owing to the lack of communication the girl would lose interest and marry another man. He complains that the time apart was becoming too long. The writer is entirely captivated by the young woman to such an extent that even when he has secured her consent and she has reciprocated his love, he still remains in a state of unease for fear of losing her. In the third stanza, he tells her that even if a long time had lapsed since they

last spoke to each other, she should wait patiently for him like the parched land that waits for water in the dry season. He asks her to be faithful to him although a year had passed between them. The comparison of his miserable condition to that of a parched land awaiting rain shows the poet's identification with processes of nature or the natural environment.

In the last stanza, he comforts her by saying that when they have remained faithful to each other and their detractors have also melted and turned quiet like hail turned to water and flowers will bloom again. P. S. Chawngthu (Nghilh Lohna Par 10) has said that during the time of composition of this song in 1943, he was in Bangalore to continue his army training after having completed his two-month initial training for the Royal Indian Air Force at Lahore. He was staying at RAF station, Jalahali with four of his friends. One night, one of his friends had a dream in which he saw his beloved and this seemed so real that when he awoke, he imagined that she was still with him and in the darkness he felt about the bed to see if she was still there. Since the poet and his friends joined the Air Force they missed practicing the Mizo social custom of courting girls by visiting them at their homes. They only had time enough to watch movies in the evenings, and their only option for leisure besides the movies, was to lie on their beds and contemplate in anticipation of the day they would get to meet their loved ones again. But this too was not a surety for it was the time of war (World War II) and they could be shifted to a place in the war zones or in a peaceful region. Therefore, whenever he thought about his beloved he was fearful that she would leave him for another man. There was nothing he could do besides beseeching her to be loyal to him through the love letters he sent her. His only hope was that if there ever came a time of peace, he would get to meet her again. Therefore, when his friend spoke about his dream, on account of his being in a state of longing as well, this song came to his mind. The song became especially popular among the Mizo soldiers who were from home and going to go to their places of posting.

His mention of enemies who will "turn quiet like hail turned to water," could refer to two things here. They could point to the enemies they were fighting against during the years of war, as well as those men who might be courting his beloved in his absence. Among the images that remind him of home is the image of flowers in the cultivated jhoom. This image of the jhoom land is found to form a part of the conception of the land image of Mizoram in the songs. The image of flowers blooming again in a cultivated land could be suggestive of re-growth and

renewal of the land after it has been ravaged by cultivation. Therefore, he concludes by saying that when flowers bloom again in the cultivated land, he and his beloved will meet again and become complete like the perfectly-matched pieces of a gong set. The reference to a gong set is the use of a traditional simile. In the contemporary Mizo songs, the images of nature used to express the songwriter's thoughts and feelings mostly comprises of flowers, hills, and the cultivated land. This image of the jhoom land inspires nostalgia in the poet but does not show an awareness of the destruction and degradation of the forests and the land that this practice brings about. This connection to the land as seen in this song is in the realm of emotions and feelings.

### ***Chuailopari (Woman with lasting beauty)***

The Chuailo flower is a deep crimson red flower and is rounded in shape. The plant reaches to the knees and the seeds are thrown around the jhoom huts after the fields have been burnt for cultivation. The flowers then bloom during the months of June and July which is the time when weeding of the jhoom fields is done.

Whenever the writer meets his beloved, his mind wanders and her captivating charm causes him much misery and pain. This is because he cannot know if Chuailopari is in love with him. He tells her that though she may set her heart on another, she will never fade or be of less importance in his heart. He compares other young people living happy lives with the ones they love to perfectly-matched pieces of a gong set. Reference to the gong set is anachronistic as it is a simile that had relevance in the old traditional Mizo songs. Even though she may be with someone else, he is ready to reject all others and to continue to long for Chuailopari. Therefore he decides that she is good for him.

In the second stanza, he wonders if Chuailopari, the one whom he does not deserve, longs for him in turn. He is forlorn and miserable under her captivating charm and can do nothing but ask her to reply to his advances with kind words of love. He believes that if she longs for him too, then the pain of longing for her would be much easier to bear than not knowing whether she is love with him or not. He appears to be weakened under the weight of his longing for his beloved and for fear of losing her.

In the last stanza, his heart breaks when he ponders over the possibility that all this longing and pining for her could turn into an empty dream. He recalls the happy days they spent together like happy birds, during which time he delighted over her beauty in the same manner as he did over a flower. On such days as these when he laughed like a happy child, days of separation from Chuailopari would surface again. Comparison of happy moments spent with the young woman to happy birds reflects an attitude of inclusivity which takes into account the seemingly happy state of birds. This attributing of human quality of happiness to birds suggests an anthropocentric observance of the living things in the surroundings.

P. S. Chawngthu (Ibid 7-8) has written that the real name of his beloved forms a part of the metaphorical name that he used to refer to her in this poem, that is, Chuailopari. He had met the young woman who belonged to another locality, during practice for the joint Christmas Carol service. He described her as tall and slender and one who dressed in a simple manner. One night during practice she caught his attention and soon enough he began courting her and their relationship began. The poet was then called by the Indian Air Force which he decided to join. He went on to compose the last stanza of the verse at Kelvin Cinema Hall in Shillong. Here too, we find that it is distance and separation that resulted in the poet's sense of longing and nostalgia due to which the song was composed. The poet is left in a miserable condition for he misses the young woman terribly, stating that she was "born to make me miserable." This distance can be seen as highlighting the reality of one who left home to work in a far off place.

***Bei nge sei Run dung? (Which is more lasting—hope or the Run river?)***

In the first stanza the songwriter reminisces about the past life that has gone by and the happy days of union which have disappeared over the horizon. He wonders if it ever resurfaced in the heart of his beloved and if she ever longed for it too. In the second stanza, he tells her that though time has passed and their relationship has become a matter of the past, his love for her will never get old in his heart for he always challenged himself with the old proverb, "Which is longer: Hope or the Run river?". This old saying is used to imply the tenacity of hope even to the extent of challenging the *Run* River in length. This is significant given the fact that the *Run* river was a very long river. The elders of the traditional Mizo society had a saying which questioned



as to whether hope of man or the Run River was longer, that is, in terms of hope as long lasting. The *Run* is the longest river known to the Mizos. It was the river they had to cross before finally entering Mizoram from the Chin Hills. The writer concludes this stanza by expressing his faithfulness to her by saying that he will always follow only her.

In the third stanza he recalls how even the senhri flower (a red orchid) wilts and fades and waits for a new year to bloom again. In the same vein, he is hopeful that, like the senhri flower, he would wait for the coming year to meet her again and is optimistic that all that waiting would not be in vain. In mentioning the cycle of wilting and subsequent blooming of the senhri flower, he compares himself to the senhri flower here. This comparison is in terms of the cycle of its life process. Given the fact of his representation and comparison of the beauty of the young woman with images of flowers in his poems, this alludes to the understanding of the beauty of the young woman as transient. Since beauty is transient and beauty and charms are the qualities possessed by the beloved, the comparison of the beloved to flowers is a form of inscribing the qualities of women within the narrow confines of the emotional realm of love and relationships. In the last stanza he expresses his wish to be with her and to laugh together again. He wishes to live in the high skies like the eagle so that he would be able to descend on her home to meet her. This comparison to an eagle exhibits the use of an old poetic imagery and at the same time, the very use of such an image portrays the extension of his emotions and feelings onto things in his environment that imply his identification with it, in this case, the eagle.

In speaking about the manner of composition of this song P. S. Chawngthu (Ibid 24-25) has mentioned that human life can be divided into three parts. The first part consists of our past life which is full of happiness and joy. The second part is that of our present life that appears to be full of pain and misery while the third part consists of our life in the future which we hope will lead to the fulfillment of our present hopes and wishes. He is of the opinion that this is the way in which we spend our lives. The writer had not seen his beloved for a long period of time. The years pass by and he hopes that he will meet her again eventually. He had fallen in love with her when he was only a youth and had been in love with her ever since. From the moment he had fallen in love with her she occupied all his thoughts but he never found the courage to approach or to court her and he could never summon the courage to even speak to her for he always felt shy in her company. As the years passed, there were many times when he would leave his home

to study or work outside Mizoram. One day in Calcutta, he met a friend of his and she told him that the said young woman had married and settled down. Even then, it was not that he was in despair, but recalling the past life and the manner in which he had always kept his hope alive, he proceeded to compose this song.

In this song, the present state of the songwriter is that of misery upon finding out that the young woman he is deeply in love with is wedded to another man. Since she is already married to another man there is no longer any hope of his marrying her. Therefore, it is significant that the writer has mentioned the grounds upon which this song has been composed, which is that of looking back at the past life and remembering the manner in which he had kept his hopes alive. When he realizes that he can no longer marry the young woman, the song does not represent his real hope but is a reflection of the past and of the hope he used to have. This shows that the real intention behind his act of praising, adoring, and courting the young woman is to ensure that his efforts result in marriage to his beloved.

In the song the songwriter expresses his love, longing, and faithfulness to his beloved almost to the extent of idealizing his love for her, while the woman is portrayed as possessing captivating charms that reduces him to a state of devotion to her. The woman is portrayed as having complete power over him owing to her beauty and charms while he is found to be in a perpetual state of anticipation of reunion or meeting with his beloved when distance necessitates their separation. Also, during his separation from his beloved he is in a perpetual state of fear of losing her to another man on account of his absence.

### **Vankhama (1906-1970)**

#### **Chhuak Lo Zawk se Vawiin Ni chu (I wish the sun does not come out today)**

The object of the poet's attention has left the village and for this reason he cannot bear the thought of spending a day without her, and so wishes that the sun would not come out to bring in a new day without his beloved. Before she leaves, he cries and holds onto her. He calls her, "Beloved little flower", "my little flower." In using this flower metaphor, he equates her beauty to that of a flower.

He asks the hills to prevent her from moving away. Then lost in tears, he climbs on each hill from where he can see her in the distance till his eyes are flooded with tears and he can no longer see. There is separation and the resulting distance between the lovers which induces feelings of longing and nostalgia in the poet. The act of asking the hills to prevent his beloved from walking away is a personification of the hills and this may be seen as an anthropocentric function of projection of his feelings onto the hills. Although this personification seems to imply the expansion of the poet's sense of identity to include nonhuman elements and objects in the surrounding environment, at the same time it helps portray the use of the objects and creatures in the natural environment by poets for the fulfillment of their needs, their desires and wishes.

He calls her 'Lenghermawii', which means 'One who moves most beautifully among all.' The beauty of the young woman merits the coining of a name for her. This naming may be considered as part of the functioning of the ideology of the male gaze that seeks to objectify women in a subtle manner in this situation. The objectification can be attributed to the comparison with the flower which is considered as something that has a short life and that which will wilt soon enough. This comparison places women as objects that have been put up for admiration and whom men court in order to marry them. This shows the ultimate aim of the praises and adoration lavished upon the young women is that of marrying them. The young woman is therefore seen as a prize to be had and the expression of the songwriter's emotions and feelings portrays his anticipation of the moment when he would marry his beloved.

His longing increases in intensity and he wonders as to whether there will come a day when he shall be able to forget his "beautiful little flower". But he is resigned to his fate as he says that he shall never forget her even if the year was longer than it is. He understands that there is an undeniable attraction between the two of them, but he does not dare to approach her in order to confess his love for her since she is the best among all other young women. He feels that she was born to make him miserable yet he wishes her well and tells her to grace the hills with her beauty. The writer considers her beauty to be capable of beautifying the hills.

The writer describes the moon as "walking in the night," and in this manner anthropomorphizes it. This description of the moon shows the extension of his thoughts and to the surrounding environment. In a sense, the surrounding environment functions as the stage which enables him, the writer, to express his thoughts, emotions, and desires. This projection

ultimately promotes the idea of surrounding nature as something which is under his control and which can be used to fulfill his desires. He says that he will look at the horizon and observe the hazy clouds hovering over and above the hills which was the place where his ‘beloved little flower’ lived. In his thoughts, he inextricably associates his beloved with the hills, that is, with the land where she lives.

### ***Zawlkhawhermawii* (The beauty of Aizawl town)**

The songwriter is in love with the young woman whom he names ‘Zawlkhawhermawii’ which can be taken to mean, “The beauty of Aizawl town.” Her captivating charms have captured him completely. He tells her that though he may hang and wilt like grasses of the plains which have been cut, he will never cease to long for her. He identifies himself with grasses that have been cut. This comparison of his state of misery with the grasses in the form of a simile shows the use of a traditional poetic device. At the same time, it shows a sense of identification with nature in that his miserable condition is compared to the miserable plight of grasses when they have been cut. He also tells her that he rejoices over her beautiful countenance like he rejoices over a flower and calls her ‘Aitenawn’ which is the name of a flower. He tells her that she is like the senhri orchid in the east. This comparison with flowers can be considered as part of the process of activation of the male gaze that relegates women and nature to the realm of aesthetic pleasure and as things which the man can hope to possess..

He realizes that he has to compete with other youth for Zawlkhawhermawii’s attention. His love for her is such that even if she happens to marry and bear children to another, he could not change his feelings for her. The mention of competition with other young men for the young woman’s attention is a reference to the act of courting of women by the young men which is still practiced to this day. The element of competition projects the young woman as a prize to be earned with the ultimate aim being that of having a wife of one’s own to take care of the man and his family. This projection assigns women to the role of becoming dutiful wives and does not leave room for any other role besides these. Women are expected to get married and become dutiful wives and the perception exists in Mizo society that to do otherwise or to refrain from marriage connotes a deviation from the social norm.

The writer desires to marry Zawlkhawhermawii and does not mind if she faded like a cloth in raising their children. He tells her that he would bear with her even if she sulked like an infant, and would even bear gossip on her account. Although the mention of the eventual fading of the beauty of the woman is intended as a promise of love and faithfulness on the part of the writer, it serves to emphasize the transience of the beauty of young women. Owing to his desire to make her his wife and because he felt that he could never have her, he could not sleep at night. He feels that Zawlkhawhermawii has turned into a dream and is unreachable. Yet he cannot stop longing for her. He says that his heart is “as cloudy as the clouds of Mizoram.” The use of this simile is once again, typical of the Mizo form of writing songs where the composer’s feelings and emotions are compared to elements in the natural surroundings.

### **Tawnmang Em Aw/ Luah Loh Lung Di (Was it a dream/ One I cannot have)**

When the songwriter returns to the places where he used to roam with his beloved, he sees tuahpui (a tree with scarlet blossoms) and vau (a flowering tree) blooming again. The old haunts that they used to frequent are now filled with greenery and young leaves start to grow again. The captivating charms of the beloved remains in his heart and he is left to wonder if there will ever be a day when he will forget his beloved whom he cannot have. He recalls that a long time ago, they had placed a beautiful senhri (red orchid) on her beautiful flowing hair. Meanwhile, the orchid is blooming again on the tall branches of the trees. He says that it will bloom without being plucked. This could mean that the flower will never be plucked because there is no young woman to adorn it. The presence of the young woman is associated with the plucking of the orchid and so the fulfillment of the wishes of the writer, that is, the presence of the woman by his side is associated with the plucking of the orchid. This may be taken to imply that the fulfillment of his desires will inevitably lead to control over nature with the plucking of the flower.

The writer finds it hard to believe that the fact of his beloved moving into the arms of another is not all a dream. He feels a sense of misery as he concludes the song by saying that he had followed her throughout the years only to be separated from her in this manner.

***Awmkhawhar Lenkaw! Ka Han Thlir A (Looking at the horizon in loneliness)***

In his loneliness, the songwriter looks at the horizon in loneliness and sees the hill covered by the hazy spread of clouds. He wonders if his beloved would be walking there and if she would ponder over him whom she was in love with before. He thinks about his beloved who lives in the distant hill which can be seen from his place. The hill and his beloved are associated in his mind for when he looks at the hill, he thinks of his beloved. The terrain or landscape of Mizoram affords a panoramic view of various hills all at once. Therefore, this enables one to view many villages all at once. He addresses his beloved with the gentle voice as ‘Lenghermawi’. He tells her that he has never met anybody as captivating as her. In the second stanza he calls her, ‘Tuangtuah par’ (tree with bright scarlet blossoms). She has disappeared over the horizon. He believes that he never crosses her mind even when he visits her house to court her. This act of courting indicates the male competition for the hand of the young woman in which she is seen as the prize to be gained.

He misses her and begs the sun to come out so that he would be able to meet his beloved. Although he knows that she is not interested in marrying him, her captivating charms bind him like the roots of a species of parasitic fig tree because of which he will never escape nor cease to long for her till the day that he dies. The poet mentions that she is “skilled at pretending” and keeps him guessing as to whether she is interested in him or not and this guessing game makes him miserable. Although he knows that she does not intend to marry him, yet he cannot refrain from longing for her as he is deeply in love with her.

**Zirsangzela Hnamte (1952-2002)**

In the interview conducted by me on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2012, the Mizo writer Jeffrey-a Pa mentioned that he always believed that Zirsangzela had an idea about the one ideal woman for him whom he appears to have depicted in all of his love songs. He also mentioned that one of the first songs that Zirsangzela composed as a youth was Ainawni.

In the same interview, Zirsangzela's wife Lalhunchhungi Pachuau mentioned that Zirsangzela was by nature an introvert who shied away from social company. Prior to composing a song, he would be filled with a sense of lunglen or nostalgia. He began composing songs while he was staying with his family in Hnahthial village in Mizoram. One remarkable fact about the sense of Lunglen in Zirsangzela's life was that this feeling became the inspiration for his songs. Therefore, when he married Lalhunchhungi Pachuau, he almost entirely stopped composing songs, saying that he no longer needed to compose for the lunglen feeling that used to be his inspiration disappeared since he met the woman of his dreams in his wife.

He composed all his songs during the years spanning 1969-1999, and the majority of them were composed between the years 1973-1982. R. L. Thanmawia (Chuailo II 107) has observed that the best of Zirsangzela's songs were composed during his stay in Shillong and wonders if this inspiration can be attributed to the beauty of the land of Shillong, to his feeling of longing in being away from his home and all that was familiar to him, or to the fact that he has grown up and experienced the feeling of falling in love. The sense of Lunglen or longing and nostalgia that formed the basis for all his inspirations in the composition of his songs appeared to have subsided post 1982, for after that year he composed only a handful songs. Also, many Mizo songwriters or poets including Zirsangzela are found to have mentioned an invitation or call to the nonhuman living beings to pay them a visit which could denote the feeling of kinship that comes from a realization of being made by the same Maker or God and which feeling or realization, is in possession of the poets in particular.

Zirsangzela uses a number of similes in his songs. Mizo love songs usually make mention of young women and they are usually praised and bestowed with attention and are even given pseudo names in praise. Zirsangzela has written many songs that seem to talk about relationships between young men and women, the main source or spring from which he gets his inspiration can be said to be the feelings of longing, nostalgia or Lunglen which he experiences. This feeling of nostalgia or longing which is usually vague in nature, is the driving force of his inspiration.

### **Kar Hla Di (My beloved far away from me)**

The songwriter arrives at a village where he feels lost and left out. He compares his feelings to one who is “lost like a chicken.” In the Mizo villages chickens are usually let out in the open during the day and when evening arrives they are guided back into their coop. This feeling of being lost, in comparison to that of chickens, appears to be connected to the feeling of being away from the familiarity of one’s home. The comparison of his situation with that of a chicken is the use of a poetic simile which has been handed down from the traditional folk songs. In the traditional worldview, songs were a means of expression of personal emotions, feelings, and experiences. Since their socio-economic life was largely dictated by their natural environment, it was only natural that their forms of expression took into account the natural world. He sees other happy couples and feels left out, wondering if there will ever be a day when the woman he is courting will think of him. Thus, we can see that he is filled with a sense of longing for his beloved from whom he is separated by distance and time.

There is a sense of the passage of time throughout the entire song, that is, in terms of the time that he has spent away from his beloved, and also in terms of the time that he waits for in anticipation of the moment when he will finally get to meet or be reunited with the girl or young woman he is in love with. In the chorus he expresses his feeling of frustration while waiting for the day in which he will get to meet his beloved again and be united with her like the perfectly matched pieces of a gong set. Reference to a gong set is the use of a traditional poetic convention which has entered the poetic diction of Mizo songs and continues to be used till today although it no longer has any relevance in the present context of a modernized Mizoram. The gong set made of brass was a prized possession in the semi-nomadic community of the Mizo traditional society. In that society, when the villagers were set on migrating, they had to take along with them only those invaluable and indispensable material possessions and livestock. Since gongs could easily be carried along and were used to accompany songs in many of their rites and ceremonies, it was considered not only invaluable but as indispensable. The poet cannot fall asleep at night for the pain of separation from his beloved who has captivated his heart is too difficult for him to bear.

In the second stanza, he mentions that he climbs up on every hill to find a vantage point from which he can get to see the place where his beloved resides. He wishes that it were possible to fly like the eagle so that he could fly towards the mountain where he and his beloved used to



spend time together. In doing so, he hopes that his loneliness will be bearable then. When the songwriter thinks about his beloved, he thinks about her as part of a place, that is, he associates his beloved to the hills where she presently lives and where they happily spent time together. In saying that he climbs on many hills in order to be able to locate where her home is situated, it is clear that he identifies a particular hill with his beloved, and this sight offers him a sense of solace and comfort in his loneliness. His wish to be able to fly like the eagle to descend on the hill where he and his beloved used to live portrays his linking of place, hill or village to happy memories capable of giving him a sense of comfort so as to bear the pain of loneliness and separation. In the song, the songwriter does not clearly mention as to whether he and his beloved are still together, have parted ways or whether he is only a romantic who is besotted with the young woman who does not reciprocate his advances. Therefore, the reference made to the hill where he and his beloved both lived could also point to the fact that he and the young woman were merely members of the same village or town and were not romantically linked in particular.

The composer uses a simile, that is, the eagle in order to describe his desire for a means of alleviating the pain of his loneliness, and his inability to be with the woman he is in love with, whether physically or emotionally. This use of a simile is a literary convention in songwriting that has been passed on from the old songs of the traditional Mizo society. As mentioned earlier, we notice that the cultural imagination as represented by imageries used to portray the natural environment in songs has not essentially changed since the pre-Christian period. In this song, the writer portrays himself as being completely under the influence of the young woman. He expresses his sentiments in an impassioned manner and fervently proclaims the hold that her captivating charms have on him. The woman is shown to be in control in the songs. However, this power and control over the writer which the woman weilds is undercut by the fact that the song is the presentation and expression of the poet's voice, his thoughts and emotions.

### ***Ka Ring Lo Che (I cannot believe this of you)***

In the first stanza the songwriter says that his love for his beloved cannot seem to fade away despite the fact that they have parted ways. His love for her is so strong that even if she falls in love with another man, he still regarded himself as belonging to her completely. In the

chorus he says that even after his beloved has left the village, her gentle voice still remains in his heart. He remembers the nights that they spent together, happily laughing together like infants and believes that she will not be able to forget it either.

He keeps on searching for his beloved like the riakmaw bird searches for a place to rest at night<sup>3</sup>. This comparison with the riakmaw, a nocturnal bird suggests a sense of futility regarding his hopeless love for his beloved who has left him for another man. The *riakmaw* flies about from tree to tree in futility, attempting to find a place to stay for the night. This simile that uses a bird for comparison is in accordance with the poetic language that is a part of Mizo songs and is an inheritance from the old folk songs. The writer feels that there is no use of living when he can no longer be with her. He feels that his bed has become as cold as hail since the day that she left him. He addresses her as the one whom he shall never tire of seeing. He wants to have the courage and bravery to visit her village to see her. He feels that this longing and pining for his beloved will last for eternity and is steeped in misery for this feeling of longing keeps increasing in intensity. He wonders how she handled the matter of their separation. As for him, he is like a sick person and cannot stop crying like an infant for her captivating charm cannot seem to lose its hold over him. In this song, the woman or the beloved is portrayed as having the ability to captivate the poet to such an extent that he is reduced to misery, loneliness, and tears. Such is the power of the charm of the woman. Like the previous poem, we find a sense of distance separating the poet from the beloved.

### **Ainawni (One who is the ainawn flower)**

The composer has fallen in love with a young woman who is too young for his age. When he observes his natural surroundings, that is, the forest under the dreamy haze (romei), it soothes his eyes. He observes the trees in bloom and finds that they live the days of their prime together and addresses them as though they could understand him. He feels that he was born too early because the young woman whom he is in love with and whom he calls Ainawni (One who is like the ainawn flower) is in the prime of her youth while his youth has passed. In creating a name for her which draws comparison with the ainawn flower, he proclaims her beauty. In the poetic language of the Mizo songs we find that flowers represent all the good and positive things as

well as qualities and attributes of persons. This continued use of the common stock of metaphors and similes suggests, in a way, that the Mizo mindset or psyche has not really changed to incorporate new worldviews or perceptions about how one observes and takes the world into account.

In the second stanza, he laments the loss of time. He addresses time, asking why it did not make him handsome in order to be able to court his beloved Ainawni before it was too late. He asks it to think over the matter of calling back ten years in order to make him younger, and wonders if this was possible. He knows that this is the only way for him to get Ainawni to fall in love with him. At the same time, he seems to be fully aware of the futility of the situation for we find that he questions time, knowing that he will never get an answer.

In the last stanza, he is determined to keep on pursuing her and expresses hope that if he keeps on searching, one day, he might find the same spirit which Thasiama met and was in a relationship, with in order to ask for a boom to be able to make Ainawni his beloved.<sup>4</sup> He knows that he is not handsome but his love for her is such that he will wait and hope endlessly to make her his. He repeats the old Mizo saying, “Is hope or the Run river longer?” to imply the tenacity of his hope of winning her.

### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the development of various types of songs and their role in the confrontation and clashes between the traditional Mizo culture and religion and the new Christian religion, see L. H. Lalpekhluva. *Contextual Christology: A Tribal Perspective*. (Delhi: Ashish Amos of Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (ISPCK), 2007)

<sup>2</sup> C. Lalbiaknema. Kan Chenna Mizoram. (Aizawl: The Synod Literature and Publication Board, 1995) 97-98: Zo Chhum: According to C. Lalbiaknema, such types of clouds appear at various times but especially during the autumn (*favang*) season in Mizoram. Traditional Mizo elders are of the opinion that when the *Zo Chhum* clouds appear, tigers tend to bolder and can prove to be a nuisance to humans. They usually appear on hills that are very high and are often mentioned in songs in comparison with the miserable state of a person who faces problems and troubles in matters concerning love and relationships.

<sup>3</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). Dictionary of the Lushai Language. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 385. Riak maw, n. the name of a bird, the call of which sounds like ‘Riak maw?’ (May I stay here tonight?), but which can never find a tree clean enough for it to stay in.

<sup>4</sup> James Herbert Lorrain. (Pu Buanga). Dictionary of the Lushai Language. (1<sup>st</sup> pub. 1940. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 449. Thasiama, n. the name of the Lushai Methuselah famed for his long life. It is said that he eventually died of disgust at what he considered (sic.) the retrograde conduct of the rising generations around him.

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**CHAPTER V**  
**CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Robert J. Buell is of the opinion that concern about the natural environment is a moral and ethical matter. He says, "Questions about preservation of the natural environment are not just technical questions; they are also about what defines the good and moral life, and about the essence and the meaning of our existence. Hence, these are not just academic or technical matters, to be settled in elite dialogues between experts. These are fundamental questions of defining what our human community is and how it should exist"(qtd. in Clark 1). Environmental issues have become a topic of concern for artists and academics. This has given rise within colleges and universities to cross-disciplinary environmental studies programmes. Buell believes that many non-humanists would agree more readily than doubt-prone humanists that "issues of vision, value, culture, and imagination are keys to today's environmental crises at least as fundamental as scientific research, technological know-how, and legislative regulation." Also, he opined that if those of us who come under the ambit of humanities feel tokenized as players in the environmental dialogue, both within the university and without, it may be because of "our own internal disputes and uncertainties about role, method, and voice than because of any stigma attached to the "impracticality" of the humanities either within the academe or the wider world" (Buell 5).

According to Timothy Morton (3-5), ecocriticism attempts to unsettle inherited modes of thinking and perception that have failed to take the degradation of the environment into consideration. He developed a mode of ecological thinking which he believes, is crucial for the survival of the planet. This is quite different from previous assumptions about it, that is, as having to do with the sciences of ecology. According to him, it includes "art, philosophy, literature, music, and culture" as well for it includes all the ways in which we imagine living together. Ecological thought was not available to "nonmodern humans" in the richness of its depth. It can be found everywhere for it is "interconnectedness in the fullest and deepest sense." He even goes so far as to say that since ecology is about coexistence and since humans need each other as much as they need their environment, each human being is the other's environment. He is of the opinion that the continued survival of humans on this planet depends on thinking past

nature. That is, nature as something which is “over yonder.” However, thinking as a whole, which therefore includes ecological thinking perceives nature as “a reified thing in the distance, under the sidewalk, on the other side where the grass is always greener, preferably in the mountains, in the wild.”

According to Morton, the modern era of the western world which began around the late eighteenth century did not witness an attempt to attain the ecological thinking. Instead, it held onto a “ghost of “Nature” ” which impeded the development of the ecological thought and which promoted the idea of a time when there was no industry or technology. However, with the contemporary global system of capitalism and consumerism, he believes that the time has come to let go of this nonexistent relic of the past that is nature which is seen as an ideal image which lies somewhere away from us in pristine wilderness (Morton 3-5). He implies that this ecological mode of thinking is all-inclusive and all-pervasive and all the more difficult for it for as he says, “it involves becoming open, radically open—open forever, without the possibility of closing again.” Morton criticizes the environmental thinking which condemns “Cartesianism” as engendering the dualism separating the world into dualistic components such as that of the mind and body, the self and the world, and the subject and the object. Since the environment is in some measure, a matter of perception, the study of art forms are useful for helping to question reality (Ibid 8).

With regard to the study of the cultural assumptions about the natural environment and its representation in literature, the concern for attribution of moral value to it as well as calling for the expansion of human consciousness to lead to the formation of an ethic of care towards the same, the present study conducted on the selected Mizo folktales and contemporary songs is such that is not so much prescriptive, as it is diagnostic. The study of the representation of the natural world in the selected works has shown that in the course of the twentieth century from which period the songs have been selected, there has been a predominant cultural imagery consisting mostly of nature images. This cultural imagery is in the form of stock images that represent the land of Mizoram as composed of rolling hills and majestic mountains around which one could observe the varied and magnificent cloud formations, dense and verdant forests where all varieties of animals, birds, insects, plants and trees can be found and of the hill sides where jhoom cultivation was practiced. This imagery induces feelings of nostalgia and longing and



bestows a deep sense of identification with the land. However, the fact that the jhoom fields which symbolize the practice of jhoom cultivation so destructive to the soil and biodiversity of the land form a part of the cultural imagery comes as no surprise and yet, this somehow reveals a distancing in the Mizo cultural attitude and assumptions when it comes to the degradation and depletion of natural resources of the land.

As has been mentioned by Mangkhosat Kipgen in the past the land of Mizoram was remote from other centres of human civilization and from the principal Asian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. As a result of this, there was barely any contact with the outsiders so this accounts for the lack of any external influence upon the Mizo culture<sup>1</sup>.

The only area in which there appears to be influence from outside is manifested in their later material culture such as “agricultural implements, personal ornaments, a variety of musical instruments and weapons of war” (Kipgen 54). Weapons in the form of flint-lock muskets, many of which were manufactured in Europe, were obtained from Burma and Chittagong. This acquisition of guns made a significant contribution to their migration towards the west and the north until their migration was finally put to a stop by the British during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The introduction of arms made the Mizo more formidable in terms of hunting and warfare. This greatly increased the potential for men to achieve the most coveted *thangchhuah* status. However, these foreign goods did not affect the Mizo culture but were instead indigenized. In fact, such new acquisitions helped enrich the traditional culture. (Kipgen 55) The introduction of Christianity to Mizoram with the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1894 brought about transformations in Mizo culture and society as never before. It is remarkable to note that, for a people who had hitherto lived in near-complete isolation from influence by other cultures from outside, the arrival of Christianity brought about profound changes in the cultural make-up to such an extent that many unpleasant aspects of the old and traditional ways of life such as superstitions and slavery were done away with to embrace the new Christian faith.

The result was that within the span of a century, almost the entire population of Mizoram had converted to Christianity. However, this new transformation was not without its fair share of unwanted elements. The Christian missionaries introduced education into Mizoram since the British administration granted them the authority to do so upon noticing their efficiency in spreading education to the Mizos. With education and the advent of the British administration, the Mizo society was inevitably geared towards modernization and the rapid transformations that

such a change entails. Since the old ways of life were abandoned in order to embrace the new Christian faith and worldview, those elements among the old ways of thinking and the traditions, customs and moral codes upheld in the traditional Mizo society but which went against the dictates of their new faith, were abandoned. In the traditional Mizo society, the natural environment, their religion and their village community were closely interlinked and played a very important role in their lives and it can be said that their entire worldview was structured by these. Upon a closer look, it could be seen that the culture, customs and ceremonies of the Mizos were geared towards fostering better relations among the members of the village community and to ensure their collective survival in a land and an environment that posed a constant threat to their survival in various forms. Their agricultural practice of jhooming cultivation was greatly detrimental to the soil and swiftly depleted its productivity such that a field that had been used for jhooming would no longer be productive after a span of four to seven years. The rugged and thickly forested terrain of the sides of the hills where jhooms were situated did not allow for alternative methods of cultivation to be employed. Also, the forests had left an indelible mark in the mindset of the Mizos with the potential for the dangers that it posed. Beyond the village and the jhooms lay the forests where dangerous wild animals lurked in wait for their prey and where enemies could possibly lie in wait, poised for a raid on their villages. It was also the haunt of unknown and strange spirits which the Mizos were in great fear of displeasing, since they had the ability to inflict harm on humans.

When the British administrators and after them, the missionaries first arrived in Mizoram, their initial impression of the religion of the Mizos was that of animism or the worship of spirits embodied in physical forms in the natural environment. They understood that this form of worship was to placate and appease the anger of the spirits which would manifest by means of the harm inflicted on humans through sickness. Upon closer inspection, it was realized that the Mizo practice of religion involved the indigenous belief in and worship of one supreme god called Pathian and several other huais or beings that were believed to inhabit all elements of nature, that is, trees, rivers, stones and so on.

B. Lalthangliana is of the opinion that the traditional Mizo beliefs appears to have been formed collectively by the members of the village community in accordance with their way of life and the functioning of their society that ensured their collective survival. At the core of their beliefs lies the attempt to ensure the collective survival of the entire community by means of the

respect and glory accorded and granted to the brave, selfless and *tlawmngai* men who were capable of protecting them (44).

Hunting had nothing to do with the worship of god in their society except as a means towards an end, that is, for food, and the attainment of a place in paradise. The *thangchhuah* or those men who managed to achieve this respected status by means of hunting the required number of animals were believed to have earned a place for themselves in paradise. This shows the importance and consideration bestowed on those men who were a great source of comfort to the village community because of their bravery. In such a society, their belief and value systems can be attributed as the reasons behind the spirit of competition among the villagers in terms of competing with each other to earn praise for exhibiting qualities of industriousness and *tlawmngaihna*. The prospect of earning a place in paradise where one could finally rest and be at peace without the threat of enemies and have ample food without having to work, proved to be an excellent incentive towards achieving such an end. Thus, the all-pervasive nature of such beliefs in the traditional Mizo society is understandable and this reveals the strong influence of the environment or of place on the people living in that place (Saiithanga 16).

According to B. Lalthangliana, during the course of their migration they were believed to have settled in the Kabaw valley for sometime around 800-850 A.D., wherein their culture and way of life was by then relatively advanced. However, they eventually migrated westwards towards the rugged Chin Hills which he believed to have been caused by the advancing Shan people who drove them out. But for whatever reason, be it for natural catastrophes, superstitious beliefs, or stronger enemies, their culture received a setback. He believed that this regressive change was brought about by the rugged hilly region to which they had migrated and which had to be tirelessly worked upon in order to produce food for survival (26). The difficult terrain of the highland consisting of steep mountains and deep gorges made it difficult to find land large enough to provide sustenance for the entire population. This led to the breaking up of the populations clan-wise into smaller groups who began living in separate villages which ultimately led to their isolation from each other. Feelings of kinship were replaced by those of clan loyalty and this inevitably led to the beginning of the inter-clans wars around the time of their stay in the Chin Hills. They usually fought over jhoom lands. Land was seen as a precious commodity worth fighting for in the name of survival. At the same time, the difficult terrain itself probably led to their conception of it as something that must be conquered in order to ensure one's

survival (Kipgen 42). Thus, the powerful influence of the environment or place on the psyche and culture, customs, economic practices and belief systems of a people, especially the Mizos who had no know-how or technology to inflict radical changes upon their natural environment for their benefit, was justified and reasonable.

With the radical changes that came about in the twentieth century due to modernization that was ushered in by the British and the Christian missionaries, songs continued to play a very important role in influencing the conversion process. This can be attributed to the emotional element in their nature, outlook and culture which is aptly termed *Lunglen*, that is, nostalgia. Thus, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, it (songs and lunglen) was the battleground upon which the new Christians and those for the old ways of life considered as heathen, was fought. Those among them who felt nostalgic for their traditional ways of life, culture, customs and practices were forbidden by the leaders of the new Christian faith to even sing the traditional songs, upon threat of excommunication. The revival of the secular song 'Puma Zai' (Puma Song) movement in 1908 drew the attention and interest of many of the new Mizos converts who were still nostalgic for their old ways of life and the traditional Mizo songs. They pined for only such songs that were able to impact and draw out their emotional and nostalgic nature.

Then came about the succession of revivals in the Christian church in the first half of the twentieth century during which the indigenization of the new Christian faith consolidated its position in the life of the Mizos. The most prominent form of indigenization was in the form of Christian songs composed by Mizo songwriters who helped instill new life into the songs by bringing in a Mizo cultural aspect to the songs in terms of both the tune and the lyrics. A remarkable feature of such new religious songs was that it evolved into a new genre of songs which did not resemble the traditional Mizo songs nor the stilted translations of the Western Christian Hymns, but had a unique identity that fused both these traditions. With their appeal, such songs were instrumental in helping spread the new Christian faith at a rapid rate throughout Mizoram. This goes to show that the traditional Mizo values, ethos and culture have remained a part of the Mizo psyche to a great extent. The fact that there was only one outside influence upon Mizo culture by Christianity that brought in immense change. With modernization, the Christian faith that brought about national unity to a great extent, education which enabled the consolidation of linguistic unity, government jobs and funds from the central government, the

monetary system of economic exchange coupled with the “shifting cultivation, uncontrolled fires, unregulated fellings and land allotment to individuals” (Environment and Forest Department), the rapid changes in the natural environment, all of which occurred in the twentieth century, caused a change in the attitude of Mizos towards the natural environment.

The forests which had hitherto been regarded as the realm of the fearful and the unknown and which posed a constant threat to the peace and safety of the village community was now no longer considered so. However, the Mizo cultural outlook or world view which is inherently patriarchal has been found to remain more or less the same as it was in the old Mizo society. This is based on the fact that just like in the traditional society, women cannot hope to attain the highest positions in the religious and political institutions of the society yet. Therefore, if the basic perceptions of the society has not changed and if the cultural values, ethics, and morals have not changed, it leaves one to wonder whether the cultural attitude and assumptions about the natural environment would really have undergone a radical change and transformation either.

In the traditional society, the Chiefs were responsible for regulating the use of the land for jhoom cultivation to ensure that indiscriminate use and depletion of natural resources was prevented. Their indigenous beliefs and the desire to attain a status of respect in the society gave them enough impetus to hunt wild animals in large numbers. Perhaps the abolition of the rule of the Chiefs in 1954 to give way to a democratic form of governance created a void which led to the formation of a spirit of freedom to do as one pleased. However, it is difficult to point to this event as the sole reason for a sudden and drastic change in attitude towards the natural environment. Perhaps Christianity, modernization, education and growing freedom from dependence upon agriculture alone for sustenance, had something to do with this change in attitude as well. Nonetheless, one cannot ignore the fact that since the cultural values and the patriarchal structure of society has remained more or less the same from the pre-Christian to the post-Christian era, it could be that assumptions, attitude and perceptions about the natural environment too have remained the same at a basic level. The present day blatant disregard for the attrition of the biodiversity and the natural environment could only be manifestations of this cultural attitude of old which has not really changed.

From a study of the folktales, we have understood aspects of the functioning of the old traditional Mizo society which was a patriarchal construct and in which their belief systems and

cultural value systems dictated the way in which they lived. Such systems dictated their manner of living in which their natural environment was mostly seen as containing potential sources of danger in the form of wild animals, unknown spirits and the threat of a raids from enemies. Their belief system also dictated the killing of wild animals in order to attain the thangchhuah status which ensured a place in paradise. For the practice of agriculture to ensure their survival, jhoom cultivation was carried out which necessitated the burning of large tracts of forest land.

Therefore it can be seen that their way of life as well as their belief and cultural value systems were anthropocentric to a great extent. A man could prove himself in society through acts that involved the destruction of nature and the subjugation of women. He could prove that he was able to provide for his family. He also proved his supremacy as the head of the family by asserting his power over the women even to the extent of refraining from showing emotions to his wife. His ability to protect the villagers was shown in the prowess exhibited by him in the matter of killing wild animals and enemies. Those among the female characters in the folktales that are portrayed as assertive and defiant to patriarchal authority were seen to endanger not only their own lives, but that of the other villagers as well. This can be seen in the tale of Chawngchilhi, Ngaitei, and Sichangneii.

The poetic imagery and language of present day community songs, and love songs undertaken for study here, strongly retain influences from the old folk songs of the pre-Christian era. Some of these influences can be seen in the repeated use of imagery and metaphors drawn from nature such as the comparison of a woman's beauty to the different variety of flowers found in the land. Then again, to express the concept of lunglen or nostalgia in connection with a sense of place and the environment, we find the predominance of imagery linked with hills, forests, cloud formations and so on. There are also several evidences of the use of culturally specific images such as gong sets and jhoom fields. Hence it can be seen that though aesthetic appreciation of nature and the environment is a strong cultural component in the selected tales and songs, when taken in the light of ecocritical study, we find a marked lack of awareness of appreciation of nature for itself, beyond its utility and provision of sustenance to man. The repeated reference to jhoom fields which arouse strong feelings of nostalgia and longing in the writer proves ironical when seen in the light of its negative impact on the environment.

### END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kipgen mentions that there could be one area in which Buddhism has managed to have an influence upon the Mizo culture. This was in the matter of rebirth which is also a Hindu concept as well. Evidence that the Mizos held onto this belief long before they came in contact with the Hindus suggests that this concept is Buddhist in origin. However, Kipgen believes that this belief should not be considered as having a significant influence upon Mizo culture because it did not develop into a doctrine of karma nor did it play an important role in the traditional religion of the Mizos. For further details, see Mangkhosat Kipgen. *Christianity and Mizo Culture: The Encounter Between Christianity and Zo Culture in Mizoram*. Mizoram: The Mizo Theological Conference, Jorhat, 1996.

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## ANNEXURE I: TRANSLATION OF THE SELECTED MIZO FOLKTALES (SUMMARIZED)

### KUNGAWRHI

In the Mizo folktale '*Kungawrhi*', Kungawrhi emerged from a swollen and sore wound in her father's thumb when he had injured himself during an attempt to split a cane or bamboo for tying and weaving purposes. When she was born, her parents fed her with a half a grain of millet. Then they kept on increasing the rations till she grew up to become a very beautiful young woman. When she would play in the evening with other young women, all the young men used to look at her from the platform in front of their houses. Each house has an outside verandah which is used for weaving, cotton processing, drying of rice, or just passing the time of day. Among them was a *Keimi* (tiger-man), a person who could transform into a tiger upon will. He fell in love with her but despaired over the fact that he could find no way of getting her to fall in love with and marry him. He finally came up with a plan to get her married to him. He took Kungawrhi's footprint from the mud, wrapped it, and heated it on the shelf over the fire. She began to fall sick and could not recover. Everybody in the village visited her, including the *Keimi* young man. Whenever he went, he would take the footprint from its place above the hearth and would leave it to cool so that Kungawrhi appeared to get better whenever he went to visit her. She noticed this and told her father but he was incredulous about it. Her family offered all the required sacrifices for her to get better but it was of no avail. Finally her father declared that he would give her hand in marriage to anyone who could heal her.

The tiger-man offered to make an attempt to help her recover from her illness. He took the footprint off from above the hearth and soon enough she recovered. Nobody in the village realized that he was a tiger-man and so they were married. After sometime, he decided to take her to his village. In a place not too far away from their village there was a large river which happened to be flooded. So he told Kungawrhi that he will turn into a tiger and instructed her to hold his tail while they crossed the river. While they were doing so an old lady saw them, ran home to the village and stumbled into Kungawrhi's father's house in fear. She could not speak at first but after they gave her rice water she was able to speak and told them what she saw and

when Kungawrhi's father realized that he had given his daughter away in marriage to a tiger-man, he was very worried and then and there, proclaimed that he would give his daughter's hand in marriage to any man who could rescue her.

Two brave brothers Phawthira and his younger brother Hrangchala of the village offered to rescue her. Kungawrhi's father fed them rice beer and meat after which they went on their way until they reached Kungawrhi's house. Her husband had gone into the jungle to procure food. She was afraid for their life therefore she hid them in a rolled mat on the shelf above the fire before her husband came home. When the tiger-man came home he could smell human flesh and questioned his wife about it. She replied that she was human and therefore it was only natural that he could smell human flesh. Hrangchala was terrified and began to shed tears. Kungawrhi's husband noticed the tears and made a remark about it but she only replied daring him to eat her. The next day, her husband told her to pack food saying that he was going away for ten nights. However, he came back in the evening and in this manner he fooled her for two to three days. One morning, he told her to pack food for a one night stay and left. Kungawrhi knew that he would usually go away for a long time whenever he mentioned such plans. As soon as her husband went away, Kungawrhi, Phawthira and Hrangchala escaped taking along with them seeds of fire, water, thorns and stones.

When the tiger-man came home from his hunt he found that the door was locked. He asked Kungawrhi to open the door. Meanwhile, the cat which they had left behind and who was spinning the thread and impersonating her, refused to open the door. When the tiger-man's patience was tested to the limit, he pounced on the door and it crashed open. He could see that there was nobody in the house since the cat had escaped into a hole on the post supporting the ridge pole of the house. He was enraged and in despair. He looked out the door and saw Kungawrhi's earring glistening in the far distance and immediately rushed in that direction.

Meanwhile, in heaven, the gods, husband and wife were busy checking each other's hair for lice when suddenly the husband gave a sudden laugh. The wife asked whether it was because he saw anything inappropriate and obscene in her manner of sitting. He replied saying that he was laughing because he saw that the humans being chased by a tiger needed much help and found this situation funny. Upon his wife's suggestion he decided to help the humans by telling them that the tiger was closing in on them and therefore to throw down the fire seed

immediately. When they did so the tiger could no longer reach them, and the time it took for a person to go to the jhoom field passed before the tiger began to catch up on them again. Then the god told them to throw the water seed, and it took the tiger the same amount of time to catch up with them. Then as the tiger began to gain on them, the god told them to throw the thorn seed which gave them the same duration of time as before after which the tiger gained on them again, until they threw down the stone seed and their store of seeds was finally exhausted.

When they realized that they no longer had any seed left to throw they began to despair. However, Phawthira came up with a plan to lie in wait for the tiger among the reeds nearby and to ambush it as it passed by. He instructed the others to hide on the side of the road. The tiger finally came along and Phawthira killed it with a dao (a Mizo chopper). Then all three of them decided to rest for the night at that place since it was too late to go on their way. The place happened to be the crossroads for *khuavangs* (fairies or spirits). As the darkness descended the fairies came to the place and enquired as to who was staying at their place. Phawthira responded bravely saying that it was Phawthira and Hrangchala who had brutally killed a tiger among the reeds. When the fairies heard his voice they responded with fear remarking that it was the voice of a brave one. As a result, they were afraid to come any closer.

Phawthira and Hrangchala decided to take turns in keeping watch all through the night. For the entire length of the night the fairies kept asking him the same question and Phawthira responded in the same manner till finally, when it was nearing the break of day, Phawthira asked Hrangchala to keep watch in turn for he was sleepy and could no longer keep awake. The fairies came again to pose the same question they had asked Phawthira all night to Hrangchala. However, Hrangchala was filled with fear, and gave the same answer as Phawthira but in a fearful tone. The fairies recognized the tone of fear and remarked that it was the voice of a coward. They came closer and taking Kungawrhi away, disappeared with her.

When Phawthira awoke from his slumber he noticed that Kungawrhi was missing. Hrangchala told him that the spirits had taken her away. When Phawthira asked why Hrangchala did not wake him up he gave an excuse saying that he tried to do so but was unsuccessful. Both of them were very worried about Kungawrhi and so they went near the reeds, pulled at it and saw that underneath the ground there was the village of the fairies. They climbed inside and Phawthira shouted at them and threatened them that if they refused to release Kungawrhi he

would throw down his comb. The fairies dared him to do so and so Phawthira threw down his comb and one street of their village was destroyed. He threatened them again with his hair-pin and threw it down in the same manner, destroying another street in their village. They began to fear for the safety of their village and therefore proceeded to whiten their princess and sent her up but Phawthira refused to be placated and threw down the princess against the western wall of the village. He then threatened to throw down his turban.

Some villagers suggested that Kungawrhi be returned for fear that there will be a landslide and the entire village would slip away. Then they smeared soot all over her and released her. Phawthira applied some spit on her forehead and wiped it clean to prove that it really was Kungawrhi. The only route from the fairy village to the outside world was by means of a thick woody creeper. Hrangchala and Kungawrhi climbed out first and before Phawthira could reach the top, Hrangchala cut the rope and Phawthira was stuck in that place. Hrangchala and Kungawrhi returned to the village and were married with great celebrations. Since Kungawrhi's parents were old, they made her and her husband rule in their place.

Stuck in the village of the fairies, Phawthira had no means of escape and had no other option but to live there. So it was that he got himself a wife who bore him two to three children. He also planted the seed of the thick woody creeper which had formerly been used to climb out of the village. The creeper grew till it reached the surface once again. He decided to escape but whenever he would climb up the creeper his children would enquire as to where he was going and would pester him to take them along. After sometime, he made a plan to escape. He boiled an egg and instructed his children to call him only when it was fully boiled but then it did not take long for the egg to boil. The next time round, he boiled a stone used for grinding salt and instructed his children to keep an eye on it. They kept prodding and poking it but even after a long time it was as hard as ever and could not be cooked and so Phawthira was able to climb out.

He returned to the village and found that Kungawrhi and her husband were giving a feast in order to attain the thangchhuah status. Both husband and wife were riding on a drum. Phawthira went up to Hrangchala and cut him into three pieces. The villagers were shocked and made an attempt to kill him immediately but he told them to refrain from doing so until he had finished his story. When the villagers heard his account of the events they believed him. Finally, Phawthira and Kungawrhi lived together as rulers of the village.

## **SICHANGNEII**

The folktale Sichangneii opens with the description of the life of a man who is a divorcee. He would regularly go to the river to fetch water every morning, but someone always reached before he did and muddied the water. He never found out who it was till one day he was informed by an old lady that it was Sichangneii and her sister who came down from heaven to take a bath at the pool from which he drew water. She suggested that if he should be able to catch one of them, she would prove to be a very good catch for a wife since they were very beautiful. She also mentioned that should he decide to catch them he should do so from their back because if he came face to face with them, their beauty would dazzle him and it would be very difficult for him to capture them. The next morning he set out to catch them and when he saw them, he was captivated by their beauty. He made an attempt to catch them from the front and missed as they were startled and flew away. The next morning, he managed to catch the elder sister *Sichangneii* and took her home. He removed her wings and the long feathers of her tail and hid them in a cooking vessel which he then placed on the shelf above the fireplace.

They were married and in time had many good sons, all seven of them. Their names were Kaptheia (meaning ‘One skilled at shooting’), Dotheia (meaning ‘One skilled at supporting’), Haitheia (meaning ‘One skilled at digging or uncovering’), Chhintheia (meaning ‘One skilled at covering’), Mantheia (meaning ‘One skilled at catching’), and the youngest was called Tlumtea. Sichangneii and her husband had a jhoom field but their sons were many and were born within short intervals of each other due to which both husband and wife could never go to the jhoom field together, for one had to remain behind to take care of the children.

Whenever it was their father’s turn to take care of the children at home, he would take out Sichangneii’s wings and the long feathers of her tail and entertain the children with it by placing it on their heads and watching them dance with it. But whenever it was their mother’s turn to take care of them, they would do nothing all day long. Their father had warned them not to tell their mother about the feathers, telling them that doing so will result in their mother leaving all of them. However, one day while their mother was minding them, Tlumtea mentioned that they were all very happy whenever it was their father’s turn to mind them for they would dance with

feathers. The elder brothers tried their best to prevent Tlumtea from disclosing the location of the said feathers, saying that Tlumtea was lying. But it was of no avail. Tlumtea revealed everything to his mother. She then put on her wings and feathers and flew away to heaven.

When their father returned and learned about the incident he was devastated. He decided to smash his testicles in grief. His sons advised him against it, asking him as to how they would live with both their parents gone. But the youngest one Tlumtea encouraged him. Finally, he smashed both his testicles and died in great pain much to the amusement of Tlumtea. In their despair, they asked Entheia to look around and search for their mother's whereabouts. He saw their mother pounding and husking rice in heaven. Then Kaptheia shot an arrow right next to their mother's mortar. She saw it and dropped a coarse rope down to earth so that all of them were able to climb up. In their mother's home, there was a maternal uncle who not only hated them with a vengeance but was also a cannibal. The man accompanied them when they went to work in the jhoom fields and came up with a plan to kill them all by crushing them under a large tree. He chopped a tree till it was on the verge of falling after which he called the brothers together to have lunch under the same tree. As soon as they began eating he made an excuse to walk away and began chopping at the tree till it fell. The brothers asked Dotheia to hold up the tree and support it while Haitheia began digging the ground, so they were saved. Their uncle was surprised to find them safe and sound.

On another day at the jhoom field, he invited them to stay and have lunch while he went to the bottom of the jhoom field to catch crabs. When he reached the bottom of the field he set fire to it. But the brothers asked Haitheia to dig a hole in the ground large enough to hold them, then Chhintheia covered the hole and they were safe again. When their uncle came round to where he imagined he would find their remains, he was surprised to find that they were still alive. When they reached home, they related the events to their mother who was very concerned about their safety since she was aware that her brother was a cannibal. She requested them to return to earth and advised them to set traps on seven hills and so they returned to earth.

When they returned to earth they set the traps as advised and swiftly caught all kinds of animals. One day they came home and sat around together saddened that their parents were not with them to share all the meat they had caught in the traps. Sunk in nostalgia, they looked up to where their mother was, and at that moment their mother was in the middle of winnowing the

husk of grains which caused them to become blind. They continued to collect the meat from the traps and distribute it among themselves. But whenever they were distributing among each other, a *chawm* (a female evil spirit) would come along and hold out her hands because of which each of them began to perceive that he did not receive the share that was his due. Tlumtea offered to distribute and whenever he was about to place meat on someone's outstretched hands he would ask whose hand it was. When he came to the evil spirit, he did not receive a reply and therefore he suddenly grabbed her, lifted her up and dashed her against a rock. Her brain was smashed and splashed onto Tlumtea's eyes and his eyesight was slightly restored. When he realized that this restored his eyesight he smeared it all over his eyes and his sight was restored. His brothers did the same and got back their eyesight.

After this, they began to have a jhoom field. They would stay in the field during the weeding season taking turns at cooking the meals. The eldest Kaptheia was the first to cook and when he prepared the food, the evil spirit would arrive and threaten him to exchange his food for his safety. This happened in turn for the other brothers as well except when it came to Tlumtea. He was enraged over the fact that whenever one of his brothers was assigned the duty of cooking food for the rest, it was never done because of which the brothers had to wait in hunger when they began cooking the food upon returning. But whenever he enquired as to the reason the brothers told him that he will learn of it someday. Finally, when his turn came, he cooked the food and in the meanwhile, attempted to make a large box out of bamboo. When the evil spirit came and threatened him and asked about the purpose of the large box he mentioned that it was for a very large cock her size and suggested that if she could fit in it the cock too would fit. The evil spirit entered the box and was trapped by Tlumtea who threatened to have her taken to the village where children would play with her. She then offered to bestow gifts for him and his brothers. She gave them gifts such as a dao, axe, sickle and spear for each as well as a gun, a wife and a mithun for each.

When his brothers came home in the evening and were about to sit down to eat, Tlumtea asked them whether they would prefer to eat now or to distribute the gifts among themselves. They chose the latter and when this was done, the time came for the distribution of wives among themselves, Tlumtea smeared a dark substance on the face of the woman he wanted for a wife. When all the brothers had finished choosing he challenged them as to whose wife was the fairest

of them all. He proceeded to wash his wife's face and she turned out to be the fairest among the wives. Later, the brothers went to claim their mithuns and while they were gone the evil spirit came near their house and asked the wives of the Brothers to provide her with water. When the wife of the eldest brother went she ate her up. In this manner, she devoured all the wives except for Tlumtea's wife who was in the throes of childbirth at that moment. She gave birth and then went to give water to the evil spirit who did not eat her but instead grabbed her by the hands and took her home. As for the infant which she left behind, it managed to keep alive and grew up with hardly anyone to take care of it.

When the infant Fahrahtea grew up, he wanted to search for his mother. He wanted to take a sheet of money with him in his search for his mother. He kept searching and finally found under the hearth. He went on his way and reached a village. The Chief asked him where he was going, and when the boy told him that he was in search of someone who could enable him to transform into a rat. The king offered to do grant him his wish in exchange for the sheet of money. He observed the place where the king placed the money, that is, in the basket meant for keeping treasured possessions and at night he transformed into a mouse and stole it back. He did the same thing in two other villages where one king enabled him to transform into an eagle and the other, into an adorable baby.

The next morning, he transformed into an eagle and flew towards his mother's village. He was thus reunited with his mother who was still imprisoned by the evil spirit. As instructed by Fahrahtea, his mother lied to the evil spirit and said that her creator was the fish in the river and upon hearing of it, the evil spirit replied saying that her creator was the pigeon with the red wing. Thinking that Fahrahtea's mother was saying the truth, the evil spirit went to the river and squeezed and bruised the fish. The next day, Fahrahtea transformed into an eagle and went in search of the pigeon with the red wing till he found it in the village in heaven. He finally managed to capture it and flew down with it and landed on the roof of the house where his mother was held captive. When the evil spirit saw that her creator was captured, she was enraged and began attacking Fahrahtea's mother but as instructed by his mother, he began to break the bones of the pigeon till he finally broke its neck, at which instant, the evil spirit died. In this manner, Fahrahtea and his mother were happily reunited.



## NGAITEII

We are introduced to the folktale *Ngaiteii* with a scene at the jhoom where Ngaiteii and her grandmother are digging for yams. At the bottom of their jhoom was a deep pool where Ngaiteii's father had drowned. The pool was believed to be haunted by his spirit. Ngaiteii's grandmother knew of this but did not tell her. So while at the jhoom one day, it was a very hot day and both Ngaiteii and her grandmother were tired and exhausted. She kept feeling thirsty and soon enough the water they had carried was finished. Her grandmother would refill it again and again. But Ngaiteii's kept getting thirsty again and so her grandmother finally decided to send Ngaiteii to fetch water from the deep pool but sent her off with a warning to refrain from uttering any expression of shock or surprise.

When Ngaiteii reached the deep pool she saw that it was dark and clear. She was so amazed at the sight that she forgot her grandmother's warning and uttered the word "Oh". Immediately, her father's spirit took her away. Her grandmother who had been waiting for her began to worry for she was taking such a long time to come back. She went to the deep pool and could see no sign of Ngaiteii which worried and distressed her. During her search, she came upon a pair of red deer and asked them whether they saw Ngaiteii. They replied,

"Indeed we saw her,

On the other side of the *Tuipui* river, on the other side of the *Tiau* river;

Where Ngaiteii's father has taken her.'

Ngaiteii's grandmother hurried along her way and soon came upon a pair of partridges and asked them as well. They replied in the same manner as the red deer and she left them in a hurry she soon arrived at the great pool. She could see Ngaiteii cooking and told her that she had come to fetch her. Ngaiteii was overjoyed upon seeing her grandmother. She enquired about the whereabouts of her father and came to learn that he was away at his jhoom and would be back in the evening. When her father came back in the evening, he took the form of a snake to enter his home and changed into human form soon after. Ngaiteii's grandmother then asked for his permission to take Ngaiteii home. He agreed on the condition that she would be returned to him soon. Ngaiteii and her grandmother happily left for their village. Back in the village, Ngaiteii

dreaded the prospect of having to return to a lonely life back at her father's house. Therefore she delayed her return.

Since Ngaiteii was taking such a long time to return, her father began losing his patience and made the waters of the pool rise to submerge her village. The people of the village suggested that her possessions be thrown into the waters to appease her father. They began by throwing down her cloth. The waters subsided for sometime but began to rise again after a short while. Her comb was thrown in next and as earlier, the waters receded for sometime but soon rose again. They threw down her bangles, necklace, basket, treasure chest, implements for weaving cloth and all her other possessions but it was of no avail. Finally, the terrified villagers decided that as reluctant as they were to surrender Ngaiteii to the waters, she must be sacrificed to save their village from imminent drowning. As soon as they did so, the waters retreated and the village was saved. The people of the village deeply lamented the loss of Ngaiteii and mourned their loss with a song:

*Ngaite hip,*

So you had to suffer the strong winds of the south;

So you had to suffer the torrential downpour,

*Ngaite hip.*

## **CHAWNGCHILHI**

*Chawngchilhi* is the folktale about a young woman, Chawngchilhi who fell in love with a snake and bore children by it. In the tale, a man had two lovely daughters. The elder one was called Chawngchilhi but the younger one was still a child who was old enough to fetch firewood. One year there was an unusual phenomenon in their jhoom. There were many animals and birds near their jhoom. Therefore, Chawngchilhi and her sister had to regularly mind the jhoom to prevent the animals and birds from feeding on their crop. Their father was pleased that they could work in his stead and so he packed rice and meat for their daily lunch. As they spent their

days in the jhoom Chawngchilhi fell in love with the snake living at the bottom end of their jhoom. They entertained each other all day long. As soon as the sisters reached the jhoom, Chawngchilhi would threaten and ask her sister to call the snake. The younger sister would then go to the bottom of the jhoom and sing a song to call the snake.

Chawngchilhi u leuh u leuh e,

My elder sibling wants it to jump,

My father wants it to jump;

Chawngchilhi 's lover.

As soon as the snake heard the song he would respond promptly,

I am going to jump I am going to jump,

While I was right in the middle of putting on my head cloth,

While I was right in the middle of tying up my hair.

On some days he would respond saying,

I am coming soon,

I was just combing my hair to make it beautiful;

I was just putting on my lovely head cloth,

To lay on your chest like a necklace.

He would emerge from the bottom of the jhoom, enter the hut and lie coiled on the floor. Then he and Chawngchilhi would happily spend their time. Chawngchilhi's younger sister feared the snake and dared not enter the hut even when it was time for lunch. In this way, skipping lunch and worried sick for her elder sister she began to lose weight and was soon very thin. Chawngchilhi warned her not to tell their father about her relationship with the snake telling her that if she did so, she would tell the snake to devour her. But since she became very thin and her condition worsened, her father began to suspect that all was not well. But she refused to divulge anything. One day, while Chawngchilhi was away on a visit he cleverly asked indirect questions to get his younger daughter to tell the truth about her weight loss. He suggested that it must be because she had a lover that she was losing weight and it was then that she confessed that it was not her but her elder sister who had a lover. Upon further questioning she divulged all the details of her elder sister's relationship with the snake and how it was because of her fear of the snake that she refused to eat lunch and became thin.

Chawngchilhi's father was enraged to learn of his daughter's relationship with the snake. He immediately devised plans to kill the snake. One morning, he told Chawngchilhi to stay at home for he was going to accompany the younger sister to the jhoom. He sharpened his dao and went to the jhoom where he dressed up like Chawngchilhi, wearing her clothes and carrying her basket. When they arrived he asked his younger daughter to call the snake as usual. As soon as the snake entered the hut Chawngchilhi's father chopped him into three pieces. Both father and daughter hurried home. He was very angry still so as soon as Chawngchilhi came home he killed her only to realize that Chawngchilhi was pregnant by the snake and her time was almost due. They came out from her stomach in large numbers and he kept killing them as they emerged. But he missed one which escaped into a hole.

The snake grew and became very fierce and began to steal eggs and chicks. As it grew bigger it began to steal chickens and as time passed it even took pigs and goats. The snake eventually started stealing children because of which the children of the village dared not play outdoors in the evenings any longer. The entire village was terrified about the disappearance of their livestock and their children but did not know the cause behind it. There was an old widow who knew the reason behind the disappearances. One day the villagers happened to ask her and she agreed to tell them on the condition that she also be given the best parts of the meat. She told

them that it was a large snake and also pointed out the location of the hole in which it lived. Since the snake was very intelligent they could not catch it. So in order to prevent it from taking more children they tried to appease its hunger by providing it with food. They managed to set a trap in the snake hole and finally caught it. They began to pull it out from its hole but the snake was so long that they could not pull it out completely. The snake told them that even as they were attempting to pull it out its tail was still touching the shore of the *Run* River.

Finally they tired of attempting to pull it out and cut off as much as they had managed to pull out. The snake meat was distributed among all the villagers and the head was given to the old widow. She boiled it all night long but it could not get cooked. Whenever she tried poking it with a thin rod it spoke up telling her to poke its eyes. Soon she gave up on it entirely and threw the meat out in anger and disgust. That night when the entire village had eaten the snake meat, the cocks of the village crowed in a strange manner at midnight. They warned all the guests in the village to leave. All those who had guests sent them home. Even the old widow sent her guest home. As soon as the last of the guests left the village, there was an earthquake and the entire village began to crumble, destroying the homes of all the villagers who ate the snake meat was destroyed and only the old widow's house was spared.

The head of the snake which the old widow had thrown away turned into a *kha-um* plant (a climbing plant) which grew at such a good rate that its branches spread wide and thick. People commented that they had never seen a climbing plant as good as this one. But contrary to the expectation of the villagers, the plant had only one fruit. The fruit was very big and healthy and so the villagers speculated as to the amount of seeds it may be holding. They would guess the amount and the topic became the main talk of the *zawl*buk or the male dormitory in the village. During that time, *Chhura* happened to pass along the village and they asked him to guess the amount of seeds in the fruit. He had overheard a *phungpuinu* (an ogress), babysitting her child saying that the fruit contained only one seed. When he gave his answer the villagers were doubtful and so they plucked the *umpui* and opened it up to find that it contained only one seed. Some say that from this incident has emerged the saying, “*Chhura umpui mu hriat*” which means “The seed of the *umpui* plant which *Chhura* knew of”.

## CHAWNGTINLERI

In the folktale *Chawngtinleri* we find that a long time ago in a village called Seipui there were two orphans called Chawngtinleri, who was the younger one and her elder brother called Lianchea (Liana for short). Since they did not have parents the siblings were very close and cared deeply for each other. Chawngtinleri was a very beautiful young woman and so the king of the *lasi*'s (fairies or spirits) called Lalchungnunga and who lived in the Tan mountain fell in love with her and wanted to make her his wife. Initially people did not know that Lalchungnunga was in love with Chawngtinleri but they came to learn of it through the accounts of the men who were *lasi zawl*. About this time, men had begun to be *lasi zawl* or in other words to be in a relationship with the *lasis* (fairies or spirits). The most popular among the spirits who used to fall in love with men was Tinchhingi, the beautiful and charming spirit of Tan mountain.

Those who had been in love with Tinchhingi spoke highly of her captivating loveliness and even rendered the same in songs in one of which the poet says that Tinchhingi graces the Tan mountain with her beauty and so he longs and pines for her. It was from Tinchhingi's lovers that they heard that the king of the spirits Lalchungnunga was in love with Chawngtinleri whose beauty seemed to make every youth in the village fall in love with her. All the youths made attempts to get her attention and at the same time the spirits were trying their best to try and persuade Lianchea to give away his sister's hand in marriage to their king by offering him gifts in exchange. The spirits, in their attempt to win over Lianchea's mind, were even appearing to him in his dreams. But when Lianchea pondered over the matter, he was saddened by the thought of giving away his sister whom he loved in marriage to the king of the spirits and so he refused to give in to the request of the spirits.

One night the beautiful *Lasi*, Liansailovi appeared to Lianchea in a dream. She was both beautiful and charming and told Lianchea that if he gave away his sister to become the wife of their king, they would ensure that he would live all his life comfortably and that Chawngtinleri would also live a comfortable life as the queen over all animals. Although Lianchea desired Liansailova immensely he refused the offer, woke up with a start and wondered at his strange dream. The next night Liansailovi came in his dreams again and she attempted to make him give in again telling him that if he agreed to let his sister marry their king, they would make him a great warrior and hunter, they would bless him in harvest and would bless even his descendents

with great skills at hunting and warfare and would ensure that he lived his entire life in comfort. Lianchea could not agree still and so on the third night the spirits appeared in his dream as before and told him that if he agreed to give his sister away to become the wife of their king they would let her live a comfortable life and would make her the queen and ruler over all the animals. They also offered to give him whatever he desired as dowry including a valley-full of animals, their prized *nghalphusen* (wild boar), whose fangs are as long as the flat polished bar in a lushai or Mizo loom, and the biggest of their mithuns. They concluded by saying that they would also include a gun and sufficient gunpowder. When Lianchea thought the matter over and contemplated the glory and honour he would achieve in killing such fearsome animals, he finally agreed.

When he woke up the next morning he remembered his dream and felt bad that he had agreed but at the same time he was doubtful as to whether it was only a dream or something real because of which he would now lose his sister. Fearing that the spirits just might take her away anytime, he guarded her all the time. In the meantime the spirits tried to follow up on their agreement and made attempts to take Chawngtinleri away to be their queen but they were hindered in their attempts by Lianchea who was fiercely guarding his sister. One morning, Chawngtinleri was threshing paddy at the verandah in front of the house when she suddenly gave a shout calling for her brother. Lianchea immediately rushed outside and called for her but she was nowhere to be seen. On their mortar he found a gun and many bullets and was greatly amazed. He began searching frantically for Chawngtinleri but could find no trace of her anywhere. He remembered his dream and realized that the spirits had taken her away. He longed to see her again and when he went on hunts he saw many wild animals that appeared to be strategically placed for him to shoot easily. However, convinced that this was an attempt on the part of the spirits to give him what they had promised him in exchange for Chawngtinleri, he refused to shoot the animals.

One time, he accompanied his friends on a hunt at Tan mountain. Hoping to find her he explored all the hidden corners and thick forests but could not find her. He finally gave up, climbed up on a flattened stone and ignoring the hunt he began to play on a leaf and sing. He sang about his longing for Chawngtinleri and cried while singing. Meanwhile, Chawngtinleri had heard him and responded in song singing about how she was crying daily on the shoulders of the

Lurh and Tan mountains on account of her loneliness. Though they spoke to each other in song, he could not see her. Dejected, he returned home. The spirits were worried because Lianchea refused to shoot the animals they had earlier promised him. Ultimately, Chawngtinleri appeared to him in a dream and with tears flowing freely, told him to shoot the animals for it was by his own consent that she had gone to the Tan mountain. Since then, he began shooting the animals. In another dream the spirits appeared to him telling him not to worry too much about his sister for she was the queen and ruler over Lurh and Tan mountains and having to do no work, was living comfortably on rice beer and meat. Slowly, his longing for his sister went away and soon he began to enjoy hunting animals again. Once he began to hunt animals he regained his happiness and Chawngtinleri often drove the animals towards him for his easy target and so the spirits even promised him that they will bless his descendents to become great hunters and cultivators.

He was very good at shooting and would kill two to three animals daily. The spirits wished to honour their promise of a wild boar to him and so they appeared to him in a dream one night and informed him that they were going to give him their prized wild boar and told him where he should wait. The next day he went to the forest near the outskirts of the village and stood waiting. The spirits came with much energy and enthusiasm and drove their prized wild boar in Lianchea's line of fire. Some of the spirits were dancing and some were singing songs in praise of the animal and Chawngtinleri who was driving it. Lianchea could see the wild boar from a distance and observed that it was moving slowly towards him. It was extremely large and had very long fangs. He began to think about the glory, honour, and adulation he would receive and how people would tell of his feats and this gave him so much joy and happiness that he smiled and all of a sudden the wild boar gave a start and disappeared.

Lianchea greatly lamented his loss and was almost in tears. The spirits advised him not to show his teeth during the hunt and offered to drive the wild boar towards his direction again. When it came again he did not help himself from repeating what he did before and so lost in thoughts about the glory he would achieve, he smiled again and the animal disappeared as before. The spirits came to him in a dream telling him that they would drive their wild boar to him for the last time tomorrow and if he failed to shoot it they will not bother to drive it to him any longer. But the next day too, as had happened before, he could not contain his pride at the



prospect of killing such a magnificent animal as the one that appeared before him that he smiled yet again and the prized wild boar disappeared for good much to the regret of Lianchea who watched it disappear. The spirits comforted him saying by telling him that maybe it was not meant for him. According to legend, the wild boar entered Tawizo and it was this very animal who killed the famous *pasaltha* (brave warrior) Khualtungamtawna (Hualtungamtawna).

After sometime, the spirits appeared in Lianchea's dream again informing him about their plan to give him their prized mithun. They warned him not to smile telling him that he would not be able to shoot the animal if he did so. The next day he happily went to the location specified by the spirits which was on a level land in the valley. They came driving the prized mithun ahead of them. The animal was very reluctant to move and so the spirits were nudging and pushing it from behind. They sang songs in praise of Lianchea's skills at hunting. When he heard their songs of praise and when he saw the large and magnificent animal approaching him with large horns that beautifully branched outwards and appeared to be transparent, he was extremely happy. He could see that there was a rainbow between the horns and the magnificence of the horns captivated him so much so that when the bull finally passed before him he forgot to shoot at it and watched it pass by with his saliva dripping away. When he came to his senses he tried to shoot it but by then it was almost out of his range and so it disappeared. The spirits scolded him because of the difficulty involved in driving the bull. They brought it back again and when it came very close to him he saw that many of the them were nudging the intractable animal with all their might when the oldest one nudged with such enthusiasm that she passed wind and Lianchea could no longer keep a straight face and so he laughed out loud. The old woman among the spirits took offence and slapped the bull on its thigh and it disappeared.

With time, the spirits and Lianchea's family improved their relations and even though Lianchea could not get to shoot the wild boar and the wild bull that they promised him, he shot many other animals which they gave him. They even permitted Chawngtinleri to pay visits to Lianchea. Whenever she took her child to Lianchea's place, if she was going out of the house for a while she would tell him not to take a look at the child. One time, he took a look at the child and was shocked by the sight for its head was like that of a goat's while its body was like a human's. When the spirits came to know about what had happened they became angry at Chawngtinleri saying that she was going to reveal their physical characteristics and so they no

longer allowed her to visit her brother. Chawngtinleri became sad and lonely for she greatly missed human company. Even after the spirits had kept her with them for a long time she showed no signs of getting over her longing for the humans and because of this the spirits finally turned and raised her eyes and it was then that her longing for humans gradually disappeared.

People say that Chawngtinleri was the queen and ruler over all the animals and she used to weave her loom between Lurh and Tan mountains. The *vamur* (swift) and the *pengleng* (swallow) helped her at weaving. It is believed that the Chhakchhuak clans began worshipping the spirits for being true to their word. The Mizos in the olden days believed that Chawngtinleri was the queen over all the animals and that she created and took care of them. They considered the wild boar as her pig.

## MAURUANGI

In the tale *Mauruangi* we find that once upon a time, there was a village in which there lived one family. They had a very good and lovely daughter who was named Mauruangi. Mauruangi's mother cared for her and fed her with good food. But her father had fallen in love with their neighbour who was a widow with an ugly daughter whose name was Bingtaii. The widow often encouraged Mauruangi's father to divorce his wife in order to marry her. Mauruangi's mother was such a good woman that despite her husband's attempts to make her angry she never wanted to divorce him. One day her parents went to another village in search of grain. On the way, they had to cross a rotten and worn out bridge over a big river with no other way to reach the other shore. Her father took this as an opportunity to get rid of his wife and so he put up a challenge to his wife saying that the one among them who did not dare to cross this bridge upon returning will be pushed over. Her mother did not believe that he really meant what he said and so she agreed.

On their way back, her father packed his load lightly while he made sure that his wife's load was very heavy. When they reached the worn out bridge he easily went across and when it was his wife's turn to cross, the bridge started to give way and so she did not dare cross. At this instance, he reminded her about the challenge to which she had given her consent and immediately pushed her into the river. She turned into a dolphin and lived in the river. Back

home, Mauruangi was eagerly awaiting the arrival of her mother and father. When she saw her father returning home alone she was surprised that her mother did not return and when she asked her father he lied saying that her mother was away washing his head cloth at the river. When it was evening and becoming dark she asked her father again and he replied saying that she was washing clothes at the river. At dinner time she still had not returned and so she asked her father again and this time round he told her the truth. Mauruangi began to cry in sorrow. The next morning she tried to light the fire in the hearth but found that the fire had died in the night. Her father's lover, the widow had doused the fire in the night without the knowledge of Mauruangi and her father so that she could devise a plan to marry Mauruangi's father. So when her father asked her to fetch fire from their neighbor. The widow told her that she will not give her the fire unless her father married her. Since he agreed, Mauruangi took the fire and soon enough her father married the widow.

In the beginning, the stepmother treated her well but as time passed she showed her true colours and began to ill-treat her. She would make her do all the hard work, make her wear tattered clothes and even tell lies against her to her father who would then beat her up for fear of his wife. She fed Bingtaii with rice and good food while she fed Mauruangi with food fit only for pigs. Soon Mauruangi began to grow thin day by day. Mauruangi missed her mother so she used to cry in loneliness and sorrow. One day she went to the river and her mother who had turned into a dolphin saw her. When her mother spoke to her and asked why she was so thin and whether her father had married again after her death, she realized that it was indeed her mother and so was overjoyed. She fed her with rice and meat and told her to come to the river whenever she felt hungry. So it was that Mauruangi was never hungry again and gradually gained back her weight and her looks improved.

When her stepmother began to notice that Mauruangi was gained weight and becoming pretty again despite the terrible food that she was giving her she was amazed and this aroused her curiosity so she instructed Bingtaii to follow Mauruangi in secret. Soon Bingtaii found out the reason behind Mauruangi's renewed health and well-being and informed her mother who immediately devised a plan to have the dolphin killed. She told her husband to call all the villagers for mass fishing the next day and since he was afraid of getting into an argument with her he agreed to do so. When Mauruangi heard about her stepmother's plan she ran down to the

river and told her mother about plan for the next day and instructed her to follow her instructions which were that, her mother was to move to the opposite side whenever she instructed her to move to one side of the river. When the villagers came to the river for the community fishing Mauruangi kept calling out her instructions for her mother to follow so that they could not catch her. The villagers realized that they would never catch the dolphin until someone stopped her and took her away. When they did so they managed to catch and kill the dolphin, Mauruangi's mother. They divided the flesh among themselves and even offered some to her but she refused and instead asked them to give her the bones.

She took the bones and kept them inside a vessel. She opened the vessel after three days and found that the bones had turned into beautiful pieces fit for a necklace. She tied them together and made a necklace which she wore much to the envy of her stepsister Bingtaii. Her stepmother ordered her to give it to Bingtaii to wear but when Bingtaii put it on it turned into coal but when Mauruangi put it back on it would turn into a beautiful necklace. Mauruangi took her mother's heart and buried it near the river. Since there was no source of food besides the one her stepmother gave her she began to lose weight and before long was thin and weak again. She took good care of the plant and it grew into a beautiful *phunchawng* tree (cotton tree). She began to drink the nectar of the plant regularly and started gaining weight again. Her good looks were revived and her stepmother began to notice the transformation. She ordered her daughter Bingtaii to follow Mauruangi again. When they found out that Mauruangi was drinking the nectar from the tree she told her husband to fell the tree. As they were chopping it, Mauruangi would encourage her mother to hold on to her life. As long as Mauruangi kept shouting in this manner they could not chop down the tree for it would regenerate and heal its wounds. They finally decided to have her taken away and thus were able to cut down the tree.

After that incident some time had passed when the stepmother decided that it was about time that Mauruangi and Bingtaii had jhooms of their to see whose is the better. She gave good seeds to Bingtaii and bad ones to Mauruangi. Both of them began planting the seeds in their jhoom. Although Mauruangi had been given the bad seeds she was hard-working and industrious and sowed the seeds and took good care of them. Meanwhile, Bingtaii was lazy and so she did not bother to sow the seeds properly. She would lie down all day in the hut and roasted the corn seeds to eat. When they returned home she lied to her mother, accusing Mauruangi of doing

whatever she had been doing the whole day while telling her how she had been working hard the whole day. The stepmother scolded Mauruangi and even gave her a beating but she never uttered a word. Though Mauruangi was given bad seeds she worked hard and took care of them so they sprouted and grew well. She took good care of her jhoom and weeded it well. When monsoon came, all kinds of vegetables grew abundantly in Mauruangi's fields. As for the lazy Bingtaii her jhoom was overgrown with weeds and her crops were lean and emaciated while she grew fatter day by day.

One day a Raja wanted to have a wife and asked his servants to find one for him. As the servants went about searching for a prospective bride for their king they came upon Mauruangi's jhoom and tired and hungry, they stopped to rest. They saw Mauruangi weeding the jhoom and asked her permission to take some corn and cucumbers from the field. Instead, she gave them the best that the field could offer. She offered them cucumbers and ripe watermelons. They greatly admired her kindness and hospitality and thereupon, decided that she would make a suitable bride for their Raja. They revealed the purpose of their travels to her and asked her if she would be willing to marry their Raja. They told her that their Raja was a great king and if she agreed to become his wife, she would no longer need to work. She was very happy to hear that they had chosen her and she readily agreed. But when they offered to ask the permission of her parents in the matter she expressed her doubt that her parents would agree to such a union for she knew that her stepmother and stepsister were jealous of her and would gladly do whatever they could to prevent the marriage. Instead she suggested that they pretend to ask for Bingtaii's hand in marriage and when everything had been agreed upon, to take Bingtaii to the outskirts of the village as if to take her to the Raja's kingdom only to dump her and take her instead. The servants agreed to the plan and asked for Bingtaii's hand in marriage.

When the servants went to Mauruangi's house as planned, her stepmother was overjoyed to hear that the Raja wanted Bingtaii for a wife. She kept praising her daughter saying how clever, kind, hard-working and industrious she was and kept comparing her to Mauruangi whom she called lazy and was not disciplined. The servants were amazed at the manner in which she praised her daughter and laughed at her in secret. They settled upon the dowry and small matters of the journey back to the kingdom and left. The stepmother could not stop boasting to everyone in the village and held a farewell feast for Bingtaii. The servants then came to take her away to

their kingdom. They placed her on a palanquin and made as if to carry her till the kingdom but when they reached the outskirts of the village and everyone else had gone back home they threw down Bingtaii among the thorns and carried Mauruangi in her place. Embarrassed, Bingtaii cried all the way back home.

The Raja was overjoyed when he saw the beautiful Mauruangi and gave her the best clothes and fed her with the best food he could provide. He brought cotton thread, a spinning wheel and materials required for weaving and she wove different designs of cloth. They were married and lived happily together. In the meantime, harbouring a deep hatred for Mauruangi, her stepmother was plotting ways and means of destroying her. She decided to send for her to return back to the village to have her killed. She asked for Mauruangi to return to the village saying that she will kill a pig and give a feast for her. Mauruangi believed that something bad would happen to her but she went anyway because she did not wish to disobey her parents. When she reached the village the stepmother kept delaying the promised feast and was busy thinking of ways to get rid of her. One day she asked Mauruangi to check her hair for lice and to remove them. While Mauruangi was checking her hair for lice she pretended that she dropped her comb through the floor and asked her to fetch it. As she went underneath the house to search for the comb, the stepmother poured a pot of boiling water over her thus killing her. They threw her corpse beyond the outskirts of the village. A serow found the corpse and blew on it till she came back to life. Unfortunately, her big toe could not be revived. She became his babysitter.

Since Mauruangi did not come back for a long time, the Raja sent his servants to fetch her back. When the servants reached the village they saw Bingtaii sitting on the porch of their house basking in the sun. She was so lazy that she could not manage to find a husband. They asked the stepmother where Mauruangi was and she directed them to where Bingtaii was. They could not believe that she could be their queen for she was very ugly and fat. But the stepmother insisted and so they took her back to their kingdom but were not entirely convinced. Meanwhile, Mauruangi's big toe that was dead had turned into a small bird and was following the procession as they went towards the kingdom. It kept repeating that the woman they were carrying was not Mauruangi.

When they reached the Raja's palace he could not believe that such a drastic transformation for the worse had taken place in the queen's appearance. He wanted to test if it

really was his wife whom he knew to be an expert at weaving the cloth. He told his servants to request the queen to weave the cloth. When they asked her to do so Bingtaii did not know where Mauruangi kept the loom and wondered aloud as to its location. The servants were surprised that she had forgotten where she kept the loom and reminded her that she kept it near the bed. She did not know where the other implements were as well so the servants kept showing the locations to her. When everything was prepared she tried to weave but did not know how to weave at all. The little bird came along and gave her instructions on how to weave. She found the bird very annoying and it made her angry so she made attempts to strike and kill it. In the midst of her frantic but futile attempts to kill the bird, she choked herself by mistake and died. When the stepmother heard of it she was so distraught and did not enjoy life anymore so she killed herself.

All this time Mauruangi was at her master's house. She would babysit the serow's child and sing to it songs about her past life and glory as the queen of the Raja and how she had fallen from that state to become a babysitter for the serow. One day the king's servants while hunting heard someone singing in a cave. When they went closer and listened more clearly they thought it sounded like the voice of their queen Mauruangi. When they saw her they realized it was indeed their queen. They were very happy to find her and proposed to take her home with them immediately and have her restored to her rightful position at the throne. But she hesitated asking them to ask permission from her master the serow to release her. The serow had gone to the jhoom field so they decided to wait for him. When he came back in the evening and saw that there were several people inside his home he felt shy to enter for her was dirty and messy. They asked his permission to take Mauruangi back to their kingdom and offered to give him whatever he wished for. He demanded a bunch of bananas and a spoonful of snot in return. They could easily procure the bunch of bananas but did not have the snot required so each man contributed and the required amount was collected. The servants left with Mauruangi and there was a happy reunion with her husband.

In another version of the folktale as told by Laltluangliana Khiangte in his book *Folktales of Mizoram* (1997), Bingtaii was still alive and living in the Raja's palace when his servants brought Mauruangi back from the cave. The servants came up with a plan to eliminate *Bingtaii* and informed Mauruangi about it. They prepared two swords, one of which was genuine and very sharp while the other was made from wood and appeared to be sharp only because it was

painted white. They were to fight a duel with Mauruangi offering Bingtaii the chance to choose her sword first. She chose the wooden one which appeared to be sharp but which was very blunt. Then Mauruangi asked her to strike first. She struck a blow on Mauruangi's shoulder but it caused no harm. When it was her turn to strike, she cut Bingtaii into two. The servants of the Raja made oil and deep-fried meat out of Bingtaii's flesh and sent word to her mother that they had killed their large pig and left meat aside for her. The stepmother went and returned with three gourds full of meat and fat. She shared it with all her neighbours including a widow. When the widow poured out the meat and fat she had been given she saw finger bones and toe bones that appeared to belong to Bingtaii and she was utterly shocked. She also found a scar mark that appeared similar to the one Bingtaii had on her face. She ran to the stepmother's house and showed her what she had seen. Bingtaii's mother seemed to be skeptical at first, insisting that it was pork meat but started having doubts about it. She examined the flesh in secret and saw that it belonged to her daughter. She decided to take revenge and angrily marched towards the Raja's palace. With a sharp sword in her hand she ran towards the Raja's palace but the servants saw her and before she could cause any harm, they threw spears at her and killed her. *Mauruangi* lived peacefully and happily with her husband thereafter.

## **RIMENHAWIHI**

In the folktale *Rimenhawihi* we find that a long time ago there was a beautiful woman Rimenhawihi whose hair was really long. Her beauty and especially the long length of her hair were common topics of discussion among people and as a result, she was very famous. Her husband was *Zawlthlia*. They were a happy couple and would tease each other frequently. When time had passed she became pregnant and had a craving for the *kumchiripar* flower. *Zawlthlia* decided to go and look for it. Before he left for his journey, he told her not to go out anywhere and to remain indoors. Rimenhawihi was the sort of woman who liked to keep clean and tidy and to take care of herself so she often took a bath in the small stream near their house. One time, when she was bathing, a strand of her hair fell off and floated downstream till it was washed away to sea. A big fish in the sea swallowed it. During that time some servants of one Raja were fishing and they caught the fish which swallowed Rimenhawihi's hair along with other fish. When they saw the fish and noticed how swollen and different it looked they were curious and



suggested tearing the stomach open to see what was inside. When the contents were revealed they saw that its stomach was filled with a strand of hair. They were amazed to find that all that amount of hair belonged to just one strand so they decided to show it to the Raja. When they brought the strand of hair to him he was amazed and intrigued and desired to know whom it belonged to.

The servants set out immediately in search of the owner and after they had travelled for a long time they reached the small river near Rimenhawihi's house. They saw her leaning out the window combing her hair in a delicate manner. They believed that she was surely the owner of the strand of hair and approached her house which was made of metal. They tried to enter her house but she refused to let them in because her husband was away. She locked herself in from the inside and they could not enter but they wished to know her name at least therefore they sang a song asking her what her name was. She did not wish to tell them so she responded in song telling them that she was one who lived on water. When they went back and told the Raja he told them that such a name does not exist and ordered them to ask what her real name was. They went and asked her again and this time she replied in song as before, saying that she was one who lived on leafy vegetables. When they went to the Raja he sent them back to ask her again.

The third time round, Rimenhawihi began to tire of the questioning so she answered in song and finally told them her real name. But the servants could not remember the entire name before the king. They could only remember 'Men' so they told him that the woman's name was 'men'. He sent them back saying there was no such name and this time the servants were afraid they would forget the name so assigned different monosyllables in the name for each one to remember but on their way back they all tripped on a bull's dung and fell down forgetting the name in the process. They went back and asked her again. This time they managed to remember it and went to the Raja to tell him the name. When he heard it he ordered his servants to go and fetch Rimenhawihi to become his wife irrespective of the fact that she already married. They dared not disobey the king's orders and so they went to Rimenhawihi's house. Since they could not enter the house made of metal they thought about ways of catching her and took many gifts along with them for gifts. When they reached the house they decided to stuff the gifts they had brought through the hole on the ground. At first, Rimenhawihi barely paid attention but since they were all delicious-looking eatables she could not resist in the end and reached out her hand

to take hold of a fruit. At that moment, the bun of her hair came undone by mistake and the servants caught hold of one strand of her hair. She feared for the loss of even a strand of her hair and did not dare move. She finally opened the door.

The servants prepared to take her back to the Raja but she used her wits and decided to leave clues for her husband to follow in order to find her. She took a ball of thread and unwound and left it trailing behind as they went along. She told her dog, chicken, and pig to tell her husband to follow the thread when he asked for her. Later, when Zawlthlia came back with the beautiful kumchiripar flower for his wife, he found that she was taken away and felt miserable and began searching for her frantically. He asked the dog, the chicken, and the pig whether they knew where Rimenhawihī was. It was then that they told him to follow the thread. Then and there, Zawlthlia began to understand what was going on and started searching for his wife. After sometime, he reached the palace of the Raja, entered it and saw Rimenhawihī inside. He was filled with anger and immediately killed the king. Both husband and wife returned home and lived happily ever after.

**ANNEXURE II: TRANSLATION OF THE SELECTED MIZO COMMUNITY SONGS**

**MIZO HLA LENGAWNG (COMMUNITY SONGS)**

**P. S. Chawngthu**

***Par Mawi Tin Bawm (Surrounded by all kinds of beautiful flowers)***

Atop the high hills swarming with myriads of flowers,

The pleasant breeze blows;

With friends and with the guitar,

We sing songs with joy.

There at the beautiful valleys and hills where we live the days of our youth,

The small and tender flowers bloom;

With the beautiful sunflowers that beautify the village,

And the orchid flowers that swarm over the hills.

In the fading sunlight over the hills where we live,

With a vast expanse of meadows;

When I look around, lovely trees

Steep precipices amidst the dreamy hazy clouds, and

Swarming with bamboo grass.

***Nauban par (The orchid)***

Young and tender without signs of fading it blooms with a subtle beauty on the branch of a tree,

Among all blooming flowers it reigns supreme;

If only it was placed on the hair of young women,  
Our town will have such beauty that surpasses all others.  
Hanging gently high above, may the days that you bloom increase,  
Surpassing all others may you bloom all year long,  
Be a source of comfort to my heart at times when I feel lonely and forlorn ,  
It gives me pleasure to see your blossoms that never fade.

***Thal Favang Ni (An autumnal day)***

Days of working at the jhoom are over and we are leaving the hoe behind,  
The skies become clear much to the joy of all around;  
When the dry season arrives the rainy season turns away,  
And bestows happiness upon our land.

The sun shining with a soft light in the heavens  
I wish that it shines again to create a sense of longing for the past;  
The dreamy haze that spreads and the bright light of the moon,  
Accompanied by my beloved, I will celebrate it with much delight.

This reddish horizon is so beautiful when one looks at it,  
Every shade of colour that it hangs out is exceedingly beautiful;  
This moving time should sulk and stay still for a while,  
Do remain with this day in the dry season of autumn.

**Vankhama:**

***Ka Hmun Inpui (My place my home)***

One who has left the land to try and acquire the knowledge and ways of life of greater nations and people ,

Descends on our hill, our place our home our land;

Does the sun rise in the east for his or her comfort the whole day long?

The hills all aligned in the south-north direction,

It is, surely it is you who is my place my pleasant land,

Where I was born and raised, where I grew up, my place the hills of Mizoram;

One within whose pleasant confines I used to feel safe and sound-

And that which made me desolate and forlorn when I wandered outside and away from it;

Many times I have spoken badly of you, because of love for the pitiable one,

It will be seen that our land our hills will not be inferior upon a closer scrutiny.

Days that other people take a stroll living inbetween

Though it may shine with indescribable glory

Your dense forests which give me solace and,

All beings that give a cry or call within your confines, with the sound of every bird with a beautiful voice,

In the east the the rhododendron, the red orchid and other orchids are blooming,

Can one forget them completely, the iris and the tree that bearing flowers;

In the hills the blooming the fartuah (tree with bright scarlet blossoms) proclaims the time for clearing of the land in preparation for cultivation,

The beautiful jharul tree, creeping plant, and the cassia tree that herald the onset of the monsoon,

Not forgetting the autumn evergreen, the chestnut tree that swarms over the hills,

They all bloom in different seasons throughout the year.

Your wealth your share of trees and bamboo stalks,  
Your cool soothing breeze amidst the fragrant scents of the flowers heaven-sent;  
Where the climate is never extreme throughout the year,  
Where will we ever come upon a land as pleasant as this?  
Which I miss, my place my home, the blessing which is my share,  
My spirit roams about and expresses its wish, my place my home;  
Where, from infancy, I grew up to be in the full bloom of youth,  
Surely you are the treasure of my heart;  
I wish I could spend the rest of my life in your embrace,  
Till the end when I shall die.

Come let the wiser youth of today's generation take note of this,  
Our place our land our own, using our resources wisely;  
Using what we have frugally, the trees and bamboo of our land,  
Saplings, new growth let us feed them with care,  
Do not use your knife except when necessary,  
This mindless striking of trees and plants on the roadside and slashing of shrubs that do not  
bother us or cause us harm,  
We are only announcing our foolishness!  
Let us preserve what we have for the future generations,  
Tiny drops of water that create an ocean,  
What we conserve now, what we will depend upon in the future.

***Rimawi Ram (Land of music)***

Our pleasant hills clad with green forests,  
Where the dew collects and a clear stream runs;  
All varieties of birds and cicadas that sing, swarm the trees,  
They sing all day long they that know how to charm and entertain the land,

In the dry season the old leaves wither and fall to give way to all the fresh new buds sprouting,  
The dreamy haze spreads, that wakes a feeling of nostalgia in me;  
In the clear air of the rainy season the branches of every tree blossoms,  
There where the different species of birds vahui (wood pigeon), rengchal (a kind of cicada) *and*  
ngirtling (a kind of cicada) all sing.

Amidst our Mizoram, the land of music and purity,  
The fragrance of the flowers of herhse (iron wood tree), *Khiang* (Chilauni tree), and ngiau  
(champa tree) restores us to health;  
This feeling of longing increases on such days as these when we visit the old jhoom fields,  
The wild pigeon that serenades its partner sings to it to give it joy.

As the dusk fell those that sing in the daylight disappear,  
To be replaced by others such as losul and kawrnu leng (types of cicadas that sing as the night is  
approaching)  
The day is over, the darkness descends and every mountain resounds with the singing of crickets  
and other insects,  
Night-time insects accompany each other in song;  
In the forests under the soft and tender rays of the moon,  
The bat that adores the light of the moon is reciprocated by the white owl of the night;  
The early morning bird chinrang (wagtail) sings from the branch of a tree,  
The rengchal (a cicada) adds to her song from amidst the trees of the forest accompanied by  
other insects.

### ***Khawtlang Lunglen (Nostalgia)***

When others tell of their feelings of longing or nostalgia,  
They say that they hang onto the captivating charms of their beloved in pain like wilting  
branches of trees that have been cut-off;  
When I think about the times that I feel a sense of longing or nostalgia,

It has no limits except the land that I see;  
So this is what they call khawtlang lunglen pensive broodings regarding the past,  
It permeates the depths of this simple heart.

The red sun alights on the high level heavens,  
The pengleng (swallow) birds who know to fly arrive to fly across the skies;  
Those that go to harvest the grains disappear in the horizon and shade descends on the courtyard,  
The youth sing traditional songs in the courtyard;  
The noises made by the cotton gin is echoed by the chickens,  
The youth in his longing blows dry leaves to make music in the hills;  
The tukkhumvilik (black crested yellow bulbul) bird happily goes away in the distance,  
And the vaiva (hill mynah) sings of its loneliness.

On the north side of that mountain which can be seen in this clear rainy season,  
The enveloping haze has left me out and barred me from viewing it;  
Let us go and explore the outskirts of that hill around the village,  
The thangrei flower and the sunflowers that hang and lie in wait;  
So it is, the spreading shrub with lavender-coloured blossoms blooms in glory on top of it,  
The gentle sun surrounds it with a soft light.

### ***Tlaizawng Par (Cherry Blossom)***

The time of the birth of the king has arrived again,  
It has begun to sprout and bloom again;  
Fed by sunlight and the clear dew of the night,  
It blooms beautifully day after day;  
The *Tlaizawng* flower with beauty like a young maid's countenance,  
I will call you '*Vulmawi*' 'Beautiful bloom' as your nick name;



I wish it were possible for you to bloom all year long,  
If you could be the never-fading flower 'Chuailopar' that people speak about.

Do take a look, it beautifies the surroundings of our town,  
On its branches are bees with the butterflies;  
The living creatures the birds, flitting from one flower to the other for lunch,  
And feed on its nectar the whole day long;  
Keep blooming without wilting O flower which I never tire of seeing,  
You are a flower that ceaselessly glorifies the maker;  
While the bright sun disappears towards evening,  
Do the spirits consider you as their home?

Beautiful Bloom, Your life is too short,  
Swaying in the wind like tassels;  
The moon will be renewed like a new cloth,  
And the Beautiful Bloom will wilt and fade;  
It is such a waste to see you, only to wilt and fade away,  
Bloom anew again in the coming year;  
O, why has Mother Nature above made all the other beautiful things,  
Only to let them fade away.

### **Zirsangzela Hnamte**

#### ***Phengphe nunnem* (Gentle butterfly)**

Flying about and gliding in the wide skies,  
The butterflies that sip nectar from every flower;  
Partaking of every sweet thing throughout the whole day till evening,

It has no shortage of homes for lying down.

If only it were possible to know how to fly,

The tuangtuh flowers in their blooming days;

I could have for lunch,

Leaving the evils of the world behind.

Under the searing heat of the sun,

That gave happiness to the heart when looked upon;

The variegated designs on your body,

How beautiful it is along with the flowers.

Mild and gentle butterfly,

Bees, insects and ants;

At times when I watch them feeding on the nectar together,

I cry when I think about how humans live their lives.

Gentle butterfly skilled at flying about,

Do come to our house again;

The flowers and I,

In longing for you, cry plaintively in my misery.

***Sulhnu Leh Lunglen (Nostalgia for old haunts)***

This longing gets worsened when I contemplate all things,

The hills that carry the dense forests;

Where the flock of birds and insects like cicadas sing in harmony in groups to serenade the afternoon,

The calm rivers where we bathed.

Oh on days when this longing increases,

If we could climb the hills and remain under the green forest;

And listen to the music unaccompanied by the guitar,

This longing many turn into wishful thinking.

The beautiful young woman whose beauty is like the *Aitenawn* flower,

When we held the swaying orchid of the hills;

Where we feed the parrot birds that plead for grains of rice,

The cockscomb blooms in a mild manner.

On the hills of good repute where we used to live,

The haze of autumn spreads beautifully;

On days that I roamed about, a youthful soul on forgotten hills that have faded in glory,

Do you ever think about me who is tracing your remains?

I cannot speak enough about this longing

The times of old when we used to happily agree with each other;

I wonder if you miss and long for all this, you who live on the other side of the *Rih* lake in the land of the dead,

I wonder how you would handle this longing.

### **Luah loh run (The deserted hut)**

The dreamy haze that gathers and enshrouds the hills in the far east,

On those high hills that raise the forests;

There stands a hut which appears to remain untouched,

The soft leaves of the trees cover it here and there.

When late night approaches the rest of the people,

Light fires in the hearth of their homes;

But in that the dark and dreary hut,

The sound of crying infants does not resound there.

Long ago in happier times,

The young man courting a young girl was happily reclining on the floor like the king of spirits;

The sound of squealing pigs and crowing cocks,

That house where such sounds were heard is now deserted!

Now there can never be days when the sound of the opening door will be heard,

The fire in the hearth is deserted and cold like hail.

For what specific reason have you become deserted,

Is it because the residents have been embraced by the hand of death?

Or it is because of some necessary shift to other hills for a better life

That you have tired of holding a family together?

The hut which has been deserted like how bees desert their homes, O just like you,

My companions have deserted me like an abandoned house;

While we were happily living life in each other's company they have decided to move away,

To far distant places without sparing a thought for me.

**ANNEXURE III: TRANSLATION OF THE SELECTED MIZO LOVE SONGS**

**MIZO LENGZEM HLA (LOVE SONGS)**

**P. S. Chawngthu**

**Par thing ang vul leh rawh (Bloom again like a flower)**

The years that have gone by and the things that now belong to the past,

When I ponder them over in my mind;

Loving words that dissipate like the misty clouds surrounding the hills on high,

They are revived anew in my heart.

When I look back on those days of long ago

They never grow old if only we could exchange sweet words of love again,

Laughing together again like infants,

Bloom again like a beautiful flower for me.

Alone and thinking about it all on an evening at twilight,

I believe I will never cease to long for you;

It remains like a scar in my heart and is difficult to bear,

My mind is troubled and I cannot fall asleep.

A heart that has not changed and loving words softly spoken like the soft flowing water,

Do bestow upon us like a flower that gives joy;  
This heart of mine that is cloudy like the monsoon clouds,  
The misty clouds like the clouds on hills will disappear.

**Tawnmang Mawl Mai A Lo Ni (An empty dream)**

Late at night, alone, I look around,  
I do not find anything that can comfort me;  
With a heavy heart in the darkness of our home,  
I lie down on the bed.

In each other's arms as if wrestling each other,  
We laugh together in harmony;  
I then wake up only to feel the empty bed,  
It was only an empty dream.

Living together before, now we are far apart,  
I don't dare to think about our fate;  
When a year passes will I meet her again?  
The time apart is becoming too long.

Even though the time since we last spoke stretches further in length like a long rope,  
Wait for me like the parched land that waits for water in the dry season;  
Though the year that we have been apart is long,  
Be faithful only to me.

When enemies turn quiet like hail turned to water,  
The flowers of the cultivated land will bloom again;  
Like finding the perfectly-matched pieces that complete a gong set I will meet you again my  
love,  
Rejoicing over your beautiful face like I rejoice over a flower.

***Chuailopari (Woman with lasting beauty)***

When we meet my mind wanders, oh it hurts  
To be captivated by you,  
You were born to make me miserable,  
Though you may sulk against me and set your heart on another,  
You will never fade in the heart.  
Other youth live complete lives happily as if made for each other like the perfectly-matched  
pieces that complete a gong set,  
Though you may be with someone else  
Nobody satisfies my heart as completely as you do,  
Rejecting all others aside I will never cease to long for you,  
For Chuailopari is good for me.  
  
Does she long for me like I do ,  
The one I do not deserve, Chuailopari;



Do pine for me in your heart,  
Forlorn and miserable under your captivating charm;  
Reply to my advances with kind words,  
It will be easier then to bear the misery of longing for you.

For it all to turn into a just a dream,  
My heart breaks when I ponder over it;  
Those happy days we spent like happy birds,  
Delighting in your beauty as we delight over a flower,  
Days when we laughed like children,  
But days of separation turn out again.

***Bei nge sei Run dung? (Which is more lasting—hope or the *Run* river?)***

Reminiscing about the past life that has gone by,  
The happy days of union that disappeared over the horizon;  
Does it ever surface in the depths of your heart?  
Are there days when you long for it too?

Though time has passed and it has become a matter of the past as for me, in my heart,  
My love for you will never get old, never ever get old;  
Always challenging myself with the saying, “Which is longer: Hope or the *Run* river?”

I would rather I always follow you, you only.

Even the red orchid fades from its prime,

And waits for a new year to bloom again;

The years that grows longer in longingly awaiting your presence,

It will not be in vain.

If only it were possible to be with you again,

For us to lovingly laugh together again;

To live in the high skies like the eagle,

I would love to descend on the memorial platform of your village.

### **Vankhama**

#### **Chhuak Lo Zawk se Vawiin Ni chu (I wish the sun does not come out today)**

I wish the sun does not come out today,

My beloved little flower is gone from this hill;

I cry and hold on to her beautiful arms, as if laden with brass, as she was departing,

Farewell, my little flower;

Go on your way.

As she was moving away towards the horizon?

O hills, make an obstacle to prevent her from walking away;

Lost in tears I step on each hill from where I can see,

Until this pool of tears collect-

To shield my beloved from my view.

Lenghermawii (the beautiful one) has reached the other side,

This overwhelming longing increases in intensity;

Will there ever be a day in the future when I shall forget you, beautiful little flower?

There shall never be forgetting for the one longing for his beloved,

Even if the year was much longer.

There in an undeniable attraction when we look at each other,

I dare not ask for her, for she is of royal blood;

You were born to make my heart miserable

Though the distance between us is long, dear beloved who has captivated my heart,

May you live your life gracing the hills with your beauty.

You made me a promise saying that whenever the skies gave a sound,

“I will surely think about you” O one with the beautiful smile;

Whenever you see the moon walking in the night,

This miserable person has pledged this promise to you.

O I will look at the horizon,  
The hazy clouds hover over it;  
My beloved little flower- the hill where you live-  
And its never-fading countenance.

***Zawlkhawhermawii (The beautiful girl of Aizawl town)***

Longing for the one I do not deserve and dare not hope for,  
Zawlkhawhermawii the youth whose captivating charms make me long for her;  
Even when I wilt and hang like the cut grasses of the plains,  
As for me I will never cease to long for you all year long,  
The days when I rejoice over your beautiful face like that covered with brass that appear to  
bloom like flowers,  
The sun above, I wish you shone like a long ray,  
As for me, Aitenawn (beautiful one), one that cheers my heart,  
Zawlkhawhermawii, who is like the red orchid flower in the east.

Even if I go into her house, in her heart and mind,  
I have to compete with other youth coming in like enemies;  
I never get a look of love from her eyes,  
But I cannot cease to long for her;

Even if she marries and goes to another place,  
Even if she bears children to another;  
I cannot change my feelings for her,  
I would rather wait for Zawlkhawhermawii to become a divorcee.

As much as I miss her if only Zawlkhawhermawii,  
Misses me too, rejecting all her suitors to the side;  
Happily placing her implements for weaving in our house,  
Even if she fades like cloth while raising our children,  
As for me I will not long to live a life like royalty,  
I will fight against this unpleasant earth where roads converge,  
Even if you sulk like a baby I will melt and soften like water;  
I will even bear gossip for Zawlkhawhermawii.

In the landless place of my dreams Lenghermawii said,  
‘Even though I may appear to pay attention to others, There is none who can satisfy my heart as  
you do  
Waking up suddenly, I was lying on the bed;  
The cock crowed at midnight and this young man could no longer sleep!  
Beautiful one do you see me, this young man in your dreams?  
Oh! My heart is as cloudy as the clouds of the hills,

Longing for the one I cannot have, one who has turned into a dream, Zawlkhawhermawii.

**Tawnmang Emaw/ Luah Loh Lung Di (Was it a dream/ One I cannot have)**

All alone I come to visit the hills where we used to roam,

Tuahpui (Trees with scarlet blossoms) and vau (flowering tree) are blooming again;

The places we used to frequent have become things of the past,

Greenery and young leaves entertain it now.

I don't have dreams or desires,

I look around and I do not see her;

However her captivating charm remains in my heart,

Will there ever be a day when I shall forget my beloved whom I cannot have?

Long back, on her beautiful flowing hair,

We placed a beautiful blooming red orchid;

But now it blooms again atop the tall branches of the trees,

It says that it will bloom without being plucked.

So it is not a dream I find it hard to believe,

That you have moved away into the arms of another;

All that time, through the years I had followed you around,

Now I am separated from you in this manner.

***Awmkhawhar Lenkaw! Ka Han Thlir A (Looking at the horizon in loneliness)***

Looking at the horizon in loneliness,

The hill can be seen from among the hazy spread of clouds;

Will she be walking about the streets over there!  
Will she ever ponder over the one she used to love before?

My beloved with the gentle voice, oh Lenghermawi, (beautiful one)  
I have never met one who can captivate my heart as you do;  
Though the distance between us may be long I miss you more,  
I miss you, oh I miss you most.

A year passes by and changes,  
O one who is like the bright scarlet blossoms of the fartuah tree, who has disappeared beyond the  
hill-  
I don't believe I ever cross your mind,  
When I come to the house in the village of the one whom everyone is after.

Oh this male youth misses her so much,  
The days of his youth which have disappeared;  
I beg you sun to come for enabling me to meet my beloved,  
That which has already turned into a foolish dream.

When will I ever stop longing for you?  
Oh it gets stronger through the nights and mornings of everyday;  
Skilled at pretending, you make me miserable,  
Making me suffer this loneliness and misery of longing.

I am clearly aware that you have no intentions of marrying me,  
But oh, *Ngaihzual* beloved your captivating charm;

Has bound me up like the roots of the *zamanhmawng* parasitic tree,  
I will never stop longing for you till I die.

**Zirsangzela Hnamte**

**Kar Hla Di (My beloved far away from me)**

Arriving in your village I feel like a chicken that has lost its way,

I haven't met one who can heal my heartache;

All the others live life in pairs,

As for me will there ever be days,

When the one whom I am courting shall think of me?

To be captivated by the charms of a beloved who lives far away,

This is very hard for me to bear;

Waiting for the day when we shall get to meet again, perfectly matched like the pieces of a  
gong set,

I cannot sleep at night.

Climbing every hill I look around,

That place in the distance where my beloved lives;

If only it were possible to fly,

Like the eagle;

I would like to visit the hill where we used to go,



My loneliness might be bearable then.

***Ka Ring Lo Che (I cannot believe this of you)***

You cannot grow old in my mind,

Although we have parted ways;

Even if you are in the arms of another,

I am still yours completely.

Even if you have left the village you still remain --

Your gentle voice remains in the heart;

Those nights when we used to laugh like infants,

I don't believe you can forget them.

Like the *Riakmaw* bird I keep searching frantically,

What is the use of living now?

Even the bed is as cold as hail,

Since you left, O beloved one whom I shall never tire of looking at.

I wish I could visit her house with courage and bravery,

So to see your face!

My longing for you gets worse in the heart,

This longing that lasts for eternity is too long.

I wonder how you contemplate over the matter!

As for me, like one who is unwell;

I cannot stop crying like an infant,

Your captivating charm is as lasting as a long rope.

**Ainawni (One who is like the ainawn flower)**

The forest under the covering of the haze,

That which soothes the eyes on days when we look,

The flowering trees that bloom beautifully;

You live the days of youth together,

As for me I was born too early;

The face of a young girl which is like the flower of the ainawn tree,

She blooms while I don't---Ainawni.

O time, you are such a loss for me!

Why did you not, before it was too late,

In order to be able to court the beauty Ainawni who lives---

Pour liquid gong over my face to make me handsome?

Do think it over while contemplating all things;

To call back just ten years---

Is it not possible? Only then will I be able to court you---Ainawni.

My wealth and face which I possess,

Though they may not surpass everyone else's;

Is hope or the *Run* river longer--

I will keep on searching for I just might find,

Just like *Thasiama* whom people talk about;

That benevolent spirit with whom he was in a relationship,

It might be possible then---For you to become my beloved, *Ainawni*.

## APPENDICES

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**DEGREE** : **M.PHIL**

**DEPARTMENT** : **ENGLISH**

**TITLE OF DISSERTATION** : **SELECTED MIZO FOLKTALES AND  
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**SEMESTER/ DISSERTATION**

**Approval of Research Proposal**

1. **BOARD OF STUDIES** : **Dt. 13/05/2011**

2. **SCHOOL BOARD** : **Dt. 08/06/2011**

**REGISTRATION NO. & DATE** : **MZU/ M.Phil/ 55 of 13.05.2011**

**DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION** : **Dt 30/06/2012**

**EXTENSION** : **June 2012**

## BIO-DATA

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**Educational Qualification** :

<b>Class</b>	<b>Board/University</b>	<b>Year of Passing</b>	<b>Division/Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
HSLC	ICSE	2003	Distinction	85.4%
HSSLC	MBSE	2005	I	64.2%
B.A	MADRAS UNIV.	2008	I	69.9%
M.A	DELHI UNIV.	2010	I	60.8%
M.PHIL	MZU	Course Work completed in December 2010	'O' Grade awarded 10 pt.scale grading system.	Corresponds to 70.3% in of percentage conversion.

**M. Phil Registration Number and Date: MZU/ M.Phil/ 55 of 13.05.2011.**

**Other relevant information:**

- i) Secured UGC-MZU Fellowship for a tenure of twelve months from March 2011 to March 2012.**