COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COMMON THEMES IN SELECTED FOLKTALES OF MIZO, HMAR AND PAITE VERSIONS

CHINGBIAKMAWI

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

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BY

CHINGBIAKMAWI
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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DECLARATION

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I, Chingbiakmawi, 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.

(Candidate)

(Head) **(Supervisor)**

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
(DRS-I/UGC-SAP Supported Department)

Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama **TANHRIL – 796004** **Telephone No. (0389) 2330631**
Department of English **AIZAWL : MIZORAM** *E-Mail : margaretzama@ yahoo.com*

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Comparative Study of Common Themes in Selected Folktales of Mizo, Hmar and Paite Versions," which is being submitted to the Department of English, Mizoram University by Chingbiakmawi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English Literature, is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. She has fulfilled all the requirements for submitting the dissertation for the award of M.Phil degree.

The result embodied in the dissertation has not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

(Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama)

Supervisor,
Department of English,
Mizoram University.

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(**CHINGBIAKMAWI**)

CONTENTS

CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

Any study on folktales is grounded on the larger framework of folkloristic studies. Folklore covers traditional art, literature, knowledge and practice that are disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioural example. The concept of folklore existed long before William John Thoms (1803-1885) coined the term ‘folklore’ in 1846, and folklore serves as a source and resource for writers throughout the history of literature. In fact, it is often said that folklore is the backbone of literature and a mirror of culture. Anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871) defines culture as, “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, l aw, customs, any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd. in George 159).

Richard M. Dorson opines that Folkloristic study incorporates a vast area in academic phenomenon and “emerged as a new field of learning in the nineteenth century, when antiquaries and philologists in Europe looked closely at the ways of the lower class people”(1). And R.U. Sayce defined folklore as “a science dealing with the whole of folk thought and practice” (68). The different genres of folklore include “epic, myth, folktale, legend, folksong, proverb, riddle, folk dance, superstition, games, gestures, foodways, folk costume, and many, many more” (Dundes, *International* vii).

Of the many genres of folklore, folktale, in general refers to household tale, or to a particular genre of oral tales. It is a general term for numerous varieties of traditional narrative. Folktale appears to be a universal cultural, common to primitive and modern complex societies alike. The *Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore* gives

two definitions of folktale, broadly “it applies to all prose narratives following traditional storylines, which are told orally, or were told in previous generations. It thus covers fairytales, legends of all types, memorates, fables, tall tales, and humorous anecdotes.” And the narrow definition “restricts itself to the avowedly fictional narratives in the above list, excluding legends and memorates” (132).

Folktale, according to Stith Thompson is “the story which has been handed down from generation to generation either in writing or word of mouth” (4). Folktale then is essentially considered oral but continues after the advent of literacy. With the introduction of literacy, people started collecting folktales, writing and rewriting the same tales, copying from manuscript to manuscript thereby undergoing changes in due course of time; moreover, as a result of this transmission process variations of a single tale is inevitable.

However, in spite of its extensive history, there has been an ongoing debate about the definition of ‘folk’ in folklore. Folklore had been earlier defined as the traditional learning of the humbler and uncultured classes of civilized nations (Blake 217) and as pointed out by Sayce, A. Nutt in 1886 stated that folklore deals with primitive man, that is, man dominated by imagination and emotion rather than by knowledge and reason. E. P. Barker also defines the folk as “those who are mainly outside of urban culture and systematic education,” but later folklorists like A. R. Wright propose the folk to be the people in general, and also believed that folklore is something “alive all around us” (68 - 69). Other folklorists like B.A. Botkin, one of the first folklorists of America, sees that “folklore is a combination of tradition and creative and functional responses to contemporary condition” (qtd. in Hrisch 6). According to Alan Dundes, folk is:

> Any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common linking factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is; it could be nationality, ethnicity, religion, occupation, kinship, or any similar factor. Folk is a flexible concept, and a folk can be as large as a nation and as small as a village or family. A single person may know family folklore, ethnic folklore, occupational folklore, religious folklore, and national folklore (*International* viii).

These definitions show that there is obviously a wide difference of opinion about who constitutes the folk. In this dissertation, the folk referred to are the tribal community belonging to the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite culture respectively, and the focus will be a parallel study of their selected tales in terms of similarities and deviations of themes, social realities and other factors.

While much has been said about the homogeneity of the hill tribes of Mizoram and southern Manipur, not much attention is given to the circumstances that bind them together while at the same time keep them apart from each other. Difference in geographical location of these people attributes to differences in their perspectives. In the colonial records, these tribes were commonly referred to as Kukis. They belong to the Mongoloid race, and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman stock. The origin of these tribes is untraceable due to the absence of adequate historical backings. Although historians are not in exact agreement concerning the origins of these tribes, they do not deviate from the fact that these tribes share a common root and were a migratory race. One common finding of historians and scholars who study the history and origin of these tribes is that they had been together at one point of time and gradually migrated south-west from China through Burma to their present settlement

in the north eastern states of India like Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and its peripheral regions.

India's North East is a home for more than 200 communities, each with distinct ethnic identities, diverse dialects, different cultural traits and knowledge systems. L. Keivom acknowledges the difficulty in tracing the history of the people settled in this region:

> It is not easy to write the history...of any tribe in North East India. To embrace the full complexity of the North East is a difficult task, if not impossible. The region is a cauldron of ethnic tribes from basically the same descent with every imaginable community claiming distinct and separate identity. It is like a big cake cut up in different sizes by the ravages of time, ineluctable fate, lack of communications, ignorance, language, religion and fanciful but unrealistic political dreams and ideologies (vii).

The above statement is the same for communities like the Mizo, Hmar and Paite selected for study here. When the central government started schedulization of tribal[1] population after India got her independence in 1947, majority of the ethnic communities, including Hmar and Paite, residing in the state of Mizoram preferred to identify themselves as Mizo. This was formalised when the Lushai Hills District Act, 1954 was passed by the Indian Parliament. On the contrary, the Kukis in Manipur further diversified into different sub-tribes with nomenclatures of their own (Guite 12). Therefore, it is probable that a Paite or Hmar born and brought up in Mizoram identifies himself as Mizo while it is not so for those in Manipur. Likewise a Mizo in Manipur will not be able to accept a Hmar or Paite as his clans man, while this will

not be the case to a Mizo in Mizoram. A brief discussion of the concept of Mizo, Hmar and Paite are given in the following paragraphs. This will better situate both the communities and the tales under study in this dissertation.

Mizo

The origin and the period when the term 'Mizo' came into being is unknown. Sangkima, a Mizo historian, writes, "It is very difficult to give a clear cut account on when the word "Mizo" was first used. It is a gradual process of evolution" (16). Evidences show that they called themselves Mizo even when they were in Burma, prior to their migration to the Indian sub-continent. Vanchhunga, who studies the Mizos in Burma, claims that the forefathers of the Mizos used to say, "Keini Mizote chuan" meaning, "We the Mizos." Colonial records of the early 19th century too made mention of the term Mizo. A.W. Davis says that the term Mizo, variantly pronounced "Mezo" or "Mizau" includes all inhabitants of the North Lushai Hills, except Pawi. Mc Cabe also mentions in his report that Lushai call themselves "Mizos" or "Mizau" (qtd. in Sangkima 16).

In fact, the term Mizo is a generic term used by most people for denoting a number of tribes including Hmar, Paite and several other sub-tribes who more or less share similar stories of origin, similar histories of migration, cultural traits and practices, and belong to the same language family of the Tibeto-Burman group. Literally, the term Mizo means hillman or highlander. It is a concoction of two words 'mi', which means man, and 'zo', which means hill or highland or cold region. However, it may be noted that all people living in high hills or cold region are not called Mizo. The term is used to refer to a specific group of people of common decent scattered in the states of Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya and the Chin

Hills of Burma. Another explanation of the term Mizo is that the people were named after the name of the settlement called Zopui in Burma around 1765 A.D. It is said that during their settlement in Zopui, they conducted successful raids on their enemies and therefore, they felt proud to call themselves as people of Zopui or men of Zopui. Hence, the compound term Mizo (Guite 18).

In India, Mizo is recognised as one of the major schedule tribes. They are found in Mizoram, constituting 77% of the total ST population (STs constitute 94.5% of the total population of the state), in Manipur, they constitute 2.0% of the total ST population according to 2001 census. They are also found in Tripura, Meghalaya, and the Chin state of Burma.

Hmar

The term ‘Hmar’ literally means ‘Northerner’. It is believed that the term is given by the ruling Lusei clan to those who left Mizoram and settled to the north. The other theory regarding the origin and meaning of the term Hmar is based on Hmar oral tradition that contends that the term was originally derived from ‘hmarh’ which means tying one’s hair in a knot on the nape of one’s neck. According to Hmar tradition, there were two brothers – Hrumsawm and Tukbemsawm. Hrumsawm had to tie his hair in a knot on his forehead as there was a sore on the nape of his head when he was a child, and he had continued this till his death while the younger brother, Tukbemsawm, tied his hair in a knot on the nape of his neck. The people who adopted his hair-style are believed to be his progenies and were called Hmars. According to Lal Dena:

> Whatever may be the truth (regarding the origin of the term Hmar), this much is clear that the term ‘Hmar’ as a common nomenclature gained

> popularity and wider acceptance among the Hmar ethnic group living in the different parts of North east India only with the dawn of political consciousness by the beginning of the 20th century... (9).

The Hmars are found in large number in India in the states of Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya, and Myanmar. They are recognised as a separate tribe in Mizoram, Manipur and Assam, consisting 5.8% of the total ST population of Manipur, 2.2% and 0.44% in Mizoram and Assam respectively according to 2001 census.

Paite

Like the term Mizo and Hmar, when the term Paite came into being is not known, and whether the name was given by outsiders or adopted by themselves also remains unknown. According to the Mizoram Tribal Research Institute, "the first group of people who migrated from Chiimnuai in Chin hills could not be overtaken by the latter group of migrators, so the latter group referred to the former group as 'Paimasate' (Those who go first), and this was latter shortened to 'Paite'" (1). Prof. M.C. Goswami and Dr. H. Kamkhenthang say that the term 'Paite is a combination of two words, 'Pai' (go) and 'te' (plural maker), and used to denote those who migrated from Chin Hills to the Lushai Hills and Manipur. The Luseis and Pawis pronounced it 'Paihte' and they used this term to refer to all Northern Zoumis other than the Luseis and Pawis. Though Paihte had been used, the more commonly accepted form and which is recognized by the Government is 'Paite' (Neihsial 1). Today, they call themselves Paite rather than Kuki or Chin though
linguistic and anthropological sources record them as such.

Paite are found in the north eastern states of India like Manipur, Mizoram, and Karbi Anglong of Assam, and in the Chin state of Burma, Kalay and Kabaw area, Mandalay, Yangoon and other place. In Manipur they are recognised as a separate tribal group consisting 6.6% of the total tribal population in the state, according to the 2001census. While in other states of India they are recognised as sub-tribes of Mizos and Kukis.

Due to the absence of any historical records, the origin and history of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite still remain unclear. However, there are various oral traditions regarding the origin and history of these people. Some of the theories common to the Mizo, Hmar and Paite regarding their origin are given below:

Chhinlung (Mizo), Sinlung (Hmar) and Khul (Paite) Theory

The term Chhinlung, Sinlung and Khul literally means ‘cave’ in English. Though not proven, the Chhinlung theory cannot be discarded as it is the most remote phase mentioned in the oratures of these communities with regards to their origins. However, there are different opinions regarding this theory.

A traditional belief among these people as a whole is that their original home was a cave or khul. Paite scholar, Tualchin Neihsial is of the opinion that the cave might not be a particular cave but different caves which are found in the Saizang region in Burma. He further states that the people took refuge to these caves for quite some time before they settled down at Chiimnuai in Burma (4). A Paite folk song goes:

Eiteng khawlkhawm a tuam omlo,

Vannuai chiteng khul a piang;

Tuun sung khat a piang hi ngeingei,

Suahpih sanggam,

Laizom khat hi ngeingei hang e.

(We the people who are in aggregation are of one stock,

Every one of us under the sun is born of a cave;

And born of the same mother.

Being born of the same mother,

We are all born together as siblings;

We are really descendants of the same siblings.) (Guite 20)

The Hmars believe Sinlung to be their original home (Darliensung 1). One of the Hmar folk song goes:

Khaw Sinlung ah

Kawt siel ang ka zuong suok a;

Mi le nel lo tam a e,

Hreimi hrai a.

(In the city of Sinlung

I jumped out like a mithun;

Innumerable were the encounters,

With the children of men.) (Pangamte 5)

Hranglien Songate, a Hmar historian, identifies Sinlung as Tailing or Silung in Southwest China while Rochunga Pudaite is of the view that Sinlung might have been Sinning in Central China. Recent studies show that a small township called Sinlung, which is situated not far from Yulung river in Schechuan province could be the place referred to in Hmar folk songs (Dena 12).

Hrangthiaua and Lal Chungnunga in their book *Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of the Mizo)* (2011) write, “Our earliest settlement or origin which we can get from our forefathers is their life at Chhinlung” (3). One explanation links the cave with a covering stone to a passage in the Great Wall of China. While 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 (260 B.C. – 210 B.C.) of the Chin dynasty, the king who built the Great Wall of China. 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 (Zuali 5).

Theory of Jewish Connection

This theory links the origin of the Mizo kindred tribes to the lost tribe of Israel. There are some folksongs that support this theory. For instance, the Hmars folksong called Sikpui Hlapui goes:

Sikpui inthang kan ur laia,
Chang tuipui aw, senma hrili kang intan,
Kanre lawn a, ka leido aw
Sun ah sum ang, zanah meilawn invak e.
An tur a sa, tlu a ruol aw,
In phawsiel le in ral feite zuong thaw ro.
Sun ra zula, ka leido aw,
Ke ra lawn a, meisum ang lawn invak e
Sun ra zula, ka leido aw,
Laimi saang chang tuipuiin lem zova.
A varuol aw la ta che,

Suonglung chunga tuizuong put kha la ta che.
(While we are preparing for the Sikpui Festival,
The big red sea becomes divided.
As we march fighting our foes.
We are being led by a cloud during day
And a pillar of fire during night.
Our enemies, O ye folks, are thick with fury,
Come out with your shields and spears.
Fighting our foes all day, we march along
As cloud-fire goes afore.
The enemies we fight all day, the big sea
Swallowed them like beasts.
Collect the quails, and fetch the water
That springs out of the rock.) (Lal Dena 10)

This folksong vividly refers to the liberation of the Israelites from the bondage of the Egyptians and the events that followed before and after they crossed the Red Sea (Exodus, Chapter 13 - 14).

In fact, a group of people with a Church denomination called 'The Seventh Day Adventist' who called themselves Jew put forward the Jewish connection theory. According to this theory, the Mizo and its kindred tribes are the descendants of the Biblical Manasseh, the King of Judah from 687 to 642 B.C. (Guite 25). On July 7, 1994 an association known as 'Chhinlung Israel People's Convention' or CIPC was formed by people who acknowledged this theory. According to a CIPC bulletin, the representatives of the CIPC met the then President and Prime Minister of India on the

10th and 11th February, 1995 and submitted a memorandum requesting them to declare the Mizos are the descendants of the Israel's lost tribe (Darliensung 12).

Contemporary Mizo historian, B. Lalthangliana rules out the Chhinlung theory and he concludes, "it would be safe enough if we keep it (Chhinlung) as a myth," and the Jewish connection theory as well (*Mizo* 14). He traced their origin through the Tibeto-Burman people. The T'ao valley of Kansu province in western China and northern Tibet is believed to be the earliest settlement of the Tibeto-Burman people. According to the Chinese record, the Tibeto-Burman at first settled in mainland Tibet and then shifted to the southern part of China and were called 'Ch'i-ang' by the Chinese. The Ch'i-ang people were nomads who moved from place to place in search of food for their goats and sheep. Unlike them, the Chinese who were living to the north were agrarians and maintained their permanent settlement. In the course of time the situation between them could not remain favourable and they fought against each other frequently as a result of which it became impossible for the Ch'i-ang to continue living in that province and hence, they started migrating southward to the Szechwan province. During their stay in the Szechwan province, the Ch'i-ang became agrarian and stopped migrating. Once they established a permanent settlement, the Ch'i-ang people started having different names: some were called 'Yeuh-hsi Ch'i-ang', believed to be the ancestors of the Nagas, and some 'Kun-han Ch'i-ang', ancestors of the Kachin and all Mizo tribes (*India* 41-42).

One important factor to be noted while studying the history of these tribes is that their migration to their present settlements was on clan basis. It is for this reason that they were differentiated by the British colonisers as Old-Kukis and New-Kukis. By the time the white missionaries arrived in the north eastern region of India, the

Mizos, Hmars and Paites already maintained permanent settlements which were again on clan basis. This clan wise settlement is known from the fact that the missionaries went to the Mizos first (1894), and then to the Hmars (1910) and finally to the Paites (1914), but not to all of them at the same time.

The study of these individual tribes often show some interesting cultural peculiarities that distinguish them from the others, for example, the Paite follow a very systematic practice of naming a child while it is not so with the Lusei and some others. With tribes like the Lusei and Hmar, it is a tradition for the youngest male child to be the heir to his father, while the Paite follow the tradition of naming the eldest son as heir. However, despite attempts by these tribes to maintain their separate identities, distinguishing them is not an easy task. Their cuisine, costume, patriarchal system of familial set up, beliefs, and religion (then and now) and others which mark their identity are more or less common to the three tribes. Moreover, a good number of folktales are common among the Mizo, Hmar and Paite, with common themes, such as wit and subversions in the guise of simplicity and ignorance; marriage practices; death and afterlife; treatment of orphans; fraternal ties; power; supernatural elements, and others. “Possession of similar folktales,” H. Kamkhenthang writes, “means ... the people are of the same folk having similar social, ritual norms and similar philosophy of life” (223).

Meanwhile, all the languages of these tribes have close affinity to each other as they belong to the same language group, but at the same time, serve as a distinct identity marker between some of the tribes. J. Glenn Gray in his essay “Heidegger’s Being” asserts, “Language is the supreme event of human existence because it enables man, in the words of poet Holderlin, “to affirm what he is”” (417).

Language and Literature:

Mizo

The Mizo language which is the accepted lingua franca of Mizoram today was formerly a dialect of the Duhlian, a Lusei sub-tribe or clan which gradually gained prominence over the other dialects mainly due to the fact that it was more commonly used by the ruling chieftains. It was generally known as *Duhlian* or *Lusei tawng*. When the British colonisers came into contact with the Mizo chiefs in the second half of the 19th century, Mizo language was already dominant among the many dialect speakers in Mizoram. J. Shakespear writes, "Lushai or Dulien, which is the dialect of the Lushei clan, modified, doubtless, by contact with those of other clans is now the lingua franca of the whole Lushai hills, and is understood in many parts of the adjoining districts" (112).

Romanized alphabet of the Mizo language was provided from the time British administrators started recording the materials on the language and in due course a reasonably workable orthography for the written Lusei / Mizo came in vogue. The earliest works which included Mizo language, *Exercise in the Lushai dialect (Progressive colloquial exercises in the Lushai dialect of the 'Dzo'or Kuki language, with vocabularies and popular tales),* was produced by T.H. Lewin in 1874. Following T. H. Lewin's work, *Brojo Nath Saha,* a civil medical officer of Chittagong published *Grammar of the Lushai Language* in 1884 to which a few illustrations of Mizo songs and translations from Aesop's Fables were appended. J.D Anderson *and C.A Soppith are other British explorers who briefly studied the Mizo language at that time* (Vanlalhruaia 1).

An important chapter of Mizo language took place in 1894 when the two Welsh Missionaries JH Lorrain and W.E Savidge introduced the Mizo language to

writing, using Roman script. Thus, the foundation of written Mizo literature was laid in 1894. The 25 letters of the alphabet (against 26 in English) is arranged as follows:

A AW B CH D E F G NG H I J K

L M N O P R S T Ṭ U V Z

In the Mizo alphabet, 'A' is pronounced as 'AA' as in Car; 'AW' as in Draw; 'CH' as 'Chain'; 'E' as 'A' in English alphabet, as in Egg; 'NG' as in 'Thing'; 'I' as 'E' in English, 'SING'; 'Ṭ' ('T' with a dot under it) sounding as 'TR' as in TREE; 'U' as 'OO' as in Loose; 'Z' as 'ZET'.

On 22nd October, 1895 the first book in Mizo language, *Mizo Zirtirna Bu,* was published by JH Lorrain and W.E Savidge. This was followed by translation of *The Gospel of St. Luke, Gospel of St. John* and *The Acts*, and in 1898, JH Lorrain's work, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Lushai* Language was published by the Assam Government. These were the products of the early period of the history of Mizo literature.

The middle period of the Mizo literature (1920-1970) saw the rise of prominent Mizo writers such as Liangkhaia, who published a number of articles in the monthly "Kristian Tlangau" and authored *Mizo Chanchin* (the first volume in 1938 and the second volume in 1948). This was followed by compilations like *Zoram kan lo luh hma Pawi rama kan awm lai leh Zoram luh tirh vela chhuak tante*. During this period a good number of poetry, plays and other creative and non-creative writings were produced in Mizo language by Mizo writers.

The modern period of Mizo literature started in late twentieth century and continues to the present day. Most of the government run schools in Mizoram are in Mizo medium. Mizo is studied till university level, and scholars are looking forward

to write their thesis in Mizo language in the near future. Also, in Manipur, Mizo is one of the MIL (Major Indian languages) offered till Under Graduate level. Today, Mizo language is the most prolific in the literature arena of all the Mizo tribes with its numerous publications and renowned authors who have contributed much for it prosperity.

Hmar

Hmar language belongs to the Old-Kuki sub-group of Kuki-Chin-Lushai (Mizo*)* group. There are two main dialects of Hmar, namely *Khawthlang* and *Khawsak.* The *Khawsak* dialect is considered to be younger but it has developed by assimilating the surrounding languages like the Mizo and Thado languages and ultimately become the lingua franca for the different Hmar sub-tribes (Thiek 221). The Hmars do not have a script of their own. They use the Roman script for writing, adopted in turn from Lushai (now Mizo), and hence share the same alphabets.

The first book published in Hmar language was the *Chanchintha Marka Bu* translated from English by Rev. F.J. Sandy, a Welsh missionary, stationed at Aizawl, with the help of Mr. Thangkhup and Mr. Thanga, in 1917. This was followed by the publication of *Chanchintha Marka Bu, Johan Bu* in 1921 and *Independent Hlabu* in 1923.The next books published in Hmar were *Bu Hmasa* (Hmar Primer), *Sierkawp Bu* (Mathematics), *Thuthlungthar* (New Testament), *Hmasawnna* (Hmar Journal) and others, which were published during the year 1921-1943. In 1952, two monthly magazines namely *Inchuklai Nun* and *Sikhawvar,* were started. Till today there are more than 600 books published in Hmar language (Pangamte 2). On the15th October, 1945, Hmar Literature Society was formed under the leadership of Dr. Thanglung with its main objectives to promote and develop Hmar Literature, to write and publish

more books and to have vernacular paper in the school, college and university examinations (Thiek 225).

Hmar language is one among the recognized Modern Indian Languages, and it has been recommended to be taught as one of the MIL Papers in Manipur University up to Under Graduate level since 2003 and in Assam University since 2011.

Paite

Paite language belongs to the New-Kuki sub-group of Kuki-Chin-Lushai (Mizo) group. The main dialects of Paite are Bukpi, Dapzal, Khonou, Khothak, Lamzang, Dim, Lailou, Ngawn, Lousau, Phaileng, Saizang, Sihzang, Tedim, Teizang, and Val. But these local varieties of Paite language are merely variations in accent / intonation, and as such, do not substantially affect the mainstream Paite language as a whole.

In the early part of the 20th Century, Pauchinhau of Lailui Village in Chin Hills had invented a new system of writing and had also started a new religion popularly known as ‘Laipianism’ which denied all worship and animal sacrifices to the devils (demons) and instead he invoked the assistance of the creator of heaven and earth, healer of all diseases. For his invention he was addressed by the honorific title ‘Laipianpa’ meaning, the creator of script, and his influence in the northern Chin Hills was already widespread. When the American Baptist Missionary Rev. J. H. Cope approached Pauchinhau for his co-operation, he refused by saying that, “yours is a foreign religion whereas mine is revealed by God specially for the Zoumis” (qtd. in Neihsial 3). So, Rev. J. H. Cope carried on his missionary work on his own introducing writing in Romanised script and opened schools in several villages. Teaching his new writing system which was adapted to the local situation was called

the ‘Ni sagih Lai’ (the seven day script) that one could learn it within seven days. This kind of education in the vernacular using Roman alphabet was found to be much easier than Burmese or Bengali or even Pauchinhau’s script. Thus, the first primer called *Laishim Lai Bu Tiddim pau Tel Shimna-1 (Chin Primer in the Tiddim Dialect Number 1)* was published in 1931 by the American. In India, Paite Romanised script was first used around 1903. In the same year Rev. D. E. Jones worked with a Paite young man, T. Vialphung, in preparing a Paite Primer in Aizawl. Unfortunately, copies of this primer could not be traced. During the World War II, Rev H. Nengzachin prepared a new primer in Paite entitled *Sintung Bu* taking all the Romanised Lusei alphabets except the letter “Ṭ” (with a dot under it).

A AW B CH D E F G NG H I J

K L M N O P R S T U V Z

(Same sound as that of the Mizo’s)

In 1942, a Christian hymn book in Paite called *Paite Kristian Labu* was published by NEIG mission and then in 1951 the New Testament in Paite was published which was followed by the publication of the entire Bible in Paite by the Bible Society of India in 1971. In Burma, the New Testament *Lai Siangthou Thak* was translated and published in 1925 and a Christian hymn book called *Tedim Labu* had been published earlier (third edition in November 21,1923). It is interesting to note that the first newspaper of Paite / Tedim in the Chin Hills was edited and published by the American Baptist Missionary. From the year 1919 Rev. J. H. Coperan started a monthly newspaper “Tedim Thukizakna” which was printed in Madras (India) and then distributed in the Chin Hills (Burma). The Paite Literature Society (Paite Laipau Saipawl) takes the lead in every sphere of the literature activities of the Paite language. It formulated rules for writing the Paite language such

as formation of words, declension, affixes, prefixes, suffixes syntax and grammatical rules and practices. The first serious attempt at Paite grammar was *Tiddim Chin: A descriptive Analysis of two Texts* by Prof. Eugenie J.A. Henderson in 1987, and H. Kamkhenthang wrote a grammar called *Pau leh Laigelhdan* (1977) (Neihsial 3).

The year 1975 was another important landmark in the history of the Paite literature as the Government of Manipur approved the use of textbooks in tribal dialects including Paite for Classes I-V from the year 1975-76 academic school session. In 1977, the state government issued another order to use the following tribal dialects, viz, Tangkhul, Lushai (Mizo), Paite, Hmar, and Thadou / Kuki as the medium of instruction, from 1977-78 school session. In 1988, the Government of Manipur again approved the study of Paite as a language subject for class VI-VIII. Today, Paite is taught as MIL upto Under Graduate level in Manipur University.

The study of the languages of the above mentioned tribes shows that prior to acquiring a script in 1894 and the consequent literacy that followed, they already possessed their rich trove of legends, myths, stories of great warriors, and others, which were passed on orally from generation to generation through their folk songs and folk narratives.

The selected folktales for study in this dissertation are: Mizo tales of *Liandova leh Tuaisiala, Chhura,* and *Zawltlingi leh Ngambawma*; Hmar tales, *Liendo leh Touisiel, Sura,* and, *Thuitling leh Ngambawng*; and Paite tales, *Liandou leh Thanghou, Penglam,* and *Khupching leh Ngambawm.*

Most of the selected tales mentioned above are more or less common in content in the Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions while they also contain subtle variations. In fact, they are the same tales in different versions. When comparing the

folktales in Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions, their commonalities are more than their variations. It is obvious therefore that tribes having the same origin share common folk narratives. The variations appear subtle and pose interesting questions as to why such similar tales would differ in different versions containing cultural differences.

With the passage of time the selected tales have developed their own colouring and nuances which are impacted by traditional practices of the group of people who told and retold the tales. The variations of the same tale today have affected the literary output and other interpretations of the tale. This dissertation brings out the similarities and variations found in the selected tales of Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions. This is done by examining the historical and cultural specificity of the related tribes, as revealed in the thematic contents of the tales. This in turn gives an in-depth knowledge of the people and their culture.

A folklore study is comparative in nature. Leading folklorists like Alan Dundes, Richard M. Dorson, Stith Thompson and others whose seminal works are used to form the theoretical backbone of this dissertation have been instrumental in legitimizing and placing folklore studies on par with other key disciplines through their insightful research and formulation of various theories, and they acknowledged their agreements on the comparative nature of folklore study. Alan Dundes in *Folklore Matters* (1989) suggests that the use and refinement of the comparative method have taken very different courses in folklore, "folklore has steadfastly continued to consider it as its *sine qua non* among competing methodologies," meaning comparative method is indispensible in folklore studies (57). The study of any folktale or any folkloristic item in isolation or as unique to a given context is erroneous. From the early studies of folklore it became obvious that one could not possibly make a proper study of folklore without being comparative in approach. The

Grimm brothers, in the early decades of the 19th century, discovered that the tales they had collected had close analogues in other countries both European and otherwise. Just as historically related languages could be shown to have cognate lexical items and parallel syntactic structures, so folktales and other forms of folklore could be drawn to demonstrate genetically and historically common traits.

However, the nature of comparative method employed in this dissertation is in accordance with what Alan Dundes called, "a strictly limited nature" (*Folklore* 61), is confined to just three tribes: Mizo, Hmar and Paite. The term 'Mizo' as already mentioned, is a generic term used by scholars and researchers for denoting a number of tribes including Hmar and Paite, therefore, the term 'Mizo' is used interchangeably in this dissertation to denote both the Mizo tribe in particular and as a generic term to denote the three selected tribes in general. Annexure of the selected folktales in translation, and summary of the untranslated tales, is given in the dissertation.

NOTES

[1] The category ‘tribe’ despite all its conceptual problems is part of Indian political and policy discourse (implemented from 1950) primarily because of a system of protective discrimination that exists in favour of groups listed as tribes. The term ‘scheduled tribe’ refers to groups that are included in the official schedule of ‘tribes’ as being entitled to protective discrimination. Therefore, for ethnic groups with certain language and cultural specificity, to be listed as one under the schedule tribes opens up many opportunities in India.

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CHAPTER – 2

A STUDY OF SOCIAL REALITY IN THE SELECTED FOLKTALES

This chapter is a study of the social reality found in the folktale of *Liandova leh Tuaisiala,* in Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions. According to the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, "the reality of a situation is the truth about it, especially when this is unpleasant or unwelcomed" (1196). Lily Kong and Elaine Go assert in their article "Folktales and Reality: The Social Construction of Race in Chinese Tales" that "while folktales are generally thought of as being borne of the imagination, there is in fact a strong relationship to be drawn between folktales and reality" (265). Scholars of folkloristic study do not deny the assertion that there are elements of reality in folktales. V.I. Lenin in 1962 said, "In every folktale there are elements of reality" (qtd. in Propp 17). Also, Jack Zipes, in his book *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* states:

> Originally the folk tale was (and still is) an oral narrative form cultivated by non-literate and literate people to express the manner in which they perceived and perceive nature and their social order and their wish to satisfy their needs and wants. Historical, sociological and anthropological studies have shown that the folk tale originated as far back as the Megalithic period and that both non-literate and literate people have been the carriers and transformers of the tale... the tales are reflections of the social order in a given historical epoch, and as such, they symbolized the aspirations, needs, dreams and wishes of common people in a tribe, community, or society, either affirming the dominant social values and norms or revealing the necessity to change them (7).

Every folktale bears the imprint of the historical moment in which it had originated. The social dimension found in a folktale is the social reality of that time. Folktales are also seen as something that embodies the ethos of peoples and that provides evidences of their continuity and national distinctiveness. In demonstrating the usefulness of oral narratives including folktales, Lynwood Montell states that he "was able to set down in print an account that could never be written by most historians who are accustomed to doing research solely in libraries and archives" (qtd. in Georges 84). It has always been believed that the society of Mizo, Hmar and Paite tribes was egalitarian by nature with no class hierarchy or social discrimination. Yet, some of the folktales reveal otherwise : the treatment meted out to different sections of the people within the same village structure, such as women, orphans, widows, show discrepancies and uneven treatment, thus showcasing this facet of their social reality.

Liandova leh Tuaisiala (Mizo), *Liendo leh Touisiel* (Hmar), *Liandou leh Thanghou* (Paite), are three versions of the same tale to be studied here to understand some aspects of the social reality of the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite society. While interpreting the tale, the variations in narratives in the three versions will be pointed out. This folktale is reflective of their traditional social structure while at the same time reflecting the urges and desires of the less privileged such as orphans and widows who are often discriminated against and who belong to the fringes of the society. The setting of the tale is a pre-literate tribal society, and the tale focuses on the sad fate of two brothers Liandova and Tuaisiala who as young children were abandoned by their mother after the death of their father.

The old Mizo, Hmar and Paite societies, that is, the pre-Christian period, were basically the same, wherein institutions and other systems though named differently

meant the same thing, like *Zawlbuk* which means male dormitory in both Mizo and Hmar but is *Haam* in Paite.

The traditional Mizo society was primitive with no pejorative intended in the sense that it was simplistic and non-industrial. The primary source of livelihood was cultivation and buying and selling was in barter system. Each village strove to be self-sufficient and self-administered. Such a society may be considered to be similar to the "folk society" Robert Redfield writes of:

> The folk society is an isolated society. Probably there is no real society whose members are in complete ignorance of the existence of people other than themselves... Nevertheless, the folk societies we know are made up of people who have little communication with outsiders... (296).

In the selected tale, a great chief named Lersia (Lersi in Hmar, and in the Paite version it is the chief of Lelsia) visited Liandova's village. The chief disguised himself as a leper and nobody recognised him. He and his followers were the only outsiders seen in the folktale. Also, when Liandova's mother eloped with her lover they settled in another village and she came to visit them only once in the course of the tale. Liandova left his village only twice, once when he went to get the mithun offered by Lersia, and when he visited his in-laws towards the end of the tale. The whole tale covers the span of Liandova's lifetime but little is seen of communications with outsiders during the whole of this period.

Though there was little communication with outsiders, it does not mean that life in the folk society was always peaceful. A village was generally situated on top of a hill and was often threatened by wild animals and raiding parties from their neighbouring villages. Conflicts often occurred between villages over land for

cultivation among other things, and the conflicts were not usually settled in peaceful ways. A village that undertook a raid against another village would be revenged by the latter in due course. Therefore, the enmity between villages could last for a very long period of time.

The presence of the threatening enemy and wild animal in the folk society is found in the tale of the Paite version, while the other two versions make no mention of this aspect. In the Paite version, Liandou and Thanghou were going back home after their futile attempt to follow their mother who had eloped with her lover, when they encountered enemies and a wild bear:

> They met the enemies. When the enemies tried to capture her she said, "Don't capture me, go and take those two brothers over there," pointing towards a bale of straw. And the enemies circled the straw bale in which Liandou and his brother hid themselves and attacked it with their spears... The cave wherein they took refuge was the den of a bear (Deng 1).

The Mizos had a well-organized polity system at the village level under the rule and guidance of a council of elders which was presided over by the village 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.

During that period, the social position of a person was not acquired by birth but more by fate, this was exclusive of the chief which was hereditary. In most cases, the chief inevitably remained the wealthiest and the supreme power holder in his village. He lived on the taxes paid by his subjects, but this depended upon the number

of households in a village. The logic for this was that the chief spent his time administering and maintaining the welfare of his subjects and could not spare time for work and in turn he was paid taxes by each household of his village. Therefore, the chief's income totally depended on the size of his village; the more the household the wealthier the chief and vice versa. Very much aware of this situation, it was least desired by a chief to lose his subjects. However, at the same time, a household which could not produce its own livelihood like, Liandova and Tuaisiala, as poor orphans, was an unwanted family and considered a liability.

Since jhoomming cultivation was the primary source of their livelihood, a family that consisted of more men capable for cultivation was a privileged and wealthy family, and held a respectable position in the society. On the contrary, a widow with young children, orphans, physically disabled men and others who are incapable of doing hard work were considered a burden to others. The economic condition of a family determined its social position; in short, a man was respected and despised according to the wealth he possessed, not so much in terms of material possessions, but the manpower he possessed.

Moreover, the traditional way of life of the tribal communities under study was a semi-nomadic one. This semi-nomadic mode of livelihood was the outcome of their agricultural practices as well as fear of their enemies. They could not settle permanently in one place as the land they farmed for cultivation became infertile after they continuously cultivated for four or five years. So, after every four or five years they shifted to establish a new village. This shifting of village was done under the supervision of the chief and his council of elders.

Similar to what Marx and Engels had asserted, that “the whole society must fall into the two classes – the property-owners and the propertyless workers” (652), it in the Mizo society it is seen that while the land tenurial system was communal ownership, the chief held the power in the distribution of land to each household for cultivation. Therefore, the land upon which their life fundamentally depended upon was indirectly the chief’s property. Each household was under obligation to pay every year a certain specified quantity of paddy and surrendering certain share in every animal shot or trapped within the chiefdom and also rendering free labour to the chief whenever called for. In turn the chief was to protect and help the villagers in overcoming their difficulties, rewarding them for their outstanding achievements and punishing them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or infringement of established customs (Guite 53).

However, once the institution of chieftainship was established, the chief held the supreme power in all matters within his jurisdiction wherein his council of elders were normally appointed by the chief from a well-to-do and influential group of persons, kinsman and close friends of the chief who were also senior members of various sub-clans. They were exempted from forced labour and were also free to choose the most fertile jhoom-land before the other villagers. This means power was concentrated within the circle of the chief and his council members who constituted the privileged group. And when there is concentration of power among the few elite there is exploitation. Thus, this elite power group often tended to serve their narrow and vested interests (Dena, *In Search* 70).

As poor orphans, Liandova and Tualsiala represent the section of society who belong to its periphery. In modern parlance, they are the socially outcast, downtrodden and marginalised section of the society. From the beginning of the story,

the two brothers were treated not as individuals but as orphans, unwanted and a burden to others. Their own mother said to them, “I don’t care what you do with yourself or where you go, but I am not going to sacrifice having a husband just because of the two of you” (Zama 219). In the tale, they are not given any physical description and they are situated in a space without any identity, they are in Marxist terms, of the ‘subaltern’ class in their society. As pointed out by Raman Seldan (234), the term “subaltern” has been adapted from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who used it in a non-military sense for the first time to refer “to those of inferior rank without class consciousness.” The term is thus generally used to refer to persons or group belonging to the lower strata of society. Therefore, Liandova and Tuaisiala being poor and unproductive do not appear to belong either to the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie as defined by Marx but may be classed among the subalterns.

After their mother abandoned them, Liandova and Tuaisiala began their sad life as hungry wanderers. Liandova somehow managed to earn enough to feed himself by working as a hired hand, but Tuaisiala being too young for hire burdened his brother for the latter had to always include him which was not agreeable to his employers. When Liandova worked as a hired hand to tend cattle or watch over paddy fields he was given supper at his employer’s house which was the term of payment in those days. When supper time came Liandova often hid his brother under the house of his employer. The houses then were made of bamboo and stood on stilts so he would then quietly drop cooked yam between the openings of the bamboo floor. He was compelled to take such measures as he knew that no one was willing to feed Tuaisiala for free.

Once, Liandova was caught dropping cooked yams between the openings of the bamboo floor for his brother. The angry employer reprimanded him saying, “so

this is why you have been consuming more than your share! I refuse to feed your twin mouths, so get out at once" (Zama 220). From that incident onward, though Liandova had to continue to look for work, he was refused because he had an extra mouth to feed. The society turned a deaf ear to their constant hunger pangs and miserable plight. They were not seen as objects of sympathy, their existence was not acknowledged, and they were exploited and despised by the community. They often accompanied hunting parties, but whenever a game was killed, they were given only the bones and leftovers. On these occasions there was no guilty feeling on the part of the others, this was because the brothers were not considered as one among them.

Even after they acquired their new found wealth in the form of gongs and precious beads, which of course they found from the discarded entrails of a python, they had to keep the fact a secret and not reveal it to anyone because if they did so they would lose everything. They had no means of resisting or opposing the treatment meted out by those better off than them. Therefore, exploitation of the marginalised section of the society which is reflected in this tale reveals the existence of a stringent class hierarchy in the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite society.

Another aspect of the social reality of the Mizo society can be seen by reading beyond what the narrative reveals of women characters. This is because the status of women in Mizo society in the old days was in the form of subtle discrimination. There was no outright bigotry over women. This is what made early writers on Mizo women like N. Chatterji to say, "The status of woman in their society was in no way inferior to that of man and she suffered none of those derogatory and discriminatory treatment as may be found in some of the more advanced societies," (5) even though the traditional Mizo society was predominantly patriarchal in construct.

Since their migration from the Chin Hills, the forests and the rough terrain unfavourable for cultivation was found to have a profound effect in shaping the social structure and psyche of the people. 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 and thus the structure of the society was a male construct. This ensured that the responsibility fell upon the males to fulfil their role of protecting the society in all the above mentioned aspects. Fulfilment of the male responsibilities in the society resulted in rich rewards of recognition and respect. On the other hand, 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 the society (Zuali 13).

Moreover, agrarian society worldwide is found to be patriarchal by theorists like Warren Motley and Briffault. Regarding the evolution of patriarchy, Motley writes:

> Patriarchy evolved when primitive economies passed from hunting and gathering to the pastoral and agricultural stage and men gained predominate economic power. The domestication of animals, and the later development of advanced agriculture, gave men economic strength… (400).

When men started practising agriculture, Briffault asserts that, “woman, instead of being the chief producer, become economically unproductive, destitute, and dependent” (qtd. in Motley 6). Since the primary source of livelihood of the old Mizos was jhoomming cultivation and protection and survival of the village community

were regarded as the most important concerns of the village, men were given the agency through which they could constantly assert their supremacy over women.

The *Zawlbuk* or male dormitory, as mentioned earlier, found in the three traditional tribal societies under study, was unquestionably the most powerful institution, introduced in the first place as a requirement for defence and protection, and a space wherein young men underwent their rites of passage to become a Mizo man. The inmates were taught useful arts and handicrafts, sports and wrestling, singing and dancing, discipline and the mores of the society, matters concerning the defence of the village and enemy raids were planned in this space. It was located at the centre of the village often close to the chief's house and was the cultural, communal and educational centre of the village. However, there was no equivalence for the young women, therefore their sole education was acquired on the home front where they learnt the workings of household duties from their respective mothers.

It is safe to state that the whole establishment in the traditional Mizo society had overtly and covertly asserted male hegemony over women. Women were indoctrinated to believe in what patriarchal ideology had affirmed. Of the functioning of patriarchy Gerda Lerner in her seminal book, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) wrote:

> The system of patriarchy can only function with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; ... by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women (217).

As a patrilineal society, the line of descent was strictly based on the male members only. Man as the head of the family always held a higher status than woman in the family as well as in the society. All productive jobs like clearing the jungles for jhoom, hunting, fishing and others were done by men and all the secondary duties like household chores and taking care of the children were regarded as women's responsibility. In general, the position of women in the family as well as in the social life was subordinate to man. Before she married, a woman was owned by her father and after, by her husband. A woman did not have any legal claim on the family property except a small share at the time of marriage which she carried with her to her husband's house. Inheritance of property was strictly by the male members of the family. Lalhmuaka states that "woman had no voice in the family administration; even if she did her words were never accepted just because they were the words of a woman," and R.L. Hnuni also asserts that "the burden of women in the primitive Mizo society knew no bounds and they simply had to surrender themselves to these as their lot" (qtd. in Lalrinawma 32).

The tale of Liandova and his brother is male-centered in a predominantly patriarchal society. The women characters in the tale are marginal character who play minor but vital roles. They represent the subordinated voiceless characters who lived under the constant domination of the male folk. However, the space occupied by them is no less important than those occupied by male characters. They are instrumental in showcasing the social reality of a patriarchal society.

Wicked stepmothers in folktales are universal: *Cinderella, Snow White,* amongst others, including *Mauruangi*, (*Mauruong* in Hmar and *Mauzuang* in Paite, a tale common to all the three tribes). Mauruangi's step-mother often starved her, feeding her with grain husks only. Even when she finally married 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.

Interestingly, the tale *Liandova leh Tuaisiala* depicts a wicked mother and not a wicked stepmother. Their mother abandoned them when they were young children. This is an unusual case and rarely to be found in the tales of the three tribes. There are widows like Ngambawm's mother in the Paite version of *Khupching leh Ngambawm*, to take a case in point, who took care of her children after the death of her husband. Liandova and Tuaisiala's mother left them as young children when they needed her most. Throughout the tale the exploitation and marginalization of the brothers by others can be seen as the outcome of the cruelty of their abandonment by their mother.

The tale in the Mizo and Paite versions open with Liandova's family after the death of their father while the Hmar version contains a scene before his father passed away. The Hmar version of *Liendo le Touisiel* opens with a small family that consists of a dying father, a pacifying wife and two young boys. From the first scene of the tale the characters involved are vividly stereotyped. Liendo is seen as a visionary who seems to know what will befall him and his brother when his father dies: "Father, father, hold on, don't close your eyes. We are too small to be left" (Dena, "Liendo" 159). Touisiel, the younger of the two brothers is slow witted who would need to be taken care of, is first seen saying, "Hah, my father's dying eyes look like the eyes of the dying she-goat of our neighbour" (Ibid 159). And the mother, in an innately patriarchal society is portrayed as an inconsistent character, weak, and incapable of loving and living for her sons and of holding the family together. She assured her dying husband, "My dear husband, don't worry about our children. I'll look after them and they will feel no loss" (Ibid160) But this assurance was rather a respond to her husband words who told Liendo, "My son, Liendo, don't worry. You have your

loving mother to take care of you. You will feel no loss at all," and "she wiped here tears with the rim of her shawl" (Ibid 160).

The woman was well aware of the circumstances of being a widow with two little sons in an agrarian society. As all the productive works by men and secondary duties by women had been practiced for generations and ingrained in the people could not be changed over-night, she comprehended the pathetic situation of single mothers and the impracticality of raising two young boys on her own.

Leaving her own children to their fate may seem inhuman, however, the inhuman treatment meted by the mother cannot be judged on moral or ethical grounds. She might have done it for her survival. Sacrificing one's life for the cause of others has been regarded throughout the history of mankind as one of the most heroic deeds a person can do, nevertheless, the reality often is that survival matters at the end of the day.

An important point to be made in this case was the silence of the in-laws. In the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite society if a man died leaving behind small children, his wife returned to her parents after a period of time, and the children were taken care of by their late father's family. The Paite version of *Liandou leh Thanghou* mentions the protagonists' aunt (*ni*) and also their maternal uncle (*pu*).

> Their mother covered them with a big tub and ran off with her lover. Hearing their cry their aunt (father's sister) opened the tub…they were not able to over run their mother and they spent the night on the straw at their uncle's jhum… (Deng 1).

The presence of the uncle and aunt in the tale of the Paite version can be said to be reflective of the social institution still practiced today, based on kinship relation in the Paite community called *Inndongta*. *Inndongta*, or Household Council is considered by Paite of Southern Manipur as a unique feature of their community. Every Paite household has its own *Inndongta*. It is a formal organisation with recognised functionaries. Households in Paite society are interdependent within the village. Each household has a certain number of invisible strings of relationship to different households. There is structural relationship of households of blood-related and other selected non-clan members of the village in a corporate manner within the Paite social system. This corporate relationship of several households forms an institutional organisation called *Inndongta*, and its fundamental function is to meet the partial needs of a household of a man (Kamkhenthang 15). All in all, the primary function of the *Inndongta* is to keep the household intact.

Within this *Inndongta* institution, the *Pu* and *Ni* are more obligated than the other members to see to the welfare of the children of the household to which they are member of the *Inndongta*. The *Pu* can be maternal grandfather or maternal uncle. Even after the Paite community converted to Christianity, the *Pu's* blessing is still regarded as necessary for a child to have a successful life. Generally, in a Paite community, a woman is sent off to her husband's home with such a blessing, and a woman married off without *Pu's* blessing is regarded as unable to bring fortune to her in-laws. In the case of elopement, an occasion called 'Send off ceremony' is scheduled wherein the *Pu* blesses his niece or granddaughter. Concerning the aunt or *Ni*, she holds the office of *Tanu* in *Inndongta*. The office of the *tanu* is traditionally kinship obligation incumbent upon the wife-receiving household. There are a certain number of *tanus* graded on the basis of proximity of kinship and seniority of married

sisters and daughters. In common parlance *tanu* means daughter, however, *tanu* in the *Indongta* is a married daughter. In case of a household without a married daughter, the office of *tanu* is held by the father's sisters. The *tanus* are supposed to be available and at the disposal of the household.

In the tale, when Liandou asked his *Pu* for a dao to butcher a bear, instead of feeling proud for them, their *Pu* informed the whole villagers, and they took all the meat leaving behind the unwanted bones for Liandou and his brother. Their *Ni*, though she helped the boys in their efforts to stop their mother from abandoning them, did not take up any initiative when the brothers were finally abandoned and despised.

Also, the above tradition wherein the community looked to the welfare of the needy show that their mother did not leave them alone, rather, she left then in the hands of others who were more capable than her. Even if there were no relatives to help them, it was the duty of the chief to look after the orphans. In the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite village community, one fundamental duty of the chief was to look after the well-being of orphans. Orphans who had no one to take care of them were taken by the chief as his house slaves. The practice of slavery in the traditional tribal societies under this study existed for a very long period of time. P.S. Dahrawka (1896-1978), a renowned Mizo folklorist was freed from his servitude in the year 1910. He was then only thirteen years old, and taken to be the Chief's slave because he was a poor orphan (Thankhumi xiv). Slaves consisted of different kinds of people. Among them, widows, orphans others who were unable to support themselves and had no relatives willing to do so were looked upon as part of the chief's household and they worked for the chief in return for their food and shelter as well as protection. The institution of slavery continued to be practiced even after majority of the Mizo converted into Christianity. The duration of servitude was a lifetime, however, it was

possible to be redeemed by payment of one mithan, or its equivalent, and this was highly impossible for a slave. Being a slave was never a desirable position; however, a slave in a way had a secure life. Therefore, the fact that Liandova and Tuaisiala were left alone shows the failure of a community which was believed to have the welfare of its people as it fundamental responsibility.

Again, Tuaichawngi (Tuoichawngi in Hmar and Tuaitong in Paite), the chief's daughter in the tale is an example of a strong woman in the tale. As the chief's daughter, Tuaichawngi was given the right to select a husband of her choice. In those days "the eligibility of young men was measured generally in terms of physique, honesty, diligence, valour and sense of self-sacrifice for others" (Dena, "Liendo" 170). Liandova might have possessed these qualities but to the others he was a poor orphan and nothing more. Liandova and Tuaisiala were very aware of their status in the society. They participated in Tuaichawngi's selection of a husband because it was expected of all unmarried young men in the village to be part of the line-up. She chose Liandova among all the other eligible bachelors of the village. The Chief was enraged with her choice and scolded her, "You could have had your choice of the best, but you chose the poorest and the most common of the lot! Tuaichawng, you will not be blessed," (Zama 226) and with these words he cut off the finger with which she pointed at Liandova. After that she was afraid to return to her father's house and followed the two brothers and remained with them as Liandova's wife.

In the traditional Mizo society, the chief had the power to interfere in his children's selection of spouses. Laltheri and Chalthanga were historical figures who fell in love but the chief ordered the killing of Chalthanga, a commoner for falling in love with his daughter, Laltheri. "During that period, the chief had the power to banish or kill a commoner for falling in love with his daughter" (Thanmawia 111). In

Liandova and Tuaisiala, it was not Liandova who pursued Tuaichawngi but rather Tuaichawngi herself. Therefore, the chief could not take action against Liandova but instead imposed an extreme bride price for his daughter which he thought would be impossible for the brothers to pay. However, the two brothers could pay the bride price without any difficulty, with the help of their hidden treasure. Tuaichawngi showed her strong and far-sighted personality during the 'Khuangchawi'[1] occasion: she threw precious beads into the crowds and when she saw her father, she brandished her disfigured hand and called out, "Father, take a look at the finger you chopped off" (Zama 227).

In spite of her courageous conduct, Tuaichawngi, is portrayed otherwise, as someone manipulative who "secretly knew of their wealth and was in love with Liandova and wished to marry him" (Zama 226) This can be considered an example of how patriarchy undermines women in narratives. Her daring decision in choosing Liandova is portrayed in such a way that makes her seem greedy for wealth. The portrayal of women characters in the tale thus reflects their subordination and the dominance of their male counterparts in the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite society.

Social reality can also be seen in the unrealistic narrative of folktales. A folktale cannot be compared with realistic literature and the unusual narrative and lack of correspondence with reality are two of the basic characteristics of folktale. Nevertheless, the unusual narrative is where the higher reality lies. In the tale of *Liandova leh Tuaisiala,* the supernatural agency or the unusual narrative appears at the moment when the plot reaches an impasse with realistic materials. Liandova was able to provide daily livelihood for himself and his younger brother Tuaisiala with his hard work, but this became impossible once he was caught secretly feeding his brother by his employer, and in order to continue to live in a village they are

compelled to have a jhoom of their own. However, as agriculture is a long term process, the brothers needed provisions to last them until the harvesting season. Therefore, it was impossible for the brothers to cultivate their jhoom without the aid of an outside or supernatural force.

At this moment, a *khuanu* or 'guardian spirit' appears in the narrative. She cooked and kept their house while they were busy cultivating their jhoom. This guardian spirit here is a supernatural agency who represents the fictive reality. Fictive reality is a construct of the narrative imagination. Apparently, this fictive reality is the higher, intangible, and philosophical reality of the era in that culture where the folktale originates. According to William James it is:

> Reality is the relation to our emotional and active life. Probably, there are numerous orders of realities, each with its own special and separate style of existence. James calls them "sub-universes": the world of sense or physical things (as the paramount reality); the world of science; the world of ideal relations; the world of "idols of the tribe"; the various supernatural worlds of mythology and religion; the various worlds of individual opinion; the worlds of sheer madness and vagary (qtd. in Schuetz 533).

If reality as William asserts means the relation to the emotional and active life, the *khuanu* or the works she performed for the brothers are not just make belief, but rather represent the desire of the narrator who represents the type to which Liandova and Tuaisiala belong. This supernatural agency was not just a fantasy but the innermost desire of the marginalized people in the traditional Mizo society. The fact that the *khaunu* provided the orphan brothers with food is reflective of the desire of the people of that era wherein having enough food was one of the most important basic requirements for their survival.

This fictive reality is the philosophical reality which not only shows the inner reality of the socially marginalised people, it also serves a pivotal role giving the tale a complete shape. Had the *khuanu* not been present in the tale Liandova and Tuaisiala would not have been able to finally be accepted nor would they have been able to performed *Khuangchawi*.

Even though the purpose of the supernatural agency is the same in the three versions, the manner in which they appear in the narratives of the three versions varied. In the Mizo version, while Liandova and Tuaisiala were busy working in their jhoom, a crow flew above them with a captured snake on its beak. The two brothers raised a hue and cry causing the crow to drop its prey. They took the snake, wrapped it up in a large leaf and tucked it in between the bamboo wall of their jhoom hut. The snake was not an ordinary snake, but the child of the *Khuavang* or guardian spirit. And, the guardian spirit, by way of repaying their kind deed, cooked food for them while they were busy working in their jhoom. However, when the brothers found out their benefactor, she left them with the promise that she would be there for them whenever they needed her. She kept her promise and solved their problem during the harvest. Their jhoom was quite small but they did not have enough implements for harvest. So, the guardian spirit reappeared for the second time and helped them harvest many times more than what they had sowed.

In the Hmar version of the tale the supernatural agency appears directly in the figure of an old woman:

> One night, they heard some strange noise, something like the noise made by a stray chicken underneath their house. They made a bamboo torch and enquired. It happened to be an old woman shivering with cold. They took her home and put her near the hearth for warmth. She had to keep the

> house. She use to rub her eyes with her hand and something like grains used to fall down she cooked it and it turned into something like cooked rice. After day's work, when they returned home, they saw their food ready. They asked her where from she got such good quality rice. But she kept mum. So, till harvest time they fed on this food (Dena, "Liendo" 165-166).

Similar to in the Mizo version, the old woman helps them during harvest in the Hmar version as well. She asked Liendo to invite all the villagers for harvest. While the villagers were harvesting the old woman danced on the threshing floor, and as long as she kept on dancing the harvesting could not be finished. By the time the threshing was done there were enough crops to last the brothers for a year. This meant that the brothers would be able continue cultivating their jhoom the next year without any assistance from others.

The Paite version of the selected folktale states that one day an eagle dropped a snake in the jhoom of Liandou and Thanghou. The snake transformed itself into an old woman. The old woman was very sympathetic towards the brothers and so she kept their house and cooked food for them when they were away. They did not suffer any scarcity of rice for as long as the old woman stayed with them. With her staying in their house and welcoming them with cooked food every evening, the two brothers could easily cultivate their jhoom. However, out of curiosity, one day Liandou spied upon the old woman while she was cooking their food. Liandou saw rice falling from the body of the old woman when she shook herself. Liandou detested the food that fell from the old woman's body. Sensing the situation, she left them saying, "Dear, I will vanish among the chaff in the mortar place [2], and whenever you need me you can summon me by sacrificing a twisted ankled cock" (Deng 2). And it is said that the

ritual practice of sacrificing animals in the mortar place in the traditional Paite religion was born from here.

The social realities found in the tale of *Liandova and Tuaisiala* in Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions are basically the same. But the narratives when compared, show some variations. The narratives of the Mizo and the Hmar versions are closer to each other than Mizo and Paite or Hmar and Paite. This may be due to the fact that Mizo and Hmar have more cultural affinities than both have with the Paites. During colonial period, all the different Mizo tribes were referred to as Kukis and further classified as Old Kukis and New Kukis. Among these people the Mizos and Hmars belonged to the Old Kukis and Paite to the New Kukis. Folktales are more or less common among all these groups of people. Like all the other folktales of these cultures, the origin of the selected folktale in this chapter is also unknown. The variations found in the three versions of the selected folktales might have been acquired during their respective process of dissemination. It can thus be concluded that the social reality of the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite community though the same, contains some degree of cultural differences worth study.

NOTES

[1] Lalthangliana, B. *Zoram Encyclopedia (Zoram Tinreng Bu).* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 2003) 274-276. *Khuangchawi, n*. It was a traditional feast given only by chiefs and prominent persons. It was the greatest and highest accomplishment a Mizo could achieve during his lifetime in a traditional Mizo society. It was a symbol of social status. *Khuangchawi* equivalent in the Hmar tradition was *Inchawng*. As far as the selected tale is concerned, the Paite version made no mention of a particular public feast given by Liandou and his brother but states that they performed different sorts of public feasts like *gal-aih*, *tang-aih*, and *khobawl* which are the same as the *khuangchawi*.

[2] Mortar place was the enclosed front veranda of a traditional Mizo house where a large wooden mortar for husking rice was kept.

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CHAPTER – 3

THE TRICKSTER AS SUBVERSIVE AGENT IN THE SELECTED FOLKTALES

Folktales are tales of common people and are generally subversive in nature. Subversion in the guise of simplicity and ignorance is one of the main motifs found in the tales of Chhura (Sura and Penglam of Hmar and Paite versions respectively). Chhura, Sura and Penglam is a legendary cultural hero of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite respectively. Though known by different names in the three communities, the said character is generally accepted to be the same folk persona. Most of the tales associated with this folk persona are the same in the three versions. Chhura[1] tales are reflective of various aspects of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite cultures and the social values then and now.

Some scholars believe in the existence of the character of Chhura not just as a fictional character but a real one. A certain clan among the Hmar believe that they are the descendants of Chhura. Lal Dena, a Hmar scholar, in his book *Hmar Folktales* writes, “Sura, one of the most popular folk heroes of Hmar, married a Mishmi girl called Thairawnchawng from Arunachal Pradesh and was said to be the progenitor of Hrangchals, one of the sub-clans of Hmar” (vii). P.S. Dahrawka too believed in the existence of Chhura in real life, he laid down two reasons as to why he believed in the existence of Chhura. Firstly, the nature of the tales. He believed that Chhura tales are much more life-like when compared with other folktales and that the tales appear more like the life and actions of a person than a story per se. He also said that Chhura tales are reflective of the social reality of his time especially the economic and the indigenous life of the people. Secondly, for the reason that his descendants are still

present today. He said that no one can question the Hmar's assertion that they are the descendents of Chhura because they have been claiming Chhura as their progenitor from ancient times (225 – 227).

However, the tales and legends of Chhura cover a wide span in the folk history of the Mizo. Suppose, if the Hmars are the descendants of Chhura, it would suggest that he lived in the remote past in Mizo history because of their large population today. On the other hand, the presence of some historical evidences associated with Chhura, including 'Chhura Farep' – a rock monument and 'Chhura Talhtumbung'- a broken piece of Chhura's club at North Vanlaiphai in Serchhip district, and 'Chhura Chirawtlung' – a stone supposedly used by Chhura to grind salt at Farkawn in Champhai district of Mizoram, to mention a few, suggest that he had lived in the recent past, after Mizo settlement in Mizoram. Nevertheless, the mysteries concerning the existence of Chhura in real life add to the richness of his character. This chapter aims to focus not on whether Chhura really existed or not, but on his importance as a folk character, to help analyse some subversive qualities in context with the Mizo beliefs and customs.

Chhura's tales are extensive. Though some are realistic and appear to be true to life, others are obviously far-fetched tales, but all are strangely consistent to his character. The intention of this chapter is to highlight events and characters in Chhura's tales, which help to reveal the inner psyche and apprehensions of the Mizo people, and which will be seen to offer comic relief from social or human tensions and thereby providing a release, without the need to suffer any consequences.

The selected tales for studying the subversive qualities of the legendary Chhura are: *Chhura and His Enemies, Chhura and Ai Um, Chhura's Attempt at*

Whistling, Chhura and Nahaia Dig for Yam, Sharing a Mithun, Chhura's Blanket and Hatchet, Chhura and Nahaia Exchange Houses, Chhura Gathers Chengkek, Chhura Fears Spotted Colours, Chhura and His Mother-in-law, Penglam the Trader, Penglam Gets Married, Chhura Loses His Way, Chhura Cooks Food, Chhura and the Horn of Plenty.

Chhura runs the gamut of roles from brother, husband, father, trickster to cultural hero, fusing both positive and negative traits. He is sometimes a fool, a coward, and a clever hero with lax morals, yet he can also be extraordinarily brave and sagacious. Chhura is sometimes a positive agent, often displaying such defining cultural features like *tlawmngaihna*[2] - the much touted Mizo code of selfless service to others without expectations of return, and its accompanying virtues of bravery, humility and respect for one's elders. Yet he also often displays some of the most antisocial behaviour. Although one laughs at his escapades and foolishness, and is often embarrassed by his promiscuity, his creative cleverness amazes and keeps alive the possibility of transcending the social restrictions a person regularly encounters. Wit and trickery combined with seeming ignorance and simplicity are in fact subversive agents successfully employed by Chhura in the tales.

To deal with Chhura's subversive character is to first categorize him as a trickster. Trickster tale is one of the oldest and most persistent cultural pattern of negation and one of the oldest narrative form, and Chhura fits into this category. The term trickster was first introduced in connection with the study of North American mythology. "The Indian trickster," writes Michael P. Carroll, "is first and foremost a "selfish-buffoon" – "selfish" because so much of the trickster's activity is oriented toward the gratification of his appetites for food and sex, and "buffoon" because the elaborate deceits that the trickster devises in order to satisfy these appetites so often

backfire and leave the trickster looking incredibly foolish" (106). Though for Chhura his buffoonery is due to his ridiculous antics, as well as his indulgence towards his lazy and cunning kinsman, Nahaia, it nonetheless results in projecting Chhura as incredibly foolish.

The term trickster is also often used to describe what Orrin E. Klapp called the 'clever hero.' The clever hero is a character who consistently outwits stronger opponents, where 'stronger' can refer to physical strength or power or both. Most of the tales of Chhura situate him against many, or against an enemy who is stronger and more powerful than him.

In general, Chhura cannot be considered a good man and is usually far from being a virtuous role model. His tales are often strong in the destructive and forbidden but his supremacy for wit, resourcefulness, deceit, impudence and sense of provoke laughter while putting his opponent in a bad light. This arouses appreciation because this is the quality that tricksters like him possess; to violate the forbidden but getting away without facing the consequences. Therefore, as a trickster, Chhura gets away with a great many things, and we encounter some degree of complexity in our interpretations.

Chhura as a selfish-buffoon is found in a group of connected tales, wherein he is seen as discriminating against the Pawi[3]. He has no esteem whatsoever for the Pawi whom he treats as objects of amusement. But humour as a redeeming feature is there and as Orrin E. Klapp states, "It may be said that humor in any form is a value which will redeem many a personal defect – such as ugliness or wickedness – and bring to it to its possessor a certain amount of popularity" (22).

The group of tales particularly relevant here are those wherein Chhura failed to remember the term *ai um* meaning fermented crab, forgot how to whistle, and when he finally succeeded in threatening a Pawi merchant into freeing him from his cage under the bridge, and then imprisoning him in turn. In these tales, one witnesses the playful impudence of Chhura who saw no qualms when he pulled off the tongue of the Pawi who helped him search and find his lost art of whistling, or when he cut the rope of the cage, thus drowning the Pawi merchant in the river and then taking possession of all his merchandise. However, the manner in which Chhura played these tricks are done in such a manner that the public laugh instead of condemning him. This subversion of justice can only be applied by tricksters and clever heroes like Chhura. Orrin E. Klapp writes:

> What is amusing about this subversion of justice? It is the success or the way it had been accomplished by an element of playful impudence, which converts crime into delightful prankishness, as when a community dismisses the bad behavior of its juveniles… The amount of money or the magnitude of the offence is not the sole factor, for great misdeeds can have the same immunity. Dress it up with a little humour, the salt of audacity and drollery, and all is forgiven: the deed becomes a show for the pleasure of an audience, not a matter to be judged in court… Values are rearranged; crime becomes comedy and being "wronged" is being made a fool. Who is guilty? The culprit is let off with a compliment or only rebuke by the public which laughs as it shakes its head. The offender has been pardoned by a comic role. The key to his immunity seems to be not a callous indifference to moral values but that people love a joke, even when occasionally it is on them (22).

There are three other connected tales which reveal Chhura as a clever hero, wherein he was pursued by his enemies, got caught, and each time, managed to outwit them and escaped again. These tales are about one against many; Chhura against a whole village. According to the Mizo and Hmar versions, the village mentioned in these tales is *Mawngping khua*, a village where people have no anuses. The Paite version mentions no name for the village. In all these tales, Chhura outsmarted his enemy in different episodes wherein he hid inside a hollow log, than climbed atop a banyan tree, than outwitted them lying in wait for him inside his jhoom hut, and finally they caught and caged him inside a bamboo basket that was hung beneath a bridge with a deep river flowing beneath. This behaviour of tricksters who constantly run away from enemies is interpreted as success by Orrin E. Klapp, who states:

> To run away and return to fight another day does not seem at first glance of victory nor a formula for heroism; and, indeed, it has more of the earmarks of cowardice than courage. But it must be recognized that continual escapes, especially those which are nimble and impudent, which leave the pursuer looking slow-footed and foolish, have the quality of the clever triumph. Part of the charm of the guerilla and outlaw comes not from the strokes of audacity he performs but from the manner in which he gets away, disappearing and reappearing with ease, evading traps, … Despite the most elaborate precautions, his would-be captors never seem to be able to lay their hands on him… The fugitive gains prestige by his immunity just as those who chase him, by failure, become fools… Thus, the small, the agile, the light-fingered and quick-witted have an inherent advantage over the conscientious but mechanical forces of law and order. They not only get away without punishment but win glory to boot. The

> clever escape is not an inglorious retreat, but a victory because it leaves the pursuer in the position of having tried to embrace a greased pig (29).

In all the tales mentioned, Chhura demonstrates what a clever trickster he is. Whenever he was caught he escaped through his wit. He was also an audacious liar tricking his enemies into believing that their forefathers really held their captives by the elbow, or by the upper lip, which was really his ruse for easy escape. He bluffed them into believing that he could really fly across the distance from the banyan treetop. When they lay in wait for him inside his remote jhoom hut, he called out to the hut from the distance pretending that it used to answer him and wondered aloud that perhaps there were enemies inside since it refused to respond. At this, one of the enemies loudly responded, in order to reassure him that all was well. Chhura had in fact known all along that they might have set a trap for him and hence had taken this precaution. He makes fools of his enemies time and again through continual escapes, inflicting loss of face and prestige, and making them fall into their own trap (Zama, "Re-reading" 211-212).

The understanding of Chhura's subversive quality would not be complete unless consideration is given to his social function. He is not just a lucky trickster who escapes merely by his wits and clever tricks, but is a social force who with his impudent audacity demonstrates how a common and simple man can exercise power over a larger opponent. His relative weakness and smallness becomes his strength; it makes his opponents overconfident and pompous. For the audience, who are individually not strong, it proves that brains and mere tricks can triumph over those who are physically more in number and stronger.

The fact that Chhura's enemies had no anuses is important in studying the subversive nature of Chhura's tales, though it is in truth an impossibility. Extraordinary creatures existed in most cultures; the Centaur and Cyclops in the Greek mythology, to mention a few. The Centaur was from a race of creatures, part horse and part man, living in the mountains of Thessaly and Arcadia (*Britannica Ready reference Encyclopedia.* Vol. I, 192). Cyclops were any of the several one-eyed giants. In the *Odessey,* the Cyclops were cannibals who lived in a faraway land. According to Hesoid, there were three Cyclops viz.; Arges, Brontes, and Steropes (*Britannica Ready reference Encyclopedia.*Vol. II, 95).

However, extraordinary creatures are hardly seen co-existing peacefully with human beings; either they are stronger and occupy a higher position or weaker and lived at the mercy of human beings. Being different from human beings makes it impossible to the readers or listeners of the tale to identify with them. In contrast, Chhura is at an advantage in such situations for one can always identify himself with the said characters in some way or other.

In the group of tales referred to, Chhura is seen fighting single handedly against a whole community. He became a potential threat to them after he was responsible for the death of their young children.

> One day Chhura made a trip to Mawngping village only to discover that it was like no other. People did not defecate because they had no anuses, and when asked how he acquired his, Chhura replied, "When we were little, our parents applied a red-hot iron skewer, and then put us all in a big basket which they opened only on the third day." At this, everyone wanted the same operation performed on their children, and so brought them to

> Chhura. Chhura followed the procedure he had told them about and asked them to come for their children on the third day. When they did so, they found that only one lone child had survived, but not for long as it too was killed by the rush of parents claiming it (Zama, *Chhura and His Enemies* 1).

In social terms, Chhura's actions are often extremely aggressive, destructive and forbidden. His deceitfulness is an outright treachery for he operates on the trust placed in him. He duped and made fools of his enemies not only once but till he tricked all who chased him into drowning themselves in the river, a fate that had been intended for him. Though anti-social, Chhura succeeded in defeating all his enemies by appealing to the universal greed in all men. He insulted them by rousing their greed for riches with the lie that untold treasures lay in the river bed and all they had to do was tie empty vessels round their waist to carry the treasures in, and jump into the river. Blinded by their greed, his enemies failed to realize that the empty vessels when filled with water would weigh them down and thus drown them. "It should be noted though, that Chhura in revealing his total lack of morals also makes himself vulnerable to his own shortcomings such as his extreme sexual appetite… " (Zama, "Re-reading" 212).

As the tale unfolds, we see Chhura acting the role of the greedy and lecherous buffoon. His lechery is evident in the tale wherein he slept with all the women of the village. Chhura returns to the village and urges all the wives to go and meet their husbands due back from their treasure-hunt. As they did so, he went to all the houses dousing the fires in the hearth of every home while he kept his own fire burning. When the women returned home from their futile errand in the evening, tired and cold

from the pouring rain, they all had to pay a price to kindle their home-fires, which was, to sleep with Chhura. This absence of moral provokes ambivalent responses.

A study of Chhura's personality shows that he seeks immediate gratification of his sexual desires. The Paite version attempts to rationalize Chhura's promiscuity. According to it, Chhura's promiscuity began sometime after he got married. When Chhura attained marriageable age, he requested his parents to find him a wife. So his parents found a suitable girl and they got married according to tradition. However, Chhura did not realize then that he had to sleep with his wife. His wife waited for him to sleep with her but to no avail and at last could take it any longer so she went to her mother with her problem. Thanks to the wise intervention of his mother-in-law the ignorant and innocent Chhura was soon initiated into the joys of conjugal bliss. It is said that thereafter, Chhura became obsessive which explains his promiscuity and desire to gratify his sexual urges irrespective of social transgressions in the process.

Regarding the discovery of his sexual desire, the Paite version contradicts Freud who argues that all children are initially characterized by an innate tendency toward the immediate gratification of their sexual impulses, and that this tendency is generally repressed (36). The narrative posits that Penglam's uncontrolled sexual desire is a social construct that in a way suggests that he is a fool in not perceiving the function of his basic human instinct until explained to him, and he is again a fool in not controlling that desire which is meant to be repressed according to social norms, and this in turn makes him a unique person.

If both the immediate gratification of sexual impulses and the maintenance of social life are things that are desired, whether consciously or unconsciously, by all individuals, it obviously poses a dilemma. If Freud is to be believed, the first leads to

the destruction of the second, and thus individuals cannot have both simultaneously. Yet, Levi Strauss argues that the purpose of myth is to resolve unpleasant dilemmas of this sort (444). Seen in this light, the myth of Chhura's uncontrolled gratification of his sexual desire provide a release valve for the anti-social repressed desire by men who tell and listen to such tales without causing any destruction to his own social life. Therefore, Chhura as a trickster is more than just a selfish-buffoon; he is also a cultural hero. His tales are excellent example of the function of folklore; Alan Dundes asserts that "Folklore offers a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of taboo and anxiety – provoking behavior. One can do or say in folkloric form things otherwise interdicted in everyday life" (qtd. in Bronner 3).

Although one can argue that the women Chhura slept with in Mawngping village were his enemies and that it was meant to be viewed as a declaration of his manhood over his enemies as is often the case during warfare, however, Chhura did not spare the women in his community as well. In the tale *Chhura and His Mother-in-law*, he succeeds in tricking his mother-in-law to sleep with him. He deliberately created a situation by manipulating his mother-in-law into surrendering herself in order to fulfill his lust and thus transgressed a taboo. Chhura is unconcerned with the societal norms and customs when it comes to satisfying his sexual appetite. He is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both.

Foolishness is the role most associated with Chhura. It is indeed his foolishness which has created the myth of Chhura the lovable, bumbling fool. The tales associated with this aspect of his persona is numerous. There is a tale which tells of one of his business ventures. It was during a time when Chhura and his family were in dire economic straits. He set off to sell an earthen vessel, the only valuable asset in

their house, which according to some version was at the suggestion of his wife who cautioned him to be very careful with the vessel. She instructed him never to put the vessel on the ground before he reached his destination, and to change sides without putting it on the ground when he was tired of carrying it in one shoulder. After some time, the load he carried proved too heavy, so he considered changing sides to ease the burden. He remembered what his wife told him so he did a full turn and headed back to his village thinking all the while that he had changed shoulders. The narrative continues, wherein he reached his village and stayed as a guest in one of his neighbours' house. When his wife inquired what he was doing at the neighbour's and asked him to come home, he thought that woman was in love with him

The whole gamut of Chhura's tales is done with the intention of making him look the most foolish of all fools. However, whether Chhura was as foolish as some of his tales would have one believe in is a question one can introspect upon. P.S. Dahrawka is of the opinion that Chhura not only fooled the people of his day, but also continues to fool people today when they fall into the trap of considering him a fool (234). What is remarkable and interesting about Chhura's foolishness is the situation when he chose to be foolish. The tales show Chhura chose to be foolish for his personal gain and for the benefit of others as well.

There is one tale which tells of Chhura's adventure. On returning from one of his travels Chhura told his wife that he had seen a big striped animal and it laughed at him. Knowing that the striped animal was a tiger, his wife warned him to be afraid of all striped things. One day Chhura stayed home while his wife went to their jhoom. He saw his wife's striped cloth hanging on the clothesline and attacked it with his spear fully damaging it. When his wife returned home in the evening, she saw her

cloth torn into pieces. She enquired about it to her husband who said, “I did it because you said that all striped things are dangerous” (Khiangte 39).

There is yet another tale in which Chhura was instructed by his wife to cook dinner when the sun is positioned above a particular tree in their compound. In the afternoon, when the sun reached the top of the tree Chhura carried utensils and other cooking materials up to the tree and attempted to cook there on top of the tree. When his wife returned from their jhoom, he complained about the impossibility of following her instruction.

Such tales can be interpreted as subtle forms of subversion against female authority. The tales show Chhura using language to subvert the authority of women. The Mizo society is patriarchal; cooking and housekeeping are regarded as women’s responsibility. A woman’s lowly status is reflected in some of their common sayings, such as : *women and crabs have no character; Let a woman and a female dog with litter growl to their satisfaction; Old fences and old wives can be replaced.* Such sayings may be viewed as classic examples of strong gender biases ingrained in the male psyche (Zama, “A Study” 116). So, his ridiculous actions here can be interpreted as his own way of demonstrating male’s supremacy over women without any outright reproach on his part.

There is another tale in the Paite version which depicts language being used as a subversive tool. It is important to mention here that Penglam, as far as the Paite version is concerned, is depicted as a poor, lazy and cunning person who would dilly-dally all day long while his wife laboured to support the family. Once she told him of how other men traded their hoe and axes in exchange for food, and suggested that he must do the same. However, his wife used the word *pei* (an old usage) for ‘trade’

while the literal meaning of *pei* is 'twirl.' So, when his wife was away working in their jhoom, Penglam literally twirled all their hoe and axes and lost them. Here his ridiculous, foolish and stupid actions are very true to his character – the foolish Penglam, but beyond that it reflects how he could live peacefully unperturbed by any of the problems faced by his family and making his audiences laugh instead of rousing their concern for the pathetic plight of Chhura's family.

Chhura and Sura of Mizo and Hmar versions have a brother by name Nahaia and Nahai respectively, while no brother of Penglam is mentioned in the Paite version. Chhura is believed to be younger than Nahaia, while in the Hmar version, Sura is elder. In the tales that incorporated his brother Nahaia, Chhura is seen as brave, resourceful, and always sacrificing for his brother, while the former is a coward, lazy and always out to deceive and grab the best at the cost of the former. Apparently, the brother character in Chhura's tales has multiple functions. He is instrumental in highlighting the positive qualities of Chhura and thereby making him a kind, affectionate, supportive, understanding character while the other tales reveal him otherwise.

As the younger of the two, Chhura fulfilled what was expected of him. Mizo is a culture where the youngest male child is the heir to his father and given the responsibility of looking after the house when a joint family falls on him. His *tlawmngaihna* shows that he is considerate, supportive, self-sacrificing and kind hearted, and these are the qualities associated with an ideal heir in the family. Respect for elders is one of the basic virtues cherished by all Mizos. It is desired that one should never go against elders. On the other hand, as the elder in the Hmar version, Sura's selfless actions reflect his concern for his younger brother. So, being both the elder and younger in different versions, Chhura fulfills the role of an ideal kinsman.

This other side of Chhura's nature is highlighted in a group of connected tales where he and his kinsman Nahaia shared a blanket and hatchet, exchanged their house, their jhoom cultivation, share a mithan, and finally when they both dig yams together.

Once, Chhura and Nahaia had a blanket and a hatchet which they shared between them. They decided to use them in turns and Nahaia suggested that he would have the blanket by night and the hatchet by day. So, everyday Chhura got hold of the blanket while his brother worked with the hatchet and at night he shivered in the cold while his bother wrapped himself with the blanket. Again in another tale, Nahaia requested Chhura to exchange house with his, saying that one could see stars from the inside of his house at night, Chhura agreed. But the reason as to why Nahaia suggested was that he was too lazy to repair his own house and devised a plan to exchange it with Chhura's house which was complete and well kept. Once they exchanged Chhura had to labour in order to repair the house and make it habitable.

A cursory reading of these tales depicts Chhura as a fool, who does not know what is good and beneficial for him. But was Chhura as foolish as these tales show needs to be re-examined. Consider the tale, *Chhura Gathers Chengkek* where many believe that Chhura was a fool in not plucking the fruits that he could pluck without any difficulty. But the possibility is that it might have been a fruit he did not really like to eat, and therefore would not pluck it. It could also have been an opportunity he took to show his brother Nahaia's negative traits in a sympathetic light and honouring him with a show of respect (Dahrawka 233).

It is believed that Chhura is not unaware of his brother's motives. He was often tired of Nahaia's unscrupulous ways, and when he did put his foot down, which was a rare thing, the later could do nothing about it. Consider the tale, *Chhura and*

Nahaia Dig for Yams. When Chhura was invited by Nahaia to dig yams for the second time, he replied, “Ah ... I f I do so, they may all turn red and puny like they did the last time, on being washed in the stream” (Pachuau 44). Nahaia had been too lazy to dig for the full grown white bottomed yams, and dug only the smaller red topped yams. In their previous outing when they washed their yams in the nearby stream, Nahaia washed his in the upstream and deliberately let go of them so that they ended up with Chhura’s yams. He then selected the big white yams while Chhura got the small red ones.

Again in *Sharing a Mithun,* the task for taking care of the mithan was divided, with Nahaia looking after the head portion and Chhura the rear. Eventually tiring of cleaning the dung every day, Chhura suggested that they exchange their task. Nahaia was too lazy to clean the mithan’s dung and would always find excuse not to do so. But when it gave birth Nahaia claimed it saying that it came out from his side of the mithan. When the second calf came, Chhura saw the mother licking it and he claimed it asserting that it came out from his end. However, Nahaia refused. So Chhura gave up saying that he was going to take his share of the mithan. At this, Nahaia had to reconcile with Chhura.

Therefore, at the other end of the spectrum, the Mizo virtue of *tlawmngaihna* is projected through Chhura who unwittingly sacrificed a lot for his brother. The seemingly foolish behaviour of Chhura showcases his capability for good deeds towards others. Nahaia’s laziness, cunningness and cowardice proves to be a perfect foil to highlight Chhura’s *tlawmngaihna* and one sees him become a perfect loser for the sake of his brother. Though Nahaia always let it seem to others that he got the better of his kinsman in his own effort to save face, it is also likely that Chhura was all the time in the know of things, but who played the role of fool, of the deceived, in

order to avoid trouble in the family and help Nahaia to save face. In other words, the selfless concept of *tlawmngaihna* at work. He was willing to face difficulties and people's jeers, and was always pliable, just to avoid shame for his brother. So, Chhura actually emerges as the moral victor (Zama, "Re-reading" 216). His foolishness is a subversive agent he employed to overcome evil with kindness.

Such interpretations reveal a different kind of subversion at work. Chhura possesses no values, moral or social, is always at the mercy of his passions and appetites; however, through his actions the values cherished most by humans come into light. His foolishness is a play; he played a fool to overcome greed with benevolence. Therefore, Chhura the fool discloses foolishness as an effective subversive agent.

There is another tale which reveals Chhura as a brave and clever hero. Chhura and his brother Nahaia had their jhoom cultivation beside each other. Nahaia discovered that an ogress lived in a hollow tree trunk on the fringe of his jhoom. Being a coward and incapable of dealing with the ogress himself Nahaia suggested to Chhura that they exchange their plots, but did not reveal anything about the ogress. All he told him was that if he pelted stones at the hollow tree trunk, flocks of parrots would fly out from it. As he usually did on many other occasions, Chhura agreed. He also pelted stones at the tree trunk as his brother told him to, and that provoked the ogress. However, unlike his brother Nahaia, he was not afraid of the ogress. On the other hand, the ogress represents the great, the strong and the cruel. But Chhura succeeded in capturing her through his clever plan. The ogress pleaded with him for her release offering him various gifts until he eventually let her ransom herself with the precious horn of plenty.

Success in any form is a universal touchstone of the hero (Klapp 21). Chhura definitely has the upper hand here; his is the one in total control. At the end, what is seemingly a simple tale turns out to be a laden with meanings that reflect some basic qualities most admired by the Mizo. Chhura here is brave and sagacious, knowing what to do in times of troubles. Bravery and being sagacious are qualities held in high esteem, admired by all cultures. And most importantly, Chhura could fulfill all of this because of his *tlawmngaihna*.

Defeating and capturing the ogress and then reducing her to a pleading pathetic victim was no simple matter when one considers that she is the unknown evil most feared by man; the enemy of man. While his opponent is an ogress characteristically representing the great, strong and evil, Chhura is essentially the champion of the weak, the righter of wrongs, in fact, an agent of comic justice. He is not only not afraid of the ogress but is able to bring her to her knees, humiliate her and make her part with her most prized possession, her horn of plenty. Chhura – the clever hero is also thus a great leveler who reduces those who have arrogated power and privilege to themselves. This role or humiliating the mighty is a role that society recognizes as a contribution to social control: he is a social-adjuster, a subversive agent with whom the underdog can identify (Zama, “Re-reading” 215).

Yet, there is another important characteristic of Chhura – his isolation. In spite of being a husband and a brother in a close-knit society, in most of the tales Chhura travelled and fought alone. He also succeeded alone. His association with solitary habits allows those unprivileged people who are at the periphery of the society to identify with him. He is their champion; the epitome of power for the powerless. In him the underdog triumphs and the weak finds victory.

So Chhura is a social force who is unbeatable in his display of wit, resourcefulness, deceit, nimbleness, impudence, altruism and sense of humour. In him people can derive a sense of superiority. He teaches that the weak can defeat the great and provides an important lesson in practical life, a formula of success. Values are rearranged in his tales. His ability to face bigger forces on equal terms proves him the champion of the weak, the righter of wrongs, and more specifically a leveler, who reduces those who claim too much privilege to themselves. He also fulfils and serves specific psychic needs. He provides more than comedy. He enables human beings to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon them by society thereby providing a release valve for all anti-social repressed desires, be it greed, avariciousness, contemptuousness and forbidden sexual desires without actually upsetting the social order. Consequently, Chhura is a subversive agent whose existence is a fundamental necessity in the Mizo culture. His several transgressions are thus forgiven or diluted in the eyes of the beholder. His tales manifest and provide potentially important insights into the working of the human psyche as a whole and Mizos' psyche in particular.

NOTES

[1]Henceforth referred to as Chhura except when Sura and Penglam are mentioned in particular.

[2]Zama, Margaret Ch. "'Tlawmngaihna' : Uniquely Mizo." *Glimpses from the North-East.*(Shillong: National Knowledge Commission, 2009) 36 – 44.Print.
Tlawmngaihna (noun), providing the core or heart of Mizo values. In its essence, *tlawmngaihna* simply means service to others, even to the point of laying down one's life, without expecting anything in return. One who is *tlawmngai* (verb) is one who is self-sacrificing, self-denying, stoical, persevering and self-respecting.

[3]James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language.* (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008) 4th Reprint. 353. Pawi. (noun). A name embracing all the tribes (such as Chins, Lakhers, Fanais, etc) who do not wear their hair-knot at the back of their head as the Lushais do.

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CHAPTER – 4

TREATMENT OF DEATH AND AFTERLIFE IN THE SELECTED FOLKTALES

Death is inevitable. Throughout the history of mankind death has been universally regarded as an event of social significance and every known culture has had rules and norms for defining death as the ultimate rite de passage, and for dealing with its consequences (Riley 192). Defining and dealing with death and its consequences highly depend upon the kind of belief a culture has in afterlife, and the belief in afterlife is one of the major aspects of religion. Religion is universal and found in every culture. On the other hand, religion is vague and full of complexities; it has different connotations for different people. In fact a religion may not necessarily be god-centered. Religion is a system of belief in something which humans consider to be beyond themselves and which binds them together so as to organize their lives into some kind of socio-religious community. “Religion,” Malory Nye writes, “works as part of the life and culture of the people in so many different contexts. In short, religion is not something mystical and detached from the sphere – it is what people do, and how they talk about what they do” (18). The aim of this chapter is to convey the old belief system or religion of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite and their treatment of death and afterlife by employing *Zawltlingi and Ngambawma*, a folktale common to the three selected tribes.

Zawltlingi leh Ngambawma in Mizo, *Thuitling leh Ngambawng* and *Khupching leh Ngambawm* in Hmar and Paite respectively, are legendary love stories. The tale is an intense love story wherein the girl died and her lover journeyed to the land of the dead in order to meet his beloved. In the early twentieth century, a Mizo

traditional priest Hrangpuia stated, “Our knowledge about the immortality of the soul is evident from the story of Tlingi and Ngama” (qtd. in Vanlallawma 6). Of the numerous folktales of the Mizos, *Zawltlingi and Ngambawma* is one of the few that depict life beyond death.

Following Stith Thompson’s classification of folktales in *The Folktale* (1946), the selected folktale fits into ‘complex tales’. It encompasses a number of what are generally considered to be folktale motifs viz; unusual narrative, magic power, animal helpers, wicked step mother, love, death, journey to the other world, and a number of others. However, here we will discuss the belief system of the Mizo folk community regarding their treatment of death and afterlife as found in the tale. Still, before going into the details of the Mizo’s traditional religion and their treatment of death and afterlife, we shall first discuss and compare in brief the similarities and differences of the narratives of the tale in the three versions in order to grasp the varieties of the same tale in its different versions.

While the treatment of death and afterlife which this chapter proposes to study are more or less common in the three versions, there are certain differences within the narratives. The absence of authorship and the fact that until recently when Mizos acquired script, this folktale had been passed on orally from generation to generation would obviously mean that the tale has been presented in a number of ways. It is interesting to note that these differences are found in communities who have certain cultural variations and speak in different languages, but are of having common descent.

The two protagonists of the tale were in love from a very young age. The Paite version of the tale states that while both the mothers of the protagonists were pregnant

with them they would often let their abdomen touch each other in order to ease the discomfort within them, and they would do this frequently as the uneasiness in their abdomen occurred more frequently than other pregnant women. This is of course an exaggeration, but the narrative employed here is to emphasis the strong bond between the two unborn babies who would later on be inseparable. As the tale proceeds, their love for each other grew, despite many obstacles and strong resistance from both their families. Mizo culture permits a young man to choose his own bride, but all arrangements are made by the parents. It is practically impossible to have a traditional wedding without parental consent.

In the Mizo version, Zawltlingi and Ngambawma were not given the permission to marry by Zawltlingi's parents. In the Hmar version, Thuitling's mother died early, her father re-married, and her step-mother favoured her own daughter for Ngambawng - the most eligible bachelor in the village. In the Paite version, Ngambawm's father died early and he was detested by Khupching's mother in spite of the promise (that they would let their children marry if they were born the opposite sex) that she made with Ngambawm's mother earlier during their pregnancy.

These variations add to the richness of the tale. However, they do not differ due to any cultural baring or difference in geographical location. The focus of the narrative appears to be the same in the three versions – it is the mother / step-mother figure of the girl who is responsible for the sad fate of the lovers. It can be said that these differences show that this tale is a widely told tale among the people under study. The variations also prove a Mizo common saying, "even the same tale told by brothers cannot be the same." There are also other aspects which show subtle differences in the narrative in the three versions which will be highlighted.

The importance of religion in the traditional society of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite cannot be neglected as "the entire culture – institutions, customs, stories and music – was integrated by the Zos[1] religious world view" (Kipgen 106). Mizos, before they embraced Christianity as their religion, were often referred to as animists. A. G. McCall in the *Mizo Crystallis* wrote that the Mizos were wholly animist (67). On the other hand, there were some writers like David Kyles who suggested that the Mizos "have no religion at all" (qtd. in Kipgen 106). Kipgen posits that such writers ignored any elements of theism in the Zo religion, which should be classified as 'primal' rather than 'animism.' Those who did not subscribe to the view that the Mizo were without religion, in fact, made no effort to elaborate the theistic elements in their belief system, and those who talked of the primal religion of the Mizo from the earliest written accounts up until recent times described the people as being, in David Kyles words, "in the power of the devil, and all their life-time subject to bondage through fear" (qtd. in Kipgen 106). There were certain elements of truth in this characterization of the Mizo religion, at the same time they also illustrate the ignorance of those who claimed to have 'advanced' religion.

Mizo forefathers believed that big trees, hills, streams, big stones and many other objects of nature were inhabited by various spirits called *Huai* (*Huoi* in Hmar and *Dawi* or *Zin* in Paite) that were responsible for their illness, misfortunes, droughts, storms and bad harvests that often befell them. They also believed in the existence of one Supreme Being whom they called *Pathian* in both Mizo and Paite (*Pathien* in Hmar), a god of humanity and the creator of everything, but who however, had little concern with men. Sacrifices were usually not made to obtain peace with this Supreme Being. Zamzachin in *Paite Tanchin*, writes, "They (forefathers) thought it not was necessary to worship or placate Pathian as he was

benevolent and full of grace and compassion who would never harm human beings" (54). Therefore, rituals, ceremonies and other religious formalities were centered on propitiating the evil spirits, and the exorcist's skill was in demand to determine what animal should be sacrificed to appease the spirit which sent the calamity and sickness as they lived in fear, always afraid of evil spirits which could cause them harm at any moment. They did not worship these spirits, but to propitiate them and avert their anger they offered sacrifices to them. Another kind of sacrifices was also offered by the Mizo to gods and was called *Sahkhaw Biakna* (*sahkhua* and *biakna* denoting religion and worship respectively). They believed in the presence of family or clan gods, and offering sacrifices to them were obligatory and was necessary to be performed by every Mizo. The sacrifices in this respect could only be performed by a *sadawt*, a priest, and they were intended for the protection and blessing of those who performed the ritual (Kipgen 109).

The Mizo concept of evil spirits or simply supernatural forces' involvement in bringing death can be seen in the death of Zawltlingi and Ngambawma, the two deaths mentioned in the tale.

The Mizo traditional concept of death was an opening for the new world. In the tale the cause of two kinds of deaths are given in detail. According to the Hmar version, Thuitling was not allowed to marry Ngambawng so they eloped, but she felt the prick of conscience, felt weak day by day and took no food and drink. At last she died of grief. In the Mizo and Paite versions, the death of Zawltlingi was caused by Ngambawma. When Zawltlingi's parents did not give their consent even after they eloped and stayed in the forest for quite some time, Ngambawma devised a plan to possess Zawltlingi, so he cast a spell on her. Ngambawma took the footprint of Zawltlingi, wrapped it and dried it on the shelf over the fire place in order to make her

fall sick[2]. One night the soot in his fireplace caught fire and burnt the thread he used to tie up the wrapped footprint. In the morning he search for it but found only the burnt thread. Shortly after this incident, Zawltlingi succumbed to her illness.

The Paite version states that Ngambawm was mentally tortured when he realised that he could not marry Khupching in any way. So he picked a strand of hair from her head. Then he made an image of her in beeswax with the hair embedded in it and placed it near a running brook, tying it to a jungle creeper. Khupching fell ill immediately. Then Khupching's parents offered different kinds of sacrifices to their gods, but none proved effective. Desperate, they offered a promise that anyone curing Khupching would be entitled to have her hand in marriage. Hearing the promise, Ngambawm hastily went over to the brook, took out the hair and planted it again in the same notch. Khupching immediately recovered. But the healer was the same Ngambawm, whom they earlier rejected, so they stubbornly refused to give her up. Ngambawm was thus compelled to repeat the spell. One night, it rained heavily and the brook overflowed carrying away the beeswax image, never to be recovered again, and Khupching thus succumbed to her illness.

In this connection, it should be pointed out that the practice of witchcraft is found in many cultures around the globe, and in many cultures only women are believed to practice witchcraft, like the Santals in the eastern Indian states like Bihar and Orissa, while among the Mundas, Oraons, Bhils and other tribes a witch can either be a man or a women (Troisi 217). Among the Mizos, witchcraft was practiced in secrecy as it was a serious offence in the society, and a person who was known to have practiced it was liable to be executed (Zawla 54). *Kaunei* or persons in traditional Paite community who were believed to possess a certain power to harm

other people were given a plot to live at the outskirt of the village by the chief in order to prevent them from troubling the villagers.

K. Zawla listed three kinds of supernatural beings whom traditional Mizo believed to be responsible for bringing death to them; firstly, they believed that those who died of any kind sickness were taken by *Manghauva*. It was said that people who dreamt of him saw him as a man with a big basket full of human skulls. Secondly, *Lalthatkhupa* was believed to be the one who was responsible for convulsions in children. All those who died of convulsion and epilepsy were believed taken by him. Lastly, *Dawi*, which in general is, the term that denotes, magic, witchcraft or sorcery. Such a practice was witnessed in Mizo society. Lalruanga, Keichala and Hrangsaipuia were some of the infamous magicians or sorcerers known among the Mizo (53-54).

Returning to the tale, the three versions state that Ngambawma and Zawltlingi eloped and stayed in the forest for quite some time.

> They decided to elope as only elopement would lead them to permanent union. They ran away in the jungle... They were left to the mercy of nature in the jungle. They had no cloth to protect them from the heat and cold of nature. The crown of trees and the leaves of plantains were their only means of protection against the inclement weather. They slept in the open air. Nature was so cruel as the parents of Khupching to them. They could not remain long in the woods because of the unmerciful environment and rough weather (Neihsial 57).

In the Mizo version, they lived in the woods for years that they even had children during their elopement, while the Hmar version did not give any clue about the duration of their elopement. It is probable that Zawltlingi could not endure the

harsh nature of life they lived in the forest and caught a disease which caused her death. However, the fact that she is said to have died because of Ngambawma's spell in the tale reveals the Mizo's concept of death being associated with malevolent supernatural forces, and at the same time, revealing the practice of magic or witchcraft in the traditional Mizo society. As already mentioned, the Mizo believed that death was caused by various spirits and also through witchcraft, therefore the association of Zawltling's death with the unnatural reflects this belief system. This is again seen in the case of Ngambawma, whose death becomes the second one mentioned in the tale.

After staying together for some period in the land of the dead, Ngambawma and Zawltlingi discovered that conjugal bliss could not be enjoyed between the living and the dead as she got transformed into a skeleton at night. So, she suggested that he should go back to the world of the living and plan his own death:

> At last Khupching asked Ngambawm to go back to the world of the living to prepare for a new life in the land of the dead. She told him to feed himself to his heart's content after which he would hang his spear on the roof with the blade pointing his bed, then he would lie on his back on the bed under the spear so that her soul in the form of an eagle would fly and free the spear that would kill him (Neihsial 3).

As far as the narratives of the tale in the three versions are concerned, it was the deceased Zawltlingi who suggested Ngambawma to kill himself which he did so. This unusual narrative reveals Mizo forefathers' belief wherein the dead and the living could communicate with each other and that the dead lived in a different place but not very far from the living. Although no direction concerning the location is

given, the fact that Ngambawma could go there suggested that the place was not very far from the land of the living. At the same time, death perfectly planned and worked out by a person already deceased in the tale sheds light on the traditional Mizo belief system wherein death, involved the role of supernatural forces.

In order to elaborate on this aspect, let us examine how the Mizo conceived the role played by supernatural forces in their everyday life. Margaret Ch. Zama states that "the Mizo today might loathe to admit the fact that knowingly or unknowingly, part of his thinking process as well as language usages, not only retains but continues to be influenced by some old taboos and superstitions" (153). For instance, *khua* in both Mizo and Paite (*khuo* in Hmar) is commonly used to mean a village, town or city. It also denotes a pervasive, and what one may call pantheistic presence whose power and influence is beyond man's understanding or grasp, so that whatever fate befalls him is accepted as *khuarel* (*rel* denoting dictate) and the power that dictates it is called *khuanu* (*nu* denoting mother).

All of man's temporal and spiritual well-being along with his natural environment was believed to be controlled by this pantheistic force. A bright sunny day and a rainy day becomes *khua (khaw) thra* and *khua (khaw) chhia* – denoting good and bad days, respectively. A bout of fever is referred to as *khua (khaw) sik*, which literally means being pinched. In like manner, *khua* is either prefixed or suffixed to several words, and this reflects the powerful influence of the supernatural forces in the Mizo society.

Death and afterlife are recurring motifs in folktales and mythologies around the world. Folktales and mythologies are often filled with instances of a living person journeying into the land of the dead. In the Greek mythology of *Eurydice and*

Orpheus, they got married when the former returned from Colchis. When Aristaeus tried to molest her, Eurydice ran from him alongside the river Peneius, where she was bitten by a serpent and died. Stricken with grief, Orpheus journeyed down into Tartarus, the land of the dead, in the hope of bringing Eurydice back. Orpheus gained entrance to the underworld by mesmerizing Charon and Cerberus with beautiful music. He was allowed to take his wife back on the condition that he must not look back at his wife until they reached the land of the living. He failed to do so and thus lost his wife forever (Flaum, 123).

In the tale *Zawltlingi and Ngambawma*, Ngambawma gained entrance to the land of the dead with the help of a wild cat couple. He caught a wild cat couple plucking the *zamzo* flower he had planted on her grave (in the Hmar version, Ngambawng planted Thuitling's nails which sprouted as flower, and in the Paite version the flower sprouted from the decaying matter of Khupching's dead body). The wild cats were in fact sent by Zawltlingi to pluck the flower her lover planted on her grave. They were the 'helpful animals' in the tale who bridged the world of the living and the land of the dead.

About helpful animals in folktales, Stith Thompson writes:

> ... extraordinary companions...peculiar helpers are animals. Though no one has ever taken the trouble to count all the occurrences, it is likely that, considering folktales all over the world, an even more important part is played by animal helpers than by human or supernatural. Such animals appear as actors in a large number of tales everywhere and they are substituted by story-tellers for human helpers with considerable freedom.

> In some tales, the role played by these animals is so important as to form the actual centre of interest (55).

In the tale, the vitality of the role played by animals and nature cannot be underestimated. On one occasion, when Ngambawma broke down with grief while cutting down the branches of a big tree in the jhoom of Zawltlingi's parents, Zawltling's soul in the form of an eagle ('bee' in the Hmar version) came to him. Here animals and flowers are treated as benevolent representatives of supernatural beings from whom human beings derive comfort and help. Therefore, conceiving animals and plants as a source of comfort and help and picturing supernatural beings not as vague, formless spirits or as monstrous beings but as animals and other natural beings as is seen in the tale, also reflects the Mizo forefathers' closeness to their natural environment.

According to Kipgen, "While still in the Chin Hills the Zos had formed a definite concept of life after death" (118). The Mizos believed in the presence of two kinds of worlds after death; *Mitthikhua* in Mizo (*Mithikhuo* in Hmar and *Misikhua* in Paite) which means dead men's abode and *Pialral* in Mizo (*Pielral* in Hmar and *Pialgal* in Paite) or paradise, separated by the river called *Run* in Mizo and Hmar (*Gun* in Paite). J H Lorrain, a pioneer missionary of the region wrote:

> Two places or conditions are held to exist after death. One of this is called Pialral and corresponds to our heaven. The other is called Mitthi Khua, but it seems doubtful whether this is simply a place of ordinary existence for those who are not good enough for heaven, or whether it corresponds to our hell. A big river 'Pial' flows between these two places, and no one can pass over it from one place to the other (qtd. in Vanlallawma 7).

The Mizos believed that when someone died, the soul proceeded towards *Mitthikhua*. During their journey they were believed to still retain all the emotions and feelings they had when they were alive as a result of which they were filled with great sorrow and nostalgia for their former life on earth. After sometime, the soul arrived at a place called *Hringlang Tlang* in Mizo and Hmar (*Teutevum* in Paite) from where mortals can be viewed. Here, their nostalgia and longing for the living became unbearable and they shed copious tears. Beyond the *Hringlang Tlang* grew the mystical flower called *Hawilo Par* (look back no more flower) in Mizo and Hmar (*Hoiloupak* in Paite). The departed souls plucked the flower, after which they lost all desire to turn back. Further off this place there was a natural fountain called *Lunglotui* in Mizo and Hmar (*Luangmuan Damtui* in Paite) whose water helped not only to make them lose all their desires for earthly existence but also their yearning for the living disappeared. Then they proceed on towards *Pialral*. Access to *Pialral* was not obtained by a life of virtue while on earth but due to the performance by sacrifices and the killing of men and certain animals. J. Shakespear, in *Lushai Kuki Clans* wrote about the conditions for entering *Pialral* in a passage entitled 'Translation of a Lushai Account of the World beyond the Grave':

> The first man is said to have been Pupawla; then he died before all those born after him. Then Pupawla, this man who died first, shoots at those who have died after him with a very big pellet bow, but at some he cannot shoot. Hlamzuih[3] he cannot shoot at. Thangchhuah he may not shoot at. Then he may not shoot at a young man who has enjoyed three virgins, nor at on who has enjoyed seven different women, even if they were not virgins; but women whoever they may be, he always shoot at ... Those whom Pupawla hits with his pellet cannot cross the Pial river and are

> doomed to stay in Mi-thi-khua ... In Pial-ral food and drink are to be obtained without labour, which to the Lushai appears the height of bliss (62-63).

Naturally, therefore, to sleep with as many women as possible, and to become *Thangchhuah* (*Thangsuo* in Hmar and *Kosah* in Paite) was an aspiration for the Mizo men. The former was not as easy a path as it might seem because there was also a belief that women who remained virgins until their death would also be exempted by Pu Pawla and passed safely to *Pialral* (Kipgen 120), and to attain *Thangchhuah* one had to be a very skilful hunter and also must possess great wealth in the form of livestock and paddy. *Thangchhuah* was a title given to a man who distinguished himself by killing a certain number of animals and performing a ceremony for each kill called *ai*,[4] and this was called *Ramlam Thangchhuah* (a *Thangchhuah* connected with the forest) and by giving a certain number of public feasts called *Inlam Thangchhuah* (a *Thangchhuah* connected with the house).

In order to become a *Ramlam Thangchhuah* one had to kill at least one each of a barking deer, sambhur, bear, wild boar, wild mithun, and elephant and perhaps a man too (Kipgen 121). The difficulty in achieving the title was that most of the animals that had to be killed were ferocious and killing a large number of one species did not count. It was not enough just to be a successful hunter; one also had to be rich enough to perform the *ai* ceremony for each of the animal killed. The ceremony was performed by a priest called *Sadawt* on the hunter's behalf in order to enable the spirits of the man and animals killed to accompany him on his way towards *Pialral* when he died. The spirits of the man and animals killed were believed to be the valued possession of the *Thangchhuahpa* (the hunter), and the spirit of the man he

killed would serve him as a slave. This according to Kipgen is “one of the primary motivations for the Zo practice of headhunting” (121).

Again, to achieve the *Inlam Thangchhuah* title, one had to give a series of public feasts; *Chawng, Sechhun (Sedawi), Mitthirawplam*, then again *Sechhun* and finally Khuangchawi (Kipgen 121). These feasts involved the whole village and relatives from other villages so it was very expensive. It was not possible for a commoner to give public feasts; therefore, *Thangchhuah* was a title only for the privileged persons. It was also said that the wife of the *Thangchhuahpa* could enter *Pialral.*

Pialral was a much better place place than *Mitthikhua*, where as explained already, only a qualified few entered. All the non-privileged ones who were not qualified to enter *Pialral* ended up in *Mitthikhua* where the quality of life was considered to be inferior to life on earth. The world of the dead found in the tale appears to correspond to *Mitthikhua*, as this was considered appropriate for a woman and non-*Thangchhuah* like Zawltlingi and Ngambawma. The inhabitants toiled for their survival; they were found building their own houses and went hunting and fishing. Most importantly, the values of things and other beings changed in *Mitthikhua*. When Ngambawma reached *Mitthikhua,* he lived with Zawltlingi and they also ate together. However, at night she got transformed into a mere skeleton like the other dead inhabitants; the dead called bamboo leaves fish; a caterpillar a bear; and the arum plant as trees. They could also transform themselves into fireflies. All these transformations into beings which were of less value suggest the undesirable and inferior quality of life in *Mitthikhua*.

As revealed by the tale, in trying to possess his beloved, Ngambawma ended up losing her. Though he was responsible for the death of Zawltlingi, it was unintentional and he suffered and grieved when she died. And it was this grief that drove him close to her even after she died. The Mizo traditionally believed that the soul of dead persons lingered on in this world. Lal Dena writes that it was a popular belief among the Hmar that the soul of a deceased person passed through different stages. Immediately after death, the soul hovered either over the village or in the firmament for some time (Dena 29). They were also believed to be reincarnated into some forms other than that of a human being and visited the living. Instances are found in other Mizo folktales like *Mauruangi.* When Mauruangi's mother died she was mistreated by her step mother. Her late mother in the form of a fish and later as a tree took care of her, provided her with food and juice. The peculiar characteristic of this kind of Mizo folktales is that the dead persons revealed themselves only to those people who really missed and needed them and grieved over their death. It is neither for revenge nor for exposing the unjust deeds of others, but it is generally to console and comfort the ones who love them.

It is an important aspect to consider the motive of Ngambawma for his determination to go to *Mitthikhua* and not to *Pialral*. Owing to their belief wherein a woman, unless she was a virgin or a *thangchhuahnu* at the time of her death would not enter *Pialral*, it is obvious that Zawltlingi's destiny was in *Mitthikhua*. The fact that Ngambawma did not abandon Zawltlingi alone in *Mitthikhua* even after experiencing the conditions of the place, and more importantly, that he did not make any attempt to secure a place in *Pialrial* by the means mentioned, indicates the extent of his love for her. He would not leave her to suffer alone but would rather be with her no matter what the consequences were.

Again, the belief that only men could secure a place in paradise showcases the gender hierarchy that existed between men and women in traditional Mizo belief system. Regarding women on religious matters, Zairema writes, “Women were considered to have no *Sahkhua* of their own. It was the *Sakhua* of her parents or husband which was responsible for her continued welfare and existence” (qtd. in Kipgen 113).

The institution of *thangchhuah* therefore, which enabled a person to secure a place in paradise could only be achieved by men. This can be considered as the assertion of the supremacy of male ego in the old Mizo society as it covertly meant that women were not considered comparable to men. A man who exhibited *tlawmngaihna* was held in high regard and esteem; on the other hand, it was a given norm in the life of a woman. According to Kipgen, the patriarchal ideology that set *tlawmngaihna* as an ideal or as the defining code of cultural life instituted it as the norm for the women, which 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 concept of a 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). Josephine L.B. Zuali writes:

> All that a *tlawmngai* woman was expected to do and the good reputation and respect that came with it was geared towards acquiring a good husband. If she was fortunate enough, she would marry a man who would attain 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 (16).

The entire Mizo culture today is dominated by the doctrines of Christianity. Death is regarded as the rite de passage of earthly life after which the soul of the deceased goes to either hell or heaven according to the virtue of one's decisions during an earthly life. Folktales as historical relics do contain motifs dealing with belief systems, rituals, death and the afterlife which unfortunately have come to be regarded as fiction today, but they in fact, indicate a rich tradition of former times worth studying. Of this impact of Christianity on traditional belief system, Stith Thompson writes:

> The very close relation of doctrines concerning future life and the next world to the whole religious belief and activity of people has profoundly affected this entire group of traditions. The patterns of organized Christian doctrine has worked for a thousand years or more to modify, and sometimes entirely to displace older concepts once universally accepted. Insofar as these survive at all, they are treated as fictions or, if not, those who believe in them are regarded as extraordinarily gullible and naïve. But the poems and tales… both literary and popular, do contain many motifs dealing with the return of the dead, and seem to indicate a much richer tradition in former times (255).

NOTES

[1]Zo is another term used to denote all Lushai-Kuki-Chin tribes, sometimes the term 'Zomi' is also used to denote the same. Thus, the term Mizo, Zo and Zomi are used interchangeably as a generic term. In the *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, Lorrain (569) wrote that Zo is the name of the Lushais and some use this name to include other surrounding hill tribes.

[2]James Herbart Lorrain (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language.* (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008. Reprint). 173 : Hniak rep, v. to dry the foot print of an enemy over the fire in order to cast a spell over him and cause his death. (It is important to note here that every spell can be broken by its own term, and the intention of Ngambawma in the tale was to cast a spell over Zawltling wherein he would be the only person to break it, so that he might gain her hand in marriage).

[3]In the traditional Mizo community if a child died shortly after birth, it was buried without any ceremony under the house, and it was called *hlamzuih* (*hlam* = after birth, *zuih* = to follow). In today's context, *hlamzuih* are those infants who died within three months after they are born. They are buried without any formal ceremony by their families inside their compound as they are not given a place in the cemetery. This practice is followed by the three tribes under study.

[4] James Herbart Lorrain (Pu Buanga). *Dictionary of the Lushai Language.* (Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008. Reprint). 4. Ai, v. 1. to sacrifice a domestic animal and perform a ceremony (a wild creature killed in hunting or a foe killed in fighting). This is done with a view to getting the spirit of the slained into the power of the slayer after death, and also to protecting him from evil consequences during this life. 2. To kill a

domestic animal and perform a ceremony of rejoicing over (such things as a good rice harvest, a bumper crop of a hundred red pumpkins, a popular song, etc).

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CHAPTER – 5

CONCLUSION

Folklore according to Dundes, is autobiographical ethnography, that is, it is a people's own description of themselves (55). The history of folklore studies reveals that folklorists in many different countries have often been inspired by the desire to preserve the national heritage. The Grimm brothers, for example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, imbued with nationalism and romanticism and armed with the fashionable methodology of historical reconstruction, collected folktales and legends with the hope of rescuing something truly German, that is something Teutonic. Likewise, folklorists as the pioneering students of culture were initially interested in folklore because they correctly hypothesized that documenting and studying it had the potential to provide insights into the historical roots, cultural distinctiveness and national character of individual nations.

The different genres of folklore including folktales are the embodiment of cultural heritage, left by the fore fathers. Folklore, as a mirror of culture, reveals differences and similarities in ways of thinking and therefore can serve as a tool for teaching cultural understanding:

> Folklore as a mirror of culture frequently reveals the areas of special concern. It is for this reason that analyses of collections of folklore can provide the individual who takes advantage of the opportunities afforded by the study of folklore a way of seeing another culture *from the inside out* instead of *from the outside in*, the usual position of a social scientist or teacher (Dundes *International* 55).

For cultures like the Mizo culture which had no written records of the past until recently, due to the absence of script, it is essential to take their folklore into account if one is determined to study their historical and cultural past. The Mizo have a rich trove of folktales, myths, legends and songs that reflect their traditional social structure, belief systems, morals and values. They were believed to have migrated to their present settlement through a long trail spanning several centuries. It is difficult to trace the early history and culture of Mizo people 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 permanent settlement.

With the passage of time during their migration, the traditional Mizo societies however, eventually developed a very well organized structure of village administration and polity with the village chief as the administrative head whose word was the law. Each village was ruled by its own chief. The smallest unit in the village was a household with the father as the head of the family, and a woman held no authority in the family as well as in the society. The old traditional Mizo society can be considered as anthropocentric. Their indigenous faith held a very important place in their lives as it dictated the way they lived. Every aspect of their lives was linked to their beliefs and values in one way or the other. The ultimate reward for the Mizo men was the attainment of a place in paradise in the afterlife where they would no longer have to work but where there would always be abundance of food grain and meat. All these aspects of the Mizo social and cultural life are reflected in the folktales studied in this dissertation.

However, the conversion of the Mizo to Christianity in the late nineteenth century brought about transformation in the culture and society as never before. It is remarkable to note that, for a people who had hitherto lived in near-complete isolation from the influence of other cultures, the arrival of Christianity brought about profound changes in the cultural make-up to such an extent that many negative 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, the entire Mizo population had converted to Christianity. However, this new transformation was not without unwanted elements. The Christian missionaries introduced education 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 British administration, the Mizo society was inevitably geared towards modernization and the rapid transformations that such change entails. Since the old ways of life were gradually abandoned in order to embrace the new Christian faith and worldview, those elements among the old ways of thinking and the traditional customs and moral codes upheld by the old Mizo society but which went against the dictates of their new faith, were abandoned. In the traditional Mizo society, the social structure, their indigenous faith 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 closer look, it could be seen that the culture, customs and belief system of the Mizo 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.

The available accounts of their history were obtained principally by means of conjectures and speculation by British administrations, historians, and scholars based on personal interviews, study of extant traditions and cultural practices that were still in practice as witnessed by them. As a result, the study of their oral tradition and other folkloric items becomes all the more important in order to form a definition of the cultural history of these people.

The acquirement of Romanised script from the white missionaries in 1894 was indeed a hallmark in the history of the Mizos. It was during this period (colonial period) that the Mizo culture underwent extensive changes, it was a period when the Mizo adopted the 'new culture' or the white man's culture and rejected the 'old culture' which was their own. The well established *Zawlbuk* institution gradually died out to be replaced by modern school education, and the whole belief system especially those related to fear of spirits were replaced by Christian teaching, to mention a few.

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, folklore became more and more neglected. These changes were in a way natural and inevitable for smaller cultures that inevitably get transformed by the bigger culture, at the same time, it also sowed the seeds of abhorrence towards the old system which eventually is detrimental for those who attempt to comprehend and study their true cultural identity. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote:

> If one were to offer men to choose out all the customs in the world such as seemed to them the best, they would examine the whole number, and end by preferring their own; so convinced are they that their own usages surpass those of all others (qtd. in Dundes 55).

The converted Mizo society thus replaced their folktales with biblical stories such as those of Joseph, David and Goliath and others, children are taught Shakespeare and Chaucer as great literature in school and the love story of *Romeo and Juliet* is appreciated much more than *Zawltlingi and Ngambawma.* Recently, "The Great Penglam" (the stories of the legendary Chhura) was filmed in Churachandpur district of Manipur, but proved a failure due to the harsh criticism from society that saw it as "too vulgar and not appropriate for children," mainly due to depiction of sexuality in the tales. Concerning the present condition of Mizo folklore, Margaret Ch. Zama writes:

> The status of folklore in Mizoram today is that our folk artifacts are seen as a mere shadow for museums or the archive ... Folk games, songs and dances, alas, are reserved for annual displays at cultural meets and festivals ... (3).

As a matter of fact, folk artifacts have gradually become irrelevant and lost some value in the modern society and this in turn suggests that a very important component in defining cultural identity is missed out.

India is a land known to the world for its diversity. Diversity in terms of climate and terrain – there are deserts and there are tropical forests and the Himalayas, and a variety of ethnicities, from Buddhists to Sufi Muslims, plus a Christian and majoritarian Hindu population. Likewise, the North-East states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, are diverse in terms of terrain, culture, religion, language and other aspects of livelihood in spite of their relative limited geographical area when compared to the other states of India. Moreover, it is also the region where several communities with similar physical

features, professing the same religion, and settling in the same communities claim individual identity which often results in ethnic violence.

The crux of the situation of the Mizo community today, particularly in the Churachandpur district of Manipur, is that each ethnic groups strive to claim their individual identity. The practice of disintegration started during their migration, long before they reached the Indian sub-continent. According to B. Lalthangliana, during their course of migration they were believed to have settled in the Kabaw valley for some time, wherein their culture and way of life by then was 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 due to 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 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 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-clan war around the time of their stay in the Chin Hills. They usually fought over jhoom lands for cultivation (Kipgen 42).

From then on, migration was on clan basis and so also settlements. For this reason they were named “New Kukis” and “Old Kukis” by the colonial administrators. Throughout history these people never stayed too far from each other

but at the same time they did not live together in the same village or community. As far as history is concerned, the reason as to why they parted ways was for their survival, but later on, the schedulization of tribes by the Indian government and certain benefits of reservation recognised by the Indian government persuaded them to ascertain their individual identity. This has simultaneously led to the fear of assimilation and loss of their ethnic identity which in turn has resulted in antagonism between kindred tribes.

When it comes to the festering armed conflicts of the region, there are few overt signs of policy reorientation to be seen, and the awareness that the persistence of the armed conflicts is formidable hurdle to the peace and prosperity of the region is low or ignored. Phrases like ‘ethnic insurgencies’, ‘cross-border terrorism’, and ‘proxy wars’ are the staple of Indian official talk about Northeast, though there is no evidence that policies spelt out by these vocabulary have successfully grappled with the sources of the region’s multilayered conflicts (Baruah 2). The ethnic clash between Paite and Thahdo in the state of Manipur in 1997 and 1998 which led to the death of hundreds is practically over, but the antagonism between the two kindred tribes remains. This is the case in other places as well, for example, the communal conflict between the Bodos and the Karbis in Assam and others. Being fed with promises for their welfare and development, the tribal communities time and again make their demands to the government and this often leads to violence and enmity towards other kindred communities, like the Hmars demanding autonomy in Mizoram, which may be to their advantage, but is likely to hamper their peaceful coexistence with the other Mizo tribes in the state. Often, the central government succeeds in suppressing hostility, yet, it offers no solution to the antagonism that follows. So, from an objective point of view, there are some who question as to

whether the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the likes of it are the central government's policy of divide and rule? It is at this point that the need for retrospection arises for tribes like the Mizo, Hmar and Paite, who must look back to their common folk heritage, and to their remote past before they come to divisive conclusions on matters of separate cultural identities, as it is a fact that folklore frequently serves as a source for historical information. When used as historical sources, folklore enables researchers to reconstruct past events, and question or rework existing historical records and interpretations.

From a comparative study of the folktales in the three selected versions, we have understood that aspects of the functioning of the traditional society of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite were (and still are) basically the same, which was of a democratic and patriarchal construct and in which their belief systems and cultural value systems dictated their way of life. The origins of these folktales remain unknown, they might have originated when the people were together or that a tale originated in one community and was passed on to the other communities during their migration. Therefore, the sometimes subtle, the sometimes obvious variations found in the tales, reveal cultural distinctiveness. However, being of oral tradition, each tale found its way into other communities with certain variations in the transmission process. As already mentioned, the tribes under study have their own language and certain nuances of cultural specificity, therefore, it is likely that the same tales are told in different community with elements that are more functional or context bound for each community. The fact that the selected tales for each tribe under study are the same tales, and that the characters in the tales are the same folk persona in the different communities are, too striking to be attributed to chance or coincidence. Thus, this comparative study of tales reiterates the fact that Mizo, Hmar and Paite are indeed the

same folk but who have developed certain nuances of distinctiveness in culture and tradition with the passage of time.

From the case studies explored in this dissertation, the ideas projected through the tales when viewed with modern sensibilities, reveals basic homogeneity of the tribes in cultural history and practice, but which in present times, has fallen prey to claims of separate identities. On the other hand, it also contributes towards a wider and more flexible study of interdisciplinary interface between folklore, culture and identity.

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ANNEXURE- I: Selected folktales available in English translation

LIANDOVA AND TUAISIALA

(Source: Margaret Ch. Zama. Trans. "Liandova and Tuaisiala." Ed. Tillotoma Misra, *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North East India: Fiction.* New Delhi: Oxford Uaniversity Press, 2011. Print. 219-228. Print.)

Once upon a time there were two brothers named Laindova and Tuaisiala who lived with their widowed mother. They were very poor and as though this was not unfortunate enough, their mother one day decided to marry again and leave them. The two boys wept at the prospect of their bleak future and Liandova, the elder of the two, pleaded with his mother saying, "Mother, please don't leave. Who will take care of us? We are still too young and we might die of hunger." But his pleas fell on deaf ears as the selfish woman replied, "I don't care what you do with yourselves or where you go, but I am not going to sacrifice having a husband just because of the two of you!" With these words she left them without a second thought, and all that the two brothers could do was shed copious tears at their miserable plight.

Soon realizing the futility of their tears, Liandova bravely told his brother, "Come Tuaisial, don't cry anymore. We have to look for ways of earning our livelihood, or look for yams to dig for food." Thus began their sad life as hungry wanderers. Liandova being the elder, somehow managed to earn enough to feed himself, but Tuaisiala being too young for hire, burdened his brother, for Liandova had to always include him which, of course, was not agreeable to his employers. So Liandova would look for yams to dig for both of them, but to do this he had to borrow farm implements such as the hoe, and in exchange, the lender would claim the major share of the yam, thus leaving little for the two brothers. In this way they managed to

survive in abject poverty, suffering from constant pangs, and exploited and despised by the community.

Liandova often found work as a hired hand to tend cattle or watch over paddy fields in return for supper at his employer's house. This was often the terms of payment in those days. Tuaisiala would follow him everywhere and when supper time came, Liandova would hide his little brother under the house. The houses then were made of bamboo and stood on stilts, so Liandova would instruct Tuaisiala to look for the cooked yams that he would quietly drop between the openings of the bamboo floor. He was compelled to take such measures as he know that no one was willing to feed Tuaisiala for free, yet his love would not allow him to let his brother go hungry. Once, as Liandova was secretly dropping the yams, the young Tuaisiala grew more daring and loudly called out from under, "Big Brother, drop the bigger-sized ones to me." On hearing this, Liandova's employer got very angry and scolded him saying, "So this is why you have been consuming more than your share! I refuse to feed your twin mouths, so get out at once!" and drove him out of the house.

Liandova however, had to continue to look for work, but was refused as soon as people knew he had an extra mouth to feed. They often accompanied hunting parties, but whenever game was killed, they would be given only the bones and leftovers. Liandova would collect these bones in a basket kept behind their little hut. The two boys grew with the passing years. One day, they ran out of food and as there was no work available, they wandered around scrounging for food until they found a solitary millet grain which they happily divided between themselves. Tuaisiala, still young and none too clever, would often cry for food, causing untold misery to his elder brother who loved and pitied him. At such times, Liandova would comfort his

brother with these works, “Don’t cry Tuaisiala, a time will come when our fortunes will be reversed. The God above is watching over us.”

One day, Liandova, while tending a jhoom cultivation, kept himself busy rolling clay pellets for his catapult, within which he would insert a paddy grain. Before long he managed to make and collect a large number of them. When the season for clearing the jhoom for rice cultivation arrived, Liandova erected a swing by the side of a strategic footpath where the farmers used to rest on their way to and from their fields. Liandova would let them use the swing while he would hurriedly borrow their tools like the axe and dao and clear the nearby area for his own jhoom cultivation. Very soon, he managed to clear three clay moulds and some bit of the surrounding land. Soon, the time came for sowing and Liandova accomplished this task with the help of his catapult, shooting his pellets with the paddy grain inside, until all of them lay embedded in the clay mounds and surrounding areas. Young shoots soon sprouted in great abundance and Liandova, who still had his swing, continued to use the farm tools of the workers for weeding his little jhoom, while they rested and enjoyed his swing.

Once, while the two brothers were busy at their jhoom, a crow flew above them with a captured snake in its beak. They raised a hue and cry causing it to drop its prey. When they went to pick it up they discovered that it was no ordinary snake, but one that belonged to the ‘Khuavang’, or guardian spirit. So they wrapped it up in a large leaf and tucked it between the bamboo wall of their jhoom hut. From then on, they would discover their meal cooked for them each time they returned from work in the evening. At first, the brothers were afraid to eat the food as they thought it belonged to someone else, but as it continued, they began to eat and enjoy it.

They became very curious about their secret benefactor, so one day they decided to lie in wait, and sure enough, an old female guardian spirit turned up and began cooking their food. As soon as she completed her chores, they seized and questioned her. She replied, “The snake you rescued from the crow and clothed and sheltered was my child and I decided to repay your kind deed by cooking your meals for you.” Liandova and Tuaisiala then pleaded with her to remain and live with them but she declined. ‘It is not possible for me to live with you, but whenever you miss me, all you have to say is – “Oh, how I miss my old guardian spirit”, and I will come to you.” Saying this she left.

Another time Liandova and Tuaisiala followed a hunting party into the deep forest and they unknowingly walked over a huge python thinking it to be a log. Tuaisiala, who was the last of the party, thought he saw it move, and on closer examination, saw it blink. Greatly frightened, he ran up to his elder brother and say, “The log we crossed has eyes and can move too!” but Liandova refused to pay heed saying, “It’s unbelievable! How can a log move or have eyes? Just keep quiet about it.” Actually Liandova did believe his brother and guessed it might be a python, but he was not interested as he knew that should the hunting party come to know of it, they would kill it and give them the worst cuts as was their wont, while everyone else would end up with the best parts of the meat.

After a while, the group stopped to rest, and the simple Tuaisiala could not resist the temptation, so he blurted out, “The log we crossed some time back had eyes,” to which Liandova quickly replied, “What lies! It’s not possible for a log to have eyes. It was probably it’s uneven surface.” Saying this, he pinched his brother on the sly, but the slow witted Tuaisiala did not realize it was his brother’s signal to stop, so he loudly exclaimed, “Ouch! Why did you pinch me? It did have eyes, and it

moved too! I am not being stupid." The curiosity of the hunters were aroused by now, so they questioned Tuaisiala closely and realised it must be a python. So, just as Liandova had feared, they decided to return to the spot and should the python not be there, Tuaisiala was promised a sound beating. Liandova was very unhappy about this as it was possible that the snake could have slipped away by now.

But the snake was still there and the hunting party got down to business. The two brothers ended up, as feared, with only the stomach and intestines of the python and were rudely instructed to clear themselves away downstream. "Take these as it is all that you deserve, and go immediately downstream as you stink too much!" they were told. The brothers had no option but to drag their smelly lot downstream to wash. Liandova shed bitter tears of humiliation and anger at the injustice of it all, but Tuaisiala was too young to understand. Happy and contended he proceeded to wash and cut the python's stomach with his blunt dao. He tried to comfort Liandoa, "Big Brother, don't cry. Listen! Can you hear the grating sounds of something as I cut? It could be a gong!" But his brother angrily replied, "You are such a fool for thinking there can be a gong inside that." But Tuaisiala continued with the task and eventually cut open the stomach and discovered that it was filled with treasures such as gongs and precious beads. Greatly excited by their find, but fearing they would be discovered, they moved further downstream. It so happened that the python they killed had swallowed a well-known merchant, Singaia of the Pawih clan, along with all his precious merchandise. They hid their gongs inside the hollow framework of their fireplace and the beads were carefully stowed away in a large covered basket. Nobody know of their new found riches not did they reveal it to anyone, knowing full well that if they did so they would lose everything.

It was now harvest time and Liandova, growing pensive called out, “Oh, how I miss my old guardian spirit.” When she appeared, Liandova told her, “It is harvest time and we have no farm tools, so please stay and help us out.” So she told him to invite the whole village to help out the next day, and as they reaped she would dance in front of them. So long as the two brothers did not laugh at her, there would be no end to the harvesting. They agreed and invited the whole village to help them with their harvest the next day. Nobody took them seriously as everyone know how small their plot was, and the womenfolk set out to help saying, “Liandova’s jhoom is just the size of a chicken’s face and we can surely complete the harvest even as we chew food for our young babies.”

As the harvesters began to reap, the old guardian spirit began her dance in front of them, and so long as she danced the little jhoom continued to yield and the work could not be over. The womenfolk, who came with their mouths filled with rice to chew for their babies, eventually spat them out all over the place. Soon, evening came and Tuaisiala, who was tired and by now, quite fed up with the work, laughed at the dancing guardian spirit. All at once the remaining paddy in the field disappeared and so the harvesting was declared over. Liandova and his brother were however very happy as they now had enough grain to last them almost a year. So though still very poor, fortune began to gradually smile down on the two of them.

One day, a great chief named Lersia and his followers were expected at Liandova’s village. As they neared the village, Lersia told his followers, “Let’s see if these people will recognise me” and proceeded to beat his entire body with stinging nettle which gave him the appearance of a leper covered with swellings and welts. When they arrived at the village, everyone wanted to host Lersia but no one recognised him. Presuming that anyone of the followers could be Lersia himself, the

villagers led them off one by one to their homes until only Lersia was left. Seeing this, Liandova and his brother invited him to be their guest, “Sir, you are welcome to stay with us. We have no food to offer you, but you can at least warm yourself by our fire.” They of course were not aware that it was the great Lersia himself.

Lersia thanked them and told them not to worry as he had ample food for the three of them. As they settled down, he brought out his flask made from gourd that contained his *zu*, the traditional rice beer of the Mizos. As they passed each other the drink, Tuaisiala in great appreciation commented, “What a sweet brew this is! I am sure that the great Lersia’s zu could not outdo this in sweetness!” At this, their guest spoke up saying, ‘I am the one called Lersia. Go outside and announce to the whole village, “Lersia is our guest!” Liandova at first thought it to be joke, but soon realized it was not so. Tuaisiala went out, stood on the high platform at the village entrance and shouted out for all to hear “Lersia is our guest!”

Soon the whole village gathered at Liandova’s house and each one vied with the other to invite Lersia to their home, some promising to kill a chicken, while another promised to slaughter a pig, “Come with us,” they said, “this house is no place for you and the inmates are poor and common people. They do not even have any food to offer you.” But Lersia refused them all saying, “No, it is fitting that I remain here. We three seem well suited enough.” Lersia shared his meal that night and the next day with the two brothers. Tuaisiala enjoyed the meals so much that with each mouthful he would exclaim, “Oh how tasty this is! Heaven right now seems to me to have shrunk to the size of a pit’s bottom!” (N.B. The ‘pit’ is a small bird very destructive to the rice crops. The exaggerated comparison used by Tuaisiala is expressive of the extent of his appreciation for the kind of meal he had never tasted before.)

When the time came for Lersia to leave, he turned to the brothers and said, “I thank you and would like to return your hospitality by inviting you to visit me. I wish to also gift you with a female mithun to help you start a herd of your own.” So they followed Lersia back to his village and stayed there as his guests. He fed and looked after them well and they enjoyed their stay immensely.

Soon, the time drew near for their departure, so Liandova paid a visit to a widow who lived next door to Lersia. “Madam,” he said, “I have come to seek your advice. Lersia has promised to give me a female mithun from his great herd, but how am I to know which is the best and most fertile of the lot?” The widow was flattered and told Liandova, “You have come to the right person. Only I know the answer to your question. Lersia’s enclosure is full of huge mithuns but do not choose any of them as they come out. Last of all will remain a tiny mithun just the size of a goat which you will find amongst the chaff on the floor. You will have to trample and tread around for it to come out. As it does so, noose it immediately, for that is the best of the herd. It will give birth every month.” Liandova thanked her and returned to Lersia’s house.

On the day of their departure, Lersia instructed Liandova to select his mithun. Liandova took a rope and stood by the entrance of the enclosure while Tuaisiala entered it. As he drove the huge animals out one by one, he would call out to his brother. “There, noose that one! Noose that one!” but Liandova would deliberately miss them. Finally, only the largest of the lot was left and Tuaisiala was by now quite desperate. “Be sure you don’t miss this one! There is none left there!” he called out. But again Liandova let it go and Tuaisiala shed tears of anger and annoyance at what he thought was his brother’s incompetence.

Liandova comforted him saying, “Don’t be unhappy Tuaisial, just tread around the chaff there and I’m sure there will be something just fitting for us both,” Tuaisiala reluctantly obeyed his brother’s instructions and sure enough, a small female mithun just the size of a goat, got up unsteadily from one corner and Laindova immediately roped her. Tuaisiala was still very unhappy and grumbled at his elder brother saying, “You let go of all the best mithuns and then you end up roping the worse of the lot!’ But Liandova pacified him saying, ‘No, little brother, we would be mismatched with the large ones, this little one is just good enough for the likes of us.”

Lersia marvelled at the wisdom of Liandova. “You have selected the best of my herd. May God bless it for you too,” he said, and looked on as they departed. They did not take the mithun home, but led it into the deep forest where they made a large enclosure with a spring nearby, for its home. In this way, no one was aware of their new possession. Each time there would be new calf, and Tuaisiala would report back saying, “Big brother, I saw a deer leaping about in our enclosure,” and his brother would reply, “That’s good, just let them be.” Before long the two became proud owners of a large herd of mithuns. In this way Liandova and his brother, unknown to anyone, grew very rich. Sometimes they would play on their gongs and passer-by would call out,

Liandova and brother, brother

What gong is it you play, you play?

And they would quickly stow them away, beating on old vessels and reply,

It is no gong that we play,

Just Liando’s old vessel that we play, we play.

Time passed by and Liandova was by now a young man. Tuaichawngi, their chief's daughter, however secretly knew of their wealth and was also in love with Liandova and wished to marry him. She was exceptionally pretty and her parents were justifiably proud of her. One day, the chief made a public announcement declaring, "The time has come for my daughter to choose her husband from the young men of my village. Therefore, all will take part in community work. Meanwhile, Tuaichawngi will await for their return at the village entrance and point at her chosen one, presenting him a woven *puan.*" On the appointed day, all the young men of the village set out for the community work. Liandova and Tuaisiala too set out saying, "We might as well since it is expected of us." In the evening Tuaichawngi, accompanied by her parents and the village elders, stood at the village entrance. As the young men returned from work, each passed her by but she paid no heed. Last of all came the two brothers and she lost no time pointing out Liandova saying, "This is the man whom I have chosen to be my husband," and presented him with her puan. The chief flew into a rage and scolded her angrily. "You could have had your choice of the best, but you chose the poorest and most common of the lot! Tuaichawng, you will not be blessed," and with these words he cut off the finger with which she had pointed at Liandova. So, afraid to return to her father's house, she followed the two brothers home and married Liandova. The traditional Mizo bride price demanded by her father was extreme to say the least. It was – enough mithuns to crash down his cattle enclosure, and enough bead necklaces that would break the clothesline with their weight.

So Liandova and Tuaisiala prepared to pay the bride price. There was one problem though. Although they had to pay countless precious beads that they had saved from the python's stomach, they had no thread with which to bead them. So Tuaichawngi approached her mother for a spindleful of cotton saying, "Mother, the

brothers' clothes are terribly torn and I need thread to mend them." Her mother gave her one spindleful but Tuaichawngi was soon back for more. Her mother was surprised and suspicious as she kept giving the same excuse, so she decided to spy on her. Far from mending the torn clothes of the two brothers, she spied her daughters busy threading colourful beads. There were already numerous necklaces hanging from walls, and many more unthreaded ones heaped on a large bamboo tray. From then on, the mother was secretly pleased and would generously help her saying, "Should this be insufficient dear child, just come and ask for more."

When they felt they had made enough necklaces for the bride price, the brothers went to Tuaichawngi's father and proceeded to hang them on his clothesline. When Liandova finally hung a particularly long and heavy one, the line snapped under their weight and the chief had to concede that it was enough. Tuaisiala went with a group of young men deep into the forest to help him herd in the mithuns into the cattle enclosure of Tuaichawngi's father. As the last mithun entered, Tuaisiala took aim with his catapult and shot a pellet at its testicles which caused it to charge in pain at the others, thus causing a stampede which crashed down all the fencing of the enclosure. In this manner, the two brothers were able to fulfil the chief's demand.

Liandova and Tuaichawngi were blessed with a healthy baby boy in the third year of their happy union. They then decided to 'Khuangchawi', a traditional public feast given only by chiefs and prominent persons. They invited their relatives from far and near including Liandova's mother. The whole village enthusiastically took part in the elaborate preparations, and when the big day arrived, all partook of the great feast and the evening celebrations that followed. To fulfill the festive tradition, Liandova and his family were put atop a huge drum carried by the young men of the village, and taken on possession. As they proceeded, they were tossed up and down to the cheers

and laughter of the crowd. Tuaichawngi threw precious beads into the crowd and when she saw her father, she brandished her disfigured hand and called out, “Father, take a look at the finger you chopped off!” And her father hung his head in shame and embarrassment. Liandova then brought out the big basket full of old bones that he had stored and emptying it with a flourish for all to see, he said to the crowd, “Behold! These are the meat cuts that you all had given us when we were poor,” and the crowd shamefacedly left one by one.

Liandova’s mother finally arrived from her village three days after the ‘Khuangchawi’ was over. On seeing how great her sons had become, with a home fit for a chief and numerous servants waiting on them, she felt embarrassed to enter and loitered on the steps. The servants on seeing her, escorted her in and took down her load that contained food for her sons, such as dried lizard meat, arum bulbs and some maize. She stayed on for days, and when it was time for her to go, her sons loaded her with smoked meat from their feast, and also returned the food she had brought telling her, “Take them back as we don’t serve such kind of food”.

As she departed, she paused at a distance and looked back at the village with the thought, “Oh, to think that Liandova and his brother have become so great!” Filled with remorse and shame, she suddenly grew faint and died there on the spot.

Liandova and Tuaisiala both led contended lives blessed with happy families of their own. So Liandova’s words of comfort to his little brother many years back, that ‘a time will come when our fortunes will be reversed. The God above it watching over us’ did finally come to pass. Many years later, Tuaichawngi’s parents moved to another village and being quite aged by now, invited Liandova’s family to pay them a visit. On their way they managed to safely cross the Run river, but on their return

journey, the river was in flood and as they attempted to cross it, Tuaichawngi stumbled and drowned in the river. Liandova mourned this loss with these words,

On my way I passed it through,

On my return flooded was the Run's water.

I led my Tuaichawngi by the hand through the flooded river,

I failed to wade through; my Tuaichawngi is now no more.

There is a version that tells us that Liandova was holding his concubine on the other side and as she was about to fall into the water, he unintentionally let go of Tuaichawngi's hand in order to save the other.

CHHURA AND THE HORN OF PLENTY

(Source: Margaret Ch. Zama. *Chhura and the Horn of Plenty*. 2010. TS)

This tale is one of many about the legendary Chhura and his brother Nahaia. One day, as Nahaia was minding his jhoom cultivation, he pelted stones at a flock of parrots and hit a hollow tree trunk on the fringe of the jhoom. Unaware that an ogress had made her home in it with her young , he was frightened out of his wits when he heard her shriek aloud in anger, "Wait till I come out!" So he persuaded Chhura to exchange jhooms with him but kept the truth from him. Instead he said, "Chhura, if you pelt stones as the hollow tree down there, a flock of parrots will fly out."

Visiting his new jhoom the next day, Chhura did as Nahaia instructed, and once again the ogress called out her threat. Far from being afraid, Chhura called back, "You may come out the size of mithans for all I care!" and pelted more stones. The

ogress called back, “You will break the heads of my children,” to which he replied, “Let them all break into pieces!” The ogress now filled with fear, stole out and hid in the river bed some distance below. Chhura immediately entered the hollow tree and taking all her young, smoked them over the fire in his jhoom hut.

Chhura now thought up of a plan to capture the ogress. He made a swing under his jhoom hut in order to lure her out of her hiding. After awhile, thinking that Chhura had left, and unable to resist the temptation, the ogress came out of hiding and as she sat swinging, she called out in glee “Chhura is around no longer!” At this, Chhura grabbed her by the hair from his hiding place above and dragging her into the hut, bound her up tightly. He threatened to take her to the village where the children would humiliate and make sport of her. In great fear and distress she pleaded that she would ransom herself. When he asked with what, she replied, “with an axe,” and then later offered a hoe. Each time Chhura refused on the grounds that the implements were not extraordinary as they could not work on their own.

Finally the ogress offered her prized possession - the horn of plenty, which could yield cooked meat and rice at command. When Nahaia came to learn about Chhura’s new possession, he coveted it, and came up with another of his devious plans. He told Chhura that should his house catch fire, he first thought must be the horn of plenty and run out with it at once. Chhura readily agreed. Unknown to Chhura, Nahaia made a hole on the floor at the entrance of Chhura’s home. He then lit a big fire nearby and shouted from the front yard, “Chhura! Your house is on fire! Remember your horn of plenty!” Chhura of course made a grab for his treasure and ran out of his house only to step into the hole made by Nahaia. As he fell, his horn of plenty flew out from his hand and landed at Nahaia’s feet. Nahaia of course

immediately picked it up saying “What Chhura does not want Nahaia will keep,” and walked off with it.

Chhura later tried the same trick on Nahaia in order to recover his horn of plenty. “Naa”, he said “when your house catches fire, run our immediately with your treasure.” He then lit a big fire nearby and called out as if to warn Nahaia. Nahaia came running out, but instead of the horn he held a grinding stone, and pretending to fall down at the entrance, threw the heavy stone at Chhura’s shin. Through tears of pain, he is believed to have muttered, “What Nahaia does not want, Chhura will keep.”

CHHURA AND HIS ENEMIES

(Source : Margaret Ch. Zama. *Chhura and His Enemies*. 2010. TS)

One day Chhura made a trip to Mawngping village only to discover that it was like no other. People did not defecate because they had no anuses, and when asked how he acquired his, Chhura replied, “When we were little, our parents applied a red-hot iron skewer, and then put us all in a big basket which they opened only on the third day.” At this, everyone wanted the same operation performed on their children, and so brought them to Chhura. Chhura followed the procedure he had told them about and asked them to come for their children on the third day. When they did so, they found that only one lone child had survived, but not for long as it too was killed by the rush of parents claiming it.

Then they realized that Chhura had duped and made fools of them, so directing their anger at him, they gave chase. But Chhura had foreseen this and hidden

himself inside a hollow long. Soon his pursuers reached the place and sat upon the log to rest. In his anger and frustration, one of them hurled his spear at the log exclaiming, “Had this been Chhura, this is how I would spear him!” At this the foolish Chhura replied from inside, “Take care! You might really spear me!” They then arrested him, “Alright,” he said “you may hold me by the elbows as our forefathers did with their captives.” As they did so, Chhura suddenly wriggled out of their grasp and violently flayed about his arms, hitting them in all directions, then made his escape.

Realizing they had been tricked, his enemies now came after him in a large group. Just before they caught up with him, Chhura quickly climb atop a huge banyan tree. As they collected in a group below deciding on their next course of action, he walked along a branch and flapping his ***puan*** (traditional lungi) about him exclaimed aloud, “I am going to fly across to the distance yonder.” At this, his enemies quickly dispatched a group shouting “Quick! Run ahead of him! Run ahead of him!” Chhura then walked along another branch in the opposite direction and did the same thing. His gullible enemies quickly dispatched another group in this direction.

Now only handful of them remained and believing that all exits were blocked, they decided to cut down the tree. As they proceeded to do so, Chhura realised the tree was about to fall, so he called out, “Wait! Let me come down and help you with the task.” They did so, and completed the job with his help. They then suddenly came to their senses and firmly got hold of him. But he again tricked them into holding him by the upper lip, and when he suddenly blew his nose they released their hold in disgust. In this way he once again escaped them.

Chhura’s enemies were now angrier than ever and determined to catch him. They lay in wait for him in his jhoom hut, but secretly aware of their plans, he

outwitted them into thinking that his hut could respond to his call. When he loudly addressed his hut from a distance, they at first keep silent. Then, as though thinking aloud, he said, “How strange that my hut should refuse to respond today. I will call once more and if there is no reply, then it will mean that there are enemies hiding in it, and the hut is afraid to call out.” So he once again called out, and this time the enemies within were compelled to make response. At this Chhura shouted, “Enemies! Enemies!” and once again evaded them.

Chhura however, was finally caught and imprisoned inside a huge basket which was hung under a bridge. Below flowed a deep river. Before long a merchant belonging to the Pawih clan came to cross the bridge and Chhura called out threateningly, “Pawia, if you don’t release me I shall kill you,” and saying this he brandished his knife from where he was. The man did as he was told. Then Chhura told him, “Why don’t you try out the basket, it is really quite comfortable,” and thus tricking him, imprisoned him in his stead. He then cut the rope from which the basket hung and the poor merchant drowned in the river while Chhura took possession of all his money and merchandise.

Loaded with his treasures, Chhura made his way into the village of his enemies. Everyone was surprised to see him. “How did you manage to escape from your imprisonment and acquire all these riches?” they asked in wonder. He replied, “Well, being a man I tried a big empty vessel round my waist and jumped into the river. As soon as it made the sound ‘bi bi birh birh”, I exclaimed ‘great riches are found! Great riches are found!’ and then gathered as much riches as I could from the river bed.”

Excited, and their greed aroused, Chhura's enemies decided to do the same. All the men folk tied empty vessels round their waist which they hoped to fill with treasures, and rushed off to the river, with Chhura escorting them. At first no one dare jump in, so Chhura pushed over one of them, and as soon as his vessel started filling water, it emitted the sound "bi bi birh birh," and hearing this the rest of them exclaimed "great riches are found! great riches are found!" and jumped into the river without further ado, unwittingly drowning themselves.

Chhura returned to the village alone and when the women inquired about their husbands, he urged them to go and help the men folk who were on their way home with their heavy loads. They all excitedly set off. Meanwhile Chhura went round the village and doused the fire at every home. Only he had a huge fire going and when a widow who stayed behind went to asked for fire, he made her earn it by sleeping with him.

Late in the evening the women returned from their futile errand, tired and cold from the pouring rain only to find their homes cold and without fire. When they asked the widow for fire, she refused them saying, "I earned my fire. Go and do the same." So it was that all the women had to pay a price to Chhura for their fire.

(Source : The following tales of Chhura are sourced from Margaret L Pachuau. *Folklore from Mizoram.* Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 2013. Print.)

CHHURA AND AI UM

One day when Chhura was out on a trip he was served *ai um* for dinner. *Ai um* was a traditional Mizo dish made of potted crab. Chhura had never eaten this dish before and he was greatly enthralled by its taste. So much so that he exclaimed, "How delicious this dish is! When I reach home I shall ask my wife to make some."

He then asked his host, "What is the name of this dish?"

And his host replied, "It is *ai um*."

Satisfied with the reply Chhura made his way home. So afraid was he of forgetting the name of the precious dish which he so relished that he kept repeating the name to himself, and he muttered, "*ai um ...ai um ...*" all the way back home.

However, on the way back he fell atop a white ant mound and forgot the name of the dish. At that time, a traveller of the Pawi tribe came along and so Chhura called out to him for help, "Pawia, help me to search for something that I have lost."

The man asked, "What is that you have lost."

Chhura replied, "If I had known what I had lost, then I would not have required your help."

The man secretly afraid of Chhura and even as he attempted to search for what Chhura had lost he muttered, "What on earth could it be that you have lost? And as it is, you are reeking of the smell of *ai um*."

Immediately, Chhura was overjoyed and jumped up and exclaimed, “That is it ... that is exactly what I have lost!”

And in fear of losing it yet again he muttered “*ai um ... ai um ...*” until he eventually reached home.

CHHURA’S ATTEMPT AT WHISTLING

Chhura and his antics were numerous. One day it so happened that he learnt how to whistle. So enthralled was he with his new talent that he began to whistle every now and then for no rhyme or reason. Now one day, as he was rather clumsy, he fell atop a white ant mound yet again and suddenly in the melee he forgot how to whistle. He felt that this talent for whistling could be recovered and so he began to search for it in earnest. Once again a Pawi traveller arrived on the scene and Chhura said, “Pawite, I have lost something, please help me recover it.”

The man said, “What is it that you have lost?”

Chhura replied, “Had I known what it was that I had lost, I would not have required your help.”

The perplexed man then tried to help him and he began to look all around the place for what Chhura had ostensibly lost. Finally, he was exhausted and so in despair he sat down upon the ground and began to whistle softly. Immediately, Chhura exclaimed, “Now that is exactly what I have lost ... you were hiding it inside your mouth all the time. Out with it.”

And saying this, the foolish Chhura grabbed the Pawi traveller’s tongue and pulled it out of his mouth!

CHHURA AND HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW

One day Chhura and his mother-in-law went out to catch crabs by the river. Chhura reached out for the crabs and as he did so he exclaimed, “The crabs are biting me and I cannot retrieve my hand anymore. You must go and ask that spirit on the mountain as to what to do in order that the crabs can let go of my hand.”

His mother-in-law went and did as she was told. As soon as she was out of sight Chhura ran and hid behind a rock. All this while he was unseen by his mother-in-law.

She then posed the question to (what she believed to be) the spirit of the mountain, “O spirit of the mountain, Chhura’s hand has been bitten by crabs and they will not let go. What do I do?”

From behind the rock, Chhura said, “The crabs will release Chhura’s hand only if you sleep with him.”

And saying this, he ran away quickly to where the crabs were. His mother-in-law went back to Chhura and he asked her, “What did the spirit of the mountain suggest as the remedy?”

She refused to tell him the truth and merely said, “Ah ... I do not really know what it advised me to do.”

Then he suggested, “Go back once more and ask the spirit of the mountain one more time.”

The woman went back most reluctantly. And Chhura once again ran ahead of her, as he had done earlier and hid behind the mountain. Once more she queried to the

spirit on the mountain and Chhura repeated once again the same advice that he had given her earlier.

Then he ran back once more and put his hand down the crab hole and when his mother in-in-law came back, he asked her yet again as to the remedy that had been suggested by the spirit on the mountain. She was embarrassed and so she refused to say what had been suggested. Chhura sent his mother-in-law for the third time in a row and even then she was reluctant to disclose what had been told to her. However, Chhura said, “I know what the spirit of the mountain has said. It said that you must go to bed with your son-in-law.”

And thus, Chhura eventually went to bed with his mother-in-law!

CHHURA AND NAHAIA DIG FOR YAMS

One day Chhura and Nahaia were digging for yams and Nahaia, being very lazy as usual, did not dig for them in earnest. So, he only dug the upper part of the yam which was not edible but Chhura, on the other hand, dug deep into the ground and managed to procure fresh yams that were ripe and succulent. On the way home, Nahaia suggested, “Chhura, why don’t we clean the yams?”

Chhura replied, “All right, let us do so.”

Nahaia washed his pile of yams upstream and Chhura washed his mound of yams downstream. Nahaia was cunning and sly, and as he began cleaning the yams he called out, “Chhura, the yams which I have gathered are being washed down the stream.”

In this manner he exchanged a lot of his own puny yams with Chhura’s fresh white yams. The crafty Nahaia thus fooled his brother and very soon they set off for

home. Several weeks later, Nahaia again invited Chhura to dig for yams with him but Chhura was much wiser by then and said, “Ah ... I do not want to dig for yams with you. If I do so, they may all turn red and puny like they did the last time, on being washed in the stream.”

Saying this, he turned away and left an astonished Nahaia all by himself.

CHHURA AND NAHAIA EXCHANGE HOUSES

One day Chhura and his crafty brother Nahaia were building a house for themselves. Chhura worked hard and was painstakingly constructing his portion of the house. At the same time, Nahaia was also constructing his portion of the house. However, Nahaia was very lazy and so his portion was very badly constructed.

The roof of Nahaia’s house was soon torn and because it was so poorly built it was in want of repair. One day, the rains came down and filled the entire house. Nahaia then slyly urged Chhura to exchanged houses with him. Chhura said, “I don’t want your house with the broken roof.”

But Nahaia urged, “The broken roof is very useful. It allows you to gaze out at the stars as you lie in bed at night.”

Chhura was fascinated by the idea and so the crafty Nahaia managed to convince his foolish brother Chhura to exchange houses with him.

CHHURA GATHERS CHENGKEK

One day Chhura saw ripe *chengkek* (a sour edible fruit), and because he could not climb atop the tree he could not gather the fruit. So he mumbled to himself, “Ah ...

if only I were Nahaia. He is so clever, he would have known what to do. I am sure if he were here he would stroke the fruit in this manner."

And saying this he caught hold of the branches and lovingly stroke them, then let go of them without even breaking them off the tree.

(Source : The following tales of Chhura are sourced from Laltluangliana Khiangte. *Folktales of Mizoram.* Mizoram: L.T.L. Publications, 1997. Print.)

CHHURA LOSES HIS WAY

Chhura and his family members had become very poor. They had eaten all the produce of their fields and it was not yet time to gather in the year's harvest. They pondered for a long time what they had better to do.

In their house there was a very large earthenware vessel of which they were very proud of. But now because they were so poor, they determined to sell their valuable vessel in order to buy rice.

The next morning after they had so decided, Chhura prepared to set off to the nearest village, one day's journey away, and there try to sell the vessel.

Before he left, his wife warned him to be very careful with the vessel and told him that he was not to put it on the ground at all, for fear of breaking it, but that when he was tired of carrying it on one shoulder he was to change it to the other.

Chhura went off very early, carrying the huge vessel on his right shoulder. His load was heavy, but as he had been so carefully warned not to risk breaking the pot he did not dare to halt on the way for a rest, and so have to put the pot on the ground.

So, he went on and on and he became very tired. When he had gone about half-way his right shoulder began to ache very badly and he decided to make a change.

He remembered what his wife had told him, not to put the pot on the ground, but to put it on the other shoulder. He wondered how he could get it to the other side without putting it on the ground, and was very puzzled about the matter.

After thinking for some time, he turned himself round and at once said to himself, “There! The pot is on the other side now,” and went on walking.

He did not realise that he was going back to his own village, and he went on travelling all the afternoon, until the shadows grew very long.

When the sun was setting he got back to his own village, but he thought it was a place towards which he had set out in the morning.

His little children saw him and they quickly called to him, “Father! Father! How glad we are that you have come home.”

But Chhura merely said to himself, “These are very nice and friendly little children in this village to call me Father.” I am glad I have reached such a neighbourly place at the end of my long day’s journey.”

He did not recognise that they were his own children. Incidentally he put up in the next door of his own house. When the children informed their mother by saying, “Father is next door and trying to sell the vessel.”

The mother replied, “Go and ask him to come home.” The children did, but Chhura remained adamant and when his wife came to the house to call him, he calmly replied, “Oh, you think that I am your husband, no I’ve got my own wife in my village and I cannot marry any other person.”

Such a man of integrity was Chhura, a man always loyal to his wife.

CHHURA FEARS SPOTTED COLOURS

In one of his travels, Chhura saw a tiger by the way side and the tiger was following him for a long time. When he reached home he told his wife that he had seen a big spotted dog on the way and was following him.

"O, my God! That's not a dog, but a spotted tiger, which is fearsome for man. From now on you have to fear all things spotted in colour," warned his over cautious wife.

Chhura remembered his wife's advice. One day he was at home and his wife went to the jhum. She dried her spotted apron in the open air. When Chhura saw it, he made a sharp and pointed spear and all the daylong he pierced in into pieces.

His wife returned home in the evening and saw her apron torn to pieces.

"Who did it," shouted she in anger.

"I did it because you said all spotted colours are dangerous", he replied calmly.

Another day, his wife brought some red fruits from the jungle. On reaching home the wife asked Chhura to take down some of her load from her back.

Alas! To his great surprise, Chhura saw some spotted colours in the basket of his wife. He suddenly ran for his spear and shield to attack the basket of his wife.

His wife stood dump without knowing the reason of her husband peculiar behaviour and asked, "What are you doing, hey do not attack me for I am your wife."

Chhura replied, "Don't move, I'm going to kill that spotted colour. You told me to be careful towards spotted colour."

"No, no, this is not some fearful animal to be afraid of, it is a fruit, put your spear down, don't hit it" exclaimed the wife at the top of her voice.

At this, Chhura stopped attacking his wife and then put down the load from the basket with great care.

CHHURA COOKS FOOD

One day just before she left for their jhum, Chhura's wife instructed him, "When the rays of the evening sun fall on the top of the tree down there, you start cooking rice," Chhura nodded thinking that he got the message in the right sense.

When evening came and the rays of the sun were falling on the top of tree, he interpreted the instruction that rice should be cooked at the main fork of the tree.

So, he carried pot, rice, firewood, water etc. and started climbing the tree to reach the first angle of the main fork. He struggled greatly but with little progress he often slipped down to the bottom.

At the end he fell all of a sudden from a certain height and got injured making him take to bed. The sun set and his wife came home from her work. She looked through the window and saw her husband sleeping nicely there without cooking but still bearing some heavy load of utensils on his back.

"Why are you sleeping like that without cooking?" she shouted. "I tried to cook at the tree-top as per your instruction" Chhura replied calmly.

"Did I ask you to cook there? No, not at all, I only told you the time to start cooking" said the wife. Any way she had to attend her ailing husband that evening

CHHURA'S BLANKET & HATCHET

Once upon a time, there lived in a certain village Chhura and his elder brother Nahaia. They were great friends and were very poor. But then somehow they got hold of a small blanket and a hatchet. And then, they decided to use them in turns.

The prior choice fell to Nahaia and he said, "I choose to have the blanket by night and hatchet by day." So it fell to Chhura to have the blanket during the day and hatchet during the night.

So every day Chhura was seen in the hot sun covering himself with a thick blanket while his brother Nahaia worked away with the hatchet.

And at night Chhura shivered in the cold, for his only covering was the useless hatchet, while his cunning brother Nahaia lay snugly wrapped himself with the blanket and snoring away happily.

SHARING A MITHUN

The father of Chhura had only one mithun to bequeath after his death and Chhura and Nahaia had to share that mithun.

Not knowing how to divide the animal, the two brothers decided to share it jointly. It was agreed that Chhura should have the hind portion and Nahaia the head portion.

Every morning, Nahaia would tell Chhura to clean the night soil as the same came out from Chhura's share.

One night the mithun calved and going by Nahaia's logic it was supposed to be the share of Chhura. But when the two brothers saw it in the morning, the mother mithun was licking her baby over and over again.

At this Nahaia argued that the new born calf had come out of the mouth and that it was to be his share. Chhura was disturbed but he had to be satisfied with the decision made by his brother. Not only this, Nahaia would tell him to clean the night soil every morning.

After a time Chhura became tired and suggested to Naa to exchange their respective shares. Naa agreed to the proposal knowing that to feed the mithun would now be Chhura's responsibility.

Every day, he asked Chhura to bring the mithun's food, for the mouth being Chhura's share, he was responsible to feed her. In course of time, the mithun calved and Naa instantly claimed the calf.

Subsequently also, Naa claimed the calf every time a new one was born in spite of Chhura's protests.

In desperation, Chhura then declared that he was not agreeable to sharing the mithun any longer, and that he was going to take away his portion of the share, namely the mithun's head.

At this, Naa had to acquiesce and share with Chhura all the calves equally.

So both the owners once again re-affirmed their joint ownership of the mithun.

THUITLING AND NGAMBAWNG

(Source: Lal Dena. *Hmar Folktales.* New Delhi: Scholars Publishing House, 1995. 92-98. Print.)

Long long ago, there was a young man named Ngambawng in a village. In the same village there was a beautiful young girl name Thuitling. Thuitling's mother died early and so she was an orphan. Her father re-married and had a daughter. This small girl was growing but was less beautiful than Thuitling. So, in no time both of them came to marriageable age.

Ngambawng was the most prospective young man of the village. He loved Thuitling very much and wanted to marry her. Thuitling also wanted to marry him. So they used to go to their jhums by turns, working together all the time. Days, months and years passed by unaware. At last they decided to get married. But Thuitling's step mother objected to their marriage because she favoured her own daughter for Ngambawng.

As a result Thuitling and Ngambawng could not get married by parental consent. But since they could not separate from each other, they eloped and became husband and wife somehow. However, Thuitling, so far obedient, innocent and harmless, felt a prick of conscience and felt unhappy all the time. She could not enjoy the bliss of conjugal life as she should. But she dared not disclose her feeling to her husband. She felt weak day by day and took no food and drink. At last, she died. At the time of her death she was in the house of her parents.

Ngambawng mourned the death of Thuitling deeply. He took no thought of work, food and drink but was simply wandering in the forest and in the meadows

every day in search of the spirit of Thuitling. As he roamed in the meadow and the forest, he was playing with flute made of bamboo.

Thuitling's step-mother still hoped Ngambawng for her daughter. So they invited him to hew down a big banyan tree in the middle of their jhum. On that day she sent only her daughter to the jhum. She prepared all the delicious food and the choicest of country-wine for Ngambawng. The girl carried all these things in a basket. Ngambawng climbed the big banyan tree and cut down all the branches with his sharp axe. As soon as he finished the work he sat down on the big branch of the tree and started playing his flute. To whichever direction he looked, he saw traces of his Thuitling. He felt lonely and full of longing for her. As he was playing his flute, a wild bee was lovingly humming around his flute which he took to be the spirit of his dead wife. So all day long he was playing with this humming bee. He totally forgot the girl waiting for him below with all kinds of dainty food and drink. The girl repeatedly reminded him of the food and drink. At last, the sun set and it was time to go home. He came down and she requested him to eat and drink. But he turned down and went home without tasting even a morsel.

The girl felt ashamed and angry at the same time. As soon as she reached home, she threw down her basket on the floor and cried, "Your food, food of shame; your drink, drink of shame."

When, Thuitling died, Ngambawng cut her nails and buried them in his garden. They sprouted into beautiful flowers. Every morning Ngambawng inspected the flower and found at least one or two petals missing. But he could not found out who did it. At last, he watched it the whole night. At midnight a wild cat stalked stealthily and plucked the flower. Ngambawng gave a hot chase, and caught it, "What

are you and who are you to steal my flowers?" Shouted Ngambawng angrily, ready to devour the cat. But the cat calmly replied, "Sir, don't catch me, I'm not doing all by myself." "Who sends you? Came the angry question. "Madam Thuitling sends me," replied the cat. "Ah, in that case, I shall also come," replied Ngambawng in a gentler voice. "You cannot come with me, the path is difficult, rough and too dangerous for living man," replied the cat. "No, if you can go, I also can go. I have to catch hold of your tail," insisted Ngambawng. "Then, you try," said the cat. So, they started their journey to the world of the dead. The path was really difficult; they had to pass through cliffs and narrow passages in the high mountains. At last, they could reach the village of the dead. At the outskirt of the village, people were busy cutting wood for Thuitling's house. He asked them what the woods were for. They said, "We are constructing a house for Thuitling; these are for the posts." For Ngambawng, it was the easiest of works; he cut them with his fingers with least effort. They all praised the might of Ngambawng. Ngambawng reached the village and put up in Thuitling's house. The villagers were busy every day doing corporate works. One morning the village-crier cried out to all that they had to go hunting for big bear. They all went out with their daos, spears and all, Ngambawng was no exception. They formed a ring round the bear, some had to drive, some had to lay in wait; but Ngambawng did not see any trace of bear. As he stepped back and forth, he trampled a small hairy caterpillar to pieces. At this, they all shouted in wonder that the great Ngambawng had already killed the bear. They were very successful. They bagged more than they could carry home. The next day, the crier proclaimed to all that they had to go fishing. The morning meal over, they all started for fishing and Ngambawng also had to go. They did not get to the river as Ngambawng expected but to the forest of bamboos. There, they started plucking bamboo leaves. Ngambawng was at a loss what to do. He

did not see river, let alone fish. However, he plucked some bamboo leaves just to fill the hole in the bottom of his basket. So all day long he was simply loitering in the forest of bamboo. Evening came and all were ready for home. They sat together and discussed the manner of their home-going. Some said, “by knees” which means on foot; some said, “Like the jumping of big fly.” Did not follow their meaning blindly said, “by knees or jumping of male fly, I have no objection.” Then they all agreed to jumping of male fly. So in the twinkling of an eye, they all turned into firefly and Ngambawng found himself along not knowing where to go. He was groping in the dark all the night and at last he could manage to reach home.

Thuitling waited for him anxiously throughout the night. Ngambawng was eager to report the day’s event that it was a complete failure; that he did not even see the river. However, Thuitling inspected his basket and shouted. “Ah, you said it was a total failure, but you still came with enough fish for one hearty meal,” as she was collecting bamboo leaves from the bottom of the basket. She roasted them in the fire and fat were coming out. But when Ngambawng tried to do they went into flame. Ngambawng complained that he was coming alone and his friends were quite unconcerned for him. He also said that there were many fireflies on his way and some of them proved even troublesome; so he slapped them down one after another. “O, No! Those were your companions, I’m afraid you might have killed some of them!” cried she. She felt that flesh and spirit could not go together. So, she said to Ngambawng, “Though we loved each other and wanted to live together as husband and wife, we could not enjoy the bliss of conjugal life because we belonged to different world. If you really loved me, you please go back to you world. When you reach home, you kill two sparrows, roast them, pierce through them with sharp iron

rod and hang them delicately on the roof with the sharp point downward. Lie down below it; open the door for chicken to come in."

Ngambawng went home reluctantly and did as he was instructed. When the chicken looked at the hanging sparrows, she flew at them, the rod fell down and pierced through his heart.

Ngambawng also then went to the village of the dead. As he reached Thuitling's house he shouted in wonder, "O my God! How many good posts, how many good wooden planks you have? Who had killed all these bear's heads hanging above your door?" "Your works in your first coming," replied Thuitling calmly.

ANNEXURE-II: Summary of tales by the scholar, not available in English translation.

PENGLAM GETS MARRIED

(Source: Dallian Haokip. *Zomite Tangthute.* Manipur: L & R Printing Press, 1990. Print.)

When Penglam attained a marriageable age, he requested his parents to find him a wife. When his parents found a suitable girl for him they got married according to their tradition. However, Penglam did not know that he had to sleep with his wife.

His wife waited for her husband to sleep with her for quite some time, and at last when she could not take it any longer she went to her mother with her problem. Her mother told her to stand in a position so that her private part was seen by her husband. Too ignorant of her wife's plan Penglam quickly ran to his mother-in-law complaining that his wife had a big boil between her legs. His mother-in-law told him that it was nothing but the one that he must valued as a husband.

Once he experienced the pleasure of sex he became too obsessed with it that he was always on the lookout of gratifying his sexual desire irrespective of social norms and values.

PENGLAM THE TRADER

(Source: Dallian Haokip. *Zomite Tangthute.* Manipur: L & R Printing Press, 1990. Print).

This tale was the time when Penglam and his family were in dire-economic straits. Many a time they would spend a day without having anything to eat. Considering their pathetic condition, his wife suggested Penglam to trade by telling

him that other husbands traded their old hoe, axes and other belongings for food (in those days economic activities were in barter system). Incidentally, she used the word “pei” (an old usage for trade) which literally means “twirl.” Penglam took the meaning of the word literally, and when his wife was gone to their jhoom he twirled away their hoe and axes deep down in the nearby gorge, never to be recovered again. So, far from making profit, Penglam lost all their scanty possessions.

APPENDICES

NAME OF CANDIDATE : **CHINGBIAKMAWI**

DEGREE : **M.PHIL**

DEPARTMENT : **ENGLISH**

TITLE OF DISSERTATION : **COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COMMON THEMES IN SELECTED FOLKTALES OF MIZO, HMAR AND PAITE VERSIONS**

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APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

1. **Board of Studies** : **26/04/2013**
2. **School Board** : **07/05/2013**

REGISTRATION NO. & DATE :**MZU / M.Phil / 120 of 07.05.2013**

DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION : **30/06/2014**

EXTENSION : **Sought but not utilized**

BIO-DATA

Name : **Chingbiakmawi**

Father's Name : **G. Donggin (L)**

Address : **c/o Thang Lianmang Guite**

Upper Republic, Aizawl. – 796001

Phone No. : **(0389) 2301325 / 9612350659**

Educational Qualification :

Class	Board/University	Year of passing	Division/Grade	Percentage
HSLC	BSEM	2004	I	74.16%
HSSLC	CHOSEM	2006	II	58.3%
B.A.	Manipur University	2009	I	60%
M.A.	Mizoram University	2012	II	54.38%
M.Phil (Course Work)	Mizoram University	Dec, 2012	'B' Grade	Corresponds to 58.6% in percentage conversion.

M.Phil Registration Number and Date: MZU / M.Phil / 120 of 07.05.2013

Other relevant information :

1) **Qualified UGC-NET, June 2012**
2) **Project Fellow under UGC-DRS / SAP since 2012, in the Department of English, Mizoram University.**

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COMMON THEMES IN SELECTED FOLKTALES OF MIZO, HMAR AND PAITE VERSIONS

(ABSTRACT)

CHINGBIAKMAWI
Registration No. MZU / M.Phil / 120 of 07.05.2013

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

Introduction

A preliminary definition of folklore and its ambit is given space in this chapter as any study on folktales is grounded on the larger framework of folkloristic studies. Folklore covers traditional art, literature, knowledge and practice that are disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioural example. The concept of folklore existed long before William John Thoms (1803-1885) coined the term 'folklore' in 1846. The ancient Greek masters' "myths" were oft-told tales, and folklore serves as a source and resource for writers throughout the history of literature. In fact, it is often said that folklore is the backbone of literature and a mirror of culture. 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 Robert A. George 159).

Folklore according to Dundes, is autobiographical ethnography, that is, it is a people's own description of themselves (*Folklore* 55). The history of folklore studies reveals that folklorists in many different countries have often been inspired by the desire to preserve the national heritage. Likewise, folklorists as the pioneering students of culture were initially interested in folklore because they correctly hypothesized that documenting and studying it had the potential to provide insights into the historical roots, cultural distinctiveness and national character of individual nations.

The different genres of folklore including folktales are the embodiment of cultural heritage, left by the fore fathers. Folklore, as a mirror of culture, reveals differences and similarities in ways of thinking and therefore can serve as a tool for teaching cultural understanding:

> Folklore as a mirror of culture frequently reveals the areas of special concern. It is for this reason that analyses of collections of folklore can provide the individual who takes advantage of the opportunities afforded by the study of folklore a way of seeing another culture *from the inside out* instead of *from the outside in*, the usual position of a social scientist or teacher (Dundes *International* 55).

A folklore study is comparative in nature. The study of any folktale or any folkloristic item in isolation or as unique to a given context is erroneous. Leading folklorists like Alan Dundes, Richard M. Dorson, Stith Thompson and others whose seminal works are used to form the theoretical backbone of this dissertation acknowledged their agreements in the comparative nature of folklore study. Alan Dundes in *Folklore Matters* asserts that "folklore has steadfastly continued to consider it as its *sine qua non* among competing methodologies" (57), meaning comparative method is indispensible in folklore studies.

The nature of comparative method employed in this dissertation is in accordance with what Alan Dundes called, "a strictly limited nature" (*Folklore* 61), confined to just three tribes: Mizo, Hmar and Paite. The term "Mizo" is in fact a generic term used by scholars and researchers for denoting a number of tribes including Hmar and Paite, therefore, the term 'Mizo' is used interchangeably in this dissertation to denote both the Mizo tribe in particular and as a generic term to denote the three selected tribes in general. Annexure of the selected folktales in translation, and summary of the untranslated tales, is given in the dissertation. Following is a brief abstract of the dissertation:

Chapter-1 : Introduction

Of the many genres of folklore, folktale, in general refers to household tale, or to a particular genre of oral tales. Folktale appears to be a universal cultural, common to

primitive and modern complex societies alike. Folktale was essentially oral, until the advent of literacy. With the introduction of literacy, people started collecting folktales, writing and rewriting the same tales, copying from manuscript to manuscript thereby undergoing changes in due course of time; moreover, as a result of this transmission process variation of a single tale is inevitable.

However, in spite of its extensive history, there has been an ongoing debate about the definition of 'folk' in folklore. Folklore had been earlier defined as the traditional learning of the humbler and uncultured classes of civilized nations (Blake, 217) while according to Alan Dundes, folk is "Any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common linking factor" (*International* viii).

In this dissertation, the folk referred to are the folk belonging to the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite culture and the focus of study is a parallel study of the selected tales in terms of similarities and deviations of themes, social realities and other factors.

In the colonial records, these tribes were referred to as Kukis. They belong to the Mongoloid race, and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman stock. The origin of these tribes is untraceable due to the absence of adequate historical backings. One common finding of historians and scholars who study the history and origin of these tribes is that they had been together at one point of time and gradually migrated (on clan basis) south-west from China through Burma to their present settlement in the north eastern states of India like Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and its peripheral regions.

Distinguishing Mizo, Hmar and Paite tribes is not an easy task as they share several common features in cuisine, costume, patriarchal form of society, and several oral traditions and cultural practices. On the other hand, the study of individual tribes often show some interesting peculiarities that distinguish them from the others, for example, with tribes like

Mizo and Hmar, it is a tradition for the youngest male child to be the heir to his father, while Paite follow the tradition of naming the eldest son as heir. Meanwhile, all the languages of the different Mizo tribes have close affinity to each other as they belong to the same language group, but at the same time, serve as a distinct identity marker between the tribes. Therefore, a brief study of the meaning of the terms Mizo, Hmar and Paite, their origin theories and their respective language and literature is done in this chapter in order to better situate both the communities and the tales under study in the dissertation.

The selected folktales for study in the dissertation are: Mizo tales of *Liandova leh Tuaisiala, Chhura,* and *Zawltlingi leh Ngambawma* ; Hmar tales, *Liendo leh Touisiel, Sura,* and, *Thuitling leh Ngambawng*; and Paite tales, *Liandou leh Thanghou, Penglam,* and *Khupching leh Ngambawm.* These are four common folktales in the three versions.

When comparing the folktales in Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions, their commonalities are more than their differences. The differences appear subtle and pose interesting questions as to why common tales would differ in different versions or related tribes. The variations of the same tale today have affected the literary output and other interpretations of the tale. This dissertation brings out the similarities and variations found in the selected tales of Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions. This is done by examining the historical and cultural specificity of the related tribes, as revealed in the thematic contents of the tales

Chapter-2 : A Study of Social Reality Found in the Selected Folktales

Liandova leh Tuaisiala in Mizo, *Liendo leh Touisiel* and *Liandou leh Thanghou* in Hmar and Paite respectively are three versions of the same tale studied here to understand the social reality of the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite society. The folktale is reflective of their traditional social structure while at the same time reflecting the urges and desires of the

less privileged such as orphans and widows who are often discriminated against and who belong to the fringes of the society.

The social dimension found in a folktale is the social reality of that time. Folktales are also seen as something that embodies the ethos of peoples and that provides evidences of their continuity and cultural distinctiveness. Jack Jipes, in his book *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* states:

> Originally the folk tale was (and still is) an oral narrative form cultivated by non-literate and literate people to express the manner in which they perceived and perceive nature and their social order and their wish to satisfy their needs and wants... the tales are reflections of the social order in a given historical epoch, and as such, they symbolized the aspirations, needs, dreams and wishes of common people in a tribe, community, or society, either affirming the dominant social values and norms or revealing the necessity to change them (7).

The traditional Mizo society was predominately patriarchal wherein village administration was under a well-organized polity system at village level under the rule and guidance of a council of elders which was presided over by the village chief, and power was concentrated within this circle who constituted the privileged group. Similar to what Marx and Engels had asserted that “the whole society must fall into the two classes – the property-owners and the propertyless workers” (652) it is seen in the Mizo society where the land tenurial system was communal ownership, but the chief held the power in the distribution of land to each household for cultivation. Therefore, the land upon which their life fundamentally depended upon was indirectly the chief’s property.

As poor orphans and being unproductive, Liandova and Tualsiala represent the class who belong to the periphery of the society, that is, they are the socially outcast, downtrodden and marginalised section of the society. The discrimination of the brothers by others who were better off than them shows the presence of a stringent class hierarchy in the old Mizo society. Another aspect of social reality of the old Mizo society found in the tale was the subordination of woman. The voiceless women characters in the tale who play minor roles are instrumental in revealing this aspect.

Social reality can also be seen in the unrealistic narrative of folktales. “Reality”, according to William James, “is the relation to our emotional and active life” (qtd. in Alfred Schuetz, 533). If reality as William asserts means the relation to the emotional and active life, the *khuanu* (found in the three versions under study) or the works she did for the brothers are not just make belief, but rather represent the inner desire of the narrator who represents the type to which Liandova and Tuaisiala belong.

The social realities found in the tale of *Liandova and Tuaisiala* in Mizo, Hmar and Paite versions are basically the same. But the narratives, when compared, show some variations. The narratives of the Mizo and the Hmar versions are closer to each other than Mizo and Paite or Hmar and Paite. This may be due to the fact that Mizo and Hmar have more cultural affinities than both have with the Paites.

It can thus be concluded that the social reality of the traditional Mizo, Hmar and Paite community though the same, contains some degree of cultural differences worth study.

Chapter-3 : The Trickster as Subversive Agent in the Selected Folktales

Folktales are tales of common people and are generally subversive in nature. Subversion in the guise of simplicity and ignorance is one of the main motifs found in the

tales of Chhura (Sura and Penglam of Hmar and Paite versions respectively). Though known by different names in the three communities, the said character is generally accepted to be the same folk persona. He is believed to be a real person and not just a fictional character by some scholars. Most of the tales associated with this folk persona are the same in the three versions. The tales are reflective of various aspects of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite cultures and the social values then and now.

The basic difference found about the Chhura tales is the fact that while many of his tales are found in Mizo, Hmar and Paite, there are some tales which are found only in one version. Again, Chhura is believed to be younger than Nahaia in the Mizo version, elder in Hmar and no brother of him is known in Paite version.

The selected tales for studying the subversive qualities of the legendary Chhura in this chapter are: *Chhura and His Enemies, Chhura and Ai Um, Chhura's Attempt at Whistling, Chhura and Nahaia Dig for Yam, Sharing a Mithun, Chhura and Nahaia share a Hatchet and a Blanket, Chhura and Nahaia Exchange Houses, Chhura Gathers Chengkek, Chhura and His Mother-in-law, Penglam the Trader, Penglam Gets Married, Chhura Loses His Way, Chhura and the Horn of Plenty.*

In these tales, Chhura runs the gamut of roles from brother, husband, father, trickster to cultural hero, fusing both positive and negative traits. He is sometimes a fool, a coward and a clever hero with lax morals, yet he can also be extraordinarily brave and sagacious. Chhura is sometimes a positive agent often displaying defining cultural features like *tlawmngaihna*; yet he also often displays strong antisocial behaviour. Although one laughs at his escapades and foolishness, and is often embarrassed by his promiscuity, his creative cleverness amazes and keeps alive the possibility of transcending the social restrictions a

person regularly encounters. Wit and trickery combined with seeming ignorance and simplicity are in fact subversive tools successfully employed by Chhura in the tales.

Chapter-4 : Treatment of Death and Afterlife in the Selected Folktales

This chapter conveys the old belief system or indigenous faith of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite and their treatment of death and afterlife by employing *Zawltlingi leh Ngambawma* in Mizo, *Thuitling leh Ngambawng* and *Khupching leh Ngambawm* in Hmar and Paite respectively. The tales are common to the three selected tribes, which is a legendary love story wherein the girl dies and her lover journeyed to the land of the dead in order to meet his beloved.

The treatment of death and afterlife is more or less the same in the three versions, however, there are certain variations within the narratives. The variations add to the richness of the tale, though they are not necessarily due to cultural or geographical location.

The importance of religion in the traditional society of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite cannot be neglected as "the entire culture – institutions, customs, stories and music – was integrated by the Zos religious world view" (Kipgen 106). Mizo forefathers believed witchcraft and evil spirits were responsible for bringing sickness and death to them, and this belief system is seen in the death of Zawltlingi and Ngambawma, the two deaths mentioned in the tale.

They also believed in the presence of two kinds of worlds after death; *Mithikhua* in Mizo (*Mithikhuo* in Hmar and *Misikhua* in Paite) which means dead men's abode and *Pialral* in Mizo (*Pielral* in Hmar and *Pialgal* in Paite) or paradise, separated by the river called *Run* in Mizo and Hmar (*Gun* in Paite). *Pialral* was a much better place than *Mithikhua*, where only a qualified few entered. All the non-privileged ones who were not

qualified to enter *Pialral* ended up in *Mithikhua* where the quality of life was considered to be inferior to life on earth. The world of the dead found in the tale appears to correspond to *Mithikhua*, as this was appropriate for persons like Zawltlingi and Ngambawma.

The entire Mizo culture today is dominated by the doctrines of Christianity. Death is regarded as the rite de passage of earthly life after which the soul of the deceased goes to either hell or heaven according to the virtue of one's actions and decisions during an earthly life. Folktales as historical relics contain motifs dealing with belief systems, rituals, death and the afterlife which unfortunately have come to be regarded as fiction today, but they in fact, indicate a rich tradition of former times worth studying.

Chapter-5 : Conclusion

The conversion of the Mizo to Christianity in the late nineteenth century brought about transformation in the culture and society as never before. Since the old ways of life were gradually abandoned in order to embrace the new Christian faith and worldview, those elements among the old ways of thinking and the traditional customs and moral codes upheld by the old Mizo society but which went against the dictates of their new faith, were abandoned. This in turn sowed the seeds of abhorrence towards the old system which eventually is detrimental for those who attempt to comprehend and study their true cultural identity.

The crux of the situation of the Mizo community today particularly in the Churachandpur district of Manipur, is that each ethnic group strives to claim their individual identity. This practice of claiming cultural distinctiveness among kindred tribes has unfortunately caught on in Mizoram as well. Being fed with promises for their welfare and development, the tribal communities time and again make certain demands to the government and this often leads to violence and enmity towards other kindred communities.

It is at this point that the need for retrospection arises for tribes like the Mizo, Hmar and Paite, who must look back to their common folk heritage, and to their remote past before they come to conclusions on matters of separate cultural identities.

From a comparative study of the folktales in the three selected versions, we have understood that aspects of the functioning of the traditional society of the Mizo, Hmar and Paite were basically the same, which was a democratic and patriarchal construct and in which their belief systems and cultural value systems dictated their way of life. The sometimes subtle, the sometimes obvious variations found, reveal cultural distinctiveness. However, being of oral tradition, each tale may have found its way into other communities creating variations in the transmission process.

The fact that the selected tales for each tribe under study are the same tales, and that the characters in the tales involve the same folk persona for the different communities are too striking to be attributed to chance or coincidence. Thus, it may be concluded that Mizo, Hmar and Paite are indeed the same folk having certain distinctiveness in culture and tradition.

From the case studies explored in this dissertation, the ideas projected through the tales when viewed with modern sensibilities, reveals basic homogeneity of the tribes in cultural history and practice, but which in present times, has fallen prey to claims of separate identities. On the other hand, it also contributes towards a wider and more flexible study of interdisciplinary interface between folklore, culture and identity.

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