

A STUDY OF MIZO FOLKSONGS COMPOSED BY  
SAIKUTI

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the  
Degree of Master of Philosophy in English of Mizoram  
University, Aizawl.

DECLARATION

Mizoram University

May 2014

*I, **C.Lalnunhlui**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anyone else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.*

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

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all [men] liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him'.* James 1:5.

Upon the completion of this study, first and foremost I want to thank the Almighty God for the unfailing grace and love for granting me the ability to write, think and carry out this research work. Secondly, I would like to give my profound gratitude to my Supervisor, Dr. Lalrindiki. T. Fanai, Associate Professor, Department of English, who gave me new insights and shaped my thoughts, without her supervision, this work, could not achieve this level.

My special gratitude also goes to the faculty members of English Department, Mizoram University, for their priceless help and generosity. I am very grateful to the people that have been interviewed for this research Dr. Zokhuma, Chanmari; Pu C. Chhuanvawra, Tuikhuahtlang; Pu Chaldailova, Ramhlun; Pu Laitanga, Hunthar; Pi Khawlkungi, Mission Veng; Dr. Lalkhawngaihi Renthlei, Tuikhuahtlang who have devoted much of their time and give their valuable comments and suggestions.

I also express my gratitude to the authorities of the libraries viz. Mizoram University, Central Library; Department of Art & Culture, Delhi University Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University Library and State Library which have granted access to their resources.

My acknowledgements cannot be concluded without mentioning my dear husband, Dr.Lalfakzuala Renthlei for the patience, love and support I have received from him. I would also like to thank my parents and my in-laws for the comfort and security they have shown during the course of my research.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The history of Mizo Folksongs and its origin dates back to 1300-1450 AD<sup>1</sup>. The Mizo Folk Songs were claimed to cover more than a hundred books. Even though many have been lost without proper records, the early Mizo literates have kept some in written record thus enabling us to read and study the annals of folk history. With the advent of Christianity and the rigid early church's teachings, within a decade or two, pre-Christianity era ended and along with it the early folk songs gradually vanished. Indeed, written and oral records have been kept, both on the works of men and women but records and documents on the works and composition of women remained far from being at par with the men's writings and works.

The Mizo people are great lovers of music and songs. The best means for them in expressing their sorrows and joys are through songs. Just as it is difficult to trace the origin of the Mizo people, tracing the origin of Mizo folksongs is equally difficult. Due to lack of documentation and information, its exact date cannot be known; however, what can be regarded as the oldest song from record available is Thuthmun Zai<sup>2</sup>. The word 'Chhinlung' appeared in the songs of Thuthmun Zai as well as Hmar Hla, so it is believed that Thuthmun Zai might have been sung when the early Mizos settled at Chhinlung but this cannot be claimed as an exact documentation<sup>3</sup>.

Thalai leh dawntuai an tliak zo ve,

Chhinlungah mi awm lo, vangkhua zawng ti ula.

Tracing the above song, it states the fact that a famine broke out which took the lives of many men and women, so as Dr. R.L.Thanmawia has stated, with the

mention of the word 'Chhinlung', some believed that the Mizos might have composed a song in order to vent out and pacify their sorrows.

The time when the Mizos migrated across the Run River is considered to be the time when their love for music and songs flourished. It is recorded that most of the songs that were composed was when they settled at the Lentlang<sup>4</sup> border. The collection of the oldest Mizo songs begins from a number of villages. The emergence of the composition of songs has different purposes and reasons<sup>5</sup>.

Any kind of singing is universal in human society; it is a manifestation of finer aspects of human life.<sup>6</sup> Often, poems and songs give us a clearer insight into a person's soul than the lengthiest discussions. What song or poetry contributes is that in those unlettered and unsophisticated lie certain important clues to their philosophy of life. Even though the folksongs are used simply for the pleasure of singing or listening, they also act as the medium for the expression of ideas or emotions held in common by a group. A community, whether agricultural or otherwise, expresses itself passionately and imaginatively through its folksongs. These are live human documents reflecting actual historical processes and phenomena of different ages.<sup>7</sup>

Saikuti, through the composition of her songs acts as a voice that speaks for the plight of womanhood during the turn of the early nineteenth century. From what seemed a casual flow of creativity that can be heard through her songs, Saikuti's choice to vent out her emotions implies a deeper meaning, a meaning which portrays the position of women during her time. From marriage, love, judgements, nature and aesthetics, courtship, women taking part in certain rituals and the various sights both subjective and objective, Saikuti effortlessly express what she felt, as a woman, from a woman's point of view.

A further study has not been undertaken regarding Saikuti as a woman composer and the study will go to reason as to how songs composed by women validates as a mode of expression. The study will mainly attempt to analyze selected folk-songs composed by Saikuti, a famous Mizo female folksong composer and will offer to examine how gender biases in patriarchy could possibly be reflected in the songs, thus assuming songs as a mode of expression when other avenues of expressions are subverted.

### **1.1. Feminist arguments on the position of women**

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other<sup>8</sup>”.

Most philosophers agree that Beauvoir’s greatest contribution to philosophy is her revolutionary magnum opus, The Second Sex<sup>9</sup>. The Second Sex revolves around the idea that woman has been held in a relationship of long-standing oppression to man through her relegation to being man’s “Other.” In agreement with Hegelian and Sartrean philosophy<sup>10</sup>, Beauvoir finds that the self needs otherness in order to define itself as a subject; the category of the otherness, therefore, is necessary in the constitution of the self as a self. However, the movement of self-understanding through alterity is supposed to be reciprocal in that the self is often just as much objectified by its other as the self objectifies it. What Beauvoir discovers in her multifaceted investigation into woman’s situation, is that woman is consistently defined as the Other by man who takes on the role of the Self. As Beauvoir explains

in her Introduction, woman “is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute- she is the Other.” In addition, Beauvoir maintains that human existence is an ambiguous interplay between transcendence and immanence, yet men have been privileged with expressing transcendence through projects, whereas women have been forced into the repetitive and uncreative life of immanence. Beauvoir thus proposes to investigate how this radically unequal relationship emerged as well as what structures, attitudes and presuppositions continue to maintain its social power.

Beauvoir’s most famous assertion, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” means to destroy the essentialism which claims that women are born “feminine” (according to whatever the culture and time define it to be) but are rather constructed to be such through social indoctrination. Beauvoir asserts various concrete demands necessary for woman’s emancipation and the reclamation of her selfhood. She demands that woman be allowed to transcend through her own free projects with all the danger, risk, and uncertainty that entails. As such, modern woman “prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating, on the same terms as men; instead of seeking to disparage them, she declares herself their equal.” In order to ensure woman’s equality, Beauvoir advocates such changes in social structures such as universal childcare, equal education, contraception, and legal abortion for women-and perhaps most importantly, woman’s economic freedom and independence from man. In order to achieve this kind of independence, Beauvoir believes that women will benefit from non-alienating, non-exploitative productive labour to some degree. In other words, Beauvoir believes that women will benefit tremendously from work. As far as marriage is concerned, the nuclear family is damaging to both partners, especially the woman. Marriage, like any other authentic



choice, must be chosen actively and at all times or else it is a flight from freedom into a static institution. Her emphasis on the fact that women need access to the same kinds of activities and projects as men places her to some extent in the tradition of liberal or second-wave feminism. She demands that women be treated as equal to men and laws, customs and education must be altered to encourage this. However, Beauvoir always maintains the fundamental existentialist belief that each individual, regardless of sex, class or age, should be encouraged to define him or herself and to take on the individual responsibility that comes with freedom. This requires not just focusing on universal institutions, but on the situated individual existent struggling within the ambiguity of existence<sup>11</sup>.

In Women's Oppression Today, 1980, Michele Barrett writes:

“The discourse of post-modernism is premised on an explicit and argued denial of the kind of grand political projects that both ‘socialism’ and ‘feminism’ by definition are. But Post-Modernism is not something you can be for or against: the reiteration of old knowledges will not make it vanish. For it is a cultural climate as well as an intellectual position, a political reality as well as an academic fashion. The arguments of post-modernism already represent, I think, a key position around which feminist theoretical work in the future is likely to revolve. Undoubtedly, this is where the book would begin, were I writing it today”<sup>12</sup>.

Michele Barrett in her book attempts to locate the sites of women's oppression. Her argument deals mainly with the oppression of women in contemporary capitalism through a consideration of gender division in Britain. Although her analysis engages with some work in the Marxist and Feminist traditions, as well as recent “Marxist-Feminist” ideas, it does not attempt to provide a systematic

exposition of either Marxist thought on ‘the woman question’ or the history of feminist theory from Mary Wollstonecraft to the present. Barrett calls for an “alliance” between feminism and the political left. Feminist should retain its autonomy as a movement (socialism won’t automatically liberate women), but feminists should not become separatists; rather they should ally themselves, around specific issues, with men on the left. And, aside from alliance around specific issues, feminists need to stay engaged with the political left in general because to liberate women is to change relations among women and men.

The advent of female literature promises woman’s view of life, woman’s experience: in other words, a new element. Make what distinctions you please in the social world; it still remains true that men and women have different organisations, consequently different experiences... But hitherto...the literature of women has fallen short of its functions owing to a very natural and a very explicable weakness- it has been too much a literature of imitation. “To write as men write is the aim and besetting sin of women; to write as women is the real task they have to perform”<sup>13</sup>.

In Women and Literary History (1989), Dale Spender<sup>14</sup> states:

“Without doubt the novel came into its own during the eighteenth century; the publication figures in themselves tell a story of sure and steady growth: ‘The annual production of works of fiction, which had averaged only about seven in the years between 1700 to 1740, rose to an average of about twenty in the three decades following 1740 and this output was doubled in the period from 1770 to 1800<sup>15</sup>’. About two thousand novels in all, by the end of the century. And the distinct impression that they were written mainly by men. Now, it is not possible to make

definitive statements about how many of these two thousand novels were written by women, and how many by men. In quite a few cases, the sex of the author remains unknown- particularly because of the penchants for anonymous publications, a practice which was more likely to tempt (particularly modest) women rather than men. But even if the 'sex unknown' authors are subtracted from the lists of novelists of the 1700's, the number of women novelists and their works which remain is little short of astonishing, given that we have been led to believe that women played no part in these productions. With a great deal of perseverance and enquiries, we can find one hundred good women novelists of the eighteenth century and together they were responsible for almost six hundred novels. This means that even by the most conservative standards women would have to be granted a half-share in the production of fiction in the 1700's. In 1773 the Monthly Review stated that when it came to fiction the field was filled by ladies, and well into the nineteenth century it was conceded that not only were women novelists plentiful, but that they were good. Yet by the twentieth century when Ian Watt comes to outline the rise of the novel, women are no longer held in high esteem. He does-in passing-acknowledge that the majority of eighteenth century novels were written by women<sup>16</sup> but how very damning is this faint and only praise".

In the 1880's and 1890's, women writers played a central role in the formulation and popularization of feminist ideology. Unlike their male contemporaries, such as Hardy and Gissing, who believed that the artist was inevitably doomed by the cheap commercialism of the new age, women were exhilarated by the prospect of a new age in which female ability would have more scope. The abrupt disappearance of the three-decker novel in the 1890's helped women writers who had never been comfortable with this format to experiment with

short fiction: ‘dreams’, ‘allegories’, ‘fantasias’, and ‘keynotes’. Whereas the feminine novelists had expressed female cultural values obliquely and proclaimed antifeminism publicly, the feminist novelists had a highly developed sense of belonging to a sisterhood of women writers, a kinship that conveyed obligations as well as privileges. Women writers did not agree that their feelings were simply a ‘delicate’ version of the noble male passions, and thus contained within the masculine soul like carved cups. They believed that female emotions were the complement, and the salvation, of masculine reserve. When they imagined heroines for whom they felt protective affection, they had genuine difficulty imagining suitable men for them. It was not enough that the men who loved Jane and Caroline and Aurora and Lyndall should be clever, idealistic and devoted. Above all they had to be whole people. Thus Rochester’s blindness, Tulliver’s wound, Moore’s sickness, and Gregory’s transvestism are symbolic immersions of the hero in feminine experience. Men, these novels are saying, must learn how it feels to be helpless and to be forced unwillingly into dependency. Only then can they understand that women need love but hate to be weak. If he is to be redeemed and to rediscover his humanity, the ‘woman’s man’ must find out how it feels to be a woman<sup>17</sup>.

In A Room of One’s Own (1945), Virginia Woolf ponders the plight of women throughout history. Woolf “reads the lives of women and concludes that if a woman were to have written she would have had to overcome enormous circumstances”. Woolf’s initial thesis is that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction”. Throughout the book, however, she develops other important conditions for artistic creation. Woolf mentions many nineteenth century female writers in order to explain these conditions, but she does not mention Mary Shelley. Woolf most likely excludes the author of *Frankenstein* because her

writing contains considerable male influence. The circumstances of Shelley's life, however, meet Virginia Woolf's basic requirements for the production of good fiction. Mary Shelley possesses a well-rounded education, encouragement, and an "androgynous and incandescent" mind.

In A Room of One's Own (1945), Virginia Woolf denotes women produce so little literature because of the tremendous discouragement and criticism that female writers face. She discusses the effects of opposition and disapproval upon the artistic mind. The opinions of others greatly affect artists, and it is those of genius who are most sensitive to criticism. Woolf proposes that it was literally impossible for a talented woman to write well during the sixteenth century: "A highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled as under by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty".

To further illustrate her point, Woolf constructs the tale of "Shakespeare's sister": a sixteenth century woman born with a genius equal to Shakespeare's. Rejection and discouragement from family, friends, and society fills her life. Because the world will not permit the expression of her genius, she eventually commits suicide. Woolf argues that like "Shakespeare's sister," any woman "born with a gift for poetry in the sixteenth century was an unhappy woman, a woman at strife against herself". Although the circumstances of female writers greatly improve over the next 300 years, Woolf finds that "even in the nineteenth century a woman was not encouraged to be an artist. On the contrary, she was snubbed, slapped, lectured and exhorted". Despite the great odds against her, a few women managed to disregard their discouraging environments and write successfully. The conditions that they overcame amaze Woolf: "What genius, what integrity it must have required in face of

all that criticism, in the midst of that purely patriarchal society to hold fast to the thing as they saw it without shrinking". In addition to discouragement, Virginia Woolf proposes that poor education and a lack of stimulating life experiences contribute to women's small production of literature. Throughout history, most women have little access to formal education. Because of their expected roles, many women are not exposed to any literature. Woolf also believes that society denies women the chance to live the "invigorating life" that is beneficial to the production of good fiction. Most women stay home and cook, sew, clean, and raise children. In contrast, men could "live freely with this gipsy or with that great lady; go to the wars; pick up unhindered and uncensored all the varied experience of human life which served him so splendidly later when he came to write his books". According to Woolf, novelist Charlotte Bronte realizes the inherent shortcomings of women's writing: "She knew how enormously her genius would have profited if it had not spent itself in solitary visions over distant fields; if experience and intercourse and travel had been granted her". Woolf considers a well-rounded education important to the production of fiction. Virginia Woolf insists that in addition to encouragement and a well-rounded education, women need an "incandescent and androgynous" mind in order to write.

Woolf explains, "The androgynous mind is resonant and porous; it transmits emotion without impediment; it is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided". Shakespeare is an ideal example of an androgynous mind: "All desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim injury, to pay off a score...was fired out of him and consumed. Therefore his poetry flows from him free and unimpeded<sup>18</sup>".

According to Woolf, a lack of support and education prevents most women from writing with an incandescent mind. Bitterness and anger detracts from their writing. About Charlotte Bronte's novels, Woolf writes, "If one reads them over and

marks that jerk in them, that indignation, one sees that she will never get her genius expressed whole and entire. Her books will be deformed and twisted". Jane Austen however separates herself from her unsupportive environment and writes with an undistracted mind. Austen writes "about the year 1800 without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching". Throughout A Room of One's Own (1945), Woolf stresses the importance of an "androgynous and incandescent" mind<sup>19</sup>.

Writing

about the evolution of women novelists, feminist literary critics were also writing about relationships to the institutions of criticism like women novelists, women critics too have demanded and received acceptance in every genre and field.

"If women's writing seems somewhat limited, I don't think it is only due to these psychological failings. Women have much less experience of life than a man, as everyone knows. But in the end are they suited to the kind of experience men have? Ulysses is not just a work of genius; it is Dublin pubs, gross depravity, obscenity, brawls. Stendhal as a soldier in Napoleon's army, Tolstoy on his Cossack campaigns, Dostoevsky before the firing squad, Proust's obviously firsthand knowledge of vice, Conrad and Melville as sailors, Michelangelo's tortures on the scaffolding in the Sistine chapel, Ben Johnson's drinking bouts, duelling, his ear burnt by the authorities because of a political indiscretion in a play – these horrors and the capacity to endure them are experienced. Experience is something more than going to law school or having the nerve to say honestly what you think in a drawing room filled with men, it is the privilege as well to endure brutality, physical torture, unimaginable sordidness, and even the privilege to want, like Boswell to grab a miserable tart under Westminster bridge...in the end, it is in the matter of experience that women's disadvantage is catastrophic. It is very difficult to know how this may be

extraordinarily altered<sup>20</sup>’.

The problem of autonomy that the woman novelist faces is, to name the extremes, whether to sacrifice personal development and freedom as an artist to a collective cultural task, or whether to sacrifice authenticity and self-exploration and accept the dominant culture’s definition of what is important to understand and describe. George Eliot believed that women could write novels that were among the very greatest:

‘We have to pour in the right elements-genuine observation, humour and passion<sup>21</sup>’.

Virginia Woolf believes that, given economic independence and a room of one’s own, given ‘the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think, then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare’s sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down<sup>22</sup>.’ If the room of one’s own becomes the destination, a feminine secession from the political world, from ‘male’ power, logic, and violence, it is a tomb, like Clarissa Dalloway’s attic bedroom. But if contact with a female tradition and a female culture is a centre; if women take strength in their independence to act in the world, then Shakespeare’s sister, whose coming Woolf asks us to await in patience and humility, may appear at last. Beyond fantasy, beyond androgyny, beyond assimilation, the female tradition holds the promise of an art that may yet fulfil the hopes of Eliot and Woolf<sup>23</sup>.

In The Laugh of the Medusa (1975), Helene Cixous, a French feminist and writer, rallies women to do the one thing that will liberate their voices, their bodies, and their sexuality:



Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement<sup>24</sup>.

Helene Cixous says that it is only superstition that has made the Medusa-the woman intellectual, writer, or critic-into a mythical monster who turns men into stone. 'If you look straight at her', writes Cixous, 'you see that she's beautiful and she's laughing'. Feminist scholars and critics have given women's fiction a critical room of its own in the house of literary history. Now we are free to come and go as we please, not in sorrow but in laughter.

A study of the status of Mizo women in the past shows that the position of the 'fairer sex' was not the same as what men enjoy. Their participation and involvement in various fields regarding their social, religious and economical position proves morally right as what their society and culture deems right and true at the time. However, what can be seen and traced is that they never did have much say and their rights were limited. This can be acknowledged when we study the works of the various women composers, they took to composing songs that reflects their true identity, an identity they never directly expose.

## **1.2. History of Mizo Folksongs**

Vankhama(1906-1970), one of the most famous poets of Mizoram describes the land as Rimawi Ram (the land of sweet melody). It runs as follows:

Lentupui chawi vel Zo tlang kan ram nuam,

Daifim tling khawm siktui thiang dawwna;

Hram thiam va tin leh reng, siahthing zar bawm,  
Ram awih thiamten nilen zai lo sa.  
Thalah hnah hlui lo til, chawr tin duatan,  
Lung tileng thal romei alo zam a;  
Thing tin zar anlo vul fur khaw thiangan,  
Huiva, rengchal, lelthang zaina.

Our pleasant highland clad with green forest,  
Where crystal clear dew gathers and flow;  
Sweet songs of birds and cicadas unites,  
And sing all day long their glad tribute.  
Old leaves fall to nourish young shoots in Spring,  
Dreamy haze spreads awakening old memories;  
Every bough breaks forth with their bright blossoms,  
And resounds with songs of winged songsters.<sup>25</sup>

The origin and development of Folksongs is extremely difficult to locate due to the absence of written records. K. Zawla<sup>26</sup> believed that the Mizos did not have any kind of songs before they occupied Lentlang. J. Malsawma<sup>27</sup> also assumed that the Mizos had no single verse line during the first part of their settlement in Seipui Khur, Khawkawk, Suaipui and Sanzawl. These were the famous towns in Lentlang where the first clan-wise settlement was made. Zatluanga<sup>28</sup>, on the other hand, noted that simple verses had already been made before they crossed the Run River of the Thantlang. The following verses are recorded by the above three writers as the first verse- forms in Mizo:

Ur ur tak ai, ur ur tak ai,  
Hnu sang hnuang tak ai, hnuang hnuang tak ai.  
Up up above, up up it goes,  
Down it cascades on, cascades on.  
Heta tangin kha kha a lang  
Khata tangin hei hi a lang.  
  
That is visible from this place  
This is visible from that place.  
  
Khawnhma<sup>29</sup> pal a er an ti;  
A duh duh in er rawh se.  
  
They say the Khawnhma fence bends;  
Let it bend as it wishes.

These lines had no implicit meanings. Vanlawma<sup>30</sup> does not accept these four pieces to be the first verses of Mizo Poetry. According to him, all these are based on assumptions. He believes that the Mizos must have many songs by those times. The language of those songs is also simple and contemporary that makes it difficult to accept it as the first kind of Mizo Poetry. The settlement of the Lentlang is estimated between the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century to 17<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. During this period, a great democracy was replaced by clan dictatorship. Almost all the cultural festivals of the Mizos were formulated and developed during this period. But the greatest development noted during the settlement at the Lentlang was the development in poetry. As recorded by J. Malsawma and Zatluanga, the folk poetry of this period were- Dar Hla<sup>31</sup>, Bawhhla<sup>32</sup>, Hlado<sup>33</sup>, Naupang Hla<sup>34</sup>, Dawi Hla<sup>35</sup> and some parts of Chai Hla<sup>36</sup> such as Salu Lam Hla<sup>37</sup> and Sailo Zai.<sup>38</sup>

These songs are simple in nature. They convey no great philosophy. The rational attitude to life is also absent. They are mainly songs of individual experiences. The language of some of these songs is not difficult to understand. J. Malsawma concluded that the composers were accustomed to the use of Pawi dialect for Hlado and Bawhhla. But this does not mean that they are composed by the Pawi clans. The invocations and incantations are mainly composed from Hmar and Ralte dialects. Chai Hla, Chawngchen and some other old songs were mainly composed in Lusei dialects and appear occasionally.<sup>39</sup> It seems, therefore, that there was no principal language at this stage, and they can communicate different dialects from one to another.

As stated by Dr. R.L. Thanmawia<sup>40</sup>, the origins of Mizo traditional music and song are unknown. This makes it difficult to chronicle, but song-chants in the form of couplets developed during their settlement at Thantlang in Myanmar between 13th and 14th century A.D. More progress is seen in the songs from the settlement at Lentlang in Myanmar, estimated between late 15th to 17th centuries A.D. The couplets evolve into triplets. Though the song-chants are simple in nature and convey no great philosophy, they are songs of individual experiences. The Mizos are believed to have occupied present Mizoram from the 17th century. The pre-colonial period from the 18th to 19<sup>th</sup> century A.D. was an important era in the history of Mizo folk orature. In this period, the songs progressed in both form and content while the flow of language became more polished. Most of the songs are named after the composers.

Pi Hmuaki was the first known poet among the Mizos. It is said that Pi Hmuaki composed many songs. The narrow minded people of her village were afraid that she would have composed all the songs unless they kill her. So, they buried her

alive. While they were covering her grave, she begged them by reciting the following verses:

Nauva te u, nau haia te u,

Tha te te khan min han chhilh rawh u

(Dear children, cover me up with a little care)<sup>41</sup>

The lack of interdependence is the most important characteristic of the poems of this time. Every stanza is self-sufficient. It consists of introduction and conclusion. Each stanza has its own message. This is, in fact, the typical form of Mizo Poetry. The metrical compositions of those poems are congenial to their customs and traditions. The Mizos used to sing on happy occasions as well as in times of sorrow for the whole day and night. As the tune of these songs is generally monotonic, they can sing the whole night without getting tired. A number of biographical poems appeared during this period. Generally, their problems evolved due to the great difficulties they experienced in their life. Songs that are composed in the same tradition like the earlier songs began to bear the names of their composers. Such a practice is rare in other cultures. Thus, we have Laltheri Zai, Darpawngi Zai and Lianchhiari Zai and these songs seem to be the echo of their hard experience in life. It is remarkable that the famous lyricists of this period were all women, such as Darmani, Darpawngi, Laltheri, Lianchhiari, Aikhiangi and Saikuti.<sup>42</sup>

One unique feature of Mizo Folk Literature is that in some of the Mizo folksongs the name of the composer or the tune of the songs can be identified<sup>43</sup>. Self-importance and self-centeredness is another distinctive feature of the Mizo poetry. A poem in which a poet does not talk about himself is very few<sup>44</sup>. As the poetry of other cultures, Mizo poetry is also an interpretation of life; the life of the authors or the

Mizo people in general. Bulk of the Mizo poetry dealt with the life of the authors. The ancient songs are mainly an expression of personal feelings. The life and experiences of other people are not mentioned. Laltheri alone is pictured in Laltheri Zai. As such, their poems are named after the composers. Interpretation of the author's own life is still cherished in modern poetry<sup>45</sup>.

The Mizos are fortunate enough in having a traditional way of classification of their folksongs, and accordingly the Mizo folksongs maybe classified as follows:

Songs bearing names of individuals, Songs named after traditional musical instruments, Songs named after modulation of the voice, Cradle songs, Invocations and Incantations. A study of their folksongs on the basis of the indigenous system of classification shows that the Mizos have about one hundred different types of songs<sup>46</sup> such as Dar Hla, Hlado, Bawh Hla, Salulam Hla and others.

There are diverse views regarding the origin of Mizo folksongs, certain records that have been kept are expressed in different terms regarding the time and reason. Since, folksongs, in general, have been passed down orally from generation to generation; it is difficult to write down definite reviews. However, in commemoration to the celebration of Mizo Literacy Centenary, B. Lalthangliana gave an analytical history of Mizo and their folksongs.

Table Reference:

Table 1 Chronological record of Mizo History and Folksongs

History	Literature
1300-1450: They resided at Thantlang and the banks of the river Run. They wore	The Mizos started composing songs: Thuthmun Zai, Nauawih Hla, Dar Hla,

‘Siapsuap’ and ‘Hnawkhal’, with maize, sweet potato and fangra bean as their staple food. Tea was plentiful	Hlado, Bawh Hla, Salulam, Couplets started appearing. Stories and folklore first appeared.
1450-1700: They resided between Lentlang range and Tiau river. They wore ‘Hmaram’, ‘Puanngo’ and started having village chiefs. Raiding lands and villages were practised.	Triplets appeared. ‘Chawngchen’, Pi Hmuaki Zai, Chai Hla, Lalvunga Zai, Darthiangi Zai, Religious and ritual songs appeared.
1670-1680: Three village chiefs combined to form the three thousand houses strong village of Dungtlang.	‘Hlado’, ‘Chai’ Hla and ‘Chawngchen’, ‘Salulam’ became more prevalent.
1700: The last of the Mizos crossed the Tiau River	
1740-1750: Seven village chiefs combined to form seven thousand houses strong village of Selesih.	
1760: Vanhnuaithanga(Lianchhiari’s father) was the chief of Dungtlang village.	Lianchhiari Zai first appeared.
1750-1760: Lallula, the chief of Zopui village invaded and slaughtered Thlanrawn village. The Mizo chiefs migrated southwards and settle at present Mizo land.	Zopui Zai (Chai Hla). The invasion and slaughtering of Thlanrawn was composed into songs and became renowned in Mizoram.
1760: Mangthawnga was the chief at Tuichhin village near present Champhai town. His son Mangkhaia was held	Mangkhang’s Zai became famous.

prisoner at Zawngte village in the east of Tiau river.	
1849-1856: War broke out between the southern settlers of Lalrivunga's progeny and northern settlers of Lallula's progeny.	1850-1860: Laltheri Zai reached its pinnacle.
1861: Tualte Vanglai under the rule of Vanhnuailiana was established. The first Mautam(Bamboo death) famine occurred.	The various 'Zai' was further refined.
1871-1872: The British first invaded Mizoram.	1870-1880: Tuchhingpa Zai first appeared.
1877-1880: War broke out between the eastern settlers of Lalsavunga's progeny and western settlers of Manga and Vuta's progeny.	Satirical verses and poetical battle began appearing.
1888-1889: The second invasion by the British. They settled permanently and were opposed by the Mizo chiefs for four years.	1890: Darlenglehi Zai became famous. 1880-1890: Darpawngi Zai became prominent. 1845-1990: Saikuti Zai was famous and her songs reached the whole of Mizoram

Source: Lalthangliana, B. Mizo Literature (Mizo Thu leh Hla). Mizo Literacy

Centenary (1894-1994) Special Edition. RTM Press, Aizawl, Mizoram. Print.



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<sup>1</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Literature*. (Aizawl: RTM Press, 1993) 9.

<sup>2</sup> There was a great famine that occurred and it was truly a dreadful time as it killed both the young and old. The first known folksong of the Mizos that can be known from existing records known as Thuthmun Zai was born and later it developed into proper chants out of their sorrow and in need of consolation.

<sup>3</sup> R.L. Thanmawia, *Mizo Hla Hlui*. 2012. 12-13

<sup>4</sup> The area that concerns the making of traditional Mizo society in Chin Hills may be simply understood as an area dominated by two ranges of hills, Thantlang and Lentlang. Though very few settlements in Thantlang were retained in folk memory, it is assumed that from an early beginning at Thantlang there was a gradual process of shifts that brought them to Lentlang. This movement is estimated to have occurred roughly from 1500 to 1700 A.D.<sup>97</sup> These two ranges of hills run side by side, almost parallel and in a north south direction. They are about 80 Km long, at their broadest stretch, and have a breadth of about 60 kilometers. Thantlang (Than Range), the eastern range, rises up from the Kabaw Valley at its highest, ascends up to a height of 8871ft. West and contiguous to Thantlang, its twin, Lentlang (Len Range) runs the course with Thantlang, and at its highest, ascends up to a height of 8551ft.<sup>99</sup> In between these two runs the Run river, starting its course from Manipur, runs for about 110 kilometers to the point where it merges with the Chindwin in Burma. Highly torrential and un-navigable, it maintains a general width of 40 meters. West of Lentlang flows the Tiau River with a general width of 20 meters. The origin of traditional Mizo society is set against the background of these mountains, Thantlang and Lentlang, and also significantly, the Run and Tiau Rivers. . It was at Lentlang that most of the various groups that make up for the population of present Mizoram and its surrounding areas make their appearance.

([http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/5376/8/08\\_chapter%203.pdf](http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/5376/8/08_chapter%203.pdf)).

4/03/2014.

<sup>5</sup> Hrangthiauva, *Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of the Mizo)*, Gilzom Offset, 2011. 263.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 65

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 65

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- <sup>8</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H. M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1997. English translation of *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949) 295.
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- <sup>12</sup> Barret, Michele. "Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter". Verso Publication. London. 1980. Introduction, p xxxiv.
- <sup>13</sup> G. H. Lewes, 'The Lady Novelists,' 1852. Web. 11 March 2013. <http://openjournals.library.usyd.edu.au/index.php/SSE/article/download/378/349>.
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<sup>20</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, London 1971.

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<sup>21</sup> 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists', in *Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney, London, 1963, 324.

<sup>22</sup> Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*, 1945.112.

<sup>23</sup> XI *Beyond the Female Aesthetic: Contemporary Women Novelists*. 260-261.

<sup>24</sup> Revised version of "Le Rire de la Meduse", *The Laugh of the Medusa*, *New French Feminisms*. Helen Cixous. Trans, Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, 1976. 875.

<sup>25</sup> R.L. Thanmawia, *Mizo Poetry*. Translated by Sangliana. (Aizawl: Franco P). 1998. 6.

<sup>26</sup> K. Zawla, *Mizo Pipute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*.p.249.

<sup>27</sup> J. Malsawma, *Zo Nun*, 1979.p.141. *Mizo Poetry*, R.L. Thanmawia. 1998. 31-35

<sup>28</sup> *Zatluanga*, *Mizo Chanchin* 1966.p.33. *Mizo Poetry*, R.L. Thanmawia. 1998. 31-35

<sup>29</sup> *Khawnhma* is a kind of fruit tree which has a sour taste.

<sup>30</sup> R. Vanlawma, *Thu leh Hla*. December 1983. *Mizo Poetry*, R.L. Thanmawia. 1998. 31-35

<sup>31</sup> Songs sung to the accompaniment of gongs.

<sup>32</sup> Songs chanted by warriors from a distance while coming back with the head of slain animals.

<sup>33</sup> Songs that are chanted after a successful hunt by hunters who proudly proclaims their brave deeds at the entrance of the village.

<sup>34</sup> Songs connected with infants and children.

<sup>35</sup> Songs of incantations and invocations.

<sup>36</sup> *Chai Hla/Zai* was mostly performed during the *Chapchar Kut* Festival when all men and women come together in a clearing to celebrate to dance after the completion of their *jhums* for rice cultivation.

<sup>37</sup> *Salu lam Zai* is sung to celebrate a successful hunt or the celebration of an animal's head

<sup>38</sup> R.L.Thanmawia, *Mizo poetry*. 1998. 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> R.L. Thanmawia, *Heritage of Mizo Traditional Song and Music* Serial No.34. November 2009. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 35-36.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 37-38.

<sup>43</sup> Laltluangliana Khiangte, Mizo Songs and Folktales. (Delhi: Vimal Offset) 2002.

Introduction, viii.

<sup>44</sup> R.L. Thanmawia, Mizo poetry (Franco Press) 1998. 220.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 221.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 41.

## CHAPTER 2

### MIZO WOMEN COMPOSERS

#### 2.1: Songs as a mode of expression

Every nation claiming to be a part of the civilized world is proud of its cultural heritage. Folklore is probably the most important and well-acclaimed component of the cultural heritage of a nation. It can reflect the essentials of a nation's cultural attributes as in a mirror and is recognized as a basis for its cultural and social identity. Nations all over the world are quite possessive about this valuable heritage and express very strong sentiments about the management of the rich resource<sup>1</sup>. P.V. Valsala G. Kutty<sup>2</sup> defines the expression of folklore as:

*Expressions of folklore means productions consisting of characteristic elements of the traditional artistic heritage developed and maintained by a community of (name of the country) or by individuals reflecting the traditional artistic expectations of such a community, in particular:*

- (i) Verbal expressions, such as folk tales, folk poetry and riddles;*
- (ii) Musical expressions, such as folk songs and instrumental music;*
- (iii) Expressions by action, such as folk dances, plays and artistic forms of rituals whether or not reduced to a material form; and*
- (iv) Tangible expressions such as:*
  - (a) Productions of folk art, in particular, drawings, paintings, carvings, sculptures, pottery, terracotta, mosaic, woodwork, metal ware, jewellery, basket weaving, needlework, textiles, carpets, costumes;*

*(b) Musical instruments;*

*(c) Architectural forms.*

*A very important and popular component of folk literature is folk tales. These include myths, legends, fairy tales, anecdotes, short stories, etc. In addition, proverbs, riddles, ballads, songs, rhymes, etymologies, folk titles, metaphors, chain letters, poetry, etc. are all part of the folk literature. Most of these elements which form part of folk literature have been created and passed on by word of mouth, some of them have been essentially oral literature now preserved in script and some have been traditionally preserved in written form.*

The study will look briefly at “traditional” folk songs before exploring the different representation of how Mizo folksongs act as a mode of expression for women in the Mizo society. Alan Dundes claims that “the term ‘folk’ can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor” and that it “does not matter what the linking or isolating factor is – it could be a common occupation, a common language, or common religion – but what is important is that a group formed for whatever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own”. Dundes also asserts that the traditional conceptions of folklore need to be expanded to include literate people. It is through Dundes’ extension of the folk that new conceptions of folk song are possible<sup>3</sup>.

Toward a definition of folklore in context, the conspicuous failure of folk-life studies to progress far beyond the collection and classification of materials has been accompanied by a pervasive vagueness in terminology. A. L. Lloyd<sup>4</sup> decries the imprecision of ‘folk’- ‘a gawky term suggesting English condescension or German soulfulness’. Maud Karpeles<sup>5</sup> – a veteran of many terminological debates- concludes

gloomily that 'it is in the nature of the subject that we cannot draw up a precise scientific definition of folksong which will serve to differentiate it entirely from all other forms of music'.

There are two main approaches to the definition of folk music, one concerned with internal properties, and the other with cultural background:

For some people, folk music must sound a certain way, it must be composed in a particular style and any music which conforms to this style is folk music. If one follows the other approach, one accepts as folk music all music produced by a particular group in society, which one calls and defines as the 'folk'<sup>6</sup>.

The term folk song is defined succinctly in Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms<sup>7</sup>:

"A song of unknown authorship that has been passed on, preserved, and adapted (often in several versions) in an oral tradition before later being written down or recorded. Folk songs usually have an easily remembered melody and a simple poetic form such as the quatrain. The most prominent categories are the narrative ballad and the lyric love song, but the term also covers lullabies, carols and various songs to accompany working, dancing and drinking".

The tribal literature and oral tradition forms a major and integral part of the folk literature, i.e. folklore. Since no specific term has been coined so far to categorise this aspect of tribal wealth into a distinct category or a separate grouping for its exclusive study, it will be a futile attempt to tear it apart from the vast spectrum of folklore and its conceptual framework.<sup>8</sup>Folk literature is the lore of unlettered people transmitted by word of mouth. It consists, as does written literature, of both prose and

verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles and the like. Each group of people has handled its folk literature in its own way, and neither its origin nor its evolution can be explicitly spoken of. Its transmission from person to person and its exposure to various influences that affect it consciously or unconsciously has brought about its constant change. In the process, some items may find improvement and develop into a new literary form or may die out from the oral repertory due to overwhelming alien influences. The skilled practitioners of the tradition, storytellers or epic singers have preserved their literary expression in the memory of folk<sup>9</sup>.

Another important factor contributing to the understanding of oral literature is that children also play an important role in carrying on certain kinds of oral tradition such as singing games, riddles and dance songs. These are passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth and enriched by continuous additions, always remain within the oral tradition. Dr. Kishore Jadv<sup>10</sup> goes on to say that even though books, radio and television etc. have replaced folk literature, in the present day urbanised culture, it is still, as it has always been, the normal literary expression for the unlettered people of all continents.

Ganesh N. Devy<sup>11</sup>, a renowned literary critic and activist on his foreword to Mizo Songs and Folktales has written that Indian Literature is marked by its immense variety of styles and forms and the rich interchange of language traditions form its complex fabric. He says that the distinction between the classical or elite and the oral or folk styles of composition has not been as sharp in India as elsewhere. The dialects and languages spoken by tribals in India are numerous. The literary compositions in most of them have survived in oral form and the value of this oral literary works can by no means be undermined. He states that these works have been



conventionally been perceived as a mere anthropological curiosity, or at best a source for oral history. A systematic study to attempt these documents should be emphasised in order to act as a representation of the tribal imagination and languages in Indian literature *per se*.

There have been diverse conclusions regarding the condition of a woman in the Mizo society. Opinions raised on their actual condition differ according to the time, situation and gender. A systematic study of Mizo folksongs reveals the status of women in the Mizo society. Regarding the position of Mizo Women as written by Laltluangliana Khiangte<sup>12</sup> :

“Today, some scholars, especially women theologians emphatically try to argue that the status of women in the Mizo society in the past was the most pathetic. However, when we look at the works of various women composers, it is safe to conclude that women had been free to express their views and they had their own share of status in the village”.

He states that a great sense of individuality can be noticed in Mizo folk songs, especially enunciated by the women folk. To theorise his point, T.S. Eliot's requirements for the creation of a great art has been used, such as:

A sense of individuality;

A sense of tragedy and liberty.<sup>13</sup>

Examining the folk art of the Mizos, he states that it is clear to the point that a work of art cannot be created without a sense of individuality, a sense of tragedy and liberty. Poetry is produced as a free play of the mind. In order to create a poem, one needs to have a free play of the imagination, free from problems or weariness in mind.

He goes on to say that as some have begun supporting the view that further enlarges the so called women status of the ancient Mizo society to its lowest ebb, he argues that this is not so by stating certain examples from the work of art of women in ancient Mizo society:

... One fine morning, as the jhum cultivators and manual labours were going to their jungle fields and were gathered in the stone platform called Lungdawh<sup>14</sup> at the main village entrance, they were attracted by a singing cicada. When Saikuti arrived at the memorial platform of stone, they asked her to respond to the music of cicada. Saikuti therefore responded to the music with the following lines:

Leng zawng ramtuan suihlung mu ang hertir

Chawm beng lovin siahthingah zai rem chung in ni e

You're troubling people who are on their way to work,

Ye singing sweetly in the tree without drums,

Here, everybody appreciated the couplet narrated by Saikuti and they automatically declared a no work day and all went home and started drinking wine and making merry celebration for the contribution of the folk poetess.

When we turn to Laltheri, he says that it was all the more dramatic as her sense of individuality, liberty and sense of tragedy gained momentum in each episode. The youngest daughter of Lalsavunga could not restrain herself when she fell in love with a young man named Chalthanga, who was a mere commoner. When her brothers beheaded Chalthanga, she started crying aloud in and outside the house. She tore off her clothes and threw away all her beads and lay down on the courtyard naked, her

mother asked her to wear her clothes. Lamenting the death of her lover, Laltheri replied:

Ka nemte puan ka chawilo ang Ka nu,  
Ka di thangdanga zalna mah  
Chhimhlei tual daiah

How can I clothe myself in linen, mother,  
When my lover lies dead and cold deep down on earth.

And she further blamed her parents for the heartless killing of her lover against her will:

Sailo ngurpui suihlung in mawl lua e,  
Kan sumtualah thadang thlunglu,  
Hawihten in tar e.

How thoughtless you are, my Sailo clan,  
The head of my lover, now hoisted on our courtyard.

Behaving like a mad woman, she refused to eat or drink anything. When her mother asked her to eat for fear of her dying, she replied calmly,

Chhunrawl lovin ka fam lo vang, ka nu  
Suihlung lengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e  
A Sailo princess may die out of loneliness,  
But never will I die without food, dear mother.

Laltluangliana Kiangte, to prove his statement further, asserts that when we look at the couplets of Darpawngi, the sense of individuality and liberty will be clearer.

... When she migrated to Thentlang under the administration of the chieftains of Zadeng clan, her goat was snatched away by the senior elder of the chieftain. Darpawngi lodged a legal claim to get back her goat. It was proposed that the goat would proceed to its mother when placed in the middle. Naturally, the goat quickly followed Darpawngi's goat-mother and started sucking its milk. But still the goat was awarded to the senior elder of the village. Due to the injustice carried out, Darpawngi raised her voice with a couplet. Since she thought the village administration was unfair, she decided to migrate to another village.

She did not care if people criticised her off and on for her migration. If there was no justice and fairness, she could not adapt to the village. So, Darpawngi Thinrim Zai came to be known.

Thus, to establish his conclusions, Laltluangliana Kiangte states from these accounts that it is evident that women were free and they had their own share in the village. Although some people talk about the helplessness of women in ancient Mizo society, he said that the reality lies in the folk songs that women's status was not bad at all, and that the fact is outlined in almost all the folk songs.

As described earlier, there are various conclusions that can be drawn regarding the use of songs as a mode of expression through the songs of women. Another viewpoint has been given by R.L. Thanmawia when he quoted that it was remarkable that the famous lyricists during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were all poetesses. In his interview with K. Zawla, a Mizo folklorist, the question on why most of the lyricists during that period were all women, K. Zawla's reply was that since the women of that time had a humble status in the family as well as in the society, it was

easier for the women to express their feelings in verse forms instead of speaking them out directly<sup>15</sup>.

Laltheri and Saikuti may be regarded as born lyricists. Saikuti composed songs from her adolescent period. She composed songs on different themes and all her songs have been composed without pre-meditation. And in her songs, certain reflections of the status of women in the earlier society are evident. One event that would portray such instance was when a feud broke out between her and the bachelors of the community regarding the attires worn by men, when the bachelors heard that Saikuti disagreed with the plans they have concocted, they were furious<sup>16</sup> and decided to burn her house down. However, they did not go to the extent of burning her house down but disassembled the gathered firewood outside her home and burnt it, in which Saikuti replied with a song:

Val zawng lungrual pal ang ka do zo lo,  
Chher mei chawiin siahthing tlar bung hal an tum ta e<sup>17</sup>.

I cannot stand against the will of the bachelors,  
With torches they attempt burning the gathered firewood.

Laltheri's songs reflect a low regard of women's condition during the time. When her brother killed Chalthanga, her lover, a mere commoner, she did not have any say, the law was not there to protect her, and her panacea was to compose songs that expresses her broken heart. The whole content of her songs reflect her love for Chalthanga and her condemnation for the cruel deed more than her grief at the great loss of her lover.

The songstress revealed the sensuous feeling in love and most importantly, they projected light upon the social and domestic relations and values through their songs. The above account gives an impression that the songs of women writers are a reaction to the poor status of women in the society. R.L. Thanmawia states that men at that time did compose songs but it appeared that men did not like to disclose their names as composers due to the ethic of Mizo Tlawmngaihna (Altruism). Also, one important factor being that disclosing their names might render them inferior to women in poetic art, since the names of the women writers were quite popular at the time<sup>18</sup>.

## **2.2: Women in Traditional Mizo Society**

Discourse on women issues has been gaining popularity beginning from the post colonial period up till now and the subject of women issues gave a new impetus of looking at the question of women's identity in the Mizo society. The status of women, since the early time, cannot be drawn to a definite conclusion as aspects relating to their condition vary according to various viewpoints. In the course of this research, a number of historians and people who are aware of the prevailing condition at the time were questioned; in fact, majority of their answers was that the position of women was fair and that they enjoyed equal status to that of men. But, there are unanswered questions as to why women, who, till the present time, are still victims of atrocities such as rape, sexual molestation, and subjugation and as a secondary sex regarding the laws of inheritance, divorce and so on. Humanity that holds the Mizo society together during the ancient time is a male and the man defines woman not in herself but as a relative to him; woman was not regarded as an autonomous being<sup>19</sup> and lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit and as such there was an equal sharing of their world which further show a glimpse of a rather silhouetted

equality of men and women. A merging of a number of views, its advantages and disadvantages will be worked on regarding the various social, economic, religious aspects of women in the Mizo traditional society.

An anecdote regarding the position of women in the traditional society:

Hmeichhe finin tuikhur ral a kai lo

Wisdom of the women does not reach beyond the village water-point

Hmeichhe thu thu ni suh, chakai sa sa ni suh

Flesh of the crab is no meat; word of the woman is no word

Hmeichhia in sakhua an nei lo

Women have no religion

Hmeichhia leh pal chhia chu thlak theih a ni

Worn out fencing and a woman can be replaced

Laltluangliana Khiantge<sup>20</sup> argues the above proverbs that some people interpret these sayings as derogatory for women which suggests that the ancient Mizo men treated women almost as slaves. But he says that it is nothing but a misconception and misinterpretation of Mizo proverbs. There exists a good division of labour, and women's and men's roles were clearly demarcated. From household work to the public water point, women could deal and solve almost all their duties, whereas men would take care of all other hard work beyond the public water point like searching of jhum plot, clearing of thick forests, making traps for wild animals, fighting with their foes etc. even if women tried to have a say on those things, the men folk would say that 'Let them grumble and be satisfied by saying whatever they

would', but the reality can be gauged from the fact that Mizos do not consider crab as the main dish for a proper meal. On the other hand, if women say that a man's wisdom has nothing to do with household works, it will be about as wise as the women's saying as mentioned above. To prove his findings, he further says that while all at the same time, there is one striking proverb:

Ka vai bik lo nge, pasal pakhat leh thingphur khat chu

Finding one husband and a basketful of firewood is not difficult at all

When women say this, they did not mean that they would find a new husband all the time. For all this reasons, he says that it would not be wise to hold that women were looked down upon in the traditional Mizo society. Different kinds of sexist proverbs and anecdotes may have existed, but he proved his point stating a fact that there was a clear cut division between the duties of men and women in the Mizo society.

A reverted hypothesis regarding the position of women in the traditional Mizo society can be understood from the given quotation below:

Laiha chawi um ang a thu, hmeltha,  
Lalthanpuui sial sawm man tur a piang e,  
Chhantling dar bang mawia leng turin.<sup>21</sup>

Like a woman holds her pitcher, the mother holds her beautiful daughter,  
Lalthanpuui, who will fetch us ten bison, is born;  
The rich man's home will be adorned with her beauty

When a girl child is born into a family in the Mizo society, her relatives with a throng of excitement would exclaim, 'For the price of a mithun (sial)'. This practise



shows that a daughter has to be sold later on in her life, equivalent to the price of a 'mithun'. The above quote exemplifies the fact that a girl or a woman is expected to be beautiful and loving so that she can aid her parents for better well being.

Nevertheless, being simply beautiful does not pay the price in full; she is expected to be graceful and thoughtful in all her ways to appear suitable for her husband and his relatives. To be married to a decent man, a woman, in all her ways has to be hard working, kind hearted and at the least, be wise enough to treat all her suitors alike<sup>22</sup>. This denotes how a woman is treated as a commodity and her existence is not for herself but for her family and the community she lives in.

A study of the cultural history of the Mizo society explains a great deal of the position of women. The Mizo society is a male dominated society which the sociologists term as 'patriarchal', as such the head of the family that is a male member, controls and exercises powers over his family. In the earlier society, the head of the family though rarely did household chores was however involved in decision making. Household duties were assigned exclusively to the female members while all the male including young members would step outside for hunting, jhumming and other tough works. All the grown up males were supposed to take part in raiding, hunting, and so forth. Meanwhile, looking after household and children, drawing water, collecting firewood, pounding rice etc. were the duties and responsibilities of the women. Women also took up laborious work like men in cultivation work except in the toughest work of cutting down forest called 'Lo Vah'. Apart from such works, stitching and repairing of worn clothes were other duties assigned to them. Since the Mizo society favoured big family, women had to work very hard and had hardly free time from dawn to dusk. Not only grown up females but the young girls would help their mothers as much as they could and would learn weaving and also various

household chores at an early age while the young boys would refrain from doing all these things due to their instinctive feeling that such works were confined to the opposite sex only<sup>23</sup>.

Donna Strom<sup>24</sup> in the early 80's wrote that the position of women before the entrance of Christianity was poor. Women were treated as inferior beings, bought for the price of few mithuns (domesticated bison), and beaten and discarded at will. They owned nothing, not even their clothes, which men wore first. They not only work in the fields all day, but before dawn carried water up from springs in long bamboo tubes on their backs, gathered firewood from the jungle, and cooked the day's food. After sunset, while the men sat smoking and talking, women spun cotton, made supper, and cared for the pigs, chickens, and children. Even though dropping with exhaustion, women could not go to bed before the men. Because of hard work and cruel treatment, many women died in child birth. Then, the baby was burned with its mother, lest its spirit haunt someone, and lest it slowly starve, as animal milk was not used for infants at the time. Polygyny was allowed, but usually only the chiefs could afford more than one wife. Sexual mores were loose, and pre-marital or extra marital liaisons were common among the men, of whom such was expected. However, adultery by a married woman was punished by repayment of the marriage price, heavy fines or divorce. A man could divorce his wife simply by saying, 'I divorce you,' and she would have to leave him and the children and return to her father's home. Though there were a few chieftainesses, as a whole, women have a low place in Mizo society.

Before a woman is married in the Mizo society she shares a common religion with her father, but when she is married, she is expected to follow the religion of her husband. In the earlier Mizo society, every clan had its own religion and the manner

of performances of sacrifices differed from one religion to another. So when a woman belonging to Khawlhiring clan became the bride of a man belonging to Ralte clan, she could no longer continue to have a religion of her clan, but will adopt the religion of her husband. In the sacrificial function, women played no important part nor were they assigned to any specific activity. In the old Mizo religion, there were two kinds of priests; called 'Bawlpu' another was the chief personal priest called 'Sadawt'. As the chief had his personal priest, every other could also have his own priest who was assigned to chant religious hymns and all other sacrifices on behalf of the clan members of the particular clan. However the Mizo women had no role to play in their religious practices. No women could become a priest/priestess. In some sacrificial function, it was a taboo for women to eat the flesh of animals killed. There was restriction for women in practising religious rites and women did not enjoy the right like their male counterparts. All these restrictions were due to the fact that the Mizo had a strong opinion that a man should have a manly character and a woman should have a womanly character. A husband should be more capable and maintain superiority to his wife otherwise he would be looked down upon by the others. Therefore, women had no chance to participate in the religious affairs of men.

The position of women in the earlier Mizo society is described by Major A. G. Mc Call in his book; Lushai Chrysallis (1949) may be recalled. To quote him, "there is little in the Lushai background to disclose the sense of any great chivalry towards woman. Without any ambiguity, Lushai has been and still is a country for men before it is one for women, or even children. But where better placed, Lushai spare their women the bondage common to the majority, the women retain chorus and grace well into the late years." But the attitude of old Lushai is betrayed by an old saying on par

with our own sentiment of old—‘A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the more you beat them, the better they be<sup>25</sup>.’

In the earlier days, a Mizo girl had more or less contribution to the various social functions. Her main participation outside the household was “pawnto<sup>26</sup>”, in which most of the children engaged themselves. Regarding the division of labour between a man and a woman, what is considered to be the job of a girl would not be touched even in jest by a boy. The most important period in the life of a woman is that which precedes her marriage. If she is attractive she has numerous suitors. Courtship or nula rim, is an institution in Mizoram which still exists. Girls have to behave very politely with boys and would not show displeasure even if they do not like any one of them<sup>27</sup>. The Mizo do not consider the women to search or select their choice of husband. Even when she is in love with someone, she is expected not to reveal any of her affections. Those who display their affections openly are rebuked by the society. The bachelors and the married man may court any unmarried woman, however, the unmarried woman are not expected to court anyone like so. It is in the hands of the parents to marry off their daughters of their own choice. Middlemen (palai) are employed by their suitors to ask for the maiden’s hand in marriage. Ultimately, if the parents like the suitor to be their son- in- law, agreement is reached and they are expected to marry even without the consent of the woman in question. As written in Mizo Robawm<sup>28</sup> (1998):

...Mizo women are sold like cattle; as a buyer examines the cattle and test their strength and endurance, the same applies in the case of women. The highest bidder is favoured by her relatives and women are sold like commodities which can be bargained and when they are bought, Mizo women are further followed with the

Mizo saying, ‘worn out fences and women can be replaced’. They are beaten, driven out of their homes...

The above saying clearly demonstrates the outlook of Mizo men towards their women. This system of buying or bartering results in the oppression of women resulting in domestic violence.

... Marriages are arranged by the parents and are usually not love marriages<sup>29</sup>...

A great deal of social stigma was attached to women who got married late or not married at all, further dictating the women to act polite, cautious and disciplined as deemed acceptable by their society.

“Inthen” stands for divorce in English language. There are eleven ways of divorce<sup>30</sup>: Ma or mak<sup>31</sup>, sumchhuah<sup>32</sup>, sum lai tan<sup>33</sup>, peksachang<sup>34</sup>, pasal awmlloh hlana chhuak<sup>35</sup>, kawngka sula mak<sup>36</sup>, zang zaw<sup>37</sup>, chhu ping<sup>38</sup>, nupui tlansan<sup>39</sup> and uire<sup>40</sup>.

Focusing on the plight of women regarding divorce and separation, history shows that divorce and separation were very easy. If a man is fed up of his wife, he could just throw her out. All that he loses together with his wife is the bride price he had paid for her. Similarly, the woman can also free herself from the shackles of the marriage by returning the price to the husband. Widows and divorced wives do not have any difficulty in getting re married. There are no social laws against widow re marriage. Adultery in the Mizo society is frowned at. In the past, the unfortunate husband had the right to kill his wife’s lover. Most probably, the husband and wife would separate. The wife and her relatives had to refund the bride price. The children

used to go to the father and the woman was supposed to have no right over them<sup>41</sup>. According to the Mizo custom, a woman on being divorced could take back only her personal properties and other belongings called 'thuam' which she brought at the time of marriage. She had no right to touch her other articles acquired at the husband's house<sup>42</sup>.

Regarding the law of inheritance, a daughter has no share in the property of her father. Her responsibility is to become a good home maker. On the contrary, a boy is taught his duties and responsibilities towards his village and the community from childhood. Generally, all the sons except the youngest settle down in separate houses after marriage. The youngest son is left behind to look after the parents. He is thus the inheritor of his father's property including the ancestral home. In the event of the death of the youngest son, the responsibility falls on the next youngest son and so on. In the case of a Lushai chief and the Paite sub tribe however, inheritance is through the eldest son. A chief who has more than one village may distribute chieftainship of his villages among all his sons, but the right of chieftainship of the main ancestral village remains with the eldest. Even here, the successor is to be from the male side. The son of a sister cannot claim inheritance to the chieftainship because a Mizo mother has no right of her own.

According to Pu Chaldailova<sup>43</sup>, regarding marriage, law of inheritance and religious ceremonies, a woman had no right. He further explains the fact by elaborating the experiences of a woman named Darlalpuui. Pi Khawlkungi<sup>44</sup> shares this belief by narrating an incident that took place in 1948 at Mission Veng, Aizawl where a lady she has been acquainted with was robbed off all her properties by her in laws when her husband died. She recollected the sad incident of this lady and her daughter who are now living in a small hut making ends meet.

Inheritance by a woman is rare. There are cases of women who take over the estate of their deceased husband and bring up his children by themselves. And as a rule, a woman who is left a widow with small children has to have recourse with her husband's relatives. As a rule, property cannot descend to a woman except in trust for her children. A woman cannot inherit a property but if no other heirs are available, a woman 'might' inherit. Thus, if a man dies without any other heirs, his widow or his daughter might inherit his estate and a man's daughter would inherit before his widow<sup>45</sup>. The position of women in the Mizo society is thus, inferior to that of men.

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<sup>31</sup> When a man divorces his wife by simply saying 'I Mak you' and the woman is then divorced.

<sup>32</sup> When a woman refuses to remain with her husband and leaves him.

<sup>33</sup> A form of divorce that is settled through an agreement. Neither party can claim to divorce the other by this form as a right. When this form of divorce has been agreed on, the price will be shared equally by both the parties.

<sup>34</sup> Peksachang is another form of divorce by agreement. If a husband and wife agree to separate, they can agree that the amount of the price already paid up will suffice, that is to say the man will not claim the return of any part of the price he may have paid and the woman on her side will not claim any outstanding price that may still be due.

<sup>35</sup> The term is used to describe a separation between a married couple owing to the man having left the community or being confined in prison or for any other cause being away from home for a long period.

<sup>36</sup> When a man finds a girl he prefers more to his wife and divorces his wife and on the same day or the next day marries the girl.

<sup>37</sup> If a man is impotent and is unable to have intercourse with his wife. The woman is entitled to a divorce.

<sup>38</sup> If a wife owing to physical peculiarities is unable to perform her duties to her husband, the husband is entitled to a divorce and takes back the entire price he has paid.

<sup>39</sup> If a man abandons his wife and family and goes away, the house, field and all the property belonging to him become his wife's property. His children are also under the care of their mother and the wife will get the marriage price of their daughters.

<sup>40</sup> Uire means Adultery and it is considered a great disgrace for a woman to be caught in adultery.

<sup>41</sup> Mizo Women Today, TRI. 1991. 2-4.

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### CHAPTER 3

#### CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SAIKUTI AS A MIZO FEMALE COMPOSER

We sing when we fight, we sing when we work, we sing when we love, we sing when we hate, we sing when a child is born, we sing when death takes a toll<sup>1</sup>.

The Mizos like any other primitive communities celebrate various festivals based on different occasions in their lives. Originally, there are three kinds of festivals celebrated in Mizoram- Mim Kut, Pawl Kut and Chapchar Kut. The festivals were practised at the time when the early Mizos settled at Run and Tiau area. These festivals are observed once in every year. Mim Kut celebration is the oldest among the other two festivals; it is believed that the festival was practiced during 1400-1440 A.D<sup>2</sup>.

Chapchar Kut celebration is believed to originate during the time 1550 A.D. Out of all the Festivals of Mizoram, Chapchar Kut is the most celebrated and appreciated festival. It is usually celebrated in the month of March. However, there is no official date whatsoever, it differs according to the decisions of each communities. A lot of preparations take place for this festival like storing rice beer and meat in abundance. The festivals are mostly organized by the village chiefs or the elders. And the individual held in charge of the festival usually divides amongst the people eight to nine barrels of rice beer. The married men, bachelors, women and children would night out on this occasion. When there is about a week left for the festival, the men would start searching for animals to slaughter; they would hunt in the forest and camp for a fortnight. Their prey not only focuses on wild animals alone, birds and fishes too are included in their hunting-list. If they are successful with their hunt, the men, before reaching their village would fire a gunshot and at this instance, the children

would shout, “They have brought us animals for Chapchar Kut festival, our elders have arrived”. The day before the festival is declared as “Kut awmni” which can be translated as “Kut Resting day”. On this day, the villagers would wash all of their clothes and searched for flowers to adorn themselves with for the later day to come. When the day arrives for the festival, everyone would gather together with their best attires and sing and dance, making merry with wine and laughter till dawn. Before they leave for home, they find it hard to part and thus sing:

I tin dial ang u,

Kum leh tharah intawk leh ila.

Let us all part our own separate ways,

And hope to meet each other in the year to come.

Different accounts of the preparations of the festival are highlighted here to denote its importance in the lives of the Mizo people. As the ‘Chapchar Kut’ festival draws near at Thingsai village, the Chief and his retainers decide when and how long to celebrate the festival and sets the time during which the villagers may search for meat for the occasion with which to celebrate the festival. The news is then spread through the village by the town crier (tlangau). The villagers then set about hunting for meat or laying traps, some go fishing while others fermenting rice to make the local brew ‘zu’ and set about gathering whatever is necessary to celebrate the festival.

Some of the bravemen at Dokhama’s village also went hunting for elephants under the leadership of Ramthlohva. Luckily, they came upon an elephant that they managed to kill after its tusks got entangled in the roots of a nearby tree and they shot it with all their guns together. Since they would be unable to haul all the meat by

themselves to their village, the leader suggested to “chhawl chhin<sup>3</sup>” the elephant. This means that the elephant will be marked as their kill by putting leaves on it....

However, as they were about to leave, they met Lalvunga and his braves (pasaltha), who were also out hunting. Lalvunga said to them “Why did you kill the elephant that we were about to kill? Leave this place and go home commoners” and so Ramthlohva and his hunting party went home sad and dejected.

When they reached their village, their chief Dokhama who was eagerly waiting for them asked if they succeeded, to which they proceeded to narrate the whole story of how they shot an elephant and how Lalvunga and his braves (pasaltha) snatched their kill from them. Dokhama then, along with his sons and some of his men, went out, divided into two groups and went after Lalvunga and his men who were busy carrying the head of the elephant back to their village. Zaduna (son of Dokhama) and his men first caught up with Lalvunga, and pleaded with them to let go of the elephant which they did not kill and was not theirs to snatch from its rightful owners. However, Lalvunga and his men paid no heed to their pleas and continued on their way. During this time, Dokhama and his men overtook them using a shortcut, and as Lalvunga and his men, followed by Zaduna and his men came up the road, he was ready, waiting for them sitting regally on the rocks. Dokhama stared at Lalvunga and said “Lalvung, have we become enemies today? If you do not let go and forfeit any claim you have on this elephant, my spear shall meet your insides” and proceeded to slice the pole with which the elephant head was carried using his dao (chempui) which prompted the men carrying it to let go. Dokhama then said, “Commoners stay out of this. We chiefs will fight. Lalvunga’s men will carry back his corpse and mine will be carried by my men” and got ready to fight with his spear, upon which Lalvunga and his men lost courage and went away. Dokhama and his men then took

the elephant and headed home amidst great celebrations. The story of how they won back the elephant quickly spread and became the talk of the village. The meat of the elephant was used to celebrate ‘Chapchar Kut’. Now, amidst the great celebrations and festival, Ngurchuailovi bore Thangawna, a daughter whom they named ‘Saikuti’ (Sai – elephant, Kut – festival)

Saikuti belonged to the Fanai Khintin clan, her father Thangawna and her mother Ngurchuailovi settled at Hlingvawm village, a neighboring village of North Vanlaiphai. They migrated to Thingsai village around the year 1848. Saikuti was the youngest among her brothers and sisters. They were, in chronological order, Chawngvungi, Darbawii, Thangchiauva, Zakungi and Rokila.

Saikuti’s family was very fond of singing, and Saikuti in particular was a gifted singer as well as a composer. So famous were her songs that they became known as Saikuti Zai).

Little is known of Saikuti’s childhood. During their settlement at Hlingvawm area, the northern end of their village was called ‘Hmarthanga veng’. While she was just a kid playing with her friends under the bachelor’s quarter (Zawlbuk), she heard a man by the name of Hmarthanga singing rather badly. Saikuti composed a song and this is the only song in record that is composed by Saikuti during her childhood.

The other instance of her childhood in recorded history is regarding her mithun (sial) herding days. Kids who were not yet old enough to work in the fields were sent by their parents to look after the mithun (sial). Saikuti and her friends went mithun (sial) herding near Varhva River. Their parents made a small tower for them and kept a small drum called ‘talhkuang’. Saikuti and her friends sang, shouted and played the whole day here. When evening came, they herded the mithun (sial) back

home and kept them in their pen. Saikuti spent her childhood as such and was deeply inspired by nature. Later, she uses her childhood memories as an inspiration to compose songs.

It is believed that Saikuti reached adolescence while they were staying at the Hlingvawm area. Saikuti Zai is also known as Hlingvawm Zai.

When their village shifted from Hlingvawm area to Thingsai area, probably around 1848, some of them built their homes at Tumtu tlang<sup>4</sup> which is 4980 ft above sea level and is a breezy place. It is said that she composed a song for this place.

When their village migrated to Thingsai area, one of the localities was called ‘Aiduzawl’ now called Venglai and was occupied by one of their chiefs’ called Hnochhuma. The village had 150 houses. Saikuti’s house was situated at the northern part on a hill of 4848 ft height. She could see a large area from her home – lands belonging to Mizo and Pawi, and was inspired to compose a song.

Just north of Aiduzawl was a village under the chieftainship of 350 houses. These two villages lived together as one village with separate localities and together, they numbered 500 houses. One day a bird (Kawlhawk) was caught in their village. But, instead of killing it, the villagers freed it and it flew northwards. Saikuti composed a song regarding this incident.

Khuatin rawn fang ka chung Kawlngo leng khaw Zokaiah,  
Hmartlang chenah Aichhung lal lai, a sang va ti la.

The song explains how Saikuti addresses the venturing bird to spread the greatness of the Fanai chiefs while it takes its flights.

When their village migrated to Thingsai, they were very proud of themselves and on the northern end marked a tree for hanging the heads of dead enemies (called 'Sahlam'). However, they did not get any heads as they hoped. So Saikuti composed a song.

Ral in rel a, kai lo lalnemate,  
In zuat sula e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang;  
In zuat sual e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang,  
Chunglum Lianak chhunrawl a vai e.  
In zuat sual e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang  
Par a chhuang e, Mihrang lu ngenin.

The song explains Saikuti's wit in seeing through matters from a distance with a clear mind, she tells the brave men that the place where the pillar has been posted have not met out its purpose yet, it seems to be a mistake. Even the crow that awaits to peck and eat the decaying skull was not successful in finding a scrape of food in it. And that the pillar because of its emptiness has started to sprout weeds and mosses on it.

When the chief Khawtindala heard the song, he became very agitated and passed an angry comment about Saikuti. When she heard what the chief had said, she was scared and composed a song to pacify his anger. And the anger of the chief subsided.

Saikuti was a well built woman, with dimpled chin and a reddish brown complexion. Before marriage she adorned herself with earrings made of ivory which were the best fashion item they had. After she married she wore earrings and lipstick.

She spent most of her heyday at Thingsai, and was a natural at composing and singing songs, and the many songs she composed spread throughout the Mizo world such that ‘Chhim zai<sup>5</sup>’ and ‘Khawnglung zai<sup>6</sup>’ were all integrated and called ‘Saikuti zai’.

As she was very famous many suitors came, among them rich men whom their parents liked. Her parents pressured her to get married but Saikuti was determined not to get married, and argued with them most of the time through her songs.

Once, her parents sent her to marry someone against her will. Saikuti retorted with a song at which her father had a change of heart and the marriage was cancelled.

As she was very famous, there were many bachelors who were afraid Saikuti would get married soon. They composed a song pleading her not to marry yet.

There are many songs which young men and women can sing to each other in Saikuti Zai. Such songs are called ‘Lengzem zai<sup>7</sup>’ and are believed to be composed before Saikuti got married.

On the outskirts of their village was a ‘Hlai’ tree. When the chief of Dawn village Sailuaia went to wage war against the southern villages, he kept a stone on the main branch of the tree to mark the parting of roads. Everyone called it ‘Sailuaia lungzeh’ and everybody in the village knew about it. One day, Saikuti and her friends were waiting for each other to collect firewood and were in a playful mood. Saikuti said “I will also keep a stone on the main branch to displace Sailuaia” and kept a stone on the main branch too. Just as she predicted, it came to be known as ‘Saikuti lung zeh’ and can still be seen this day. However, only a small part can be seen now as the bark covers most of it, and the stone is higher up as the tree grows with it.



Saikuti has deep love for aesthetics. She loved flowers in particular. When she heard of the men talking about the beauty of the ‘Phunchawng<sup>8</sup>’ flower on the banks of the Tiau River, she desired deeply to see it. She asked the men to bring it home and told them of her desire to see the flower. The men were very agreeable to her request and brought home the flower on their very next venture. This made Saikuti very happy and she composed a song expressing her gratitude.

A ‘Thingse<sup>9</sup>’ tree stood firm and erect next to their house. Saikuti was very fed up of it and wanted it trimmed down. One day, as they were drinking Zu (rice beer), Saikuti asked the men (bachelors) to trim the tree in a song. It is said that even men who were already inebriated rose up and went to the tree and attempted to climb and trim it which they were unable to do in their inebriated state.

Since she was very good at composing songs, many requested her to compose songs; particularly the families of the dead who have lost their loved ones by drowning, by a fall from trees and cliffs and by rampaging elephants.

Once they celebrated the killing of a deer sitting on a bamboo mat and feasting on ‘zu’ the whole night. Even in the morning the celebrations continued, and her mother came to fetch her saying ‘It’s time to go to the rice fields, your friends are waiting for you’. But instead of going with her mother, she replied in song to express her unwillingness.

There was an instance when a guest from the Pawi clan was enamored of her. Instead of going home to his village, he stayed and went to her house each night courting her. He mistook Saikuti’s courtesy and hoped that he could have her hand in marriage. So, she composed a song expressing her lack of interest towards him.

However, the Pawi guest became even bolder and passed a rumor that he had slept with Saikuti. She and her mother went to the Chief's court and the chief gave them a date for their hearing. When the day came, Saikuti and her mother went to the chief's house. The Pawi guest was already present. He was ashamed and started to shiver when they saw him. At which Saikuti expressed this incident to her mother in a song.

None of the allegations could be proven and as the Pawi guest had to go home to his village he said:-

“Bela zu leh Saihniangi zu ka rui,  
Ka kal tang e, ka khua dang a e”,

(I am drunk on wine in the pot and ‘Saihniangi’ (a poetic reference to Saikuti), I must go now, for I am from a different village).

Once, their mithun (sial) was killed by a tiger while they were away on another village to finalize the marriage plans of her brother. The news made them very sad and her father even expressed his desire to compose a song. So Saikuti sang:-

“Chhingkhuala mi daw ang ka zawn laiin,  
Kan Changsialin kamkei lunglian tam lai a tawk e”,

(As I was searching for something akin to magic in another village, our best mithun met a ravenous tiger).

The time before Saikuti got married was a time of war between villages. Mothers and fathers kept ready their best treasures in a ‘thul<sup>10</sup>’ with some rice for the children and kept a ‘hnam<sup>11</sup>’ with which to carry it. Even when they slept, they never tuck their arms inside for the fear that they might sleep too soundly and not hear when

someone sounds the alarm by shouting ‘Ral’ (enemies). When they went to work in the fields, they were led by a man with a gun, and behind they were also guarded by another man with a gun. Even in the fields, they always kept a loaded gun nearby. The men always worked with the women as it was a period of unrest. Saikuti once had a handsome young man working with her. She did not trust him to protect her from enemies as he was still very young. So, to know his mind, she sang of her doubts about him being too young.

At which he got angry and did not even want to talk to her. Saikuti felt bad for doubting him and sang a song. However, he still did not want to talk, so she sang another song addressing him as Rangtha puallenga<sup>12</sup>. Being called Rangtha puallenga made him happy and his demeanor changed slightly. Saikuti, taking advantage of this, yet, sang another song. Her co-worker became very happy at this and even sang back to her. And so they happily spent the whole day. Sadly, history has forgotten the name of her co-worker.

Occasionally, the men would go to war and would come back with the heads of their enemies or some animals. They would camp outside the village, fire their guns in the air and sing their “Hlado<sup>13</sup>” a whole night so that the whole village would know they have succeeded. The next morning, the whole village would go to the outskirts and the maidens would stick ‘chhawn<sup>14</sup>’ on the men who succeeded in bringing home the enemies’ heads. They would then celebrate the bringing home of heads with alcohol (rice beer), meat and dance.

This ‘Milu lam<sup>15</sup>’ (head dancing) lasted for three days. The braves who came home with heads of their enemies were given a special alcoholic drink – ‘Hrang zu<sup>16</sup>’

which no one else was allowed to drink. This was one of the highest honors that could be bestowed during these times.

Tigers were aplenty then, and they would occasionally come out at night and kill their livestock and carry them away. The villagers would shout “Sa a tla e<sup>17</sup>” and every man and bachelor would jump out, burn torches and chase the tiger and attempt to take back the killed livestock. If they do not succeed at night, they would continue in the morning. Since tigers would often strike during moonless and rainy nights, the men and bachelors had to be very vigilant and brave to display their altruistic traits. Even Saikuti composed:-

“Sakawl lunglianin dai arawn vel e,  
Tho rawh u le, hran tum val zawng chu”.

(There is a wild beast on the loose, venturing for prey. Young men, who are willing to show your courage, get up and hunt for the animal)

The young women during Saikuti’s time wore clothes that would cover up their chest when they went out for work in the fields. And while they are at home, they kept aside the work clothes and wore clothes (puan) covering their bodies, the men on the other hand wore a cloth from their waist below. What can be found in the satchels/bags of men are knives, smoke pipe, lighters, tobacco boxes for tobacco tar water/ nicotinized water and for those who avoided smoking, would take tobacco tarred water orally. They could keep it in the mouth for some time and then would spit it out.

During the days of Saikuti, there was an instance when the bachelors were tired of carrying their tobacco tarred water boxes around and decided that the young

women should start stitching pockets in their work clothes for the men's tobacco boxes and carry it for them. They felt that they have come upon a brilliant plan as it proves better convenience for them. However, when Saikuti heard of their plan, she thought it was ludicrous and decided to teach the men a lesson for their ridiculous idea. So she gathered the young women of her village, and told them, "Whenever we are to smoke a tobacco pipe, we will not use lighters anymore; instead we will light our tobaccos only at the flicker of a gunshot". When the men heard of this, they realized their folly and withdraw their plan.

When a bachelor is courting a young woman, they would help them out in their various household chores. Out of the chores, the men would help them in making the cotton yarn into a ball from the spinning wheel. Some of the men who did not stand much chance, in order to make themselves more appealing and welcomed would finish the task for them at one night to impress the young woman. And the men, who did not have much work ethic in weaving and interlacing as such, were in a dilemma, so they discussed the issue at the bachelor's quarter and they came upon with another plan. They gave an order for all the bachelors that when they court a lady in the evening, they should not help the woman with more than three bags of cotton, and if anyone disobeys the order, they would tear all of their garments. Saikuti was agitated with the plan and she called the young women of the village and said that a woman should not give the bachelors not more than three nicotinized water at a time as the men have come up with a hideous plan.

When the bachelors heard of the plan, they blamed Saikuti for it. Again, they had a meeting at the bachelor's quarter, and realizing they were no match for Saikuti's wit, they were ashamed as they did not have any idea for a proper retort. The decision they drew upon was to destroy Saikuti for her interference. They said," No one should

lend a hand to Saikuti's family in times of sorrows and celebrations, no one should visit her place and no one is to talk to her". Nonetheless, Saikuti was indifferent towards the bachelor's anger for she thought that it was for a trivial reason. She knew how hard it would be for her family, being abandoned by the community, however, she put on a strong face and even went out to do her daily chores. Saikuti sang of this incident in a song. Her song infuriated the bachelors further and they decided to burn her house down, but later when they thought of it more clearly, they decided that burning would prove too extreme an act; so, they dismantled her doorway (kaiten) and burned it instead. Saikuti and her family were devastated at the incident and it took a number of days for both Saikuti and the bachelors to come to good terms. But like all struggles do, the feud subsided. The peace holder however is unknown, but whoever it is, both parties seemed to unlike the disagreements that took place. They announced a peace-day for the occasion and Saikuti anticipated for this day to come, and composed a song to express her happiness. Saikuti was relieved and joyful and her family decided to kill a pig and prepared a feast for the community with rice beer and dance for peace. From then on, Saikuti's family's house was again packed with visitors and courtiers.

Saikuti's fame spread far and wide, and people from all corners came to witness her songwriting talent and befriended her. Her house was always full with visitors and travelers. She even sang of this:

Hnam tin valin tui ang anrawn zawt a,

Nemten chhang la, ka nu, val zawng an kai run mawi e.

Chippui valin sakhming anrawn zawt a,

Hmuh a nuam e, Saikuti hmel leh Thingsai kan vang khua.

The song indicates that the visitors travelled far to seek her and Saikuti asked her mother to reply to her seekers in a polite and soft tone as these bachelors are what makes her home beautiful. The bachelors from Chippui village came all the way to meet her and they seemed delighted with Saikuti's face and her Thingsai village. However, not all bachelors are driven with the same morale; some of the visitors thought Saikuti had a loose moral character and was easy with the men. When Saikuti heard of this she replied their doubtful judgments with a song:

In tawng awl e, chhingkhual val uanga te,

Saikhaw lanu zawl hlui leng angin.

Saikhaw tlangah chunnu'n min chawi lain,

Mi zawl awm lo, kan run a rang an kai tam na e.

Sakhmel thain chhingkhual mah thang ula,

Ka ngai loving uan hmang val rual chu.

The song implies that the men were blabbering away about Saikuti being easy to love and the song is Saikuti's response on how wrong the men were. Saikuti said even though they were handsome and their names known far and wide, she would never fall for men who were boastful and haughty.

The visitors were ashamed and embarrassed and they left the village soon.

Saikuti fell in love with their village chief Khawtindala's son Rothawmliana. However, Saikuti's father was not happy with their courtship and advised her

daughter, “Why do you have to fall in love with the chief’s son, our situation cannot even afford it?” Saikuti replied her father in a song:

Ai ka pa e, tum tawk tiin dar ang ka chhai nem maw,

Hmel duhah lunglai ka mawl ta e”.

The song explains Saikuti’s sentiments proving her sound judgments. She told her father that it is not because of social situation that made her fall in love with Rothawmliana. The attraction and charms of love was what made her fall in love with him even at the cause of being called a fool.

Saikuti’s brother Thangchiauva once killed a wild animal. The whole family and her community celebrated this occasion. They were filled with much mirth and joy that they sang till the wee hours of the morning. Saikuti was leading the singing, she seemed to have been lost in the moment, her father on seeing her behavior was not very pleased and grabbed Saikuti from her seat. Saikuti replied her father with a song saying:

Zanin chuan nghovar zaiin kan awi,

Chhim thlipui leh kei ka zua pa’n hran chang an nei e.

The above song explains Saikuti’s pugnacious trait. She told her father that the night was to sing of the animal’s killing with merrymaking while her father’s wrath was blowing like that of the north wind. The guests without the presence of Saikuti felt pointless and left leaving her father dumbfounded.

Saikuti lived her days long enough as a bachelorette. She married a man named Zakunga Fanai Hniarcheng, who was also a settler at Thingsai village. Saikuti



was still reluctant of giving her hand in marriage even at her ripe age, but her family forced her to marry Zakunga. Their marriage was a happy one and they were blessed with a son and a daughter.

One day, while she was still a newly-wed bride, she had visitors coming at her place. Saikuti, on that particular day made a plan to finish her spinning, but as it was time for lunch, it would seem rude to not welcome her guests and prepare food for them. During their visit, she was disturbed on whether she should continue her chores or to keep her guests company. Since she was tongue tied, she blurted out saying, “Slowly eat your food quickly”. She was embarrassed of the situation that she recalled this incident over and over till her old age.

As a mother, she continued on composing songs. She would humor her husband with songs and there was one night when she sang:

Laikhum chungah lungduh loh puan ang pawm,

Ka runpui leh haulai bellian ngai ing e.

The song says that Saikuti is lying on the bed with a man she does not love and sings of how much she misses her home and their pot of rice beer.

Her husband looked at her with disbelief, but she continued singing:

Chhingkhuala min dawí ang minrawn dil a,

Laikhum chungah lungduh loh puan ang ka pawm reng e.

The song says before marriage, she used to have several suitors but married her husband because he seemed to have cast a spell on her to marry him and now she lays on their bed with a man she does not love

Hearing this, her husband could not take it any longer, so he kicked her out from their bed. Saikuti however, came right back to bed, humored by her husband's action.

While they were residing at Muallianpui and Lungleng, they had five children; the youngest however was born at Pa-awh village. Saikuti would glance over the mountaintops of Thingsai village from Pa-awh village and would recollect her younger days and was often filled with nostalgia, she sang of this in a song:

Thlohmu angin thangvan kai thiam ila,

Ka chuan ang bualdim kit ha leh Saihniangi lenna.

The song shows Saikuti's longing for her younger days, how much she misses her youth and her village. She prayed that if she had the power to soar like an eagle, she would certainly visit her hometown. Saikuti's family settled at Pa-awh village for three years. They had six children: Khuangpuithanga, Darhnuna, Darpuiliani, Thangnovi, Sawichhungi and Chalkila. The youngest Chalkila lived on till 1966 and died at the age of 83.

Saikuti met with many adversities at the later stage of her life, she lost her husband and her children. She was deeply distressed and would sing and hum a tune for her grandchildren and would go here and there in search of solace to pacify her loneliness. It was difficult for her to sleep at night and one time, her neighbor Chhanhnawka adopted pigeons at his compound, on hearing the chirping of the pigeons, she composed a song saying:

An tuah kim e, zan mu reng ka chhing love,

Khua Chhanhnawk pa parva fam di min ngaih tir leh e.

Saikuti's longing for her past days is clearly reflected in this song, it says that even the pigeons lived in pairs and their cooing made her miss her dearly departed husband while, she, Saikuti could not get a good night's sleep because of her loneliness. Since she was alone and single, it made it easier for her to travel and visit places. She was invited to festivals and the villagers would always invite her to lead their singing.

Saikuti, in her final moment was weary and weak; it was difficult for her to bathe out under the sun even. People from far and wide would travel all the way to visit her and on such occasions, she would humor her guests by pretending to be someone else or directing them to other's houses. Her fame was such that, Major. J. Shakespeare ( Bawrh Sap Tarmita) invited her to sing when he came to Lungleng village. She sang with a renowned Fanai singer, Thangzika on this occasion.

Being a famous composer and songstress, her posterities were named after her. Some of them were named, Enthangi, Zaithangi, Kawlzami, Zaizami, Zaihnuna etc. Saikuti's later stage of life was streaked with various symptoms that old age brings. She started losing her vision and often she would dream of the day she would die. Her last wishes are all about music and songs, she pleaded her family and friends to hum and serenade her dead body showing her love for music through and through. Her last wishes are:

Van hnuai mihril rihsang ka kai hun chuan,

Nau ang min tah lo u, kawl len zaiin min awi la.

The song indicates Saikuti's passion for music and life, her last song expresses her desire to be serenaded with songs. She requested her family and friends not to weep for her when she dies and goes to heaven, but instead to sing her a lullaby.

Saikuti died in the year 1921, April 22 (Friday) at the age of 90 in her hometown, Thingsai village. Her wishes to be fare welled with a song were fulfilled and her tombstone can still be seen at the north of Thingsai Village. In her tombstone are written<sup>18</sup>:

SAIKUTI. K. 90 (AGE 90)

MI HMINGTHANG HLA PHUAHTHIAM (REPUTED SONGSTRESS)

IN LOVING MEMORY.



Fig. Picture of Saikuti. Collected from Thuamliani Buarpui, Dawrpui Vengthar on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1993 by K. Pakunga and H.Lalrinthanga. Below the portrait of Saikuti is written:

Kan nghilh loh Zaikung thlafam tawh hnu,  
Ka sawm vel e, an hlimthla runlum mawi a'n,  
Hringchan vangkhua a la cham zawng nen.

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Our dearly departed songsters we cannot forget,  
I invoke them, your shadows to warm our homes,  
And all that are dwellers of this living world.

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## Works Cited

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- <sup>1</sup>Quoted in Okumba Miruka, Encounter with Oral Literature. Osadebey, D. C. et al, "West African Voices", African Affairs 48,1949. 87.
  - <sup>2</sup> Hrangthiauva, Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of the Mizo). 2011. 62-70.
  - <sup>3</sup> To cover up the object with leaves.
  - <sup>4</sup> Tumtu Tlang is just two kilometres away from Thingsai Village.
  - <sup>5</sup> Songs of the South.
  - <sup>6</sup> Khawnglung is a village surrounded by treacherous hills, with only one narrow way to enter it from outside. It is inhabited by the Lusei clan. The villagers have a specific way of singing known as Khawnglung Zai.
  - <sup>7</sup> These are love songs that have no distinctive form but are generally named after the theme. They are a type of love songs with no distinguishing form.
  - <sup>8</sup> The botanical term for Phunchawng is Indian Cottonwood.
  - <sup>9</sup> A chestnut tree.
  - <sup>10</sup> A traditional Mizo basket.
  - <sup>11</sup> A traditional weaved rope with which to carry a basket.
  - <sup>12</sup> A swift and handsome bachelor.
  - <sup>13</sup> Victory song sung by successful hunters and warriors.
  - <sup>14</sup> Feathered embroidery especially made for the brave men to wear.
  - <sup>15</sup> Milu Lam is a celebratory dance when the warriors who have set out for battle return with the heads of their enemies.
  - <sup>16</sup> Rice beer especially made for the successful brave men to drink.
  - <sup>17</sup> The translation for "Sa a tla e" would mean that there is a wild beast on the loose.
  - <sup>18</sup> The source for the completion of Chapter 3 is based on the book by Selthuama, Saikuti Chanchin. 1964. 1-127.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE SONGS OF SAIKUTI

#### 4.1. Transcriptions on selected songs of Saikuti

##### 4.1.1. Saikuti Zai:

Not all songs that are sung in Saikuti Zai are composed by Saikuti. This kind of songs have been sung and hummed by the Mizo people long before Saikuti was born. Saikuti was asked, ‘Madam, what was the term given to Saikuti Zai before the songs took to your name?’ She replied, ‘They were called the Songs of the South<sup>1</sup>’. They were also given names as ‘Hlingvawm Zai’ and ‘Khawnglung Zai’. Since Saikuti composed a number of songs to the style and tune of these songs, they have been termed as ‘Saikuti Zai’ from then on.

Saikuti Zai can be divided into four categories:

Lengzem Zai, Mihrang Awih Hla, Mitthi Ngaih Hla and Salu Awihna Hla.

“Lengzem” can be understood as Love songs that are composed and sung between lovers, these songs are a reflection of the practices and customs of courting and lifestyles of the youth of their time. The songs often portray a much deeper emotion than the modern love songs:

Ka ngai em e, senlai ka chun hnehin,

Tlangza rel Sialin ka dawn lo ve.

Tlangza rel hi Thapui dawn ngai em ni?

Luah loh tur lungdi zui mah hian rel an dawn lo ve.

Missing someone more than a child misses a mother,

And shunning my mind to rumours.

Why should I take these rumours to heart Thapui?

Like tabooed lovers never take rumours to heart.

“Mihrang Awihna Hla” is a song that is sung in praise for the courageous and brave men. The Mizos, in the early society have a deep respect for ‘Courage’. The brave and courageous men were applauded and praised to the utmost degree in their communities. From the songs that are composed during the time of Saikuti, it is clear that brave men were praised and honoured. When a male child is born into a family, expectations are high for them to be brave men. Traces of such desires can be seen as illustrated below:

A lo piang e, Ka nu Ngunhnam a ti,

Hrang hmunpuiah dokim sah lai a ni a tiam e.

A child is born, Mother, ‘a sword’ he plead,

Promising a future he would encounter with brave men.

“Mitthi Ngaih Hla” is a song that is sung for the departed souls. When a family member is dead, to mourn the loss of their loved one, the family member would not even wash their faces and apply oil on their head and live with their dishevelled and unkempt hair for over a year. When it comes to the death of a lover or beloved, the songs that are sung are filled with passionate longings:

Thlafam ngaiin run chhungah ai ang vial,

Kawlkhum har e, vanzawl ni rii riai.

Hmanah in hril rihsang ka kai ang e,

Ka lungdi e, Zatuaia kalna.



I wailed missing the departed at home,  
Hazy skies and insomniac.

I will go to the land of death foretold,  
Where my sweet heart, Zatuai resides.

“Salu Aih Hla” has a close similarity to “Mihrang Awih Hla”; they are also songs that are sung in praise for the brave and courageous men. The difference between them is that when a hunter shot and killed an animal while out on his hunt and reached his home with his prized kill, the whole community would stay up and drink rice beer and sing till the wee hours in the morning. Such songs that were sung on this occasion are called “Salu Aih Hla”.

As have been mentioned above, not all the songs that are sung in the tune of Saikuti Zai are composed by Saikuti. However, the various lyricists or composers of most of the songs remain unknown, and it is difficult to tell which songs are composed by Saikuti and which songs are composed by her contemporaries. But what can be recorded in full fact of the songs that are composed in the tune of Saikuti are the songs of Laltheri<sup>2</sup>.

The tune of the songs in Saikuti Zai which are sung in merry making places with rice beer may not be pleasing for the new generation. However, it has its own beauty in the sense that all the words are in rhyme and with a perfect flow when a narrator of the songs narrates them, it has a close similarity with chanting and this was considered very pleasing to the Mizo musical ear<sup>3</sup>.

There are two types of sub-tunes in the tune of Saikuti Zai. One is called ‘Chhim Zai’ which can be understood as ‘Southern style of Singing’ and the other is ‘Herawt Zai’ which can be vaguely termed in English as ‘The Spinning Wheel Zai’.

Saikuti's songs were written in couplets which are considered to be the oldest style of song writing in the history of Mizo Folksongs. The prime of Saikuti's life is believed to be during the time 1845-1900. Based on records, it can be seen that Saikuti lived a long life and lived up to the age of 90 years and died in 1921. What can be mentioned regarding her life and works is that with the advent of Christianity, during the later twenty years of her life, the spirit of the age of Animism gradually disappeared. With this, her inspiration vanishes eventually. Saikuti, as a person has a deep connection and longings for her past and with the coming of Christianity and the change in various aspects of life, gradually this acted as a stumbling block to her creativity and finally closes the chapter of her life as a songstress<sup>4</sup>.

#### **4.2. Analysis on the Songs of Saikuti:**

As have been said, Saikuti was gifted with the art of composing songs since she was a child. The first song that she composed in her lifetime is a story which tells of the great singer Buizova. One fine day, Khuafoh Pawi Hmarthanga was singing Buizova's song at the bachelor's pad:

Kawrfen thi leh ka hmel mah chul sela,

Ka zai a chul lo ang khua reiah.

If my visages and necklace fade with time,

My songs will not fade even in the days to come.

Saikuti and her friends were playing under the bachelor's quarter that day, pretending to sieve rice with sands. When Saikuti heard Hmarthanga singing, she continued with her own lines in the tune of Buizoa Zai:

Zawlbuk hnuaiah buh lem kan thap chiam a,  
Hmarthanga zai kel be lo ang e

The song states that Saikuti was pretending to sieve rice under the bachelor's pad, when Hmarthanga sang like the bleating of a goat.

Days and years passed and her ability to compose songs grew deeper. While her family was settling at Hlingvawm village which was close to Vanlaiphai village, Saikuti is believed to step into the stage of adulthood. Songs that are sung in the tune of Saikuti are also known as Hlingvawm Zai. One out of the many Hlingvawm Zai is:

Khuangkhaw zopui a ngur mah kai sela,  
Chunnu hneha ka duh Saihniangi kai si love

The song implies that even if the chief settles at Khuangkhaw village, if Saikuti, who exceeds my mother, does not reside there, it means nothing.

Saikuti even composed a song for her neighbouring bachelors of Lungkawlh village, teasing them-

Chhimtlangval chu in kal mah lenkawl a tawp e  
Keini lenna Selawn zopui sahmul dum dur e.

The song above implies that Saikuti wanted to let the bachelors of the south who are travelling far and wide till the end of the horizon acknowledge the dense and deep flora of Selawn village that is still flourishing back home and much to explore there. When her family migrated to Thingsai village from Hlingvawm village, Aiduzawl village with not more than 150 houses under the chieftainship of Hnochhuma could be seen from her house which was situated at the top of the hill. Saikuti was mesmerised with the landscape of the land,

and was nostalgic as she could see the villages inhabited by the Pawi clan, she composed of this in a song:

Khuatin lang tlang ka pa run a zau.

Kawla vanrang chum angin leng rih nang ka ti.

The song explains how Saikuti is filled with memories of her previous village; she says that she misses her father's house where she could see villages from a distance and that she wishes to stay on like the clouds in the sky.

Up close to the Aiduzawl village was another village with not less than 360 houses under the chieftainship of Khawtindala. Since this village was very close to Saikuti's village, they were more or less like neighbouring streets and localities. One fine day, a bird flew in to their village and instead of hurting it, they lifted the bird in the air and it flew southwards. Saikuti sang of this incident in a song:

Khuatin rawn fang ka chung Kawlngo leng khaw Zokaiah,

Hmartlang chenah Aichhung lal lai, a sang va ti la.

The song explains how Saikuti addresses the venturing bird to spread the greatness of the Fanai chiefs while it takes its flights.

The people of Thingsai village seem to be too aware of their greatness that the brave men of the village hoisted up pillars where they would tie and portray the heads of their enemies. However, with the amount of enthusiasm they had, there was not a single head and killing of any enemies, so, Saikuti composed this incident in a song:

Ral in rel a, kai lo lalnemate,

In zuat sula e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang;

In zuat sual e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang,

Chunglum Lianak chhunrawl a vai e.  
In zuat sual e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang  
Par a chhuang e, Mihrang lu ngenin.

The song explains Saikuti's wit in seeing through matters from a distance with a clear mind, she tells the brave men that the place where the sacrificial pillar has been posted have not met out its purpose yet, it seems to be a mistake. Even the crow that awaits to peck and eat the decaying skull was not successful in finding a scrape of food in it. And that the pillar because of its emptiness has started to sprout weeds and mosses on it.

When their chief Khawtindala heard Saikuti's song, he found it to be an insult and said, "Why do you have to open your mouth Saikut?" Saikuti, on hearing that the chief was displeased with her, she sang a song to pacify his anger:

Saikhaw tlangah lal lai a zing dawn e,  
Chhimtlang naufa banah kai I, ka runpui mawiin.

The song says that the villagers should go northwards and take slaves for captives to adorn their houses, and in that way, the fame and glory of Thingsai village will be known. The chief's anger thus subsided on hearing the song of Saikuti.

Her fame has spread far and wide, so, a number of suitors would come and ask for Saikuti's hand in marriage. There were a number of eligible bachelors that Saikuti's parents wanted her to marry, however Saikuti was still enjoying her days as a bachelorette. When her parents would stir her to marry, she retorted in a song:

Min tir lo la, Siali thlang khuandimin,  
Fapa lenbuang ka awihna khua tlai love,

Lungtlu lo chu pawmlai a har ka nu,  
Min tir lo u, Siali khuandimin ka mawi lo ve.

The song explains how Saikuti responded to her parents, she told them not to send her off to marry and that it is never too late for her to bear a child. She talks of her not being ready to give her hand in marriage to someone she does not like.

Saikuti's parents were worried that she would not marry, and they continued to prompt her, Saikuti retorted in a song:

Ka chun leh zua suihlung in rual em ni?  
Ka kal tang e, Saikhaw Zo nemah tual leng lovin.

Saikuti asked her parents whether they were both in agreement to send her off, she told them that she might as well go away from Thingsai village if they force her to marry. Her father then took pity on her and cancelled their plans.

Saikuti is a great lover of beauty and nature. One day, she heard of the beautiful Phunchawng flower (Indian cottonwood/Shemba) across the banks of the Tiau river being spoken by the bachelors. She requested her suitors to get the Phunchawng flower on their way there. When they returned with the flower, Saikuti was deeply pleased and she sang of her gratitude in a song:

A hei hi maw phaia Phunchawng a par valin an sel chu?  
Ka lawm ang e, senlai nau angin.

Saikuti in her song questioned, "Is this the famed Phunchawng flower that the bachelors have always talked about?" Saikuti adores the flower like a little child does.

There was a Thingse tree which spreads its leaves very close to Saikuti's house, she seem to tire of its leaves falling on her compound that she requested the

bachelors, who were drinking alcohol to trim down the tree. She requested them in a song:

Thingtin tulawr pualleng a fam ngai lo,  
Khawzo siahthing a ai nem duai e

The song tells of the flirtatious side of Saikuti's character, how she put her demand in a song to stir the bachelor's enthusiasm. The song says that like a Vapual (hornbill) bird that pecks and clean trees for shelter, a lover of Saikuti would never fail to trim down the tree for her. On hearing Saikuti's song, the bachelors and even the widowers of her village were enthusiastic to trim down the tree for her.

Due to her skills and talent in composing songs, people would invite her to compose songs for them; relatives of the deceased specially favoured her and would often request her to compose for them for their dear departed. She composed songs especially for persons who died out of unnatural deaths like drowning, falling from cliffs and trees and those who are trampled over by elephants. The song goes:

Hnawmtui senvung, siahthing, Saipui lunglian,  
Khamrang senvung, Phullenga fam na;  
Chhingkhual angin zing zin theih chang se la,  
Hmuh ka nuam e, thlafam buantual ropui an relna.

The song sings for the dear departed who have died due to flood, drowning, those who are trampled on by elephants and those that have fallen off cliffs and trees. She wishes to travel to the land of the deceased and expresses her desire to reach the courtyard of the dead.

Once, the brave men killed a deer and they had a celebratory feast drinking rice beer and singing. They sang on till dawn and Saikuti's parents were worried. Her mother came to fetch her at the wee hour of the morning, at which Saikuti replied:

Zampher chungah ka nu, tuanphung loh chu,  
Tumpang ki vialvar vukin zu kan dawn rih e

As Saikuti was drunk, she could not even budge and go for her daily chores, the song explains her denial to go to work that day, she told her mother that since they were drunk and sitting and singing on a mat, it was impossible for them to go for work that day. Her mother was left dumbstruck and did not even reply to her song.

A bachelor of the Pawi clan was enamoured with the beauty of Saikuti. He stayed on for weeks at Thingsai village and would go to Saikuti's house every night courting her. Saikuti never gave him negative signs nor talked to him impolitely. So, the Pawi bachelor thought he had a high chance of dating her. At which Saikuti replied:

Kan laichhuatah hrum sawm a zan cham e,  
Changsial lovin tunge thai tura lengi hel le.

Saikuti found the Pawi bachelor to be overstaying his welcome, so she addresses him in a song as to why the bachelor would even have the nerve to win her over when he did not even offer a bison to marry her.

On hearing the song, the Pawi bachelor instead of feeling embarrassed replied Saikuti in a more mocking way, still thinking that he could win her hand. Saikuti was displeased with his attitude and composed a song regarding the bachelor's impolite retort:



I tawng tam e, chhingkhual val uang a,  
Saikhaw lanu zawl hlui leng angin.

The song explains Saikuti's modesty regarding her femininity. It says that the Pawi bachelor have said too much, he talks as if he can sleep with Saikuti at his demands.

The Pawi bachelor who had come from another village was spreading rumours as if he had won over Saikuti. At this, Saikuti and her mother went to their chief Laldawva. They summoned the Pawi bachelor to be there and discuss issues that he had been spreading. The next morning, the Pawi bachelor made it first to Laldawva's house and when he saw Saikuti and her mother coming, he shivered with fear at which Saikuti sang:

En teh ka nu, hrumsawm val uanga kha,  
A ngur run rem dawhtling laichhuatah val a khur e.

The song explains how the Pawi traveller who was a healthy and eligible bachelor, who teased and taunted Saikuti and spreading rumours about her shivered with fear on the floor of the chief.

The final words could not be made regarding the rumours as the bachelor was now too embarrassed and frightened, he replied Saikuti in a song before he set off for his village:

Chhingkhuala mi daw ang kan zawn lain,  
Kan Changsialin kamkei lunglian tam lai a tawk e.

The song talks of the Pawi bachelor's sentiments, he says that he has been drunk on wine and of Saikuti's songs, and excused himself from Thingsai village and set off.

Some of Saikuti's relatives have migrated to Muallianpui village. Saikuti would often visit her relatives for days and months. She would even sing of Lalnu Darbilhi who was the queen of that village:

Lallianbuk nu'n hrai a awi e, swank in lerah'

Hming liai luaiin i run thim ruai dokim sal banna.

The song says of Lallianbuka who was Darbilhi's son. Darbilhi was carrying Lallianbuka at their corridor and singing a lullaby to him. And it talks of their enemies' heads that were taken in wars and displayed in their house to portray their bravery. Lalnu Darbilhi was so pleased with Saikuti that she gave her, her prized possession-a shawl, as a gift.

During these times, there was a war that went on with the Zahau clan. Even Saikuti's lover Tuvunga set out for war at Tiau land. Since, he had been gone for a long time; Saikuti was yearning for his presence and sing songs for him that says:

Kan khawval tha chhaktiangah leng zove,

Thlenghial val tha kan runah an lawi love.

Khalh hreng rawh maw, vuangtu, nghosai lunglian,

Zam rel lovin ka khaw val tha Tiau ral an kai e.

Chhaktiang ram loh in hrilh pautu bung phun,  
Hmuh ka nuam e, nghosai thiang lenna.

Pautu bung phun hi maw zaiah in chawi?  
A tang zar khi dokim thlunglu ban nan a tha e.

The song is an encouraging word for the brave men who have set out for war and especially her lover Tuvunga. She says that since the brave men have set out for war, there was no one who would come and visit her at night. She tells the brave men to follow the elephant of Vungtu land, which is in the border of Myanmar and tells them about the famed Pautu tree that have often been sung in songs and how good the branches are for hoisting the heads of the enemies.

Her hopes to see her lover Tuvunga was never fulfilled as he was killed in the war and his dead body could not make it back to their village. Saikuti was heartbroken at the news of Tuvunga's death and sing songs of her longing for him:

Senhri par iang ka chhak Bawmzo daiah,  
Pual chang hmul ang ka di in hlan e.

Han thlir ila chhaktiang Hrumsawm daiah,  
Senhri par iang vungdang an thlau ve.

Min sel lo u Zatlangin dawn lungrukah,  
Aitenawn par lenlai ka chuai e.

Min sel lo u hawihkhawm ka lenrualin,

Di then chungah suihlunglen tuar har ka ti e.

Ka riang lua e, Liankhaw zathum laiah,

Chhailai ka chan hmelma di par and lo riam lo u.

Fam zawng tawh nan mim leh sawhfang kan zar,

Hmel hmuh lova Vungdanga khan phurhhlan siam ve maw?

Ka kham ang e ka tumloh darin e,

Vangdang ka ngaih kumtluang hlui love.

The song says how the body of her lover Tuvunga was left by the other brave men at the Bawmzo land and says they have left Tuvunga's body as if it was a feather that have fallen off a hornbill bird. The next stanza says that one should take a far look at the land of the Pawi clan where the other brave men have left off Saikuti's handsome lover Tuvunga. The third stanza talks of Saikuti's plea to her neighbours not to talk of her in a degrading manner. She says that she could not bloom like the Ainawn flower that she once was. The fourth stanza goes on to talk of Saikuti's yearning of Tuvunga, she requested her neighbours and community not to talk of her behaviour as she finds it hard to accept the fact that she has lost her lover and misses him deeply. The fifth stanza says that Saikuti, out of all the three hundred inhabitants in her village, her plight was the worst as she has lost her lover. In the sixth stanza, Saikuti requested people not to sneer at her; she says that she has left off corn and rice for her dear departed and wonder if Vangdanga (Tuvunga) has eaten the food left for him in the land of the dead. The last stanza says that Saikuti was willing to barter a brass gong which she does not even own for Tuvunga and that her longing for him will never die.

Saikuti had experiences that were life changing for her and the community. As have been mentioned in Chapter 3, a feud broke out between her and the bachelors and a number of songs were composed by her regarding the event. When the bachelors decided to burn down her house, Saikuti composed a song:

Val zawng lungrual pal ang ka do zo lo,  
Chhermei chawiin siahthing tlar bung hal an tum ta e.

The song says that Saikuti did not have the strength to fight off the brave men who have lighted up torches and were on the verge of burning their corridor.

Saikuti died in the year 1921, April 22. She died at the age of 90 and from record, what can be known of Saikuti's love for music and words can be seen in the following song:

Van hnui mi hril rihsang ka kai hun chuan,  
Nau ang min tah lo u, kawl len zaiin min awi la.

By reading the above songs, a lot can be known of Saikuti's love for words and music. Her last wishes on her deathbed were to have songs sung over her dead body. The song says that she does not wish people to weep for her; instead she wanted her relatives to sing songs for her when she reaches the land of the dead.

The pre- colonial period that is from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century A.D was an important era in the history of Mizo Literature. Before the annexation by the British Government, the Mizos occupied the present Mizoram for about two centuries. In comparison with the poetry of Len Range, which is estimated between the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century A.D, the poetry of this period was polished and the flow of music became much better. Most of the songs that were composed during this period were

named after the composers<sup>5</sup>. There are certain songs like Darpawngi Zai, Laltheri Zai, Lianchhiari Zai, Darlenglehi Zai, Aikhiangi Zai, Darmani Zai and Saikuti Zai among others. These poems mainly deal with the assertion of the chief's superiority and the description of their villages. From their songs, it can be seen that the Mizos were proud of their success over their enemies and animals. Therefore, the names of animals such as Sial (Bison), Sakei(Tiger), Sai (Elephant), Sazuk (Deer) , Sakhi (Barking Deer) and different species of birds appear frequently in their songs. The Sun, the Moon and the Stars are also often mentioned. Different kinds of flowers that are familiar to their day to day life are repeatedly referred as well. Their favourite flowers, as can be seen from their poetries are Chhawkhle (Rhododendron), Dingdi(Scarlet Milkweed), Ainawn (Woodfordia fruticosa) and Zamzo(Cockscomb). Flowers, birds and stars are usually employed as the objects of simile. All of these elements can lead to a conclusion that the poets of this period were aware of their natural surroundings and the place of man in creation<sup>6</sup>.

The lack of interdependence is the most important characteristic of the poems of this period. Every stanza is self sufficient. It consists of an introduction and a conclusion to it. Each stanza has its own message. This is, in fact, the typical form of Mizo Poetry. The metrical compositions of those poems are congenial to their customs and traditions. The Mizos are justifiably well known as a singing tribe<sup>7</sup>. The Mizos used to sing on happy occasions as well as sad hours for the whole day and night. As there is no high tone in their songs, they can sing the whole night without getting tired<sup>8</sup>. A number of biographical poems appeared during this period. The poems that were written had much to do with the great difficulties they experienced in life. Poetry acts as a medium of expression in so far as that period is concerned<sup>9</sup>.

### 4.3. Saikuti's Songs as a Medium of Expression:

Saikuti, as have been analysed through the composition of her songs acts as a voice that speaks for the plight of womanhood during the turn of the early nineteenth century.

From what seemed a casual flow of creativity that can be heard through her songs, Saikuti's choice to vent out her emotions implies a deeper meaning, a meaning which portrays the position of women during her time. From marriage, love, judgements, nature and aesthetics, courtship, women taking part in certain rituals and the various sights both subjective and objective, Saikuti effortlessly express what she felt, as a woman, from a woman's point of view.

Regarding judgements that are carried out in her community, one instance that shows Saikuti's bravery can be seen through her song:

The people of Thingsai village seem to be too aware of their greatness that the brave men of the village hoisted up pillars where they would tie and portray the heads of their enemies. However, with the amount of enthusiasm they had, there was not a single head and killing of any enemies, so, Saikuti composed this incident in a song:

Ral in rel a, kai lo lalnemate,  
 In zuat sula e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang;  
 In zuat sual e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang,  
 Chunglum Lianak chhunrawl a vai e.  
 In zuat sual e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang  
 Par a chhuang e, Mihrang lu ngenin.

The song explains Saikuti's wit in seeing through matters from a distance with a clear mind, the pillar which have been posted have not met out its purpose yet and she saw the whole incident carried out by the bachelors somehow disgracefully

amusing, it seems to be a mistake. Not even a scrape of food is left for the hungry crows to feed on. And that the pillar because of its emptiness has started to sprout weeds and mosses on it.

Saikuti, as any other women, was destined to marry and start a family life as society deems her to. Her fame has spread far and wide, so, a number of suitors would come and ask for Saikuti's hand in marriage. There were a number of eligible bachelors that Saikuti's parents wanted her to marry, however Saikuti did not want to get married as yet. When her parents would stir her to marry, she retorted in a song:

Min tir lo la, Siali thlang khuandimin,  
 Fapa lenbuang ka awihna khua tlai love,  
 Lungtlu lo chu pawmlai a har ka nu,  
 Min tir lo u, Siali khuandimin ka mawi lo ve.

The song explains how Saikuti responded to her parents, she told them not to send her off to marry and that it is never too late for her to bear a child. She talks of her not being ready to give her hand in marriage to someone she does not like. Saikuti mediated her true desires through her songs and often this was the plight of all young women who were of marriageable age.

When Saikuti felt violated regarding her womanhood, she resorted to composing songs and almost always succeeds to win the case in hand.

Songs serve as a milder instrument for taunting the young men of the village in a situation where women were not traditionally allowed to express their opinions.

Once, a Pawi bachelor who has come from another village was spreading rumours as if he had won over Saikuti. At this, Saikuti and her mother went to their



chief Laldawva. They summoned the Pawi bachelor to be there and discuss issues that he has been spreading. The next morning, the Pawi bachelor made it first to Laldawva's house and when he saw Saikuti and her mother coming, he shivered with fear at which Saikuti sang:

En teh ka nu, hrumsawm val uanga kha,  
A ngur run rem dawhtling laichhuatah val a khur e.

The song explains how the Pawi traveller who was a healthy and eligible bachelor, who teased and taunted Saikuti and spreading rumours shivered with fear on the floor of the chief.

The final words could not be made regarding the rumours as the bachelor was now too embarrassed and frightened, he replied Saikuti in a song before he set off for his village:

Chhingkhuala mi daw ang kan zawn lain,  
Kan Changsialin kamkei lunglian tam lai a tawk e.

The song talks of the Pawi bachelor's sentiments, he says that he has been drunk on wine and of Saikuti's songs, and excused himself from Thingsai village and set off.

All of the above and much more show how Saikuti resorted to composing songs to express herself when other avenues of expression are subverted.

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- <sup>5</sup> R.L.Thanmawia, Mizo Poetry. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1998. 36.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 37.
- <sup>7</sup> Laltluangliana Khiangte, Mizo songs and folktales.2002. Intro: v-vi.
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- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 37.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

An examination of Mizo Poetry shows that like all other modes of expressions in early societies, it began with self-expression. Poets and singers of the early periods expressed what they had in mind subjectively in short poems. This kind of poetic expression would pass for a lyric. Bulk of the Mizo poems is lyrical in nature. Mizo poets use to express their immediate feelings in a sensitive manner, and those poems can be set to music. But the Mizo poems are all blank verses, and there is no regular stanza. Examples of the ancient lyrics are: Saikuti Zai, Lianchhiari Zai, Laltheri Zai, Salu Lam Zai and Chawngchen Zai such as Lumtui Zai, Tlangphei Zai, Nilen Zai and Khawhar Zai. The metres of each of the following couplets differ from one another. The common feature of it is a caesura towards the middle of every line and at the end of the first line, signifying partial completion of sense at the end of the couplet<sup>1</sup>.

The Mizo Folksongs were characterised by pessimism, and they were very rich on the theme of lamentation and mourning. The Mizos believed in the life after death and also believed in the suffering at Mitthi Khua (city of the dead). This belief might have caused the Mizo poets to be touched deeply by the death. When her beloved son died, Darpawngi burst with the following verse:

Awmlai lengin tlang tin dung rawn zui,

Vanduai runah ser ang cham na e;

Ka tuai chawnban a kai e.

Visiting every village on her way,

Death has stayed in our luckless home;

He has snatched away my son.

The poetess personified death as a cruel and powerful ruler whose demand is a must for his people.

Their songs of mourning and lamentations exhibit their theory of life after death, the Mizo custom of burial. The dirge of Saikuti manifested the distinctive thoughts of the Mizos about death.

Ral a lian e, tlangah dan rel ila,  
Awmlai hawktui ang a lian e, ka dang zo lo ve.  
Chhingkhual angin zing zin theih chang sela,  
Hmuh ka nuam e, thlafam buantual ro pui an relna.

We established our stronghold against enemies.  
But nothing stands in the way of death when it comes like a flood.  
Were it possible like a pilgrim to visit the city of death,  
I would like to see the ground where judgement is carried out<sup>2</sup>.

Any kind of singing is universal in human society; it is a manifestation of finer aspects of human life.<sup>3</sup> Often, poems and songs give us a clearer insight into a person's soul than lengthy discussions. What song or poetry contributes is that in those unlettered and unsophisticated lie certain important clues to their philosophy of life. Even though the folksongs are used simply for the pleasure of singing or listening, they also act as the medium for the expression of ideas or emotions held in common by a group. A community, whether agricultural or otherwise, expresses itself passionately and imaginatively through its folksongs. These are live human documents reflecting actual historical processes and phenomena of different ages.<sup>4</sup>

As described earlier, there are various conclusions that can be drawn regarding the use of songs as a mode of expression through the songs of women. Another viewpoint has been given by R.L. Thanmawia when he quoted that it was remarkable that the famous lyricists during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were all poetesses. On his interview with K. Zawla, a Mizo folklorist, the question on why most of the lyricists during that period were all women, K. Zawla's reply was that since the women of that time had a humble status in the family as well as in the society, it was easier for the women to pronounce their feelings in verse forms instead of speaking them out directly<sup>5</sup>.

Laltheri and Saikuti may be regarded as born lyricists. Saikuti composed songs from her adolescent period. She composed songs on different themes and all her songs have been composed without pre-meditation. And in her songs, we see certain reflections of the status of women in the earlier society. One event that would portray such instance was when a feud broke out between her and the bachelors of the community regarding the attires worn by men, when the bachelors heard that Saikuti disagreed with the plans they have concocted, they were furious<sup>6</sup> and decided to burn her house down. However, they did not go the extent of burning her house down but dismantled the gathered firewood outside her home and burnt it, in which Saikuti replied with a song:

Val zawng lungrual pal ang ka do zo lo,

Chher mei chawiin siahthing tlar bung hal an tum ta e<sup>7</sup>.

I cannot stand against the will of the bachelors,

With torches they attempt burning the gathered firewood.

Laltheri's songs reflect a low regard of women's condition during the time. When her brother killed Chalthanga, her lover, a mere commoner, she did not have any say, the law was not there to protect her, and her panacea was to compose songs that express her broken heart. The whole content of her songs reflect her love for Chalthanga and her condemnation for the cruel deed more than her grief at the great loss of her lover.

The songstress revealed the sensuous feeling in love and most importantly, they projected light upon the social and domestic relations and values through their songs. The above account gives an impression that the songs of women writers are a reaction to the poor status of women in the society. R.L. Thanmawia states that men at that time did compose songs but it appeared that men did not like to disclose their names as composers due to the ethic of Mizo Tlawmngaihna (Altruism). Also, one important factor being that disclosing their names might render them inferior to women in poetic art, since the names of the women writers were quite popular at the time<sup>8</sup>.

Songs, in fact was a medium of expression for women in the early Mizo society. The study of the songs of Saikuti, Latheri and Darpawngi reflects the condition of women at the time. These songstresses took to voicing out their deepest desires in songs when men, in their community chose to suppress their voices as they thought it was demeaning to their masculinity, and found it safe rather to portray their masculinity through their physical attributes. As have been said in the previous chapter, women did not have much say when it comes to marriage, they had to obey their parents whether it is to their liking or not. But when Saikuti's parents forced her into marrying someone she does not love, she retorted in a song:

Min tir lo la, Siali thlang khuandimin,  
Fapa lenbuang ka awihna khua tlai love,  
Lungtlu lo chu pawmlai a har ka nu,  
Min tir lo u, Siali khuandimin ka mawi lo ve.

The song explains how Saikuti responded to her parents, she told them not to send her off to marry and that it is never too late for her to bear a child. She talks of her not being ready to give her hand in marriage to someone she does not like.

### **5.1. Saikuti and her Contemporary Lyricists**

This section in brief highlights how the songs of Saikuti had an impact on the composition of songs by her contemporary lyricists. Rather than analyzing all of the songs and dimensions of the music written by other writers during the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the study examines how she, as a person, has a strong influence on selected contemporary writers who have had the chance to have the knowledge of her name and fame during her lifetime. The three contemporary writers chosen – Awithangpa, Laltheri and Darpawngi, provide excellent examples of how the musical expression enhances comprehension of the emotive ideas present in the songs of Saikuti.

Before mentioning the details of the life of Laltheri, how she came to be a renowned songstress and her acquaintance with the songs of Saikuti, it is proper to first trace her genealogy, as the experiences she underwent in her life personally in relation to her life in society was the reason why poetry act as her medium of expressing herself.

Amongst the Sailo Chiefs, Lallula is considered to be the mightiest and well known chief. In 1776, his second eldest son Lallianvunga's wife gave birth to

Lalsavunga. In 1812, Lalsavunga's family migrated to Aizawl, which is now the capital city of Mizoram. Lalsavunga had three sons- Vanhnuailiana, Lalphunga, Thawmvunga; and four daughters- Ropuiliani, Laltheri, Thangpuii and Chawngpuituali. They were all well known kings and princesses during the time, but among them, Laltheri, Vanhnuailiana and Ropuiliani made a great mark and change in the history of Mizoram<sup>9</sup>. Lalsavunga died in the year 1818, and due to his death, they moved to Saitual in 1820.

Laltheri was a Sailo princess, and her real name is Lalchungpuii<sup>10</sup>. Based on records, Laltheri's prime is believed to be around the year 1850-1860. While they were in Rallung, Laltheri fell in love with the most eligible bachelor in their community. During the olden times, the kings never permitted their daughters to court or marry a commoner and if they do so, the penalty for it was death. Since Chalthanga was a commoner and belonged to the Pawi clan, Laltheri's family was against their relationship and decided to kill her lover, Chalthanga. When Laltheri heard of the killing of her lover by her father's servant Lamhawiha<sup>11</sup>, she was devastated and heartbroken. In order to fill the void in her heart, she started composing songs to vent out her grief<sup>12</sup>.

Laltheri's courage to sing out her heart against the injustice done to her has a great impact. Her songs led to the end of the great gap and divide that existed between kings and the commoners. When the relatives of Laltheri, seeing the condition of their sister, felt remorseful and decided that the traditions that existed in the Sailo family should be broken. Laltheri's songs act as a medium in changing the norms of the king's family, thus, changing the outlook of the Mizo society as a whole<sup>13</sup>.



The songs of Laltheri are in the style of songs of Saikuti (Saikuti Zai). This fact shows that Saikuti was well known and influential during her life time for her works. Laltheri's songs that are in the tune of Saikuti Zai:

1. Ka nemte puan ka chawi lovang ka nu,  
Ka di Thangdanga zal n amah chhimhlei tual daiah.  
  
How can I clothe myself in linen, mother,  
When my lover lies dead and cold deep down on earth.
2. Ka chun leh zua suihlung in mawl lua e,  
Kan sum tualah Thangdang thlunglu hawihten in tar le.  
  
How thoughtless you are, my Sailo clan,  
The head of my lover, now hoisted on our courtyard<sup>14</sup>.

The contents of the songs of Laltheri reflect her love for Chalthanga and her condemnation of the cruel deed of her family more than her grief at the great loss of her lover.

Awithangpa (1887-1965) may be said as the last traditional poet<sup>15</sup>.

Awithangpa composed more than three hundred stanzaic poems having different themes<sup>16</sup>. The major themes of the songs of Awithangpa are love and the relationship between man and woman, the beauty of nature and its relationship with man. Like other Mizo poets, Awithangpa did not rhyme his poems. He puts vowels like 'a', 'aw', 'e', 'o', and 'u' in the last letter of the last word. Those of the verse lines ending with consonants are also usually having a vowel sound which is apt for the tonal language like the Mizo<sup>17</sup>.

Awithangpa's real name is Hmarlutvunga, he belongs to the Ralte clan and lived his whole life at Maubuang village<sup>18</sup>. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the first two known poets of the Mizos, Awithangpa and Diriallova used to exchange satirical verses, which later became a long poetical battle. Being an inhabitant of Aizawl city, Diriallova mocked disparagingly his opponent who lived in a small village of Maubuang, and sent his compositions to the village occasionally. An example is given below:

Ka zai virthlileng va chang mai rawh,  
Diriallo val Zawlkhawpui huthang vala'n  
Awithangpa runpui va deng chim rawh.

Let my verse be as strong as whirlwind  
That devastating Diriallova of Aizawl city,  
May wreck Awithangpa's house by its blows.

Awithangpa replied in a satiric tone:

Awithangpa runpui a deng ngam lo,  
Zai a let e, Buang khawpui virthli lengin,  
Diriallo vala va khuai nuai rawh.

Never fulfil its mission to hit the target house  
Arise then, the whirlwind of Buangkhawpui  
And storm the retreating Diriallova himself<sup>19</sup>.

The important characteristic of the traditional poems was the anonymity except a few poems like Awithangpa Zai. Like other folksongs, the stanza of Awithangpa Zai is self sufficient conveying its own message. The stanzas are

composed in triplets. The first line usually begins with fact, second, simile and the third, its conclusion:

Hmana lenlai a ngai lo kan awm lo ve,  
Tuahpui vau ang kan chuai tawh hnu,  
Vul lehin kan mawi lo ve.

All of us long for the prime of our life,  
Faded we are now like the flower,  
That does not look as if to rebloom<sup>20</sup>.

Saikuti's son Khuangpuithanga happened to kill a bison (sial) at Muallianpui, so, Saikuti and her youngest son Chalhriauva joined in the occasion of the celebration. At the time, Awithangpa Zai was well known and Saikuti also seemed to have heard of his songs. So, at this occasion, Saikuti decided to compose a song in the style of Awithangpa Zai:

Ka awi ang che, I runpui leh Hrangthiauva  
Liantlang vangkhua a thlum e, chawltui ningzu  
Khuanzanghinpi lung a leng chur chur.

I will sing you a lullaby, for your home and Hrangthiauva  
The land of Liantlang is sweet, with wine  
Khuanzanghina's grandmother is deeply nostalgic.

Ka zaithiam hmar tlang a thang leh thin e, thang nawn rawh  
Khua Selluaipi'n chengpui run ngei a mawi  
Sumtual tlang lamna a thing love  
My fame as a songstress have spread far and wide through the hills of the

north, spread more

Her songs have blessed homes

The dance floor can never fade away

Khawzanghinpi Awithangpa'n mi chhing zo lo

Saikhaw tlangah lallai mal tin a sawm e

A thang ruai ruai thin e, saw hmarah<sup>21</sup>.

Awithangpa does not exceed Khawzanghina's grandmother

She blesses Thingsai village with her songs

Her fame soars high and above, in the north.

Khawzanghina that she mentions in her song is her grandson. The people present at the time sang her songs and everyone enjoyed themselves at this occasion. Awithangpa came to know of Saikuti's song of his name mentioned in it, that he replied from a distance:

I lenna Saikhawpui ka hai nem maw

I zai zamin min phuar vel chhingkhual karah

Hmuh ka nuam Saihniangi run riai ruai.

I will not mistake Saikhawpui, the place where you live

Your songs enraptured me in the midst of strangers

I long to see where you, Saihniangi resides.

Saikuti's songs are mainly written in couplets whereas the songs of Awithangpa are written in triplets and have different tunes. When the above mentioned songs are analysed deeper, Saikuti, in her songs seemed to be in praise for her composition of her own songs and appeared as though she considered the songs of

Awithangpa in a demeaning manner. However, Awithangpa seemed to be all in praise for Saikuti as he replied to Saikuti's song with respect and meekness. Since Awithangpa started composing songs when the peak of Saikuti's fame reached the whole of Mizoram, there are traces of Saikuti's style of singing in the songs of Awithangpa.

Saikuti's songs for the bachelors in her community when they tried to burn her house down:

Nangmah hi maw Liankhawpui chhan mihrang an hril chu

Khawnlai dawn u, Tiau rala hnam len valte zawng chu.

You, the saviour of Liankhawpui exalted

You and your drunken thoughts, all the bachelors that are residing at the Tiau river.

Awithangpa's song that has a close resemblance to the above song of Saikuti can be seen when he composed a song for a woman named Zairemthangi:

Nangmah hi maw, khu thlangtianga parmawi tha an hril chu

Ka thai chang la piantlai Nikhuma chunah

Kawpzai leh di tuah I rel dun ang<sup>22</sup>.

You, the blooming beauty of the west exalted

Be the wife of a late bloomer Nikhuma

And live together happily.

Saikuti was born in the year 1830 and died in April 22, 1921. Awithangpa on the other hand was born in the year 1887 January and died in the year April 14, 1965. What can be known from this fact is that when Awithangpa was born, Saikuti has

lived to the age of 57 years and the knowledge of them responding to each other's songs proves that they were both well known composers.

Darpawngi, as a child, lived as a slave in the house of the Laisawral chief, Lalcheua. She later lived with Lalkhuma (Tuchhingpa) and was married to his son Lalbuta but later divorced after they had one child. Darpawngi migrated to Khawbel village in the year 1888-1889, but when the British burnt the village down, she again migrated to Phunchawngzawl village<sup>23</sup>. Later on in her life, Thawmpawnga, the son of Khuanglung Chief Manga, took pity on her as Darpawngi belonged to the same Ralte Bungsut clan as him. Darpawngi was married to Chawngbawnga, who was also another slave in Thawmpawnga's household and earned their living at Siallukhawt village. The couples would submit all of their earnings to the Chief, and the Chief, being so pleased with them, took them as his own children.

A son was born to them, and they named him Bawihbanga but he died at the age of three. Darpawngi was devastated and this was when she started composing songs which later on came to be known as 'Darpawngi Lusun Zai' (Darpawngi's Songs of Lamentation). They then migrated to Thentlang village, which was ruled by the Zadeng clan. Her stay at this place gave birth to 'Darpawngi Thinrim Zai' (The infuriated Songs of Darpawngi). The infuriated songs of Darpawngi arose because of her anger towards the village chief. It reflects a quarrel between Darpawngi and the village chief on the issue of a kid (goat). The chief, with the powers he had, got the kid (goat). Darpawngi thus condemned and attacked the ruling of the chief by her forceful and revolutionary verses<sup>24</sup>.

Darpawngi travelled to various places of Mizoram and her name became a household name to all. During her travels, she made a stop to the north eastern part of

Mizoram, which is in Khuangthing village<sup>25</sup>. While she was staying at Bawngchawm village under the chieftainship of Rochungnunga, instead of going home, she visited Khuangthing village which was very close to Saikuti's village. Darpawngi expresses her desire to meet the famed Saikuti in a song:

Nang leh kei reng chu e,  
Intawk ila tumtu daiah,  
Sai lian lu awiin e<sup>26</sup>.

The song explains Darpawngi's eagerness in wanting to meet Saikuti at the time; she says that if Saikuti and she met, they would sing of songs of the glory of elephants and the village Thingsai where it had its name from.

Saikuti heard that Darpawngi had composed a song for her and her eagerness to meet her through songs; however, they could not meet then. That was the time which proved a true testimony of Saikuti's fame. Darpawngi composed a number of songs, such as 'Thlek Zai', 'Lusun Zai' and 'Thinrim Zai' and most of her songs were made in the style of Saikuti Zai<sup>27</sup>. From the life experiences of Darpawngi, a lot can be acknowledged that Saikuti had a deep impact and influence on her songs.

Through a study of Saikuti's songs, it appeared that Saikuti was well aware of the power of her voice as a medium of expression and how her influence spread through songs. She knows for a fact that her songs will live on as she expresses in one of her songs:

Zai a chul e, zaitin a chul zo ve,  
Kei ka zai leh thlangkawr puan a hlui dawn lo ve.

The song indicates that songs that are sung fades, however her singing and the cloth obtained from the plains will never fade. This song shows that Saikuti in fact was prideful of her talent as a songstress and her pride on being able to use her composition of songs as her medium to express herself when she cannot do so in casual discourse.

The study of Saikuti's songs highlights the fact that women composers use the medium of songs to express their experiences, emotions, opinions, cultural and historical positions of women in rigid patriarchal communities. Through these songs, they unconsciously give themselves a 'voice' like Saikuti when all other avenues of self-expressions are subverted.

### **5.2. Tonic Solfa on the songs of Saikuti**

In the Tonic Solfa of Saikuti Hla, there are six beats between the big bars. This six barred song can be sung by blending the beat as that of two beats between the big bars. The tempo of the song depends upon the singer which originally is around 125 beats per minute or '6 beats' in tonic solfa. It can also be blended and sung as 'two beats' in tonic solfa making it 25 beats per minute. The songs are sung at a low pitch giving it the character of a chant. The tonic solfa of Saikuti's songs is given in the appendix.



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  - <sup>9</sup> Lalsangzuali Sailo, Sakhming Chullo. 1995. 33.
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**APPENDIX I**  
**PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE**

NAME OF CANDIDATE	: C.LALNUNHLUI
DEGREE	: M.PHIL
DEPARTMENT	: ENGLISH
TITLE OF DISSERTATION	: A STUDY OF
MIZO FOLKSONGS COMPOSED BY SAIKUTI	
DATE OF PAYMENT OF ADMISSION	: 01. 08.2012.
COMMENCEMENT OF 2 <sup>ND</sup> SEM/DISSERTATION	: DECEMBER 2013
APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL	
1. BOS	: 26.05.2013
2. SCHOOL BOARD	: 07.05.2013
REGISTRATION NO. & DATE	: MZU/M.PHIL/123
	OF 07.05.2013
DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION	: DECEMBER
2013	
EXTENSION	: JUNE 2014

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT  
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

## APPENDIX II

## TONIC SOLFA OF SAIKUTI ZAI/HLA

Doh is A

	:	:		s <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> : d		d :- :-		- :- :-	
				Ka hming Sai kut					
m	:r	:d		<u>m.d:d</u> :-		- :- :-		l <sub>1</sub> : l <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub>	
Khua vel		mah		thang				se la	
	:	:		s <sub>1</sub> : d : d		d :- :-		- :- :-	
				ka ngai lo vang					
m	:r	:d		<u>m.d:</u> :		s <sub>1</sub> :	:		s <sub>1</sub> : t <sub>1</sub> : t <sub>1</sub>
chhing khual a				mi					uan himang val
	l <sub>1</sub> : s <sub>1</sub> :-			- :- :-		s <sub>1</sub> :- :-		:	:
	suat					chu			

Source: The Tune of the song of Saikuti is extracted from Dr. Zokhuma, Chanmari, Aizawl on 28.03.2014 and arranged into Tonic Solfa by Dr. Lalkhawngaihi Renthlei on 30.03.2014.

In the Tonic Solfa of Saikuti Hla, there are six beats between the big bars. This six barred song can be sung by blending the beat as that of two beats between the big bars. The tempo of the song depends upon the singer which originally is around 125 beats per minute or '6 beats' in tonic solfa. It can also be blended and sung as 'two

beats' in tonic solfa making it 25 beats per minute. The songs are sung at a low pitch giving it the character of a chant.



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<u>Examination</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>University</u>	<u>Div</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
HSLC	2003	MBSE	I	64%
HSSLC	2005	CBSE	I	73.6%
B.A	2010	Panjab University	I	66%
M.A	2012	Delhi University	II	58%

**A STUDY OF MIZO FOLKSONGS COMPOSED BY SAIKUTI**

**Abstract**

**Submitted by:**

**C.Lalnunhlui**

**Department of English**

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the Degree of Master  
of Philosophy in English of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

The history of Mizo Folksongs and its origin dates back to 1300-1450 AD<sup>1</sup>. The Mizo Folk Songs were claimed to cover more than a hundred books. Even though many have been lost without proper records, the early Mizo literates have kept some in written record thus enabling us to read and study the annals of folk history. With the advent of Christianity and the rigid early church's teachings, within a decade or two, pre-Christianity era ended and along with it the early folk songs gradually vanished. Indeed, written and oral records have been kept, both on the works of men and women but records and documents on the works and composition of women remained far from being at par with the men's writings and works.

The Mizo people are great lovers of music and songs. The best means for them in expressing their sorrows and joys are through songs. Just as it is difficult to trace the origin of the Mizo people, tracing the origin of Mizo folksongs is equally difficult. Due to lack of documentation and information, its exact date cannot be known; however, what can be regarded as the oldest song from record available is Thuthmun Zai<sup>2</sup>. The word 'Chhinlung' appeared in the songs of Thuthmun Zai as well as Hmar Hla, so it is believed that Thuthmun Zai might have been sung when the early Mizos settled at Chhinlung but this cannot be claimed as an exact documentation<sup>3</sup>.

Thalai leh dawntuai an tliak zo ve,

Chhinlungah mi awm lo, vangkhua zawng ti ula.

Tracing the above song, it states the fact that a famine broke out which took the lives of many men and women, so as Dr. R.L.Thanmawia has stated, with the mention of the word 'Chhinlung', some believed that the Mizos might have composed a song in order to vent out and pacify their sorrows.

Any kind of singing is universal in human society; it is a manifestation of finer aspects of human life. Often, poems and songs give us a clearer insight into a person's soul than any forms of discussions. What song or poetry contributes is that in those unlettered and unsophisticated lie certain important clues to their philosophy of life. Even though the folksongs are used simply for the pleasure of singing or listening, they also act as the medium for the expression of ideas or emotions held in common by a group. A community, whether agricultural or otherwise, expresses itself passionately and imaginatively through its folksongs. These are live human documents reflecting actual historical processes and phenomena of different ages.

In The Laugh of the Medusa (1975), Helene Cixous, a French feminist and writer, rallies women to do the one thing that will liberate their voices, their bodies, and their sexuality:

Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text- as into the world and into history- by her own movement<sup>7</sup>.

Helene Cixous says that it is only superstition that has made the Medusa-the woman intellectual, writer, or critic-into a mythical monster who turns men into stone. 'If you look straight at her', writes Cixous, 'you see that she's beautiful and she's laughing'. Feminist scholars and critics have given women's fiction a critical room of its own in the house of literary history. Now we are free to come and go as we please, not in sorrow but in laughter.

A study of the status of Mizo women in the past shows that the position of the 'fairer sex' was not the same as what men enjoy. Their participation and involvement in various fields regarding their social, religious and economical position proves morally right as what

their society and culture deems right and true at the time. However, what can be seen and traced is that they never did have much say and their rights were limited. This can be acknowledged when we study the works of the various women composers, they took to composing songs that reflect their true identity, an identity they never directly expose.

Saikuti, through the composition of her songs acts as a voice that speaks for the plight of womanhood during the turn of the early nineteenth century. From what seemed a casual flow of creativity that can be heard through her songs, Saikuti's choice to vent out her emotions implies a deeper meaning, a meaning which portrays the position of women during her time. From marriage, love, judgements, nature and aesthetics, courtship, women taking part in certain rituals and the various sights both subjective and objective, Saikuti effortlessly express what she felt, as a woman, from a woman's point of view.

A further study has not been undertaken regarding Saikuti as a woman composer and the study will go to reason as to how songs composed by women validates as a mode of expression. The study will mainly attempt to analyze selected folk-songs composed by Saikuti, a famous Mizo female folksong composer and will offer to examine how gender biases in patriarchy could possibly be reflected in the songs, thus assuming songs as a mode of expression when other avenues of expressions are subverted. A brief synoptic view of the five chapters of the dissertation is presented below.

**Chapter 1. Introduction:** This chapter deals with the various feminist arguments about the position of women across cultures and nations. It also deals with a brief study of the history of Mizo Folksongs which are relevant for the proposed study. It is divided into two sub-topics:

- i) Feminist arguments on the position of women.
- ii) History of Mizo Folksongs.

**Chapter 2. Mizo Women Composers:** This chapter focuses on how songs can be a powerful mode of expression and relate it to the position of Mizo women in regard to this. It also deals with a general overview of the studies of Mizo women in traditional Mizo society as reflected in their customary law. Its sub- topics are:

- i) Songs as a mode of expression.
- ii) Women in traditional Mizo Society.

**Chapter 3. Contextualization of Saikuti as a female composer:** This chapter gives an analytical background of Saikuti as a female composer in Mizo society. It deals with the relevance of using songs as a mode of expression and her influence towards her community per se.

**Chapter 4. Analysis of the songs of Saikuti:** This chapter analyzes the selected songs of Saikuti. A transcription of the songs of Saikuti is dealt upon and shows how she resorted to composing songs as a medium of expression. It is further divided into two sub-topics:

- i) Transcriptions on selected songs of Saikuti.
- ii) Analysis on the songs of Saikuti.

**Chapter 5. Conclusion:** The last chapter evaluates the earlier assessments and attempt to conclude on the achievements of Saikuti through her songs and also sums up the influence she had on some of her contemporary song writers. It is divided into two sub-topics:

- i) Saikuti and her contemporary lyricists.
- ii) Tonic Solfa on the songs of Saikuti.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Literature*. (Aizawl: RTM Press, 1993) 9.

<sup>2</sup> There was a great famine that occurred and it was truly a dreadful time as it killed both the young and old. The first known folksong of the Mizos that can be known from existing records known as *Thuthmun Zai* was born and later it developed into proper chants out of their sorrow and in need of consolation.

<sup>3</sup> R.L. Thanmawia, *Mizo Hla Hlui*. 2012. 12-13.