

ABSTRACT

RE- CONSTRUCTING THE IDENTITY OF MIZO WOMEN  
IN SELECTED MIZO FOLK SONGS

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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled '*Re-constructing the Identity of Mizo Women in Selected Mizo Folk Songs*' submitted by K.Vanlalruati for the award of Master of Philosophy in Mizo embodies the results of his investigations carried out under my supervision and that, to the best of my knowledge, the same has not been submitted for award of any degree in this or any other University or Institute of Higher learning.

The candidate has been duly registered and has completed all formalities required of his as an M.Phil. candidate.

I consider the work worthy of being submitted for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Mizo Language and Literature.

Dated the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2017  
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## DECLARATION

I, K.Vanlalruati, hereby declare that the subject matter of this Dissertation is the result of work done by me, that the contents of this Dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or anybody else, and that, to the best of my knowledge, 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 award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Mizo.

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IN SELECTED MIZO FOLK SONGS

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## APPENDIX

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## **CHAPTER- 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

### 1.1. Definition of 'Identity':

Identity is defined by *Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary* as “the state or quality of being specified person or thing; who or what a person or thing is” (Mairi Robinson, 669). *Oxford Dictionary* defined as “being specified person or thing; individuality; identification or the result of it; absolute sameness” (Julia Elliott, 368). Identity identified an individual or as a group and categorizing as a particular group needs same quality or sameness.

Women identity is basically formed by sexes and the differentiation of male and female identify women. In most societies, there are certain identity of the two sexes based on their masculinity and femininity for the formation of an individual social identity. Being identified as a woman, the identity of women can vary due to dissimilarity of society's expectations. The identity of Mizo women is shaped by society's performance and expectations. Therefore, women belonging to different society or culture produced diverse quality and identity as a woman.

Womanhood is a changing conceptualization, an idea that is defined by society and culture. There is a constant effort to reconcile the differences of identity reflected through standards of sexuality and gender. Female identity is biological in nature but female social identity is formed by society and culture. Identity can be considered as continuing the quality of the self, from the past to the present. In Mizo society, the identity of Mizo woman is linked from the past to the present, preserving the

sameness of an individual. But since identity is a flexible concept, social and cultural performance changes gradually.

The identity of Mizo women is a sensitive and controversial issue which is debatable. It produced different ideas and notions, in trying to define the identity of woman. Different writers and scholars claimed that Mizo woman are dominated by male, and that they hold lower status in the area of gender. J. Malsawma in *Zo- Zia* defined the traditional Mizo woman as, "... hmana Mizo hmeichhiate chuan Sal an ang ber a, an tlawm ngawih ngawih mai a ni" (66)/ "the traditional Mizo woman are likely a slave, they are extremely inferior". H. L. Malsawma also argues that "The society being an extremely patriarchal one, women had no place in it. The status of women was pathetically low. There was hardly any society in which women had lower status than among the Mizos" (*Sociology of The Mizos*, 71). James Dokhuma also described the status of Mizo women in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* as, "Hmeichhia an en dan chu, an pawng hmusit lutuk deuh ani law maw chu aw, tih theih khawpin an ngaih dan ahniam avangin an thu pawh chawtak khukupui tlakah an ruat lo" (269). / "The way they look women can be considered as being archly despicable, which show that women are taken inferior and their ideas are not given interest".

From these writings, it is visible that the traditional Mizo women are lower and inferior to man. Men suppress them and the social identity is distinguished by man. But there is certain concept about women that put in equal position with men. As it is a controversial issue, research study is necessary to define the identity of Mizo women.

## 1.2. Mizo Folk Songs and its relevance:

Folk song is defined by M.H.Abrams as, “Folk songs include love songs, Christmas carols, work songs, sea chanties, religious songs, drinking songs, children’s game songs, and many other type of lyric, as well as the narrative song, or traditional *ballad*” (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 136). *New Webster’s Dictionary* define folk song as “ A song originating among and transmitted orally by the common people of a nation or area, often occurring in a number of versions and usually characterized by simple melody, narrative style, and verse repetition; a popular song written in imitation of this type by a known author” (379). From oral to written tradition, songs that depict the folk life can be regarded as folk song. Many writers and scholars regard folk songs as old and archaic, as in oral tradition only. But the limitation needs to be broadened as many younger poets have composed on the folk life too.

The character of Mizo traditions, culture and society is indubitably reflected in Mizo folksongs. Traditionally, the Mizo composed songs and sang it on various events and occasions. As Mangkhosat Kipgen puts it, “Whether the event be the making of war or the making of peace, whether it be victory or defeat, success or failure, whether there is experience of joy or sorrow, happiness or anger, love or hatred, contentment or disappointment, the Zo gives expression to it in songs” (*Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 94). The social character, the personal problems or sufferings are rolled along in their folk songs.

The study of the problems about women identity is based on folk songs. From traditional to modern era, folk songs consist of the true feeling of an individual. As “Poetry is, at the bottom, a criticism of life”, Mizo folk songs are deeply connected to truth and facts of one’s own life or folk life. It is relevant to reason and question the folk songs as the voice of the poets tells the story of mankind; historical and modern ideology is manifested in the form of folk song.

### **2.1. A brief introduction to Mizo and its origin:**

The history and genealogy of the Mizo is difficult to trace in the absence of written documents and of limited contact with neighboring peoples. The Mizo tribe belongs to the group of the Mongoloid race, speaking the language of Tibeto-Burman. They are also known as Lushai, Kuki, New Kuki, Khyang, Chin, and Plains Chin before they dwell in Mizoram. After their sojourn in Burma, they migrate towards eastern and southern and reside in North- eastern parts of India. Mizo is a generic term which stands for various tribes and sub- tribes. But the inhabitants of Mizoram which share common language, custom and culture became one particular tribe.

### **2.2. Mizo culture:**

Mizo culture can be traced back to the times the Mizo lived in the region of Thantlang and Run valley. It can also be called the primitive age of the Mizo people.

Since the Mizo are of illiterate, the origin and beginning of Mizo culture is uncertain. But by using folk song as an agent, the history of Mizo culture can be outlined in a sequential order. B. Lalthangliana traced the origin of Mizo culture and wrote, “Mizo culture hi China leh Tibet ramriah, kum zabi 4-na (AD) hma lamah a intan awm e (*Mizo Chanchin*, 27)”. / “Mizo culture may originate in the border of China and Tibet, before the 4<sup>th</sup> century (AD)”. Another prominent writer, Rev. Liangkhaia states that Mizo culture began during their dwellings in the Run valley, assuming that this period lasts up to thousand years.

There is another saying that the Mizos originate from ‘Chhinlung’ or ‘Sinlung’ which is claimed to be proven by oral history. Rev. Liangkhaia writes, “Hman lai A.D. 750 emaw lai tawhah khan China lal Chhinlunga chu a pa nen an inngeih theih loh avangin mi tam fe hruaiin a chhuak a, Burma rama “Awksatlang” an tihah hian khua a siam a. An lo pung a, an tam ta hle mai a, mahse ama dam chhung chauh kha a ni a, a thih chuan a khuate chu an lo teh darh leh zo ta a; chu mi khaw chhuak zawng chuan “Chhinlunga’ chhuak an in ti a ni, an ti a” (*Mizo Chanchin*, 13 )./ “During the olden days of about 750 A.D, the emperor of China named Chhinlunga cannot join hands with his father and migrate with a number of people, he arrange a village in what is called “Awksatlang” in the land of Burma. Their population increases and become numerous, but lasts only his lifetime, and the people wander to other places; those who migrate from that village claim themselves as emerging from “Chhinlunga” as rumour has it”.

The exact beginning of Mizo culture cannot be determined since the Mizo's hold no written record of their origin. From the folkloristic study, it is possible to look back the olden period of the Mizo. *Thuthmun zai* is regarded as the most ancient song which is believed to be composed during the times the Zo's still lived in Chhinlung. Prof.R.L.Thanmawia writes, "Thuthmun zaiah hian Chhinlung a lang nual a, Hmar hla lamah pawh a lang a, chuvangin thenkhat chuan Chhinlunga an awm laia an hla niin an ring bawk" (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 11). / "Chhinlung is seen numerously in Thuthmun zai, as in the song of Hmar also and by that matter, there are some peoples who believed to be composed during their days at Chhinlung." But there is nothing evident on cultural and sociological history of this time.

### **2.2.1. Religion:**

Mizo people from earlier times take religion seriously. It can be said that Mizo social and religious life is bound together. In the pre- Christian era, the Mizo religion is called *Sakhua*. *Sakhua* is a composition of *Sa* and *Khua*, *Sa* stands for the god from the ancestors and *Khua* represents 'Khuanu' or 'Khuavang.' These two gods has different purposes. Rev. V. S. Lalrinawma described *Sa* as "According to the most common understanding, *Sa* was a clan- deity, a supernatural being who gave each clan its unique identity"(*Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, 75). *Khua* is believed to be the protector, sustainer and designer of man's destiny. *Sa* is worshipped by sacrificing boar and *Khua* by offering a mithun. The *sadawt* chanted his *Thiamhla* and



performs the sacrifice. *Sakhua* can be used only by man who is the head of the family. The religion of Mizo women depends on her husband or father's religion.

There is a traditional saying that "Hmeichhia leh chakaiin sakhua an nei lo"/ Women and crabs have no religion (LTL Translation) can be said to have evolve from Mizo religious perspective. It can also be said that this saying is not just a concept of women domination, but is the fact about Mizo religion.

Mizo people in the earlier times believed in the afterlife, and all spirits went to *Mitthi Khua* to start the next life. Those who are *Thangchhuah* advance to *Pialral* where they no longer needed to work. The path to *Pialral* starts with the use of *Sakhua* and that those who finished the process of *Thangchhuah* are considered as the most glorious, honorable and desirable status of man in a lifetime and the afterlife.

The Mizo people also offer sacrifice to evil spirits. It is often believed that the Mizo's worship *ramhuai* as a religion. But on the other hand, the ideology of the earlier Mizo people rests upon fear. Whenever a person is ill, they believed that it is caused by *ramhuai* for making it angry or does harmful things. In order to cure their diseases or illness, they offer sacrifices performed by *Sadawt* or *Tlahpawi*. They believe that those sacrifices offered to *ramhuai* heal their illness. Major A. G. McCall also wrote, "It was the RAMHUAIS who brought illness or injuries to humanity and who punished the breakers of oaths" (*Lushai Crystals*, 68). The old Mizo's believed the *ramhuais* are of powerful spirit, some resembles human stature; but they are believed to have supernatural power and control over human beings.

### 2.2.2 Christianity:

Christianity is brought to Mizo people by the missionaries of Arthington Mission, Rev. F. W. Savidge and Rev. J. H. Lorrain on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1848. As Rev. Liangkhaia writes, "...he Sapte hi Mizorama kum 3 an awm chhung chuan khaw fangin an zin hman lova, Chanchin Tha chi mu zawng an phum na a, Kohhran erawh chu an phun hman meuh lo a ni" (*Mizo Chanchin*, 188)./ "...this British men does not have the time to visit other villages during their 3 years in Mizoram, though they sow the seed of the Gospel, the Church is not planted yet" (My translation). Rev. D. E. Jones (Zosaphluia) and Rev. Edwin Rowlands (Zosaphthara) under the Welsh Mission started school in 1848, which came to be the foundation and strengthener of Christianity in Mizoram.

The advent of Christianity brought many changes to Mizo culture, society, religious beliefs and modes of living. Mizo people became literate gradually, and can be considered as the most reasonable benefits except religious enlightenment. Though development can be seen in every aspect of life and surroundings, it can be stated that the status of women stand still. In Christian religion, women cannot hold responsibilities and women must follow the religion of the husband. It can be said that this view is hold up from the past, and it rolled along with the minds of the Mizo people.

### 2.2.3 Festivals:

The Mizo people have three occasional festivals, namely- *Chapchar kut*, *Mim kut* and *Pawl kut*. It has been observed that festivals dates back to the times of their dwellings in the Run valley. These three festivals include every member of the village. *Chapchar kut* is described by K. Zawla in the following way:

He kut hi lo vah zawha hman a ni. Zum leh hriam laka dam taka an chhuah avangin, lawmna entirman an hmang ta fo a ni. He kut hi mi zawng zawng tan a ni; nula leh tlangvalten an chen nasat bik deuh avangin, nula leh tlangval ta bik deuh anga ngaih theih a ni. (*Mizo Pi Pute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin*, 62)

This festival is celebrated after the cutting of jhum. It is used for the indication of gratitude for their survival from the dangerous work. This festival is for all the villagers; as ladies and gentleman enjoy it most, it can be considered as owned by them. (My translation)

*Chapchar kut* is the biggest and most fascinating festival. During this time, it is tabooed for husband and wife to get separated, to quarrel and to get angry. It is the moment of joy for all the people.

One of the most fascinating items of *Chapchar Kut* is *Chai*. *Chai* is a dance performed with song called *Chai hla*. It only occurs at *Chapchar Kut* and so, the people are eagerly waiting for this to happen. R. L. Thanmawia defined *Chai* in the following way,

An chai dan chu hmeichhia leh mipa inkarthlakin an dingkual a, mipain hmeichhe kokiah an kuah a, hmeichhiain mipa kaawng hnung lamah an kuah vet hung a. A laiah khuangpu leh seki tumtu an awm a. Khuangpu chu hla latu a ni a, seki tumtu chu hla hriltu a ni thung... A tlangpuiin

lam tura ding kualte kha ding lamah leh vei lamah an insawi kual dual dual thin a ni. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 166- 167)

They performed *chai* by forming a circle with young men and women standing alternately, young men put his arms around women's shoulder, women put their arms at the back of the men's waist. There is the drummer and the player of the *gayal* horn at the middle. The drummer begins the songs and the player of a *gayal* horn chanted the lyrics of the songs... Those who stand to dance usually move together at the right and left side of the corner. (My Translation)

*Chai* has different songs, of various subjects but the tune itself is pleasing to dance with. There are about ten songs or more which is used in the performance of *chai*. All the people enjoy this moment and this festival mostly lasted for seven days.

*Mim kut* is the festival for the death and is believed to emerge from the story of Tlingi and Ngama. James Dokhuma writes, "He kut hi hlimna kut a ni lo va, khawhar taka hman a ni zawk. Mi zawng zawng tan kut ni mah se, uar bik an awm a. Kum hmasaa an Mim Kut hman leh tun inkar chhunga lo thi leh tate chhungkuain an uar bik thin" (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, 96). / "This festival is not a festival of joy, but carried on with a forlorn mood. Although it is a festival for every person, there are those who celebrate it more extensively. The family of those who passed away between last year's *Mim kut* celebrates more hard" (My translation).

*Pawl kut* is the oldest among Mizo festivals and is celebrate at the beginning month of a year shortly after the harvest of *jhum* rice. It is regarded as children festival although is also celebrated by adults. Dr. Laltluangliana Khiantge says, "Rich and poor, children and adults, men and women would partake of the grand feast as a sign of close- knit society for their life philosophy being, share and live, grab and die.

No one tried to grab alone but shared his wealth to others” (*Mizos of North East India*, 33). This festival brought equality among the people, there is no class distinction and gender discourses.

#### **2.2.4. Economic System:**

Earlier Mizo economy depends on agriculture. Every family except the chief’s family engaged in jhum cultivation. A new land is cut and burnt for field every year. This system demand a large area of forests, the villagers migrate to another area after the land has been ruined. So, the Mizo family owned less material, only of a movable property. Rich people are measured in terms of annual production of rice and of a domesticated animal. A family owning a large number of a mithun and cow are taken as rich.

In jhum cultivation, men and women have different responsibilities. The cutting down of trees for jhum lies in the hands of man whereas, sowing vegetables seed is usually done by women. The sowing of paddy seed rests on both hands. Dr. Laltanpuui Ralte describes as, “Men and women are equally involved in sowing of paddy seeds which is done by dibbling with the help of a small hand hoe at appropriate intervals” (*Mizo Studies*, 327). In this process of jhuming, there is three to four weeding in a year which is carried by men and women equally. The ripen paddy is collected by both workers and so, the transport of paddy by head load.

In case the field is far-distance, the workers work mostly by lodging. There is a small temporary hut, which served as a jhum house at the fields. They used to camp for the whole week and went home only at weekends. On the fields or outside domestic life, man does the important activities. It is the duties and responsibilities of men to prepare meal, to collect firewood, to fetch water, etc. Women are given leisure outside of household activities.

### **3.1. A brief Study on Mizo Society:**

Mizo society is deeply shaped by the basic of social institutions, which is family. Family can be considered as the formation of Mizo society. Mizo family is based on patriarchal system in which the head of the family controls other family members. In family, an individual studies a sense of belonging and to socialize with other individuals. This quality is continued in the society and its environment.

Mizo society can be regard to have divided in a hierarchical order. Social stratification is seen in various societies like the Indian caste system, as that of the *Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. The western societies are divided into the upper class, the middle class and the lower class. In every society, there is social categorization of people according to their socioeconomic status and sometimes based on religion.

The social strata of Mizo society are in the following way:-

1) In a traditional Mizo village, there is a chief in every village that is responsible for village administration, and yet the most powerful man in a single village. He maintained his position through hereditary rights and his sons are to become chief of the village. The daughter of the chief could also marry the descendents of another chief only. If a man of *hnamchawm* has sexual affairs with the chief's daughter, the chief can punish him and sometimes given a death sentence. Chalthanga was killed for having sexual affairs with the chief's daughter Laltheri.

Dr. N. Chatterjee describe the position and status of the chief,

The chief's position in the village was indeed that of a benevolent ruler. All those who lived in the village were looked upon as his own children. He was bound to help them in their adversities, counsel them in their difficulties, reward them in their achievements and punish them when they were found guilty of misdeeds or infringement of established customs. The villagers, on their turn, were to obey his orders implicitly, carry out errands assigned to them individually and collectively and help the Chief in all possible ways. (*The Earlier Mizo Society*, 35)

The chief is like father to its villagers and has the authority to declare war, and of the life and death of its village members. The chief are 'the Lord of the soil' and all the villagers gave a tithes called *fathang* and a hind and front leg of every wild animal killed or trapped.

2) *Lal Upa* or *Lal Khawnbawl* (minister of the chief) is the second most powerful person. They help the chief in the administration and the chief pay high value to their words. They are the one who gave counsel and advice to the chief; they also served as

the chief's wisdom. If the family of *Lal Upa* or *Lal Khawnbawl* could engage in jhum cultivation, they choose the lands first of all the villagers.

3) *Ramhual* and *Zalen* is the third important unit in the society. *Ramhual* are the big family that could earn much harvest than normal family. They earn the chief's favour and can choose the land for cultivation earlier than normal villagers. But they offer *fathang* six times larger than ordinary villagers. They are regarded as honorable family in a society. They do not interfere with village administration and has no power other than the selection of the land.

4) Thirdeng (blacksmith) holds an important position in a village. Usually there is one blacksmith in single villages that has permission from the chief and are also called the blacksmith of the chief. He fixed all the weapons and tools of the villagers, so he has no time to cultivate a jhum. Each family offers tithes to the blacksmith.

5) Tlangau is a herald that announced news of the chief and village administration to all the members of the villages. Though they play a necessary job, they were never regarded as a respectable man. They do not work at fields but received tithes from each house.

6) All the common people except the ruling clans are known as *hnamchawm*. There are wealthy family, *thangchhuah* and *khuangchawi* family, a heroic called *pasaltha* among *hnamchawm* are considered honorable and respectable. Poor people, an illegitimate child and the family of a widow are despised and unnoticed. In traditional



Mizo society, wealthy and large families are admired. Wealth has classified Mizo people into different class.

### **3.2. Position of women in the society:**

Women played vital role in the domestic and economic life of a particular family. She does the household activities as well as the economy of the family depends on her. A good wife or women is measured according to her hard work, her skills in weaving, her diligence and laborious quality and respect for her husband. A woman is supposed to be quiet when it comes to decision- making. But woman or the mother is the most influential person in decision- making process. The father decides important matter of family, and behind the father, woman stayed active.

Mizo women received necessary protection from her family. Though women hardly hold important position in the community, their place is at home and never participates in the social organization. It is likely that women never have words or place outside home. They lived under men's guidance, their father or husband. According to Chatterji, "gaining whatever education she needed in a simple preliterate agriculture based primitive society through living participation in the activities of the family during her childhood she continued her existence under the overall protection of her parents" (*The Earlier Mizo Society*, 3). Women find shelter and maintain her dignity through men in the family. In other words, it can also be said that men holds the dignity of women in the family as well as in the community.

Women are also responsible for kin relationship. A good and wise woman tied the relationship of relatives and stay close together. A family with a large kin relations and relatives are considered respectable and honorable. In such a way, women hold the family's respectable status in the society. The position of women in Mizo family does not changed; from traditional to modern time, they play the same role within the family.

### 3.2.1. The *Bawi* System or Slavery:

The *Bawi* system has been practiced among the tribe of Mizo, but these slaves are different from slaves of other clan or tribes. Slaves are mostly held by the chief on various grounds. There are three types of *bawi*, they are:

#### 1) *Tukluh Bawih*:

These are persons who are captured in war and can be redeem by offering a mithun. If they are chief or descendent of the chief, three mithun is required usually for their freedom. It can be said that this system of *tukluh bawih* is their way of draining another chief's wealth, and the capturer becomes rich and powerful.

But there are some exceptions in this system of *tukluh bawih*. In the case of Darpawngi, this system is changed for some reasons. She is a slave to the chief of Laisawral, Lalchema during her childhood. At her puberty, she stayed at Lalkhuma's and married her son. But the relatives of her husband were dissatisfied to accept a

*hnamchawm* girl to be the mother of a chief's family, they divorced Darpawngi. She is poor and destitute and fall on to Lalchema's solace again. Darpawngi's father tried to bring her back, but Lalchema does not allow her to go back and take her as his slaves.

### 2) *Chemsen Bawih*:

There are criminals who took shelter in chief's house. If a person kills, it is possible for the relatives of the death person to take revenge and kill the killer too. In such case, the killer took refuge to the chief's houses by touching chief's 'sutpui'. From that moment, he became the slave of the chief for the rest of his life, but received protection from vengeance. If the chief wish to, they could manage to stay apart from the chief's house but continued to be his slave. The price of her marrying daughter also goes to the hands of the chief.

### 3) *Inpuichhung Bawih*:

These are those who hope for refuge at the chief's house for being unable to support themselves or no relatives to do so. They are poor and are in the condition to starve and so took shelter and became the slaves to the chief. They could free themselves by paying a mithun or its equivalent cash or kind. When a male *bawih* reach an age to marry, his master bought him a wife and after staying three years, they could live to other house called *Inhrang bawih*. They continue to serve the chief until they could free themselves. Mangkhosat Kipgen writes, "If a chief or his wife ill- treated a **bawi**, the victim could leave and find a new master- chief" (*Christianity and Mizo Culture*,

74). This shows that the *bawi* system has a clear-cut order; their slaves were treated with kindness and a good way.

There is another ground on which a person becomes a slave. Bertram S. Carey in his *The Chin Hills* wrote that “If a man was caught stealing he gave his daughter or son to slavery until he paid some 20 times the amount of whatever he stole” (204). It can also be understood that the *bawi* system controls the character of an individual; sometimes, more like that of a punishment.

In the *bawi* system of the Mizo’s, every slave could pay for his freedom by offering one mithun for ordinary slaves and three mithun for the descendents of the chief or the chief himself. The slaves could also free themselves out of generosity and loyalty to their master. Darpawngi and her husband Chawngbawnga earn themselves the name of son and daughter to their master Thawmpawnga. Their act of faithfulness worth a mithun to bought their freedom.

#### **4.1. Changes in Mizo Socio-Cultural Life:**

There is so much changes and transformation in the Mizo socio- cultural life which is caused by various reasons. The Mizo lived a nomadic and primitive life, and engaged to a barbaric practice. Their mode of living was low and undeveloped; and there is no formal education of their own. The education they received was from Zawlbuk, which does not reach the qualities of formal education. Women do not find

any education except the domestic work done at home; but, that is regarded as good enough for women to have a successful life.

#### **4.2. Changes after the advent of the British and Missionaries:**

The second advent of the British in 1888 has been remarkable since they had rule the land. Mizo tribe used to attack and raid the people of the plain and kill many of them. They had become a threat to the plain people and the British came attacking the Mizo village. Every chief tried defending their village but the British defeated them. And Mizoram lies under the British rule. Soon after the British rule, the missionaries think the time is right to start their gospel mission; and started their work by spreading the Gospel and education too.

The first change brought by the British government was to lower the status of the chief, but yet ruled through the chiefs. The chief were responsible for maintaining law and order, collecting taxes in their own village. After the independence of India, Mizo District Council was inaugurated on 25 April 1952 and was responsible in the administration of the district. In 1954, under the guidance of Mizo Union and District Council, the traditional institution of chieftainship is abolished.

The British government and the missionaries worked together having different purposes. The society has been transformed, clearing the barbaric practices by giving laws and order. No war against civilians, there was solidarity to all the villages. The

missionaries had driven away the evil spirit, which had changed the mindset of the Mizo. This brought peace to their life; rejecting liquor had made the society calmer.

Education brought light to the life of the Mizo, as well as to women. Women were treated more honorable and the relationship between husband and wife reformed. Though changes have taken place in the Mizo society, the status of women has not change. Women still play the role of the traditional women played, but in a more respectable way.

The advance of the British and the missionaries has put an end to the famous *Zawlbuk* institutions. Though the decisions are made by the Mizo themselves, the changing life patterns had drove away the traditional institution. But it can be said that *Zawlbuk* has been changed by Young Mizo Association (YMA), who carry on social and communal services, to promote social development, as well as *tlawmngaihna* in the society. Every Mizo men and women are known for their *tlawmngaihna*, their love towards other people and the sacrifices made to make others happy. The Mizo tribes are close to each other, they care for one another and the people share equal status which made the society peaceful.

Christianity also put an end to the *bawi* system. The *bawi* system is closely related with the chieftainship and usually, only the chief has slaves. A young chief, Khawvelthanga set free all his slaves after becoming a Christian. He may be the first chief to have done the good deeds, other chiefs follow as well. The abolition of chieftainship also contributes to the end of the *bawi* system in Mizo society.

**Glossary:**

Sadawt: a private exorcist or priest, especially employed by ruling chiefs.

Thiam hla: an incantation, invocation or a spell.

Mitthi Khua: the abode of departed spirits.

Pialral: The Lushai paradise.

Thangchhuah: The title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase or by giving a certain number of public feasts.

Ramhuai: an evil spirit.

Hnamchawm: the common people.

Khuangchawi: The name of a public feast given by Chiefs and other well- to- do Lushais.

Bawi: a slave.

Tlawmngaihna: self- sacrifice, unselfishness.

Zawlbuk: The large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.

Sutpui: the wooden pole at the chief's house.

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**CHAPTER- 2**  
**THE SILENT VOICE OF MIZO WOMEN**

### 1.1. A Study on *Darpawngi zai*:

*Darpawngi zai* is one of the most outstanding folk song composed by women. Darpawngi was born in the year 1845 and died in 1907. From her songs, it can be understood that the subject of her songs are personal experiences happening during her life. Darpawngi like the other poetess, composed out of her surrounding, events and everyday life. Her songs define the socio- cultural life of a particular time, her anger and sorrow and can be regarded as a confession of her emotions. The songs reflect the mind of the composer, her view on the nature of social and communal performance.

As a confessional poet, the songs of Darpawngi provide information about historical social practices and norms. Being in a society, a person has to follow certain rules or customs in order to fit inside the society. Those norms and customized rules may not be fair enough for every member, but those socially constructed and accepted rules are to be followed. Darpawngi also feels insecure being the poor *hnamchawm*. In one of her songs, she reflects the hierarchical order of society.

Mi zun ngai lo, keimahni zun ngai,

A tap ruai ruai thin e, ni chhunah,

Nikungpa laldang a mawi lo ve. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 259)

Missing me, rather than missing someone,

In the middle of the day, he cries desperately,

It is not suitable for a gentleman, Lalkung.

This verse reflects the life story of Darpawngi and her married life. She brought her personal experiences into a platform through which the world sees and knows.

Darpawngi married Lalkunga, the son of chief Lalkhuma who are the family she lived during that time. Darpawngi used to stay at the chief Lalkhuma's home, instead of her family. As they both attracted each other and falls in love, they married without hesitation. Though their parents admitted them at the time of their marriage, there are problems arising from the chief's family. As quoted by R. L. Thanmawia in *Mizo Hla Hlui*, "Mahse, hnamchawm nula chu Sailo lal chhungpuinu atan chuan a nu leh pate chuan an iai deuh si a, an maksak ta a" (259). / "But they as dissatisfied as a hnamchawm girl is going to be the mother of the chief's family, they filed for divorce". The cross marriage between the chief's clan and *hnamchawm* is not an appropriate actions during this period.

Even though the situation is worse and painstaking for Darpawngi, she follows the social rule knowing the consequences. As a divorced woman is socially despised or lower in status than unmarried woman, there are certain effects to bear. But a *hnamchawm* woman does not have the strength and ability to fight back what is accepted as a society. In this verse also, she does not speak the subject of disliking the rules or blame the chief's family. Rather, she conveys the message that it is not suitable for man to cry for the reasons of missing his divorced wife. This justifies than Darpawngi has an image of man as having strong and reliable personality that is not shocked or moved by certain condition like mental pain and heartbreaks.

Darpawngi being the victim of the social system, she does not stay contaminated. She has the individuality of a strong woman, an individual who support the social system. Even though the situation is worse and dissatisfied, she tries to live according to what the society demands.

In another song called *Darpawngi Thinrim zai*, she again voiced the social discrimination endured by her. As enunciated in her song,

Khiangvawn rai ka rah e,  
 Khiangvawn rai ka rah e,  
 Ka lengkelin sum tual zawlah;  
 A chun a hai lo ve. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 268)  
 I am a poor solitary orphan,  
 I am a poor solitary orphan,  
 My babygoat in front of the house;  
 Had not mistakes its mother.

This verse announces the wrong judgement made by the lady chief of Thentlang village. During their stay in Thentlang, Darpawngi and the chief's elder claimed for the goat's baby. The chief ordered them to tie both the nanny- goat and the baby goat will run for its mother. The baby goat runs for Darpawngi's nanny- goat and suck its breast. The owner of the goat is revealed but still it was given to the chief's elder. As K. Zawla writes "Mirethei nih vang chauhva chang zo lovah inngaiin Thinrim zai a phuah ta a" (*Mizo Pi pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin*, 353). / "As she considered her

poorness as the only reason for losing, she composed *Thinrim zai*” which is the nature and evolution of this song.

During that period, there are distance between the poor and the wealthy people. Social discrimination can be witnessed from this experience. It seems to be unfair for the poor and lower position to win the favor of the chief. She cannot fight back the decision of the chief even if it is wrong. She has to follow the chief’s order as fair and just at that time.

From her *Thinrim zai*, it is known that such unfair decision is fought back by means of songs. In another song of *Darpawngi thinrim zai*,

Chhimtlang ka liam dawn e,  
 Chhimtlang ka liam dawn e,  
 Khuazanghinnu’n biahthu tumthing;  
 Laiah I tan lo ve. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 269)  
 I am leaving the south region,  
 I am leaving the south region,  
 Khuazanghinnu, you false;  
 In making the judgement.

This verse is understood to be the response from Darpawngi. She warned the chief that she is leaving the village and move to other places.

It is already remarkable to fight with the elite class, where quarreling with the upper status holder is rare in Mizo society. It is courageous and brave action for a commoner woman to have trouble with the elites. But Darpawngi possess all the bravery and courage to bring justice to Mizo society. She even composed to a satirical song, reflecting the bias judgments made by the chief. She even warned the chief that she no longer interested to be members of the village, and that she is moving out to live to other villages. Such heroic personality defined woman as a strong and brave individual, someone who has the courage to fight for justice.

Darpawngi has the nerve to find faults in the social system. She is poor and lived a desolate life, but her songs imitate the inner self of Darpawngi. She cannot change the wrong deeds during her life, but her devotion to the good and justice shows her inner quality. She depicts the image of woman as heroic, who fights for justice and woman consists moral quality to demonstrate the wrong practices in the society.

### **2.1. A Study on *Laltheri zai*:**

*Laltheri zai* is composed by Laltheri, daughter of chief Lalsavunga. Being the family of the chief, she is bounded by social norms and rules regarding her choice of love affairs. According to K. Zawla, she is fierce and brave, having a strong personality and she lived by her free will. She fell in love with a handsome young man Chalthanga, who is among the commoner. In the traditional times, having an affair

with the commoner is considered a severe offense, which sometimes could lead to penalty of death. The traditional social rules described by James Dokhuma states,

‘Michhia’ an tih, hnamchawm tlangvalin lal fanu lo ngai ta se, lal fanu chuan a ngaihawn ve reng avanga lo intheihtir pawh ni se, lalpa chuan a fanu tibawrhbangtu chu a duh phawt chuan a that thianga, tuman an sawisel thei lo. Chutia lal nula ngaitu an thah tak- ah si chuan a tlangval chhungte pawh chu lal khuaaawm reng a lo nuam tawh lovin an pem chhuah phah ve hial thin a ni. (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, 128)

As termed as the poor, if a commoner copulate with the chief's daughter, even if they have sexual intercourse by their own choices, the chief can kill the person seducing his daughter, no one can argue. As the person copulating the chief's daughter is killed, it is not enthusiastic to stay at the village and they often shift to other villages.

Laltheri breaks the barrier by choosing a commoner as her lover.

The character of Laltheri can be understood from one of her song, which define her as a free- soul, a person who is not controlled by others opinion.

Anrawn hung e, chawltui ningzu a laiah,

Chhuihthang, ka di, zate'n dawn dun i. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 241)

They arrange the rice beer at the centre,

Let us drink, Chalthang my love.

Laltheri used to invite Chalthanga at her house and accompanied him with rice beer. Both lovers do not have the time together as their courtship is not accepted by the society. Laltheri does not mind the opinions of the society or relatives. She fell in love deeply with Chalthanga, which let her ignore the social norms.



The affairs between Laltheri and Chalthanga soon spread among the villagers. As Laltheri is the centre of society's attention, the social norms and customs do not permitted such behavior. Being the daughter of the chief, she has to maintain distance between the commoner and the chief clan. When fail to do so, an order for the penalty to murder Chalthanga is arranged by the chief. The assignment was carried out by some trustworthy man of the village, selected by the chief.

When Laltheri heard the death of Chalthanga, she understands the condition of her death at once. She enunciated the situation in a song,

Bawmzo ral mah dar ang chhai ngam lo,

Belzu kungah ka di Chalthang, chawngsai ang sat e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*,  
241)

(You never had the courage to fight the enemy, but yet you stupefy my  
lover Chalthanga, make him drunk and you killed him)

She is filled with anger, hatred and sorrow. This verse contains the reality of how Chalthanga is killed by some man who does not have the courage to fight the enemy. She despised the killer and regarded him as coward and unheroic person.

The dead of Chalthanga arouse the stubborn and rebellious personality of Laltheri. In mourning for Chalthanga, she tore her cloth, and walks naked around the village. She does not eat proper meals, and rebel against the socially constructed norms and regulations. As evident in her songs, her mother tries to feed her; she replies with a song,

Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam loving ka nu,

Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 241)

I will not die of hunger, mother

For my beloved lies deep down the earth.

And when her mother forces her to wear clothes, she again replies with songs.

Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu,

Ka di thangdanga zalna mah, chhimhlei tualdaiah. (241)

A Sailo princess may die out of loneliness,

But never will I die without food, mother. (LTL translation)

Laltheri's mental suffering can be seen in these songs, but she does not withhold her pain. She is not afraid to take the pain and show it to the villagers and her family too. She fights against the class distinction, against the social norms that is prevalent during her times. The rebellious actions of Laltheri, her pain and grieve wins the heart of her father and family. They allow her to live by her will, and her choices are given importance.

As written by K. Zawla in *Pi Pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin*,

Tin, Thlangtlak hnuin an khaw pathlawi pakhat Dingmanga nen an lo inngai leh ta a, Chalthanga chungchang avang khan Laltheri chungte chu an sim ta a, engtin mah an hal duh lo, a duh phawt chuan nei mai se an hnial lo theuh va. Heta tang hian Sailo nula ngai an thah thin kha an ti ngai tawh lo va, Lal nula ngai thah hi anmahni thuin lalin a titawp ta a ni. (330)

And then, after they move towards the west, she again copulate with a widower of the village Dingmanga, her family ended the assault due to the

matter about Chalthanga, they no longer oppose, they wanted him to marry if she wishes to, no one argue. From that instant, to murder a person who slept with the chief's daughter has ended, the chief ended the murder at his will.

Changes or reformation occur when someone rebel against the rules or administration. Sometimes, it takes revolution for changes to take place. The actions of Laltheri brought about changes to the society of the Mizo, on the matter of love affairs between the *Sailo* woman and a commoner.

Dingmanga and Laltheri married and attain the chieftainship at Darlawng village. They are a good ruler, and their village is claimed to be peaceful as seen in *Laltheri zai*.

Siallamthangpa, sakawl lungliana,

Chengrang kau lo Lalchawngpuii, kei ka thlang zawk e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 242)

(A well-known man from Siallam, who claimed himself as stubborn and strong choose to move to Lalchawngpuii's village for she does not support war)

The man in this verse prefers the good administration of Laltheri. She support peaceful environment of her people and protect her villagers well. She is claimed to be good at ruling than some men rulers (K. Zawla, 330).

Through the reformation brought by the rebellion of Laltheri, the customary law is revised to narrow the distinction between the elite and the commoner. Laltheri has the courage to stand against the society, her strength and stubbornness reveals the power she has. Taking Laltheri as a representing woman, the former image of woman

as weaker and inferior to man is eliminated. The portrayal of inferiority in terms of sex is confiscated, and that Mizo woman does not always hold the lower status. If one possess the ability to rebel and fight against it, there are possibilities in Mizo society which is evident from *Laltheri zai*.

### **3.1. A Study on *Saikuti zai*:**

Saikuti is considered as born- poet as she composed from her childhood period. She lived in Thingsai village which is found in many of her songs. From a simple to complicated experiences, she put in the form of songs. She was born in 1930 and died at 1921 which denotes that the socio- cultural images seen in this song are between the years of 1930- 1921. Saikuti zai defined the background and status of Mizo women, the rights and freedom given to them are presented.

The traditional Mizo society given much importance to composing songs, and that songs evolve from their daily experiences. Mizo folk songs are mainly composed to produce their feelings, without the motif to make it beautiful or philosophical. As said by Kishore Jadav, “Here, the music is born out of free vein of human sensibilities unlike its modern trend based on conscious systematization and codification with a view to reaching an impersonal transcendental world of aesthetics ”(*Folklore and Its Motifs*, 67). Mizo folk songs often display the folk life and the direction of the people’s mind can be seen generally.

*Saikuti zai* vary in terms of concept, and no specific themes can be point out. As she composed from different occasions, she has put the social life of that particular time on the platform. One of her song,

In zuah sual e, chhuahtlang thing lenbuang,

Par a chhuang e, Mizo lu ngenin. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 244)

You wrongly spare the tree at the village entrance,

It has bloom demanding the Mizo head.

Saikuti confront the situation where their village does not kill enemies for a long period of time. During this time, the glory of the village lies at conquering the enemy. Those who kill and bring home a number of enemies head define power and strength in those years. In these lines, Saikuti point out the weakness of the village as well as the chief.

In the traditional period, a tree is spared at the entrance of the village for hanging heads of the enemy that are killed. It was the traditional practice that denotes the pride of being a heroic fighter. As failed to do so, the irony of Saikuti's song cause serious effect to the chief's emotion. She has struck the chief's feeling by revealing the weakness of the village particularly the chief and male members. The chief of Thingsai village was angry toward Saikuti, and she mended the angriness by composing a song. "Sai khaw tlangah lal lai a zing dawn e" (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 244) / "The chieftainship of Thingsai is getting mightier" which cleanse the angriness of the chief.

In such a way, Saikuti able to speak the truth with no regards of the elite people. And she has the ability to cure the mental pain she has caused. In another song,

Rum vung vungin sakawlin dai a vel,  
 Tho rawh u le, hran tum val zawng chu. (*Mizo hla Hlui*, 248)  
 A tiger ventures around the outskirts of the village,  
 Rise up young man, if you ready to fight.

In the earlier period, a tiger is a dangerous animal that cause death to the people. Sometimes, it catches the domesticated animals and takes it to the forest. It is common practice to seize back the animal being caught. In this moment, there are no people to attack the tiger and Saikuti took responsibilities giving strength to men. The tiger is scary and it frightens all men at the village, but Saikuti encourage them to drive the beast away.

Saikuti is much aware of the frightening men at this time. Mizo men are expected to be brave as they are the protector of the village. Saikuti is not afraid to point out the weakness, but in doing so, she never hurt their pride. She encourages and praise them, giving confidence and cheer them to do better. She transformed her skill as a song composer to a helpful adviser through her songs.

As a woman, she has been pushed by her parents to marry which she does not support. She has a quick reply in a song,

Min tir lo la siali, thlang khuandimin,

Fapa lenbuang awih nan khua a tlai ngai lo ve. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 246)

Do not force me to marry,

It is never too late to bear son.

As she does not accept the marriage proposal, she described her excuses in this line. As the general Mizo youth married at an early age, she refused to follow the practice of common people. She loves the feeling of unmarried woman; she does not care to marry late. However, it looks as if the problem of her parent is reproduction; she replied directly with her own ideas of marriage. She is brave speaking her ideas, which displayed that she has a straight- forward character, standing up for what she held right.

The voice of Saikuti reflects the society during this period. The Mizo people are known to practice courting, which gives the idea that they chose their partner. It is true at some points, but it is not universal in some case. It is often the parents who decide the partner of their life. Saikuti rejects to follow the order of her parents, which she announced it through these lines. The social expectation as woman to be obedient and weak in making her own decision is broken by Saikuti. Despite the fact that Mizo woman have no voice in the society is swept out by her story.

Courting is basically regarded as custom in Mizo society. Every unmarried woman is expected to have male suitors at night. It is supposed to be cheerful and at the same time, enjoyable. Having a large number of male suitors denotes that she was

a good woman, wise and friendly. It is a quality woman held as high standard. As written by Chatterji in *The Earlier Mizo Society*, “It was during such evening pursuits that the Mizo boys and girls would try to size up each other to examine whether they could, in the long run, develop such intimacy into matrimonial relationship” (3). It is possible for all men to go and accompany woman at night.

One of Saikuti’s male suitor spread rumors about getting intimacy with Saikuti. It is a worse case, shaking the reputation of woman. In her songs, it is written,

Saikhaw tlangah chunnu’n mi chawi laiin,

Mi zawl awm lo, kan run a ra ng an kai tam na a. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 251)

At times mother took care of me at Thingsai village,

There are many male suitors but no relationship with none.

The rumors being untrue, Saikuti and his mother went to the chief and start petition. It is a courageous action for woman to bring up petitions during those days. For the rumors already destroy her reputation as a woman. But Saikuti fight against the wrong doer, protecting the name of woman as a whole. She acts as a teacher for the wrong person, and for woman to have courage to stand for their rights. Her womanhood does not hold her back as she has the power to protect her rights and honor.

In another verse, she mocked at the man saying,

En teh ka nu hrumsawm val uanga kha,

A ngur run rem dawhtling laichhuatah val a khur e. (*Mizo Pi Pute leh*

*An Thlahte Chanchin*, 366)



Mother look at the boasted man,

He stands trembling at the chief's floor.

Darpawngi talk back when the rumor was proven to be false. The man spreading the rumors was trembling when he saw Saikuti and her mother at the chief's place where the local court is being held. Then she narrated her feelings directly at the moment, causing shame for her opponent. This situation led the truth triumphs, and she reveal that woman has to stand strong and fight to protect their dignity as a woman. Saikuti defend the status of woman which is found weak in that time.

From *Saikuti zai*, it is visible that woman fights for their rights and reputation. As a talented song composer, the evidence lies in her songs. She is capable of pointing out the faults in the administration or personal problems. It can be seen from her songs that woman had the right to speak out her feelings or decision. She has the freedom to express her thought, personal experiences, emotions or faults without having bias feelings. As Laltluangliana in *Mizos of North East India* states, "...Saikuti runs the village governance with her song and everyone appreciated her talents" (74). She has the ability to cheer and encourages her fellow villagers; make them become a better person by enchanting her songs. The moral standard of Thingsai village has been changed by Saikuti, her songs embrace good deeds and she can be considered as playing an important part in political administration of the village.

#### 4.1. A Study on Lalsangzuali Sailo's *Tlawm ve lo Lalnu Ropuiliani* :

Ropuiliani is among the few female rulers in the history of Mizoram. She is famous as a wise and patriotic chief, who sacrifice herself in protecting her land. Lalsangzuali Sailo has documented the story of Ropuiliani in her song *Tlawm ve lo Lalnu ropuiliani* which was composed in the year 1999.

The Mizo people hardly had women ruler in the traditional times, untill the chieftainship was abolished. As seen in *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, Kipgen states,

As expected, under the leadership of the Mizo Union party the District Council proceeded to take measures to dismantle the entire edifice of the ancient political institution of chieftainship. At its meeting of 25 November 1952 the Mizo Union unanimously resolved to abolish the chieftainship. Following this up, the District Council prepared bill to implement this decision without compensation to the chiefs. (174)

The abolition of chieftainship was passed as the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act, 1954 which ended the power of the chief and the people started the new era of government by the people.

In the earlier times, the position of the chief is hardly acquired by female as the social system of administration lies at the hands of man. But there are exceptions like death of a chief passed on the chieftainship to his sons, but if not so, his wife was to be the chief. The son of the chief often inherited the chief's position, but Ropuiliani is among the rare female ruler in the Mizo society.

Lalsangzuali's *Tlawm ve lo Lalnu Ropuiliani* tells the life of Ropuiliani. In the first stanza, it is found that Ropuiliani married Vandula who hold the chieftainship in the south region of Mizoram. "Chhimtiang Rengpui chhuihthang Vanpuilal nuthaia'n" (*Lalsangzuali Sailo Hlate*, 63) / "As a wife of the South chief Vandula" which inform the marriage of both chief's clan. The descendants of *Sailo* clan inherit the ruling class and it is tradition to marry among the chief's clan. Ropuiliani comes from the chief family, which denotes that she possessed wisdom and inherit the rulers blood.

The chieftainship of Ropuiliani starts from the death of her husband, which she was claimed to be a great ruler. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Lushai Hills now Mizoram incorporated the colonial empire. The emergence of colonialism is against the Mizo people, as each ruling chief were autonomous in their own area. The British colonialism narrowed their power and the chief has to follow the rules implied upon them. Some chief obey the order without hesitation, but some chief oppose to the largest extent. Vandula is among the few chiefs who opposed the colonial rule. After his death, his wife Ropuiliani continued to fight against the British rule.

In the song *Tlawm ve lo Lalnu Ropuiliani*, it is written

Ngur zawng saiin Vailian tawna'n ding zo awm lo,

An hran a na, tlang tin khua tin tui ang nem zo;

An hril Laldang Lungliani zawng a nem ngai lo,

Hrenthir an ban ta maw lungduh hnutiang chhawnin. (*Lalsangzuali Sailo Hlate*, 63)

(The British army gunfire the locale of the chief's where no chief could stand against it, they rule furiously that all the villages subjugated before them; the adamant lady chief never gave in, they tie her and arrest her away from her villagers.)

Chief Ropuiliani disobeyed the rules of the British colony, protecting her village from colonialism. In doing so, she refused to offer fees and kulis demanded. She ignored all the official request and demands to show that she was against the British rule.

As it is evident in this song, Ropuiliani got arrested by the British. She is a stubborn and strong woman; she has the mental strength to stand for her people.

A tlawm ve lo ROPUILIANI sappui tawnah,

A zam ngai lo pheisen dar feng doral hmaah;

Thlangkawrvaiyah anpai Jail Run nghaka fam hnu,(63)

(Ropuiliani never submit to the British, She never gives in before the army; She died at the foreigner's jail.)

Ropuiliani was arrested and kept her at the Rangamati jail. While they kept her at Lunglei, she was choices to submit to the British government. She rejects the proposal and chose to die at jail rather than to desert the land. She acts as she thought the best to support her land; she is termed as a patriot.

During her days at the Rangamati jail, there were relatives who visit her but she gave no interest to them. As written by Lalawmpuia, “Chittagong jaila a tan hnuin amahrawn tlawhtute zinga mi Lalluava a pasal Vandula unau tel ve chu hmusit leh ngainep takin a lo be sawm a. Mingo puitu leh ‘hnam’ phasantua a ngaih vang a ni,” (Zolife, 45)/ “When she was a prisoner at Chittagong jail, Lalluava the brother of her husband Vandula, who was among the Lusei clan visited but she talk in a despise way because she think that he collaborate with the white people. She considered him as betrayal of the land”. Ropuiliani shows much affection and love to her territory, she never looked at the British as the upper hand.

Ropuiliani fight against the British government for protecting the territory. She shows the British that they will not be defeated easily, and that she sacrificed herself to support the land. She is known as a fighter against colonialism and from her life, it can be seen that the concept of patriotism lies within her deeds.

Ropuiliani as portrayed by Lalsangzuali Sailo, it can be understood that she is powerful and strong. Her stubborn personality creates a great ruler in the Mizo society. Ropuiliani removed the conception of female as an inferior member of the society. She shows that woman has the wisdom to administer in the political sphere. She is honored and earned reputation as a patriot.

The traditional ideas and notions concerning the status of Mizo woman as a dominant class can be considered as false perception. Laltluangliana Khiangte wrote in his song,

Tlawm mai lovin,

I do ang aw- sual tinreng hi,

Kan hnam dan sual paiha hma lam pan chung zelin,

Ropuiliani, Darpawngi, Laltheri iangin,

Sual do ang aw, Ram leh hnam tana tang zelin. (*Rochuam*, 62)

Let us not deprive,

But stand against wrong deeds,

Removing the wrong customs let us proceed,

As like as Ropuiliani, Darpawngi and Laltheri,

Let us oppose wrong deeds, fighting for the land and the people.

This song defines the position of these three poetesses, Ropuiliani, Darpawngi and Laltheri. Laltluangliana portray these women as an opposer of wrong practices in the society. Ropuiliani fights for the protection of her territory against the British colonial government. Darpawngi fights for justice and express the bias judgement of the chief. Laltheri rebel against the social rules of marriage, and brought changes to the rules of killing the commoner who has intimate relations with the chief daughter.

This view on woman as a social reformer can be regarded as the modern concept of woman. He gives credit to the poetesses, who are capable of constructing the social norms in their period. The woman reflected by Laltluangliana voices the

social ill treatment, between the elites and a commoner. But no such domination as gender based, is not found in their songs.

**Glossary:**

Hnamchawm: the common people

Sailo: the name of the clan of Lushai chief.

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## **CHAPTER- 3**

### **Mizo Women as an Essential Domestic Role Player**

### 1.1. Introduction:

The most noticing role of women in Mizo society can be considered as her domestic role. Family is regarded as women domain where every tiny detail went through the mother. Inside the family, the mother had full authority to administer her own family. Mizo women rarely left their houses except in case of work. They work for the benefit of home as well as the development of household materials depend upon women. All the necessities related to domestic activities belonged to women and men do not interfere in those activities.

Mizo society offers an important role for women in their today life. All the domestic necessities are assigned to women and it can be regarded as the role which men lay their full trusts upon women. Women are very busy every day, having no leisure time to relax and rests their feet. Day time and night, there are loads of work engaged to the hands of women only. Men have free time at home, and helping women at home is regarded as *thaibawi*. Men stood at higher place and doing the household activity is not regarded as men work. In a family, men try to be the wisest, the most powerful and he try to keep his wife under himself. He does not want to follow the suggestion of his wife because he fears to be unrespectable.

Mizo society identifies masculine supremacy as traditional bound as there are important issues related to male power. The traditional villages require men to look after the security and safekeeping of the people. In times of war and when tiger venture near the village, it is the duty of men to defend and protect the people. The

physical strength and bravery had given men the power to achieve a higher position in the society. This may result in the state to locate the domestic work as the work of less admirable group.

It can also be understood that there is division of labour between men and women. The roles and duties assigned to them are different. Women took full responsibility to do the household chores, prepare cloth and blanket, prepared meal and dinner at home, etc. But men took responsibility outside the realm of home. At forest or fields, man is responsible for all necessary chores like preparing meals, fetching water and so on. All the hard work women cannot partake, lie at the hands of men. Dr. Laltluangliana Khiangte describe the situation as,

The fact is that there was 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 with solve almost all duties, whereas men could 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 foes etc.  
(*Mizos of North East India*, 81)

Considering the clear cut division of labour, men and women perform their duties accordingly. Both party failing to perform their own duties resulted in disgrace of the family. For example, if the family members do not have good clothes to wear, it is ignoble for women. Likewise, if the tool of one family is blunt and hard to use, men are responsible for that. As adopted in the Mizo sayings, "Men are given priority at the water point, and women at a village smithy hut" (LTL Translations) meaning men never fetch water from the water point unless there are no women in their family or

sick to do so; so if men try and fetch water, he was given priority and make him return as soon as possible. And when woman is seen at the smith hut, men will forge the tools for her first instead of their tools. It generally means that fetching water is the duty of women and forging tools is the responsibility of men.

Mizo women are truly hard-working being even though their condition requires. There are certain social expectations regarding the diligence of a woman. Mizo woman is expected to be diligent; a lazy woman is despised and unwanted to tie the knot with. The honor and reputation of a women lies at her performance, her hard work and diligence. Women do not free their hands for some ordinary sickness, pregnancy, dizziness or tiredness. It has been claimed that even after the next day of giving birth, women continue to perform her domestic roles. In *Lushai Chrysalis*, McCall tell the story of one women,

There was not so long ago a case, where a mother was about to deliver her child, though she was alone in the house. She had sent word to some friends, but they delayed coming till they had finished the evening meal, which they were taking. By the time they appeared the child had been born, and they arrived in time to take charge of it, the mother being at her ordinary work the next day. (176)

A healthy mother continued her daily work after deliveries without hesitation. In those times, special care and medication are not available. And the mother is expected to line up at work right away. As a diligent woman is admired, all women try to become that admirable person rejecting their personal problems and difficulties. Apart from social expectations, women are afraid to be called lazy which is a notorious

name, a shameful quality for a woman. This idea held the mind of women; resulting a diligent and dependable Mizo women.

Away from the traditional busy and hard working women, Mizo women of this era still continue the domestic hard work. The liberation of women has helped women to enjoy more leisure time as compared to that of the traditional times. It has been due to the work of the missionaries, and education to Mizo people has paved a new way for the society. Even though the roles and duties are rigid, men become caring and understanding and so the expectations of the society decrease. Modernization and industrialization happens to be a glorious change as it transforms the life of women.

Modernization has really changed the inward and outward mode of living. Even though, there are changes affecting to all of the people; the changes it brought to the life of women is remarkable. All the heavy domestic work such as pounding unhusked rice in a mortar every morning is not necessary due to the emergence of modern machines. Fetching water in the village water point is no longer needed, the making of cotton cloth at the autumn season is not required, and to collect fire woods as much as possible is not essential anymore. Women no longer need to rise early in the morning at dawn, she can sleep comfortably without the urge of domestic work.

The emergence of modern machine and technology has served as the saver of women's time. But the duties and roles assign to male and female members is still the same. Domestic work is considered to be at the hands of women but there are some exceptions. Unlike the traditional period, the modern men do not unnecessarily

concentrate on power and authority. The modern men do not hesitate to help his wife doing household activities, cooking meals and so on. The definition of *thaibawi* is being extended, for men knew the busy routine of womenfolk. There was tender and care for women; but in general, a larger number of men do not involve in domestic work.

A modern woman is still busy inside her home. All the housekeeping process is assign to her. The looking after of children is totally assigned to mother. All the children went to school and her time is as busy as the traditional times. Rokunga pictured the mother in his song *Chunnemi* as,

Chhungtin run in lumtu chu chunnemi,

A tel lo chuan chhung tin rel a kim si lo;

Rinpui ber tangkai ber chu chunnemi

A tel lo chuan chhung tin rel a kim thei lo. (*Rokunga Hlate*, 64)

The maker of every family a home is the mother,

Our home administration is not whole without her;

Mother is most dependable and helpful,

Our home administration never gets perfect without her.

He later reflect the image of mother as, “A mi hluanin awl ni reng a nei si lo” (*Rokunga Hlate*, 64)/ “Of all the people her hands are never free”. This song portray the real life images of women with all her dependability, her perfect services for the

family regenerate the traditional hardworking women as the foundations of a great family.

Based on ages, the functions of women can be elucidated. Taking women as a domestic role player, there are differences formulate by age group. For example, a girl helps her mother in fetching water; an adult female can weave cloth or collect fire woods. If she had two or three daughters, then she can have more free time than mothers who does not have one. But all women perform their duties accordingly, age based division of work build a dependable, hard working and diligent Mizo women.

### **2.1. Roles and duties of a girl:**

Mizo women have roles implied upon them which are based on age. A girl in a family might not play a hard working activity but there are possibilities that a girl in a family are not wondering around. Children play an important part in the society; the role of male and female children is also divided. From the basic teachings of the family, the function of men and women is distinguished. Boys are not supposed to do the household chores, but collecting small fire woods for the use of *Zawlbuk* is a must. Every boy child must carry out their duties and those who failed to do are punishable. It is the moral conduct of the society and it is the custom practice. The boys have a little responsibility in comparison with girls.

A girl at an early age learns to do the domestic work by helping the mother. Mizo family is nuclear family where the mother does not receive help from other

relatives. All the domestic work is her responsibility and a girl is always helpful for the mother. A girl helps her mother by fetching water; follow her mother collecting fire woods, looking after her younger brothers or sisters, doing every work she could possibly handle at an early age. A girl following the mother's footsteps makes the home a proper training to become a good woman. Dr N. Chatterji described the helpful female child in a family and the credits she received in the following way,

As the female child grew in years she was meticulously initiated into adult responsibilities of keeping the home. Unlike the male child who, by custom and convention, had to move very early in his life to the 'zawlbuk' discipline, the female child continued to exist in the family constellation. This, by itself, provided a greater psychological reinforcement to the parents in favour of the female child. Besides, her greater closeness to them as also the availability of her help more abundantly and continuously went a long way to establish for herself a secure position in the society's structure. (*The Earlier Mizo Society*, 2)

A girl with her close attachment to home creates an environment pleasurable for her living. Being a helpful daughter, she has learned to deal with her own duties.

Men and women work every day at the fields and small children are usually minded by the grandparents or older children. Grandparents are not always present in every single family because married couples start a separate family on their own. In such condition, girls play an important part taking care of the younger ones. There is an old song *Losul Hmuah Hla* which is used to sing by children when they wait for their parents to come home from work.

Ka nu, ka pa,

Lo haw thuai thuai ang che,



Tlangah ruahpui a sur e,  
 Sakhi lam pengrawn zawh la,  
 Lo zangphar der de rang che.  
 Chhingi a tap e, Rolenga a tap e,  
 Ka mumang mang chu ni sela,  
 Ka zuk au na ral ral tur a. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 22)  
 Mother, Father,  
 Come home soon,  
 It is raining heavily,  
 Walk along the branch of a deer path,  
 Stretch out your arms to the fullest.  
 If it was my dreams,  
 I will call out for you.

This song portrayed children waiting eagerly for their parents in the evening. Their parents are not home yet, so they sing this song to wait for them. Usually a girl took responsibility taking care of children if not grandparents.

A girl before reaching the age to work regularly, she stays home playing with friends apart from doing the household chores. There are a lot of games children played; some of them are a training to learn the basic way of life. A girl learns to weave cloth at an early age. They prepare the tools and properties of weaving much smaller than the real ones. She learns to weave cloth and embellish with different

colours and to add a beautiful feature to the cloth. ‘Mizo puan’ is hard to weave and it requires a highly skills for creating it. A girl from young age learns to weave so that she can become a good woman.

One of the joyful games of children is called *inbailemchhuan*. It is a part of those games they are playing to learn how to cook and compose *bai*, one of the favourite dishes of the Mizo. They contribute vegetables and cook their own lunch. It can be regarded as a preparation of meals for their future. Likewise, girls learned sifting rice in their play. Saikuti illustrates her sifting rice in a song, “Zawlbuk hnuaiah buh lem ka thap chiam a” (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 243)/ “I play sifting fake rice hardly under Zawlbuk”. There are less folk song describing children and their lives. A girl child in a family learns the necessities for her upbringing in her home and her everyday life.

The passing years has a tremendous change to the lifestyle of the Mizo people. Children before the age of fourteen must go to school every day, this create less time and space for children to enjoy the life of a young innocent child. Children need to concentrate on their study which is the most important duties for them. But the condition of women does not change instantly; helping the mother at home as much as they could and taking care of themselves is their roles and duties in a modern family too.

### 3.1. Roles and duties of young women:

When a girl turns to be an adult woman, she functions completely useful for the domestic roles. She can take care of most of the mother responsibilities at home. In the traditional times, women are hard working throughout the year. Men used the free time of autumn to go for hunting, while women took advantage to weave the blanket. Women before marriage took responsibilities hardly as it is a measurement of good women. She tries to be polite, kind and good looking, hard-working and skilled in weaving. A woman in Mizo society married at an early age, so she spends not much time in the family. But their stay in the family is much worthy for her mother. The role of a married woman can be considered as more visible in the context of Mizo society.

Mizo women wake up early in the morning and her first move is to fetch water. The Mizo does not own utensil to store pounded rice or water. They make anew daily according to their needs. Fetching water is needed every morning; pounding unhusked rice is also a lot of work women dealt with in the morning. They have to cook meal and packing lunch for work is at their hands. At day time, they work in the field and when they come home, making dinner and looking after the domestic animals are their duties again.

The night time is a time to accompany with suitors. Women having suitors at night is a custom practice and women with large number of suitors are regard as a good woman. Lalhmuaka argues that, "Silhfen puahchaha la kai hna thawh paha,

zana tlangval lo leng lo kawm hi an hna thlakhlehawm tak a lo ni ta thin a ni” (*Zoram Thim Ata Engah*, 26). / “Accompanying their male suitors along with preparing cloth and weaving is their cherished work at night”. Women do not stay empty handed, but find themselves some work to do even at night time. They are expected to be happy and open- minded, showing favour to some particular men is not a smart move. Women are not supposed to look tired or sleepy until all the suitors get home. After that, she could sleep soundly and the next day will be another hard working hours.

Women participation as a domestic role player is never considered as real work. It is taken as women roles and duties, sticking to women’s everyday life. A part from what mentioned above, collecting fire woods is a necessary thing regarded as a domestic work. In the dry season, women would start cutting fire woods and store them for used in the rainy season. Women mostly collect it from their field and carry it home after work. If not, they went to the forest with a group of friends and collect a branch of trees. Collecting fire woods is considered as a joyful moment; sometimes, they paired with their partner and have it as the time to have affairs alone. *Rualchhingyungi zai* enunciate the moment in a song,

Kawlhrei bata tuahting kan phurhna,

Tlangnuam a chul lo vang khuareiah;

Siang kan lawi leh relthang kan hawn e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 311)

The place we collect fire woods with axe on our shoulder,

The pleasant hill will not fade through years;

As we enter the house of neighbors we brought home defamation.

These lines suggest the situation of two young lovers collecting fire woods. But there must be some who knew the happening that there are some rumours about it. Most youth enjoyed collecting fire woods even though it requires hard work.

Another prominent work of women is to make cloth for all the family members. It is a tough work because all the processes are carried out by themselves. There are no machines in earlier period, so it is hand woven by them. Women grow cotton at the work field, from there using local made tools to complete the cloth processing; women create a beautiful cloth with different colours. The process is complicated so a great skill is required to weave a handsome cloth. Women used all of their free time trying to produce enough quantity of cloth for all the family members.

The making of blanket is one hard labor for women. Traditional Mizo family is not wealthy, and the houses are made of wood and bamboos. Winter is difficult to face without good bed clothes and blankets. Autumn season where most agricultural work is finished, the making of blanket is usually started. Mostly women ask their friends or relative to help finished it. Women bring blankets when they marry, and so blanket is essential items for women who are supposed to marry. Having a good blanket for all the family is hard work, but it is the excellence of a women.

Even when women participate in the communal services, their duty is mostly the same as domestic work. Women are not expected to involve in serious and

important issue, their duty does not reach beyond the domestic activities. Lalhmuaka states the duty of women in communal services as, "...chhiat nia thingkhawn te, tuichawi te, lungdawh nia tuichawi te, se chhun- khuangchawi dawna zu bilh tur buh den te, chai nia tel ve te, etc..." (*Zoram Thim Ata Engah*, 25)/ "...to collect fire woods in case of death, fetching water, to fetch water when constructing memorial platform, to pound rice for use of brewing liquor in times of *sechhun- khuangchawi*, to join in festivals and *chai...* ". Women are considered domestic workers and communal services also offered the same exact duties to them.

Education has contributed so much for women liberation. Modern woman has different set of goals rather than to be skilled and a good domestic worker. Women have taken up the educational line, trying to be capable of holding government jobs. Even though looking after the household material lies at her hand, modern technology has seized most of the hard work. The duty of a woman does not change in modern world, but the feature of a good woman changes. Modern women are busy earning money because all the necessities in life are not made but bought. Modern women no longer weave clothes but readymade clothes are available for buying. Modern technology has lessened the duties of domestic activity. So, women take steps to have permanent jobs like the government jobs, tailoring work and doing business. In the urban area, women outnumber men in the market place. Women are up to earning their livelihood where the economic status of family is at the hands of both men and women.

Even though modern technology has made it easier to handle the domestic work, women do not have much of free time. As the mode of living under goes changes and improvement in household manner, woman has had a lot to do maintaining a clean and hygienic house and surroundings. An unmarried woman has usually taken the role of cleaning the residence, and the mother is supposed to be free from such duty. Doing the laundry, sweeping and cleaning the floors everyday is also a lot of work for most of all women or daughters for most of them pursued higher studies in day time. It can be regarded as the role of women as a domestic role player is not changing from the traditional to modern period.

#### **4.1. Roles and duties of the mother:**

Mizo women as a mother of one's family hold an important status in the family as well as the society. The domestic role is probably on her hands and passed on to her children. Based on age, a married women duty is different. A newly bride or daughter- in- law is known to be the most hard- working female in a lifetime. The condition of a woman who has in- laws are supposedly guessed to be difficult or troublesome. The name holder of *Darlenglehi zai*, Dartinthangi is said to divorce her husband for being a diffident daughter- in- law. R. L.Thanmawia writes, "Pasal a nei ve a, mahse a zahzum em avangin chaw pawh a ei tha ngam thin lo va, chutih nak alaiin nau a chhiat leh ta bawk si a, rei pawh innei lovin an inthen leh ta a ..." (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 273). / "She married, but she does not have the courage to eat proper meals

for being diffident, being in that situation she miscarry her first child, they get divorced in a short period of time... ”. It is often a hard time for a new family member to act courageously for it feels another home at the very beginning.

Mizo society viewed a new bride to be a working machine, and her energy is used to make the most profit out of it. Such idea forced a newly married woman to try to free her mother- in- laws in all the household chores. If she can make her mother rests at domestic duty, she is taken as a good bride. She has to work hard at home, trying to please members of the family even though it is her duty. This period can be regarded as the most intricate moment of all women.

Mother can be regarded as the most valuable person within a single family. She take care all the necessities of living for all the family members. She provided foods, cook them and feed the whole family. She teaches her young daughter to become helpful and useful doing the domestic chores. Mother took responsibilities in aiding, serving and securing the position of a family. Her daughters take a part of mother’s responsibilities, helping her out of her busy task. The role of Mizo women has been discussed earlier in this chapter, and it can be understand that the foundation of a helpful girl and daughter is the mother.

A diligent woman has done a great service for the entire family. Her domestic roles are nevertheless unchanging. The traditional women’s roles are described by Dr. H. L. Malsawma as,

The daily life cycle of a Mizo woman was full of tribulation and drudgery. A Mizo woman had to rise early in the morning, fill her



basket with empty bamboo tubes, and trudge off before daylight down to the spring, which is generally someway down the hill and the supply of water is frequently so scanty that it takes her sometime to fill her bamboo tubes. Having conveyed her basketfull to the house, she has to set to work doing different kinds of household chores simultaneously the whole morning. (*Sociology of the Mizos*, 72)

Women had used all of her potential for the wellbeing of her family. There are certain circumstances where men do not interfere in the realm of duties and responsibilities.

Being a domestic worker, looking after children is her responsibility. Children learn the basic of life, manners and duties from the mother. Babies and children are handed completely to the mother; men do not play part in the upbringing of an infant child. Before their children become adult, mother is busy all day long. Besides taking care of the children, she has to perform all the domestic activities from morning to night. All the family necessities like, providing food for the entire family, making clothes and blankets, looking after the domestic animals, providing enough water and carrying fire woods for the entire year, bringing up and taking care of children requires the hand of women.

Mizo women's responsibility as the caretaker of children is a difficult task. She has to combine with laborious work and domestic work and so the upbringing of children creates a lot of sweat. Due to the close connection between mother and children, mother has great relation with all of her children. In most of Mizo folk songs, the poets addresses mother more often than the father. In the case of marriage, the mother have more ability to convinced their sons or daughters. The good

relationship bonding children and mother enable the mother to have influence over controlling children.

It is a blessing for mother to have a daughter who can help her reduce the tough domestic works. For mother who does not give birth to female, her domestic role in the family is the same until her sons married. The daughter-in-law decreased most of her busy cycle. She can have more free time to enjoy her day. When the mother is old and inactive, she no longer engaged in agricultural labour; she plays the role of caring her grand children. All the members of the family at an age to work take on agricultural activities; she has done some jobs fitting his age. She weaved cloth and took care of the various stages of producing cotton yarn.

Regarding the modern women's role as a mother, her role at home does not change from traditional period. She held the identity of an essential domestic role player from traditional times to modern days. As she got married, her life has just begins; and all the hardships and toil are supposed to be in existence. Modern life makes domestic activities easier but in comparison to the old days, things have been complicated so far.

Besides domestic activities, there are a lot of issues to take care. Women are the caretaker of all the important matters within the sphere of family. The mother domesticated the administration of family matters; finance the family income, managed the home decoration and goods, provides sufficient clothes and responsible for laundry duty, preparation and handling good food for the family and cleanliness of

the house and compound are major work. Above all this, mother is a good teacher for the children. A good woman teaches her children the good way of life.

Women are responsible for the happiness and welfare of the family. A good woman brought loyalty and dignity to her children, and create a peaceful environment to the social life of the family. One of Rokunga's song, *Hmeichhe tha chu* portrayed mother as a servant of the family and a teacher to be chaste and decent.

Rinawm takin, rawng min bawl thin,

Hahtlak mah se, phunnawi lovin,

Chhung tan lal maicham rawngbawlin,

Thianghlim, zahawm min zirtir thin. (*Rokunga Hlate*, 69)

You have served us, faithfully,

Do not grumble although it is wearisome,

Serving God for the family,

You taught us chastity and respect.

Giving us the feature of a good and caring mother, we can find from this verse that mother is the foundation of a nice family. On the other hand, bad-tempered or immoral mother can spoil the family's character. She can bring disgrace and heavy environment for all the family members. In *Run Lum Nuthai*, Rokunga describe the effect of a bad mother,

I sualna tuipei fawn velin,

Nun mawi leh tha a chimpil ta.

Kan run in chhung dan mawi leh tha,  
Thiattu mai maw i lo nih le? (*Rokunga Hlate*, 67)  
The waves of your immorality,  
Has sunken the good and beautiful life,  
The ideal code of our home,  
Have you become the one to demolish it?

These lines give us the effect of the bad or impious mother to the family. Mother is the caretaker of family's happiness, and the well-being of every member depends on the mother. Beautiful families need a good woman to control the home environment and create unity; whereas a bad mother can cause trouble to the family.

Mizo women and mother has served her family or society in a respectable manner. Her role as a domestic role player leads to an important status. She meant so much to the family and society, and she holds the key to transform the nation. She starts from a domestic role player in the family, with loads of work all day and night; but such hardships and never ending work is the succession of a great woman.

**Glossary:**

Thaibawi: a man who is under the thumb of a woman.

Zawbuk: the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.

Inbailemchhuan: childrens game to contribute vegetables and cook together for lunch.

Bai: Mizo dish made by boiling water and vegetables with salt, chingal and saum.

Sechhun and Khuangchawi: Feasts given by the chief or well- to- do Lushais.

Chai: the name of a group dance.

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## **CHAPTER- 4**

### **Mizo Women as Co- Bread Winner**

### **1.1. Introduction:**

The concept of earning livelihood in Mizo society is an important aspect for the survival of the tribe. The honor and reputation of family is earned by men in the traditional times but in modern period, the eminence is distinguished by men and women. Women has functional identity regarding the concept of work, their importance are practical and realistic. Although there are division of work between men and women, both parties can be considered having equal occupational characteristics.

The main occupation of the traditional Mizo people was jhum cultivation, and is still practiced nowadays in the rural areas. Mizo society has primal characteristics where there was no contact with the outside culture. All the land was covered by hill region; and plain area are rare. The land is fresh and a small population offered enough land for all the people. The traditional Mizo people are poor, and there are no ideas of becoming rich if one has enough food supply for the next year. Every year, they sow the same seed and their life cycle revolves around the same process.

The advent of the British and Christianity has a great impact on the Mizo people. They have seen another people and culture, meeting more advanced societies. There are a lot of developments happening in a short period of time. Education is one of the largest contributions to change the primitive mode of living. Education makes it possible to enlarge the area of occupation mostly by business and taking the government jobs.



As the mode of living and occupational system changed, women stand upon the pillars of becoming the economic unit within the family. They have maintained their status and upgraded to a more reliable sources which transform the shape of Mizo society. In every community, money or wealth define one's social position. It has become one of the standards of social value from a long time. Women contributed in shaping the social status of a family unlike the primitive era. Women in a situation to work and finance the family's economy has given a new identity in the society.

### **2.1. Mizo Women as agricultural worker:**

Agriculture is the most common occupation adopted by the Mizo people. From the primitive times till today, women and men engaged in jhum cultivation. It was the primary sources to earn their livelihood. It is well- known profession for the people of rural areas to participate manually in agriculture. There are no other means to earn their livelihood, and also it is the only work known during the early period. In *India Hmeichhiate Dinmun*, B. Sangkhumi describe the hard- working female condition,

Mizo hmeichhiate hian in lam leh ram lamah hna an thawk rim hle. Mizo eizawna ber chu lo neih a nih avangin lo lamah mipate ang bawkin lo lam hna zawng zawng a thawh angai a, lo atanga buh leh bal thar zawng zawng chu chhipa phurh hawn a ngai a, thlai thar ngat phei chu chhipa phurh hawn tura ngaih a ni. (216)

Mizo women work very hard at home and at the jhum. As the main occupation of Mizo tribe is jhum cultivation women work as hard as men , all the vegetables produced are suppose to be carried home by women, especially new vegetables are supposed to brought home by female member only.

The occupation of the primitive period consists of the participation of both men and women. Though there are certain activities carried out specifically by men, both parties can be considered as taking equal opportunity at work. Mizo women have maintained the identity of a co- bread winner from time immemorial. Even though they participate as much as men in the family, the main purpose was keenly to help men in the family.

Jhum cultivation offers a lot of hard work during the whole year. The cutting down of forests called 'lovah' and burning them lies particularly at the hands of men. Apart from those item, women work as hard as men in the family. As emphasized by H. L. Malsawma, "Most other tasks such as sowing, weeding and harvesting in the *jhum* fields and also carrying the paddy to the house were done by men and women jointly" (*Sociology of the Mizos*,74 ). Women and men play the same role in earning their livelihood during the earlier times.

Mizo folk songs are made up of writers from different perspective and motif, of various diverse backgrounds. It is simple and straight- forward but defines the life being lived during their times. Some folk songs are personal and subjective; basically women poets describe their emotions more than that of men. It is always helpful to scrutinize the poetess folk songs.

The Mizo people can be described as song lover and producing songs is addictive in the earlier period. A talented song composer or poets are so much adored

and respect in their own way. Songs are composed from their daily today life which made it simple and clear in the subject. Songs are a portrayal of everyday life, society, culture, emotion, experiences and imagination. History is fold between the lines and made way to go back to the past reality.

Mizo women play an important role in shaping the family and society's structure. The individual cycle of women life revolves around loads of work. Their participation in earning foods for the family along with male members is valuable. There are folk songs depicting the modes of work in the Mizo society. The participation of women in Mizo folk song as a composer, a subject or partaking in the events resulted in understanding the social life of the Mizo people.

Mizo folk songs are rich in depicting the everyday life in a form of poetry. There are songs bearing the name of work called *Tuan hla* and *Ramtuan zai*, which revolves around the situation of Mizo youth and work. The composer of these two *zai* is not known, the exact period is also unclear. From the word used and style of verse, it can be said to have born at the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These *zai* generally consists of two or three lines in one stanza and the unique characteristic is that it is completed in one stanza.

*Tuan hla* and *Ramtuan zai* has the same element and characteristics. The main theme is work and its environment, how the communities carry on the basic structure of life. Women play essential role in this song which demonstrates women and their work experience. Mizo women engaged in almost every phase of their surroundings.

Jhum cultivation is the only occupation owned during the early period, men and women practiced ‘inlawm’ where they assist each other at work. One of *Tuan hla* describe this situation precisely,

Biangnote, lawmah ka sawm ang che,

Mahriak chuan phaikhaw ramtuan ka zuam lo;

Chunglum laini reng a rei thin e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 569)

Sweet honey, I will ask for assistance,

I am afraid to work alone;

Long is the warmth of the sun.

The song depicts one man inviting a woman to join at work. This ‘inlawm’ became traditional practice in Mizo society. A number of young men and women assist each other at work; sometimes lovers practice ‘inlawm’. In this system, work became less toil where a number of young people jointly work together. However, this system creates a healthy work environment for Mizo people.

Based on this song, Mizo people carry out work in a collective manner. Men and women took part in earning their livelihood. This ‘inlawm’ system mentioned in this song identify woman as a collaborating partner, a joined participation of both man and woman.

Another song from *Tuan hla* describes the situation of work,

Lungrunpui ngurah i piang si lo,  
 Phaitlang turni sawmfang zing ri riai hnuaiiah;  
 Chhawl ang I uai tur chu hmelthai. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 568)

You haven't born royal darling,  
 Under the sunny field of rice;  
 How you may lose the young beauty face.

This song can be understood to have been composed by male poet and it addressed female or a young woman who is a commoner. Being a commoner, she has to work very hard and beauty does not save her from hard work. The chief's daughter or family does not need to work and they used to be more beautiful and good looking than ordinary girl. The subject of this song has to work in the farming field, and the composer is sympathetic about the subject's situation. From the song, she can be pictured as a beautiful and lovely young woman. Even though she is lovely and good looking, her beauty will vanish due to hard work.

This song portrayed the life of a commoner woman, representing the general Mizo woman. Every woman except the chief's family had to engage in work. A day full of work and activities is exhausting and tiresome; it needs physical strength and a good health. Such busy routine of hard work every day makes woman ugly in their physical appearance. And this song locates the environment of working behaviour in Mizo society.

In *Awithangpa zai*, the glimpse of Mizo women can be seen in his songs,

Lawma hlima riah ram in tuan changah e,  
In lam pualva i lungdi zawng,  
Min ngaiin ka ring lo che. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 385)  
At the moment you work even the night shift,  
Your lover who stay home,  
I have a feeling you do not miss me at all.

This song is the portrayal of Awithangpa and his wife, which could be taken as a love song. Awithangpa's wife, Laltuahpuii is out of the village working in the agricultural fields. The Mizo system of agriculture sometimes involves spending the night at the jhum field where the location is far distance. In such situation, women do not hesitate to free their hands from the work; but took part as an essential member of the family and agricultural worker. Laltuahpuii spend the night working in the jhum fields, which is found in the song.

Another verse from *Lalawithangpa zai* discussed the theme of laborious occupation.

Thal favang tlai ni tla sen siar e,  
Chul thum zozam parin min thuai ta si lo,  
Ka di kha nau ang a nuar ta nge? (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 390)  
The beautiful sun of autumn is setting,  
You do not place zozam from the old field,  
Can it be that you get annoyed like a baby?

The practice of ‘chhawl- thuai’ is popular among the work mates of youngsters. This verse illustrates the social agricultural practices which include the participation of women at work. The young workers placed a branch of leaves or flowers in a particular spot to indicate that he/ she has gone home. It happens between friends or group of friends, and sometimes between lovers. It has reflects the traditional way of communication between friends and lovers. However, the agrarian society involves women in producing the basic necessities of the family.

The participation of woman at agriculture is traditional based, the social performance of Mizo society. It carried out the identity of Mizo women as having the free will to involve and participate in the administration of family’s financial income, and to earn basic necessities of family.

The participation of women in taking the responsibilities of earning livelihood in traditional times has been hold up by women of modern period. Mizo women continue to be the co- bread winner, taking up responsibilities as an agricultural worker. Rokunga’s *Turnipui Kan Do Dai* gives a picture of women working in the jhum cultivation. The lines “Hah chhawl dawi ang min dawm turin, Lengin tui rawn chawi e” (*Rokunga Hlate*, 24) / “To relieve the tiredness and thirst, some woman brings the water” presented the scene of collective work in which woman participated among men at the paddy field. Agriculture has been the local occupation in rural areas even during the modern period.

From the song of Rokunga, there is a disclosure of masculinity among the Mizo work environment. As women are weaker in physical strength, men often led them take up easier tasks or rests sooner. Women used to prepare lunch for all the working members or fetch water from the waterhole and distribute to the male workers. There was a good understanding between male and female at work and the weaker groups were treated kindly. The relationship between male and female members at work disclosed that men do not necessarily use his superiority to control the weaker group. The patriarchal system had given superiority to male but it occurs as men do not exercise his power to control women; rather there were good connection and comprehension between the two sexes.

### **3.1. Women and the modes of earning livelihood in the modern era:**

Every mankind needs to earn the basic necessities of life as an individual or family. The basic necessities include- food, shelter, water and clothing. To accomplish this, an individual has to work or earn money for survival. The modes of earning livelihood vary based on the social background of an individual. In the traditional period, earning livelihood generally implies agriculture. The growth of development in society and economy provides another way of earning livelihood in Mizo society.

As Mizo economy stems from agrarian society, the general rural areas continue the agricultural ways of living. But in urban areas, other modes of



employment took place in the modern period. The growth of globalization and urbanization happens to change the economy of Mizo people. Urbanization helps in growing local market, and creates better profit day by day. Education produced educated woman employed by the government which increase the number of working woman. From the works of Lalfakzuali, some women are becoming the earners in the family. In *Changing Position of Mizo Women*, she writes,

Mizo women played a very active role in the economic life till today. Among the respondents 17.5% married women are found to have earned more than those of their husbands. Besides, 28% families have more female earners than their male counterparts. It is also not uncommon in many of the families where it is the woman who maintains the family's economy even though the husband may also be economically contributing. (15)

The economic contribution made by Mizo women denotes a tremendous change in the economy, as well as the status of woman defined.

The traditional concept of woman as the helper of man's income is accepted as common perception. The agrarian society requires tough work only man could carry on. The system of jhum cultivation like cutting down trees and burning the jhum promotes masculinity and put woman to work under the guidance of man. But modern woman through education, decrease the supremacy in earning their livelihood.

The developments and changes happened in the society rise the importance of money in the market. Urban people devoted themselves in buying goods than handmade. Every goods are bought in modern days, which develop the value of money. The modern people are busy earning money involving the financial

contributions of female members worthy. Therefore, the life of modern- urban areas extended to earn livelihood by making a sum of money as different from the traditional times.

### **3.2. A study on the songs of Lalsangzuali Sailo:**

Lalsangzuali Sailo produced more than three hundred songs which are of having different themes. She can be claimed as the born- poet, collecting inspirations from her daily surroundings. She can make a simple event into songs, and some of her songs contain an important material to connect to the past experiences. She was born in 1949 and passed away at 2006. The songs studied are composed in the middle of her lifetime. The songs portray a modern sense of real life situation, and the themes portraying womanhood are taken for this study.

The modern period has dissimilarity in the mode of earning livelihood as compared to that of the traditional times. A modern woman has the freedom to follow her dream and a lot of woman became the bread- winner of the family. A part from agriculture, modern- urban areas concentrated on employment jobs. Education creates possibilities in self- employed system, proving the quality of women in education.

Education paved a new way in the development of Mizo society and women are a part of it. Lalsangzuali composed the celebration of Zikpuii's holding M. A. degree.

Hlim takin- zaiin hril ila,  
Malsawmna hlu Zikpuii pass kan lawm;  
Thiamna, finna petu Chung Pathian chuan,  
Ropuina zawng chu nei rawh se. (*Lalsangzuali Sailo Hlate*, 291)  
Let us happily spread and sing,  
We celebrate the blessings of Zikpuii's completion;  
The bestower of wisdom and knowledge is God,  
Let him have all the glory.

Chauzikpuii completed M. A. degree in 1980, which was extraordinary among the Mizo people. When Lalsangzuali attended the celebration, she made it to a beautiful song in accordance with the appraisal of the mighty God. Education is precious for it makes a person respectable and functional. Mizo women pursue higher studies making a better conception of womanhood.

Education opens the road of women to secure the government jobs. It builds the personality of woman and changes the mode of living. Women having permanent jobs secure their position in the family, helping men to earn the necessities of family. It is the modern trend to participate among men, competing against each other in searching for job. This changes the traditional model of woman as participating under the guidance of men folk to a supporting model without the help of men.

In *J. L. High School Hla*, Lalsangzuali Sailo denotes the job she has taken.

ZAIIN KA CHAWI- J. L. School Runpui,

Lampuitluang thlang Zawlkhawpui mawitu;  
 A riang naufa, hnam tin suihlung ruala kan lenna,  
 Chhun nitin kan bel e. (*Lalsangzuali Sailo Hlate*, 312)  
 I sang the song of J. L. School,  
 Standing along the west side of Aizawl city;  
 The place kids share laughter together,  
 We went there every day.

Lalsangzuali Sailo works in J. L. School as a teacher, representing the modern woman engaging in a government job. She is an educated person, studying outside Mizoram. She is employed by government and teaches until she retired.

However, life in urban city can be regarded as more advance than that of rural areas. A part from educated woman employed by the government, handloom has been carried on by Mizo woman. The clothing in the primitive period has been ‘siapsuap’ and ‘hnawkhal’ which is made by putting the jute together. As written by Lalsangzuali Sailo in *Zo Handloom Hla*,

HAN DAWN KIRIN pi pu nun hlui kha,  
 An silh an fen *hnawkhal* leh *siapsuap*;  
 Hmatiang sawnin- an ching- an her, an sai  
 Zo- La- kan pi pute’n. (234)  
 Looking back the past life of our ancestors,  
 Their clothe are *hnawkhal* and *siapsuap*;

Developing into planting, gining and scotching,

Zo- cotton- by our ancestors.

The development of clothing method is described in this verse. The Mizo tribe processed all the clothing material, weave them into different styles. From planting the cotton to finish the process of making involves talent, skills and hard work. From the traditional times, Mizo women provide clothes to all the members of the family.

Likewise, the modern women continue to provide clothes especially ‘puan’ which is the traditional dress still worn by women. Mizo *puan* is given values as it defines the Mizo culture and it is inherited from the ancestors. It is used to dresses up properly in formal occasions as marriage ceremonies or Church services. There are few people weaving as employment because skill is needed and general woman bought instead of weaving. This resulted handloom industry as a part of local market, providing job for some women. As written by Lalfakzuali in *Changing the Position of Mizo Women*, “Though the majority women today have little time for weaving work, the skilled labour hand of few people help to produce puans of better quality and design”(17).

In another verse of *Zo- Handloom Hla*,

Uar zel ang Zo- Handloom ze mawi,

Sakhming khuavela kan than vena;

Zofaleng zawng tana rosum tin hnar tha,

Intodelhna bul chu! (234)

Let us carry on Zo- Handloom.

It is a means we achieved fame in the world;

It is a good source of earning money for all Mizo people,

A key to support without help from others.

Lalsangzuali pin point the line of business for Mizo tribe is handloom. The productions have been sold to foreign countries which earn fame in weaving and designing. The production of handloom industry is bought by female members without weaving the needs of the family. The process is no longer the traditional method; the emergence of machine makes it easier and faster to produce cloth. It is known from this verse that handloom industry is carried on by women and it is a good source to earn money in the modern period.

To distinguish the modern women occupation, *Durtlang Nurse Hla* by Biakliana holds information on women and their services in healing. In the traditional period, sickness is believed to be caused by evil spirits. In *Pi Pute Biak Hi*, written by Zairema, “An dam lohin eng huai emaw tihnatah an inngai a, a thawi dam thiam an awm a, chung ho chu bawlpu an vuah” (5). / “They believed that sickness is caused by evil spirit, there are people who can cure them and are called bawlpu”. This healing system is performed by offering sacrifices to the evil spirits. Lalfakawmi also writes,

The traditional system of curing diseases, i. e. giving sacrifices to spirits, was performed exclusively by male members called ‘Bawlpu’ who acted like a doctor. Such practices have now been replaced by medical treatment being given by medical doctors- male or female. In the traditional society no woman

could become a Bawlpu or offer sacrifices to spirits. (*Changing the Position of Mizo Women*, 33)

The concept of healing system in the traditional period excludes women from the sacrificial performance. Men can only accomplish the position of 'bawlpu'.

In Biakliana's *Durtlang Nurse Hla*,

Durtlang nurse- ho hi thlir the u,

Nalh ber mai a'n Zawmliani,

Biaksang leh Zami,

Khualthangi a nalh bawk a,

Rinawmah chuan Zauvi, Lalbiakveli. (*Biakliana Robawm*, 51)

Look at the nurses of Durtlang,

Zawmliani is most beautiful,

Biaksang and Zami,

Khualthangi is pretty too,

Zauvi and Lalbiakveli as trustworthy.

A number of female nurses are stated namely by Biakliana. He is patient in Durtlang Hospital, and he received care from female nurses. It is a song composed out of humour feelings, and the nurses too enjoy this song. But the focus is on the point of women working in the Hospital, curing and taking care of patients. The traditional system of healing does not allow woman to involve in the healing process, but a modern woman took the responsibility of a healer. Modernization and education

brought changes in the Mizo society which is highlight by Biakliana. Nursing needs qualification and women study the necessary course to be able to work in the hospital as nurse. It is a job women took for earning their livelihood.

The selected songs of Lalsangzuali Sailo describe the modes of earning livelihood, different occupational job taken by woman. The rural areas mostly earn by engaging in the jhum cultivation; whereas urban woman earn by getting the government's job, running small business and handloom marketing. To show that woman holds a variety of occupation, Biakliana's *Durtlang Nurse Hla* is is used purposely. This displayed the women occupation as nurse in the Hospital. This proves that from the traditional times to the modern times, Mizo woman contributed as a co-bread winner in the society.



**Glossary:**

Lovah: the cutting down of trees for jhum cultivation.

Jhum: the process of agriculture adopted by Mizo where forest is cut down every year.

Inlawm: to take turn and turn about at helping one another in any kind of work or occupation.

Chhawl thuai: to indicate to (a friend) that one had gone on home by placing a leafy branch or twig at a place leading to his or her jhoom.

Siap suap: the name of a short skirt or kilt made of strands of fibre, cotton or grass.

Hnawkhal: the name of cloth wore by man made of fibre, cotton or grass.

Puan: the traditional Mizo cloth made of cotton.

Bawlpu: An exorcist or priest.

Zozam: A flower planted at the jhum.

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**CHAPTER- 5**

**CONCLUSION**

The identity of Mizo women is a debatable topic which produced critical arguments from various writers and scholars. The ideology of women as a dominant class, as submissive to male members is prevalent among writers. Mizo women had been portrayed as a lower class than men in the society. The concept of regarding women as dominated by male, based on gender is common understanding among the Mizo people. But in a gender conscious rational thinking, the identity of women portrayed as a dominant class needs to be studied precisely. This study is to reveal the nature and identity, and to re-construct the former identity being given to Mizo women.

Mizo society adopted the patriarchal system of society where the father or eldest male is the head of the family. The patriarchal system favours male, inheritance and lineage is traced through the male side. The feminist perspective regarding patriarchy is not universal and inapplicable to all societies. Considering Mizo society women are not oppressed or dominated in general. There are women sufferings but not because of their gender, but due to other reasonable conditions or circumstances. Social norms and individual rights need to be separated, and the generalization of all female sufferings as domination and oppression has to be terminated.

In the social structure, there are different roles and responsibilities assign to male and female members. Mizo women accepted the roles and responsibilities inclined to them. The domestic activities are assigned to female members and men do

not involve in women's responsibilities. Likewise, men hold responsibility in the social and communal services, which women do not partake. In the concept of religion, it is the role of men to perform and participate in religious ceremonies. However, the division of roles and responsibilities does not designate discrimination and inferiority.

The significant role played by Mizo women is her domestic role. From traditional to modern period, women are a domestic role player. From the study of selected folk songs of *Rualchhingvungi zai*, *Losul hmuah hla*, and Rokunga's songs, it is concluded that women are the domestic worker which is the roles assigned to them. Women never hesitate to carry out their duties; even if they have a busy routine they never failed to perform the tasks under their responsibilities. From this selected folk songs, women hold the identity of a domestic role player within the family.

Earning livelihood is the survival of an individual, society or tribes. The main occupation adopted by Mizo people is jhum cultivation. In the process of earning livelihood, women are an essential role model. The traditional women mostly engaged in jhum cultivation; whereas modern women take up different kind of job. From the selected folk songs, women are employed by the government, or start their own business like handloom industry. There are women earning more sum of money than their husbands, and a lot of families have more female earners than their male counterpart. This defined the identity of women as a co- bread winner in the Mizo society.

The hierarchical system of society can lead to sufferings for the poor people. In Mizo society, it is evident that certain individuals suffer the ill treatment and bias judgement according to social division. *Darpawngi zai* describe the sufferings due to her poor condition; wrong judgement is made by the chief in favour of the elites. *Laltheri zai* also reflects the social system where the commoner are despised and drop behind. The traditional social norms regarding the cross- marriage between a commoner and chief's clan is abolished due to the rebellious actions of Laltheri. *Saikuti zai* express the freedom of speech of Mizo women. Saikuti as a free poet, throw ironical verse towards the villagers if she finds fault in the system. Ropuiliani is a female heroic and a patriot who sacrifice her life for the protection of her territory. The silent voices of women poetesses reveal the identity of women.

In Mizo society, the system of patriarchal society causes male supremacy. It is accurate that men are more powerful and authoritative in a family or society. But this does not signify that women are dominated by male. From this study, it is evident that there are division of labour, roles and responsibilities; and women accepted their roles and stay functional within the society.

The study of Laltheri zai denotes gender discrimination. In analyzing the social rule regarding the cross- marriage between a commoner and a chief's daughter, the rule can be regarded as biased. This is evident in the ancestor of Laltheri. Her grandfather married a brave and fearless ordinary girl, and her mother Tuantiali is also a commoner. In the traditional period, it appears as if there are no rules binding

them in case of marriage. But if such things happen, Laltheri has the courage to stand up fighting to protect her rights.

Mizo women as an individual are not inferior to men; rather they had the identity to fight back what is wrong in the society. And the expression of feelings in songs denotes the freedom of speech women had in the Mizo society. The dominated or oppressed class seldom had the freedom to express their ideas or voices. But Mizo women has the freedom to counter, oppose and talk back ironically. They had the identity to offend people and in return heal their angriness by their enchanting songs.

From my study, I have concluded that Mizo women are not inferior to man, and they are not the dominant class. There are roles and responsibilities assigned upon them in the society which women carry on without hesitation. Women have the identity of a domestic worker, a co- bread winner, and they have the strong and powerful personality that oppose and fight against the social system. From this point, the identity of women is re- constructed and the concept of Mizo women as a dominated class is thus, removed.

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## "Re- constructing the Identity of Mizo women in Selected Mizo Folk Songs"

The identity of Mizo women is an important and sensitive controversial issue. It produced different aspect of arguments in searching the identity of Mizo women and the problem requires special attention. Women play an imperative role in Mizo society which increases their importance in everyday life. Mizo women have been portrayed by different scholars and writers as living a low life, as an oppressed class. This study is necessary to reveal and discover the identity of Mizo women through Mizo folk songs.

The first chapter is an introductory part of the study which focuses the meaning of identity and women identity as a whole. It describes the background of Mizo society and culture and depicts the position of Mizo women.

Identity is defined by *Chambers 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dictionary* as “the state or quality of being specified person or thing; who or what a person or thing is” (Mairi Robinson, 669). *Oxford Dictionary* defined as “being specified person or thing; individuality; identification or the result of it; absolute sameness” (Julia Elliott, 368). Identity identified an individual or as a group and categorizing as a particular group needs same quality or sameness.

Women identity is basically formed by sexes and the differentiation of male and female identify women. In most societies, there are certain identity of the two sexes based on their masculinity and femininity for the formation of an individual

social identity. Being identified as a woman, the identity of women can vary due to dissimilarity of society's expectations. The identity of Mizo women is shaped by society's performance and expectations. Therefore, women belonging to different society or culture produced diverse quality and identity as a woman.

Folk song is defined by M.H.Abrams as, "Folk songs include love songs, Christmas carols, work songs, sea chanties, religious songs, drinking songs, children's game songs, and many other type of lyric, as well as the narrative song, or traditional *ballad*" (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 136). *New Webster's Dictionary* define folk song as "A song originating among and transmitted orally by the common people of a nation or area, often occurring in a number of versions and usually characterized by simple melody, narrative style, and verse repetition; a popular song written in imitation of this type by a known author" (*New Webster's Dictionary*, 379). From oral to written tradition, songs that depict the folk life can be regarded as folk song. Many writers and scholars regard folk songs as old and archaic, as in oral tradition only. But the limitation needs to be broadened as many younger poets have composed on the folk life too.

The character of Mizo traditions, culture and society is indubitably reflected in Mizo folksongs. Traditionally, the Mizo composed songs and sang it on various events and occasions. As Mangkhosat Kipgen puts it, "Whether the event be the making of war or the making of peace, whether it be victory or defeat, success or failure, whether there is experience of joy or sorrow, happiness or anger, love or hatred, contentment or disappointment, the Zo gives expression to it in songs"

(*Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 94). The culture of the Mizo is rolled along with their folk songs.

Mizo society is shaped by the basic of social institutions and family can be regarded as the formation of Mizo society. Mizo family is based on patriarchal system; the head of the family controls all other family members. Women play vital role in the domestic and economic life of a particular family. Women had full authority inside the realm of household activities; but do not participate in the social organization.

Women identity is formed and shaped by men in the traditional times; but changes occur with the advent of missionaries and an introduction of education. Women can participate in the social activities, Church services and work at the government jobs. Education brought light to the life of the Mizo, as well as to women. Though changes have taken place in the Mizo society, the status of women has not changed. Modern women still play the role traditional women played, but in a more respectable way.

Chapter two focuses on the silent voice of Mizo women. The poetesses of Mizo folk songs portray their inner thoughts, emotions, tragic love affairs, family problems, social discrimination, and so on. In this chapter, the study is rooted from *Darpawngi zai*, *Laltheri zai*, *Saikuti zai* and Lalsangzuali Sailo's *Tlawm ve lo Lalnu Ropuiliani*.

*Darpawngi zai* can be considered to be the voice of the silence, the shout outs of the unjust judgment. These can be evident in some of her songs,

Mi zun ngai lo, keimahni zun ngai,

A tap ruai ruai thin e, ni chhunah,

Nikungpa laldang a mawi lo ve. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*,259)

Missing me, rather than missing someone,

In the middle of the day, he cries desperately,

It is not suitable for a gentleman, Lalkung.

This verse reflects the life of Darpawngi; telling stories of her marriage life. She married Lalkunga, the son of chief Lalkhuma. Their marriage does not last long for Darpawngi do not fit to be the mother of a chief's family. Lalkunga used to cry in daytime, living a desolate life. When Darpawngi knew the condition of her former husband, she composed in a song.

In *Darpawngi Thinrim zai*, the social discrimination is voiced by Darpawngi. As enunciated in her song,

Khiangvawn rai ka rah e,

Khiangvawn rai ka rah e,

Ka lengkelin sumtual zawlah;

A chun a hai lo ve. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 268)



I am a poor solitary orphan,  
 I am a poor solitary orphan,  
 My babygoat in front of the house;  
 Hasn't mistaken its mother.

This verse tells the wrong judgement made by the lady chief. Darpawngi and the chief's elder claimed for the goat's baby. Even though they found out the baby was Darpawngi's goat, the chief gave it to the elder. Nobility has taken the truth and the poor are not given equal judgement.

*Laltheri zai* is composed by Laltheri, her real name is Lalchawngpuii. She was the daughter of chief Lalsavunga, she had the life of nobility during her period. Being the family of the chief, she cannot have relationship with *hnamchawm*. But she deeply falls in love with Chalthanga, who was killed by the chief's order. Mourning the death of her lover, she composed a number of songs,

Chhunrawl lovin ka fam lo vang ka nu,  
 Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 241)  
 I would not die of hunger mother,  
 It will be easier to die of loneliness for Sailo woman.

Laltheri had not eaten for a long day, without wearing clothes she wander around the village. Her baby, Chalthanga's son died after one year that increases her suffering. But after that experience, her family did not interfere with the love affairs. K. Zawla writes, "The killing of those who have sexual intercourse with the chief's daughter is

ended due to this incidence” (*Mizo Pi Pute*, 330). Laltheri and her rebellious actions create a healthy social environment, especially for lovers for the future.

*Saikuti zai* denotes the freedom of women in the Mizo society. Saikuti speaks and enunciates her feelings and decision in a song which portray the freedom of speech during this period. Her song,

Rum vung vungin sakawlin dai a vel,

Tho rawh u le, hran tum val zawng chu. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 248)

A tiger ventures around the outskirts of the village,

Rise up young man, if you ready to fight.

This resulted in encouraging the male members to rise up and fight the tiger. The moral standard of her village is changed by Saikuti, her songs embrace good deeds and she can be considered as playing an important part in political administration of the village.

*Tlawm ve lo Lalnu Ropuiliani* is a song about lady chief Ropuiliani who fights and die in protecting her territory. Lalsangzuali Sailo writes in her song, “Fam chan a huam, anpai bawiha kun ai chuan” (*Lalsangzuali Hlate*, 63)/ “She chose to die rather than to be a slave to the British government”. This song portrays the patriotism and power of Mizo woman.

Laltluangliana Kiangte’s *Tlawm mai lovin* has put Mizo women as the fighter, patriots, and struggling to reform the land. His song “Ropuiliani, Darpawngi, Laltheri iangin, Sual do ang aw- Ram leh Hnam tana tang zelin” (*Rochuam*, 62). / “As

like as Ropuiliani, Darpawngi, and Laltheri, Let us fight against evil, and support our land” has taken Mizo woman as an exemplary image to stand against wrong and evil deeds. From the modern perspective, the silent voices of these three women are remembered, and are entitled as heroic fighter.

This chapter described women as a domestic role player in the family. The most noticeable role of women in Mizo society can be considered her domestic role. Family is regarded as women domain where every tiny detail went through the mother. Inside the family, the mother holds responsibility to administer her own family. Mizo women rarely left their houses except in case of work. They work for the benefit of home as well as the development of household materials depend upon women. All the necessities related to domestic activities belonged to women and men do not interfere in those activities.

Women participation as a domestic role player is never considered as real work. It is taken as women roles and duties, sticking to women’s everyday life. *Awithangpa zai* depicts one woman weaving cloth in one of his song,

Darkhaw tlang hniam rawh I sang lua e,

Kungpui mi ril Lalhnemi’n tahpuan a khawng e.

Thlir ing e, lunglen a bang mah na. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 377)

Stay low hills of Dar village, you stood too high,

The profound Lalhnemi is weaving.

The loneliness may disappear if I stare.

Mizo women weaved sufficient quantity of clothes for all the family members. In their free time at home, at night or day time, women carry on the work of making clothes. The method of producing cotton yarn and weave it to cloth or *puan* requires a lot of energy. Lalhmuaka also argues that, “Silhfen puahchaha la kaih hna thawh paha, zana tlangval lo leng lo kawm hi an hna thlakhlelhawm tak a lo ni ta thin a ni” (*Zoram Thim Ata Engah*, 26). / “Accompanying male suitors along with preparing cloth and weaving is their cherished work at night”.

An important and necessary task assigned to female role is collecting fire woods. During the dry season, women collect a large number of fire woods and store it dry for the rainy season. *Rualchhingvungi zai* described it in a song,

Kawlhrei bata tuahthing kan phurhna,

Tlangnuam a chul ovang khuareiah;

Siang kan lawi leh relthang kan hawn e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 311)

The place we collect fire woods with axe on our shoulder,

The pleasant hill will not fade through years;

We brought defamation when going home.

The domestic work can be divided based on their age groups. All female members had roles to play based on their age. The mother having more than one daughter might have more leisure time than those who had none. In modern days, all children went to school which free them on most of the domestic work. In the primitive era, a girl used to take care of her younger sister or brother. *Losul hmuah*

*hla* is a song sung by children when they wait for parents to come home from work. Every girl in a family helps the mother and learned to take care of the household chores. One verse of *Saikuti zai*, “Zawlbuk hnuaiah buh lem ka thap chiam a,” (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 243)/ “I play sifting rice- grain under Zawlbuk” has portrayed the involvement of girl to learn the domestic work practically through games.

Rokunga’s *Chunnemi* represent a modern woman taking care of household responsibilities. In one stanza of this song, the role of the mother is reflected.

Chhungtin run in lumtu chu chunnemi,  
 A tel lo chuan chhung tin rel a kim si lo;  
 Rinpui ber tangkai ber chu chunnemi,  
 A tel lo chuan chhung tin rel a kim thei lo. (*Rokunga Hlate*, 64)

The maker of every family a home is the mother,  
 Our home administration is not whole without her,  
 Mother is most dependable and helpful,  
 Our home administration is not perfect without her.

These lines depicts mother as the administrator of home; without whom the family matters do not stay perfect.

As written by Laltluangliana Kiangte, “The fact that there was a good division of labour, and women’s and men’s roles were clearly demarcated” (*Mizos of North East*, 81). The roles and duties assign to them are different. Women had full responsibilities in the domestic activities; it can be regarded as the role which men lay

their full trusts upon women. They hardly had leisure time, and were burdened with loads of work to carry out in their life cycle. There are certain social expectations regarding the diligence of a woman. The honor and reputation lies in her performance, her hard work and diligence too. Owing social expectations, women are afraid to be called lazy which is a notorious name, a shameful quality for women.

This chapter is the study of the role of women as a co- bread winner in the family. The concept of earning livelihood in Mizo society involves participation of family members. Mizo women has functional identity regarding the concept of work, their importance are practical and realistic. Both men and women can be considered having equal occupational characteristics. This chapter study women and their identity as a co- bread winner within the family.

Jhum cultivation is the only occupation owned during the early period, men and women practiced 'inlawm' where they assist each other at work. One of *Tuan hla* describe this situation precisely,

Biangnote, lawmah ka sawm ang che,

Mahriak chuan phaikhaw ramtuan ka zuam lo;

Chunglum laini reng a rei thin e. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 569)

Sweet honey, I will ask for assistance,

I am afraid to work alone;

Long is the warmth of the sun.

The song depicts one man inviting a woman to join at work. This ‘inlawm’ became traditional practice in Mizo society. A number of young men and women assist each other at work; sometimes lovers practice ‘inlawm’. Based on this song, Mizo people carry out work in a collective manner. Men and women took part in earning their livelihood. This ‘inlawm’ system mentioned in this song identify woman as a collaborating partner, a joined participation of both man and woman. *Saikuti zai* also illustrate ‘inlawm’ in one of her song, “Tleitir lawm chu ralah ka ring nem maw”/(*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 247) “to assist a young man is not reliable against the foe”. This line display man and woman works together in the paddy fields.

Another song from *Tuan hla* describes the situation of work,

Lungrunpui ngurah i piang si lo,

Phaitlang turni sawmfang zing ri riai hnuaiah;

Chhawl ang I uai tur chu hmelthai. (*Mizo Hla Hlui*, 568)

You haven’t born royal darling,

Under the sunny field of paddy;

How you may lose the beautiful youth faces.

This song portrayed the life of a commoner woman, representing the general Mizo woman. Every woman except the chief’s family had to engage in work. A day full of work and activities is exhausting and tiresome; it needs physical strength and a good health. Such busy routine of hard work every day makes woman ugly in their physical

appearance. And this song locates the environment of women's working behaviour in Mizo society.

The modern women carry on the identity of being a co-bread winner. Lalsangzuali Sailo composed a song for an appraisal of J. L. School, in which she was a teacher. In *J. L. High School Hla*, she address the school as “Hnam tin naufa sennau ang kan nuihza-na” (*Lalsangzuali Sailo Hlate*, 272)/ “The place the kids of the community share laughter together”. As education paved a new way, modern woman are employed by the government with the benefit of playing part as an economic unit of the family.

Rokunga's *Turnipui Kan Do Dai* gives a picture of modern women engaging in agricultural work. The lines “Hah chhawl dawm ang min dawm turin, Lengin tui rawn chawi e” (*Rokunga Hlate*, 24) / “To relieve the tiredness and thirst, some woman brings the water” presented the scene of collective work in which woman participated among men at the paddy field. Agriculture has been the local occupation in rural areas even during the modern period.

As the mode of living and occupational system changed, women stand upon the pillars of becoming the economic unit within the family. They have maintained their status and upgraded to a more reliable sources which transform the shape of Mizo society. In every community, money or wealth define one's social position. It has become one of the standards of social value from a long time. Women contributed



in shaping the social status of a family and women in a situation to work and finance the family's economy has paved a new way in the society.

The last chapter is the summarization and conclusion from my study. The identity of Mizo women is a debatable topic which produced critical arguments from various writers and scholars. The ideology of women as a dominant class, as submissive to male members is prevalent among writers. Mizo women had been portrayed as a lower class than men in the society. The concept of regarding women as dominated by male based on gender is common understanding among the Mizo people. But in a gender conscious rational thinking, the identity of women portrayed as a dominant class needs to be studied precisely. This study is to reveal the nature and identity, and to re-construct the former identity being given to Mizo women.

From my study, I have concluded that Mizo women are not inferior to man, and they are not the dominant class. There are roles and responsibilities assigned upon them in the society which women carry on without hesitation. Women have the identity of a domestic worker, a co- bread winner, and they have the strong and powerful personality that oppose and fight against the social system. From this point, the identity of women is re-constructed and the concept of Mizo women as a dominated class is thus, removed.

Glossary:

Hnamchawm: the common people.

Inlawm: to take turn and turn about at helping one another in any kind of work or  
occupation.

Puan: the traditional Mizo cloth made of cotton.

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