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Lalhlimpuii

CONTENTS

Inner Cover page

Certificate

Declaration

Acknowledgement

1. Introduction

Mizo Folksong	1
Nature and Characteristics of Mizo Folksong	4
Folksong in the Late Nineteenth Century	8
Life of Darpawngi	10
Life of Laltheri	17
End Notes & Works Cited	22

2. Confessional Poetry

Nature and Characteristics of Confessional Poetry	23
Meanings and Definitions	27
World Famous Confessional Poets – Sylvia Plath	28
– Kamala Das	34
Works Cited	41

3. Darpawngi Zai	
A confessional Voice in Darpawngi Zai-“One Woman’s Autobiography”	42
A Self-portrait in Darpawngi Zai	49
Her Thinrim Zai-Confluence of Anger and Self-pity	53
End Notes & Works Cited	59
4. Laltheri Zai	
Life Performance: Her Disobedience and Courage	60
Love, Obsession and Fury	65
Her Voice: A Wounded Woman’s Rage	71
Works Cited	78
5. Conclusion	79
Works Cited	96
Bibliography	97
Bio-Data	103

DECLARATION

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

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

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CONFESSIONAL VOICE IN MIZO FOLKSONG:
AN ANALYSIS OF *DARPAWNGI ZAI* AND *LALTHERI ZAI*

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CHAPTER- 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Mizo Folksong

Mizo folksongs are of a little variety that they can be distinguished into two- *tlar hnih zai* (Couplet) and *tlar thum zai* (Triplet). Yet, it has already been distinguished into three basing on its period:

- 1) Before they crossed Tiau river (Before 1700 AD)
- 2) After they crossed Tiau river (Between 1700-1900 AD)
- 3) Folksong in the Twentieth Century (After 1900AD)

One whole song is summed up in two or three lines, having its own message within a single stanza. But, there can be many stanza-like songs, in one 'Zai'. For instance, *Darpawngi Zai* has three different *zai*¹ in which each *zai* has more than 15 songs. The meaning is that when one composes a song wholly independent from an existing *zai*, he or she can simply composes another song using the same tune.

Hence, within a one *zai*, there can be many composed song having the same tune but different lyrics. So, when a new *zai* comes into existence, anyone can compose another song using the same tune but who simply uses an existing tune cannot bear the name of that *zai*, or a song which has an existing tune cannot bear the name of the one who composes. For example, *Darpawngi*, besides her original *zai*, composes some songs using the tune of

Saikuti Zai and others. Those songs cannot be included in *Darpawngi Zai* since *Darpawngi Zai* has its own tune.

Many historians and writers trace back the primitive age in order to find out the first Mizo folksong having a thorough research, yet the results or the claimed-first songs are all different. Also, the time when the primitive people began composing songs cannot be clearly stated. So, without a mere supposition, it is not easy to ascertain the first song and the period when they began having songs. The first known Mizo songs are, according to one writer, Zaithanmawia in his “History of Mizo Hla” composed at the bank of Chindwin.

Thanmawia writes, “K.Zawla believed that the Mizos did not have any kind of song before they occupied Len range. . . . Zatluanga, on the other hand, noted that simple verses had already been made before they crossed the Run River of the Than range (Mizo Poetry, 33). And the first songs recorded by these writers are as follows:

Ur ur tak ai, ur ur tak ai.

Hnuang hnuang tak ai, hnuang hnuang tak ai.

Vai vai tak ai, vai vai tak ai.

According to Zaithanmawia, the first known Mizo songs were those songs our forefathers composed at the bank of Chindwin. He writes:

Their songs during this time were sung by young adults. They made the leaders, and when the leaders sang “Haa law, haa law” others sang “Aw e, aw e.” . . . When they dwelled in Shan State, they already began composing many good songs. The song of our forefathers when in Shan State is:

Shan fa tlang khua pu tling tling e,

In do thlunglu bakin chhah;

Kan mi thah, ka laimi do,

Tual thatin lan eih de ning. (As quoted by B. Lalthangliana, 3)

On the other hand, Lalthangliana opposes this assumption:

It is contradicted with Mizo History saying that the first Mizo songs are composed at the bank of Chindwin basing on “Shan” word in the supposed first Mizo song, which is “*Shan fa tlang khua pu tling tleng e*”. We all believe that our forefathers migrated to westward on the route of Chindwin River. Yet, Shan State of Burma is not at the bank of Chindwin River but on the eastern side of Irrawaddi River, so, geographically proved to be wrong.” (6)

According to *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, written by K. Zawla and Zatluanga, their first song is:

Heta tang hian kha kha a lang a,

Khata tang khan hei hi a lang a.

(That place can be seen from here,

And here can be seen from there.) (Quoted by Lalthangliana, 3&4).

However, assuming the above songs to be the first Mizo songs is thought to be wrong by other writers for it does not contain any archaic words. All these contradictions show that Mizo folksongs cannot be put in a chronological order till today. Writes Thanmawia, “It is acceptable that the Mizo ancestors might have forgotten their earliest songs due to the absence of record, and it would really be difficult to arrange the chronological sequences of their earliest songs.” (Mizo Poetry, 33)

Lalthangliana opines, “We believe that amongst the Mizo folksongs we can have a record of, “*Tlar Hnih Hla*” (couplet) is the oldest.” (8)

1.1.2 Nature and characteristics of Mizo Folksong

In the broadest sense, Mizo folksongs are of a little variety that it can be distinguished into two – *Tlar Hnih Zai* (couplet) and *Tlar Thum Zai* (triplet). Yet, it can be categorized into different *zai* basing on its name and theme. Mizo folksong bears different names and it has different themes. Thanmawia writes in *Mizo Poetry*:

The Mizos are fortunate enough in having a traditional way of classification of their folksongs, and accordingly the Mizo folksongs may be classified as follows: Songs bearing names of individuals; Songs named after modulation of the voice, Cradle songs, Invocations and Incantations. A study of their folksongs on the basis of the indigenous system of classification shows that the Mizos are having about one hundred different types of songs. (41)

All *zai* which bears the names of individuals does not bear the name of the one who composes it. For instance, the one who composed all the songs of *Darlenglehi Zai* was not Darlenglehi, but a blind man, Lalkhawdina. Though her name bore the name of this *zai*, she never composed a song. She was a good-looking and well-figured widow. Her good nature and beauty were talked about a lot. Lalkhawdina, though blind, really longed to be able to see; so he used to court her. He then started composing songs. All these songs were called *Darlenglehi Zai*.

Some folksongs bear the names of villages. One of the appropriate exemplars is *Tlangkhaw Zai*. It came into existence when the Mizo forefathers reside in Tlangkhua, before they crossed Tiau river. In accordance with hearsay, Luaisiali and Saingova of Tlangkhua have an intimate relationship. They made a vow to spend one whole day together. But, Luaisiali's parents sent her to the field. Then, Saingova sang his melancholy:

Tlang khuaah Saingo ka kual reng e

Siali feh kirin ka ring lo ve.

(I, Saingo hovers around in Tlang khua,

I think not she will be back.)

It is said that from the above song, *Tlangkhaw Zai* has appeared. Even without evidence, it is quite reliable that this *zai* had begun when they reside in Tlangkhua from its lyrics.

Love, nature, patriotism, sufferings, confessions, and boasting of one's heroic action are the major themes of Mizo folksong. Amongst them, love is the principle theme as it is in other literature as well, so would it be worth taking into account. Poetry plays a vital role as a means of transportation of love from the primeval era till today. In *Hrangchhawni Zai*, we have seen this:

A tuarah thangte ka zuau em ni?

Dawrkai sahbawn rimtuiin zotui thiangah;

Di zun leng kan tleng, a fai thei lo.

A sawi hian sawi suh ka lung min len,

A ko kal u, Laldang khua chhan pualhrang val,

A ngaiin Hrangchhawni them reng mai.

(Am I a little bit weak?

With fragrant soap and Zo pure water;

We rinse the charm of our beloved, it cannot be cleansed.

Say not more, it makes me feel lonely,

Will you please go call him,

Hrangchhawni suffers from love-sick of missing him.)

Love is what drags Latheri, one of whom this dissertation studies, into the chasm. She was possessed by a strong love for Chalthanga. When Chalthanga died a terrific death by a brutal order of her brothers, she tore off her clothes and sang her stark love for him that she would not die of starving but of longing to be with her one and only love:

Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu,

Ka di thangdanga zalna mah, chhimhlei tual daiah.

Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu,

Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.

(I will not clothe myself, mother,

Even my lover lies dead beneath the earth.

Will I not die of hunger, mother,

It'll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for Sailo princess.)

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

Darpawngi, who can be said as a woman of adversity, too was not an exception to love. When she was deserted by Thanglianpuia she sang her lost love with this sentimental song:

Tluang hluana chham ang zal min ti maw!

Chuti Liandang lung her zun leng ka ngaih chu;

Rual ang ka hring zo lo ve.

(You said that I sleep on the pathway!

I, suffering from the pangs of my lost lover,

Cannot live normally as others).

Lianchhiari, daughter of Thangluah chief, Vanhnuaithanga, too fell for a poor guy named Chawngfianga who was an orphan. Despite of his low dignity, her parents approved him for their soon to be son-in-law. Then, he sent messengers accordingly. But his messengers interposed a wrong message. Though Lianchhiari's parents promised to accept anything he could afford for the bride price, they delivered a wrong message to him that, if he did not leave the village immediately, he would probably be killed for he angered their chief. Suddenly, he left the village for his life; he did not even dare to run to Lianchhiari. So, Lianchhiari sent a bird as her emissary to tell her lover, Chawngfianga in her pensive loneliness. She sang:

Kawlawna huivate, biahthu hrilh thiam che maw?

Suihlungleng ka tah hi,

Nemte'n va hril rawh maw.

(A wood pigeon of skyline, if you know how to tell,

Tell him softly that,

I weep in deep loneliness.)

1.1.3 Folksong in the late nineteenth century

The late nineteenth century has played a crucial part in Mizo folksong. During these times, their religion, or rather ritual practice is more precisely than before, the chieftainship or the society improves a bit; and furthermore, literature becomes more improved. There are numerous female poets; and most of them come into existence during these years. In some other literature, women are barred to write in its early ages. Even in western literature, one can come to know from the study of George Eliot's curtailed side of truth that women's writing was not taken seriously during Victorian era. Mary Ann Evans has her pseudonym 'George Eliot' in order to escape the stereotype of women only writing lighthearted romances.

In Elizabethan era, William Shakespeare came to prominence in English literature whose works are still worldwide known and whose name became immortalized even today. His fame cannot be ceased till today. But if we read Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own", wherein she writes about the story of Judith, Shakespeare's sister who died by her own hands in a piteous manner. Judith wanted to enter the stage to earn some honour and fame. But she was deprived of by her parents. They "told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers" (61), while her brother, Shakespeare had all time to study "Latin – Ovid Virgil and Horace – and the elements of grammar and logic."(61).

However, her parents did not thwart her from doing what she so eagerly wanted to do out of discrimination among the siblings. "They would have spoken sharply but kindly, for they were substantial people who knew the conditions of life for a woman and loved

their daughter – indeed more likely than not she was the apple of her father’s eye.” (61) A possible assumption from this quoted line is that during the Elizabethan period, women were not allowed to act or perform at stage. The condition of life for a woman is to stay at home doing household things and mind only to cater for the family. Nevertheless, she was forced to marry the son of a neighbouring wool-stapler when she was at her teens. She then ran away from their home to escape that marriage. She went to London, stood at the stage door, and said that she wanted to perform at stage. But, the manager bellowed ‘no woman could possibly be an actress’ (61), they just laughed in her face. “Nick Greene, the actor-manager took pity on her, she found herself with child by that gentleman” (62), then she killed herself.

If studying gender issues in Mizo literature, Mizo women possessed a very low status in Mizo society during the times of their forefathers. They were seldom treated as same as men. They were simply taken as granted that even their sufferings were always neglected and ignored. Yet, they were not hindered to compose a song, nor their songs be treated as petty or lightly. Rather, they were valued and estimated not only by the whole village but also by their neighbouring villages to which their songs spread. So, Mizo women might possess a very low status and they might never be treated as human, but when it comes to songs, there was not such a vast gap between man and woman, no partiality between man and woman since Mizo people were always so fond of singing. That may be the reason why there were numerous poetesses in Mizo folksong.

Mizo folksong bearing the names of female which prevailed during the late nineteenth century are:- *Darmani Zai, Aikhiangi Zai, Thanghniangi Zai, Thangnunnemi Zai, Laltheri Zai, Lianchhiari Zai, Saikuti Zai, Chhingpuii Zai, Lalchhungi Zai, Rualchhingyungi*

Zai, *Darlenglehi Zai*, and *Darpawngi Zai*. There were eight poetesses during this time except Darmani, Thangnunnemi, Chhingpuii, and Darlenglehi who just bore the names of it but did not compose a song. Amongst them, *Darpawngi Zai* and *Laltheri Zai* will be analyzed in this dissertation.

1.2 Life of Darpawngi

The exact date of birth of Darpawngi is not known. Perhaps, it was around 1845 as recorded by Thanmawia. Darpawngi did not hail from a well-to-do family, yet she was born with a gift which is one of the most admirable traits in the minds of the Mizo people, Mizo society ever since the primeval era. She had to shift from one place to another ever since her childhood. The reason why she had to live like this is not mentioned in any published book. Yet, we can assume that she was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth like Laltheri, who was an offspring of one of the famous chiefs. In her early stage, she lived in the house of the chief of Laisawral, Lalchema. Then, in her adolescent period, she lived in Lalkhuma's house, whose father is Vuta, one of the famous Mizo chiefs.

Darpawngi belonged to the clan of *Ralte Bungsut*, her mother belonged to *Khiangte* clan. She was very fond of singing, and had quite a good voice. So, she used to sing with Lalkhuma, also known as Tuchhingpa or Hniarvungpa, who was also very fond of singing. There, her master's son, Lalbuta fell in love with her and married her. But soon after they had a daughter, Lalnikungi, Lalbuta's parents objected her to be the bride of the chief and separated them. Then she moved to Rullam.

Darpawngi did not only love to sing, she was also a good composer of songs. Her songs can be categorized into three- *Thlek Zai* or *Thlekzual Zai*, *Lusun Zai*, and *Thinrim Zai*. After Rullam, she moved to Zawngtah village, from Zawngtah to Aizawl, and from Aizawl to Darlawng according to “*Pipute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*”, written by Zawla. Even though she had parents, she wandered about as an orphan. There can be two reasons- one is because of poverty, and the other is her talent. During these times, those who were good song-composers, good singers, good dancers and great warriors were treasured a lot that they were often invited by other chiefs to stay in their village. And Darpawngi had possessed the first three admirable traits. While she stayed in Buangtheuva’s village, Nikhama, Khawbel’s chief paid a visit to Darlawng. There, with Khawbel’s chief, they sang and danced. All the villagers’ eyes were stuck on her. And she composed a whole new song. Buangtheuva was astonished by her talent; so, he pleaded her to stay in his village, and then she followed him.

Here in this village, there was one man who regularly paid court to Darpawngi. His name was Thanglianpuia. Darpawngi too could not resist his love for her. They spent most of their times together. As time goes by, she finally carried his baby in her womb. She was filled with joy. But, haplessly, her man tried to deny her for not wanting to be the husband of chief’s slave. Then, he suddenly stopped wooing her. Darpawngi’s heart broke into pieces. She slovenly lazed around for she did not have an enthusiasm to even take care of her appearance. Thanglianpuia kept on ignoring her. Some elders, out of sympathy, told her to put some oil on his hair in order to help her forget him. That is one of the Mizo traditional superstitious beliefs.

One day, she luckily found him in his siesta. She then oiled his hair and went away. But when he woke up, they told him of what Darpawngi had just done; he washed his hair thoroughly. Even though Thanglianpuia washed away Darpawngi's oil which she put on his hair, Darpawngi's feelings for him could be swayed away somehow. She could now forget him slowly and returned to her normal life.

Another writer, Lalbiakliana writes that Darpawngi had a non-Mizo, Gurkhali husband who worked as a cook at the camp of army men. And with this man, she had a daughter, named Chhimtlangthangi, the name which was taken after her fame towards the North zone. When the British army shifted to their main land, she followed him till Silchar without the permission of the authority. But, from Silchar, they could somehow send her back. When she came back, she composed a song wherein her daughter's name is included:

Min lo hmuak u, dailungah,

Ka lo thleng e, chhimtlangthangnu;

Maharini ka hawn e.

(Come meet me at the entrance,

I, Chhimtlangthangnu, have reached;

Bringing home Maharini).

'Maharini' is another name of Chhimtlangthangi. What she had brought home is not the daughter but her photograph. Commenting on her affair with this Gurkhali man, Lalbiakliana writes, "Her adversity makes her roam to every nook and corner, if pondering over her situation closely and carefully she is so pitiful that she just hangs on to this man. It can neither be because of loose character nor capriciousness." (183) However, some other

experts doubt this assumption. They opposed it saying that there is no proof for the name “Maharini” to be a Gurkhali name. It was true that she went to Silchar and brought home photography of ‘Maharini’. But this ‘Maharini’ is not her daughter but Queen Elizabeth.

In the year 1889, as written by Zawla, *Vai Lian Hnuhnung*, Indian sepoy burnt Khawbel; therefore, the villagers run for their life to Phunchawng. There, one guy named Daipawla, whose house was near the village chief started wooing her. Darpawngi hopefully thought that this man would not hurt her like Thanglianpuia; and her master, Nikhama too did not object him. So, she agreed to have a relationship with him. She again became pregnant with this man. When she gave birth, she named her baby new-born girl Lalremi, taking after a compromise she had with the chief.

Nonetheless, Daipawla too did not want to marry her for the same reason that was with Thanglianpuia. He too forsook her. During this time, if an illegal child was born, a child belonged to the father, and the mother had no right to claim her child. Because of this critical circumstance, Darpawngi felt so insecure. She said:

I, a wretched woman will surely die at the house of the chief. When I’m getting old, I will not be able to please our chief. Even in times of sickness, I will just lie on the floor without having anyone to sympathize with me and nurse me. How so pathetic life it would be! The only reason why no one wants to marry me is that they do not want to be the husband of the chief’s slave who will only have to work laboriously. They rather do not dare to marry me. And my children too belong to their father, unable to keep them. It will be better to have one to be mine alone, so that will we live together. And even in my old days, my child will be the one to nurse me with love. It may not be possible for me to be free from this slavery. The only way for me to prosper is the very highest humiliation ever for a woman, which is to bear an illegitimate child (K. Zawla, p.285).

Darpawngi and Daipawla both lived in Hmawngkawn at this time. She thought of getting pregnant with his child again, so that would it be the second time and no fine would be charged. If he did not pay any fine then a child would be able to be raised by her own. And if he tried to snatch away, she thought of saying that it is an illegitimate child having no father to claim because other men were also involved in it. In that way, she might be able to raise her child alone. Hence, she started to persuade Daipawla once and again. Daipawla too, having left her only because he did not want to be the son (slave)-in-law of the chief, could not resist her. He too really loved her.

Then, they had a child again as planned by Darpawngi. She named her Thlangladiiai. And she used to call her “Laktei” (taken from *falak*²) to prove that she was an illegitimate daughter. But, Daipawla tried to snatch this child too. In despair, Darpawngi pleaded Liannawna, a circle-interpreter, who dwelled in Aizawl with a pathetic song. When Liannawna heard her sing a sorrowful song, he promised her that he would surely try his best to help her. And fortunately, Darpawngi won over Daipawla. But sadly, when Thlangladiiai reached an age of ten, she died. Because of this tragic loss, Darpawngi almost went insane. This was not the first time she lost her child. A child she had with Thanglianpuia too died not long after its birth. Her misfortune is so unutterable that it is interestingly enough to form an inexhaustible topic of conversation till today.

When Thawmpawnga, son of Manga, chief of Khuangbung, who already lived independently in a separate house heard all this sad story of Darpawngi, out of sympathy, he invited her to stay in their house. He showed her a real hospitality that he did not even allow her to work. In his house, a kinless man, Chawngbawnga also stayed; and both of them had

quite a lot in common. Perhaps, because of their same situation, they fell in love with each other.

While at this time, because of the colonization of Mizoram, army men occupied some of the land for a camp. Some Mizo people worked for daily wages as sweepers and other menial jobs. In the year 1895, with their master, Thawmpawnga's permission, Darpawngi and Chawngbawnga worked for daily wages in Siallukawt. They always sent their earnings to their master though he told them to keep it for themselves for they were the ones who need it the most. But still, they bought some jewellery for the children and continued to send him. Eventually, Thawmpawnga declared, "Now you are not slaves but my children. I renounce your slavery because of your goodness. You can come look for me whenever you want but as my children. Whenever and wherever, you will be no more slaves to anyone except that you bring yourselves into it again."

Both of them were filled with blithe. And when they had a child, they named him after their freedom "Bawihbanga" (Retired-slave). But, this child deceased at the age of three. She was pounded at the heart by this cruel untimely death of her son. It is very easy to say that adversity could not leave her alone. Even after she finally met her better half, and earned her freedom from slavery, she could seldom have time to enjoy her fortune. She composed mournful songs which is called "*Lusun Zai*" for her loss. Her '*Lusun Zai*' permeated through the land of Mizo. Those parents who also lost their children could not listen to her song without shedding tears. They used to call it "*Hla mittui titla*" (A song that provokes tears). After sometime, Darpawngi gave birth to another baby. But this time they did not dare to name it after their freedom. They named her Bawihchhungi, which had borne an opposite meaning to Bawihbanga. Bawihchhungi died recently at a very old age.

The army men who stayed in Siallukawt were transferred to Aizawl. As there was no more jobs to work, Darpawngi and her family shifted to Thentlang in which their chief was a widow. While their stay in Thentlang, one of the chief's elders and Darpawngi, one day both claimed ownership to a kid (baby goat). Their chief told them to leash their goat in the field, and then they would unleash a kid. It would not mistake its mother. They did so as they were told. The baby-goat approached straight Darpawngi's goat and sucked its breast. However, their chief gave a kid to her elder. Not only this, that elder slew the baby-goat since they found it troublesome to keep a kid away from its real mother. Darpawngi's goat wailed and wandered about searching for its baby. Then, Darpawngi compared her goat to her for her mourning over the death of her child was not yet over. She wept every time her goat cried. She thought that she could not possess her baby-goat just because of her poverty, low status. So, she composed her "*Thinrim Zai*" which also permeated throughout Mizoram. This *zai* speaks loudest amongst her three unique *zai* as confessional. It is her songs that bring her to fame. She might not be fortunate in her lifetime, but her songs make her one of the famous persons of Mizoram.

Then they left Thentlang to Sialhau, and here she mourned the death of her husband, Chawngbawnga. Her master, Thawngpawnga, too already passed away. And Liannawna, who once helped her in claiming her daughter, Thlangtladiaii, got retired of his job and stayed in his father-in-law's house in Chhingchhip. Her children were still too small and young to depend upon. But, Liannawna overheard her worry; he brought her to stay with him along with her children. But, Darpawngi could not feel free to just join the one who already joined his father-in-law for support. Therefore, in order to support the need of her

children and to provide an immediate need of the joined family, she started travelling around and doing some business.

Daipawla, her daughter, Lalremi's father too lived in Chhingchhip. He was now a widower. Lalremi urged him to marry her real mother, Darpawngi if he ever thought of remarriage; and she also urged her mother. Then, Darpawngi finally married the one who did not want to marry her in her previous life in Phunchawngzawl. Darpawngi died in Chhingchhip at an old age, mourned by Daipawla.

Darpawngi also composed some songs using the tune of *Saikuti Zai* and other tunes. But no one composes a song using her tunes. Says Zawla, "Darpawngi has been labeled as the best song-composer of Mizoram for there is no one who can compose a song using her three different unique tunes- *Thlekzual Zai*, *Luzun Zai*, and *Thinrim Zai*." Thanmawia, too writes, "Darpawngi's songs have uniqueness that no one composes a song using her tune; and it is just like pure water which is not concocted or diluted with anything."

1.3 Life of Laltheri

Her real name is Lalchawngpuii, daughter of one of the most famous Sailo chiefs, Lalsavunga. The exact date of birth is unknown, yet as assumed by some historians; it may be around the late 1830s. She had three brothers and two sisters. Her ancestors were known for their bravery and courage; and so, she and her siblings bore a semblance of their ancestors. She was a good-looking woman, tall, and with good and friendly nature. Even though she was just a woman, she had possessed male character like her father, bold and stubborn. Says Zawla, "Due to the deceased of her father, Lalsavunga at Darlawng range,

with her brother, Vanhnuailiana, they shifted to Saitual in 1842” (265). Here at Ruallung, her interesting story begins.

She, as a daughter of Chief, was not supposed to mingle with the commoners. Yet, she fell in love with Chalthanga, *hnamchawm*³ *tlangval*⁴. During these times, it was strictly prohibited to have an affair for the chief’s family with the commoners. But, Laltheri, being bold and stubborn, did not give a damn to those rules. She just hanged around with him very often with no intension to hide it from public. Many a time, she was rebuked and warned by her family, but to no avail. Laltheri loved and favoured Chalthanga a lot that she never wanted to drink wine or eat meat without Chalthanga. If she could not find him, or he was not around her, she would send someone to look for and bring him to her.

Some of their elders could not bear the way they show their love, and with envy they convinced their chief. Soon after, the whole village was not secure for Chalthanga. During these times, if a *hnamchawm* made love with the chief’s daughter, it was the fatal mistake. There was a vast gap between *hnamchawm* and the royal family. When Chalthanga overheard that there was a dangerous plot against him, he told her that if they continued on having shown their love openly, it could cause bad things to happen. But Laltheri comforted him saying he would be safe if he just stuck with her. No one would dare to harm him because she was the one who would protect him, the one who was the daughter of the chief, whom they feared the most.

The reasons behind Laltheri’s courage and boldness would be worth taking into account. As has already been said before, from her ancestors they were brave. Her siblings too were well known for their bravery; for instance, one of her brothers was named as

‘Thawmvunghuaisena’, which means ‘Thawmvunga the brave’. And herein lay the fact that she had quite a family, blood-relatives to resemble. Besides this, she was not an ordinary person but the daughter of the famous chief. All the rules and regulations were laid by her family; therefore can be said as the owner of the rules. No one dared to mess with the chief’s family. As a matter of fact, even if she violated the rules, her protection would be her family anyway. No villagers would dare to harm her. Perhaps, knowing this fact made her bold and courageous.

Furthermore, she possessed some masculine character. She had the courage to repudiate the rules that the chief’s family is deprived of mingling with the commoners. That is the reason why she openly loved Chalthanga with no holds barred. The more their love increased, the more their foes became angry. Eventually, Chalthanga had to flee from their village for his own safety. Nevertheless, the enemies still chased after him out of zeal to get rid of him. Then, they finally found him in the midst of the jungle; deceived him by saying that they came to look for him not to hurt him but by an order of Laltheri to bring him home again for drinking and feasting. At the mention of Laltheri, Chalthanga got ensnared in their deceit; because that was what Laltheri often did. After reconciliation between the two sides, they had decided to drink a rice beer and rest for a while for they were all tired, and then to go back to Laltheri altogether.

While they have drinks and rest, one of the men struck down Chalthanga from his back. They cut his head, and then returned to their village. While this time at the village, Laltheri, not knowing that her lover had fled and got killed in the jungle, looked for him for a drink and meat. She sent some men to bring him. She prepared some meat and wine to have with him and dreaming on spending the whole day with him again as usual. But the

consequence became very tragic. It struck her at the core of her heart that she burst out into tears and fury. Her lover ran away for his life and was at the point of death, followed by some men, got ensnared and killed in the midst of the jungle. Her lover's head was hanging on *sahlam*⁵ where enemies' heads used to be hung.

Laltheri's life changed upside-down. She could not bear the sight of her lover's head being hung on *sahlam*. She went right away to find his dead body that lay down somewhere pathetically. There she found it in the midst of the jungle, swathed it with her *puan thulkhung*⁶, and then buried. When she came back to the village, the grieving chief's daughter mourned over the death of her lover; and the mourning had no limits, no ends, nor boundaries. She neither wanted to put on her clothes nor eat food. She just wailed lying on the floor. Fall season ended, then winter came, still Laltheri did not want to wear anything to warm her cold dead-like body. Her mother tried to feed, to clothe, and to soothe her pain; but try as she may, Laltheri did not insist on obeying her mother.

The demise of Chalthanga caused a great fury to Laltheri that she was full of anger towards her family who gave order and towards those who killed her lover. In lieu of living a normal life, she chose to lament over her loss and composed mournful songs. Before the tragic loss of her lover, Laltheri was never known as a song-composer. As an old saying goes, her adversity paved the way for her songs. She might never have a song, and we might never have her name erected in Mizo folksong if she had not lost her lover.

Laltheri got pregnant with Chalthanga's child before the most tragic happened. She gave birth to a lovely baby boy. When her son learned to walk, she used to let him hold a knife, chop a pumpkin, and told him to find out the ones who killed his father and avenge

him as soon as he became a grown-up man. When they heard this, those who killed Chalthanga run away for they feared to get killed. But at a very young age, her son died. She could hardly bear the loss of her lover and her son. Writes Thanmawia, “Unfortunately, her son dies; her life then turns into melancholy and loneliness after her only comfort passed away” (Mizo Hla Hlui, 240).

Her songs which came oozing out of her lonesomeness and rage are called ‘*Hlingvawm Zai*’. As written by Thanmawia, the period in which she composed all her songs is a short period between 1840-1845 (241). She is one of the most worth remembering women who dared to break down the walls which was built up by Sailo chiefs who called themselves ‘Chiefs who dwell between sun and moon’ that there should be a wide gap between the chief’s family and other clans. Her fearless reaction against her family and the rule drew all her brothers and other chiefs together to mend the rules that they should not do the same mistake to anyone thereafter. Therefore, she, the most remarkable, paved the way for freedom for all Mizo young adults.

Because of her reaction against her family, one of the unwritten laws that says the daughter of the chief is not supposed to mingle with or marry *hnamchawm*, was altered and moderated, that they should not strictly follow this rule. After she got over the pain, Laltheri, as stubborn as she was, fell in love with the man who was also *hnamchawm*. But this time, her family did not dare to protest against her remembering her early reaction. She got married to him and lived happily ever after.

End notes:

1. Zai : Equivalent to a book of songs in which all songs have one tune
2. Falak : An illegitimate child
3. Hnamchawm : Ones who belong to the lowest status in Mizo society
4. Tlangval : A young man
5. Sahlam : A place where they used to hang an enemy's head
6. Puan thulkhung : A valued shawl which is kept in a *thul* basket and rarely worn

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CHAPTER 2

CONFESSIONAL POETRY

2.1 Nature and Characteristics of Confessional Poetry

William Shakespeare was confessional in his Sonnets when he was betrayed by his friend with the lady known as ‘the dark lady’ for his personal sufferings can be traced in the sonnets. Even almost all his tragedies came oozing out of his agony and anguish. In “On His Blindness”, the real life unwanted tragic incident of John Milton, his unfulfilled dreams, and fear of the loss of creative power or insecurity can be sketched. William Wordsworth was confessional when he expressed his deep love of nature in his poetry since his love for nature is true. He has been called the “Worshipper of nature”.

All the above poets herald their confessional voice in their poetry when they expressed their agony, psychic disturbances, personal failures, or inner self. As opined by Raymond Williams, “In absurdist experience, agony is individual... Agony is seen as a collective experience, as the experience of everyone... The entire human race suffers from the division between itself and the rest of the world.” (Quoted by Chaudhary, 5)

On heeding to confessional poetry or writing, numerous questions arise to our mind: who are the confessional writers or poets? What is a confessional poetry? How do we distinguish the said poetry from other style of poetry? And why do they confess? Ted Hughes, who appreciates the confessional writings of his ex-wife, Sylvia Plath after her suicide, opines: “The real mystery is this strange need. Why can’t we just hide it and shut

up? Why do we have to blab? Why do human beings need to confess? Maybe, if you don't have that secret confession, you don't have a poem – don't even have a story. Don't even have a writer.” (Quoted by Gill, 67)

Elizabeth Gregory in her essay “*Plath, Sexton, Berryman, Lowell, Ginsberg and the gendered poetics of the ‘real’*” writes:

Confessional poetry came to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s in the work of Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman and Allen Ginsberg, . . . Their work has deeply influenced much poetry since, opening up the possibility of moments of personal ‘sharing’ in the work of poets in every mode. At the same time, it has been looked down upon, for being too ‘real’ – as an outpouring of unedited data from the world of experience (a view indicated in the frequent linkage of the adjective ‘mere’ with the noun ‘confessionalism’). And it has been disparaged as too feminine. (Gill, 33)

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

Michel Foucault views:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who

requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile. (4)

Here, we find the importance and value of confession in its early practices. Peter Brooks, citing the importance of confession, says, “confession . . . has become in Western culture a crucial mode of self-examination; from the time of the early Romantics to the present day, confession has become a dominant mode of self-expression” (6)

Writes Chaudhary in her published book, *The Poetry of Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das*:

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

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

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

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

Theodor Reik’s 1961 *The Compulsion to Confess* exemplifies an increasing anxiety in this period to comprehend powerful unconscious forces, such as the ‘urge for expression’, which threatened to ‘shape the destiny of us all’ (Gill, 6). Therefore, confessional poetry is poetry of self-revelation, self-purgation, self-scrutiny, self-exposure, and self-examine in order to feel, as the words of Ted Hughes, relief. They pour out all their feelings of suffocations, personal anguish and tortured psyche while seeking a new identity. They have

felt the need, an urge to reclaim what has been lost or suppressed in their lives which is closely related to Fanon's idea of 'the need to reclaim the past'. Writes Chaudhary:

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

2.2 Meanings and Definitions

Jo Gill defines:

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

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

Suzette Henke terms it ‘scriptotherapy’ – “a term which implies the need, and delivery, of a cure” (7).

Laurence Lerner suggests that “the characteristics of confession are factual accuracy of remembering, self-centeredness, self-abasement expressed in clichés” (7)

M.L. Rosenthal cites “Confessional poetry is said to feature an autobiographical voice which speaks with ‘uncompromising honesty’ about taboo subjects including the author’s ‘private humiliations and sufferings’” (68).

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

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

2.3 World Famous Confessional Poets

2.3.1 Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath was born in Boston in 1932. She graduated from Smith College and went on to Cambridge University on a Fulbright scholarship, where she met and later married Ted Hughes. She began writing poetry as a child and wrote stories from her mid-

teens as is written in the preface of *The Bell Jar*. In her lifetime, she published only one volume of poetry, *The Colossus*. A collection of prose, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* and a poetry collection, *Ariel* are published posthumously after she committed suicide.

Sylvia Plath is one of the best-known poetesses in the twentieth century. Her poetry was initially seen to be amateurish and was overshadowed by the powerful poetry of her husband, Ted Hughes. However, after her death, her work was re-examined, particularly by feminist critics, who drew attention to the command of her language, to the expressions of rage and outrage that run through her writing and to the way in which her work can be seen as illustrating many of the contradictions and dilemmas faced by women struggling for self-realization while attempting to conform to social expectations. While some critics read into Plath's work the story of a damaged individual whose death was the end of a long flirtation with the idea of dying, others saw her as an everywoman, whose poetry narrated the pain of being a woman struggling to live up to impossible standards of womanliness.

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

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

She writes in her *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*: “As from a star I saw, coldly and soberly, the separateness of everything. I felt the wall of my skin: I am I. That stone is stone. My beautiful fusion with the things of this world was over.” (120)

The birth of her brother unexpectedly gave birth to “the other world” and her world, which she lovingly enjoyed as the centre of everything, started fading away. She felt an urge to reclaim her identity as though she lost them all. As she was emotionally and mentally perturbed, she felt that even her parents and grandparents too developed a little coldness in their love for her. So she possessed hatred for her brother.

She confessed her hatred for her brother, “I hated babies. I who for two and a half years had been the centre of a tender universe felt the axis wrench and a polar chill immobilize my bones. I would be a bystander, a museum mammoth. Babies!” (120)

Yet, haply, she redeemed and retained the position of being the apple of her father’s eyes. She indeed did so many things to get this fascination. In her entire life, she was greatly proud of her father, and he remained the centre of almost all the activities of her life. When Plath was only nine years old, her father died. The untimely demise of her father “created a

great chasm in her mental equipoise.” She became mentally disturbed at the death of her beloved father, and henceforth, due to her churning heart, she made her grieving mother sign to promise never to marry again.

As being extremely attached to her father, her poetry has been said to contain some elements of Oedipus complex. Chaudhary, commenting on this attitude, cites: “Sylvia Plath was so attached to her father that she considered him to be her God. She was extremely angry and irritated at the injustice of God who had so cruelly taken away her father an assured rock-like protection against all the fears of the world. She took a solemn-vow never to ‘speak to God again’ (13)

Not only this, her father’s decease brought financial conundrums to the family. Her mother had to support the young children and the old parents. The problem became more critical that she had to sell off her fine Winthrop house and move to a modest dwelling. This economic problem deepened Plath’s emotional insecurity. If not for scholarships from various sources, Plath would not be able to continue her college and University. As quoted by Chaudhary- Jane one of her close Cambridge classmates, reveals this fact thus: “She did not much talk and seem to think about literature and writers, about ‘art’ in short, as she did about the business side of things. The names and editorial leanings of magazines made up a large part of what she had to say whenever she talked about modern poetry... (14)

She was forced by the situation to take part-time job so that would she be able to pursue her further studies. All these hardships and calamities were the result of her father’s untimely death. As some people often say, in education there is nothing better than adversity; the adversities she faced in her previous life made her so determined and hard-

working. She says, “After all, I wasn’t crippled in any way, I just studied too hard, I didn’t know when to stop.” (15)

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

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

A reliable website, “biography.com” records, “After Hughes left her for another woman in 1962, Sylvia Plath fell into a deep depression. Struggling with her mental illness, she wrote *The Bell Jar* (1963), her only novel, which was based on her life and deals with one young woman's mental breakdown. Plath published the novel under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas.”

This can be evidenced in her poem “Lady Lazarus”, “I have done it again/ One year in every ten/ I manage it” (1-3). At the age of ten, she almost died of drowning in a pond. She says “The first time it happened I was ten/ It was an accident.” (35-36). When she reached twenty, she ate so many pills in order to end her life out of depression, she locked herself inside her room and was lying in her bed as good as dead for three days. When she was found out, worms were already found on her body. But fortunately, they saved her back to life. “The second time I meant/ To last it out and not come back at all/ I rocked shut.” (37-39).

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

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

February, 11, 1963, she finally succeeded committing suicide. She was the first poet to win a Pulitzer Prize posthumously.

2.3.2 Kamala Das

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

She was married at the age of fifteen to Madhava Das, and this marriage proves a total failure. She was influenced much in writing by her mother, a well-known Malayali poet, and her maternal uncle, Narayan Menon, a prominent writer; knowing this, her husband did never deprive her of writing them. But, her marriage to a man who believes in sex as a matter of routine made her completely dissatisfied and discontented in life. On the contrary, she believed in marriage as an emotional and spiritual bond. She was not satisfied emotionally and mentally due to her husband’s coldness. And this failure of marriage compelled her to enter into extra-marital affair. Even in her extra-marital affair, she did not find the real satisfaction which she desperately desired for. Hence, as a result of this failure in her love-making life, she boldly and frankly has written all this unflattering experience in her works.

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

Arranged marriage is very common in Indian society. She knew that her mother did not marry her father out of love. She says, "My mother did not fall in love with my father. They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched." (Chaudhary, 33) In lieu of caressing her father with love, her mother rather feared her husband, and served him as though she was his slave. Sensing the condition and situation of this marriage bondage, she had a strong desire to marry a man who would be able to bring her all comforts. But all her dreams shattered when she married Mr. Das, a lustful person who failed to give her emotional satisfaction, love and care. He had a long experience of sexual enjoyment with his maidservants and other attractive women so far before Kamala Das entered his house in Mumbai. She was only fifteen, and her mind was full of hopes and desires. That period was supposed to be the blooming period. She desired to marry a loving rich man, a Zamindar and to live in the city of Calcutta. She hoped that her husband would provide her all comforts. But she had to write what she expected and what she got in her marital life:

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

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

Her "An Introduction" tells us that just like Sylvia Plath; she cursed her being born a woman. When she was only fifteen, her parents married her off for she was considered a grown-up lady because of some changes on her body. She became tall, her limbs swelled, and hair sprouted in one or two parts of her body. . "I was child, and later they/Told me I grew, for I became tall, my limbs /Swelled and one or two places sprouted hair" (24-26). If only she was not a woman, a typical Indian woman, she would not have to go through all these unexpected sufferings. She wore a shirt and her brother's trousers, she even cut her hair short pretending to be a man in order to ignore or avoid her womanliness. "Then ... I

wore a shirt and my/Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored/My womanliness” (33-35). But her ‘so-called advisers’ advised her not to pretend to be a split personality suffering from a psychological disorder, and not to become a nymphomaniac. They urged her to be a typical Indian housewife doing some embroidery or cooking and also to keep quarrelling with the servants.

Dress in sarees, be girl

Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,

Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,

Belong, cried the categorizers (35-38).

Many critics have analyzed Das as a “confessional” poet writing in the tradition of Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Denise Levertov. But while writing this kind of poetry, Kamala Das is unaware of the existing confessional genre. She had no knowledge of Sylvia Plath and the like. Perhaps, she had the “need”, which Hughes defined as we find in the previous chapter, to write what her tortured psyche suffered, and confessed her dissatisfaction in her marital life in order to achieve relief in one way or the other.

She herself said when Merrily Weisbord eagerly came from Canada to have an interview with her, “...having watched mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, great-aunt suffer with a silence that did not protect them at all, I determined to write honestly. All the pain unexpressed and all the sad stories left untold made me write recklessly and in protest.” (Weisbord, 25)

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

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

*Don't write in English, they said, English is
Not your mother-tongue. Why not leave
Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,
Every one of you? Why not let me speak in
Any language I like? The language I speak,
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. (7-13)*

Straightforwardness and boldness is her forte after all. After reading these lines who would dare to further request her to stop writing in English? Without beating round the bushes she just frankly goes to the point, and without any guilty feeling, she tells them to leave her alone for every language she speaks becomes her own language. She further says,

“It voices my joys, my longings, my /Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing /Is to crows or roaring to the lions” (16-18).

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

*They let her slide from pegs of sanity into
A bed made soft with tears, and she lay there weeping,
For sleep had lost its use. I shall build walls with tears,
She said, walls to shut me in. (11-14)*

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

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

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CHAPTER- 3

DARPAWNGI ZAI

A Confessional Voice in *Darpawngi Zai* – “One Woman’s Autobiography”

The detailed life story of Darpawngi has been written in the first chapter. She was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth, yet she was born with a gift which is one of the most admirable traits in the minds of the Mizo people, Mizo society ever since the primeval era. She has three songs – *Thlek Zai or Thlekzual Zai*, *Thinrim Zai*, and *Lusun Zai*. All these songs are like an autobiography of Darpawngi. She may not have tended to sing what has happened in her life so far, but she extrudes them in her songs probably in order to feel relief as the words of Ted Hughes suggest.

To what extent can it be considered confessional poetry? Is it a covert or an open confession? Mostly, the subject matter of *Mizo* Poetry, especially after the invasion of Christianity, implicitly includes little of the poet’s private life. Rather, it focuses upon public issues using a detached persona or even if it tells about one’s own life, a poet speaks to the readers through an imagined persona. And how they confess in their poems is so covert. Particularly, in Post-modern poetry, the confession is like cirrus which cannot be seen clearly. However, *Darpawngi Zai* has quite a different feature from the veiled confessions of most of the Post-modern *Mizo* poetry. *Darpawngi zai* has been classified into three: - *Thlekzual zai*, *Lusun zai*, and *Thinrim zai*.

In her songs, Darpawngi appears to have faced conundrums which are not the mundane problems, and that makes her bold and straightforward in her expression. As recorded by Thanmawia in his *Mizo Hla Hlui*, she had been married to three husbands, Lalbuta, Daipawla, and Chawngbawnga; divorced by Lalbuta and Daipawla; abandoned by Thanglianpuia right after she conceived a baby, losing two of her children, and justice denied her. Lalbiakliana records that she had a non-Mizo husband. Commenting on this affair, he writes, “Her adversity makes her roam to every nook and corner, if pondering over her situation closely and carefully, she is so pitiful that she just sticks with this man. It can neither be because of loose character nor capriciousness” (183).

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

Not only that, she was also looked down upon and ill-treated by all the villagers instead of pitying her. She honestly sang about this- “*Keimah Vanhnuaithangi khua tin sel*”, (Me, who is defamed by everyone on earth). In fact, we do not have a single time to have a smile on our face while reading her story. Rather, her life story stabs right through the core of our hearts that we are filled with sympathy. Truth to say, she was oppressed and suppressed all her life. If love was really in every corner, perhaps, her life was going round

in a circle till she met her third husband, Chawngbawnga. Her songs deal with her personal anguish and most of her songs give ample evidence to her painstaking efforts with life.

After being divorced by her husband Lalbuta's family, she met Thanglianpuia. They used to help each other in their work, and most of the time they would spend their times together. One night when they were out to have rice beer, he asked her to go home together for he wanted to take a walk with her from the place where some villagers drank rice beer, she refused him. Out of anger Thanglianpuia started ignoring her for a few days. Darpawngi really regretted for refusing him that night, and she could not bear to be alone without him. So, she composed this song:

Zan mu ka chhing lo ve, rilthangah,

Thlawr vung vung bel lianpui zu vangin;

Ka chan e, Diliana.

(I do not sleep at midnight,

Because of a distilling brewed wine pot;

I have lost my lover.)

The above song seems to tell of her as a woman who loved to drink more than anything else for having said that she had lost her lover because she refused to leave that place with him just because of a brewed-wine. After sometime, she found herself with a child of Thanglianpuia. But Thanglianpuia did not want to marry her, not because he did not love her but because he did not want to be the husband of the chief's slave who would only have to work laboriously. He tried to avoid her so would Darpawngi not see him again.

Darpawngi missed him the more, she was pacing here and there just like a dirty fool person.

She sang:

Tluang hluana chham ang zal min ti maw!

Chuti Liandang lung her zun leng ka ngaih chu;

Rual ang ka hring zo lo ve.

(You said that I sleep on the pathway!

I, suffering from the pangs of my lost lover,

Cannot live normally as others).

When she lived in Phunchawng, one guy named Daipawla, who lived near the village chief, started wooing her. Darpawngi hopefully thought that this man would not hurt her like Thanglianpuia; and her master, Nikhama too did not object him. So, she agreed to have a relationship with him. She again became pregnant with this man. When she gave birth, she named her baby new-born girl Lalremi; taking after a compromise she had with the chief.

Nonetheless, Daipawla too did not want to marry her for the same reason that is with Thanglianpuia. He too forsook her. During this time, if an illegal child was born, a child belonged to the father, and the mother had no right to claim her child. Because of this critical circumstance, Darpawngi felt so insecure. After she lost her daughter, Lalremi to Daipawla, she thought of conceiving another child to be claimed as an illegal child, to be her child alone. And if Daipawla claimed himself as the father, she planned to tell him that he was not the only man involved; therefore, he could not claim paternity for a new-born child.

She, then, would be able to raise the child. So, she started hovering around Daipawla, thus successfully getting pregnant again.

When Daipawla tried to snatch away her daughter, Thlangladiiii; she was afraid and feeling insecure of losing her daughter. She tried her best to keep her child saying he was not the only man involved. She told him, “You are not the only one, there were other men also, and she is an illegitimate child.” (Zawla, 285) But try as she may, she did not think that she could win over for such a groundless reason she made. So, she cried out for the help of Rahsipui (Circle-interpreter) Liannawna with a sorrowful song:

Ka hrai ram lai ang ka chang lo ve,

Sappui chhawn thiam Liandang zu bia i;

Tawng tin lei anga theitu.

Ka tap ruai ruai, sappui daikawmah,

(I cannot have my child,

Let me consult the man who can talk to the White men,

Who is fluent in every language.

I wail on the outskirts of the White men’s camp.)

Her songs mostly deal with her luckless romance in love, grief-stricken demise of children, and rage. As recorded in *Mizo Hla Hlui*, in her *Thlek Zual Zai*, she talked about the invasion of British:

Sappui lianin lawirawt an ham e,

Tlangah auva e, Mingo valin

'Laldang tlan rawh' a ti e.

(The big Britishers blow a trumpet

And herald on a hill,

“*Laldang*¹ run”.)

Her melancholic separation from her first husband, Lalbuta can be seen in her *Thlekzual Zai*. When she was married to Lalbuta, son of their village chief, she was deeply loved by her husband, but not by his family. His family could not approve her to be the bride of the chief for she hailed from *hnamchawm*, who lived separately from her parents for being a slave. Hence, Lalbuta's family's disapproval estranged them to sever forever. Then, she left the village and moved to Rullam. Lalbuta missed her so much that he used to cry for her. She was compelled to leave the village so as to separate them in full success. When she heard that Lalbuta used to cry because of her, she sympathized with him and sang their misfortune:

Mi zun ngai lo, keimahni zun ngai,

A tap ruai ruai thin e nichhunah.

(Being nostalgic for the allure of our lost-love,

Lalbuta used to weep during daytime.)

We have her *Lusun Zai* after she lost her first child. She had her first child from Thanglianpuia. Even though she was left alone by Thanglianpuia, she still had a child to assuage her loneliness. But, that child of hers too left her to increase her misfortune. She personalized death that took away her child and poured out her anger upon it:

Ka tuai chawnban a kai Manghauva'n,
Suanglung tih lo ngunhnam chawi ing e;
Zunfeiin sial ang chhun nang i.

(He takes my baby's hands,
 Wish I could take the pike
 And stab him as *sial*².)

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

Khiangvawn rai ka rah e,
Ka lengkelin sumtual zawlah;
A chun a hai lo ve.

(I am such a down-and-out loser,
 My kid does not mistake
 Its mother on the field.)

Here she compared her goat with her hapless life, and she sympathized with both. She was then filled with fierce that she could not have reverence for their chief anymore. She might be stereotyped as a mere nonentity who wandered about as an orphan, who her

fellow villagers thought nurtured in a ghetto environment; yet, she had the courage to confess her wrath against their chief in a very offensive way:

Dengpui 'ka var' i ti e,

I vangkhua chung siar zatin;

Pawlin ka ring lo ve.

(Dengpui, you think you are just,

I don't think your villagers would

Be as much as the stars.)

She directly told their chief that the villagers would be decreased in numbers instead of increasing because of her unjust rule. She thought the power of their chief too would surely subside due to the loss of her villagers in numbers. Even though Darpawngi was just a mere nonentity, she was daring enough to fight for whatever is wrong. Just like Laltheri, she was ready to struggle for change.

A Self-portrait in Darpawngi zai

The world-famous poets or writers who dwell under the sky hardly have a happy life. Rather, their lives are full of sorrows. And those very sour experiences make them write poems which are worth remembering. As a matter of fact, we, human beings who were born on this earth are all the victims of the ebb and flow of life. As Malvolio says, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them," while there are some people born with a silver spoon in their mouth, some people

seem to be born to face a lot of trouble from birth to death. And Darpawngi is one amongst them. Her life was full of misery. It seems like she had no luck in this sinful world. Her ordeal pushed her down into the chasm and she looked into the void. There was nothing she could grab and have a long hold of it except an empty dark space. It seems like to each and every pole she turned there was only a thick tall wall built up of stones. It will be very apt to take out one line from Lalzuahliana's poem, "Kan Chenna" to explain her situation : "*Lung bang a ni! Lung bang a ni!*" (It's a stone wall! A stone wall!) (4)

She unmasked her life and provided an insight into her private life. In her *Thinrim zai*, she portrayed herself as a woman, who was carrying social stigma, saying: "*Keimah Vanhnuaithangi khua tin sel.*" (Me, who is defamed by everyone on earth). Though she had no wrongdoings she was condemned and blamed for her misfortune. In her life span of time, she had enough despondency. After her first husband, Lalbuta's family divorced her for being *hnamchawm* and a slave, she met Thanglianpuia but enjoyed only for a while for he left her when she was with his child. He would obviously stoop to woo her, but soon after getting what he wanted, he walked away from her. This is actually the hallmark of men's infidelity. That ephemeral relationship really hurt her that she could neither sleep nor eat; neither put on nice clothes nor combed her hair. All she could do was compose songs of her lost love. Then again, she became the centre of the talk of the village. She sang:

Chun leh zuain hal lo u,

In hrai Thuami a tlu ruai e, tlangrelah;

Thanchhingpa di ai a rui e.

(Don't get angry, mother and father,

Your daughter stumbles upon a hearsay,
 For being obsessed with her lover.)

She did not hail from a well-to-do family. As written in *Mizo Hla Hlui*, when she was a little girl, she had to live in Lalchema's (Chief of Laisawral) house as a slave; and after a few years, in Vuta's son, Lalkhuma's house; then, moved back to Lalchema after she was divorced by her husband, Lalbuta's family for she was *hnamchawm*. Then again she moved to Khawbel and then to Thentlang. It is the circumstance that makes her move from one place to another. Nevertheless, she had fallen victim to her fellow villagers as people are all so much interested in other's business. We have seen in her *Thlek Zual Zai* like this:

Khua tin a chhiar min ti reng lo u,

Saithuamipa'n tlangnuam nihliap min zar e;

Tuankham kawltu ka chawi reng lo ve.

(Do not always gossip of my migration,

Here, I am treated so well;

It is not because I am an idle woman.)

According to Zawla's *Pipute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, when she lived in Darlawng, Buangtheuva's village, their chief – Buangtheuva was having *khuangchawi*³, a grand feast of fame. The neighbouring village, Khawbel's chief was invited to that feast. During the celebration, Khawbel's Chief, Darpawngi and the people were singing and dancing on the ground. All eyes were on Darpawngi, well-known for her talent in dancing. She then composed a song in a trice.

Chief of Khawbel was so moved by her talent that he invited her to live at his house. This kind of invitation was very common during this time. Mizo forefathers were very fond of singing and dancing, and of a brave warrior. Some chiefs often invited people who got one or two of these admirable traits to live at their village. So, Darpawngi and Chief of Khawbel left Darlawng together. But, like Lalbiakliana writes in his *“Mizo Zaita (Vol. 1)”* “All the fame brings along a kind of disgrace” (183), Darpawngi’s fame too seems to bring her some infamy. She was criticized badly for moving here and there. At this time, Darpawngi composed the above song- *“Khua tin a chhiar...ka chawi reng lo ve”*.

Darpawngi Zai is like a portrait gallery. It shows all the nuances of her pictures. In her *Thinrim Zai*, she painted her portrait as a woman, who did nothing but lazed around:

Tahpuan kan khawng mawh e,

Thlum hang kai tha Laldanga runah;

Tlai ni ka leng leh e.

(Seldom do weaving,

I, in the house that has the best brewed wine,

Spend my whole day again.)

W.B. Yeats, in his poem “Sailing to Byzantium”, writes, “An aged man is but a paltry thing/A tattered coat upon a stick” (9-10). Darpawngi was not an aged woman yet, still she was considered a paltry thing, as worthless as a scarecrow, a torn coat hanging upon a stick to shoo away birds. But her songs became so popular that it spread to other villages

very soon. She too noticed this and, being aware of the fact that the power of time, which is like a scythe to Shakespeare, cannot swallow the infinity of poetry, said:

Ka tak laikhumah zal reng e,

Ka zai mu ang leng e, khua tin fangin;

Hnam tin zaleng di awihna.

(My body always lies down in a bed,

Yet my song flies as a bird to every village,

‘Tis a love song for everyone.)

She had made her own tunes and no one can compose a song using the same tunes of hers. Says Thanmawia, “Darpawngi’s songs have uniqueness that no one composes a song using her tune; and it is just like pure water which is not concocted or diluted with anything.” (261) She, a woman of frankness to peel off the layers of her life, was well known for her courage. It would be very appropriate to quote Kamala Das’ lines which show the necessity of peeling off one’s own mask: “... by confessing/By peeling off my layers/I reach closer to the soul” (Composition, 152-154). Only by confessing and by peeling off her layers, Darpawngi could find some kind of relief and solace from her critical circumstances.

Her *Thinrim Zai*, Confluence of Anger and Self-pity

When she lived in Thentlang, Darpawngi and one of the chief’s elders both claimed ownership over her kid, a young goat. Then, they were brought to the chief’s court. It had been decided that a kid would be unleashed in front of the two mother goats, so would it approach its mother. Even though a kid approached its mother which belonged to

Darpawngi, the chief gave it to her elder. Soon after, they slaughtered it for they found it difficult to keep it away from its real mother; and Darpawngi's goat kept on searching for its kid. When she saw her goat craving for its baby, she compared it to her situation when she lost her child. And out of empathy, she sang:

Ai! Ka lengkel, ke lengkel,

Keimah iangin hrai a ngai e;

Nau ang a tahna.

(Ay, my goat, my goat,

It misses its kid just like me,

Can't help crying and wailing.)

She was then filled with anger. She could no longer have any respect for their chief, who was a widow. She could not just sit back and stared at the injustice. One of the hardest parts in life is when we are filled with vengeance but cannot take revenge just because we are of lower class or our voice has been ignored and rejected. Even Heathcliff (Emily Bronte's' Wuthering Heights) is obsessed with taking revenge on Hindley. When Mrs. Dean tries to prevent him from doing it, telling him that it is for God to avenge, he replies, "No, God won't have the satisfaction that I shall." (65) Darpawngi too could not take any vengeful action accordingly but cried out against their chief and expostulated about her anger and that she would be her chief's opponent so forth:

Keimah Chhimtlangthangnu,

Khua lian chalngeng intai angin;

Dengpui, ka tai dawn che.

(I, mother of Chhimtlangthangi,
 Will be against you;
 As big buffaloes brawl.)

When her child died, there was nothing that could replace her son. Happiness was gone; pleasure had no role to play anymore. Even the beauty of nature from which people get blessings and enjoyment withered immediately after the death of her son. She cried, mourned, and sang sad songs that talked only of her pain and rage towards death. Verily, she liked to slay death that took away her child.

Kawla awmlai lungmawl a lian e,
Chu ka thin chu, tinkim dawn hlei lo;
Chawngsa iang sah nuam ing e.
 (And oh, death! The big proud death!
 My burning heart, unable to think of anything else,
 Longs to chop it like *Chawngsa*⁴)

Darpawngi personalized ‘death’ and thus longing to chop ‘it’ like a meat. Simultaneously, she wanted to have wings to hover around the clouds so as to search for her child. She, then composed a song to express her desire to fly up above in order to find solace and perhaps her lost child too. She uttered:

A va chan nuam ing e, chung pualhrang;
Tlang tin fang i lunglenin.

(How I long to become a bird,
And fly to each and every hill.)

There is a saying that time heals everything. But we have to wait patiently for it requires the wait. She had to wait for time which could soothe the pang she had been undergoing, but time seemed to take so long and the wait itself seems so cruel. And vice versa it is also a destroyer, as we can see it in Shakespeare's sonnets. Sonnet 65 explains better the hotchpotch of these two opposite powers. It reads like this:

Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?

O fearful meditation! where alack

Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid? (8-10)

Everyone is subject to the destructive power of death after all, and so is Darpawngi's child. No one can escape death's cold hands. But the one that brought her child to his end is Time. However, she needed to wait for the same Time to heal her injured heart. But it seems the wait could not be over. It would obviously be so unpleasant having to wait for time that destroyed her child, to heal her pain. She then cried:

Ka riang mang e, vanpui chung chhinah,

Chinlai chhuahtlang an dailung rawnah;

Khuarei ngaiin ka tap e.

(I am so lost and lorn under this firmament,

On the porch of the neighbouring village;

I bewail for the pang of longing for time.)

She tried to wake her dead-child who was already laid in a grave, “*Bawihbangpui, hai ang lo thang la.*” (O my child, wake up from your deep slumber). But she was not Jesus who, endowed with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, called out Lazarus after he was buried for four days. She was just a woman, a condemned woman, who lamented and sought a solution to fill the void left by her son’s death.

Awmlai lengin tlang tin dung rawn zui,

Vanduai runah ser ang cham na e;

Ka tuai chawnban a kai e.

(An uninvited death, as it goes to every hill and valley,

“Tis stuck in the very unfortunate house,

And taking my baby’s hands.)

We do not need to make a separate subtitle to write about her biography for her songs say it all. Reading her songs becomes reading her life. It more than makes us empathize as she empathized with her goat that had lost its baby. Rarely, she provided us an optimistic point of view of her life. Yes, for her, life is not fair at all. Lalthangliana also writes like this, “Darpawngi’s whole span of time is in a state of flux, that it can be said that she is one of those who suffer the most untold sufferings” (53). She did not hide her feelings and personal experiences. Rather, she had given vent to it. She had unveiled and was displaying her personal experiences, and that made her a confessional poet. When we read her songs, we are entering an old forlorn triangular room which has a mural of her picture on each wall.

Certainly, we seldom have a chance to read of her happy moment when we read her songs. Yes, her life is indeed sorrowful. That is the reason why her songs only talk about a bitter memoir. She was not ostracized but marginalized, not deserted but denied, not alone but lonely, not an outlaw but made living in a remote corner of a particular place, not convicted but victimized. If compared to Hardy's heroines, her misfortune cannot be considered less severe. She might be a mere nonentity during her lifetime, but her songs speak too loud to be pushed aside. As forthright utterance is her forte, she unveils her excruciating story and thirst; reveals her secret thoughts and feelings; and provides a spectacle for the readers into her private life without any sense of shame and guilt. No doubt, she sang her songs just like confessional poets who do not tend to persuade us but take the readers into their confidence.

End Notes:

1. Laldang : A poetic word for a young man.
2. Sial : A large animal known as a *mithun* in the North-East India, which was one of their domestic animal and slaughtered in Mizos' festivals.
3. Khuangchawi : A grand feast of fame which could be prepared only by a wealthy man/family.
4. Chawngsa : A meat of great feast.

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CHAPTER- 4

LALTHERI ZAI

4.1 Life Performance: Her disobedience and courage

“Performance, like writing, is always a ‘text’, and it is the textual instabilities of specific,” writes Deirdre Heddon (Quoted by Gill, 137). Laltheri’s life performance- how she lives her life plays a vital role in her tragic loss of her lover and the unpleasant reaction towards her family and over the dead-body of Chalthanga.

Lalchawngpuii, well known as Laltheri was, as has already been mentioned in the first chapter, the daughter of one of the most famous Sailo chiefs, Lalsavunga. Her ancestors were known for their bravery, which may be the reason of her bold character. During this time, there was one rule which they strictly follow that the children of the village chief were not supposed to have an affair with *hnamchawm*. They were strictly forbidden to tie a knot with them. And if the chief’s daughter got pregnant with *hnamchawm*, that man should be killed. However, Laltheri being courageous enough to disregard this entire unwritten rule pushed aside it. She disrespectfully disobeyed her Sailo brothers and enjoyed the love of Chalthanga.

Performance texts, like written texts, are capable of complex engagements with the matter of experience, with the problematics of memory and its potential representation, with the intricate relationships between lived life and its telling (Gill, 137). Laltheri’s confessional voice began right after a terrible tragedy happened. Before that, she was never

known as a song-composer. If pondering over her terrible tragedy, we would come to know that she was responsible for her loss, because if she had obediently followed the words of her brothers when they rebuked and thwarted her from dating Chalthanga, Chalthanga would not have died that way.

During the times of our forefathers, all the chiefs remained so powerful that their village was under the complete control of them. If anyone angered them or defamed them, they could just kill that person. Amongst the chiefs, Sailo chiefs were best known for their pride. They kept a vast distance between them and *hnamchawm*. Daughter of Lalsavunga, (a proud Sailo chief), Laltheri, born with a silver spoon in her mouth, was such a stubborn and bold woman. Even though she was thwarted by her family to date Chalthanga, *hnamchawm tlangval*, she dared to break the code of her family. She chose Chalthanga to be her lover of all men. Not only this, she openly dated him with no holds barred which put her lover's life into danger. Chalthanga told her not to show the love overtly; still Laltheri pushed aside his suggestion saying that she would protect and save him from any harm. At last, she conceived Chalthanga's baby.

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

Sailo brothers. They hired Lamhawia, a slave to kill Chalthanga. Chalthanga was beheaded, and his head being hung on *sahlam*.

Laltheri did not stoop nor yield over the death of her lover. The more her brutal brothers showed their disapproval of her unbiased love for Chalthanga, the more she became fierce. She ‘was not just a victim but also an active participant who struggled for change.’ “The Sailo brothers considered the death as ‘honour killing’” (187). But for Laltheri, it was a vital incident in her life that changed her from a woman of love into a woman of wrath, from a woman of friendliness into a woman of grief-stricken avenger. Her mourning had no boundaries, no ends, and no limits just as she loved him with no holds barred. She chose to lie naked on the cold floor than to clothe her body, sing mournful songs than to eat, act as though she was a fool to furiously protest against her arrogant brothers than to live the Sailo princess’ life, and listen to her wrathful heart than to yield to her brothers’ brutal action to show her weakness. She was determined to wreak vengeance on the person who killed Chalthanga. She sang with full conviction:

Ka chun leh zua suihlung in mawl lua e,

Kan sumtualah Thangdang thlunglu hawihte'n in tar le.

(How thoughtless are you, mother and father

Displaying the head of my beloved on our court yard?)

As written by Ruth:

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

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

All the chiefs wanted to maintain a vast distance between them and *hnamchawm*. They needed to be so different from others. But, as cited above, unlike those proud typical chiefs' daughters, Laltheri wanted to erase all those kinds of margins, desired to be free so as to live normally and equally with *hnamchawm*, and insisted on breaking 'the barrier of the Sailo marriage institution'. She had a strong intent to fill up entire gap between her place as a princess and *hnamchawm* by leading her life in her own way with no heed to the words of her brothers. She was widely reckoned to be married to an eligible man who would be fit enough to rule over a village just like her brothers. But, she pushed aside all these expectations and chose to date Chalthanga.

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

Chalthanga's demise made her stripped off her clothes and walked around naked on the streets. She looked miser and dirty day by day as she did not maintain her physical

appearance. Out of sympathy, her mother asked her to clothe herself and eat at least some food. But Laltheri replied her with a sad song:

Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu,

Ka di thangdanga zalna mah, chhimhlei tual daiah.

Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu,

Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.

(I will not clothe myself, mother,

Even my lover lies dead beneath the earth.

Will I not die of hunger, mother,

It'll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for Sailo princess.)

As time goes by, the pain which was inflicted upon her was also gone day by day. After she got over with her mourning, she, as stubborn as she was, dated another guy who was also *hnamchawm*. Her previous tragic loss did not prevent her from wanting to date *hnamchawm*. Rather, she seemed determined to break the code of her proud Sailo brothers from the beginning. But this time, her brothers did not dare to thwart her. She was married to this man.

Once and again, she chose to be with none other than *hnamchawm tlangval*, and this shows that she had no intention to obey her brothers and to marry a man of her family's level, a man who would suit her dignity. The consequence of her reaction towards her brothers is very worth-remembering, and this very consequence is the thing which immortalizes Laltheri's name so long as *Mizo* exists in the world especially for young adults. Her reaction made her brother sent out a message on his dying bed not to commit the

same thing which they just did it to Laltheri, not to strictly impose a rule which says a Sailo princess must not date or marry *hnamchawm tlangval*.

Lalthangliana too cites, “As R.L. Thanmawia rightly says, ‘She uses humiliation as her rod to strike down the wall which brings groan to *Mizo* young adults not to be shut again’ (49). Had she not been so stubborn and courageous, as arrogant as her brothers, to protest against them, or rather had she not been disobedient to her brothers, the wall which had been built with reliable foundation that brings tears to many young adults would have been still the same till today.

4.2 Love, Obsession and Fury

Love always plays a vital role in literature. It is always the centre of every relationship, the reason behind every sacrifice, and a thing which dwells in every man. It is one of Kamala Das’s most frequent themes. She has been called “The love queen”. John Donne has been rightly reckoned “a poet of love”. Shakespeare’s love for his friend and the dark lady persists throughout his sonnets. Vankhama’s love poem “*Hmangaihna*” is so divine.

For Elizabeth Barrett Browning, love was the greatest thing in the world. She wrote down a beautiful sonnet on her love for her man entitled “How do I love thee”. Her love for him was unfathomably deep and steady enough to remain throughout life-long span of time, and that she would love him more and “better after death”:

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

With my lost saints, - I love thee with the breath

Smiles, tears, of all my life! – and, if God choose

I shall but love thee better after death. (11-14)

On the other hand, love can also be destructive as it is a powerful thing. For instance, the love of two men from two different countries for Helen of Troy brings war in Homer's "Iliad". The love which exists between Heathcliff and Catherine brings lifetime guilt for Catherine and self-destruction for Heathcliff in Bronte's "Wuthering Heights". Othello's love for his wife, Desdemona makes him murder her out of jealousy. Hardy's character, Angel Clare from "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" did not show his love for Tess enough to save her from leading a very burdensome life which was worsened by stringent economy and from dying by her own hands for Clare was much disturbed by jealousy.

It is such a thing that often overwhelms and dominates men. It can bloom beautifully and last for a life span of time; on the other hand, it can turn into hatred and bring destruction to human. Many writers already penned an essay about 'love', yet not a single written note can suffice its true meaning.

Laltheri's love for Chalthanga is worth taking into account. She, as a daughter of Chief, was not supposed to mingle with *hnamchawm*. She was nurtured and taught in a royal Sailo chief's house. Yet, she fell in love with Chalthanga, *hnamchawm*. During those days, it was strictly prohibited to have an affair for the chief's family with *hnamchawm*. But, Laltheri, being bold and stubborn, did not give a damn to those rules. She just walked around with him very often with no intention to hide it from public. Many a time, she was

rebuked and warned by her family, but to no avail. Laltheri loved and favoured Chalthanga a lot that she never wanted to drink rice beer or eat meat without Chalthanga. If she could not find him, or he was not around her, she would send someone to look for and bring him to her.

She loved him with no strings attached and was obsessed with him. She would wait for him when he was on his way to the field, and stop him for a while just to be with him. Even when she was about to have rice beer, she never wanted to drink in his absence. She would just send someone to look for him. Her love and obsession blindfolded her to see that there could be a fatal plot against him. She was too obsessed with him to maintain his safety. Therefore, her love and obsession dragged him to the road of death, he then died pathetically.

Laltheri's arrogant brothers hired Lamhawia to have him killed. On hearing this plot against him, Chalthanga ran away for his life. He did not dare to procrastinate even a little time to run to Laltheri, who promised to save him from any harm. Fortunately, Chalthanga could safely leave the village. Nonetheless, while he was sleeping in the midst of the jungle, Lamhawia came upon and caught him. He tried to run, but Lamhawia told him that he came to bring him home to Laltheri, and that Laltheri was looking for him for feasting and drinking. That was what Laltheri used to do very often. At the mention of Laltheri, Chalthanga got ensnared. While they were drinking rice beer, Lamhawia struck him down from his back and killed him. He cut his head and went back to the village.

While at this time, Laltheri was looking for Chalthanga. But she was pounded by the death of her lover. Now, his head was hung on *sahlam*. She could not bear the sight of her lover's head being hung pathetically. She dashed out to the jungle in search of her beloved's dead body which would be lying alone somewhere. She brought her *puan thulkhung* to swathe his cold dead body. After having buried him, she came back to the village and started mourning the deceased of her lover. She did neither want to eat nor clothe herself.

Laltheri's life changed topsy-turvy. Her mourning had no limits, no ends, nor boundaries. She neither wanted to put on her clothes nor eat food. She just wailed lying on the floor. Fall season ended, then winter came, still Laltheri did not want to wear anything to warm her cold dead-like body. Her mother tried to feed, to clothe, and to soothe her pain; but try as she may, she could not persuade her daughter. She sang:

Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu,

Ka di thangdanga zalna mah, chhimhlei tual daiah.

Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu,

Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.

(I will not clothe myself, mother,

Even my lover lies dead beneath the earth.

Will I not die of hunger, mother,

It'll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for Sailo princess.)

The demise of Chalthanga caused a great wrath to Laltheri that she was full of anger towards her family who gave order and towards the one who killed her lover. In lieu of living a normal life, she chose to lament over her loss and composed a number of mournful

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

When they killed Chalthanga, Laltheri’s brother’s thought they ended their defamation and the bad for once and for all, yet it became worse. It was not the end for Laltheri at all. Instead, it was just a starting point for her to show that her love for Chalthanga was real, and that it was not that weak to be ended by the cruel deeds of her brothers. Even after Chalthanga’s life was ended, her love still remained. Not only remaining but it became stronger. The darker the world, the brighter her love shone. The demise of her lover aroused her poetic talent which was long in a deep slumber. And she used this awakened talent as her armour to show her brothers that she would not be subjugated, and that she would fight them back till her last breath. She chose to struggle for change instead of remaining a slave to the royal boundaries and bondage.

Laltheri got pregnant with Chalthanga’s child before the most tragic happened. She gave birth to a lovely baby boy. When her son learned to walk, she used to let him hold a knife, chop a pumpkin, and told him to find out the one who killed his father and avenge his father as soon as he became a man. When Lamhawia heard this, he ran away for fear of getting killed. But at a very young age, her son died. She could hardly bear the loss of her lover and her son. “She refused to talk to her brothers and even refused to pay a visit to her

eldest brother, Lalphunga on his dying bed as she could not forgive their unforgiving act. Lalphunga regretted his unkind action and thereafter sent out a message saying that a Sailo could freely date and marry other clan” (Ruth, 188). She sang her anger:

Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga,

Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu.

(Why don't you kill me instead?

My unnatural death would rather float in the air.)

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

After she got over the pain, Laltheri, as stubborn as she was, fell in love with the man who was also a commoner. But this time, her family did not dare to protest against her. She got married to him and lived happily ever after. Ruth has written like this: “Laltheri did

not care the status of her partner as she was humble and kind. When it came to love she forgot her own identity as Sailo princess.” (Mizo Studies, 190)

4.3 Her voice: A wounded woman’s rage

As for Thomas Hardy, a wounded vanity of a lady is more dangerous than a lion, Laltheri’s rage was dangerous enough to subjugate her powerful Sailo brothers who were considered the most powerful and invincible chiefs during their times. In the first place, they thought they would put their sister under their control, so they thwarted her and suppressed her from doing things in her way. But in the long run, Laltheri proved to be “not just a victim but also an active participant who struggled for change”. Her painstaking effort to vanquish the Sailo pride and the wall which stood erect between them and *hnamchawm* diminished the wide gap, and her strong love for Chalthanga penetrated through the chasm and filled up the void.

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

Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga,

Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu.

(Why don't you kill me instead?

My unnatural death would rather float in the air.)

When her man was beheaded, she was full of anger, and her rage made her wanting to struggle till she won over her brothers. Soon after Chalthanga's tragic death, Lalphunga, Laltheri's brother too died. Before he died, he sent a message to his sister, Laltheri pleading her to visit him as he was on his dying bed. But, she did not even want to bother to pay a visit to her brother, Lalphunga on his dying bed. She said, "Why did he kill his brother-in-law? It is illegitimate. I shall not go." (Lalsangzuali, 44&45). Writes Ruth, "Lalphunga regretted his unkind action and thereafter sent out a message saying that a Sailo could freely date and marry other clans" (188).

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

And there is a charge, a very large charge

For a word or a touch

Or a bit of blood.

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.

So, so, Herr Doctor.

So, Herr enemy. (61-66)

The doctor would probably thought of being a life-saver for Plath, yet Plath did not think in the same way. Correspondingly, Laltheri's brothers ordered a death warrant of Chalthanga in order to save her from further infamy as well as to keep up their royalty intact. But, unfortunately, they had failed to prewise what this cruel deed would bring to their sister. She sang:

Awi ka nu e tum tawk lungdi Chaltuaia ka chan e,

Tap tap tang e, Saikhaw nihliap Ruallung zodaiah.

(Oh! mother, I have lost Chaltuaia of my equal status,

I will but weep and weep here in the high land of Ruallung.)

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

Why not leave

Me alone, critics, friends, visiting cousins,

Every one of you? Why not let me speak in

Any language I like? The language I speak,

Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses

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

Hopes (8-17).

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

Bawmzo ral mah dar ang a chhai ngam lo,

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

Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga,

Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu.

(They dare not to face their enemies of Bawmzo,

Yet, they chop my lover's body as though it was a meat of feast.

Why don't you kill me instead?

My unnatural death would rather float in the air.)

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

Ka chun leh zua suihlung in mawl lua e,

Kan sumtualah Thangdang thlunglu hawihte'n in tar le.

(How thoughtless are you, mother and father

Displaying the head of my beloved on our court yard?)

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

At times, she hopefully thought his soul would like to visit her and his child. Whenever she was offered a rice beer, she would ask for Chalthanga's share too. She was more than aware of his death, yet she still did not want to drink rice beer or eat meat without Chalthanga. She would spare some for the soul of Chalthanga. After she gave birth to a child, she was filled with joy and sorrow as well. That confluence of the two opposite feelings haunted her. She sang piteously:

Lungduh lakah hraite han chawi ila,

Kara thlak loh a riang tur hi ka ngaingam lo ve.

(Though it was born out of love,

I can't imagine how pitiable it would be being raised by a single parent.)

The Mizo forefathers believed that when someone died, his soul would go to *pialral*¹. But before he entered that place, his soul would be roaming around. The grieving family used to have *thlaichhiah*² for the soul. They used to believe that the soul would be hovering around them for some time that it would visit their house too. Laltheri, too, thought

the soul of Chalthanga would like to visit his child and hug him tenderly. So, she sang her reverie:

Thlohmu lengin Chhippui kan dai a vel,

Ka tawnmawngah Thangdang rauthlain run a vel e.

Rauthlalengin kan run khuai ang a vel,

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

(A hawk hovers around our courtyard,

My beloved's soul too hovers around our house in my dreams.

His soul hovers around like a bee,

With no food, mother, give him a pot full of food)

She was still so conscious about his soul. She was afraid his soul might be starving somewhere because she feared that he might be scared to find food to eat for he died a terrific death. So, she asked her mother to give him food aplenty. Nonetheless, she feared his soul would still be afraid of her cruel brothers who did their best to sever them forever. She thought of him roaming around their house on one hand, and feared his soul would still be terrified at the brutal killing on the other. So she sang her hopeless dream:

Hmara lenbuang va tinrengin a par an tlan,

Chalthang rauthla'n run in hlam sawm a vel ngam lo ve;

A hraite chawi awih lai nuam ve maw?

(All kinds of birds eat the fruits of Northern trees,

But Chalthanga's soul dares not to hover around our house;

Does he long to cuddle his child?)

All her songs cannot be put in a written book due to an absence of a record. *Laltheri Zai* contains about thirty songs. The period she composed all her songs is not that long, perhaps, around 1840-1845. All her songs are songs of, as has already mentioned before, protest. She strongly protested against her cruel brothers. She openly mourned the demise of her lover, and was lamenting over her loss with no limits. And because of her courageous reaction towards the wrong deeds imposed upon her by her Sailo brothers, the wide gap between Sailo chiefs and *hnamchawm* had been vanquished.

I must let my mind striptease

I must extrude

Autobiography (94-96)

says Kamala Das in her poem “Composition” for she has an intense need to let her “mind striptease” so as to sigh out all her suffocating breath. Laltheri, a wounded woman, too had felt the need to express all her anguish, tortured psyche, and extreme anger; so, she did great.

End notes:

1. Pialral : A place which was thought to be as paradise since pre-Christian era.
2. Thlaichhiah : All kinds of food prepared by the grieving family in one corner of a house for the soul.

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6. R.L. Thanmawia, *Chuailo I*

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Confessional poetry, like other literary genres has its own nature and characteristics. First of all, confessional poetry is personal. It is wholly basing upon the life of a poet. All men have one or two skeletons in their closet. Confessional poets expose that embarrassing secrets of their life in their poems, which is why they are often mistaken for mentally sick people. They are present everywhere in their works in one form or the other, and their confessions appear to be very direct. The private experiences of the poet play a significant role in confessional poetry. Agony, sufferings, sorrows, and disturbances are all personal as regards the confessional poets.

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

As in the words of Lalthangliana, "Darpawngi's whole span of time is in a state of flux, that it can be said she is one of those who suffer the most untold sufferings." (53) Darpawngi and Laltheri, though they are of two different statuses, belong to the same

period. They both suffered mental, emotional and psychological disturbances. Their songs too came oozing out of their agonies, sorrows, and adversities. Darpawngi, if exaggerated, being born a slave, remained a slave wherever she went till Thawmpawnga freed her as a reward for he was pleased with her and her husband, who was also a slave. Her rod is justice, and one of her *zai* – *Thinrim Zai* is a demand of justice. This *zai* speaks loudest among the three *zai* of Darpawngi as regards confessional poetry.

When she lived in Thentlang, as already mentioned in Chapter 3, she and one of their chief's elder both claim ownership over a kid, a baby goat. During this time, their chief was a Zadeng chief who was a widow. The chief told them to leash both of their mother-goats in the field, and that they would unleash a baby-goat in the field believing that it would not mistake its mother. So they did as planned; a baby-goat approached straight Darpawngi's goat once it was unleashed. Still, their chief gave a kid to her elder. Darpawngi could not just stare at this injustice despite the fact that she was just a slave. During this time, no one dared to mess with the chief. Nevertheless, Darpawngi, a woman of rage and courage immediately composed a convicting song:

Keimah Chhimtlangthangnu,

Khua lian chaln-geng intai angin;

Dengpui, ka tai dawn che.

Chhimtlang ka liam dawn e,

Khuazanghinnu'n biahthu tum thing;

Laiah i tan lo ve.

(I, mother of Chhimtlangthangi,
 Will be against you;
 As big buffaloes brawl.
 I will be gone far away,
 For Khuazanghinu did not do;
 Justice to your villagers.)

She chose to be rumoured as the one who always migrated from one village to another rather than to simply accept the twists and turns of the unjust chiefs who partially treated their villagers. She used her precious talent in composing songs as her armour to fight back their chief. Commenting on Darpawngi's courage, Thanmawia writes, "Zoram may beget a son as good in administration as Vanapa, a daughter as expert in soothing people's mind as Saikuti, but will it give birth to a daughter who will dare to take Darpawngi's oar and lead our boat to the right path just as she did..." (Chuailo I, 148).

Regarding Laltheri, her armour is love which does never discriminate anyone. Although she was not supposed to mingle with *hnamchawm*, she was rebuked many a time for her unbiased love and likes. She had no intention to follow all the rules and restrictions imposed on her from the very beginning. She wanted to be emancipated from all barriers and being treated as V.I.P. She desired to live like an ordinary people leading a normal life. She would likely choose to hang around with her *hnamchawm* friends. Not only that, she chose Chalthanga, a *hnamchawm tlangval* to be her lover despite the fact that she was beautiful enough and had a high status to lure an eligible husband.

When she carried a baby in her womb, her arrogant brothers could not tolerate this defamation that they killed Chalthanga. They thought they won over her when they killed her lover, yet it was not the end of the road for Laltheri. She was obviously emotionally and mentally injured badly, yet not defeated. She came back, as though from the city of death, to avenge her lover. She had now turned from a woman of love to a woman of rage. She sang out all of her grief and fury against her brothers:

Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu,

Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.

Kei mi thah thung loh Laldanga,

Ka fam erawh khuavel thansarah a zam tur chu.

(Will I not die of hunger, mother,

It'll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for Sailo princess.

Why don't you kill me instead?

My unnatural death would rather float in the air.)

There was a thick tall wall built by Sailo chiefs which stood between Sailo clan and *hnamchawm* so that no one may climb up to break the rules. That wall often brought tears to many Mizo young adults. Thanmawia rightly remarks as “*tahna bang*”, ‘Wailing Wall’. Laltheri’s strong determination and courage broke this wall not to be built up ever again. At being a daughter, a sister, and a princess, she found the atmosphere very choking as there were many useless restrictions imposed on her which thwarted her from freedom. So, she craved for an opportunity to break away. After her brothers killed Chalthanga, Laltheri’s true colour was shown. They realized that she was a sister they cannot subdue that, they

gathered together and had sent out a message which says, “Let us not do this to any of our descendants again hereafter.” (Chuailo I, 149)

After she had gotten over with this pain, she married Dinmanga, who was also a *hnamchawm tlangval*, out of her will. Even her brothers did not dare to prevent her anymore. Her unyielding and bold character to break the code of her family successfully broke down the fence which over-protected her. She unleashed herself and also all other Mizo young adults. Amongst her admirable traits, her unbiased love is most memorable and notable.

Another important characteristic to be noted is that confessional poetry is like purgatory. In accordance with the beliefs of Roman Catholic, purgatory is the place where all sins, ignorance and blemishes would be cleansed away by an eternal fire, so that one may enter the kingdom of eternity. Therefore, it is not only purgation of one’s sins, but a step to enter the whole perfectness. Chaudhary remarks, “The act of writing confessional poetry implies not only a desire for self-purgation, but also, a desire for transmuting one’s traumatic experiences into something creative, a work of art and a poem.” (4)

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

I survive the while,

Arranging my morning.

These are my fingers, this my baby.

The clouds are a marriage dress, of that pallor. (49-52)

This is true for writers and poets. After having articulated all their worries and sorrows, they find some kind of relief and joy over their creative works. For Darpawngi and Laltheri, exposing and unveiling all events and their feelings in their songs became their only weapon to fight back their opponents. Therefore, they used their weapon repeatedly till they succeeded in their fights. Composing songs was a means of conveying their true colour.

In all their songs, Darpawngi and Laltheri never tried to appear as others nor tried to wear someone else's mask. Rather, they even unmasked themselves while telling their audiences all the incidents they had encountered boldly and openly without hiding anything. They both had mental breakdown. So, they used their songs for self-purgation to get breakthrough.

While exposing and unmasking their bitter sorrows in their poems, they look forward to transmute their chaotic and traumatic experiences. They intensely desire to redefine and refine themselves in order to reclaim what has been lost due to critical circumstances. They desperately seek for a new identity while stripping off their veil. After all, confessional poetry has rightly been said a psychic striptease. Darpawngi and Laltheri were not easily consoled till they found adequate remedy for the destruction inflicted upon them. They eagerly look for something to transmute their chaotic and traumatic experiences.

The *Mizos* are very fond of singing and dancing. So, those who were capable of composing songs, or of singing, or of dancing were always appreciated a lot. Darpawngi had possessed all these three talents. She was highly appreciated that she was invited to many villages. And another reason to be noted what made her shift to another village very often is her adversity. Therefore, she became the victim of the talk of the village for being unstable. When she heard this scandal, she sang:

Khua tin a chhiar min ti reng lo u,

Saithuamipa 'n tlangnuam nihliap min zar e;

Tuankham kawltu ka chawi reng lo ve.

(Do not always gossip of my migration,

It is not because I am an idle woman;

And here, I am well-treated.)

Confessional poetry is also self-justification. Confessional poets have the need to re-identify themselves, the need which is closely related to Fanon's idea of the need to reclaim the past. They feel an intense longing to justify themselves in one way or the other. Darpawngi too had felt the same way when she was deserted by Thanglianpuia right after she conceived a baby. She knew she was victimized for always being lying lethargically. She immediately felt the need to justify herself:

Tluang hluana chham ang zal min ti maw!

Chuti Liandang lung her zun leng ka ngaih chu;

Rual ang ka hring zo lo ve.

(You said that I sleep on the pathway!

I, suffering from the pangs of my lost lover,

Cannot live normally as others.)

She was afraid her parents might be astonished and ashamed of her if the rumours reach them. So, once and again, she felt the need to justify her attitude to her parents:

Chun leh zuain hal lo u,

In hrai Thuami a tlu ruai e, tlangrelah;

Thanchhingpa di ai a rui e.

(Don't get angry, mother and father,

Your daughter stumbles upon hearsay;

For being obsessed with her lost love.)

Laltheri stripped off her garments when she heard that her lover was beheaded. Stripping off her clothes symbolizes, as Ruth rightly explains, stripping off an identity from which she longed to be free. She desperately sought for freedom and a new identity. She wanted to live an ordinary life like everyone else. So, she lay down on a floor naked and did nothing except crying as though she was a mad woman. Even her mother could not persuade her to swathe her cold body. She replied, "I will not clothe myself, mother/Even my lover lies dead beneath the earth." Her mother then asked her to take some food for fearing that she might die of fatigue or lack of food. But, she refused, "Will I not die of hunger, mother/It'll be easier to die of pensive loneliness for Sailo princess."

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

... Rob me, destiny, if you must,

Rob me of my sustenance, but do not, I beg

Of you, do not take away my thirst ... (Quoted by Weisbord, 5)

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

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

Similarly, Laltheri chose to lament her loss. When her mother tried to help her get over it sooner, she refused by saying that she would neither clothe her body nor ate anything" She preferred a lamenting life to a normal life. She chose not to forget about her

loss and her lost lover. Even after having borne a baby-boy, her son was an ample reminder of her deceased lover. She sang:

Sawngka lerah ka hraileng ka awi,

Ka lungdi Chaltuaia a riang ngei e.

(I sang my baby lullaby to hush at our front porch,

Oh! How lonely is my lover, Chaltuaia.)

Darpawngi, too was reminded of her dead son, Bawihbanga by her goat when it cried for its baby. She could not forget how angry she was towards death. She suddenly compared herself to her goat which lost its baby and sang:

Ai! Ka lengkel, ke lengkel,

Keimah iangin hrai a ngai e;

Nau ang a tahna.

(Ay, my goat, my goat,

It misses its kid just like me,

Can't help crying and wailing.)

Darpawngi was born with a gift that made her one of the best song-composers in the contemporary period. Besides her confessions, she had many other songs which cannot be included in her confessional voice. But, Laltheri was not like that at all. She never composed a single song before the tragic incident of her life. So, all her songs talked about her lamentation, sorrow, and rage. She did not have as many songs as Darpawngi, yet her songs were all confessional.

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

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

Sylvia Plath had undergone a traumatic experience at the time of the expected birth of her brother for she was left to her grandparents. The untimely death of her father created a great chaos in her mental equipoise. She took these two incidents as a betrayal. Even her

marriage life was destroyed by her unceasing fear. All this mental sufferings of Plath permeates her literary works. So are Darpawngi and Laltheri. All their sufferings flow out in their songs. Their songs had been serving as a means of communicating their sorrows and thirst.

Every poet is, indeed, confessional. Yet most of them resort to some devices like an imaginary person or event, myth-making, story-telling and surrealism in order to cover their identity. They prefer using “he” or “she” or even “it” in lieu of using the “I” so will their identity be hidden. Therefore, over the veiled surface, they freely express their feelings and stories. Some poets and writers wear different masks to reveal their thoughts, their emotional sufferings and distortions. On the other hand, Darpawngi and Laltheri take off whatever that covers their naked identity. Laltheri tears off her clothes in order to expose her grief and fury. Darpawngi unmask her inner self and bitter memoir in order to express her personal sufferings and rage.

These two courageous Mizo women’s songs show all the nuances of their images, feelings, and thoughts. There could be no other left behind the curtain. Their songs play a role of the wall which has a mural of them. Therefore, they were not treated as normal women sometimes. But, while they might be treated as fools or abnormal, they were rather extra-ordinary daring women; so they should be praised and exalted, and must be considered outstanding women for their courage and straightforwardness.

Chaudhary cites, “Roethke considered that the confessional poets laid bare their heart to their readers. Roethke’s following remark is significant in this regard:

My secrets cry aloud.

I have no need of tongue.

My heart keeps open house.

My dresses are widely swung.” (Chaudhary, 4)

Laltheri and Darpawngi laid bare their heart in their songs so will their readers be able to see what is in store in the core of their heart. They boldly let their voice be heard, their hearts be seen, their secrets be shouted, and their inner self be displayed in their worth-remembering songs. Their songs mostly dwell in their psychic disturbances, sorrows and fury. They not only reveal their personal sufferings and anguish, rather they compose their songs in order to redefine themselves, to regain their true identity which has been suppressed all along while seeking a new refined identity. Ruth in her essay “*A Princess Versus Her Sailo Brothers*” writes:

In the past, women who desired change were demonized as bad women while their attempt was to cope with the changing world around them. Laltheri’s nakedness highlights the cavity of Sailo readymade patriarchal system. Stripping off all her clothes symbolizes stripping off her Sailo identity as a princess and to show how she longed to be free, to be able to live like a normal human being without boundaries. She was overprotected and denied freedom to fall in love as she desired while her Sailo brothers could freely date any girl they liked. The princess wanted to reveal her strength and power over others and the madness was all around her. (Mizo Studies, 189)

These two women’s confessional voice is not to be considered as inferior neither to American confessional poets nor to an Indian outstanding confessional poet, Kamala Das. In

their songs, these confessants take us into their world wherein they were over-protected and ill-treated which makes us feel their sufferings and agonies on our own pulses. Their songs are all about them, their emotional feelings, personal sufferings, agonies, and rage. Through their songs, they extrude their bitter memoirs; and successfully immortalized their names. Reading their songs is like reading their story.

Confessional poetry is certainly a psychic striptease. As quoted by Seema, Anne Sexton opines “It is very embarrassing for someone to expose their body to you. You don’t, learn anything from it. But if they expose their soul, you learn something. That is true of great writers.” (2). Mostly, confessional poets wear a troubled soul, a tortured psyche, a churning heart, and a perturbed mind which needs an escape. And the only escape is taking off the veiled side of their life and exposing their true colour. Just like a dancer takes off her clothes one by one in order to attract her audiences, a confessional poet takes off his or her mask to reveal what lies behind the curtain and gives an artistic form to the inner world which is in a state of turmoil.

Darpawngi, as has already been stated earlier, has three songs. These three songs play a role of a triangular shape-like wall, in which each wall has a mural of her bitter life story. The circumstances in her life complicated everything for her but thus arousing her genius talent that helps her immortalize her name. Apparently, she passed from one tragedy to another as if it is what fate has in store for her which cannot be changed or altered. Then, in her songs we can feel her loneliness, hear her cry, and taste her anger. Her song is like the Confessional of the Roman era; herself being a confessant and; we, the readers the confessors.

There are many historians and scholars who have a thorough survey about the life of Laltheri, yet there is no one who makes a record of Laltheri as a song-composer before the tragic decease of her lover, Chalthanga. When Kamala Das was asked about her painstaking efforts in life and about her lustful husband who does not satisfy her hunger and thirst in love, she said, “Poetry came oozing out like blood out of injuries. How could I have written so much of poetry if he hadn’t made me cry? All the anguish, you weed something out of it” (Weisbord, 16), and so for Laltheri. If her life had not been over-protected by the code of her proud family, if she had not lost her lover by the brutal act of her arrogant family, she would not have composed any song. Her songs came oozing out of the tragic loss of her lover.

Had she not been so stubborn and courageous, as arrogant as her brothers, to protest against them, the wall which had been built with reliable foundation that brings tears to many *Mizo* young adults would have been the same till today. When her brothers thought they were superior to her that she should obey each and every rules and restrictions they imposed on her. However, she proved herself superior to all her brothers She fearlessly satirized her brothers’ brutal order that she was not inferior to them by any means:

Bawmzo ral mah dar ang chhai ngam lo,

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

(They dare not to face their enemies of Bawmzo,

Yet, they chop my lover’s body as though it was a meat of feast.)

Then, her brothers, in the long run, realized that she was a sister they could not subdue, and then sent out a message not to do the same mistake again.

Darpawngi too, had the courage to fight back their Zadeng chief, a widow who unjustly ruled over her villagers. She did not tend to remain weak and powerless to their chief. Instead, she utilized her power as a song-composer. Topsy-turvy, their Zadeng chief would be blamed so long as *Darpawngi Zai* appeared. She sang with full conviction:

Keimah Chhimtlangthangnu,

Khua lian chalngeng intai angin;

Dengpui, ka tai dawn che.

(I, mother of Chhimtlangthangi,

Will be against you;

As big buffaloes brawl.)

Even the worldwide known confessional poets, sometimes, use an imaginary persona to reveal unwanted incidents in their life and their psychic disturbances. On the other hand, Laltheri and Darpawngi, the two courageous women never sought an escape. They daringly chose to fight back to their last breath in lieu of remaining defeated. They were victimized and trampled in the first place yet they were ready to overcome and outshine those wrongdoers. Not only this, throughout their songs, they honestly identified themselves and their heart-breaking life stories instead of seeking an escape or a hidden place.

Just like Kamala Das said, “I too call myself I” (An Introduction, 61) and Plath “I am I” (Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams, 120), Darpawngi and Laltheri chose to call themselves “I” instead of remaining defeated and inferior to those who imposed restrictions and hardships on them. They sought for a new identity which would be able to make them say “This is who I am”. And so they successfully did it. In Darpawngi’s song, we have seen

this: “I, mother of Chhimtlangthangi.” She had the courage to appear as what she was not as what she was not, or rather, not as others.

Their courage and candour lift them to the world of confessional poetry. They unveiled and displayed their personal experiences and wrath, and that makes them confessional poets. As forthright utterance is their forte, they unveiled their excruciating story and thirst; revealed their secret thoughts and feelings directly; and provided a spectacle for the readers into their heart and private life without any sense of shame and guilt. Their confessional voice makes them typical confessional poets, and therefore, the first labeled confessional poets in Mizo Literature.

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