

**UNMASKING THE FAIRIES: A STUDY OF SELECT MIZO
NARRATIVES**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
OF PHILOSOPHY**

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NARRATIVES**

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Submitted

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MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that “**Unmasking the Fairies: A Study of Select Mizo Narratives**” written by **Lalnienga Bawitlung** has been written under my supervision.

He has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the M.Phil. regulations of Mizoram University. The dissertation is the result of his own investigation. Neither the dissertation as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted by any other University for any research degree.

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DECLARATION

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

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the broadest sense, from the ietsistic¹ and theistic point of view, fairies may be defined as spiritual beings who are closely associated with human beings. They possess supernatural powers enabling them to take different forms to attract and entertain the eyes of men. It is mainly through their enchantment and illusion that they associate with humans. Oftentimes, these fairies are characterized by their feminine illusive attractiveness, and, hence, the word fairy, to an extent, has become synonymous with bewitching. The notion that fairies manifest themselves to men as “females of inexpressible beauty, elegance and every kind of personal accomplishment” (Tibbits 5) is very common to the Greeks, Romans, and the Italian and French Romances.

The word *fairies* in the title of this dissertation specifically means *lasi*² or very attractive spiritual beings that dwell in forests, usually feminine in gender. It is used since the Mizo word, *lasi*, is closest in meaning to the English word fairy. The fairies in this study are those spiritual beings who have been taking a part in folktales and stories for thousands of years usually connoted as females of exquisite beauty. While they may not be worthy of consideration in some texts as they feature minutely; however, these beings play foundational roles in some. Also, there are texts which are called fairy-tales where only the ideas and ideals remain but no actual fairy characters are to be found. This study deals with the Mizo texts where fairy or *lasi* characters occupy a very significant place, from their conception of them as gods to their perception of them as devils.

Though being very friendly with humans and appearing to be caretaker of animals and nurturer of nature, Christianized observation shows the *lasi* to be workers of illusion and “cheaters of men by ‘fantasy’.” (Tolkien 14). In “The Meaning of Fairy

¹ Of, relating to, or exhibiting an unspecified belief in an undetermined transcendent force. The term is derived from a Dutch word *iets* meaning ‘something.’

² Very attractive spiritual beings of human size, who can take different forms at will, dwell in the forest, usually feminine in gender, and whose path often crosses with that of *pasalthas* or hunter-warriors.

Tale within the Evolution of Culture” by Jack Zipes, they are shown to be witch-like and using their supernatural powers “to test or contest ordinary mortals.” (225) These fairies often carry split images whenever they come into contact with human beings or when stories about them are told. Their outward bodily perfection is tarnished by their enticing nature that could eventually bring about the downfall of men.

The word fairy in a general sense is so vast that there cannot be a definitive definition as Tolkien posits, “Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible.” (Tolkien 10) Nonetheless, they are perceived by people, and stories about them are told abundantly by different generations across the globe. When the term fairy is narrowed down to *lasi*, eternal beings that have always occupied a very important place in Mizo oral and written narratives, their spirituality becomes more lucid. The association of *lasi* and human beings at different stages of Mizo history, while keeping in mind the nature and the different roles of the Greco-Roman nymphs and the fairy in general in the western world, is an important aspect of this dissertation.

In this work, the *nymphs* are the *fairies* who are in turn the *lasi*.

1. The Greco-Roman Nymphs and Their Queen Artemis-Diana

Nymphs, like *lasi*, especially in the present generation, are conceived to be of female sex though there are male nymphs too. The Greeks presented these beings of various kinds in the perfection of female youth and beauty under the various appellations of Oreades, Dryades, Naïdes, Limniades and Nereides. They dwell in mountains, trees, springs, lakes, sea, caverns grottos, etc. (Keightley 444).

One of the best English poets, Alexander Pope did not, at one point, differentiate the nymphs from the fairies in his translation of Homer’s *Iliad* which appeared in 1720, possibly because he saw the similarity of the two folkloristically, historically and contemporaneously apart from the consideration of syllabic and rhythmic pattern of his verse. The extract below can, hence, be called the earliest mention of fairies:

Where round the bed, whence Achelous springs,

That wat'ry Fairies dance in mazy rings. (24.775-776)

Achilles alluded to them while consoling Priam for the loss of his son Hector. Pope used 'Fairies' to mean the Greek word “νυμφάων” (“neemfawn” Homer, *Perseus* 24.616), whereas, such other translators as Samuel Butler and A.S. Kline remained attached to the Greek original word and transliterated *νυμφάων* as *nymphs*³.

The nymphs bear close resemblance with the nereids who mainly dwell at sea and their names are often interchangeably used. The nereids are attendants of Thetis, who is the most well-known of the nereids, who has an important cosmological status as well as being the mother of Achilles (Larson 7). In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a work of the Golden Age of Latin Literature (70 B.C. - A.D. 18), it is shown that they have been on earth for millennia since they are said to have witnessed the Great Flood⁴- “The Nereids are astonished to see woodlands, houses and whole towns under the water.” (1.301-303) From the words of Jupiter, spoken before the flood had taken place, these beings- demigods, the wild spirits, nymphs, fauns and satyrs, and sylvan deities of the hills were known to belong to him. He loved them more than human beings although not held worthy yet to be in heaven with other gods but allowed to remain on earth (1.177-198).

Often Achelous figures as the father of the nymphs or the nereids though many others are also named depending on the region. When Hercules broke off one of the horns of Achelous the “Naides Hesperiae” or Italian nymphs took it and consecrated it by filling it with fruit and scented flowers, which then became the *horn of plenty* or

³ “...where men say the *Nymphs* that dance on the banks of Achelous take their rest...” (Homer, trans. A.S. Kline, 24.552-620, par. 4); “...where the *nymphs* live that haunt the river Achelous...” (Homer, trans. Samuel Butler, 24, par. 42).

⁴ The Biblical flood in the book of Genesis took place around one thousand six hundred sixty-five years after creation.

cornucopia (9.87-88). Liriope, a naias⁵, is the mother of Narcissus. Their excessive beauty scattered all over the Greek and Roman stories reached its zenith in Narcissus who rejects the love of another nymph, Echo, causing her to waste away. It is out of pride and self-love Narcissus said to her, “Away with these encircling hands! May I die before what’s mine is yours.” (Ovid 3.388-399) The nereids, nymphs or naides are all extremely beautiful beings, demi-goddesses of the sea, rivers, streams, fountains, hills, trees and woodlands, or attendants on greater deities. Although they have different names, their association with water makes them indistinguishable from one another:

More often the terms naiad and nymph are juxtaposed in order to make the sense unmistakable. This practice begins in Homer and continues as a habit of diction through late authors. Similarly, certain names are typical of nymphs, particularly names containing the element nais (naiad) or those ending in the suffix- *rhoē*, so that they describe the flowing movement of water. (Larson 4)

Zeus too is considered in Greek folklore as the father of the nymphs (Ibid.). They are also seen as attendants of the goddess of the hunt Artemis or Diana, who is the daughter of Zeus and Leto. They are therefore sisters in a sense and yet the nymphs hold positions lower than that of the goddess Artemis. More important than parentage and sisterhood are their close association by deeds and character with one another. Not only is Jupiter their father-head and ruler but lover as well since he is often seen lying with the mountain nymphs. Even Echo is cursed by Juno, wife of Jupiter, for she helps her fellow nymphs flee before Juno could catch them sleeping with her husband (Ovid 3.361-367). Callisto, the favourite nymph of Diana, is humiliated and expelled from the companionship of Diana and her other followers because it is found out that she was raped and impregnated by Jupiter, to intensify the woeful lot, she is later turned into a bear by Juno, wife of Jupiter, out of envy (2.437, 464, 488).

⁵ The singular form of Naides. They are water nymphs, demi-goddesses of the rivers, streams and fountains.

Artemis' closest companions are the nymphs. Their loyalty to her is such that they would not allow anybody to see her naked rather they would cluster around her using their bodies to clothe her nakedness (3.178-181). She has very close fellowship with these nymphs, except Salmacis, who would not take up bow, quiver or spear even when the other sisters tell her to. Salmacis is only interested in her own body, flowers and boys (4.302-319). When she sees Hermaphroditus, she is inflamed with desire, blazing her eyes in passion and is even compared to a snake coiling for its prey when she clings to him, eventually resulting in the two merging into one, hence, conceptually, causing transsexualism (346-388).

In the *Odyssey*, Homer refers to the nymphs as "daughters of Jove" (17.282). Artemis, of all the nymphs, may be referred to as the chief of the nymphs or fairies or even more correctly for this particular work, Queen of Iasi. This Queen of beauty is known by many names:

The Phrygians, first-born of mankind, call me the Pessinuntian Mother of the gods; the native Athenians the Cecropian Minerva; the island-dwelling Cypriots Paphian Venus; the archer Cretans Dictynnan Diana; the triple-tongued Sicilians Stygian Proserpine; the ancient Eleusinians Actaeon Ceres; some call me Juno, some Bellona, others Hecate, others Rhamnusia; but both races of Ethiopians, those on whom the rising and those on whom the setting sun shines, and the Egyptians who excel in ancient learning, honour me with the worship which is truly mine and call me by my true name: Queen Isis. (Apuleius 171)

Of all the different names, Hecate is most often used interchangeably with Diana. She, like Diana or Artemis, is also worshipped as the triple goddess. Orpheus, in the initiation of his *Hymns*, brings out the goddess' role, nature and appearance fearfully and demonically. She is shown as ruler of the night, witchcraft and ghosts. She reigns in hell and when the night is darkest; she is called 'lovely dame' yet she loves the ghosts who roam about the night and shadows. She holds the power to give to or withhold any gifts from men. She at once carries the earthly, watery and celestial frame, the appearance of which is made horrified by her ominous and sepulchral

saffron-attire. She is the goddess of enchantments and magic charms who sends demons to earth to torture mortals (0.54-58).

The oneness of Diana and Hecate is more explicit in the epic poem *Thebaid* of Publius Papinius Statius, one of the principal Roman epic and lyric poets of the Silver Age of Latin Literature (A.D. 18- 133). The poet writes:

Nor do the shadows lack a divine power: Latonia's (Artemis-Hecate's) haunting presence is added to the grove; her effigies wrought in pine or cedar and wood or very tree are hidden in the hallowed gloom of the forest. Her arrows whistle unseen through the wood, her hounds bay nightly, when she flies from her uncle's (Haides') threshold and resumes afresh Diana's kindlier shape. (4.422-426)

She is the queen of the night and darkness in the underworld, whereas, to the eyes of human beings she is an innocent virgin goddess who is worshipped with all kinds of veneration.

In *The Rape of Proserpine* by Claudian (Claudius Claudianus), Egypt-born Latin poet of the 4th century, Diana and Proserpine are shown as two completely different persons yet the associations of the two with the nymphs abound. The chief nurse of Proserpine, in this poem, is a nymph (3.235). When Aetna (Enna), the parent of flowers, saw Proserpine and her companions including Diana and Minerva coming towards her meadow of flowers just before Pluto came to snatch away Proserpine "the fairest of the herd" (2.259) to the underworld, she referred to them as "beauteous nymphs, with yonder three" (90), whereas Venus, the deceitful leader of the company, addressed them as "sister-nymphs" (146).

2. The English Fairies

The term *fairy* is much more general and diverse than that of *nymph* owing, among many, to the fact that the people in Britain "are racially so mixed." (Briggs 270) The term is associative of all sorts of creatures that are considered unworldly, here, the folkloric otherworldly beings of the Scots, the Irish, the Welsh, the Celts,

tincture of the Saxonians, the elements of the Romans and the Greeks, are all drawn in. The fairies' contradistinctive natures and appearances can be reconciled as follow:

They can obviously change their size and shape at will. And though small they are formidable. They can travel round the world as quickly as the moon, they are masters of shape-shifting and glamour, and when they quarrel the seasons are thrown out of joint. (283)

As far back as the works of the early Middle Age British writers are concerned, it is noticeable that the minds of some of the best learned were also very much occupied by fairies. Stories about them could not then be neutrally disposed of as incredulous but were indeed a part of their faith and lives. Giraldus Cambrensis, a Cambro-Norman archdeacon of Brecon and historian, in his *The Itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin through Wales*, writes about a certain Welsh man named Melerius, who:

on a certain night, namely that of Palm Sunday, met a damsel whom he had long loved, in a pleasant and convenient place, while he was indulging in her embraces, suddenly, instead of a beautiful girl, he found in his arms a hairy, rough, and hideous creature, the sight of which deprived him of his senses, and he became mad. (53)

He adds that "the spirit of luxury and lust was more beautiful than others in appearance, though in fact most foul." (ibid) What is even more perplexing is the similarity of the beings met by Melerius and the goddess Diana in her persona as the goddess of the hunt, especially, when they "appeared to him, usually on foot, equipped as hunters, with horns suspended from their necks, and truly as hunters, not of animals, but of souls." (ibid)

Giraldus also records a misadventure that had befallen a priest, Elidorus, a short time before his days. When Elidorus was twelve years old, he ran away to escape the frequent stripes inflicted on him by his teacher and hid himself under a hollow bank of a river. After fasting for two days, two little men of pigmy stature appeared to him, saying, "If you will come with us, we will lead you into a country full of

delights and sports.” He assented and was led to a most beautiful country where all the people were of a fair complexion, with luxuriant hair falling over their shoulders like that of women. He would frequently come home and go back as often, disclosing about the land and the inhabitants only to his mother, until one day, he stole the golden ball with which he used to play with the king’s son, the two pygmies came, and, unforgivingly showing the boy every mark of contempt and derision, took the ball back. The illusiveness of the occurrence is heightened when the boy, trying to get back to the world of the fairies, returned by the usual track to the subterranean road, but found no appearance of any passage, though he searched for it on the banks of the river for nearly the space of a year (69-70).

Gervase of Tilbury, the contemporaneous of Giraldus, in his *Otia Imperialia* speaks of a servant-like being, whom he conceived as a sort of fairy the story of which echoes the Greek’s cornucopia or horn of plenty. It went thus— In the forest of Gloucester, there was a mound about a man’s height, upon which if weary knights or hunters climbed alone leaving their companions behind and uttered “I thirst” as if asking to someone, a man of cheery countenance would appear out of nowhere with a big horn decorated with precious stones and gold which contained unknown but pleasing drink, when taken it removed weariness and thirst instantaneously (Oman 7).

The secretive nature and attractiveness of a fairy damsel are seen in the poem “Lanval” by Marie de France, a French poetess of the 13th century. The poem, however, is said to have been translated into French from the narration of the romantic adventures by Breton poets in their *Lais*⁶ (Keightley 420).

Lanval was one of King Arthur’s knights who was forgotten by the king and neglected by all his court out of envy which eventually impoverished him. He one day went out of the town to lighten his heavy head and there he met on the meadows two ladies, “the fairest he’d seen in all his days,” (France 56) who then took him to their

⁶ A medieval type of short tale in French literature that is usually in octosyllabic verse and deals with subjects of Celtic origin often connected with King Arthur.

tent of gold in obedience of their queen's command. This queen, who was more beautiful than "new-blown rose, lily-flower when in Spring their petals unfurl," (94-95) expressed her love for him. When the love was requited, she granted him riches more than he could ever wish for, however, there was a condition in their affairs that could not be compromised:

"Now I warn you," she says, "my fair
 Friend--a warning, an order, a prayer:
 Don't reveal yourself to any man!
 I tell you, if you break this ban,
 You will have lost me forever!
 If this love is known, ever,
 Never again of me you'll catch sight;
 As for my body, you lose any right." (143-150)

When Lanval revealed the secret, he was "ravished" by her to a faraway island, thenceforth, neither was he heard nor was he seen ever again (658).

It is in the work of Geoffrey Chaucer that the nymphs and the fairies are gathered in one stream. In "The Merchant's" tale of *The Canterbury Tales*, Pluto, husband of Persephone or Proserpine queen of the underworld, is depicted as the king of the fairies in hell, or according to A. Kent Hieatt and Constance Hieatt's transcription of the poem he is the king of "fairyland" (Chaucer 287) which, however, is one and the same:

Pluto, that is kyng of Fayerye,
 And many a lady in his compaignye,
 Folwyng his wyf, the queene Proserpyna,
 Which that he ravysshed out of Ethna... (983-986)

Pluto says of his wife, Persephone, that she is a treacherous woman, whose "untrouthe and brotilness" ("infidelity and fickleness" 997) are well known. Although Chaucer used Proserpine, Queen of the fairy, as an example of women's frailty, he, more importantly, by fairy, conveys the idea of enchantment and beauty:

Mayus, that sit with so benyngne a chiere,
Hire to biholde it semed fayerye.
Queene Ester looked nevere with swich an ye
On Assuer, so meke a look hath she. (530-533)

Diana and her followers' nature are laid bare by Shakespeare in *Macbeth*. Hecate-Artemis's image, the profile of Persephone of hell and Luna of the celestial, is stated thus in a sentence by Macbeth: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen." (1.3.39) This ambiguity of perception is caused by unnatural demonic forces. The abnormality of the day encountered by Macbeth and Banquo when temptation was near and the prophecy which though ominous, had bright prospects at the same time, were all characteristics of the different facets of Diana. In the play, the nymphs and their attractive leader Artemis disappeared but appeared again in the persons of Hecate and the three witches. These were the beings who polluted the air, influenced the minds of great personalities like Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, eventually, leading them to their horrible end.

The genderless witches with the power of vanishing at will are as ambiguous as their words:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air. (1.1.13-14)

The witches, elves and other fairies, while performing their witchcrafts laboriously with blood and bones and all the incantations for the destruction of mankind are praised by their leader, Hecate, who finds great pleasure in man's sorrows:

O well done! I commend your pains;
And every one shall share i' the gains;
And now about the cauldron sing,
Live elves and fairies in a ring,
Enchanting all that you put in. (4.1.41-45)

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the pervading presence and minuteness of the fairy are stressed:

I do wander everywhere,
 Swifter than the moon's sphere...
 I must go seek some dew-drops here,
 And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear. (2.1.6-7; 14-15)

Unlike early medieval writers, Shakespeare is not moralistic in his narration of the fairies in this play, but turns every character for the eventual good of the other. Nonetheless, the quantum of the English folk fairy stories including the fairies' role in misleading night-wanderers, causing success to the endeavours of men when they will through the person of Robin Good Fellow, their ability to take different forms even as human beings, their infidelity and promiscuousness through the characters of Oberon and Titania who always quarrel and mistrust each other; and their magical charms and witchcrafts in the power of the magical love juice, are all inclusively and comically presented.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Queen Mab is said to be "fairies' midwife," (1.4.58) her role closely resembles that of Diana in her character as the goddess of childbirth. This fairy, whose size is no bigger than that of an "agate-stone," (59) has a very unique ability to control human's dreams:

... she gallops night by night
 Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
 O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight,
 O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees,
 O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream... (74-78)

Not only did the fairy and the nymph flow in one stream as in the work of Chaucer but are together diminutized in "Nymphidia, The Court of Fairy" by Michael Drayton. In the poem, a nymph, Nymphidia, is one of the maids of Queen Mab wife of fairy king Oberon; she is also known as "gentle Fay" (25). She is in the midst of the fairies who build their palace in the air, the suspension of which was done by

necromancy. Even in this work, infidelity is thematically deep-rooted. Like the mountain nymphs who used to forewarn Jupiter from being caught red-handed by his wife while having an affair with other mountain nymphs, Nymphidia forewarned Queen Mab when she “sat with Pigwiggen arm in arm.” (322) When the queen and her trains were desperate for safety Nymphidia said:

Dear Queen, be glad;
Let Oberon be ne'er so mad,
I'll set you safe from peril. (358-360)

Their diminutiveness is even more hilarious and emphasized than in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Nymphidia continued:

“Come all into this nut,” quoth she,
“Come closely in; be ruled by me;
Each one may here a chooser be,
For room ye need not wrastle:
Nor need ye be together heapt;”
So one by one therein they crept,
And lying down they soundly slept,
And safe as in a castle. (361-368)

The unexpected appearance of Proserpine in this work affirms the oneness of the fairies and the nymphs which had been indicated by Chaucer. When Nymphidia was performing her witchcraft to prevent Hobgoblin or Puck from getting at them, she chanted the name “Proserpine” (405) for the fulfilment of her magic spell. And, Queen Mab, to end the duel between her husband Oberon and Pigwiggen her lover, went to “Proserpine Queen of Shades” (571), who, then, with the magical power of the fogs of “infernal Styx,” (633) water from the “Lethe spring” (637) and in “dreadful Pluto’s name” (662) caused them to forget their hatred for one another and ceased the turbulence.

3. The Confusion

By the 17th Century, the nature and behaviour of fairies have turned abstruse as evidenced in the 17th-century work of Charles Perrault, *Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye* (*Mother Goose's Tale*). Their attractiveness and femininity are clearly brought out in contrast to the repulsiveness of the ogres and they are presented as embodying limitless kindness and as ever-present helpers in time of need to innocents. Nevertheless, in "Little Thumb," their connection to ogres is not all lost since one of ogres' greatest weapons, 'the long boots' with the gift of becoming big and little with which they can walk across mountains and rivers easily, are "Fairies" (122). Again, in the "Blue Beard," amid of luxury and great riches, there is a room the floor of which was covered over with clotted blood and wherein death reigns. The door of that dreadful room can be opened with a special 'key' which in itself is a being and can act as an informant:

Having observed that the key of the closet was stained with blood, she tried two or three times to wipe it off, but the blood would not come off; in vain did she wash it, and even rub it with soap and sand, the blood still remained, for the key was a *Fairy*, and she could never make it quite clean; when the blood was gone off from one side, it came again on the other. (40)

Even though Brothers Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children and Household Tales*) is most popularly known as a book of fairy stories, actual inclusion of fairies in the traditional sense of the term is very limited in the work. In fact, after the publication of the second volume in 1815 they went on publishing six more editions, each time polishing the stories making them more child-friendly, adding in Christian references and removing mention of *fairies* before releasing the seventh edition, the one most famed today, in 1857 (Flood par. 2). There are beast fables in great numbers and wonder tales incorporating biblical figures are also to be found – from the friendship of the cat and the mouse to the twelve apostles. Though characters like the fairies, elves and other folk supernatural beings do not retain their beauty and personal appearance in these tales, yet they pervade the atmosphere with their invisible presence. This work, well known all over the world, which is deeply

influenced by Charles Perrault paved the way for the exclusion of the fairies themselves in their own fairy-tales.

The belief which was once held so close to the soul and livelihood of the people, after much experimentation, caricaturing and moralizing reached its climax in the beautified and notionalized retelling fairy tales of the 19th century Andrew Lang's twelve books of twelve colours. This compilation of many popular European folktales by Andrew Lang and other authors, largely before his time, in one basket, under the umbrella term fairy-tales, is the reason for which some people often find it difficult to differentiate between folktales and fairy tales. The pervasiveness of the fairy beings, even when there is not a single appearance of them, is substantiated by the inclusion of "A Voyage to Lilliput," an extraction of one of the stories from Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, in the *Blue Fairy Book*. Swift's story is not a fairy story from the viewpoint of the author's design nor is it a tale of fairies from the understanding of his readers in general.

4. The Mizo Lasi

According to speculation forwarded by Pastor Liangkhaia, one of the most authoritative Mizo historians, the Mizos descended from Japhet who was one of the three sons of a great Biblical figure Noah. Subsequently, the physiognomy of the Mizos shows that they are most likely the lineage of the Mongols. Even among the Mongolian descents, regionally and linguistically, they belong to the Tibeto-Burman category (*Mizo Chanchin* 12). The tribe entered the thickly forested hills of Mizoram, north-east India, in the late 17th and early 18th century from Myanmar. They were religious people who carried on their pagan sacrifices for more than a hundred years even after their migration into the present Indian territory.

When many of the civilised regions of the world were discarding their beliefs in the existence of fairies as spiritual beings, the Mizos were still worshipping and offering sacrifices to these spiritual beings of immense beauty and of extraordinary powers, considered to be gods of wild animals and referred to as *lasi*. Just as the great poet Alexander Pope saw the similarity between the nymphs and the fairies, one of

the best Mizo translators and dictionarians J.F. Laldailova perceived the closeness of fairy and *lasi*. He straightforwardly translated *fairy*, in his *English-Lushai*⁷ *Dictionary*, as “*lasi* (nula leh tlangval).”⁸ (194)

According to the pre-Christian Mizo belief, the *lasi* were conceived as human-size eternal beings dwelling in forests, caves, clefts and crevices of mountains, caretaking the animals of the jungles. The Mizo ancestors, believing that *lasi* had the power to prosper hunters in their hunting of wild animals, used to offer piglets to appease them (Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* 52). The appearance of the Christian Missionaries and the Christianization of the land which continued from the last decade of the 19th century brought an end to the sacrificial offerings to *lasi* and *huai*⁹ and many other pre-Christian objects of worship. However, even during the 20th century and to this day, the belief in the spiritual existence of *lasi* dies hard in the lives of the Mizo people.

With the Christianization of the people of the land barely a hundred years, the belief in pagan rituals do not go far back as stated by Pastor Liangkhaia, in his *Mizo Chanchin (Mizo History)*¹⁰:

Inhawina tam takte hi a lo pian chhuahna a la rei lo em em vek a ni.
(Liangkhaia 50)

(The origins of many of the ritualistic sacrifices did not go back too far).

⁷ Same as Mizo.

⁸ *nula* means damsel; *tlangval* signifies young man.

⁹ Evil spirits who supposedly dwell in stream, cave and banyan tree of the forest.

¹⁰ The first Mizo history book written by a Mizo.

Neither did extant oral *lasi* stories' development go back too far. They were developed in the early 1700s when the clan had already stepped into Mizoram, however, traces of their past in Myanmar are also recognizable in these oral tales.

4.1. Oral Tales of Lasi (Before the Emergence of Christianity)

Three of the best well-developed Mizo oral *lasi* tales are – 1) “Chawngtinleri;” 2) “Chhuihthanga;” and 3) “Thasiamama.”

“Chawngtinleri”: Chawngtinleri was a young woman of exceptional beauty from Seipui village. She had an older brother named Lianchea (Liana). The two of them stayed alone and were very dear to each other as their parents had passed away. Since she was very beautiful, the *lasi* king of Tan Mountain¹¹ Lalchungnunga was enamoured by her and wanted to have her as his wife. *Lasi* maidens were sent to her brother by Lalchungnunga to obtain his consent of marriage. They continually pestered him day in and out, even going to the extent of imploring him in his dreams with promises to shower blessing in hunting, cultivation, to give a life of comfort and make his sister ruler over all animals. However, he would not approve.

One night, in his dream, they came heavier than usual promising to let him have as many animals as a dale could hold, further, assuring to give him their earmarked wild boar whose tusk is as long as a *themtleng*¹² and the biggest of their wild buffaloes. On top of this, the *lasi* added that as thanksgiving they would also give him a gun and a full *hrai*¹³ of bullets. He was very thrilled at the thought of becoming a great hunter- killing great and enormous beasts, and, impulsively assented to let them have her. When he woke up in the morning, he was perturbed by it, but

¹¹ A legendary mountain in Mizoram. Coordinates: 23°8'9''N 93°17''E.

¹² Weaver's shuttle; or “the flat pointed wood-bar in a loom for ramming home the threads of the woof.” (Vanlalngtheta 486) Its length is about 3 feet.

¹³ A cane-basket for containing rice. It can hold about five kilograms of rice.

consolingly and regretfully tried to discard the whole affair of the dream with the belief that there was no way of a dream coming to reality.

But one morning, when Chawngtinleri was pounding rice on the porch outside, Liana who was inside their house heard a sudden scream of his sister calling for his help along with the falling shock of the pestle. Rushing out quickly, he found a mortar, the promised bullets and flint-lock musket in the place of his sister. The fairies kept their promise. Nonetheless, being grief-stricken, he never shot any of the animals that came his way thinking that they were sent by the *lasi* for his sister's price. One day, the *lasi*, who were very worried, caused Chawngtinleri to appear in her brother's dream. In the dream, she asked her brother to shoot the animals and told him that he should not be so debilitated since it was with his permission that she took her leave. The *lasi* also joined in her attempt of cheering him up. They told him his sister had been installed as the queen of Lurh and Tan mountains and was enjoying her life with rice-beer and meat without having to labour for them. From that moment afterwards, whenever Liana went out hunting, never again did he come home empty-handed.

As time went by, Chawngtinleri, who longed for the company of his brother and other humans, was allowed to visit them. She then frequently visited her brother's household bringing along her baby child. However, whenever she was going to leave her child, she would tell them not to look at it. The more often she told them, the more desirous they became to have a look at the child. One day while she was away to respond to a call of nature, they peeked at the child. They were awestruck upon seeing that Chawngtinleri's child had the head of a goat with a human body.

When the *lasi* learned about the discovery, they were very displeased. Fearing that she would reveal them to humans they forbade her ever visiting them again. Her longing for her fellow beings went to such an extreme even after a long while that the *lasi* not knowing what else to do to quench it turned her eyes vertical, gradually diminishing her longing for them. Chawngtinleri then became the Queen of all animals. Often, she would weave in the pass between the mountains of Lurh and Tan where martins and saw-wings helped her put up cotton threads.

Historically, the Seipui village, mentioned in the tale, was a very important place for the Mizo ancestors. It was here all the Lusei clans came together to safeguard themselves from other clans (Liangkhaia 57). There was no known formally established procedure of worship during their stay in the east side of the banks of Run *lui*¹⁴ before the 15th century; however, during the 16th century when they moved to the west side of the river banks, before crossing Tiau *lui*¹⁵, they began to chant the names of the village of their ancestors whenever they offered their prayers (Siama 10). Since, the Mizos had already included Chawngtinleri in their folk song *Sa khal zai*¹⁶ around 1550 (Thanmawia, *Mizo Hla* 202), sacrificial piglet offerings to *lasi* could have also been practised by the Lusei clans in Seipui and its surrounding villages during this period.

The appearance of Seipui village in the tale serves as a locational and time bridge to the closeness of the geographical location and historical period, respectively, from the moment the tribe moved out from Seipui to their settlement in the surrounding regions of Tan Mountain; or in other words, during the composition of this tale, the Mizos were astriding the Tiau river, settling one foot in the west side and the remaining one in the east side of the river just as the story is set in both sides of the river.

“Chhuihthanga”: Chhuihthanga was said to be from Chawngtui village which is believed to be located in the legendary Tan Mountain region. The present East Chawngtui village established at the close of the 19th century is only about three kilometres from the famous mountain.

Chhuihthanga came across two *lasi* who were weaving in the forest of Tan Mountain in one of his hunting explorations. He was enchanted by their beauty so

¹⁴ Run River or Manipur River. *Lui* is a Mizo term for river.

¹⁵ Tiau River. It runs between Mizoram, India and Chin State of Myanmar.

¹⁶ Songs for or of the *lasi*.

much so that he did not consider going home even after sunset although they insisted him to take his leave. They told him again to go and shoot the bison they appointed for his kill, but he wouldn't still leave. After they eventually left him, with deep craving he sang:

*Thangtei u leh e, Tuahtinlungruni,
Khawtlang mu ang ka ngai ngam love. (Zofa, Mizo Tlang Hmingthangte Vol-
11 231)*

*(You Thangtei and you Tuahtinlungruni,¹⁷
Without you, life will be an elegy).*

Seeing that he was crying after them they came back and, at last, persuaded him to leave, putting a good amount of *thipui*¹⁸ in his satchel to light his way home. The next morning when he inspected his satchel, he found a *thipui* of good size, the lone remainder from the previous night. Realising that he threw away many precious stones of great value, he was very regretful and traced his way back to the forest but could recover none.

When Chhuhthanga told the villagers about the fairness and beauty of the *lasi* he had met with, they took them to be daughters of gods¹⁹ whom their forefathers often spoke of.

“Thasiamama”: Thasiamama is said to have lived a very long and prosperous life, shot a great number of wild animals, because of the blessings of the *lasi* he had been in a relationship with. He is most famous for an occurrence where his mithun gave birth on top of a mountain near the Tan Mountain; the peak is surrounded by precipitous rock clefts and was very difficult to access even for a man of strength. It

¹⁷ Thangtei and Tuahtinlungruni are the names of the *lasi*.

¹⁸ Amber-beads (fossilized tree resin).

¹⁹ “khuavang note.” (Zofa, *Mizo Tlang Hmingthangte Vol-II* 232)

is believed that the *lasi* lifted the pregnant mithun and put it up there. The peak was named after him calling ‘Thasiamama se no neihna tlang’ (‘The peak where Thasiamama’s mithun gave birth’).

The ability of the *lasi* to take different forms is seen in this tale. When Thasiamama caught two *lasi* who used to open, eat and ravage his *chawfun*²⁰ in his jhum-house, they, trying to escape, turned themselves into snakes and caterpillars but as he had seen them assuming human’s form, he wouldn’t let them go. When he would not release them from his clutches, out of despair, they assured to fulfil his wishes if they were uttered continuum without taking his breath. He agreed and wished for – ‘rice, yam, wealth, pigeon pea, dog, fowl, pig, mithun, goat, kill men, beasts, festive, excel others, long life- children.’

The *lasi* fulfilled whatever he uttered except ‘children’ as he had taken his breath just before he wished for it. He lived so long that he hated the way of life of the new generations that he could not quite cope with. His fallen tooth was always replaced by a new one; all the fallen teeth were said to have amounted to a full *paihper*²¹. As he could not just die yet by himself, he cursed the *lasi* who blessed him with long-life, moreover, disclosing his affairs with them which ought to remain a secret, unable to bear the revelation, it is told, they put an end to his life.

It is most likely that Thasiamama was also from the same village as Chhuhthanga, because he could see his mithun’s tail swaying on top of the mountain peak from his *luhka*²². The peak is located in the Tan Mountain region, and there is no known legendary village other than Chawngtui in this area.

²⁰ Cooked rice, usually wrapped in banana leaf.

²¹ Woven basket used for holding rice while sowing in the jhum. It can contain about a kilogram of rice.

²² Elevated platform in front of the earlier Mizo house.

Since Chawngtinleri's tale connects Seipui and Tan Tlang or Myanmar and Mizoram and both the tales "Chhuihthanga" and "Thasiama" are set in Chawngtui village and Tan Mountain regions, these stories mark the entrance and earlier geographical settlement of the newly migrated Mizo people. The presence of firearms in all these three tales not only indicates that the three male characters in these folktales were *pasalthas* or hunter-warriors and men of good stature during their time but also signifies a very important transitional period, because:

Tiau ral chhaka an awm chhung zawng khan Mizo-ho chuan Silai an la nei lo va; Kawl mite leh Pawite erawh chuan tuna Mizo Silai ang hi an nei awm e. (Liangkhaia 57)

(The Mizos did not possess guns during their stay on the east side of the Tiau river, whereas the Burmese and the Pawi had had possession of it).

However, the Ralte clan, who were not superior to the Lusei clan, had possessed firearms before 1650 (59-61) making it plausible that even the Mizo clan had got hold of it before they came to the west side of the Tiau river. Chawngtinleri, for all her association with the Burmese soil where the ritualistic sacrifices had been offered to *lasi*, the presence of firearms in the hands of the close kin of the Lusei clan, her attribution with Buannel²³ and its forests, could have been from Seipui village and later euhemerised. The inclusion of the legendary Tan Tlang could be an addition to the later development of the tale. It is also said that *pasaltha*²⁴ had already begun to be in a relationship with *lasi* when Chawngtinleri was a young woman (Zofa, Mizo *Tlang* 233) discarding then the belief that Chhuihthanga was the first of the Mizo

²³ A naturally vast area of grassland surrounded by thick forests where wild beasts abounded in ancient times, it is located within the territory of Lentlang village in Myanmar. Coordinates: 23°16'30.8" N 93°31'03.2" E). Chawngtinleri is supposed to have ruled as Queen of animals in this region.

²⁴ A hunter-warrior (pl. *pasalthas*).

pasalthas to have been a *lasi-zawl*²⁵. It can be argued that “Thasiama” is the freshest of these tales because of the association of his name with such extant historical sites as ‘Thasiama se no neihna’, ‘Thasiama sangha khawina’ (‘Thasiama’s fishpond’) and ‘Thasiama hmun’ (‘Thasiama’s spot’).

4.2. Written Lasi Stories (Post-Christianization)

During one hundred years’ Mizo history beginning from the emergence of Christianity (1894-1994), out of almost two thousand book publications there is only one book that has a direct link to and used *lasi* as its title. “Aukhawk²⁶ Lasi” is a short story included in the collected short stories of Lalzuithanga under a book title *Aukhawk Lasi* published in 1983. The short story was supposedly written in 1950 (Thanmawia, “Aukhawk Lasi” par. 4) the year the author died.

In “Aukhawk Lasi,” it is difficult to tell with certainty whether the main character Thuama’s experience happened in his dream or real-life doing dignity to the Mizo cultural belief as is often said about the affairs of men with *lasi* as *tawnmang lasi* (*lasi* of the dreams). The writer took a popular fairy name Tuahinchhingi who was often recalled by the Mizo ancestors as a *lasi* who used to be in a relationship with the Mizo hunter-warriors. Thuama speaking of her said:

Chuti taka nula hmeltha leh pianfung duhawm chu mihring zingah tun thleng pawh hian ka hmu leh ngai tawh lo va. (4)

(Never again did I behold among human beings a woman with such a lovely face and a beautiful body).

²⁵ A man who is bewitched or enchanted by *lasi*. Women can also be in communion with *lasi*. In Mizo folklore, Lianlunga’s wife was said to be a *lasi-zawl* on account of which her husband was abundantly blessed with wild animals for his kill (Lalthangliana 110).

²⁶ It means echo; the name of a place at the outskirts of Aizawl.

The diminishing power of the *lasi* is felt in the work though surrounded by elegance and riches. There is still a tiger at her command to show that she is yet ruler of the animals, at the same time, she is somewhat shown as pitiful for she could no longer roam as free and lively as she used to in ancient times.

The *lasi* regained their power at its utmost height in the works of H. Ralliantawna who is popularly known as Zochhumpui Pa. His works are mainly concerned with the pre-Christian Mizo beliefs. He was born on 11th October 1948. Although born in Sairang village, Aizawl district, his parents were originally from Hmunpui village, Mamit district and he was brought up there. His father, Hualkunga, was the first person to clear a matriculation (class 10th standard) examination from Hmunpui village. His works dealing with *lasi* stories are *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana (Lasi of the Tan Mountain and Pasaltha Thangliana)* (2016), *Chhaktiang Kawlrrawn (Pasaltha Thanhranga leh Lasi Nula Varparhi) [To the Far East (Pasaltha Thanhranga and Lasi Dame Varparhi)]* (2018) and *Galaxy (Pasaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy) [Galaxy (Pasaltha Thansanga and Lasi Dame Galaxy)]* (2019).

Zochhumpui Pa's rendition of the Mizo oral tales especially of stories about *lasi* is uncommon due to his induction of the modern knowledge about the stars, progress in the world and the nature of animals without losing the importance of the past cultural beliefs of the Mizo people. By inserting empirical knowledge of the advanced society, he not only gives shadows to the ancestral past but brings out the fantasy and psychology of the present generation as well.

Lalmachhuana Zofa, though twenty years younger in age than Zochhumpui Pa, is the successor of Lalzuithanga in the field of *lasi* stories chronologically but is thematically the predecessor of Zochhumpui Pa. His *lasi* stories deal with the post-Christian Mizo outlook. He was born on 19th April 1968 in Champhai. His mother was a native of Champhai whereas his father was from Ailawng, a village barely six kilometres from Reiek. His serialized *lasi* stories were published in Zonunpar Monthly magazine from 1999 to 2005 under the heading *Buannel Lasi Nen (With Buannel Lasi)*. His works *Tawnmang Lasi 1* (2012) and *Tawnmang Lasi 2* (2013)

along with the serialized renditions were so influential that numerous *lasi* stories were born shortly after their publications.

Zofa's approach to the fairy stories is distinctive from other authors in that he stresses and give importance to the different aspects of the fairy characters, for instance, like men *lasi* have their set of rules and regulations within their realm, and can be vengeful and harmful to men and to other spirits when their laws are transgressed. This vengeful nature is more pronounced in his works.

In contemporary Mizo society, just like the rest of the ever-developing regions, what was once so distinct in the belief system is undergoing immense changes, the *huai* and the *lasi* have also turned fantastical in their attires, affairs and nature. Psychologically, the *huai* and *lasi* are the representations of the fear, fantasy and aspirations of the Mizo ancestors and the people of the present day to some extent.

5. Theories Applied

For the exploration of the psychological realm of the stories and to link certain events, behaviours and conceptions which cannot be sufficiently connected historically C.G. Jung's *archetypes* or *the collective unconscious*, the inherent components in the human psyche which is the deepest and most extensive area of man, a point of contact between the individual and the transpersonal life forces are employed. And, to study the creations of fantasy Tolkien's theory of the *secondary world*, where one escapes into, Forster's theory of the *sideshow*, for which one must pay an extra price and *fallen man's nature*, the insatiable desire and longing after the fall of man in Judeo-Christian belief, are employed.

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CHAPTER II

**THE PRE-CHRISTIAN CONCEPT: LASI AND HUAI IN
ZOCHHUMPUII PA'S NARRATIVES**

In the preface of *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, Isaac Zoliana documents the experience of the Mizo people with the *lasi* which has always been an important component in the belief system of the tribe:

Tantlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana tih lehkhabu hi phuahchawp ni lovin,
Lasi zawlin a Chanchin a sawi atanga ziak a ni. (vii)

(This book, *Tan Tlang Lasi and Pasaltha Thangliana*, is not mere fiction but is based on the accounts of a man who had been bewitched by *lasi*).

Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana (2016), *Chhaktiang Kawlrawn (Pasaltha Thanhranga leh Lasi Nula Varparhi)* (2018) and *Galaxy (Pasaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy)* (2019) are fanciful depictions of the Mizo beliefs and perceptions of *lasi* and their affairs with men from the late 17th century to the last decade of the 19th century. All the three works directly or indirectly have connections to Tan Mountain. This place is the centre of the narratives where the protagonists' minds point to and rest, and the mountain, from the olden days to the present, is often called *lasi khawpui* (city of the fairies). Hence, these narratives put together is referred to as The Tan Trilogy in this study.

The three select works are mainly portrayals of Mizo man's *pasalthatna*²⁷ which is seen in their abilities as adept hunters, also depictions of their bravery in defending their pride, family and village to the extent of sacrificing their lives. They most importantly show the Mizo people's aspirations, the limitlessness for their longing to know beyond what the bare eyes could see, all of which are enhanced by the inclusion of *lasi*. In the stories, the fairyland is the joyful 'secondary world' into which the *pasalthas* entered "to survey the depths of space and time." (Tolkien 13)

²⁷ Warriorship.

1. Affairs of the *Huai*

None of the *lasi* characters in Zochhumpui Pa's novels at any time caused any harm to human beings physically, although reciprocated emotional pain and longing are found abundantly. Rather they are always at war with *huai* whenever humans' lives are endangered by the presence of these evil beings, hence, drawing a clear distinction between these two spiritual beings. *Lasi* are like some of the friendly nymphs whom Martin Nilsson termed "gentle and benevolent aspect of nature." (15) The *lasi* always try to have a good relationship with the *pasalthas*, whereas the *huai* are evil-minded ever luring hunters to distress them. When humans step into the *huai*'s territories, they like to hurt them whether the trespasser does it knowingly or unknowingly.

In *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, the ancestors' belief of the *huai*'s nature of taking the soul out of human's body without killing the person is delineated when hunters of *Khawzing*²⁸ village entered the Dampa forest. A *huai* appeared in the dream of one of the hunters, Daduha, warning them:

Ka awmna Sih²⁹ leh Puk in lo thlen chuan in chak lo vang. (9)

(It'd be regretful for you to come to the spring and cave where I live).

As is often the case of a courageous man, to show that he was not perturbed by dreams and to not be taken as a coward by his friends, he did not reveal the dream to his fellow hunters. But when his friend Rotawka entered the cave and threw a stone into the swamp missing his aim at an alluring beautiful red bird, the *huai* were enraged. They seized his soul and brought him into their cave. With the help of Chawngtinleri who gave a powerful stone to the protagonist Thangliana, they entered the cave and fought

²⁸ A deserted village located at the river head of what the Mizos call 'Theihai lui' (Mango River), and Amsuri by the Chakma or Takam people (*Tan Tlang x*).

²⁹ "Stream that springs out of no proper water course or ravine." (Laldailova 197)

with the *huai* who took up different forms to frighten them. They stopped only when they felt that the soul had been released. It proved true. When the men got back to the shed, they found Rotawka fine and sound (13-16).

This firmly embedded belief of the Pre-Christian Mizo had been a part of their life for about four hundred years, as can be concluded from their ritualistic practices from the period of 'their stay in the river banks of Run in the 1500s A.D.' (Siama 10) to the appearance of the Christian Missionaries in 1894 in Mizoram (Liangkhaia 224). The belief is that when a bedridden sick person, whose actions the villagers have reason to supposedly have caused discontentment to the *huai*, is heard crying frightfully in his bodily absence then that person's soul is thought to be seized by the *huai*. It was only Rotawka's voice his friends were chasing after into the cave. The voice cried:

Awi ka nu, min chhan ru, min chhan ru! (13)

(O my mother, help me, help me!)

When such kind of terrified cry of a sick person is heard at some other locations and with certainty is affirmed that the person is not present in the place where the voice is heard, it is called *thla ai* or the cry of the soul. Even if the *huai* does not get hold of the innocent trespasser's soul, they would still leave them with ailments and excessive fear. In *Tawnmang Lasi 2*, one such incident is mentioned by Lalhmachhuana Zofa as a story within a story.

When a certain villager named Thangreia climbed a banyan tree at the outer fringe of his jhum to shoot birds feeding on its fruits, oblivious of the *huai* dwelling in the tree, they were infuriated and appeared to him with unnerving forms. At first, they assumed the body of birds and at other times appeared like tiny human-like beings with ugly faces. Whilst these tiny beings got hold of him and were on the verge of carrying him off, his wife Biaki, who was looking for him, happened to come upon the scene. Seeing her, the little devils dropped him. The harm brought to them was narrated thus:

In an thleng chu an thil hmuh te pawh sawi chiang hlei thei lovin an damlo ta chiam a, an samte a tla kawlh a. Lukawlh rawt khawpa rei tak an nat hnuah an lo chak leh ta deuhva. An chhhungte hnenah pawh an thil hmuh dante an sawi thei ta a. An thil hmuh chuan mumang lamah a ti buai reng bawk a, an tha sawt lo hle a. A hmaa ram ngaina leh hlauh pawh nei lo kha hlauh nei reng rengin an awm ta a. (211-212)

(When they reached home, they became so ill that they could not tell what they saw, even their hair started falling off. After a long illness and having gone all bald, they recovered a little and revealed what they saw to their family. But as they were always kept perturbed in their dreams by what they had witnessed, there could not be any progressive recovery. The couple who had always loved the wild and had never had fear was then filled with perpetual fear).

To restore the soul in the body and revitalize the health of the victims, two actions are often taken by the Mizo people. The first is by ‘force’ (Dokhuma 75). In Rotawka’s case, not only did the Khawzing hunters enter the cave with torches, guns and daos and struck whichever direction they heard the cry of their friend Rotawka. They also slashed down plants about the marshes which the *huai* had said was his abode. The same method is applied to heal Thangreia and his wife Biaki’s illness. His inflamed family decided to cut down the banyan tree with the help of the men of the village although the *huai* of the banyan tree appeared in Thangreia’s dream and said:

Kan awmna bung kung hi in kih zawngin in chak lo teh ang chu, i nupui hi kan la ang. (Zofa 212)

(You will surely regret if you fell the banyan in which we live, we will take your wife).

The night the tree was chopped down, Thangreia’s wife’s illness got worse leading to her eventual death. As for him, recovering faster than usual, he soon moved out from his bedridden state and after a while could work again just as before the incident.

The second is by ‘propitiation’ (70). Whenever the ancient Mizo had reason to believe that their suffering was caused by evil spirits, they used to offer chicken, dog, goat, etc., depending on the kind of sickness, as a sacrifice to appease the spirits so that their sufferings might be taken away. The idea behind their sacrificial offerings is noted thus:

Pi leh pu chuan ramhuai hi an be lo va, an duh bawk hek lo. Mihringte tina thintu leh tihrehawm thintu ni-a an ngaih avang erawh chuan, chu an nunrawnna chu tlawn nem tumin a lakah inthawina an hlan a ni mai thin zawk.... Ramhuai an tih tak hi chu ramhnuai lama cheng tam zawk thin, mihringte tinatu leh tihlum hial thin, thlarau hlauhawm tak leh sual tak, mi a khawih loh pawha mi tihthaih hmang si, thawm leh hmel hlauhawm tak taka inlar thin niin an ring a. (ibid.)

(The ancestors did not worship *ramhuai*³⁰, neither were they wanted. Since they were conceived to bring suffering and misery, they offered sacrifices to propitiate their cruelty... They believed that the *ramhuai* dwell in forests and cause suffering and death to humans. Convinced that these are demonic beings, who, even when they do not lay hands on men, would try to terrify them with terrorizing sounds and appalling appearances).

However, it is believed that men of extraordinary courage are feared even by the *huai*. These *pasaltha* or hunter-warriors would use force against them, even destroying their habitations. They are not intimidated by the various horrifying forms taken by the *huai*, and this valour aroused greater admiration of the *lasi* for them. The ancestors believed that the *lasi* loved to see these men hunting in the forests. They often stalked them and eventually ended up in a relationship with some of these brave men. The man who entered into a relationship with the *lasi* is known as *lasi-zawl*. The protagonists of The Tan Trilogy– Thangliana, Thanglura, Thanhranga and Thansanga– are all fearless men who are greatly admired by the *lasi*. The love the *lasi*

³⁰ Same as *huai*. It literally means ‘forest-spirit.’

had for a human warrior extends to such a height as when Rotawka's soul was possessed by the Dampa *huai*, Thlawhvaia, Chawngtinleri the Queen of the *lasi* said:

Kei hi lo kal lo pheii ila chu in vaiin in thi vek ang! (15)

(Had I not come here you would all be dead!)

The night the *lasi* extended their hands to humans, the vengeful *huai* waged spiritual war with the *lasi* of the Tan. It is said:

Hemi zana Tan tlang Lasi ho leh Dampa huai leh a puitute meithala an intawng hi a de zuai zuai mai a. A nasa khawp mai a, arsi tla chum chum ang mai hi a ni. Pi leh pute chuan vana arsate khi an lo tla ta mai emaw an ti hial a ni an ti. (17)

(That night, arrows of fire between the warring Tan Mountain's *lasi* and the Dampa *huai* repeatedly lit up the skies. It was so intense that it looked as if stars were falling in numbers. The ancestors thought, as often told, the stars were falling from the sky).

Lasi are perceived by the Mizos as superior to and better than *huai* in every way. The *huai*, on the other hand, often carry their curse where their presence is experienced:

Thil mak deuh mai chu hemi kum hian Khawzingho buh vui chu a tha em em mai a. Mahse a seng a lo hun chuan Khawzingho buh chu a si zo deuh vek mai a. Chuvang chuan kham khawp nei zo tu mah an awm lo va. (18)

(What is so strange was that that year the rice panicles of *Khawzing* village sprouted abundantly fruitful. But when the time of harvest came, most of the grains turned chaffy. Because of which not a villager yielded to last a year).

The whole village had to shift to another region because of the curse brought upon them that year. Oppositely, in *Galaxy (Pasaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy)*, the *lasi* damsels Galaxy and Hawilopari were so benevolent to even extend hands to *Thansanga* to clear weeds in the jhum. It was to spend quality time with him that they

cleared the weeds in no time for which he would have spent at least a week of laborious endeavour:

... Hawilopari chuan Thansanga lo chu a han kaw kual pawp mai a. Mak tak maiin hlo chu a vuai sul sul a. A zung atangin a thi ta vek mai a. (112)

(... Hawilopari pointed her finger about the jhum of Thansanga. Amazingly, the weeds withered instantaneously and all died from the roots).

2. Darkness and Secretiveness

The *lasi* are ever helpful not only in their farming but to a larger scale in finding animals for their human lovers' kill (ibid.). The acts are to make the men happy and so that the short-lived men will have more time to spare for them. A clear distinction of *huai* and *lasi* is always drawn throughout all the three novels of Zochhumpui Pa. However, there are allusions where the two spiritual beings come very close to each other. One such instance was when Thanglura was taken into the cave of *Tawi* mountain and shown *lasi* of different kinds who nonetheless were cordial and respectful to them. None of them were aggressive towards him like the *huai*. The sight is described thus:

Thui vak lo an han kal hnu chuan a lo eng ta sut mai, chu lai hmun lo eng sut mai an han hnaih chuan mi an lo awm sup sup mai a, *Lasi* nula rualte leh mipa, a then chu te bing tak tak, hang tak tak leh lukir bip bepte an lo tam mai a. Khuavelchhingin Thanglura arawn hruai chu an lo hmu duh hle a. (*Tan Tlang* 114)

(After walking in for a while, the place was brightly radiated and when they moved closer toward the lighted place there were many people, *lasi* damsels in groups and men, some of whom were very short, very dark and with curly hair. They enjoyed watching the sight of Thanglura brought in by Khuavelchhingi).

In *Galaxy (Pasaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy)*, the dark complexion of some of the *lasi* are compensated by their attractive physical features (229). The

author mostly links *lasi* with light and *huai* with darkness. Not only are the *lasi* associated with light but a very sweet scent is always emitted when they are around. When a *lasi* damsel, Maxy, stalked and wooed *pasaltha* Thanhanga in *Chhaktiang Kawlrawn (Pasaltha Thanhanga leh Lasi Nula Varparhi)*, she always emanated a very good scent like that of fragrant flowers to let him know her presence and the kills were because of her blessings (12, 49). Before appearing to him like a lady of extraordinary beauty, she often called out his name, sent forth wooingly giggling sounds to invite and be invited; all are to make sure that the man's heart is opened for her and to be received with love when she manifests herself in her human form (11).

In contrast, when the *huai* make sound audible to the men, it is to mock or to frighten them (*Zofa, Tawnmang Lasi I* 138-139). Unlike the *lasi*, the *huai* are offended when their cry is responded to and they often come out in numbers to cause harm to the person who has responded to their cry (*Pa, Chhaktiang Kawlrawn* 144). Their presence is linked with anger and hatred. Even caves inhabited by them are also always dark and repellingly odorous when one enters into them. One such cave was where Rotawka had had a misadventure. It is described thus:

... puk kil lam chu a va en pheï a, a thim em avangin engmah a hmu thei lova.
(7)

(... he looked towards the corner of the cave but could see nothing since it was very dark).

And:

Puk chu a rimchhe hle mai a. (10)

(The cave had an offensive odour).

Nature of the *lasi* which is questionable yet justified is their secretiveness. They are presented as always being busy. Although they have, most of the time, a place or another to visit to perform unrevealed tasks, yet, they always manage to present themselves when needed by men. Such an instance is found when Chawngtinleri said to her man Thangliana:

“Thanglian, hun eng emaw ti chhung chu ka zin bosan che a tul dawn a, ram hla deuhvah kal a tul a, i ngaihawm dawn ngei mai, harsatna i neih chuan in vau lui tuihkhawthla bula lungpui chungah khan lungte pahnih lo dah la, ka thiante pahnih hian an rawn pui thin dawn che nia,” a ti a. Thangliana chuan chu thu chu a han hriat chuan a huphurh hle mai a, “Khawiah nge i kal dawn a, a kal loh theih mai lo’ m ni?” a ti a. Chawngtinleri chuan, “Ka kalna tur hi hrilh che a rem tlat lo. Tin, ka kal ngei a ngai bawk si a, kei tak hian a nia kal bo chu hreh ni,” a ti a. (*Tan Tlang* 35)

(“Thanglian, I’m going to be away for some time, I need to go to a very far country, you will be dearly missed. If you need any help, put two pebbles upon the rock which is located near the waterfall at the fringe of your jhum so that my two friends will be able to help you.” When Thangliana heard her words, he became very apprehensive and asked, “Where are you going? Can’t you avoid going?” But Chawngtinleri answered, “I cannot tell you where I am going.³¹ I am very reluctant to be away, but I must leave you for some time).”

The confidentiality trait of the *lasi* characters is maintained throughout the novels by all the *lasi* characters. The old conception that the *lasi* tend to keep their affairs away from men other than their lovers in folk stories is heightened by the author in not letting the *lasi* reveal certain affairs even to their closest human lovers.

The ancient belief of the *lasi* as good and *huai* as evil entities is confirmed by Khuavelchhingi’s expression of her hatred for the *huai* of the Dampa forest who had perpetually disturbed the people. Moreover, among the *huai* were some who had cut

³¹ All the *lasi* characters are depicted as having undisclosed businesses to attend to unspecified locations. According to Ariosto, Demogorgon has a splendid temple palace in the Himalaya mountains, whither every fifth year the Fate are all summoned to appear before him, and give an account of their actions. They travel through the air in various strange conveyances, and it is no easy matter to distinguish between their convention and a Sabbath of the Witches. (Keightley 452)

off the head of Vanzema, lover of Khuavelchhingi's companion Zonunmawii. She was called away to the Tan Mountain for a certain task when her *zawl* was killed. She confided her concern to Zonunmawii thus:

Min tibuai hle a ni. Kan thian pasalthate tihnat an tum fo a. A chang leh thlahrangahte changing mi an tihthaih a, khuaa mite an tibuai a. Mi thlate an man thul a. An chimawm riau a. Keinin a hring a hrana han tih theih a ni si lo va. Kan danin a phal si lo va. Nang pawhin chu chu i hre ve vek tho a. Mahse mi huaisen tak, hlauh nei lo, kan thiante mihring zinga mi kan hmuh theih chuan, chungte hmang chuan sawng Dampa huai ho saw kan sawisa thei dawn a. (149)

(They are causing great trouble for us. They have frequently tried to hurt our hunter friends. Often taking the form of ghosts they terrify and trouble the villagers. They at other times seized their souls. They are indeed bothersome. But we cannot just lay hands on them since we are not authorized by our laws. If we could find a courageous and fearless man amongst our human friends, through him we will be able to wreak havoc upon them).

When they came to *pasaltha* Thansanga he was more than ready to help them. He told Zonunmawii frankly that he did not have the slightest fear of the ghosts or *huai* (154). After they empowered and shielded him, he entered the *huai*'s cave which was located in the Dampa forest. Realizing they had no chance against him since he had been equipped by the *lasi*, the *huai* turned themselves into bats and flew out of the cave. But they were caught just outside the cave in a storm and whirlwind controlled by Zonunmawii. She then banished them from Mizoram never to come back again except for one old *huai* who had been partially good to her human lover Vanzema. He was exiled for a hundred years.

3. Principled Beings

The *lasi* characters are governed by regulations to which they comply as well as possible throughout these stories. Although their human lovers are not always happy in the application, none of these laws is meant to bring harm to human beings.

As in *pasaltha* Thangliana's case, he was so angry at Chawngtinleri for not revealing where and why she was going away that he shot her favourite wild hog to show he was not to be disregarded and no secrets were to be kept from him. Even so, the *lasi* Queen had no intention of telling him her whereabouts but calmly told him that they never revealed their whole affairs because it would be of no use to humans (*Tan Tlang* 37). Another event occurred when the *lasi* damsel Varparhi was telling Thanhranga about his future marriage with a *Pawi*³² lady, Bualdimi. Before she could finish Chawngtinleri appeared out of nowhere and warned her not to continue her words as she was trespassing the permissible limit (*Chhaktiang Kawrawn* 138). The reason behind the prohibition was that the prophecy was going to have implications of the untimely death of Rampari who was yet to be Thanhranga's wife shortly and was to be fatefully replaced by Bualdimi.

Also, when a *lasi* out of favour gives her possession to her human lover, be it in the form of a stone or flower, if that person out of negligence leaves it behind or hands it over to someone else other than whom it was meant for in the first place, then the *lasi* and the man are prohibited from meeting again. In *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, a *lasi* named Galaxy gave Thansanga an ever-blooming red flower that could not fade as a mark of her fondness for him, he uninformed of the possible consequence gave the flower to Hlupuii (a human), daughter of Vanghmun village Chief. From the moment the flower was handed over to another human, Galaxy could no longer see him but could only hear his voice. The same happened to Thansanga; he could only hear her cry and see traces left by her. Galaxy later said to him:

Lal fanu Hlupuii khan ka pangpar kha lo tichhiain lo paih bo hman sela chu kan inhmu thei tawh ngai dawn miah lo va. (330)

(Had princess Hlupuii destroyed or thrown away that flower, it would never be possible for us to meet again).

³² A generic name of a tribe embracing such sub-tribes as Chin, Lakher or Mara, Hlawndo, Fanai, Bawitlung etc.

Even Queen Chawngtinleri was prohibited to live in the territorial forest of Sihzawl and its regions by the *lasi* law. Because, her human lover Thangliana had left a beautiful stone given by her, when Rotawka was seized by the *huai*, in the cave inhabited by the *huai* of the Dampa forest (156).

The most sacred of these guiding laws of the *lasi* in their affairs with men is for the preservation of the sanctity of marriage. They are not to have a relationship with married men. If a man who is in a relationship with a *lasi* gets married, the *lasi* is prohibited by the law to appear or be seen before him or to speak to the married man except in dreams. Even when this law is broken, it usually is out of love and for the greater good of man. In *Chhaktiang Kawlrawn*, Khuavelchhingi confided to Thanglura about their law when Thanhranga needed help from his *lasi* friend Varparhi (or Maxy). She said:

Ka u chuan an inhmuh hi a phal tawh lo va. A chhan chu pasaltha kan thianten kawppui an lo neih chinah chuan a taka inhmuh a, inkawm te, inbiak te phal a ni tawh lo va. Hei hi kan dan a ni a. Mahse hei Varparhi hian min dil nasa mai si a. Ka u hriat lohin ka hmuh tir mai daw a emaw ni ka ti deuh a. (187)

(My sister (Chawngtinleri) had banned the two from meeting again. Because, when our hunter-warrior friends are married, it is forbidden to meet, to have any affair or to chat with them. This is our law. But since Varparhi has been pleading with me persistently. I have been thinking of allowing her to meet him without her knowledge).

3.1. Longing Defined by Transgression

The longing of the *lasi* for the men is such that they often break their laws. When Varparhi learned that Thanhranga was mortally wounded by the Pawi hunter-warriors, because of his *tlawmngaihna*³³ to safeguard his fellow warriors, she quickly came to him without fearing the punishments her act could bring upon herself. She

³³ Chivalry; a self-sacrificial act.

prepared for him herbal medicine³⁴ with which she helped him recover the wounds of bullets and daos (*Chhaktiang Kawlrawn* 188). Again, when Khuavelchhingi pleaded with her sister, the Queen, in tears, to allow her to see Thanglura after he was married as she still had not fulfilled her promise to take him to the city of Tan, she out of compassion devised a way to let her meet her human lover (*Tan Tlang* 154-155).

The lasi's love for human beings surpasses that of their constant companions—the pet animals—as seen through the character of Galaxy. Chawngtinleri, not knowing what else to do with her unruly tiger, let it roam as freely as it wanted and commanded her fellow *lasi* not to interfere in its business. The rule was that neither could they help the tiger nor its victims. Regardless of her Queen's rule, Galaxy helped Thansanga when he was about to be attacked by the tiger and also healed a villager wounded by the tiger with herbal medicine (*Galaxy* 122). For her kindness, she received harsh words of exile from Mizoram:

³⁴ The *lasi* used herbal medicine several times. Galaxy used it for Thansanga's fever (*Galaxy* 101); she also used it to treat a villager wounded by a tiger (122); again, she treated Thanglura's fever with it (*Tantlang Lasi* 201-202). Varparhi used the medicine to treat Thanhanga when he was mortally wounded by the enemies (*Chhaktiang Kawlrawn* 188). Negatively though, the closeness of these *lasi* and Hecate-Artemis and Circe, the leader of the nereids, is seen in their ingenuity to make herbal medicines. According to Diodorus Siculus, Greek historian of the 1st century B.C., Circe is the daughter of Hecate, who is the daughter of Perses, a very cruel king of the Tauric Chersonese. Hecate loves hunting, however, when she finds no luck, she would turn her arrows upon human beings instead of wild animals. She, in no time, poisoned his father and gained the throne. Then, founding the temple of Artemis and commanding that strangers who landed there should be sacrificed to the goddess, her cruelty was known far and wide. Her daughter, Circe, who dedicated her life to the making of all sorts of drugs and discovered roots of all manner of nature and potencies, is no exception; she poisoned her husband, king of the Sarmatians or Scythians, and committed many cruel and violent acts upon her subjects (485).

Galaxy, Mizoramah i awm thei tawh lo vang. Hmar tawpah kal nghal ang che.
(123)

(Galaxy, you can no longer live in Mizoram. You get away to the north-end).

The Queen herself is no exception. When she was still forbidden to enter Sihzawl village and its surrounding regions, urged by her longing for her lover Thangliana, she disguised herself as a human and entered the village but only to find out that her man Thangliana had just passed away (47). She found it very hard to hide her feelings for him that people often saw her crying at Thangliana's grave. Her coming to Sihzawl was her wish to change the fate over which she had no power because she had prophesied his death thus:

Engtik ni-ah emaw chuan ka lo kir leh ang a, mahse nangni hringmi zawng in
dam chin te a tawi si a, chutih hunah chuan nang chu piallei daiah i lo awm
tawh awm si a. (42)

(Someday I will come back, but as for you for the shortness of your humans' lifespan, by the time I return, you would have made the coolness of the soil your home).

Men's longing for their *lasi* damsels is no less. Thansanga, for instance, is not satisfied by the comfort of his home. Even while staying with his family at the insistence of his brother the village Chief, his mind is always pulled away somewhere else by the thrill of the wilderness and the glamour of the *lasi* (*Galaxy* 165). There was a void within him that could not be filled by the winsomeness of a human princess Ngursangi. The charm of the *lasi* worked him up so well that even when Ngursangi wanted him to stay by her side, his state of mind is portrayed thus:

Mahse a ramvah chakna leh a thian *lasi* nula pian nalh leh kawm nuam tak mai
Zonunmawii hmuh a chak tawh bawk si! (179)

(But his longing to hunt the forest and his eagerness to see Zonunmawii with her beautiful figure and cordiality was too great!)

Thangliana, grandfather of Thansanga, did not marry because of his relationship with Chawngtinleri. He spent his life in the wilderness with the *lasi* so much that he even neglected his family's advice to get married and settle down as a man of his class should. His father was one of the Elders of Sihzawl village richer than some of the village Chiefs in Mizoram, yet, Thangliana led the loneliest of lives since his thirst for the *lasi* was unquenchable. Even his untimely death is "a kind of voluntary death"³⁵ (Jung 32) because of his unfulfilled longing for Chawngtinleri. A while before his death he visited the Tan Mountain hoping to meet her as she had been away for a long time, or at least to catch a glimpse of her younger sister Khuavelchhingi in the event of her absence. But he unexpectedly found the cave deserted and to add to the bleakness, not a chirping was heard about the cave:

Tichuan lungleng tak leh beidawng takin Thangliana chu an khaw lamah a haw leh ta a... Chuta chinah chuan Thangliana nun khua chu a lo zuai ta tial tial a.
(*Tan Tlang* 46-47)

(Thangliana then went back home filled with longing and great despair... From that moment on Thangliana's life gradually withered away).

His son, Thanglura, also died almost the same way. Having been the Chief of Herhzawl village for many years, and three years after the death of his wife, his memories came back to him heavily. The author questioned Thanglura's loneliness when longing for his past relationship with the *lasi* seized him:

Thanglura lunglenzia hi tu nge sawi chhuak thiam ang le? (230)

(Who would have the artistry to deliver Thanglura's wistfulness?)

³⁵ "It is a surrender of our own powers, not artificially willed but forced upon us by nature; not a voluntary submission and humiliation decked in moral garb but an utter and unmistakable defeat crowned with the panic fear of demoralization." (Jung 32)

While absorbing himself in the past, he smelled a very sweet scent, a mark of the *lasi*'s presence, which he had acquainted in his youth. His emptiness was so overwhelming that he swooned and fell. Regaining consciousness, he saw Thachungchuangi, Galaxy and two other *lasi* who, knowing that his time was near, came to pay him their last respects. Their tarriance was only to stretch his longing to its limit and eventually led him to his death a moment after their disappearance.

3.2. The Other Name of *Lasi* is Grace

Because of their love for human beings, the *lasi* do not always use their magical powers; they like to live as humans do. Zochhumpuii Pa cites numerous occasions where the *lasi* do not only give the *pasalthas* animals for their kill but would often help them carry smoked meat in the *bawmrang*³⁶ if they were going to be too heavy for a man to be carried by himself. As they often trekked far from the village to the forest for their hunting expeditions, the *lasi*, who would have been waiting for them eagerly, loved to journey back home along with the men. These *lasi* maidens were able to fit in wherever and whatever their human lovers find contentment. In *Chhaktiang Kawlrawn* after Thanhranga hunted down a wild gaur of great size given by Varparhi:

Tichuan Tumpang sa chu an chan ta a. Meiin an ur tluk tluk mai a. A sa lah a tam kher mai a. Lasi nula chuan Thanhranga chu bawmrang lian deuh mai a tahtir a. Hemi zan hian puk lamah pawh an chho ta lo va. An tumpang sa repna hmunah hian an riak ta a ni. (88)

(They cut the gaur's meat into pieces. They then went on with the task of smoking. The meat was so plentiful that the *lasi* damsel made Thanhranga weave a very big basket. That night they did not go back to the cave but spent the night at the spot where they were smoking the meat).

³⁶ A large woven bamboo basket, commonly carried by Mizo men.

Although Varparhi had a cozy bed in the cave to sleep in, yet she chose to stay with her man in the coldness of the forest.

Throughout the novels, to affirm their status as caretaker of the animals, their kindness towards animals is maintained. Words of knowledge about animals, which at times surprised human characters, are also found through the *lasi* characters abundantly. From the smallest creatures to the largest and most marvellous creatures, not excepting whales and leviathan, they seem to know everything about them. Their knowledge of the nature of the animals imbibed to the hunters is a very powerful tool. This is because the most admired hunters are the ones who bring home the highest number of animal heads and have a vast knowledge of the nature of animals since this marks one's adeptness in hunting. Thansanga, for instance, was so pleased to hear about animals from Galaxy that he said to her:

E Galaxy, ramsa chanchin I han sawi hi chuan ngaihnam ka tiin, zankhua pawhin sawi la, ka ning lo vang.... (*Galaxy* 15)

(Well Galaxy, I am always thrilled whenever you discourse on the nature of animals, even if you go on for the whole night, I would not get bored...).

On the other side, this knowledge inspired the *pasaltha* characters to respect tigers and not harm them unless they endanger the lives of human beings. The reverence they have for tigers is a deeply inculcated ideological aspect of the Mizo society mixed with superstitiousness. The *pasalthas* are the highest class of men in the ancient Mizo society without whose presence the community would have no pride, and the manliness of these men is matched with the fierceness of tigers, which in turn is because of their close association with the gods of animals. The sanctimony associated with the tiger is brought out by Galaxy when she tells Thansanga about the footprint of a *sairal*³⁷:

³⁷ A tiger whose size is bigger than usual.

Thansang, he sakei hi sakei lian chi, sairal an tih chi hi a ni a. Hetiang sairal sawm zet hi kan hotunu Chawngtinleri hian a kawl bik a. A duh loh zawng titute hrem nan a ti a. A theih hram chuan kahsak lo vang che. (50)

(Thansang, this tiger is the bigger kind of tiger named *sairal*. Our Queen Chawngtinleri especially keeps ten of these *sairal* for the punishment of those who go against her. If possible, by any means, do not shoot it).

Again, when Thansanga got to know that his two friends, instead of laying hand on the tiger, shared the meat of the deer they shot with it, he was very thankful and said:

Nakinah khuanu malsawmna pawh in la dawn phah ngei ang! (54)

(Someday, this will surely induce the blessing of *khuanu*³⁸ upon you).

The *lasi* are not only knowledgeable with pleasing words, but to make their lovers happy they would climb trees where women do not customarily climb (*Tan Tlang Lasi* 318). Sometimes, they would take them into flights, flying from mountain to mountain to tour their cities (41). They are very playful as well. The happiest scenes are those where Thansanga and Galaxy whiled away their time playing in the water. Thansanga had never seen a better swimmer than his *lasi* friend; she could move about the water as if it was her own home. The fishes were no match for her quickness, she could easily catch them whenever needed. Thansanga thus speaks of her speed:

Galaxy, tui hi i lo thiam hle mai! I lakah chuan satel ang mai ka lo ni tak tak a nih hi! (*Galaxy* 20)

(Galaxy, you are such a good swimmer! I am only like a tortoise in comparison to you!)

The *lasi*, to show that their human lovers' happiness is their joy too, would not only separate themselves after their men's marriage but give gifts as well. Moreover, when they foretold Thanglura that he was one day going to become a Chief of the

³⁸ God.

village, they taught him how to lead his life as a ruler. When he eventually became the Chief, the *lasi*, knowing that wealthy Chiefs are admired and glorified by their subjects, told him of a spot wherein the *Bawm*³⁹ people had hidden their treasures before running away from their raiders. They assured him that all the riches are his since the people who had buried them are all dead and nobody knew about it. After receiving this blessing from the *lasi*, Thanglura was said to be one of the richest of the Chiefs of his time (*Tan Tlang* 222).

4. Their Abode

Although the *lasi* are always associated with riches and luxury, they can turn greatness and beauty associated with them into nothingness in a blink of an eye— just as they do not have a fixed place of stay. These *lasi* mainly use caves as their home and change the locations very often. The transiency of residing in a particular place is a part of their hiddenness. Once, when *Pasaltha* Thangliana was flown to Tan cave by Chawngtinleri and two of her friends, the grandeur of the spectacle is narrated thus:

... puk chhung an han tum chuan puk chhung chu khaw ropui tak mai a lo ni reng mai a. In pawh chu a lo tamin a lo ropui hlawm hle mai a. Lasi nula tam tak mai an lo awm noh noh mai a, naupangte pawh an lo awm nuk nuk mai a, chutia Chawngtinleri leh a thiante pahnih leh Thangliana an lo lut chu Lasi nulaho chuan an rawn pan khawm a. (33)

(...Upon landing in the cave, the inside was made up of a marvellous city. There were many houses which were indeed magnificent. Many *lasi* damsels were moving about actively, and children were also crowding the place. When they saw Chawngtinleri and her two friends and Thangliana, the *lasi* damsels thronged around them).

On the second visit, the city within the cave was still as great as before. But this time, Thangliana met Chawngtinleri only for a short while, and for reasons unrevealed, she

³⁹ One of the Mizo sub-clans.

unstoppably had to leave him again for the far east (42).⁴⁰ It was only on his third visit that there was nobody to welcome him and the cave was completely deserted and blocked by a rockfall a few metres into its opening. The only thing left of its previous grandeur and liveliness was then just forlornness (46).

In *Chhaktiang Kawlrawn*, a few years after Thangliana's death, Thanhranga was taken to Chawngtinleri's mansion by Varparhi. She had then shifted her household to a cave in Murlen⁴¹. He found the home comfortable and very luxurious. To add to his liking, he descried all kinds of Mizo items including clothes, woven baskets and sets of brass gongs in the cave. He also caught sight in the corner of the room of unfamiliar clothes, made of wool, which looked foreign to him (78).

Thanglura is contemporaneous with Thanhranga though a little younger. This man witnessed a very different sphere of the cave. During his days Chawngtinleri had reoccupied the Tan cave and Khuavelchhingi had given him a tour of the cave's city. She revealed to him that the Tan cave was connected to Mawmrang⁴² mountain's cave. To prove this, she flew him to the Mawmrang cave. The two caves were well

⁴⁰ In *The Tragical History of D. Faustus* by Marlowe, Beelzebub is said to be *prince of the east* ("Orientis princeps Beelzebub" Marlowe 1.259). And, in the "Devil's Stench and Living Water, R.B. Pynsent writes, "In the Jew Mardocheus' letter to Alexander the Great the writer informs his addressee that Belzebub is the 'king of darkness' (cf. Matthew 12:24- 27), the same as 'the god of the underworld, Pluto'." (613-614)

⁴¹ Previously a name of a mountain in Mizoram. The village established at the site is now known as Murlen village. It is located in Champhai District. The distance between Tan and Murlen mountain peaks is two hundred fifty-nine kilometres by road.

⁴² A mountain peak within the territory of Pawlrang village in Saitual District of Mizoram.

connected in the underground, and he saw all kinds of animals all along the cavern (*Tantlang Lasi* 214).

The *lasi* are believed to live all over the globe but the narrators do not specify their habitation in other parts of the world. As far as can be seen in the select texts, some of them inhabit the other side of Tiau river, and many of them including Chawngtinleri frequently visit *hmar tawp* (north end) and are closely associated with *khawchhak* (far east). Galaxy also tells *pasaltha* Thansanga that she was from *hmar tawp* where the weather is extremely cold and that the name Galaxy had also been given by the people there (*Galaxy* 198-199). To indicate that they live and move all over the globe Varparhi said to Thanhranga when he asks her name:

Thanhrang, ka hming chu khawvel hmun hran hranah a danglam a, hming tam tak ka nei a. Mahse nang chuan Varparh min ti mai rawh. (*Chhaktiang Kawlrawn* 67)

(Thanhrang, my name varies in different parts of the world, I have many names. But you should just call me Varparh).

5. Supernaturality

The *lasi* can travel lightning quick to different places, and also can talk with other *lasi* from different locations using extrasensory cognition. When Thansanga and Galaxy went about the forest of Herhzawl⁴³ and found Chawngtinleri's tiger pet roaming untended in the same forest, she informed her about it using telepathic communication. During the exchange of information, Chawngtinleri was at Murlen which is located over three hundred kilometres away. Fearing that the tiger will touch livestock of the villagers, the transference of thoughts occurred thus:

“Ngawi teh, ka'n hotunu ka'n bia ang e,” a ti a. A han maimitchhing vang vang a. Arawn nui chhuak ta a. “Kan hotunu chuan a ko hawng dawn e. 'Engati nge ka thu lo va, khang lai thleng thleng a lo kal?’ a ti a ni,” a ti a. (*Galaxy* 50)

⁴³ A fictional village located in the Damparengpui forest region in Mizoram.

(She said, “Wait, let me convey it to our Queen.” Closing her eyes for some time she smiled and stated, “Our Queen is going to call it back home. She said, ‘Why is it wandering to such a far distant place as that without my permission?’”)

Also, Zonunmawii, whom Galaxy entrusted to take care of her lover Thansanga when she was away in exile, could connect her thoughts to Galaxy who was in the north end (142-143).

To sway the intentions of men, these *lasi* often transform into different forms. In one of *pasaltha* Thangliana’s hunting expeditions, Chawngtinleri and her two friends assumed the appearance and personalities of Remi, a young woman, and her parents, who were from the same village as Thangliana, to build a good relationship with him (*Tan Tlang* 29). They also have the power to appear differently to the same observer. When Galaxy appeared before the villagers of Herhzawl on the day of the celebration of Thansanga’s *Thangchhuah*⁴⁴, to crown him with *Diar Tial* (a headdress) a symbol of *Thangchhuah*, she, speaking of the villagers’ perception of her, said to Thansanga:

Tuna min hmuh ang hian heng mipuiho hi chuan min hmu ve lo a nia. Tleirawl te angin min hmu a ni. (*Galaxy* 97)

(These people do not see me like you are seeing me now. They see me as a mere teenager).

The *lasi* can also enter into the mind and be controllers of human dreams. Many of the experiences the *pasaltha* had with the *lasi* usually occurred in dreams. Even after their human lovers have got married, they can still meet and have a relationship with them in dreams which is no less enjoyable or wretched than waking

⁴⁴ “To fulfil, complete, finish, carry out anything that should/must be done in order to go (or go up) to Pialral or Paradis; a title given to a man who distinguished himself by giving a certain number of public feast or by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, which is regarded a stairway to Pialral.” (Vanlalngheta 475-476)

experiences. There are instances where dreams are indifferentiable from reality. One such phenomenon is found in the words of Galaxy while speaking to Thansanga thus:

Zana i mumang lama ka pek che, zinga i lo hum khan mak i ti hle a. Mahse keini ho hi mumang leh a tak inzawma thil tih kan ching thin tih i la hre lo niin ka ring a. (330)

(You were so astonished the other morning to be holding (the flower) which I gave you in your dream the night before. But I believe you have not realized that we perform things by incorporating dreams and reality).

6. A Stepping Stone to *Pialral*

One of the most important roles of these *lasi* in the ancient Mizo belief is the conception that their blessings upon a man can make that person's life more comfortable than others in *pialral* or paradise. For this reason, the Mizos offered sacrificial piglet or fowl in their religious and other worship practices such as *dawino chhui*, *kawngpui siam* and *lasi khal*.⁴⁵ The animals are offered to the *lasi* to prosper them in their hunting which will eventually enable the blessed person to become a *Thangchhuah Pa*, whose status is desired by all the pre-Christian Mizos.

There are two kinds of *Thangchhuah* in the Mizo traditional practice. One is *In lama Thangchhuah* (*Thangchhuah* from home or *Thangchhuah* by domestic deeds) the ceremonial event of the display of riches organized by a wealthy villager. The second is *Ram lama Thangchhuah* (*Thangchhuah* from forest or *Thangchhuah* by hunting exploits), mainly achieved by *pasalthas* by killing a certain number of animals

⁴⁵ *Dawino chhui*- a family religious worship activity performed for children at the threshold of adulthood; *kawngpui siam*- a whole village involved in this worship ceremony. It was performed for prosperity in hunting and raiding; *lasi khal*- a personal sacrificial offering made to *lasi* to prosper a hunter in his hunting of wild animals. Although these three ceremonies are very significant concerning *lasi*, they formed only fractions of the larger ancient sacrificial practices.

which is a mark of manliness and adeptness in hunting. It is in order to *Ram lama Thangchhuah* they need more help from the *lasi* to prosper them, although one also has to offer sacrifices to *lasi* even to fulfil the other *Thangchhuah*. The reasons for desiring such accomplishments for both the *Thangchhuah* ceremonies are:

- 1) In the afterlife they will be fed with *faisa*⁴⁶ in *pialral*.
- 2) To avoid Pawla *sai*⁴⁷ while on the way to *pialral*.
- 3) To be revered and held high during their lifetime. (Zawla, 42)

The Mizo men sought the blessings of *lasi* in order to *Ram lama Thangchhuah* since the following animals are needed to be killed: elephant, gaur, bear, stag, wild-hog, flying-fox, eagle and king cobra. All the *pasaltha* protagonists in the selected novels of Zochhumpui Pa are *Thangchhuah Pa*⁴⁸ whose accomplishments are due to the help and blessings they received from the *lasi*. When Galaxy asked Thansanga why the Mizos are desirous of becoming a *Thangchhuah Pa* so much, he replied:

“E, Thangchhuah thei chu mi ngaihsan an ni a. Ram lama Thangchhuah ngat phei chu, kan pi leh pu te sawi danin ‘PIALRAL’-ah faisai ringin an awm der der mai a ni, an ti a. Mitthi khaw kawngkhar bula lo awm thin PAWLA sairawkherh, phulraw phel phawk, a saihlum pawh artui tia tia, pawhin a lo sai ngam lo ve,” an ti alawm! Thangchhuah pa khan Thangchhuah diar tial ngei mai kha an khim vang mai a. A silai akin, a zukchal kah chungah a chuang a. Zukchal ki hreuah khan rulngan pa a invet chuat mai a. A lu a ti lawr veng mai a. Chung lamah mu vanlai a thlawk vir vut vut bawk a. Thangchhuah pa chu a

⁴⁶ It literally means milled-rice; implying that they will no longer have to toil for food but will be provided freely and abundantly because of the feat they had achieved on earth.

⁴⁷ Pawla is the gatekeeper of the city of the dead or *pialral* or Paradise. If the spirit of the dead is shot by Pawl’s bow, the wound of the pellet will get sore for three years.

⁴⁸ A man who had fulfilled all the steps in order to *thangchhuah*.

sa kahho zawng zawng, sai te, sakei te, ramsial, savawm, sanghalten an zui duah duah mai a. Pawla pawhin a lo hlau a, a lo perh ngam miah lo. Tichuan ropui takin pialralah an lut ta a ni. (*Galaxy* 105)

(Well, those who have the prowess to *Thangchhuah* are highly esteemed by others. According to our ancestors, those who achieve this feat will live comfortably relying on *faisa* in *Pialral*. They said, “The gatekeeper of the city of the dead, *Pawl*, with his bow, splitted-half of a *phulrua*⁴⁹ and his pellet the size of an egg, dare not shoot the man!” The *Thangchhuah Pa* would expressly wear the symbolical striped *Thangchhuah diar tial*. With his gun on the back, he would ride the stag he had killed on whose antlers the king cobra would wind around, strikingly projecting its head. The eagle would also vigorously hover above his head. The *Thangchhuah Pa* would be followed by all the animals he had killed – elephants, tigers, gaurs, bears, wild-hogs and the likes. Even *Pawl* would fear him and dare not shoot him. They would then gloriously enter into *Pialral*).

The ancient Mizo forefathers considered the *lasi* as gods and it was very important to be on good terms with them. Moreover, they were believed to rule over the destiny of not only the animals but also of the humans and the security and comfort of life on earth and the life to come after death. Due to the belief that *lasi* were faithful to their words, the Lusei sub-clan ‘Chhakchhuak’ worshipped the Lurh and Tan mountains (*Zofa, Mizo Thawnthu Vol. 1* 31). Lines were even composed and passed down for generations in reverence for the *lasi* Queen thus:

Buannelah ramsate an piang
Chawngtinleri 'n a siam.

(Born were beasts arrayed in Buannel
Made by Chawngtinleri).

⁴⁹ A largest kind of bamboo in Mizoram.

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CHAPTER III
THE SPLIT IMAGES: LASI IN LALHMACHHUANA ZOFA'S
NARRATIVES

Tawnmang Lasi 1 and *Tawnmang Lasi 2* portray the affairs of *lasi* and their relationship with men in Mizoram after Christianization of the land. Written in the first-person perspective, the *lasi* are no longer presented as superior than the *huai* though they still retain their beautiful appearances and possess the power to control the destiny of animals. The stories are set in the period when the religion of the Mizo people has been changed from the paganistic religious worship to Christianity. Through these works the author presents far-reaching permeation of the life of the people by these spiritual beings as he writes:

Mizote Kristian kan lo nih tawh hnu, ‘*chanchin thain kan ramah ramhuai a um bo ta,*’ kan tih tawh hnu, kan khawsak phung pawhin khaweng a hmuh tawh hnu, kum sangkhat zakua sawmnga chho vel a Mizote nunphung mitthla chung, he thawnthu hi duan a ni a. Kum sangkhat zakua sawmsarih chhote pawh a thawnthu kal tluang pangngai hian a hawlh chho thuak thuak dawn a ni. ‘*Chanchin thain kan ramah ramhuai a um bo ta,*’ ti bawk mah ila, kum sangkhat zakua sawmriat chho thleng khan pasalthate nunphungah chuan lasite hian hmun thuktak an la luah reng a, lasi zawl sawi turte pawh an la awm hial a ni. (*Tawnmang Lasi 1 9*)

(The story is designed keeping in mind the life of the Mizos in the nineteen fifties, when we, the Mizos, have become Christians, and have said ‘*the gospel has cast away the demons from our land,*’ at a time our way of life has seen daylight. The course of the story from time to time is also going to prod incidentally on life in the nineteen seventies. Although we say ‘*the gospel has cast away the demons from our land,*’ yet the *lasi* still occupied a very significant place in the life of the *pasalthas* even during the nineteen eighties, and in those days, there were still some to be regarded as *lasi-zawl*).

Zofa exhibits changes in the appearance and nature of the *lasi* after the people of the land have embraced Christianity over paganism, shifting their faith from *lasi*

and *huai* to Jesus Christ⁵⁰ in order to attain the *pialral*. In his works, they are no longer the kind and benevolent gods but have turned into vengeful evil spirits who allure men with masks of beauty to trap them and lead them astray. There are passages in the works where the author portrayed the *lasi* as almost pitiful, echoing the words of William Blake when he speaks about Milton's touching portrayal of the downfall of Satan in *Paradise Lost*.⁵¹

1. Oneness with *Huai*

The most striking aspect of the novels is the coherency of identity of the *huai* and the *lasi* given by the author. Not a line in The Tan Trilogy mentioned the responsibility of *huai* as caretaker of animals. Contrastingly, in both the books of *Tawnmang Lasi* *huai* are portrayed as having the duty of watching over animals though animals under their care are often depicted as insolently prideful. Just like *lasi* they are very fond of animals and show favouritism to some of their chosen ones. They do not allow these favoured animals to be touched by men. When Vala, the protagonist of the story, tried to shoot a stag feeding on the *sih*⁵² water- the place which the villagers often said was hunted by the *huai*- he misfired his gun thrice and whilst attempting the fourth time he witnessed a strange incident:

Kah nawn leh ka tum lai takin zukchal bulah chuan hmeichhe naupang hmel fel tak mai hi ka hmu ta mai a. Chu naupang chuan 'kap nawn suh' min rawn

⁵⁰ According to Judeo-Christian belief Jesus is the Son of God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

⁵¹ Blake had said of Milton that he is "of the Devil's party without knowing it" for evoking a sense of compassion for Satan (*The Marriage* 7).

⁵² Small spring or swamp or stream in the forest. The ancient Mizos believed *sih* to be abode of the *huai*.

ti ni awm tak hian a ban a rawn phar a, chutih rual rual chuan ka lam pana zukchal lo kal mek pawh a ding ve ta nghal a. (*Tawnmang Lasi I* 133)

(Just as I was aiming to shoot again, I surprisingly saw a very pretty girl by the side of the stag. This young girl raised her hand as if to say ‘don’t shoot again,’ just then even the stag that was approaching me stopped instantaneously).

When Vala saw the little girl for the first time, he could hardly believe his eyes but soon recalled a misfortune which had befallen his friend Muka in their boyhood days. Like the enticing bird which had caused great illness to Rotawka in *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, Muka chased a very strange bird in one of their jungle wanderings to shoot birds with bow and pellet. When the bird was finally shot down it fell in the same *sih* where Vala had then encountered the little girl. Just when Muka was attempting to pick up the bird, it vanished and instead the *sih* water upon which the bird fell started bubbling and there appeared a very pretty girl who pointing her finger at him said:

Engatinge ka sava khwi lai i um i um ni? (144)

(Why do you keep chasing my pet bird?)

Muka was so frightened that he looked all pale and could hardly walk. He had to be led home by the hands by Vala and his other friends. Only after recovering from his illness which lasted for a number of days, could he reveal what he saw. The frightful temper of the *huai* is perceived through this incident. A deceptive yet attractive personality traits are seen through the little girl’s character like that of Artemis, since:

Artemis, the famous huntress, is often transformed into a deer; in other words, the hunter and the hunted are secretly identical. The hind frequently shows the way or finds the most advantageous point for the crossing of a river. On the other hand, she sometimes lures the hero to disaster or even to death by leading him over a precipice or into the sea or a swamp. (Von Franz 118).

The little girl's manifestation as a *lasi* was beheld by Vala when he met her the second time. Her alluring figure is such that:

‘A chuti deuh lo maw’ tiin sawiselna tur zawng ngial mah ila, han sawisel lai tur reng a awm lo. (163-164)

(Even if one attempts to find a flaw in her physique, no imperfection is to be found in her (appearance)).

When he met her for the third time, she displayed the finest of etiquettes often shown to humans by the *lasi*. Even regarding the mockingly jeering sound and the intimidation caused by *sih huai* to him the other night, she, while acknowledging her involvement in the act of terrorizing, mannerly said:

U Thai'n a tirh ngeiah che ka ngai asin, aniin a tir che a nih loh chuan I chungah thil kan lo tusual der a nih chu... Ka pu chuan kan Thachungchuangi zawl chu a huaisen hle mai... nakinah I nulat hun chuan ani anga huaisen kha ila zawl ve dawn nia min ti asin. (190)

(I took it firmly that you were sent by *u Thai*⁵³, if you had not been sent by her what we did to you was indeed due to a misunderstanding... My grandfather (the chief of the *sih huai*) said to me, ‘Thachungchuangi *zawl*⁵⁴ is such a courageous man... be in a relationship with a courageous man like him when you become a woman.’

When Vala met Thachungchuangi, the *lasi* protagonist of the story, she told him about the young girl and her grandfather stating that it was the chief of the *sih*

⁵³ *u* is a term used to address one's elder siblings, close relatives or older people in general. The little girl meant to say ‘elder sister Thachungchuangi’.

⁵⁴ A person who is in a relationship with *lasi*. The word can be used as both noun and verb.

huai who incited the young children of the *huai* at *Zukbual*⁵⁵ *sih* to work for the bereavement of humans, whose words the young ones harked with immense enthusiasm. Whenever one of these beings appeared to Vala, they always tried to find fault with the one absent, censuring in order to justify oneself for their actions which they believed had caused displeasure to him. Feeling that there was something behind the little girl's decency, Vala brought out the Christianized conceptions of these beings by thinking to himself:

... hmun dangah inlar se hmeichhe naupang angin a inlar tawh kher lo maithei.
Thachungchuangi anga nula duhawm tak pawh a lo ni ve reng thei e... (193)

(... if she was to reveal herself somewhere else, she might not reappear as a little girl. She might also have been a lovely damsel like Thachungchuangi...)

Again, in *Tawnmang Lasi 2*, he thought to himself:

Khawilaiah emaw chuan puitling chet danin a che fo ta ve ang. Anni ho hi
zawng duha inti danglam thei, kan mithmuha rawn inlar a, inti bo leh mai thei
an ni miau si a. (76)

(She must have often acted like a grown up in some other places. For these beings can take different forms at will, appearing before our eyes, only to disappear when they please).

In relation to the belief of the Mizo Christians proclaimed in the above extracts, it would be worth quoting an account of an actual incident by Thawkiana, Craft Teacher, Government MES Borapansury⁵⁶ in *Ramhuai*, collected eye-witness accounts of *lasi* and *huai*, by Mizoram Upa Pawl (Elders' Association of Mizoram). The account goes thus:

⁵⁵ The name of the *sih* where Vala saw the little girl for the first time. *Zuk* is a shortened term for *sazuk* meaning *sambar deer*; *bual*, here, means *a bath*.

⁵⁶ A village in the north-west region of Lawngtlai District, Mizoram.

There is a Rest House in Borapansury where Police wireless operators used to stay. In February 1981 on the night of a full moon, ASI Barabuaia, an Assamese, saw a very beautiful woman who dressed herself in traditional Assamese attires in the Rest House premises. Taking her to be an Assamese lady, Barabuaia approached her and spoke to her but the woman did not respond to him. When she just vanished into the thin air, he was somehow stunned and affrighted.

Not long since the occurrence, in the month of March, Thangirha, another wireless operator, saw a very strange woman in his bedroom who, at once, threatened him saying, “Don’t tell anybody that I come to you, if you disclose about it, you will die, or a member of your family will die.” Thangirha was horrified. A short while after the dreadful sight, severe illness took hold of him and he was bedridden for two weeks. Could it be due to the revelation of the lady he had seen? His grandmother in Saiha⁵⁷ died coincidentally. Barabuaia saw her in the premises whereas Thangirha saw her in the bedroom of the Rest House; and, the trepidations caused by the two appearances were also very different. (224)

The new belief Zofa tries to assert is that the *lasi* would feign forms not only to attract and please human beings but to frighten them as well. They would put on different looks and miens as required by situations like the Dampa forest *huai* who turned themselves into large snakes and caterpillars to horrify Thanglura when he confronted them in *Tantlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana* (169). The two *lasi* caught by Thasiama also changed their beautiful appearance as young ladies into snake and caterpillar respectively when they wanted to escape from his clutches.

The rendition of the conception of *lasi* as always more potent than *huai* in The Tan Trilogy is also discarded by Zofa when the little girl was trampled by an old hag. After a tiger under the care of the pretty girl and a favourite wild hog of the old she-devil fought a deadly duel, the two beings appeared at the spot where the fighting

⁵⁷ Siaha. The capital city of Siaha District, Mizoram.

occurred. Vala espied the whole incident though without understanding a word these beings uttered. He interpreted from their actions that the old hag was blaming the girl for the uneventful occurrence and the girl was asking for forgiveness when she prostrated herself under the feet of the she-devil (*Tawnmang Lasi* 2 146).

Not only did Thachungchuangi call herself and other *huai* and *lasi* characters “*ramhuai misualte*” (“wicked demons” 252) but spoke of the little girl as being given a training by the *ramhuai* to conquer the hearts of *pasalthas* in time to come. The little girl referred to the old *huai*, chief caretaker of the *sih*, as grandfather; fears an old hag of the region as her grandmother; and called a *lasi* damsel Thachungchuangi, the female protagonist of the story, her elder sister in the hearing of Vala. The unnamed little girl embodies the essential nature of *lasi* and *huai* in one person. She may be described as a “nymphet,” a “demon” girl or an “enfant charmante et fourbe.” (Nobakov 18)

2. Fallen Beings

In “Fallen Angels in the Book of Life,” Gerold Necker states that the main purpose of demonic beings is “to seduce men on earth and thus prevent the soul from successfully ascending⁵⁸” (74) to heaven. Quoting from the *Book of Life*, written by Toshaphist Hayyim ben Hanane’l of Paris at the turn of the 12th or 13th century, he pronounces that:

Angels have never been sentenced to hell except for the group that fell from the highest heaven. In the beginning there had been angels in all ten firmaments. Those living in the highest one and filled with the highest light saw all the worlds beneath them, all ranks and all (kinds of) light and every

⁵⁸ “Every soul is formed - literally carved - out of the light of the angels and ascends to its origin by way of the dedication of a person’s life to purity and wisdom.” (Necker 74)

troop. They came down to earth and said that they would never return to heaven, but rule over the inhabitants of earth.

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took them up (to heaven) against their will, judged everyone according to the measure he chose and sent them down. Some of them descended into the abysses, because they said their reign shall be in the abysses; some of them fell into the oceans, because they chose to rule over the oceans first. And some fell on mountains, some on hills, some in forests and some into the deserts. Everyone was sentenced according to what he had chosen and his light withdrew - *a wind that passeth away*, forever. And the Holy one, blessed be He, directed them to their place of rule in the sublunar world, to act there as they wish, but without enjoying it. (75)

Unlike the *lasi* in The Tan Trilogy, the *lasi* in *Tawnmang Lasi* made most of their appearances at night time and even when they appeared in daylight their actions are doubtful. The *pasalthas* no longer believed them fully in spite of their firm attachment to them. Their desire to be away during daytime is frequently seen in the works as in such line as: “Inthen tawh mai ang aw khua pawh a rawn var dawn ta e.” (“Let us take our separate ways for even daybreak is at hand” *Tawnmang Lasi I 59*) The tendentiousness of the *lasi* to be nocturnal and the fear of light is in contrast with the words of Christ, the person on whom the new generations of the Mizo put their trust:

Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him. (John 11.9-10)

Inasmuch as the *lasi* want to remain away during daylight, they like to keep their affairs and their relationships with men unknown to the general public. It is a predominant belief amongst the Mizo Christians that the *lasi* often caused harm to their *zawl* or to a member of the family if the *lasi-zawl* revealed their secret affairs with them. In the story, Vala neglected his responsibility as a family man since he spends too much time in the forest to have sufficient time for farming. His life is filled

with longing for the *lasi*. The same happened to his contemporary *pasaltha* Khuma. None of them wanted to reveal or be boastful about their associations with the *lasi*. Let alone glorification in them as in the ancient time, the narrator regarding Khuma's affair with the *lasi* said, "Chutiang lam hawia fiam pawh a duh ngai lo" ("Never did he like to even hint jokingly about it" *Tawnmang Lasi* 2 59) The fear of the revelation and the necessity to keep their works in secret are consistent opposing ideas with the biblical words: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16.15)

In *Tawnmang Lasi 1*, although Vala told Thachungchuangi there was none like her in beauty and his life was only for her, yet there is no happiness in her face. Rather she responded to him by saying that her wish is to be a human being like him. She added that the *lasi* oftentimes feigned to live and copy the way of human's life but all in vain. She went on revealing to him that under the guise of their beautiful appearances they were always at war with other *lasi* or demonic beings. For the said reasons there could not be any progress in their lives and their homes are restricted to caves and holes of trees. Moreover, to add to her sorrow, the most admired and most rewarded among them are the ones who are most unfaithful to men and those who are able to bring greatest devastation to mankind. Regarding their reward, she said:

Kan lawmman dawn chuan kan dawn rual rualin min chhun a, tho kang leh ngai tawh lo turin min chhun bet thin a ni. (232)

(No sooner do we receive our rewards than these same rewards pierce us, and the piercings numb us to never rise again).

The author's conception is hardly any different from that of John Milton's conception of Satan's woe in *Paradise Lost* where he states:

Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell;
Under what torments inwardly I groan:
While they adore me on the Throne of Hell,
With Diadem and Scepter high advance't
The lower still I fall, only supreme

In misery.... (4.75,88-92)

Guilt, sadness, and a sense of loss always surround these *lasi* beings. Thachungchuangi' words, "... hmangaihna der chauh lo chu kan nei lo," ("we have nothing but fake love" *Tawnmang Lasi I* 235) evokes the same thought as Milton's description of Satan as an "Artificer of fraud.../ That practis'd falsehood under saintly show." (4.121-122)

3. Vengeful Beings

Unlike the *lasi* who never, even for once, raised their hands to harm human beings in the works of Zochhumpuii Pa, the *lasi* of Zofa's works appeared to have often prepared traps in order to catch men. Rather than using their powers to protect them from *huai*, they are not reluctant to use them to cause misery to human beings. When a gaur under the care of Thachungchuangi killed a villager, who was from the same village as Vala, the enraged hunters were determined to kill the beast. Knowing the intention of the *pasalthas* the *lasi* damsel said to Vala menacingly:

Engtikah emaw chuan ka se duh lai hi ka la chan ngei ang, chu hun a lo thlen hunah chuan ka awm mai mai hauh lo ang le. (*Tawnmang Lasi I* 57)

(Someday I will surely be bereft of my beloved gaur, when that time comes, I will not just be idling around).

But when Vala revealed to her about the loss of a life that had been caused by the gaur, she became a little softer, and agreed that the animal too was to be killed but, yet again, on conditions. The agreement for giving her best friend, the gaur, to humans was such that the head of the beast would never be put up to be showcased or to decorate the walls of the villagers. And sealed her words by saying:

In lo tar a nih chuan a tartu chung chu a pik e. (78)

(If you hang it up, woe is the man who hangs it up).

When the gaur was eventually shot by Vala with the conditional permission of Thachungchuangi, he entreated his fellow hunters to leave the head and not to take it

home because of the pact he had had with the *lasi*. But the eldest among them by the name Thuama insisted that it be brought home, notwithstanding the perturbation they all witnessed of the gaur's ominously blinking eyes and putting out of its tongue even after the head had been cut off.

Thachungchuangi became the most mournful creature because of the death of the gaur. The villagers were in ecstasy to have brought home such a big beast. But the *pasaltha* who killed it was lukewarm -not happy nor unhappy, for his greatest achievement made his most beloved sorrowful. He had no idea that behind her attractive melancholic innocent appearance the main intention was "deep malice to conceal, couch't with revenge." (Milton 4.123) He along with his friends had gotten hold of the bait and were trapped. Thuama, still going against the pleas of the shooter and very satisfied with the grandeur of the skull and its horn, tied it on the *seluphan*⁵⁹ securely. However, when the skull tragically fell on one of the children playing underneath and caused the child's death, Vala knew the reason but dared not reveal it.

It was no longer the affair of the dead skull to take life but the 'affairs' of *fairies*. After the trespassing, the prudence of men was not enough since there was the involvement of real wills and powers behind the fantasy, "independent of the minds and purposes of men." (Tolkien 14) When Thuama brought the skull to his house and hung it on the wall, not only did the neighbours and passer-by of his house witness the skull grinning and making faces at them, but his wife became bedridden and went mad for some time. The anger of the *huai* intensified when Nghilhlova (Thuama's son) casually kicked the skull which was kept in the backyard garden. The skull had been placed there for fear that the life of Thuama's wife might be taken if it was still hung on the wall. Starting from mild soreness in the feet with which he kicked it, Nghilhlova was seized by a painful ailment which consequently led to his death in a very short period of time.

⁵⁹ A sacrificial post upon which the skull of a mithun is displayed.

The bitterness of Thachungchuangi's words knew no bounds when Vala tried to shoot the ghost-like animal which she raised from the dead gaur's skull by means of enchantment. This is what she said:

... kut I thlak leh a nih chuan nang nen hian kumkhuain kan inhmelma tawh ang. Keini paw'n kan zuah bik hauh lovang che. (*Tawnmang Lasi 1* 120)

(... if you lay hands on it again, you and I will be enemies forever. Surely you will not be spared by us either).

It is most likely that Zofa has drawn this particular theme of the hunted gaur from narrations of real-life incidents associated with the killing of wild gaurs by pre-Christian Mizos, especially the one killed by Sawibunga. Below is a translation of the significant portion narrated in *Ramhuai*:

The real name of Sawibunga was Sawithanga. Later he became widely known by the name Sawibunga since after the shooting of the gaur his ghost was often seen eerily. This incident had taken place during their stay in Luangmam⁶⁰ village. When Sawibunga and his friends were heading for Mualbu⁶¹ forest to hunt elephants, they came across a very vast *sih* in Lungrang⁶² mountain. It was here that he shot the gaur which was feeding on the *sih* water. When he tried to chant a *Hlado* (the hunter's chant) over the dead body of the animal he could only cry "Ungau, Ungau"⁶³ whilst thinking that he chanted the perfect *Hlado*. Even when his confused friends asked him what had happened to his

⁶⁰ A deserted 19th century village, located in the western region of Lunglei District, Mizoram.

⁶¹ A village in Lawngtlai District, Mizoram.

⁶² A village in Lunglei District, Mizoram.

⁶³ A crying sound produced by one of the wild-cat families.

voice, he unconsciously questioned them back, “What’s wrong? Didn’t I just chant a *Hlado*?”

The horn of the beast was indeed good. It was somehow luminous. From the night of the kill, the villagers started seeing his ghost. At times, wrenching off his own head, he would throw it to the young men at *Zawlbuk*⁶⁴ and at other times he would carry his leg which he had pulled off from his body. He would also often enter the *Zawlbuk* with his entrails coming out of his belly to the horror of the young men who consequently abandoned the *Zawlbuk*. It is told that only his closest friend did not fear him. Even one of his sons was named, *Sialhranga*,⁶⁵ after the ghastliness of the ghost brought up circumstantially by the killing of the gaur.

The then Luangmam village Chief was Roberhi, sister of Seipua⁶⁶ Chief of Valcheng village. Sepuia was covetous to have the widely famed illustrious horn, and asked Sawibunga to give it to him in the name of his son Vanngura. Sawibunga was reluctant but dared not refuse the Chief so he handed it over to him. As soon as the horn was given to Sepuia even the ghosts departed from the village. Not long after he reached home with the majestic skull, a terrible illness got hold of his son Vanngura. He cried vehemently, “I am afraid, I am afraid, a gaur is butting me, help me.” Whenever he cried thus, the young men

⁶⁴ “The bachelors’ dormitory. It is a large, humped roof situated at the centre of a village where all the young bachelors gather at dusk and sleep at night. It is a cradle wherein a Mizo lad is drilled to become a responsible member of the society.” (Vanlalnggheta 612)

⁶⁵ *Sial* means a gaur or a buffalo; *hrang* signifies to hunt or be hunted.

⁶⁶ Seipua was the son of a Sailo Chief, Lianzaluta. His brother Vandula was the husband of the famous Ropuiliani, the Chieftain who refused to submit under the rule of the Britishers till her death.

would take the skull to the outskirts of the village and fire their guns repeatedly. The ritual often made him well visibly. Though the affliction was grievous and Sepuia's wife even implored her husband to return it to the original possessor, yet he adored it too much and was reluctant to part with it. His son eventually died after the third wave of the persecution. People often alleged him exchanging his son with the skull. Presently the horn is in the house of his grandson, Rolura, of Aizawl, Ramhlun 'N', but is attached to a carved board in the place of its original skull as it is no longer to be found.

As for Sawibunga, having fully regained good health, he believed in the word of God and moved to Sesawm⁶⁷. Fortunately reaching the age of 103, he passed away in the year 1947. There has not been a gaur associated with demonic beings as disturbing as Sawibunga's gaur in Mizoram. In his tombstone is engraved – VANHNUAI THANG SAWIBUNGA ("Sawibunga, renowned under-heaven"). (150-152)

From the extract it can be seen that the attendants of the gaur were angered by the death of their ward causing great trouble for human beings. These *lasi* conceived by the ancient Mizos as beings who never break their promises to bless human beings are now realized as beings who can also curse men with plain and twisted words alike. In the lyric of K. Hminga, the *lasi* are alluded thus:

*An hril nunnem hmeltha,
Thihna anchhia lawh theitu ni si,
I mawinain min daw i a,
Thinlung buan chaklo mi min chan ta. (1:32-1:48)*

*(Recited gracious fair,
With the curse of death in its might yet,
Your beauty hexed me to lair,
Softly dimming away my heart's flair).*

⁶⁷ A village in Lunglei District, Mizoram.

4. Adulterous Beings

The *lasi*, in *Tawnmang Lasi*, are not as lawful as the *lasi* of old. They have become quite immoral in Zofa's work with no such restriction regarding relationships with married men as in Zochhumpui Pa's work. Thachungchuangi's *zawl* Vala is a married man who has had children. It is a firm belief that *lasi-zawl* and *lasi* often have actual lovemaking, the conception is implicitly portrayed in The Tan Trilogy. Zofa frankly delineated Vala's desire for the *lasi* and his guilt which accompanies his relationship with Thachungchuangi:

Ka ngai ngawih ngawih hi a ni ber a, chuti e ti lo chuan ka inthup hram hram a, mite'n lasi zawl min ti ang tih te ka hlau a, ka inthup nasat em avangin lasi nen kan inzawl thu hi tuman an hre lo. Ka nupui erawh hi chuan min ringhlel deuh thin a, a taka fiahna a hmuh bik lem loh avangin a sawi chhuak lem lo a ni. (*Tawnmang Lasi* 36)

(In spite of my terrible longing for her, I try to conceal it effortfully for fear of being called a *lasi-zawl* by others, and, as I am concealing it so laboriously, nobody knows about my relationship with the *lasi*. As for my wife, she is often suspicious of me, but since she does not find any evidence, she does not bring it out).

In The Tan Trilogy, Chawngtinleri and the other *lasi* are ever occupied with a task or another telling their human lovers that they have to attend some urgent businesses, oftentimes, to *north end* whenever they are going to leave their men. Most of their affairs remained unrevealed. But their occupation is revealed when Thachungchuangi says,

Nang nena kan inhmuh loh chhung zawng khan kei chu midang kawp tur zawngin ka hmanhlel a, mihringte an nun phung pangai atanga kawih her tumin hma ka la a. (237)

(During the time we were not together, I engrossed myself to be with someone else, employing myself to lead men astray from their normal way of life).

With the involvement of the temptation of the spiritual power, the words of Jeanna Jorgensen substantially seemed to have proved true with all the no-younger-than three hundred years old latently erotic Mizo *lasi* tales and the stories produced in the 21st century. She said, “It is sexual desire, often intertwined with the desire for power over another human being, that comes to the forefront of eroticized fairy tales.” (28) Of all the ramifications of these selected narratives, sexuality is the most important aspect, portrayed implicitly in Zochhumpui Pa’s works and explicitly in Zofa’s works. Because of the universality of the idea, even the insertion of additional elements in the selected works, such as the apparent oneness of the nature of the nymphs and the *lasi*— seen through the character of Galaxy⁶⁸ and the status of some of the *lasi* as rulers of the sea which are found in the words of Thachungchuangi⁶⁹— soon led to the appended idea of the *lasi* as “sexually promiscuous” beings. The Roman Goddess who bears a very close resemblance with the *lasi* is also no exception. *The Obscure Online Directory* writes:

Fauna is an old Roman Goddess of Prophecy and Fruitfulness, with ties to the forest and fields and the animals found there. She is closely related to the God Faunus; She is variously His wife, sister, or daughter. Her name, like Faunus's, is from the Latin *faveo*, “to befriend, support, or back up,” from which we get our “favor;” an alternate etymology is from *fari*, “to speak, talk, or say,” referring to their powers of prophecy. (“Fauna” par. 1)

⁶⁸ In *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasmaltha Thangliana* and *Galaxy (Pasmaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy)*, the *lasi* damsel Galaxy’s extraordinary ability to swim and catch fish with her bare hands is frequently narrated (*Tan Tlang* 200, 248; *Galaxy* 20, 63, 70, 80, 82, 99, 156).

⁶⁹ “A thente phe chu tuipei chung a rorel tura siamte an ni a, tuipei zawng zawng hi an thunun a. Anni aia tha reng reng hi an awm lo.” (“Some of them were made to watch over the sea; they control the entire sea. There are none who are better (in appearance) than them). (*Tawnmang Lasi I* 223)

The little *lasi* girl's role in *Tawnmang Lasi* is very relatable with Fauna. She has the appearance of a child but her intention though irksome is same as that of Thachungchuangi like the rest of the *lasi*. Their main scheme is "to sleep with men", especially with the hunter-warriors (Dokhuma 272). The parallel essentiality of these two beings can be discerned through the words of Jack Zipes:

Like many goddesses or divinities, Fauna had a split image and was often associated with courtesans and free sex. At the same time, she was known to be a model of chastity and modesty and rarely left her domain. (230)

5. Conquerors of the Will of Man

Although portrayed as an unfaithful spiritual being Thachungchuangi's compassionate side is seen when Vala was thrilled at the anticipation of seeing a wild hog and a tiger battling for life and a kill respectively. She expressed her kindness towards the animals to her human lover:

Vala, min hrethiam teh khai, nangni ang hi kan ni ve lo atin a ni. Kei zawngin an intibuai lai hmuhnawm ti takin ka thlir ve thei lo. Keni hi chu ramsa enkawltu kan ni a. An insual buai te, hliampui an tawrh changte hian kan tanpui thin a. (*Tawnmang Lasi* 2 123)

(Kindly excuse me Vala, it is because we are not like you humans. As for me I cannot enjoy seeing them fight. As caretakers of animals, we help them when there is brawling amongst them and when they have major injuries).

To the understanding of the Christians, Thachungchuangi is inverting the word of God. For it is Jesus who can answer the prayer of the demonic beings even to enter into the pigs; the outcome of which was also unfavourable for the animals, since their prayer was to cause harm rather than healing (Mat. 8.28-34). Again, the claimed power and responsibility are discarded by Christ when He says:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart

from your Father's will. "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." (10.28-31)

However, the temptation exerted by the extraordinarily beautiful Thachungchuangi was too arousing and too charming to be declined. Her beauty, benevolence, kindness and the luxury associated with her were not comparable with the mundane life Vala was leading. Often, Thachungchuangi expressed her wish to be a human being making Vala feel very lucky for being one. But he could not still leave her. He had been conquered by a *demon*. He failed to be a man, whereas Thachungchuangi fulfilled her existence. He felt his life was complete in her presence and meaningless in her absence. He was fully won over when her words of bewitchery charmed him:

Nang nen kumkhuaa chen dun hi ka van chak thin tak em! Hrin hran kan ni kher kher hi chu a paw i a nih hi, I tello chuan ka khua hi a har ngawih ngawih.
(*Tawnmang Lasi* 2 124)

(How often I crave to live with you forever! It is so sorrowful for us to have been born as different beings, without you, I am continually filled with emptiness).

After making sure that he was all hers and nothing else could separate him from her, she revealed many things about their demonic nature, nonetheless, all his strength to reject her had been drowned and eaten up by the power and realm of the *lasi*. In conclusion he said:

Min ngheng riala thu, inthiam lohnaah khat lasi lal fanu Thachungchuangi chu ka en a, tluk lo hlein ka inhre thar a. (234)

(Looking at the remorseful *lasi* princess Thachungchuangi sitting beside me and leaning on me, I realise that she is much better than me).

And after her beguiling presence fully worked him up, he added:

Ka ngaina tulh tulh a, tlang taka a awm dan leh a nih phungte min hrilh duh avang chuan ka ngaisang thar a, ka duhna a zual zawk. Keini mihring te anga lemchang nun, inzep tittet hi a awm ve si lo. (236)

(Cherishing her more and more, I admire her afresh for her willingness to openly tell me her nature, even my love for her has increased. Unlike us humans, there is no pretentious life, nor clandestine attitude).

When attractiveness of beauty and goodness are used by the *lasi* to win men, they often let the men choose freely as in the case of *pasaltha* Thanglura in *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*. When the *lasi* could easily fly him to the Tan Mountain to meet Khuavelchhingi, apparently to prove his loyalty to his beloved *lasi*, as in many other cases, Galaxy conditionally and temptingly said to him:

Tu man kan hruai thei dawn lo che a, nangmaha i kal a ngai dawn a, i han tlawh chuan a lawm hle ang, Sazuk ki tha deuh, a tluca ki tha awm lo khawpa tha, kahtir che a tiam a nia. (202-203)

(Since none of us will be able to take you, you will have to go by yourself. If you pay her a visit, she will be very pleased and moreover promises to let you shoot a stag with very good antlers, so good that there is none equal to it).

The *pasaltha* made his decision and started on his journey to the fantasy world of the fairies. The exceptional beauty of the *lasi* is a ‘sideshow’ for which the *pasaltha* must make an extra mile journey leaving his family and village or the ‘main show’ (Forster 163).

Not all the *pasalthas* in the select works are enamoured by the attractiveness of the *lasi*. In the hunting expedition to kill the gaur, Vala was pining to see Thachungchuangi, Thuama and Ruala also expressed their desire to see her again. The latter two had completely forgotten about the gaur which had killed their fellow hunter when they saw Thachungchuangi riding on the same beast. They were drowned and thought to themselves:

Vanchung nula meuh pawh khi ani ai chuan a tha bik kher lovang. (*Tawnmang Lasi I 68*).

(Even the lady from up the sky will not be prettier than her).

But one of the hunters, Kunga, assured himself:

Eng anga tha leh duhawmna tinrengin a bawm pawh ni sela, ramhnuai nula zun a uai atan zawng ka inphal love. (ibid.)

(Even if she was such a pretty being surrounded by all the attractiveness of a dazzling beauty, I will not allow myself to fall for a damsel of the forest).

Although Thachungchuangi frankly told Vala that the animals had always been their closest companions even before he came into existence, yet he could not do much to resist since he had been brought down so low as to even feel jealous of the animals. His words affirmed that he had submitted his will to her:

Nang hi ka dam chhan i ni alawm, i tel lova dam hi chakna reng ka nei hleinem. (225)

(You are the reason I live; I do not have the slightest desire to live without you).

Thachungchuangi represents the unreasonable and insatiable sexual desire of human beings to fill a fragment of hollowness in the heart inherent to all. Vala is a fallen man who fantasizes a wicked damsel in disguise for his eventual destruction.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—” (Rom. 5.12) “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (Mat. 15.19) “Hell and Destruction are never full; So the eyes of man are never satisfied.” (Prov. 27. 20)

6. Demolition of the Ancient Belief System

The *lasi* equated men with animals and played with both alike for their pleasure. In the Christianized Mizo culture, their distinctiveness is pluralized day by day. Regarding the conception of *lasi* and *phung*⁷¹, James Dokhuma's discourses of the Mizo ancestors runs thus:

Tlangval pahnih hi an ram kal a, an kalna lamah chuan nula hmeltha zet zet pahnih hi an tawng ta a, anni tlangvalte lah chuan an ngaizawng ta nasa mai a. Nulate pahnih lahin zawl ngei tumin an lem bawk si. Tichuan, chu tlangvalte chuan an zawl-dun ta a. Chu nula pahnih te chu pakhat Lasi nula a ni a pakhat erawh chu Phung nula a ni a, an ti. Tichuan, Phung nula zawltu chu kar loah chil Phuan tla buahin a nam thlu a nam thlu ta maia. Lasi nula zawltu erawh chuan sanghal leh zukchal ki hreu tha pui pui a kap ta thung a an ti. (305)

(Two young men out on a hunting expedition met two gorgeous damsels by whom they were badly enamoured. As the two damsels were also arduous to be in possession of them, the young men entered into a relationship with them. It is said one of the two damsels was a *lasi* and the other a *phung*. In a short while, the one in a relationship with the *phung* was overthrown by her repeatedly with froths coming out of his mouth. Whereas, it is said that the other one in relationship with the *lasi* frequently shot wild boars and stags with fine antlers).

Dokhuma's rendition of *phung* as a very attractive damsel is somehow different since *phung* have always been conceived as having grody appearances. Vanlalngbeta in his *The Britam Mizo-English Dictionary* translated *phung* as "a ghost, spirit, goblin, ogress, bogey. ~ was black and large who had the power of causing epileptics." (390) And the correlation of primitive conceptions worldwide is witnessed regarding the folk beliefs. As in Mizo folklore, it is from the hands of a *phung* that

⁷¹ A demonic being in Mizo folklore. It is believed that *phung* can cause convulsive seizures.

Chhura⁷² snatched away the *sekibuhchhuak* or horn of plenty (Irish 112) which, in the Greek Mythology, used to belong to the nymphs. The role of the *phung* of harming and possessing man is not only a deeply inculcated belief of single ethnic culture but of the world at large. Richard Gallagher, the man “of science and a lover of history,” writes in *The Washington Post*:

Ignorance and superstition have often surrounded stories of demonic possession in various cultures, and surely many alleged episodes can be explained by fraud, chicanery or mental pathology. But anthropologists agree that nearly all cultures have believed in spirits, and the vast majority of societies (including our own)⁷³ have recorded dramatic stories of spirit possession. Despite varying interpretations, multiple depictions of the same phenomena in astonishingly consistent ways offer cumulative evidence of their credibility.

As a psychoanalyst, a blanket rejection of the possibility of demonic attacks seems less logical, and often wishful in nature, than a careful appraisal of the facts. As I see it, the evidence for possession is like the evidence for George Washington’s crossing of the Delaware. In both cases, written historical accounts with numerous sound witnesses testify to their accuracy. (par. 14-15)

Substantially, Mizo men also used to be in relationships with such beings as *phung* who assumed different natures and appearances knowing men’s weaknesses especially that of sensual attractiveness and luxury.

These seemingly good spirits who they thought would lead them, in the ancient paganistic world, to *paradise* would, according to Christ’s teaching, lead them now to hell. The name *lasi* is even more dangerous than the term *huai*, because it is

⁷² Chhurbura. A paradoxical character in Mizo folktale whose pervasive fame stemmed from his bold applications of his stupid philosophy. Chhura or Chhurbura is synonymous with such terms as *idiot* or *fool*.

⁷³ United States of America.

wickedness in disguise whereas the latter is open malignant threat which is easier to be identified. The ancient conception of the *lasi* and their affairs, according to Christianity, is distortions of creation and the responsibilities entailed after creation. In the scriptures, the following statement is written with regard to transitional change in faith:

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 john 3.8)

Lasi, who were always a part of the ancient Mizo worship practices as good spirits, are now conceived as one kind of *ramhuai* or harmful spirits. The change in the belief system within the Mizo culture can be pictured through Laithangpuia's poem:

*Kan pi puten Sanghal khuavang tualvawk lo ti,
Tan lasi siam a ni lo va, Chawngtinlerin a siam hek lo;
Immanuela Lal siam a lo ni, kan tan arawn phal thin,
Lal hmangaih kan chang e. (qtd. in Ramhuai 227)*

*(Forebearers of ours named wild-pig khuavang's⁷⁴ pet
No Tan lasi formed them beasts, nor were they made by Chawngtinleri;
King Immanuel is their maker, He bestows them to us freely,
Loved are we by the Lord).*

⁷⁴ Often interchangeably used with *lasi*.

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CHAPTER IV

FALLEN MAN'S FANTASY: LASI AND THE MIZO FOLK

The *lasi* depicted in the works of Zochhumpuii Pa and Lalhmachhuana Zofa are equipped with vast empirical knowledge. Their conscientious self is portrayed as feeling almost guilty, yet are delineated as possessing immeasurable power and beauty within their sovereignty. Even if there are portrayals in the narratives which do not correspond to logical truth and beliefs scientifically and religiously, such elements are still indispensable constituents in the construction of these fantastical works.

Chawngtinleri, as mentioned earlier, in Mizo folklore, is a Mizo woman who had been turned into a *lasi* in order to become the head of all the animals. In the select works, she is portrayed not only as caretaker of the animals but also as Queen of the rest of the other *lasi* characters. This conception, according to the Christian belief, is erroneous since there is a Supreme being who is the ultimate cause and creator,⁷⁵ whereas, the *lasi*, legions of the Devil,⁷⁶ has, at most, the power to distort God's creations but not the power to create or change humans into *lasi*. The artful distortions of perception can be seen in the words of Thachungchuangi:

Mihring ve tho Chawngtinleri thlah kal zelte kan nih vang hi aniang chu keini lasi ho hian mihring te hi kan ngainain kan ngaisang em em che u a, zawl tur kan zawng reng cheu a nih hi! (*Tawnmang Lasi* 2 249)

⁷⁵ "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1.8)

⁷⁶ "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, the lowest depths of the Pit. Those who see my brother's you will gaze at you, and consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world as a wilderness and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners?'" (Isa. 14.12-17)

(Since we are the descendants of Chawngtinleri who too was a human being, we are fond of you humans and admire you so much that we always seek to be in a relationship with you!)

On the other hand, the conceptual link, accepted by the pre-Christian Mizos and some Christians alike, of the *Tau Meichher Chhi*⁷⁷ or will-o'-the-wisp with the *huai* or *lasi* is rejected or at least cannot be yet accepted by scientific studies. In *Tawnmang Lasi 1*, Zofa, through his main character, Vala, talks about an elf-fire or *Tau Meichher Chhi* which was often seen by the villagers. The sighting appeared out of the *Zukbual sih* whereat the character himself had encountered with the *huai* and the little *lasi* girl. Regarding the phenomenal occurrence about the region of the *sih*, the narrator said:

...he sih hi tun hma ata tawh vengtu nei awm hian a lang tlat thin a, eng emaw chang phei chuan ral khat atanga han thlirte hian a eng leh phung thin. Eng nasa deuh anga a lan lai te hian va kal ila eng hmuh tur a lawi a awm leh chuang lo va. (130)

(... for a long time, this spring seemed to have possessed protectors, at certain times the place would be brightly irradiated when viewed from afar. Confoundingly, even when it was unusually lighted there would be no light visible when one went to the spot).

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton conceptualises the same phenomenon thus:

...a wand'ring fire,

⁷⁷ *Tau* is conceived by the ancient Mizos as an evil spirit who comes out at night. Since *tau* is thought to be of female sex she is also known as *Taunu*. They used to offer animals to propitiate the spirit owing to their belief that she is a harmful spirit with the power of causing stomach pain. *Meichher* and *chhi* mean *firebrand* and *to light* respectively. There have been a number of claims that *Tau Meichher Chhi* is a form of gas or bacteria, yet there has not been any scientific evidence to prove it so as of now.

Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night
 Condenses, and the cold environs round,
 Kindled through agitation to a flame,
 Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends,
 Hovering and blazing with delusive light,
 Misleads th' amaz'd night- wand'rer from his way
 To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool,
 There swallow'd up and lost, from succour far. (9.634-642)

However, the belief in *Tau Meichher Chhi* as having spiritual connection is brushed off by Isaac Newton in his *The Third Book of Opticks* (1704) by questioning:

The *Ignis Fatuus* is a vapour shining without heat, and is there not the same difference between this vapour and flame, as between rotten Wood shining without heat and burning Coals of fire? (134)

Refuting the paganistic belief of the spirituality of the ignis fatuus or *Tau Meichher Chhi*, Fernando Sanford also suggests the materiality of the phenomenon thus:

...they are little swarms of luminous bacteria which are carried up from the bottom of the marsh by rising bubbles of gas. Many kinds of luminous bacteria are known and the marshes from which these lights arise are known to be the favoured habitat of some of these kinds. Some, at least, of these bacteria do not become luminous until exposed to the oxygen of the air. This seems to be true of the bacteria which cause the luminosity of rotten wood, the "fox fire" of our boyhood... Was not Newton probably right in his suggestion...? (365)

Concluding from the scientific view of this phenomena, it can be affirmed that other spiritual elements and various more complex affairs of the spiritual characters and men will not, with sufficient proof, find their place in the realm of empirical reality. Since the scientific observations are not enough to understand *lasi* and *huai*, religious perspectives, psychoanalysis, and artful fantasies of human imagination need to come to the forefront for their interpretations.

1. Realm of Fantasy

1.1. Desirable Secondary World

Fantasy has a lot to do with *lasi* and tales about them. The two authors not only incorporate folk characters and other ingredients that have always been a part of Mizo culture since prehistoric time but also include foreign elements in many instances in the novels which do not have cultural signification in the traditional sense. One such inclusion is the names given by both the authors for their *lasi* characters. Apart from the folkloric *lasi* name Chawngtinleri the rest of the names – Khuavelchhingi, Galaxy, Varparhi, Maxy, Zonunmawii, Hawilopari, Kumtluangpari and Thachungchuangi – are all concoctions of the authors to suit their nature, behaviour, and to enrich and give freshness to the stories.

In the select narratives, characters or a community as a whole are often caught in the murkiness as well as in the light of fantastical beings. In *Aspects of the Novel*, E.M. Forster describes the working of fantasy elements in the following manner:

There is more in the novel than time or people or logic or any of their derivatives, more even than fate. And by “more” I do not mean something that excludes these aspects nor something that includes them, embraces them. I mean something that cuts cross them like a bar of light, that is intimately connected with them at one place and patiently illumines all their problems, and at another place shoots over or through them as if they did not exist them.
(157)

He adds, “Fantasy asks us to pay something extra.” (159) Extra effort of the audiences and the characters are sought alike.

All of the male protagonists in the select works had to pay a heavy price to enter into the world of enchantment and beauty. In *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, the two *pasalthas* Thangliana and Thanglura took a very long journey from their respective villages Sihzawl and Herhzawl to Tan Mountain to meet the supernatural beings in the enchanted cave. From the two villages, the distance to the mountain is roughly three hundred kilometres and the journey was undertaken by foot.

The prize they paid is heavy too. Thangliana and Thanglura were killed by mental and physical exhaustion in their effort to have glimpses of fairies in the secondary world of fantasy. The lives of some of the Mizo men who used to spend most of their time in the forest without proper sustenance, and, supposedly, whose longevity of life was also affected due to their excessive engagement in hunting explorations, are reflected through these *pasaltha* characters. *Pasaltha* Thansanga needed to be reminded of the primary world by a *lasi*:

Thansang, vawiin chu i haw duh ka ring a. Ram i vahna hi thla khat lai a tling tawh tih i hria em? I u Ramliana pawhin a ngaihtuah viau tawh che a ni. In khuaah pawh an sawi deuh sap sap tawh a. (Pa, *Tan Tlang* 332)

(Thansang, I believe you will want to go home today. Do you know that it's been a month since you came to the forest? Your brother Ramliana is very concerned about you. It is also becoming the gossip of the village).

The author nonetheless ends the relationship between the *lasi* and the other two *pasalthas* Thansanga and Thanhranga benevolently and by mutual understanding.

Although the *lasi* are portrayed as destructive in the Christianized cultural purview, the conception is not always so as Zipes says:

The social-cultural context in a particular time period must always be taken into consideration when trying to grasp the symbolic function of a fairy and tales about fairies. ("The Meaning of Fairy" 231)

They provide "units of cultural information" (Zipes, "The Meaning of Fairy" 239) through the interactions of reality and dreams within a given culture or between cultures. Likewise, one of the main intentions of the author of *The Tan Trilogy* is to delineate the life of the people who were soaked with varied conceptions of preternatural beings wherein *lasi* was a driving force of life. Zochhumpuii Pa remains true to some extent when he paints the ancient world of the Mizo ancestors. His fairy stories do "not seek delusion, nor bewitchment and domination" but "seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves." (Tolkien 54) This feature, a

closely embedded belief of the Mizo people, is perceived when Khuavelchhingi spoke to her human lover:

Thanglur, kan hnenah awm hlen ta mai che! I nu te, i pi te chu kan pui reng thei tho va, Ro awmna pawh kan hria asin, lungmawi tam tak leh thi leh dar awmna, chungte pawh chu kan la ang a, i nu te kan pe ang a, kan pahnih a kan awm dun chuan a hlimawm dawn asin, heng lai ram zawng zawnga sa lah hi i duh duh i kap thei bawk ang a, hnathawh a ngai dawn si lo. (*Tan Tlang* 113)

(Thanglur, stay with us permanently! We will still be able to help your mother and your grandmother. Moreover, we know the location of treasures- the place of precious stones, pearls, necklaces and gongs, we will fetch them and give them to your mother. It will be very joyful if the two of us live together, you will be able to shoot whichever animal you want in these regions, and there will not be any need for labour).

Shifts in the cultural conception of the folk are also found in a number of places throughout the work. The trans-cultured and the hybrid mind is depicted in Zochhumpuii Pa's naming of two *lasi* as Maxy and Galaxy and the foreign clothes which belonged to them. By giving them alien names with immense knowledge, the author not only borrows for the sake of fantasy but reveals the scientific progress of the present generation as well. In *Pasaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy*, when Thansanga asked Galaxy to tell him about the stars, she said:

Khing arsi chanchinte leh van boruak zauhzia te hi han hrilh dawn che ila, i hrethiam pha ang em aw ka ti deuh a ni... vana arsite khi te tak te tein lang mahse, an te lo teh asin. In chenna khawvel let eng emaw zata lian vek an ni! Van boruak zauzia pawh hi a mak a nia! Kawlphe han ranzia leh chakzia hi I hria em? Arsi hnai ber pawh khi kawlphe tluka chakin kal ta la, kum 47 vel kal zuk nia! (65)

(If I tell you about those stars and the vastness of the universe I wonder if you will be able to comprehend them... though the stars in the sky look so small, they are not so. All of them are a number of times bigger than your habitat

earth. Even the vastness of the universe is astounding! Do you know how quick and fast is lightning? If you were to reach even the closest star at the speed of light, it would take 47^{78} years!)

In artistic creation, even if contents of a given work is fallacious from some perspectives, they will ever remain true to the sub-creator's inner world as in the words of Tolkien:

But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true? Men have conceived not only of elves, but they have imagined gods, and worshipped them, even worshipped those most deformed by their author's own evil. (55)

To make a better world, the author of The Tan Trilogy rebuilds the past world of the Mizos by revitalising a very depressive age using fantasy as a technique. The historical setting of the three works falls between 1840 to 1890.⁷⁹ This period during which the author created heaven on earth was not as blissful and ideal as portrayed. Including Thansanga the youngest of the *pasaltha* protagonists, historically, all of the hunter-warriors were in a very harsh age because of the invasions the people confronted racially and spiritually.

⁷⁸ The author seemed to have committed a numerical error. "Proxima Centauri, the closest star to our own, is still 40,208,000,000,000 km away... at 4.25 light years." ("The Nearest" par. 3)

⁷⁹ When Thansanga was born, his father Thanglura had been a middle-aged man. The second youngest *pasaltha* Thanglura was born a few months after his father Thangliana's death; the man died in his prime. Thanhranga as a boy met Thanglura's father Thangliana who was then in his prime. Thanhranga was barely nineteen years of age in 1856. In pg. 8 of *Chhaktiang Kawlrrawn* he was eighteen years old, and a year had elapsed when the author mentioned the year 1856 in pg. 26.

Since the burning of Sentlang village by the Britishers under the leadership of Col. Lister in 1850⁸⁰, the people did not live peaceful days of good length until the appearance of the Christian Missionaries in 1894. The ‘Lushai Expedition 1871’⁸¹ along with the ‘Expedition 1889’⁸² ravaged Mizoram. Governing power distribution system within the society was reconstituted and the men were pulled down from the height of their pride in their sacredly held warriorship ethos. Within the scope of the setting of The Tan Trilogy, two major wars- Chhim leh Hmar Indo (The Battle of South and North) (1841-1848) and Chhak leh Thlang Indo (The Battle of East and West) (1877-1880)-⁸³ amongst the Mizo clans were fought along with a number of minor assaults. All of these contributed to a tortuous period in Mizo society.

Drawing out the most beautiful strands from Mizo turbulent historical era, even the horrifying Khawnglung run (raid of Khawnglung)⁸⁴ during the Chhim leh Hmar Indo, is used by the author for a family reorganisation of his character Thanhranga and his relatives in Khawnglung. It is the inclusion of the fairies in the midst of the troubles which makes the past world so attractively liveable as these beings could take men away from the mundane life of reality to their world of fantasy filled with luxury and beauty. Into this secondary world created by the author “both

⁸⁰ Lalthangliana, p. 162.

⁸¹ Lalthangliana, pp. 166-168.

⁸² Lalthangliana, p. 173.

⁸³ Liangkhaia, pp. 70-76.

⁸⁴ *Chhaktiang Kawlravn*, p.31. During the war of the North and South in Mizoram, Lalngauva, son of Vuta, and the Tiau village Chief Khawtindala along with their *pasalthas* sacked Khawnglung village (Zawla 123). The destruction brought upon the village was so deleterious that it could never return to its formal stature and was eventually deserted.

designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose.” (Tolkien 53)

In *Chhaktiang Kawlrawn, pasaltha* Thanhranga’s despair in his love relationship with a human woman was comforted by going out into the forest, shooting animals and meeting with the *lasi*. Even before he met with his beloved *lasi* Varparhi, he is depicted to have been charmed and conquered by her sweet scent. But in actuality, it is often told that *lasi* are odorous and men who were in a relationship with them carried the same stench, like:

The devils that appear in *Jirikovo Videni* (The Vision of Jirik), even the one who is metamorphosed into Jirik’s sweetheart, after he has said his exorcizing refrain prayer, always vanish ‘with a great shrieking and a great stench.’ (Pynsent 604)

The *lasi-zawl* often disclosed themselves unintentionally, notwithstanding the efforts to hide their affairs with the *lasi* from fellow villagers, because of the peculiar bad smell they produced. In his artistic procreation, while accepting his *lasi* characters as fallen angels, Zochhumpui Pa lets his *lasi* characters still carry “the fragrance of a honeycomb” as from “the breath of the angel who visits Asenech⁸⁵.” (608)

The secondary world created by Zochhumpui Pa is a fairyland where one escapes into to find fulfilment that cannot be achieved, lived or enjoyed in the primary world. The people he depicted embraced, desired to be in relationship with and even worshipped the rulers of the fantasy world believing them to be their benefactors.

1.2. Undesirable Secondary World

But the fairy world reconstructed by Lalhmachhuana Zofa is not as fine as the other author’s conception. In the two books of *Tawnmang Lasi*, the men’s relationship with *lasi* brings more curses than blessings. The *lasi* are shown as tempters and the men as doubters. The damsels are no less beautiful than the *lasi* in The Tan Trilogy, nevertheless not as attractive.

⁸⁵ Asenath. Wife of Joseph in the Bible (Gen. 41.45).

Regarding the complexities of the working of fantasy and the importance of culture for its creation, Rudolf B. Schmerl says that “the sophistication, then, not of the individual reader, but of a culture which a work of art simultaneously reflects and is received by, provides a criterion of fantasy.” (645) In *Tawnmang Lasi 2*, Lalhmachhuana Zofa captures a very critical aspect in the lives of some of the Mizo *pasalthas*, which is shown through his character, Vala, who completely neglected his family in his attempt to meet with the *lasi* in the realm of fantasy.

Usually, *pasalthas* are portrayed as very prosperous in their hunting and are spoken of as very decorated men with all the favours bestowed upon them by their Chiefs, garnering respect and admiration from villagers because of the blessings they received from *lasi*. However, the reality of the unfavourable effects associated with spending too much time in hunting and a seemingly blissful relationship with the *lasi* was brooded on by Vala when his wife went against his intention to go out hunting:

Zonundika Nuin ‘ram lam hna hi pa mawh a ni’⁸⁶ tih a sawi chu ka ngaihtuah neuh neuh a, ‘pasalthate hi chuan sa la thei hle mahsela, in lam leh ram lamah an kawrawng duh’ an tihte chu dik ta riauvin ka hria a. Kei pawh hi ka ram vah hrat aleiah mipa tih tur tih loh ka ngah mai a. Kan tuium hmun leh luhka thlengin a tla bal a. Huan ni se, ka hung tha hman lova, thenawmte kel a lut reng a, pal tak ngial pawh ka ping tha hman lo a ni. Lo lam nise, kan thlawh hneh loh a leiah buh kan thar tam tur angin kan thar tam ngai lova. (*Tawnmang Lasi 2* 233)

(I keep pondering upon the words of Zonundika’s mother- ‘it is the responsibility of men to feed the family,’ and somehow, I also find it true what they often say about hunters- ‘though *pasalthas* regularly bring home their kill

⁸⁶ the phrase ‘ram lam hna hi pa mawh a ni’ signifies a number of responsibilities of the Mizo men, almost any engagement other than household chores which mainly fall into the hands of the women. A clear-cut division of responsibilities between men and women in the Mizo society is delineated by the author. (ram- a forest; lam- relating to, of etc.; hi- that, this; pa- a man; mawh- a duty/responsibility; a- it; ni- is).

yet they are often hollow domestically and economically.’ I myself neglect many of the responsibilities and duties of men at home because of hunting. Even the place where we keep water containers and our doorsteps are falling asunder. The garden is frequented by neighbouring goats since I do not have time to mend the fence. The jhum too is often overgrown with weeds which results in the yielding of less rice than we ought to).

Also, regarding a pasaltha named Khuma, the narrator states:

Khuma hi ramvachal a ni a, kan khaw ram chin hi chu a ni aia hre bel hi an tam bik kher lovang. A kut hi a hmui hle a, a ramvah tawh hi chuan a hlawhchham ngai meuh lo... A ramvah nuam ti hi a chhungte’n an sawisel reng a, a ni lah tak a, lo lam hna tul lai tak te hian vau vela sakhi thangkam leh sanghal pel te hi a ching a. A thawk thei ber a ni si a, a ram vah hrat aleiah mi hnukhawiah lo an zo kum tin mai a ni... Heti taka sa a lak theih chhan hi a thiante sawi dan chuan Lasi a zawl vang a ni a. (58-59)

(Since Khuma is a *ramvachal*⁸⁷, there are not many better acquainted with the territory of our village. He is very blessed, hardly comes home empty-handed when he hunts... His family always criticizes his love for hunting, the cause is well-grounded too, for he would often go to the fringe of the jhum to set traps for deer and hunt boar when cultivation is at its peak. As he is the main workforce, his overindulgence in hunting causes them every year to trail behind other villagers in farming... His abundant prosperity in hunting, according to his friends, is because of his relationship with *lasi*).

Possessing a gun was considered a mark of a higher class in the societal hierarchy among the ancient Mizos, yet the adverse effect was more and more visible at the turn of the second half of the 20th century. The men who spent too much time away from home, especially the *lasi-zawl*, were usually poorer as in the case of Vala and Khuma. With the decreasing number of animals, there was an increasing demand

⁸⁷ An extremely avid hunter.

for more effort and time causing barrenness to the household of the ones who were still clinging to the primitive thrill of hunting.

The fantasy world sub-created by Lalhmachhuana Zofa is a secondary world where *pasalthas* entered suspiciously. The fairies in their realm sought possession rather than mutual improvement. The atmosphere is that of treachery as articulated by Thachungchuangi:

Kan kawih her tam leh kan lawmman dawn tur a nasa a ni mai a, kan inhmuh loh rual ruala ka phatsan chung chein, nang erawh chu ka tan I nung a, midang tan i inphal lo va. (*Tawnmang Lasi 1 237*)

(The more we misguide (men) the more will be our reward, even though I betray you the moment you are away yet you are devoted to me, withholding yourself from others).

It is a mesmerizing world where the *pasaltha* escapes into, but cannot escape from it even after realizing that the world is filled with demonic beings who guise themselves with irrefutable beauty. The folkloric character Thasiamama who at first asked the *lasi* to prolong his life had to wish for his speedy death to break away from his relationship with the *lasi*, but did not feel as guilty as Vala; nor the *lasi* in The Tan Trilogy were as depressed as Thachungchuangi in *Tawnmang Lasi*. The arousal of continual guilty conscience among the characters in the narratives may be attributed to the introduction of Christianity in the land:

Harsatna lian tak an neih chu misual nih inhriatna thu hi a ni. Misual chu an awm, mahse pianpui sual ang chi, Sam ziaktuin “Ka nu min pai tirh atang rengin misual ka ni” (Sam 51:5) a tih ang chi kha an hre ve lo. Nu leh pate chu a chhun theih tih hriain nupui pasal inzawnah an fimkhur hle. Nu buan chak lo fanu chu buan a chak duh lo ngeiin an ngai a, ‘sual pianpui’ tih ang chi hi a ni lo. (Zairema 234)

(A very big problem they had was the realization that they were sinful people. There were sinful people, but they had not known inherent (archetypal) sin as spoken by the Psalmist, “And in sin my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5)

Knowing one could take after parents, they were very careful in choosing matrimonial partners. They firmly believed that a licentious woman's daughter was bound to be licentious, but this was not same with 'original sin').

The reason the author of The Tan Trilogy fails to represent his characters as guiltless goddesses is because his Christianised conscience does not allow him to paint them as purely good; hence, mirroring the state of mind of a particular community with respect to cultural changes regardless of the degree of factuality or duplicity of the literary composition.

2. Psychoanalytical Paradigm

The interactions of the material and the immaterial witnessed through the evolution of cultural beliefs are expressed in stories in which fantastical elements abound; because the human psyche is an entity where the physical and the spiritual become indifferentiable. This oneness of the two worlds is expressed in the words of a psychologist:

Although the idea of immateriality does not in itself exclude that of reality, popular opinion invariably associates reality with materiality. Spirit and matter may well be forms of one and the same transcendental being. (Jung, 212)

According to Carl Jung's psychoanalytical study, *lasi* and many other supernatural characters in various folktales are archetypal substances. Archetypes are "incapsulated personal system" (22) inherent to all human beings that:

... satisfactorily sums up all the statements of the unconscious, of the primitive mind, of the history of language and religion. It is a "factor" in the proper sense of the word. Man cannot make it; on the contrary, it is always the *a priori* element in his moods, reactions, impulses, and whatever else is spontaneous in psychic life. It is something that lives of itself, that makes us live; it is a life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated with it, but from which, on the contrary, consciousness arises. (27)

This permeability of these archetypes is reflected in the words of a transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, who says that he is “related to the earliest times and to the latest.” (218) The feminine aspect of this human psyche is known as Anima.

2.1. *Lasi* as a Trickster Anima

The characteristics of one of the archetypes represented as a seductive enchantress adhere extensively to the distinctive natures of Mizo cultural conception in supernatural beings especially those with a bearing of feminine attractiveness, i.e., *phungpuinu* and *lasi*. The varied conceptions and manifestations of these beings formed a part of Jung’s archetypes in the human collective unconscious. He writes:

The nixie is an even more instinctive version of a magical feminine being whom I call the anima. She can also be a siren, melusina (mermaid), wood-nymph, Grace, or Erlking’s daughter, or a lamia or succubus, who infatuates young men and sucks the life out of them. Moralizing critics will say that these figures are projections of soulful emotional states and are nothing but worthless fantasies. (25)

The similarities of *lasi* and siren or mermaid are found, as mentioned earlier, in the character of Galaxy and other *lasi* spoken of as controllers of the sea. Like the wood-nymphs, all the prominent *lasi* characters in Mizo oral and written narratives are told to be inhabitants of the woods. Lamia’s nature suits that of Thachungchuangi, and the *lasi* as workers of promiscuity in dreams invariably resembles the cardinal traits of succubus. Despite rejecting the idea that these beings are fanciful conceptions, Jung does not take them as spiritual beings in the traditional sense but defines them independently.

Just like *lasi*, this trickster anima can assume different shapes and natures, charming as well as repulsive to fulfil or distort human desires:

Occasionally she causes states of fascination that rival the best bewitchment, or unleashes terrors in us not to be outdone by any manifestation of the devil. She is a mischievous being who crosses our path in numerous transformations

and disguises, playing all kinds of tricks on us, causing happy and unhappy delusions, depressions and ecstasies, outbursts of affect, etc. (26).

The *lasi* as an inborn psychological essence can be discerned through the folk belief system. In the ancient Mizo tradition, the people used to practice a very peculiar customary dance accompanied by a chant known as ‘*Sa lam zai*’ to deceive the *lasi* to obtain more animals from them:

Eza leh Aw za tiin lam turin a han chham phawt a, khuangpuin a letlingin, “Aw za e, Aw za e, Aw za e, Eza e, Eza e, Eza e” tiin a hla chu a la hlauh thin. Bang chhaka lo ngaithla ru tu Chawngtinleri mi tirh te chuan a lam ber hla sawi leh khuangpuin a han lak dan kha a inan tak loh avangin, “An hla a buai e mai, a hriat theih lo ve, sa lung dang i pe leh teh ang” an ti thin. Chu chu sa dang kah lehna nia an ngaih avangin chutiang chuan an tan thin a ni. (Lalthangliana 110)

(He (a dancer) would shout, “*Eza and Aw za,*” to begin the dance, but the drummer would start, “*Aw za e, Aw za e, Aw za e, Eza e, Eza e, Eza e,*” reversing the order of the chant. Since the song hinted by the dancer and the song sung by the drummer were not similar, the messengers sent by Chawngtinleri who were listening to their songs from the other side of the wall would say, “Their song is so vexatious, it cannot be grasped, let us give them another animal.” Believing that it will help them shoot more animals, they used to start the song in reverse).

2.2. Colour of the *Lasi* Anima

Jung’s archetypes, from the Christian perspective, can be understood as the nest of the knowledge of good and evil- the serenely created self which had been polluted after the fall of man. Concerning the inherent feminine facets of a person which applies to all human beings, he says that:

She is not a shallow creation, for the breath of eternity lies over everything that is really alive. The anima lives beyond all categories, and can therefore dispense with blame as well as with praise. Since the beginning of time man, with his wholesome animal instinct, has been engaged in combat with his soul

and its daemonism. If the soul were uniformly dark it would be a simple matter. Unfortunately, this is not so, for the anima can appear also as an angel of light, a psychopomp who points the way to the highest meaning, as we know from Faust. (29)

The archetypes at the centre of human beings are “as wide as the world and open to all the world.” (22) This unfathomable heart of man has an eternal cause for its existence as spoken in the Bible in the book of *Ecclesiastes*:

He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. (3.11)

The contents of the heart or inner being are “genuine symbols precisely because they are ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed meanings, and in the last resort inexhaustible.” (38) Each of the main archetypes bear affinities with angel and demon; this is because when innocent man (Adam) disobeyed God and fall for the temptation of Satan he became impure resulting in the origination of the knowledge of good and evil.⁸⁸ All the archetypes- ruler, inventor or artist, wise old man, innocent, explorer, rebel, hero, magician or wizard, jester, everyman, lover, caregiver- have their “positive” and “negative” traits or in other words good and evil tendencies under the reign of death. For the conception of the archetype and its colourization, Jung seems to have taken into consideration the Scriptural rendition that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17.9)

Lasi, as an inherent unconscious element, forms a unit of the larger archetype within the anima. Even though she is only a portion of the core of the self, she has lived for thousands of years (Galaxy 112), and her immensity is such that she claims to have dwelled among the stars billions of kilometres away (65). She is an alluring

⁸⁸ See the book of Genesis chapter 2 and chapter 3 in the Bible. “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.” (John. 8.44)

beauty who can take the form of a damsel, a hag, a pretty little girl, an animal, a caterpillar, etc. The following is what Keats writes about her:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
 Vermillion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
 Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
 Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
 And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
 Dissolved or brighter shone, or interwreathed
 Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries. (1.47-53)

She is a shapeshifting angelic monster with such a great power as to even direct the people to the *pialral*. It is with her that men can indulge in ‘sweet sin.’

2.3. Activation of the Enchantress

There may be a number of factors for the arousal of the unconscious elements. Within the Mizo culture, alcoholic beverages appeared to be a very important agent for the incitement of the inert archetypes, because the conception concerning the phenomena of *huai* or *lasi* or similar beings in various cultures is very close to seeing of spirits or demons who cause mild disturbances as well as horror while hallucinating or in delirium; one of the reasons for such occurrence is excessive content of alcohol in the blood.

Before the emergence of Christianity, *zu* or rice beer was always an important component of all their religious practices and festivities and “there was no counter action against” it (*Zu in Mizo* 31-32). Its indispensability was such that in almost all the sacrificial ceremonies, the animals sacrificed were usually sprayed with *zu* by the *puithiam/bawlpu*⁸⁹. The priest and the ones for whom sacrifice was made drank *zu* on the occasion of every ‘*inthawi*’ or ‘sacrifice.’ (34)

⁸⁹ *Inthawina* or sacrificial offering made to evil spirits for appeasement was performed by *Bawlpu*; *sakhaw biakna* or sacrificial offering made to God for religious worship was performed by *Sadawt*. *Bawlpu* and *Sadawt* are known as *Puithiam*.

The *puithiam* often followed directions given by *zawlnei* or soothsayer pertaining to the animal sacrifice to appease spirits whom they believed were bringers of illnesses. *Zawlnei* were mainly in communion with *khuavang* who gave information about the illnesses and propitiatory offerings to be made. The sick people who came to the *zawlnei* for casting lots customarily used to bring a pot of *zu*. The result was that when these soothsayers increased in numbers, even *zu* increased:

Lalhriata chu Manga⁹⁰ thlah, lalpui tak, fing tak a ni a, Zawlneite hi a ngaihsak hle mai a, mahse a rin vang a ni kher lo thei. A upa te hnenah chuan “Zawl khawn i bawl vek ang u, zu an ti tam a nia” a ti thin a. A khuaah zawlnei an tam bik a, zu lah an ti tam na ngei, an ti a ni. (Saiaithanga 14)

(Lalhriata was a lineage of Manga, a very strange Chief, was a very wise man, he took great care of the *zawlnei*, though it might not be because he believed in them. He used to say to his Elders, “Let us all serve the *zawl* (*zawlnei*), they are increasing *zu*.” It was famed that there were more *zawlnei* in his village, who effectually increased *zu*).

The heavy drinking habit could be one of the instruments for the origination of some of these preternatural elements. Similarly, many of the hallucinating drinkers’ conceptions could have been passed down for generations as a source of factual encounters or as additions to the claims made by some others. In *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*, Marie-Louise von Franz writes:

Personally, I think it likely that the most frequent way in which archetypal stories originate is through individual experiences of an invasion by some unconscious content, either in a dream or in a waking hallucination—some event or some mass hallucination whereby an archetypal content breaks into an individual life. That is always a numinous experience. In primitive societies practically no secret is ever really kept, so this numinous experience is always talked about and becomes amplified by any other existing folklore which will fit in. Thus, it develops just as rumors do. (24)

⁹⁰ A Sailo Chief, son of Lallula. He died around the year 1812 (Liangkhaia 112).

Many of the animals that are shot by the *pasalthas* in the select narratives have association with *lasi* and are prerequisites for attaining an extraordinary status in the life to come after death, hence are numinous. Although all the *pasalthas* protagonists in The Tan Trilogy are *thangchhuah pa*, they are hardly portrayed as indulging in alcoholic beverages. The fact, in the ancient Mizo tradition, is that when more animal heads entered the house of a *pasalthas* the presence of *zu* was sure to increase, because:

When a man killed an animal in the chase, he invited his friends and neighbours to celebrate with him the head of the animal killed. They sat up at night with the head of the animal which was usually accompanied by a feast consisting of at least one pot of beer, the flesh of the animal's head itself and a fowl. This ceremony was known as 'sa lu men'. Those who had rice beer in ready stock cheerfully brought it in for consumption at the ceremony. Those who washed the intestines and stomach and those who received the legs of the animal as a due had to contribute at least one large pot of rice beer each.

On the following day or a few days after performing this ceremony, the killer of the animal performed another ceremony known as 'Ai' or 'Aih' in order to put the spirit of the animal killed under his control. He had to sacrifice either a mithun or goat or pig for this 'ai' ceremony. The villagers enjoyed this with *zu* and feast. (*Zu in Mizo* 17-18)

One of the intentions of a *thangchhuah pa*, for both in *lama thangchhuah* and *ram lama thangchhuah*, was to feed fellow villagers with *zu* abundantly. This could have brought about 'mass hallucination.' These ceremonial occasions, especially *ram lama thangchhuah*, was an ideal atmosphere to give rise to the birth of archetypal stories related to *lasi* since they were believed to be gods of animals who made it possible for a *pasalthas* to *thangchhuah*.

Again, a Chief's house, in the ancient Mizo society, was the source of all kinds of tidings and stories. The Chief, his Elders and the *pasalthas* regularly gathered in this place and *zu* was always a part and parcel of these meetings. In *Galaxy*, there are many instances where Chief Thanglura and his Elders drink rice beer. Be it at home

or at jhum, they hardly ever gathered about the Chief without alcoholic drinks and termed even bittered kind of *zu* as sweet:

Lalpa zu thlum tha kan in ve tak hi, Lalpa zu hi chu a thlum tha thin teh a nia.
(168)

(Verily we are drinking the Chief's nectared beer, the Chief's beer is well nectared as ever).

The excessive drinking habit of rice beer of the Mizo Chiefs is mentioned by a renowned citizen Brig. T. Thenphunga Sailo in an interview while speaking about his father's refusal to accept Christianity for the sake of *zu*.⁹¹ He tells the interviewer:

Hmanlai chuan maw lal ho reng reng hi an chaw chu zu a ni a. Ka nu nen an innei a. Mahse missionary an lo kal khan, "Kristian ni tur chuan zu in loh," an ti a. Ka pa kha hmanlai chuan lal reng reng hi an chaw chu zu a ni mai a... Mahse ka nu khan Kristian nih a duh tlat a, chuvang chuan ka pa bula awm lovin a chhuah san ta a ni. (Sailo 12:43-13:17)

(In the olden days the food of all the Chiefs was rice beer. He got married to my mother. But when the Missionaries came, they said, "To become a Christian one should not drink." As for my father, the food of all the Chiefs was simply rice beer... But since my mother determinedly wanted to become a Christian, she chose to leave him).

Intoxicating drinks have been associated with many hardships and the ability to see bizarre and incongruous things as stated in the Scripture:

Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things. (Prov. 23.29-33)

⁹¹ T. Thenphunga's father Vanchheuva was Thuampui village Chief.

This psychotic disorder because of alcoholic abuse is scientifically proven as well. Regarding the mental impairment caused by excessive alcohol consumption, Nicolle Monico writes:

Features of an alcohol-induced psychosis include alcohol hallucinosis, a rare complication of chronic alcohol abuse that occurs during or after a period of heavy drinking. These hallucinations are typically auditory but may manifest as visual or tactile. The condition is also characterized by mood disturbances and delusions which may eventually mimic schizophrenia or delirium tremens. (par. 6).

Zu can induce talkativeness, feelings of euphoria, depression, and can even act as a stimulant to the personal as well as collective unconscious because there are spirits in them. Some alcoholic drinks are named plainly as spirits, yet even other alcoholic beverages which do not go through distillations contain a certain amount in them. This physical spirit may give rise to numerous inborn sleeping knowledge, but its enlivening association with the enchanting *lasi* which has eternal consciousness is more manifested in Mizo cultural beliefs than with any other archetypal elements. Although, the existence of *lasi* is felt and its presence exerts power, they cannot be caught physically or with words except through beliefs as it is said, “The accomplishments of later generations in their laboratories may turn matter into energy, but not fantasy into reality.” (Schmerl 646) Oftentimes, it is not men who caught the *lasi* but the other way around. Whenever the *pasalthas* tried to grasp them, they turned reality into dreams and at their pleasure turned dreams into reality.

3. *Lasi* as an Independent Inspirer

In “Mr. Testator and the Ghost” by Dickens, a strange visitor appeared more like alcohol-induced archetype than a spirit as the narrator ponders:

Whether he was a ghost, or a spectral illusion of conscience, or a drunken man who had no business there... whether he died of liquor on the way, or lived in liquor ever afterwards; he never was heard of more. (par. 13)

Contrastingly in “To Be Taken with a Grain of Salt” and “The Signal-Man,” despite the total absence of liquor, ghosts find their place disturbingly. Likewise, just because hallucinations can cause one to see strange things or beings, it does not mean that this study refutes the existence of such essentiality as soul or the external persona of spirits, neither the psychologist who propounded the idea of archetypes rejects it. Jung religiously accepts the autonomous existence of spiritual beings:

The religions should therefore constantly recall to us the origin and original character of the spirit, lest man should forget what he is drawing into himself and with what he is filling his consciousness. He himself did not create the spirit, rather the spirit makes him creative, always spurring him on, giving him lucky ideas, staying power, “enthusiasm” and “inspiration.” So much, indeed, does it permeate his whole being that he is in gravest danger of thinking that he actually created the spirit and that he “has” it. (213)

Zipes’ conception of fairy-tales and the beings themselves as metaphors or “means of communication” between “storytellers and listeners” or expressions of “discontent with the civilising process” (*Fairy Tales* xiii) without spirituality is refuted by Jung’s idea, nonetheless, acting as metaphors, their independent spiritual existence cannot be ruled out either. Depending on the evolution of culture, these fairy beings may act as “ideologically variable machines.” (Bacchilega 7) The *lasi* and tales about them can easily adapt according to the changing appetites and ideals of the people of a community. The pervasiveness of spirits is brought out by Carl Jung from the most common discourse when he states:

A special instance is the time-spirit, or spirit of the age, which stands for the principle and motive force behind certain views, judgments, and actions of a collective nature. (209)

Their vitality is very much felt amid wealth and beauty which attracted men more than anything. For instance, Bill Gates and the wealth he has amassed is referred to by Penny Le Gate as “his fairy tales success story.” (Gates 01:25-01:29) Likewise, Geta Thunberg terms the prosperity of the economic powerhouse of the world in the R20

Austrian World Summit, Vienna, as “fairy tales of economic growth.” (“In full” 00:41-00:44).

Again, the ability of these spirits to adjust according to time and the people they meet is witnessed from an account of Lalenghluna of Ratu⁹². In *Ramhuai*, he narrated an incident where a Keralite Sunil, a road construction manager, met a very beautiful woman at Tuithiang (a spot between Darlawn⁹³ and Sawleng⁹⁴) on 13.03.2003. This damsel spoke to him in fluent English and asked him for a ride. As they were riding along, the two of them chatted in English till the outskirts of Sawleng village. He did not know when she got down from the car but she was no longer seated beside him when he entered Sawleng village. The next morning on 14.03.2003 they inquired her whereabouts in the possible case of her falling off from the running car and subsequent accidental death. They asked all the travellers who passed through the road they had taken together the previous night but nobody had a clue. Not knowing what else to do, they concluded that the woman must have been a *lasi*. The narrator added:

...as the world is advancing, they (the *lasi*) are also progressing, even the present one has been able to speak in English. It seems they will also be able to operate even computers in the near future. (221)

In *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, Thanglura was blessed because the *lasi* had had a good relationship with his father *Thangliana*, the same applies to *pasaltha* Thansanga who was in a good relationship with the *lasi* because of his father Thanglura. The external forces which contributed to their prosperity are as much reasonable as the internal forces that governed their lives. Though *zawl* (communion

⁹² A village in Aizawl District. Coordinates: 24.11°N 92.9°E.

⁹³ A village in Aizawl District. Coordinates: 24.02°N 92.9°E.

⁹⁴ A village in Aizawl District. Coordinates: 23.9°N 92.9°E. The distance between Darlawn and Sawleng village is seven point five kilometres.

with *lasi*) is not hereditary yet transference of blessings often occurred within family members as depicted in Mizo folklore:

Lianlunga hian lasi zawl lovin, a nupuiin a zawl zawk a, a nupui zar zo hian sa a kap thei hlein an sawi. (Lalthangliana 110)

(It was rumoured that Lianlunga was not in a relationship with *lasi*, but his wife *zawl* them, and he was very prosperous in shooting animals through her).

They seemed to have powers even to interact with and control the collective unconscious because they inspired the consciousness of eternity in man to build processions to get to *pialral*.

4. Fallen-Man's Fantasy

The realm of *lasi* or fairies which is being dealt with in this work included an environment where there is “beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever-present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as swords,” (Tolkien 3) where “there is mortal peril for a human to enter the home of a fairy folk,” (Chalker 7) and where:

The woman had a strange appearance, both human and fairy, with a beautiful, almost unnatural face and figure set off by enormous, deep, sensuous eyes, that no human ever had. Her skin, too, was a soft orange, and her hands and feet, with their length, and claw-like nails were pure fairy. (5)

Incorporating the biblical idea of creation, new findings in the field of astronomy and man's artistry, Zochhumpui Pa speaks through his *lasi* character Galaxy of the longing for a better world and the lost grace thus:

Siamtu ropuizia hi sawi fiah sen rual a ni lo. Nang ni chuan Pu Vana in tih loh leh Khuanu in ti a ni lawm ni? Thansang, arsite leh van lam chu i sawi tawh lo vang. Tun hma chuan kan lo chen ve thinna a ni a. Kan thiante tam tak pawh kan kalsan a tul avangin khing arsite khi kan tlawh thei tawh lo. Siamtu ropui tak lung kan ti-awi lo va, khing lai hmunte khi kan chhuahsan a tul ta a ni. Aw, theih chu ni se khing laia arsi tam takah te khian kal leh ka va han chak tak em! Mahse a theih tawh si loh. (*Galaxy* 65-66)

(The greatness of the Creator is beyond description. Do you not either call him Pu Vana (Heavenly Grandfather) or Khuanu (Guardian Mother)? Thansang, let's not talk further about the stars or the heaven. They had once been our home. We had to leave many of our friends and we can no longer visit those stars. Since we displeased the glorious Creator, we had to leave those places. O if ever possible how I long to go again in the midst of those stars up there! But it is no longer possible).

The extract does not only delineate the longing of the angels who had been cast out from God's presence but depicts images of the present as well as primitive lives and thoughts of human beings who desire to regain the lost grace. The longing for certain indescribable past images which are common to all human beings has been brought out by the authors. Because of this yearning, man often asks, "Why were the former days better than these?" (Eccles. 7.10) This escapist idea or the unquenchable desire for something else may be termed as archetypal fantasy. It shows the working of the complexities of the human soul or the psyche of man that "is not wholly lost nor wholly changed." (Tolkien 54) Men always want to be more content with the things they want to have rather than such things as they presently have. The vast emptiness within man is one of the most important themes of the select works. In the 2006 film *Apocalypto* directed by Mel Gibson, the ever-in-search man is brought out in the story narrated by an old man. It goes:

And a man sat alone. Drenched deep in sadness. And all the animals drew near to him and said, 'We do not like to see you so sad. Ask us for whatever you wish and you shall have it.' And when the man had all the gifts that they could give... he left. Then the owl said to the other animals, 'Now the Man knows much and is able to do many things... Suddenly I am afraid.' The deer said, 'The man has all that he needs. Now his sadness will stop.' But the owl replied, 'No. I saw a hole in the Man deep like a hunger he will never fill. It is what makes him sad and what makes him want. He will go on taking and taking until one day the world will say: 'I am no more and I have nothing left to give.'" (*Apocalypto* Old Man's Story" 0:04-2:13)

The collusion of the inner self's desire and demonic being's temptation's permeability is so much so that even Mizo people are now harking back their attractiveness which had been witnessed by the *pasalthas* in the past. The longings for these beautiful beings are abundantly told. Although they are already known to be "the chaotic urge to life" (Jung 30), yet their veiled beauty and loveliness is expressed as a symbol of fallen man's fantasy even after Christianization thus:

Amah pawm reng chung a, zut zut chungin ka ngai em em a, ka lungte a leng lawk tlat a, kan inhmuh rualin kan inthen hun tur ka ngaihtuah thleng a, ka khua a har lawk tlat thin. Kim lo tlatin ka inhria a, thil kim lo erawh eng ber nge ka hre si lo. (*Tawnmang Lasi 1 31*)

(Even whilst embracing and caressing her, longing fills me for the hereafter. The moment we meet, I am reminded of the parting hour and feel lonely for the time to come. I feel empty (in her presence) yet I do not know what is missing).

The select works portray the interactions of human consciousness, spiritual beings and creations other than men. The *lasi* in the works are an artful assemblage of the fantasy, temptatious spirit and the corporeality of human beings. They are constructed to please the tastes and senses of the people because it is in the woven artistry of the incorporation of the supernatural, the natural and the weaver's imagination one frequently finds succour.

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CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Lasi so far are no less graceful in appearance than the Greek's Artemis, the Roman's Diana or the damsel who took away Lanval. The parallel pervasive conception of these beings is witnessed throughout the world. The peculiar set of eyes which is often reported to be vertical⁹⁵ by some of the Mizo ancestors goes beyond the Mizo folk's accounts. D.L.R Lorimer's states in his study of the supernatural beings in Gilgit⁹⁶ region that:

The Peris of the Shina-speaking peoples⁹⁷ are of both sexes. The female is called a Peri and the male a Perian. They are not spoken of as "little folk," and appear in general to resemble human beings... Their eyes are said to be vertical, that is with the axis set vertically. (519)

The Mizo forefathers never wanted to hurt swallows believing them to be the favourite birds of *lasi* which often helped them in their weaving. Even the two *lasi* damsels met by Chhuihthanga were also weaving when he encountered them in the Tan forest. The same beings were also witnessed to exist in Britain as K.M. Briggs' mentions "the spinning fairy" or "Habetrot" (271) in his study of the English fairies.

Moreover, the communion between man and *lasi* or *khuavang*, and the seizure of man by *huai* or *ramhuai* which were firmly embedded and a part of the life of the ancient Mizos had also been alluded to by Aristotle in his *The Eudemian Ethics* while discoursing on happiness:

Perhaps people are made happy in none of the above ways, but in one or other different manner. Are they like people possessed by a *nymph* or a divinity, getting carried away by the inspiration of some kind of spirit? (3)

⁹⁵ An mit hi khamphei lovin a tung khaih a." ("Their eyes are set cutely in vertical not horizontally)." (Dokhuma 74)

⁹⁶ The capital city of Gilgit-Baltistan, a territory forming the northern region of Pakistani administered Kashmir.

⁹⁷ Major ethnic group in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The ancestors' custom of sacrificial offering to *lasi* to prosper them in hunting is not mentioned in any of the select works by Zochhumpuii Pa or Lalhmachhuana Zofa. They are preoccupied with composing fantastical relationships between men and *lasi* while trying to reproduce the ancient and modern conception, hence, causing them to concentrate mainly on the femininity and attractiveness of the *lasi*. Barely a hundred years back, sacrifices to *lasi* were always a part of the religious rituals. Such musical instrument as drum or *khuang* (*Mizo Hun Hlui Hlate* 110) was also involved in their chants and prayers. Three thousand years back even the Greeks used to offer this kind of sacrifice to *nerheids* or fairies as seen in *Odyssey*. At the island of Ithaca⁹⁸, Athena⁹⁹ reminded Odysseus regarding the offering thus:

Now lift thy longing eyes, while I restore
 The pleasing prospect of thy native shore.
 Behold the port of Phorcys! fenced around
 With rocky mountains, and with olives crown'd,
 Behold the gloomy grot! whose cool recess
 Delights the Nereids of the neighbouring seas;
 Whose now-neglected altars in thy reign
 Blush'd with the blood of sheep and oxen slain.... (13.391-398)

The essential goodness of the fairies, their character as thieves, their ability to possess men etc., are comparably similar across the globe in different cultures. It is then important to retrospect the conceptions, experiences and practices within the Mizo tradition as filtered as possible, leaving as much of the extensive influence of the influx of intercultural works for their enrichment to create fantastical works, so as to unmask the *lasi*.

⁹⁸ A fictional home-island of king Odysseus in *Odyssey*.

⁹⁹ In Greek mythology, she is the goddess of wisdom, daughter of Zeus.

1. Divinity of *Lasi*

Zochhumpui Pa claims that his work is constructed out of the accounts of *lasi-zawl* or *lasi-possessed* and portrays the relationship between men and *lasi* of the 19th century, yet superfluous delineation of the fantasies and conceptions of the Mizo people of the present era leads to insufficient duplication of the ancient beliefs pertaining to *lasi*. According to his account in the preface of *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, the ancestors conceived *lasi* thus:

Lasite chu ramhuai tha mi, mihringte tina ve ngai lo, tihnat ahneka malsawm thintuah an ngai a ni. Tin, mihringte hi an duhsakin an kawm nel ve thin a; pasalthate phe chu an ngainain an ngaisang ve em em mai a. Ramsa neitu an nih avangin an duhsak zawngte chu sa an kahtir thin a. (*Tan Tlang Lasi* ix)

(*Lasi* were good *ramhuai*, who never hurt humans, but were rather believed to be their benefactors. They tried to develop cordial relationships with human beings and were especially fond of the *pasalthas* whom they respected and admired. Since they were the owners of wild animals, they often let their favoured men shoot the animals).

His usage of the term *ramhuai* is contradictory because *huai* or *ramhuai* were mostly associated with malevolence in the ancient conception. *Lasi*, on the other hand, were good spirits to whom personal, familial and community worship sacrifices were offered as below:

a) *Lasi Khal- Khal* implies ‘an attendant’ or ‘a driver.’ Chawngtinleri is said to be the chief *khal* of the animals born in Buannel (ibid.). *Lasi Khal* is a personal sacrificial offering made to *lasi* to prosper a hunter in his hunting of wild animals. A piglet was offered in the ritual to ask for blessings. In *Mizo Awmdan Hlui (Ancient Tradition of the Mizo)*, Pastor Liangkhaia distinguishes the identity of *lasi* from that of the *huai* to whom the people used to offer propitiatory offerings to appease them in order to rid illnesses. He writes:

Khal hi Thlarau tha, min khalhtu, min awmtu, min vengtu, min hualhimtu awmin an ring a, chumi tih lungawi tum nana inthawi a ni thin. Sakhua anga biak chu a ni lo va, mahse damloh vanga inthawina pawh a ni chuang lo. (28)

(*Khal* is a customary sacrificial offering extended to please the good spirit, whom they believed is our driver, our protector and our defender. It is not observed as a conventional religious worship practice, nor is it a sacrifice to cure illness).

This suggests that *lasi* were conceived not only as attendants of the animals but humans as well. *Lasi Khal* was primarily practised by a *pasaltha* when he felt that he was no longer as prosperous in hunting as he used to. It is to restore the blessings (Saiathanga 43).

In 1909, J. Shakespeare, a British administrative officer, had come up with a very close conclusion with that of Pastor Liangkhaia respecting *Khal*. He writes that “there are sacrifices to meet every possible contingency, *Khal*, which are to appease the *Huai* frequenting the village and houses.” (378) Although the inclusion of the term *huai* portends placation rather than benediction it was *Sadawt* who conducted the ceremonial activities of *Khal*.

b) *Dawino Chhui*- This is a family worship activity performed for the children at the threshold of adulthood. Its sub-divisions are: *Hnuaite*, *Chung*, *Lasi*, *Hnuaipui*, and *Vansen* (Zairema 18-19). Concerning *lasi* and this ceremony, Pastor Zairema says that:

Mihring hmelma an ni hran lo, sual pawh an sual lem lo, sa kah theih dil nan dawino chhui tumin vawktein Lasi an be ve thin... (75)

(They were not enemies of human beings nor were they malicious, *lasi* were worshipped with a piglet for prosperity in shooting animals during *dawino chhui*...).

Pastor Liangkhaia includes *Pathian*¹⁰⁰ in *dawino chhui* apart from the ceremonies mentioned above, whereas Pastor Saiaithanga excludes *Lasi* and *Vansen* and includes *Pathian sa* (animal for God) instead. Like *Lasi*, a piglet was offered for both *Pathian* and *Pathian sa*.

c) *Kawngpui Siam*- ‘The Preparation of Highway’ is one of three ritualistic sacrifices in which a whole village was involved. The ritual was carried out to implore blessings to god with respect to hunting animals and raiding enemies. It was performed every year with a piglet or a fowl alternately (*Lalthangliana, India, Burma leh Bangladesh-a* 397). There is no direct reference to *lasi* as their object of worship in this ritual, yet it is inferable that *lasi* or *khuavang* was worshipped in the ceremony since these beings were mainly held as the gods of animals. Pastor Zairema writes:

Thlarau khawvel miin mihring mal an sawm chuan “Kan siam ang che” an ti thin. Bible-a Pathianin Abraham hnenah “Mal ka sawm ang che” a tih kha Mizo sawi dan chuan “Kan siam ang che tih tur a ni... Lasite pawhin mihring an zawl chu “Kan siam ang che” an ti thin. Khaw pum huapa khua an biakna pakhat chu ‘Kawngpui siam’ a ni. Khaw kawtchhuah lun ber chu mi lu, sa lu, luhna turin an lo ‘siam’ (titluang) a ni. A khaw luhna kawng chu hmuingil turin an siam a ni. (6-7)

(When beings from the spiritual world bestow blessing upon human beings, they would say “We will make you.” The word spoken to Abraham by God in the Bible saying “I will bless you” is to be rendered in Mizo as “Kan siam ang che” (“We will make you”). Even the *lasi* say to their *zawl* “We will make you.” *Kawngpui siam* is a worship ritual for *Khua* in which the whole village is involved. They make (prepare) the most frequented entryway to the village for the abundant arrival of the head of enemies and wild animals. They make the passage into the village for prosperity.)

¹⁰⁰ God; one of the ceremonial activities during *dawino chhui* in which a piglet was offered to *Pathian*.

1.1. *Khua, Khuanu, Lasi and Khuavang*

Regarding the being *Khua*, Zaliana writes in *Mizo Sakhua (Kumpinu Rorel Hma) [Mizo Religion (Before the Company's Rule)]* that:

... ‘Khua’ kan tih leh ‘Khuanu’ kan tih chu thil thuhmun a ni a... Khua chu thlarau tha ho zinga mi Lasi anga hmeichhiaa ngaih ve bawk a ni. Lasi hi thlarau tha ramsa chung a thuneitu leh enkawltu leh humhalhtu a ni. Khuanu chuan mihring mai bakah an thil neih, ran vulhte chenin a enkawl sak thin a ni.” (9)

(... What we call *Khua* and *Khuanu* are the same thing... *Khua* are good spirits, who are conceived like *lasi* as feminine in gender. *Lasi* are good spirits who have power over and are caretakers and protectors of animals. *Khuanu* not only watches over human beings but their belongings including livestock as well.)

In *Pasaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy*, the *lasi* Queen Chawngtinleri partly takes the place of *Khuanu* as showing kindness to her beloved animals is believed to be one of the sources to receive blessings from *Khuanu* (54). A ceremonial chant during *Kawngpui Siam* also includes “Buannel” the place where Chawngtinleri was believed to have created animals. The song goes:

.... *Lo lawi rawh, kawngpui tluang takin*
Ka siam i lawina tur,
Sakawl lung lian ka sawm tel lo ve,
Buannela sa, Ngaizawla sa,
Aw lo lawi rawh. (Zatluanga 19)

(... *Come, I prepare for your entry*
Road of prosperity,
Excluded is brutish beast in my call;
Beasts of Buannel, beasts of Ngaizawl,
O may you come).

Again, *lasi* takes the place of *khuavang* as K. Zawla writes:

... Mizo zawlneiten an zawl ber pawh Lasi hi a ni. Heng zawlneite hmang hian vawkte te ngen chang an nei thin. (52)

(... Mizo soothsayers were mostly in communion with the *lasi*. Through these soothsayers they often asked for piglets).

He added lyrical lines composed by the earlier Mizos:

*Cham a rel e, laisen khaw zawlah,
Zeltluang tuai te Tantinchinghniangin;
A ngen ngen e. (ibid.)*

*(Firm is her presence at the hamlet,
Tantinchinghniangi¹⁰¹ pleads on and on
For a piglet).*

According to Pastor Saiaithanga, it was with *khuavang* the seers among the Mizos were in communion with; and *lasi* were also *khuavang*. The inseparability of *khuavang* and *lasi* is apparent when he says that the animals for kill were given to the people by *khuavang* (4). These *khuavang* permeated the core of the ancient Mizo religious practices as he writes that:

Sabiak hi inthawina tih a ni ve ngai lo, Sakhaw biakna a ni ringawt mai. Damlo thawina ni lovin chhungkaw sakhaw biakna, chhungkaw tana hlan a ni. An biak leh an kohte pawh, thlarau tha, khuavangte kha an ni. (15)

(*Sabiak* (religious worship-sacrifice) was never called inthawina (propitiatory offering), it was solely religious worship. It was not propitiation for the sick but family worship sacrifice offered for the family. Even the ones they worshiped and called upon were good spirits, the *khuavang*.)

¹⁰¹ The name of a *lasi*. It is a combination of three terms— *Tan*, *tinching* and *hniangi*; they refer to the name of *the famous mountain*, the name of *a lasi*, and *very feminine* respectively.

He adds:

An koh duah duahte hi ramhuai ni lovin, malsawmtu leh vengtu, an pi leh pute pawhin an lo biak thin nia an ngaihte zel kha a ni. “In kohte hi engte nge ni” tiin zawt ila, sawi ngaihna an hriat berah pawh, “Khuavang” an ti ang.” (16-17)

(The beings they sequentially called upon were not demons but keepers and benefactors, whom they believed were worshipped even by their forefathers. If one asks (the ancestors), ‘What are these that you call upon?’ they will most likely say, ‘*Khuavang*.’)

1.2. Celestial Beings

Thangchhuah is not celebrated by any of the *pasalthas* in all of the three texts of The Tan Trilogy as a doorway to *pialral* but only as a mark of greatness in hunting. Though a *lasi* crowned the *Thangchhuah Diar Tial* on one of the *pasalthas* (*Galaxy* 97), she did not show its relevance for life after death, rather she asked the *pasaltha* why *Thangchhuah* was so important to them. Even the *pasaltha* did not seem to cherish the achievement so much since he could only talk about the ancient conception and not his own despite being a *Thangchhuah Pa* himself (105). The *lasi* in the works are glued to the earth and are as terrestrial as the *pasaltha* characters. V.L. Siama’s descriptions of *lasi* in *Mizo History* is almost consistent with the beings presented by Zochhumpui Pa:

Tin, mihringte Pathian ni lo, ramsate Pathian hi a awn bawkin an ring a, a hmingah “Lasi” an ti a. Lasi chu ramsate siamtu leh enkawltu a ni a, ramsate chu an thu thuin an dah thei a ni an ti a, lui dungah hian an cheng berin an ring a... Lasi khawpui chu Tan tlang hi a ni... Lasi zawl khan Lasi a zawl a ni tih a sawi phawt chuanm Lasi khan a thlah vang vang a, sa a kap thei reng reng tawh lovang. Chu vangin zawl mah se sawi hauh loh tur a ni. (52)

(Additionally, they believed in the existence of God of animals apart from God of men, whom they named *lasi*. *Lasi* were creators and keepers of the animals, they had full control over animals, and were mostly believed to dwell along

the rivers... The capital city of *lasi* was Tan Mountain... If *lasi-zawl* by any means revealed his affair with *lasi*, the *lasi* would totally leave him, and his prosperity in hunting would also be taken away. Therefore, even if they had an affair, it was never meant to be revealed).

However, the ancient conception of these gods goes much deeper than they are presented in the select works as seen in the old folk song of the Mizos. Below is the song the forefathers chanted during the *Dawino Chhui* and *Lasi Khal* rituals:

Lasiin ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Sikhawthangan ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Sikhawvaran ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Hmawngfianga thovin ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Ni zung rawn zui che,
Thla zung rawn zui che,
Nuntluang tumpui ang che,
Pangdam tumpui ang che. (Lalthangliana, *India, Burma leh Bangladesh-a*
 418)

(May you lasi being answer the piglet,
May you Sikhawthanga answer the piglet,
May you Sikhawvara answer the piglet,
Arise from the banyan and answer the piglet,
Follow the sun's beam,
Follow the moon's beam,
May you land with good life,
May you land with good health).

It is perceptible from this chant that the ancient Mizos conceived *lasi* to be dwellers of high heaven. In addition to their prayers for blessing in the hunting of wild animals, they also asked for prosperity and well-being in general. The beings called upon in this song were far too great to show weaknesses and ignorance before men and were too revered to have a cordial relationship with men let alone a sexual relationship.

These heavenly beings presented with the power to use even a ray of light as a passage to come to earth appeared more connected with *pialral*.

Apart from scanty oral narratives, Mizo ancestors' conception of *lasi* are disseminated to the general people in written form only after Christianity entered Mizoram, and almost the whole population have been Christianised, by writers all of whom are Christians. These writers refute or at most give vague hints of the divinity of *lasi* in pre-Christian Mizo belief.

2. The Murkiness of the Concept of God

Pastor Liangkhaia's description of *khuavang*¹⁰² renders premises to hypothesize that such beings as *khuavang* or *pathian* were, at a point in time, no different beings from that of *lasi* in the belief system of the Mizo forefathers. The following is what he writes about under the heading, *Khuavang*:

Hei hi hriatthiam a har hle mai; thlarau tha chu an ni awm e. Mizo upate chuan, *Khuavang* nge lal zawk *Pathian*? tih hi an hrethiam thin lo. "Khua leh vang a awm ang a," tih leh "Pathian a awm ang a," tih hi intluk rengah an ngai. Mizorama zawlnei zawng zawng chuan *khuavang* hi a ni an zawl thin ni. *Lasi* tih nen hian a inang lek lek a ni. *Khuavang* zawlte khan Lurh leh Tan zawl niin an insawi bawk thin a, *khuavang* hi Lurh leh Tan vela chenga sawi an ni bawk. "Khua leh Vang," tih a nih avang hian tun hnua han ngaihtuah hi chuan *khuavang* hi chu, "Khuanu" kan tih kha a ni mai awm mang e aw tih a awl hle! *Khuanu* kan tih kha a nih loh pawhin *khuanu* chekawi, thlarau thate an ni mai dawn lawm ni? tia ngaih theih a ni. *Khuavang* hi chu Mizoramah chuan lar chu a lar hle mai. Mi tina mi chu an ni lo a ni ang, *khuavang* nena inthawi chu a awm lo. (*Mizo Awmdan* 36)

(This is indeed complex to understand; they seemed to be benevolent spirits. Ancient Mizos could not understand who was more authoritative *Khuavang* or

¹⁰² One of the great gods in the ancient Mizo belief.

Pathian. Both the sayings, ‘There must be *khua* and *vang*’¹⁰³ and ‘There must be *Pathian*’ were equally relatable to them. All the soothsayers in Mizoram used to *zawl* with *khuavang*. The being is very close to what is known as *lasi*. The *khuavang-zawl* often said they were in affiliation with Lurh and Tan, and these *khuavang* mainly dwelled in Lurh and Tan regions. *Lasi* were also often reported to be dwellers of Lurh and Tan regions. Since it was said (of old) ‘*Khua* and *Vang*,’ and as late reconsideration points, this (*khuavang*) is easy to cognize as “*Khuanu*!” Even if this was not what we call *khuanu*, could they (*khuavang*) be good spirits, attendants of *khuanu*? *Khuavang* is indeed very popular in Mizoram. Assumably they are not harmful beings since propitiatory offering was never done to them).

While likening *khuavang* and *pathian*, he says that the habitats of *khuavang* were Lurh and Tan mountains which were the very abode of the *lasi*. Tan Mountain, particularly, is accepted by all the Mizo authors referred to in this work as the city of *lasi* to the pre-Christian Mizo conception.

Christian Missionaries entered Mizoram in 1894, and the same year they prepared the Mizo alphabets based on the English alphabets. Two decades before their emergence, Thomas Herbert Lewin¹⁰⁴, in his 1874 book named *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in the Lushai Dialect of the Dzo' or Kuki Language with Vocabularies and Popular Tales*, recorded folk stories he heard from the Mizo people. One such tale is about a certain man named Lamdzara¹⁰⁵. He wrote in what he termed

¹⁰³ “There must be a creator and a protector.”

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Herbert Lewin (1839-1916) was a British administrative officer and a linguist. The Mizos called him Thangliana. When he was working on the book referred to in this work, he was serving as Deputy Commissioner, Chittagong Hills.

¹⁰⁵ Father of Lalruanga. Though Lewin recorded the name as Lamdzara, he is popularly known among the contemporary Mizos as “Zauhranga” (Hras 5:21-5:23) or

Dzo¹⁰⁶ dialect and translated the same into English. About the man who killed a very big boar which was exchanged with a very small boar by a spirit, he writes:

Kuavang-in tsa-nghul ano-tey-in an-tleng-ta, tey tuk tey anitá.¹⁰⁷ The Great Spirit (meanwhile) had changed the big boar for a small pig, it was a very little pig. (Lewin 74)

And:

Chiti-chú-un Lamdzára ahnú adzui, adzui Euavang in-a alútá, “Kuavang in atsher” ati ey; “lo-lú- tschúh” ati.¹⁰⁸ “Do not come in here” was said, “the Great Spirit's house is ‘tabu’ (sacred) .” (ibid.)

In his footnote, *Kuavang* (*Khuavang*) is translated as God. Lewin’s understanding of the ancient Mizo concept of God is still more confusing. Elaborating on *Kuavang* he goes further:

“God. — The Great Spirit’s house is sacred.” The Dzo recognize two deities, *Kuavang*¹⁰⁹, the good spirit, and *Patien*¹¹⁰, the evil spirit. The former is said to reside in a village among the hills, which is often seen indistinctly, far away amid the clouds which hide the blue hill-tops, but which, like the Fata

“Zalhranga” (Zofa, *Mizo Thawnthu Vol- VIII* 147). His son Lalruanga is the greatest magician in Mizo folktales.

¹⁰⁶ Mizo or Lusei or inhabitants of the Lushai Hills.

¹⁰⁷ “*Khuavangin sanghal a notein a thleng a, te tak te a ni ta.*”

¹⁰⁸ “*Chutichuan, Lamdzara chuan a hnu chu a chhui zel a, Khuavang inah a chhui lut a, Khuvang chuan, ‘Khuavang in hi in serh a ni, lo lut suh,’ a ti a.*”

¹⁰⁹ *Khuavang.*

¹¹⁰ *Pathian.*

Morgana¹¹¹, possesses the property of vanishing as it is approached. A chief told me in all good faith, how his father, who was a mighty man, had for a long time seen in the distance a village which no one could identify ; he had said “Who is this chief, his people do not come to us, they hold aloof — this is not good” so he collected his young men and they travelled east, travelled and travelled ; as they mounted each range of hills the chief said “Surely this is the last, we shall reach the village after the next valley;” but as fast as they advanced the village receded. At last they topped a lofty hill, the eastern side of which was a precipice, and they looked towards the sun which was rising, and there was the village, quite close. They heard the roar of the war-gongs and the houses were decked in red cloth, and as they looked a cloud came over the sun and over the village, and when it lifted there was no longer any village to be seen— “Then” said the narrator, “my father knew that the village belonged to Kuavang and he was afraid. None of our young men came back, they had gone so far. My father only, who was very strong, reached home, and he told our people and then he died.”

¹¹¹ A complex form of superior mirage. It is believed that Morgan le Fay (Morgan the Fairy), a sorceress in the Arthurian legend, created these objects or castles to lure men away to their death. Briggs, in “The English Fairies,” writes: “Morgan le Fee occupies a peculiar position in our folklore. There seems little doubt that she was once Morgan the sea goddess, later euhemerised as a mortal queen with magical powers... As a fairy she is something of a foreigner, and her kind are better represented in France and Italy. The fairy godmother of the sophisticated French tales which have had such an influence on our literary fairy-stories is probably descended from the Fatae of whom Fata Morgana was one.” In *Hierarchie*, regarding this being, Thomas Heywood writes:

One kinde of these th’ Italians Fatae name;
 Feé the French; We, Sibils; and the same
 Others, White Nymphs; and those that hae them seen,
 Night-Ladies, some, of which Habundia Queene. (507)

There is something almost pathetic in this wild story. The simple people seeing God's village in the clouds far away towards the rising sun, and then the sudden awakening to the knowledge that they were fighting against a supernatural power, and the solitary return of the old chief to die.

Kuavang, the good spirit, has to this day, and in almost every village of the Dzo, certain special favourites (male or female) who are known by the name of "Kuavang Dzawl," possessed or inspired by Kuavang. The Dzawl are subject to long trances or ecstasies when they are thought to be present only in body, the soul (*tlarao*)¹¹² having gone to visit its master at Kuavang's village. This power or property is by no means hereditary; it is however held in high consideration among the Dzo, and is supposed to carry with it an inherent knowledge of medicines, simples, &c. A Dzawl is also able to cure barrenness in women, and the ill-will of a Dzawl is sure to bring evil consequences. Last year the husband of a female Dzawl at Button Poia's village quarrelled with his wife and spoke evil of her office. Lo! next day he dislocated his jaw in yawning and died miserably of starvation. Provoke not the Dzawl!

It is believed, moreover, among the Dzo that Kuavang's young men occasionally become enamoured of fair mortal maidens. The result, however, is fatal, for the girl must die and that quickly. Hence if a young woman pines away, or is consumptive, the people say "one of Kuavang's young men has lain with her." This belief will bring to mind a still older one, "and the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men." Patien, the evil one, is a rest-less spirit; he roams about in the forest seeking what evil he may do. Sometimes he steals children away, and he always lies in wait at a death to appropriate the soul of the deceased, which, if he catches it, he straightway eats. He sometimes causes death by eating the heart of a live man or woman whom he specially fancies. Those honest Dzo who are not eaten by Patien (the souls of them, that is) go to a dark and dismal abiding place under the earth known as "Deadman's village," here those who have done well will be born again in some other

¹¹² *Thlarau* (spirit).

human body. The Dzo are frequent in offering sacrifice of animals, some to Kuavang, some to Patien, some to the minor spirits of the trees and rocks, which latter are supposed to be able to exercise a malign influence in their own immediate vicinity. Those beasts which are sacrificed during life time to Kuavang will after death be found and possessed by the sacrificer in Deadman's village. (Lewin 81-82)

According to him, *pathian*, the spirit that had always been conceived as a benevolent spirit and the name the people continue to use to mean absolute-being even after Christianization, is an evil spirit; whereas, *khuavang* is comprehended as a good spirit. Contrastingly, James Dokhuma, defining the Mizo forefathers' conception of *khuavang*, writes:

(Upa chuan khuavang hi ramhuai chi khat, hmeichhia hlir niin an ring a, Nula an ni berin an pianhmang erawh chu mihring nen an danglam a... Mihring hi an zawl ve thin a, mahse Lasi ang em chuan khuavang zawl chu an tam lo. Anmahni chu dam reina leh tar theih lohna neitu ramhuai chi khat an ni a. Mizo zinga khuavang zawl an sawi lar tak chu Thasiama a ni). (74)

(The ancestors conceived *khuavang* to be a kind of *ramhuai* (or evil spirit), all of whom were feminine in gender. They were mostly damsels but had different physical features from humans... They were often in relationship with men, but not as many men as with that of *lasi*. They were one kind of *huai* who possessed power to increase one's lifetime and power to make one not grow old. Thasiama was one of a very famous *khuavang-zawl* among the Mizos).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Thasiama was a *lasi-zawl* and the *lasi* whom Chhuhthanga met were spoken of by the villagers as *khuavang's* daughters. Again, negating Lewin's statement, Dokhuma records the Mizo forefathers' conception of *pathian* as:

Engkim mai hi a rel leh a ruat ni-a an ngaih avangin, 'chan tawka khwrel' tih te, 'Khuanu khua bawl' te an ti thin. Chuvang chuan manganna leh thlaphanna an tawh pawhin, "Chung Pathianin bawkkhupin min rawn thlir ang a, henga

kan manganna zawng zawng pawh hi min tikhian sak hun zawng a awm chek ang,” tiin inhnem nan tak an hmang thin. Chu Pathian chu a ni, ‘Khua’ an tih chu ni. (46)

(Since they believed everything is designed and appointed by Him (*Pathian*) they would often say, ‘God’s purposeful allotment,’ ‘*Khuanu*’s settled design.’ Likewise, in times of distress and sorrows, they would consolingly say, “Heavenly *Pathian* lying face down will watch over us, surely, in good time, he will take all our troubles away.” It was this *Pathian* whom they named ‘*Khua*’.)

Nonetheless, he likens *Pathian* to *Khuanu* and *Khuanu* is in turn equalized with *Khuavang* lexically when he attempts to describe *Khuanu*:

Hei hi ‘khua’ leh ‘vang’¹¹³ an tih ber chu a ni a. Malsawmna neitu, lei leh vana thuneihna sang ber changtu a ni. A kutah chuan malsawmna tinreng a awm avangin mi tinin an zah a, an thlamuanpui bawk a. An tawng chhan ber pawh a ni. Amaherawhchu hmeichhia a ni a, chu avang chuan ‘Khuanu’ an ti a ni. (46-47)

(This is what they principally called ‘*khua*’ and ‘*vang*.’ She is the benefactor, the keeper of the highest power on earth and in heaven. For in her hand are all the blessings, everyone adores and finds peace in her. She is the sole reason they speak. Nonetheless, she is called ‘*Khuanu*’ on account that she is a woman).

Hence, it is plausible to say that all these beings- *Lasi*, *Khuavang*, *Khuanu*, *Pathian*- permeated and formed the basis of the pre-Christian Mizo religious sacrificial worship for none of them can be taken out singly, rather all of them are

¹¹³ ‘protector’ and ‘caretaker’ or ‘caretaker’ and ‘protector;’ *vang* seems to have been added to *khua* to stress on the role of this spirit.

intricately interwoven in the ancient past. Regarding, *sakhua* or religion Dokhuma writes:

Pi leh puten *sakhua* an tih chu tawng chi hnih sa leh khua atanga lak kawp a ni a. Sa chu ‘siamtu’ bulpui hnam hrang hrangte siamtu a ni ber a. *Khua* erawh chu ‘vengtu, zui zeltu leh malsawmtu’ a ni ber a. Mizote chuan an sakhaw thil serh sang an hlanin ‘bia’ tih tawngkam an hmang lo va, an sakhua chu an be lo va, a hmana an hman avangin *Sakhaw hmang* an ti a ni. (43)

(What the ancestors called *sakhua* is an affixion of two words *sa* and *khua*. *Sa* is the supreme ‘creator,’ generally creator of all races. *Khua* on the other hand is chiefly the ‘protector, omnipresent and benefactor.’ When the Mizos offered sacrifices in their religious rite, they did not use the word ‘worship,’ rather they said ‘*to consume religion*’ since they ceremonially consumed the ritual offerings).

Pastor Liangkhaia discards the idea of the Mizo ancestors’ practice of worshipping demonic beings as under:

Kan sakhua takah chuan Mizo hi Ramhuai bia chu kan ni lo. Ramhuai kan biakna chu damlo thawina a ni a, tun laia damdawi hmannaah hian inthawi kan hmang mai a lo ni. *Sakhua* hi chu *Sa* leh *Khua* hi kan be ve ve a, chu chu kan sawi zawm a, “*Sakhua*” kan ti ta mai a lo ni. (Liangkhaia, *Mizo Awmdan Hlui* 9)

(At the core of our religion Mizo were not *Ramhuai* worshippers. We worshipped *ramhuai* to cure illness, we solely used propitiatory offering instead of modern-day medicine. As for the term *Sakhua*, since we worshipped both *Sa* and *Khua*¹¹⁴, by juxtaposing the two terms, we then came to say “*Sakhua*.”)

¹¹⁴ *Sa*- Creator; *Khua*- Protector or Benefactor.

At the heart of this religion, *khuavang* stands as a very important figure of worship. Nevertheless, in one of the Mizo folktales “Kungawrhi,” the protagonist Phawthira, a human, was much feared by the *khuavang* and even married one of them. (Zofa, *Mizo Thawnthu Vol. 1* (47-49). These intricacies of varied conceptions symbolize the hyper-activeness of the inherent unconscious aroused by a number of cultural practices under the influence of external spirits. Regardless of the names the ancient ascribed to certain beings for certain powers, there was always the knowledge of a Being above all beings because:

The God of love and the God of revenge, both the same God, is an ambiguous God. Only ambiguous thinking can reflect His reality. He is a mystery, and we think rightly about Him in the mystery and confusion of the subconscious rather than in the clear-cut definitions of the scholars. (Wurmbrand loc. 670)

3. Christianity and *Lasi*

Lalmachhuana Zofa does not deviate from the rendition of Zochhumpui Pa with regards to the ancient conception of *lasi*. In *Tawnmang Lasi*, he too includes them among *ramhuai* and unlike the latter he openly narrates their demonic nature. Almost a decade before Zofa was working on his serialization of *lasi* stories, James Dokhuma in his *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung (Tradition of the Ancient Mizo)* records about *lasi* as:

Lasi chu tlang lal zinga chhiar, nula hmeltha tak tak, thlarau tha mi, ramsa neitu, Lurh leh Tan tlang hmunpuia hmanng niin an sawi. (73)

(*Lasi* were counted among mountain lords, very beautiful damsels, and good spirits, and were reported to use Lurh and Tan as their central abode).

Dokhuma’s portrayal is slightly different. He writes that *huai* that dwelled in precipice were called *precipice-huai*, and those of them in the water, *water-huai* and so on. He goes on saying that the *huai* that dwelled in mountains were known as *tlang lal* or mountain lord, and were not called by the name *huai*; the ancestors used to refer to them saying ‘the lord of this mountain, the lord of that mountain.’ Of all the *huai*

these mountain lords have the vastest control, including the control over storms of rain and wind (70-71).

K. Zawla, in his *Mizo Pi Pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin (History of Mizo Ancestors and Their Descendants)*, categorizes *lasi* under *ramhuai* and *phung* (50) but likening them to *khuavang*. On the other hand, Pastor Zairema and Pastor Saiaithanga include them among *thlarau thate* (good spirits) not among *huai* or *ramhuai*.¹¹⁵ From the accounts of the aforesaid authors, it is clear that *lasi* is inseparable from goodness in the Mizo forefathers' conception; and the term *huai* or *ramhuai* might have been used to mean 'spirit' with greater tendency to evil than good or more probably *lasi* and *huai* are clustered together only after the appearance of Christianity. The perception that *lasi* are goodness in disguise as in the works of Lalhmachhuana Zofa originates due to the convergence of religious beliefs.

Thomas Keithley says that "not unfrequently a change of religious faith has invested with dark and malignant attributes beings once the objects of love, confidence, and veneration." (4) This idea seems to prove true with the evolving conception of *lasi* as well. *Huai* had always been feared in the pre-Christian Mizo world and are continued to be considered as evil beings in the Christianised culture. However, it is the *lasi* who were once venerated and are now considered as demonic beings. Even in Greek society, the fluidity of conception of the nymph or the *divine*, just like the *lasi* or the *pathian*, is perceptible when the present and the earlier community's musings are compared. In *Phaedrus* by Plato, Socrates addresses Phaedrus, "Do you not perceive that I am already overtaken by the Nymphs to whom you have mischievously exposed me?" (par. 88) He asks the question when he feels that he delivers his speech out of divine inspiration. Also, Plato lets Socrates refer to himself as "*a diviner*" (par. 92). W.R. Connor, in his study of nympholepsy, writes, "In Plato, nympholepsy betokens heightened awareness and eloquence," and is very different from "the tearing of clothes, the biting of lips, or convulsions and frenzies"

¹¹⁵ Zairema p. 76; Saiaithanga p.5.

which are attributives of demonic possessions (158). Again, regarding the association of Socrates and the nymphs, Anthony Kenny also states:

In English the word ‘nymphomaniac’ is most unfairly restricted to sexual obsession in females. The word translated ‘spirit’ is ‘daimon’, the word used by Plato for beings intermediate between gods and men, with some of the functions Christians were later to attribute to guardian angels. (Aristotle 14)

It can be stated that even in the ancient Mizo society some of the spirits whom they confronted must have really been good spirits whilst some were in the guise of goodness regardless of their given names. However, most of the Mizo narratives including the selected ones suggest that *lasi* are evil spirits in disguise.

In all the select narratives, the encounters between *lasi* and men are depicted as somehow desirable and beautiful. The attractiveness and the bewitchment of their relationship are enhanced by sexual relationships. More than the relationship itself, the reason for the Mizo ancestors’ commitment to the goddess of the wild is the expectation of a warm welcome and a good life after death in *pialral*. B. Lalthangliana writes of the forefathers’ greatest desire as:

Pi puten thlen an chak ber ‘Pialral’ kai theihna kawng chi hnih an nei a, chu chu ‘In lama Thangchhuah’ emaw, ‘Ram lama Thangchhuah’ emaw a ni. (Mizo Chanchin 45)

(The ancestors’ most desired destination could only be reached by two means, they are- either ‘*Thangchhuah from Home*’ or ‘*Thangchhuah from Forest*’).

The Mizos worshipped *lasi* to prosper them in hunting which would, in turn, enable them to go to the *pialral*. This was a better place than *Mithi Khua* or Dead Man’s Village, where ordinary people were believed to be destined, after the death of the physical body. *Lasi* stood between man and their eternal destination to distort the image of paradise by polluting their minds and letting them see the Fata Morgana like mirage for the eventual destruction of man, because in the ancient religious beliefs external grandeur always came before inner goodness:

Nakin lama chantha chan nana pawimawh pawh, mi tha mi dik nih lam a ni lo, nei zo leh ti thei nih new chauh a pawimawh a ni. Thih hnua mi aia ropuia awm nan dam laia mi bak sawn nih a tul a ni. (Saiithanga 55)

(To attain good status in time to come, being good or righteous was purportless, only riches and might were prioritised. To be mightier than others in the afterlife, it was important to achieve beyond others before death).

Getting to *pialral* was all about financial capability as in *In lama Thangchhuah* and physical strength as in *Ram lama Thangchhuah*, a very different belief from ‘a new heart’¹¹⁶ proclaimed by Christianity. The *lasi* favoured only men of great physical strength as shown in Zochhumpui Pa’s narratives. Despite the fact that fellow villagers profited from the meat brought home by a *pasaltha* towards the accomplishment of *Ram lama Thangchhuah*, the people in general were excluded to attain a life of comfort in *pialral*:

Mizo nun hluia pialral kai tur chuan ram lamah emaw in lamah emaw thangchhuah ngei tur a ni a, hei hi hmeichhia leh mi rethei tan chuan theih loh tluk a ni. (Zairema 234)

(In the ancient Mizo society, it is a must to *thangchhuah* from forest or from home in order to attain *pialral*, and this is close to impossible for women and poor people.)

Going beyond the limit of repressive sexual desire, some of the Mizo men were reported to have sexual affairs with *lasi* or “*khuavang*.” (Dokhuma 74-75) This passion for sex was an inspiring mechanism in the lives of the eternity-conscious men to form a chaotic paradise. A very critical aspect in the process of entering *Mithi Khua* without torture was the subordination of women in the society. It is reflected in the forefathers’ beliefs and practices to not get shot by *Pawl* at the gate of the *Mithi Khua*.

¹¹⁶ “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (NKJV, Eze. 36.26)

John Shakespeare writes the dead people's souls whom the gatekeeper of *Mithi Khua* cannot shoot at thus:

*Hlamzuih*¹¹⁷ he cannot shoot at, *Thangchhuah* he may not shoot at. Then he may not shoot at a young man who has enjoyed three virgins, nor at one who has enjoyed seven different young women even if they were not virgins; but women, whoever they may be, he always shoots at. (379)

It is worth noting that even years after Christianization of the land, there were still a number of tombstones on which were engraved the number of animals the *pasalthas* had killed and women they had slept with.

3.1. Chawngtinleri

Chawngtinleri is the most prominent *lasi* figure in Mizo folktales and the focal *lasi* figure in all the selected works. Her appearance as the first *lasi* to appear at the start of the first book of the selected works, *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana*, (15) marks the narratives as a *lasi* or *fairy* story, and manifestation about her as the Queen of *lasi* near the close of the fifth and final work, *Tawnmang Lasi 2*, (249) shows her infusive presence. The name of a spirit, 'Kuavang,' which Thomas Lewin translated as *God* or *the Great Spirit* in 1874 (74) is rendered as "Chawngtinleri" by P.C. Vanlalhruaia alias Pc Hras on his *YouTube* audio narration of a different version of the same folk-story published on 20 March 2019 (08:05-08:10). Even in the contemporary society, people are still expressing their longing for her as is evidenced in the chorus of one of the songs composed for her in 2020:

Chained by her beauty, her blessings and her curse
Freedom wasn't her choice to be
Not written in her fate, destined to rule over blessings
But her rise wasn't her dream, how my heart bleeds for you
The woman, the Queen Chawngtinleri, Chawngtinleri. (Varte 0:54-1:26)

¹¹⁷ An infant who died before reaching three months is called *hlamzuih*.

Nevertheless, this *lasi* or spirit who takes the name of a human being cannot be a good spirit. Her associations with other deformed beings, who snatched her away by force, contrasts the biblical idea of creation and love. Even her child, who is a goat-man, finds its counterpart in Roman faun or Greek satyr¹¹⁸. Prophet Isaiah while prophesying about the destruction of Babylon declares:

But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and *satyrs* shall dance there. (KJV, Isa. 13.21)

‘Satyrs’ is translated as ‘demons’ in The Living Bible. In chapter thirty-four verse three of the same book, ‘owl’ as deciphered in The King James Bible is translated as ‘lilith (night demon)’¹¹⁹ and ‘lamia’¹²⁰ in Amplified Bible and Douay-Rheims Bible respectively. The same context is rendered in the book of *Revelation* by the cry of an angel:

Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. (Rev. 18.2-3)

¹¹⁸ The satyrs mainly love to overindulge themselves in the realms of sex and drinking (Lissarrugue 220).

¹¹⁹ The creatures of the desert will encounter jackals. And the hairy goat will call to its kind; Indeed, Lilith (night demon) will settle there and find herself a place of rest. (Amplified Bible, Isa. 34.14)

¹²⁰ “And demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry out one to another, there hath the lamia lain down, and found rest for herself.” (Douay-Rheims Bible Isa. 34.14)

“*Saiyr*, other than rendered as satyr, is also translated as... ‘devils’ (Leviticus 17:7).” (“Mythical Animals” par. 2) Sexual immorality is mentioned again even in the said verse as: “And they shall no more offer their sacrifices unto devils, after whom they have gone a whoring.” (The King James Bible, Lev. 17.7)

Again, this lustful woodland god’s nature does not stray from the eponyms derived after the children of Aphrodite who:

... was thought to be a goddess, who living in continual infidelity to her husband, symbolized promiscuity... In Greek mythology we are told that when she was thus exposed, she fled, covering her face in shame. But out of her illicit relationships were born two children, Eros and Phobos, from which we derive the words *eroticism* and *fear* -one an insatiable appetite, the other a paralysing emotion. (Zacharias 161)

Throughout the primary works, Chawngtinleri is never presented as a human being but purely as a *lasi*. She lures the men with her beauty and consumes them in secret. Other *lasi* under her chieftainship are also depicted as accursed creatures, their depressive nature and fondness for darkness are stressed in the character of Thachungchuangi. The Queen along with her trains, though portrayed as almost unblemished yet sexually immoral, appeared to be spirits of lust ever working to lead humans away from the supreme Creator.

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ABSTRACT

**UNMASKING THE FAIRIES: A STUDY OF SELECT MIZO
NARRATIVES**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & HUMANITIES**

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Unmasking the Fairies: A Study of Select Mizo Narratives

ABSTRACT

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Under the Supervision of Prof. K.C. Lalthlamuani

Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Philosophy in English of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

This study deals with the pre-Christian and the Christianized conception of *lasi* in select works of Zochhumpui Pa and Lalhmachhuana Zofa respectively. The interaction and the clash of these concepts are important aspects of this work; the association of *lasi* and human beings at different stages of Mizo history, while keeping in mind the nature and the different roles of the Greco-Roman *nymphs*, and the *fairy* in general in the western world is also a prominent feature. *Tan Tlang Lasi leh Pasaltha Thangliana (Lasi of the Tan Mountain and Pasaltha Thangliana)* (2016), *Chhaktiang Kawlrwn (Pasaltha Thanhranga leh Lasi Nula Varparhi) [To the Far East (Pasaltha Thanhranga and Lasi Dame Varparhi)]* (2018) and *Galaxy (Pasaltha Thansanga leh Lasi Nula Galaxy) [Galaxy (Pasaltha Thansanga and Lasi Dame Galaxy)]* (2019) by Zochhumpui Pa; and *Tawnmang Lasi 1 (Lasi of the Dream)* (2012) and *Tawnmang Lasi 2* (2013) by Lalhmachhuana Zofa have been selected for the study.

The word fairies in the title of this dissertation specifically means *lasi*¹ or very attractive spiritual beings that dwell in the forest, usually feminine in gender. It is used since the Mizo word, *lasi*, is closest in meaning to the English word fairy which in turn is synonymous with the Greek nymph. Alexander Pope rendered ‘nymphs’ as “fairies” (24.776) in his translation of Homer’s *Iliad* which appeared in 1720, possibly because he saw the similarity of the two folkloristically, historically and contemporaneously apart from the consideration of syllabic and rhythmic pattern of his verse. Again, one of the best Mizo translators and dictionarians J.F. Laldailova perceiving the closeness of fairy and *lasi*, translated the English word fairy as “*lasi (nula leh tlangval)*.”² (194)

In this study, fairies are spiritual beings who have been taking a part in Mizo folktales and stories for hundreds of years usually as females of exquisite beauty. However, there are also texts which are called fairy-tales where only the ideas and ideals remain but no actual fairy characters are to be found. In the select texts, fairy or *lasi* characters still occupy a very significant place, from the conception of them as gods to the perception of them as devils.

The word fairy in a general sense is so vast that there cannot be a definitive definition as Tolkien says, “Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible.” (Tolkien 10) Nonetheless, they are perceived by people and stories about them are told abundantly by different generations across the globe. When the term fairy is narrowed down to *lasi*, eternal beings that have always occupied a very important place in Mizo oral and written narratives, their spirituality becomes more lucid. In contemporary Mizo society, just like the rest of the ever-developing regions, what was once so distinct in the belief system is undergoing immense changes, the *lasi* have also turned fantastical in their attires, affairs and nature. Even psychologically, to an extent, *huai*³ and *lasi* are the representations of the fear, the fantasy and the aspirations of the Mizo ancestors and the people of the present day.

For the exploration of the psychological realm of the narratives and to link certain events, behaviours and conceptions which cannot be sufficiently connected historically C.G. Jung’s *archetypes* or *the collective unconscious* is used. To study the creations of the fantastical realm, Tolkien’s theory of *the secondary world*, and Forster’s theory of *the sideshow*, and *fallen man’s nature* are employed.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In earlier Greek society, the nymphs or nereids were venerated; and even sacrifices were offered to them. The pre-Christian Mizos did the same for *lasi*. They believed that *lasi* were benefactresses in the hunting of wild animals. This conception often undergoes change after a change in one’s religion. Though being very friendly with humans and appearing to be caretaker of animals and nurturer of nature, Christianised observation shows them to be workers of illusion and “cheaters of men by ‘fantasy’.” (Tolkien 14). Their outward bodily perfection is often tarnished by their enticing nature that could eventually bring about the downfall of men. In “The Meaning of Fairy Tale within the Evolution of Culture” by Jack Zipes, they are shown to be witch-like using their supernatural powers “to test or contest ordinary mortals.” (225)

The excessive beauty of the nymphs or the fairies scattered all over the Greek and Roman stories reached its zenith in Narcissus who rejected the love of another nymph, Echo, causing her to waste away. Achelous figures as the father of the nymphs or the nereids though many others are also named depending on the region. When Hercules broke off one of the horns of Achelous the “Naiades Hesperiae” or Italian nymphs took it and consecrated it by filling it with fruit and scented flowers, which then became the ‘horn of plenty’ or ‘cornucopia’ (Ovid 9.87-88). Zeus too is considered in Greek folklore as the father of the nymphs (Larson 4). Not only is Jupiter their father-head and ruler but lover as well since he is often seen lying with the mountain nymphs. (Ovid 3.361-367).

The term fairy is much more general and diverse than that of nymph owing, among many, to the fact that the people in Britain “are racially so mixed.” (Briggs 270) The term is associative of all sorts of creatures that are considered unworldly, here, the folkloric other-worldly beings of the Scots, the Irish, the Welsh, the Celts, tincture of the Saxonians, the elements of the Romans and the Greeks, are all drawn in. It is in the work of Geoffrey Chaucer that the nymphs and the fairies are gathered in one stream. In the “The Merchant’s Tale” of *The Canterbury Tales* (1400), Pluto, husband of Persephone or Proserpine queen of the underworld, is depicted as “kyng of Fayerye” (983) in hell. The belief which was once held so close to the soul and livelihood of the people, after much experimentation, caricaturing and moralizing reached its climax in the 19th-century work of Andrew Lang’s twelve books of twelve colours. The pervasiveness of the fairy beings, even when there is not a single appearance of them, is substantiated by the inclusion of “A Voyage to Lilliput,” an extraction of one of the stories from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), in the *Blue Fairy Book* (1889).

When many of the civilised regions of the world were discarding their beliefs in the existence of fairies as spiritual beings, the Mizos, who entered the thickly forested hills of Mizoram, north-east India, in the late 17th and early 18th century from Myanmar, were still worshipping and offering sacrifices to these spiritual beings of immense beauty and of extraordinary powers, considered to be gods of wild animals. The Mizo ancestors, believing that *lasi* had the power to prosper hunters in their

hunting of wild animals, used to offer piglets to appease them (Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* 52). The appearance of the Christian Missionaries and the Christianization of the land brought an end to the sacrificial offerings to *lasi* and *huai* and to many other pre-Christian paganistic objects of worship.

The primary works for this research were written only after a hundred years of the emergence of Christianity in Mizoram (1894). In the Mizo literary history beginning from the year Christianity made its entry to 1994, out of almost two thousand books published, *Aukhawk Lasi* (1983) by Lalzuithanga is the only book that has a direct link to and used *lasi* as its title. The short story “Aukhawk Lasi” included in the book was supposedly written in 1950 (Thanmawia par. 4) the year the author died. Some of the best well developed oral *lasi* tales incorporated in the study include- “Chawngtinleri,” “Chhuihthanga,” and “Thasiama.”

CHAPTER II: THE PRE-CHRISTIAN CONCEPT: LASI AND HUAI IN ZOCHHUMPUII PA’S NARRATIVES

Zochhumpuii Pa’s works delineate the Mizo beliefs and perceptions of *lasi* and their affairs with men from the late 17th century to the last decade of the 19th century. They portray the pre-Christian conception of *lasi* within the Mizo society. The three narratives by him selected for the study directly or indirectly have connections to the Tan mountain⁴. This place is the centre of the narratives where the protagonists’ minds point to and rest, and the mountain, from the olden days to the present, is often called *lasi khawpui* (the city of the fairies). Hence, these narratives put together may be called *Tan tlang trilogy*.

None of the *lasi* characters in the novels, at any point of time, caused any harm to human beings physically, although reciprocated emotional pain and longing are found abundantly. Rather they are always at war with *huai* whenever humans’ lives are endangered by the presence of these evil beings, hence, drawing a clear distinction between these two spiritual beings. *Lasi* are like some of the friendly nymphs whom Martin Nilsson termed “gentle and benevolent aspect of nature.” (15) They live in the secondary world full of enchantment and luxury incomparable with the impoverished primary world of reality.

The *lasi* characters are governed by regulations to which they comply as good as possible throughout these stories. Although their human lovers are not always happy in the application, yet none of these laws is meant to bring harm to human beings. The most sacred of these guiding laws in their affairs with men is for the preservation of the sanctity of marriage. The *lasi*, like Queen Mab in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), can enter into the mind and be a controller of human dreams. Many of the experiences that the *pasaltha*⁵ had with the *lasi* often occurred in dreams. The inseparability of dreams from reality plays a very important role in the construction and interpretation of the works.

One of the most important roles of these *lasi* in the ancient Mizo belief is the conception that their blessings upon a man can make that person's life more comfortable than that of the others in *pialral* or *paradise*. For this reason, the Mizos offer sacrificial piglets in one of their religious worship practices known as *Dawino Chhui* (Siama 61). The piglet is offered to the *lasi* to prosper them in their hunting since all of the following animals are needed to be killed- elephant, gaur, bear, stag, wild-hog, flying-fox, eagle and king cobra- in order to become a *Thangchhuah Pa*⁶, whose status is desired by all the pre-Christian Mizo men. The reasons for desiring such accomplishment are:

- 1) In the afterlife they will be fed with *faisa*⁷ in *pialral*.
- 2) To avoid Pawla *sai*⁸ while on the way to *pialral*.
- 3) To be revered and held high during their lifetime. (Zawla, 42)

All the *pasaltha* protagonists in the selected novels of Zochhumpuii Pa are *Thangchhuah Pa* whose fulfilments are due to the help and blessings they received from the *lasi*.

The ancient Mizo forefathers considered the *lasi* as gods and it was very important to be on good terms with them. Moreover, they were believed to rule over the destiny of not only the animals but also of the humans, and their security and comfort on earth and the life to come after death. Due to the belief that *lasi* were faithful to their words, the Lusei sub-clan 'Chhakchhuak' worshipped the Lurh and

Tan mountains (Zofa, *Mizo Thawnthu Vol. 1* 31). Lines were even composed and passed down for generations in reverence for the *lasi* Queen thus:

Buannelah ramsate an piang
Chawngtinleri 'n a siam.
(Born were beasts arrayed in Buannel⁹
Made by Chawngtinleri).

CHAPTER III: THE SPLIT IMAGES: LASI IN LALHMACHHUANA ZOFA'S NARRATIVES

In *Tawnmang Lasi 1* and *Tawnmang Lasi 2*, Zofa exhibits changes in the appearance and nature of the *lasi* after the people of the land have embraced Christianity over paganism, shifting their faith from *lasi* and *huai* to Jesus Christ in order to attain the *pialral* or paradise. Through these works, the author presents far-reaching permeation of the life of the people by these spiritual beings as he writes:

The story is designed keeping in mind the life of the Mizos in the nineteen fifties, when we, the Mizos, have become Christians, and have said '*the gospel has cast away the demons from our land,*'... yet the *lasi* still occupied a very significant place in the life of the *pasalthas* even during the nineteen eighties, and in those days, there were still some to be regarded as *lasi-zawl*. (*Tawnmang Lasi 1* 9)

The most striking aspect of the two novels is the coherency of the identity of the *huai* and the *lasi* given by the author. Not a line in the *Tan tlang trilogy* mentions the responsibility of *huai* as caretaker of animals. Contrastingly, in both the books of *Tawnmang Lasi* *huai* are portrayed as having the duty of watching over animals, moreover, animals under their care are often depicted as insolently prideful. The new belief Zofa tries to assert is that the *lasi* would take up forms not only to attract and please human beings but to frighten them as well. In the Christianized Mizo culture, their distinctiveness is pluralized day by day. Dokhuma's rendition of *phung*¹⁰ have always been conceived as having grody appearances. Because of their excessive beauty, they are irresistible *sideshows* distinct from the mundane world of reality whose prize could even cost lives.

In Zofa's works, guilt, sadness, and a sense of loss always surround these beings with the *lasi* having become quite adulterous. It is firmly believed that *lasi-zawl* and *lasi* often have actual lovemaking. Jorgensen's statement, "It is sexual desire, often intertwined with the desire for power over another human being, that comes to the forefront of eroticized fairy tales," (28) seems true with all the no-younger-than three hundred years old latently erotic Mizo *lasi* tales and the stories produced in the 21st century. Sexuality is the most important aspect of all the ramifications of these selected narratives implicitly portrayed in Zochhumpuii Pa's works and explicitly in Zofa's works. The little *lasi* girl in *Tawnmang Lasi* has the appearance of a child but her intention though irksome is "to sleep with men", especially with the hunter-warriors (Dokhuma 272). The parallel essentiality of the *lasi* and Fauna can be discerned through the words of Jack Zipes:

Like many goddesses or divinities, Fauna had a split image and was often associated with courtesans and free sex. At the same time, she was known to be a model of chastity and modesty and rarely left her domain. (230)

The *lasi* in Zofa's works are no longer the kind and benevolent gods but have turned into vengeful evil spirits. These seemingly good spiritual beings who they thought would lead them, in the ancient paganistic world, to *paradise* would, according to Christ's teaching, lead them now to hell. The ancient conception of the *lasi* and their affairs, according to Christianity, is distortions of creation. The changes in the Mizo belief system can be perceived through Laithangpuia's poem:

*Kan pi puten Sanghal khuavang tualvawk lo ti,
Tan lasi siam a ni lo va, Chawngtinlerin a siam hek lo;
Immanuela Lal siam a lo ni, kan tan a rawn phal thin,
Lal hmangaih kan chang e.* (qtd. in Ramhuai 227)

*(Forebearers of ours named wild-pig khuavang's¹¹ pet,
No Tan lasi made them beasts, nor were they made by Chawngtinleri;
King Immanuel is their maker, He bestows them to us freely,
Loved are we by the Lord).*

CHAPTER IV: FALLEN MAN'S FANTASY: LASI AND THE MIZO FOLK

Man's vagary has a lot to do with *lasi* and tales about them. The authors while incorporating folk characters and other ingredients that have always been a part of Mizo culture since prehistoric time, there are, at the same time, intrusion of foreign elements in a number of instances in the novels which do not necessarily have cultural signification in the traditional sense. One such example is the names given by both authors for their *lasi* characters. Apart from the folkloric *lasi* name Chawngtinleri, the rest of the names –Khuavelchhingi, Galaxy, Varparhi or Maxy, Zonunmawii, Hawilopari, Kumtluangpari and Thachungchuangi– are all concoctions of the authors to suit their nature, behaviour, and to enrich and give freshness to the stories.

In order to make a better world, the author of *Tan tlang trilogy* rebuilds the past world of the Mizos by revitalising a very depressive age using fantasy as a technique. The historical setting of the three works falls between 1840 to 1890. This period during which the author created heaven on earth is not as blissful and ideal as portrayed. Including Thansanga the youngest of the *pasaltha* protagonists, historically, all of the hunter-warriors were in one of the harshest age because of the invasions the people confronted racially and spiritually. Pulling out the most beautiful strands from Mizo turbulent historical era and ideologies, even horrifying raids are used by the author for a family reorganisation of his characters. It is the inclusion of the fairies which makes the past world so attractively liveable as these beings can take men away from the mundane life of reality to their secondary world of fantasy filled with luxury and beauty. However, it is a must for the *pasaltha* to pay an extra price or to tread the extra mile to enter into the fairyland.

The interactions of the material and the immaterial are also witnessed through the evolution of cultural beliefs expressed in narratives in which fantastical elements abound; because human psyche is an entity where the physical and the spiritual become indifferentiable. The closeness of the two worlds is expressed by Jung when he says that “spirit and matter may well be forms of one and the same transcendental being.” (212)

Jung's psychoanalytical descriptions of nixie as a portion of anima adheres extensively to the distinctive nature of Mizo cultural belief in supernatural beings especially these spirits with a bearing of femininity, such as *Phungpuinu*¹² and *lasi*; spirits of their Greek and English counterparts are no exception. Anima is the feminine side of the archetypes or the collective unconscious. The incomprehensibility of the contents or the archetypes of this centre of man are depicted as "genuine symbols precisely because they are ambiguous, full of half-glimpsed meanings, and in the last resort inexhaustible." (38) From the Judeo-Christian view, the anima or the archetypes can be understood as the nest of the knowledge of good and evil- the serenely created self which had been polluted after the fall of man. The destructiveness of *lasi* as a substance of the human psyche is due to the disobedience of man to the Creator.

The collusion of the inner man's limitless desire and demonic being's temptation's permeability is so much so that even Mizo people are now harking back the attractiveness of *lasi* which had been witnessed by the *pasaltha* in the past. Although they are already known to be "the chaotic urge to life" (Jung 30), yet their veiled beauty and loveliness is expressed as a symbol of fallen man's insatiable desire even after Christianization thus:

Amah pawm reng chung a, zut zut chungin ka ngai em em a, ka lungte a leng lawk tlat a, kan inhmuh rualin kan inthen hun tur ka ngaihtuah thleng a, ka khua a har lawk tlat thin. Kim lo tlatin ka inhria a, thil kim lo erawh eng ber nge ka hre si lo. (*Tawnmang Lasi I 31*)

Even whilst embracing and caressing her, longing fills me for the hereafter. The moment we meet, I am reminded of the parting hour and feel lonely for the time to come. I feel empty (in her presence) yet I do not know what is missing).

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Lasi are no less graceful in appearance than the Greek's Artemis, the Roman's Diana, or the damsel who took away Lanval (France 56). The parallel pervasive conception of these beings is witnessed throughout the world. Their peculiar set of eyes which is often reported to be vertical by some of the Mizo ancestors goes beyond

the Mizo folk's accounts as in D.L.R Lorimer's study of the supernatural beings in Gilgit¹³ region wherein certain beings are recorded as having the axis of their eyes "set vertically." (519) The *lasi* beings as weavers also finds their counterparts in Britain as "the spinning fairy" or "Habetrot." (Briggs 271)

The ancestors' custom of sacrificial offering to *lasi* to prosper them in hunting is not mentioned in any of the select works by Zochhumpuii Pa or Lalhmachhuana Zofa since they are preoccupied with composing fantastical relationships between men and *lasi*. However, barely a hundred years back, sacrifices to *lasi* were always a part of the religious rituals. Three thousand years back even the Greeks used to offer this kind of sacrifice to nereids or fairy as seen in *Odyssey* (13.391-398).

Apart from scanty oral narratives, the Mizo ancestors' conception of *lasi* are disseminated and made known to the general people by writers all of whom are Christians. These writers refute or at most give vague hints of the godliness of *lasi* in pre-Christian Mizo belief as god of man. Nonetheless, the Mizo ancestors worshipped *lasi* in order to reach *pialral* or paradis after the death of the physical body. Even a folk song goes:

Lasiin ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Sikhawthangan ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Sikhawvaran ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Hmawngfianga thovin ka zeltluang lo chhang ang che,
Ni zung rawn zui che,
Thla zung rawn zui che,
Nuntluang tumpui ang che,
Pangdam tumpui ang che. (Lalthangliana 418)

(May you lasi being answer the piglet,
May you Sikhawthanga answer the piglet,
May you Sikhawvara answer the piglet,
Arise from the banyan and answer the piglet,
Follow the sun's beam,
Follow the moon's beam,

*May you land with good life,
May you land with good health).*

The *lasi* favoured only men of great physical strength as shown in the select narratives and stood between men and their eternal destination to cause inequality since:

Mizo nun hluia pialral kai tur chuan ram lamah emaw in lamah emaw thangchhuah ngei tur a ni a, hei hi hmeichhia leh mi rethei tan chuan theih loh tluk a ni. (Zairema 234)

(In the ancient Mizo society, it is a must to *thangchhuah* from forest or from home in order to attain *pialral*, and this is close to impossible for women and poor people.)

Getting to *pialral* was all about financial capability as in *In lama Thangchhuah* (*Thangchhuah* from Home) and physical strength as in *Ram lama Thangchhuah* (*Thangchhuah* from Forest), a very different belief from ‘a new heart’¹⁴ proclaimed by Christianity.

Chawngtinleri is the most prominent *lasi* figure in Mizo folktales and the focal *lasi* figure throughout all the selected works. The name of a spirit, “Kuavang,”¹⁵ which Thomas Herbert Lewin¹⁶ translated as “God” or “the Great Spirit” (74) in 1874 is rendered as “Chawngtinleri” by P.C. Vanlalhruaia alias Pc Hras on his YouTube audio narration of a different version of the same folk-story published on 20 March 2019 (08:05-08:10).

Notes

1. Very attractive spiritual beings of human size, who can take different form at will, dwell in the forest, usually feminine in gender, and whose path often cross with that of *pasalthas* or hunter-warriors.
2. *Nula* means damsel; *tlangval* signifies young man.
3. Evil spirits who supposedly dwell in stream, cave and banyan tree of the forest.
4. A legendary mountain in Mizoram. Coordinates: 23°8'9''N 93°17''E.
5. A hunter-warrior.
6. A title given to a man who distinguished himself by giving a certain number of public feast or by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, which is regarded a stairway to *pialral*.
7. It literally means milled-rice; implying that they will no longer have to toil for food but will be provided freely and abundantly because of the feat they had achieved during their life on earth.
8. Pawl is the gatekeeper of *Mithi Khua* or Dead Man's Village; sai means to shoot. If the spirit of the dead is shot by Pawl's bow, the wound of the pellet will get sore for three years.
9. A naturally vast area of grasslands surrounded by thick forests where wild beasts abounded in ancient times, it is located within the territory of Lentlang village in Myanmar. Coordinates: 23°16'30.8" N 93°31'03.2" E. Chawngtinleri is supposed to have ruled as the *Queen* of animals in this region.
10. "A ghost, spirit, goblin, ogress, bogey. ~ was black and large who had the power of causing epileptics." (Vanlalngheta 390)
11. Often interchangeably used with *lasi*.
12. Same as *phung*.
13. The capital city of Gilgit-Baltistan, a territory forming the northern region of Pakistani administered Kashmir.
14. Same as *khuavang*.
15. A British administrative officer and a linguist. Mizos called him Thangliana.
16. "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." (*The Holy Bible*, Eze. 36.26)

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