

ABSTRACT

NUCHHUNGI RENTHLEI: AN ANALYTICAL READING OF MIZO
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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

EVELYN ZORAMTHARI

MZU REGISTRATION NO. :- 1170 OF 2006- 2007

M.PHIL. REGISTRATION NO. :- MZU/M.Phil./584 of 29.05.2020



DEPARTMENT OF MIZO

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

SEPTEMBER, 2022

Chapter V

Conclusion

After the entire land and hills of the Mizo were enlightened by the Christian mission brought by the western missionaries, their system of beliefs and values changed drastically. The attention and care that they had started to show towards children fairly aligned with the gospel they had embraced. As children were given prior importance in the church and schools, good teachers were assigned for them. Nuchhungi was among the few who paved way for the Mizo children in this matter. The works she had done and the literary works she had contributed are not only interesting but are of great value. For this reason, the stories and songs she had written and collected for children will be increasingly valuable for the time to come.

Nuchhungi's literary works occupy an important place in the field of academics. Its worth and values are immeasurable. The highest stage of education is now accessible for the Mizo and research can be done in Mizo subject. Nuchhungi was the one who took the initial step for this progress. She wrote her literary works in Mizo vernacular language and compiled into school textbook. Her books were titled *Primer, Serkawn Graded Reader Book I, II and III*. At first, the Christian missionaries enlightened the dark world of the Mizo by educating them and creating alphabet for them. This helped them know the values of education. Though schools were established for the Mizo they did not have textbook for Mizo subject. So, Nuchhungi made textbooks for school students and enhanced their learning. She showed them the right path of education and taught them how to follow it.

Nuchhungi was deeply concerned about the well-being of children. Through her literary works she was trying to inculcate in them the values of hardwork and certain other qualities that can help them attain loyalty and become a good citizen. The children's songs that the Mizo had during the primitive era were mostly games songs. These songs were already outdated and it could no longer excite or delight children. For this reason Nuchhungi composed poems and songs that will be interesting for them and simplify the words she used in a way that the children could understand. This makes her an important figure who paved way for the development of Mizo Children's poetry and songs. The stories and songs she had written and collected for the children will always be helpful in imparting life lessons to children of the present and the future years.

Majority of books written about the Mizo and other Mizo literary works were mostly written in a way only the adult readers could comprehend. Nuchhungi's literary works, on the other hand, have its own distinctiveness as they are specifically written for children. She used simple words and sentences for the children to have a better understanding of her stories and to register it in their mind easily. Moral messages were always inculcated in each of her songs and stories, and apart from that, important information was also added in relation to what is mentioned in her songs and stories. This had marked the distinctiveness of her works from other literary works. Thus, the works done by Nuchhungi, who was the author of the literary works which carries moral lesson and which expresses Mizo culture in a comprehensible manner, was no doubt remarkable.

Ever since the advent of the written script, amongst children literature and poetry, Renthlei's contribution may be considered as the greatest. Renthlei compiled and prepared textbooks or learning books for children, compose poems and proses for every level, suitable for their respective ages. As a teacher, Renthlei taught her students acting through plays and skits and never neglecting the physical educational aspects through games and sports. None could surpass Renthlei's contribution in this field as she truly was at the forefront and simultaneously the forerunner of the field in Mizo literature. From the study of her Life and Works in Chapter II, it is revealed that her songs and story collection books are indeed good and reliable books which can enlarge the knowledge of children. They can guide children towards maturity, give them a wisdom of life and can be a good entertainer for children. In addition, they are also instrumental in transmitting the knowledge of Mizo culture, history and tradition.

Children's literature comprises of songs and stories. As these songs and stories are created to delight and engage children, the language used has to be simple enough for the children to understand. The stories and verses of the songs should also be clear and concise. In the same way, Nuchhungi's children's songs are composed using simple words and the verse of each song is short and concise. It also stands as a source of entertainment and the means through which children keep themselves engaged. Nuchhungi's "Children's Song" followed proper rhythmical pattern and were written in simple words. It did not have many verses and each verse were not excessively long. From the study of her Children's poetry from Chapter III, it is clear that her songs were instructive and effective in instilling ethical values in the children. Besides, her songs not only served to entertain children but also engaged

them in learning. B. Lalthangliana in “Naupang Literature” wrote that when most English children’s literature published, gratification of the mind is greater kept in mind rather than lessons (93). According to H. Laldinmawia, “Children’s literature and all other literary works arises not as a lessons for its readers but rather for the gratification of the readers, satisfaction, lightness, and celebration of life” (1). Children’s literatures similarly are meant to promote a sense of gratification of the mind, arousing the mind with their inquisitive wonders; rather than boring them with lessons. In this field, Nuchhing’s work are exemplary, composing them to be simple, fun, and gratifying, and at the same time with hints of guidance, instructions and lessons for life ahead.

Many of Nuchhungi’s songs reflected Mizo custom, culture and practises. Shifting cultivation was the major occupation of the Mizo during the primitive period. In her songs Nuchhungi again gave a realistic picture of the socio-cultural life of the Mizo, what they did for a living, how they engaged themselves in their everyday task and how they tended the jhum. For those children who never experienced the simple rustic life of the Mizo, her songs become a source of information which can enable them to understand and visualize the true picture of the Mizo early ways of life. Nuchhungi was never ashamed of the life and occupation of the Mizo forefathers, instead she advised children to know and appreciate the beauty of it through her songs. She constantly told them to love the land they have dwelled in and to follow the right path in life.

Nuchhungi prioritized animal conservation as she loved them dearly. She, for the most part appreciated and perceived nature differently from other songwriters and

poets. In Children's literature dangerous and terrifying things have to be defeated or conquered. If not, they have to be interpreted in an appealing way. Nuchhungi did the same in her literary works and remained positive in her way of presenting different subjects. Apart from that, she always found goodness in every bad, less attractive and terrifying things that are known. As her songs were written for children, she always helped them look on the bright side of things. Using words that can be easily understood by children she arranged her songs beautifully.

Children are naturally curious and interested in insects and they oftenly asked questions about them. Knowing this, Nuchhungi presented ants and fireflies in the most delightful and appreciative manner. Considering the manner in which she represented insects, one can learn the universality of how she observed and appreciated nature. It is also found that many of her songs also depicted the immorality of meaningless killing of animals and other countless violence meted out towards animals. Understanding the values and beauty of God's creation and the glory of God himself, she believed that showing compassion towards animals is the duty of humans and failure of doing so will be disrespectful to God. She therefore, used her songs as a platform to plead all the Mizo to give up this cruelty.

Nuchhungi lived with the western missionaries from childhood till she grew up as an adult. Though educated in western lifestyle and being under the control of the white men, she rendered a great service for to motherland by writing remarkable poems, songs and stories where she reflected Mizo cultural values and beliefs, as well as their myth. She was a patriot who loved her land dearly and who always

wanted to contribute for the progress of her land. She was among the first to cultivate the seeds of patriotism in the minds of the Mizo.

In most progressive countries, children are always appreciated and are given prior importance. Literature such as Nursery Rhymes and chorus are specifically composed for them and these songs and poems encapsulates their simple yet important ways of thinking and how they understand the world. Instructive and motivational books with ethical values are written to guide them to the right track of life. Considering the early Mizo society and their way of life, one can see the lesser appreciation and attention that they had given to the children. From this, one can understand how children are not given much importance in primitive Mizo society. As schools were not available for them to attend, they spent their free time and entertained themselves with *Pawnto Hla* (Game Song). The tales of their grandparents and their own parents served moral purpose and listening to such tales was their only means of acquiring moral education.

From the study of her Children game songs from Chapter IV, it can be said that Nuchhungi always wanted to safeguard Mizo culture. For this reason she did her best in collecting Mizo children games and songs. In the changing life of the Mizo, traditional Mizo game known as 'pawnto' is no longer in practice. As the new generations have different new games, majority of Mizo children are not familiar with *pawnto* and *pawnto hla* (game song). For this reason Nuchungi felt that Mizo traditional games will soon vanish and to prevent that she collected Mizo children's games and game songs.

The games and game songs she collected mirrors the priority she had given to children. For them to learn it easily, she arranged the games and games song she collected in a simple manner. She knew that playing games was not only healthy for children, it made their life less stressful; it helped them in making new friends and have many other benefits for them. Being a teacher, she understood their feelings and knew how to think about what they will need.

Narrative pieces written in a lyrical form or songs written based on folktales are popular among the western cultures. Nuchhungi also wrote many songs carrying narratives of Mizo folktales and these songs are greatly useful in preserving the folk narratives of the Mizo. The songs she composed were not written out of nostalgia, nor were it the expression of her emotions. As majority of her songs were written for children she avoided difficult words and opted for simple words which can be easily comprehended. Each of her songs is given separate tune and the tunes of some songs were even arranged in a way that could be expressed through gesture.

Looking into various prose and poetry of the Mizo one can understand the trivial role that children played in Mizo literature. In stories where they had made their appearances, we can see their sufferings and misfortune. Though they were constantly guided to have a better life, they were always ignored by the adults. 'Children smelled like puppy' was as common phrase that demonstrates how negligent adults were toward children. As this was their status in the community, only few were concerned about their future. They lived a simple life in their own world which was indeed small. Besides their role of imparting happiness in the family they did not have important status in society. From the study of folktales from

Serkawn Graded Readers book, it is shown that children of widows and the poor were disdained and mistreated the most. The condition of children in the tales they had told unfold the fact that the ethical code of '*tlawmngaihna*' which was honoured by the Mizo forefathers did not happen to be in full practise. At the same time, class distinction which was assumed to be absent in Mizo society was also proven wrong. In the tales of *Liandova te unau*, *Rairahtea*, *Mauruangi*, *Rahtea*, and *Thailungi* the pain and loneliness endured by the children can be clearly seen. The other findings in this research is that Nuchhungi's collection of folktale, on the other hand, is useful in teaching what is right from what is wrong. As Nuchhungi herself underwent poverty and many other obstacles in completing her education, she understood the condition of the poor children and had done her best in helping those who wanted to study like her.

In similar to other tales, the tale of *Sichangneii* told the story of *Sichangneii* (winged beauty) who did not love her children and husband and who left them instantly as soon as she found her wings. Besides, in the tales of *Chala leh Thangi*, *Duhmanga leh Dardini* and *Chhawtuineihlala leh Tuanpuii*, one can learn how love was honoured and valued in the primitive Mizo society. Every story has its own messages to convey and each message comprises of difficulties and challenges in life. Likewise, Nuchhungi's children's stories convey messages which disclose the various aspects of life and what had happened in human life. Moreover, the various themes of her stories teach an important life lessons to children.

As specified in Nuchhungi's *Serkawn Graded Readers*, "To indicate or teach the right and ideal course of life" is the core principle of the different set of morals

and values embraced by the Mizo ancestors. It includes important teachings on the significance of willingness to sacrifice one's life for loved ones, the futility of fighting over the possession of anything and how it can bring about unfortunate result, the disadvantages of being slothful, the viciousness of a stepmother, the possibility of becoming successful for the poor orphan through hardwork, and the immorality of blaming others for one's own mistake.

Though the primitive Mizo were identified as savage and uncivilized, their thoughts, visions and way of life are more intelligent than as perceived. They developed remarkable folk literature such as folk songs, tales, proverbs etc. which provides an insight into their cultural traits, ideals, behaviours and way of thinking. As these literatures were primarily generated to instruct and guide children to the right course of life, they are greatly valuable for the Mizo children.

Nuchhungi's short stories are useful and valuable just as fables. They stand as an important guidance for life. She framed the sentences of her stories in a way that would be appropriate for the readers. Moreover, complex sentences are also added to enhance the sentence construction skills of the students. This in turn will help children in constructing sentences of their own and multiply the creativity level of the children. The study of Nuchhungi's short stories from Chapter IV revealed that similar to her Children's song, Nuchhungi also wrote her stories to give advice and teach moral lesson. Besides writing about tales inherited from the Mizo forefathers, she wrote stories which can guide children's mind towards the right path just as Aesop's tales did. Looking into her stories, one can understand the importance of being obedient, hardworking and loyal. The moral lessons in her tales are

instrumental till today and are studied by students of lower classes. Nuchungi belonged to the time when cleanliness was not yet rooted in the community life of the Mizo. For this reason, she voiced out the values and importance of cleanliness through one of her stories “Zovi Thu”.

The other findings in this research is that Nuchhingi’s folktales collection played a significant role for the development of Children’s literature. Nuchhingi stood as a pioneer in Mizo folktales collection and many writers who came to know the values and importance of Mizo folktales followed her footsteps. From times immemorial, stories were told and were orally transmitted to the new generation. As Nuchhingi had a keen interest in this process and was deeply concerned about the future of Mizo children, she collected the orally transmitted tales and put it in written forms. Her stories have been passed on to the new generations and children of the past and the present have learnt it as part of their classroom lesson. This helped them recognize the values of Mizo folktales.

Looking into the various children’s stories penned down by Nuchhingi one can understand that her stories can be easily comprehended, and it contained moral teachings which can be easily followed by children. Her stories were not just made-up narratives, rather they followed a meaningful pattern in rendering moral values and education to the children of her age and of the present age. Moreover, the appealing manner in which she represented the Mizo community unfolded how special and remarkable she was. As her stories depicted the core values of Mizo culture in a simple and explicit manner, her stories would be of great use for the study of Mizo history. The greatness and reliability of her literary works can also be

seen when measured with the yardstick made by experts for judging children's literature. Even for those who haven't known or presented during the time it was written, the culture and community life of the Mizo she represented in her songs and stories can be clearly understood.

Nuchhungi Renthlei, a person who could never be excluded while discussing Mizo Children's literature, who influenced the life of children through her literary works, who did her best and worked hard for children, and who was known throughout the entire land of Mizoram for her literary works, will always be valued and remembered as long as the Mizo survived in this world. In the changing and growing world of the Mizo, the literary works that she had prepared for the Mizo children will always remain. As her delightful stories and beautiful songs continue to entertain Mizo children till today, it is of great importance to preserve and promote her remarkable literary works.

Every Children's Literature is worth reading. It encapsulates important life lesson which is helpful and valuable for children, but also for the adult as well. Nuchhungi's children's stories are simple and pure, they are inoffensive and instrumental in developing sense of moral behaviour. This is an important essence of Children's literature. Important moral lessons are deeply embedded in every Children's literature. This can also be found in all the literary works of Nuchhungi. The study of her literary works carried out in this research unfolds the fact that the songs and stories that she had written for children are greatly useful for imparting moral lesson and for indicating the right path in life, for motivating and entertaining children, and for expanding their knowledge and wisdom. Thus, her songs and stories

become an important literature for Mizo children and it will continue to be valuable and helpful for the future generations to come.

Nuchhungi Serkawn Graded Readers is a collection of stories packed full of adventure for young children. These stories are amusing, exiting, and full of helpful advice for dealing with the challenges that all children face. While children are reading these entertaining stories, they learn about developing self-esteem, dealing with fear, making choices, living in blended families, and many other issues. Renthlei's works will help young children build a good character that will last a lifetime.

From the above study, I can conclude that wisdom and knowledge are the hidden gems in Renthlei's poetry. In her poems, much importance is seen on social and societal living which can be stated to be the wisdom she truly desired to impart, and gave great importance to. The imparting of moral and ethical living, with obedience and respect to children is at the core of her writings. Furthermore, Renthlei compiled and published Mizo folktales into words children could understand thus promoting the Mizo folktales and children literature.

Works Cited

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Glossary

Chap- lands cleared for cultivation.

Chhepchher- beating of bamboo stick to make clapping sound, musical instrument made of bamboo to produce capping sound.

Dawrawn- a close-weaved basket used by the Mizo for storage purpose or for carrying rice.

Fasuar- a platform made of bamboo for winnowing chaff or husk.

Kehme- bud and flower of thatching-grass.

Pialral- Paradise, the resting place of the nobles in Mizo Mythology. It is believed to be located on the side of Pial river. A place for those who attain the coveted title of 'thangchhuah', a place reserved only for those who attained prestigious honour in life.

Phurhhlan- a generic name given for all kinds of baskets used by Mizo.

Thlanrawkpa khuangchawi- the great Khuangchawi feast hosted by the legendary Belzebuta in Mizo folktales.

Ulen- games played by Mizo girls, their hands are held together to spin around.

Vani an- name of one forest herbs