

THEME OF DEATH IN MIZO POETRY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled ‘**Theme of Death in Mizo Poetry**’ submitted by Lalzarzova has been written under my supervision.

He has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the Ph.D. regulations of Mizoram University. The thesis is the result of his own investigation. Neither the thesis as a whole nor any part of it was submitted to any other University for any research degree. It is also certified that the scholar has been admitted to the department through an entrance followed by an interview as per UGC Regulation 2016.

Dated Tanhril

The 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2022

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## DECLARATION

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

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

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## CHAPTER – I

## Historical and Perspective Milieu of Mizo Society and Poetry

The Mizo people are an ethnic group primarily residing in the northeastern region of India, particularly in the state of Mizoram. They are also found in the neighboring states of Manipur, Assam, and Tripura, as well as in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and Chin State in Myanmar. The Mizo people have a distinct culture, language, and history. They are known for their vibrant folk traditions, including music, dance, and traditional attire. The Mizo language, also known as *Mizo tawng*, belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. In the olden days there was a saying that the Mizos emerged from a big cave called '*Chhinlung*'. The Mizos could be characterized under the race of the Mongolians. Following the conceptualization, the Mizos then came under the Tibeto-Burman tribes. One of the Mizo historians Rev. Liangkhaia said:

(Circa 900 A.D.) The Mizo forefathers believed that human beings came out from *Chhinlung*, but nonetheless it seemed *Chhinlung* was a hole on the ground covered by a flat rock. Some gossip about China that people nowadays talk about can come to a close relation with the concept of *Chhinlung*. (13)

The story of *Chhinlung* was translated in English which was recorded by J. Shakespear in 1912, he wrote:

The place whence all sprang is called *Chhinlung*. All the clans came out of that place. Then two *Ralte* came put together, and began at once chattering, and this made God think there were too many men, and so he shut down the stone. (94)

'Mizo' chiefly comprises of people who live in Mizoram, and claim themselves to be Mizos. During the British times they were called Lushai, Kuki and Chin. But it is certain that they all belong to the same race. British Colonial Administrator, J. Shakespear says, "All the Lushai Kuki clans resemble each other very closely in appearance and the Mongolian type of countenance prevails. There is no doubt that the Kukis, Chins and

Lushais are all of the same race" (8). One historian describes the meaning and what Mizo or Zo is composed of, Lusei and other related clans who are settled in the Lushai hills (Mizoram) call themselves 'Mizo' from time immemorial; 'Mizo' meaning 'Zo people.' Lusei designates only people who were under the rule of Sailo chiefs, and 'Mizo' now covers all ethnic Zo people (Vumson 2).

The Mizos lived in hilly areas, having one chief to rule over a village. The Mizo society was a chief centered society. The chief was not only the head of the village, all powers including the matters of life and death were in his hands. It can simply be said that complete authority was vested in him. He attained a high and respectable position in the society. The economy of the people was based on agriculture, most of them practised shifting cultivation. The Mizos habitually invaded one another, mainly due to land issues. Sometimes conflict between chiefs also caused war. One thing to be noted is that the acclaimed north and south battle in the history of Mizoram broke out solely due to a quarrel over a bride between two notable sons of chiefs.

Life of the Mizos was simple, the villages were set in jungle areas where wild animals were still found in large number. The village was usually built on the crest of a hill with the chief's house having the best location, normally at the center of the village. Every village had a bachelors' dormitory (the Mizos call it Zawlbuk) which was obtrusively locating near the house of the chief. Zawlbuk played a very important role in the lives of the people. It was a place where all young men and some elders of the village stayed and slept in the night. Apart from this, Zawlbuk was the training center for boys and a place where the youths were trained and shaped to become responsible members of the society. It was the best institution of the society for building up the lifestyle of the people in general, especially for the Mizo youths. The Mizo society had a beautiful ethical code known as *Tlawmngaihna*. The term being untranslatable, the concept can be somewhat understood as respect for others, hospitality, unselfishness, courage and helpfulness to others in all respect. It demands self-sacrifice for the service of others and is the Mizo principle and philosophy of life. N.E. Parry said, "It is really a very good moral code enforced solely by public opinion....*Tlawmngaihna*, therefore, deserves every encouragement, as it were allowed to fall into desuetude (sic) it would be most detrimental to the whole of the tribe," (qtd.in Mizos of North East India 23). The spirit of



*Tlawmngaihna* controlled the tendency to stratify the society. The mechanical solidarity and cohesiveness of the society were maintained by restricting multiplicity and specialization of labor (Thomas 10).

Mizo society was a patriarchal society where male dominance was observed. Most of the villages located in the jungle, where wild animals were still found plenteous; and sometimes they invaded one another. The people of the village needed a protector, *Pasaltha* (warrior) who played an important role for their safety. The *Pasaltha* of every village took up tasks to maintain security and defense of the villagers. *Pasaltha* achieved respectable position in the society by means of their talents and abilities in terms of warfare and hunting. Every village had a number of *Pasaltha* to defend and protect the people and their domesticated animals against invaders, wild beasts like tigers, bears and wild-boars etc. which sometimes attacked people and animals.

The significance of a warrior of a village was very notable; the people could live peacefully under their patriotic safeguards. Almost every village had its famous warrior, and they customarily invaded one another. The people and the safety of the village was in the hands of the warrior. T.H. Lewin described the picture of a raid which was practically followed in the olden times, he wrote, "On starting for a raid, the old men and women of the village accompany the party an hour's journey on their way, carrying the provisions, and then leave them with out loud wishes for their success. 'May you be unhurt, and bring home many heads,'" (148). When Mizo warriors defeated their enemies, they would chop off their heads and bring them to their village to prove their victory. They did not invade each other exclusively for want of heads, they merely did so to show off their victory to the people of their home. The life and safety of the people was fully dependent on the warrior of the village. In war and stressful times, the warriors were very important. Some famous warriors rendered all their efforts for the safety and defense of the chief and the people. Traditionally Mizo tribes were arrogant, but they were affectionate on the inside. Sometimes their lives seemed more peaceful than other tribes.

As mentioned earlier, Mizo society was based on patriarchal system, work was systematically distinguished for both male and female. Difficult tasks like building up of settlements and earning daily bread were placed in the hands of the male. Women did household chores and management of homes were primarily in their hands, although they

too went to the jhoom. Selet Thanga described Mizo women as, "Mizo women carried out works like fetching water, husking and cleaning rice, domesticating pigs and poultry, cooking and washing and looking after the children. They were always busy and tired, having inadequate time to sleep" (17).

There were certain important personalities in Mizo society. The chief was the supreme law and order, having power even over death in his village. The second most important persons were the ministers of the chief. The chief appointed ministers to help him govern the village, they were the village's governors exclusive of the chief, and therefore they were highly important. Coming in the third was the Val Upa (middle-aged men) who gathered and disciplined young men of the village besides performing every essential task for the good of the society. They were respected by these young men, and if necessary, they took part in the dealings and administration in the court of the chief. The blacksmiths being forgers of all the tools were also important in society. Every household supplied them with rice because they had no time for cultivation.

The principal man in the field of religion was the *Sadâwt* (priest), his position could be equal to a Pastor in Christianity. They depended on *Bawlpu* (priest) concerning ailments and diseases. His position could be similar to a doctor in the present day. There was also a *Tlangau* (village crier) whose duty was to make known the orders of the chief to his subjects. Though his position was not considered honorable, he played an important role in society.

The Mizos thought highly of the persons who offered their lives for their land. Almost every village had a person who could be called a patriot. The most important and eminent persons in this regard were the young men. Let us take a look at their audacity and how society expected them to be so. The young men were typically sacrificial to society, offering themselves to society whenever needed. They were the consolers and protectors of the village where wild beasts like tigers were still found plenteous. Their significance was eminent owing to their custom of battling (Lalthangliana 144-147). C. Nunthara talked of a Mizo boy as, "Every boy was trained to be courageous ever since he was old enough. Their primary judgment of bravery during those times was not to flee and to fight boldly in the face of wild beasts and enemies," (Seminar and Important Papers 43).

One very essential deed in the history of the Mizos was their appreciation and honor of possessing '*Nopui*' (cup for drinking wine) which was presented to the most hospitable and brave young men, reputed for their good performances in the society. Mizo young men were expected to act speedily in case of calamities and emergencies. For this reason, they slept at *Zawlbuk* at night. 'A man and a Water buffalo should always stay alert' was the opinion of the young men. There were innumerable enemies and wild beasts, as mentioned earlier, their position was important owing to their custom of battling, and they held in high esteem the persons who stood firm in the face of enemies and wild beasts who stood brave without discerning the matters of life and death. The society respected, admired and exalted these incredibly hospitable and brave persons. The chief presented with them '*Nopui*' in front of all his subjects. B. Lalthangliana says,

The people admired, exalted and respected the incredibly brave and extraordinarily hospitable persons who were willing to lay down their lives protecting the people. They would prepare *Nopui* or *Huai No* (cup for the brave) on *Chawngchen* (to join or take part in a 'chawng' feast and festival) occasions (qtd.in Mizo Pasaltha: Socio-cultural Perspective, C. Nunthara 43).

The brave and the hospitable were priceless as their situation demanded them to be. Moreover, '*Tawlhloh puan*' was clothed to the brave who did not flee from their enemies. This apparel at the beginning, as K. Zawla says, belonged to the rich only, and they began to use it to clothe the brave as time went by (155). At times when they won battles they celebrated in the chief's compound, they planted a piece of wood at the center of the compound, and those who dared confirm they would not retreat from wild beasts and enemies would cut the wood. They called this '*Thingserh sat*' and they valued it to a great degree. They admired the persons daring to cut *Thingserh*, and they often spied on those who would cut it. K. Zawla defined the attitude of the persons who cut *Thingserh*.

I will never flee from enemies unless there is an utmost necessity. I will never let the enemies who attack my village escape. I will not draw back from protecting my village and its women and children. I'd rather die than not prevailing. Therefore, hear ye that I am willing to lay down my life to protect the chief and his subjects (96).

The villages having large numbers of persons cutting *Thingserh* secretly took pride in their attainments and the people of the village were comforted by these persons. The Mizos scattered in different villages having chiefs, and almost every village had a famous *Pasaltha*. In the book *Mizo Heroes* published in 2003 by Tribal Research Institute, Government of Mizoram, it is recorded that there used to be as many as 24 warriors. Let us look at the names of the most famous warriors as told by B. Lalthangliana: Vanapa, Chawngbawla, *Khuangchera*, Taitesena, Neuva, Zampuimanga (51).

**Let us take a glance at each one of the Mizo warriors:**

**Vanapa:** Vanapa's real name as used to say was Thangzachhinga while some people called him Chawngzachhinga (*Seminar and Important Papers*, 82). He belonged to a clan of Chawngthu Vanchiau and the exact year of his birth is untraceable. C. Lalaudinga believes it to be about 1785 (*Mizo Pasaltha hmingthang Vanapa* 11). He was famous for his bravery and hospitality and was sometimes said to be bad-tempered. Some said he later repented his bad temper. During his residence at Kelsih in 1810, Lalsavunga's village was attacked by the Hualngo clan. In this incident the conditions of the attackers were worse than the village they attacked; it is said the villagers led by Vanapa drove them away. This is believed to have been the first time Vanapa appeared in history (*Lalaudinga* 11). He was hospitable and serviceable to society, a good craftsman, and is said to be very good at weaving bamboo. One popular theme usually mentioned alongside the story of the Mizos is 'Tualte Vanglai'. The period Tualte Vanglai was famous for its warriors. It is said Vanapa was the best among the warriors (34).

His main profession was the art of weaving bamboo and the people were fond of buying his bamboo baskets. According to K. Zawla, the people of Vanapa's village would say about him, "If Thangzachhinga could be a little good-tempered there would not be much to criticize about him." (*Mizo Pipute leh an thlahte chanchin* 249). His surliness was one of the reasons for his popularity. Later on, he learned to be gentle and consequently became a very gentle person, and it is said that even his voice had become soft (250). His hospitality is mentioned often. Once the young men of the village went hunting with Vanapa. After a while they became extremely hungry. Vanapa saw a ripe fruit of fig, he beckoned his friends and on reaching there one of them grabbed the fruit and savored it whole. With this Vanapa commented, "Young man, even I have not eaten a single bite.

We your friends do not carry stones,” (253). It is known that apart from being brave, he was very hospitable. His house was at the far end of the street, he was always willing to take the lead in times of battle. Vanapa, the one who is always mentioned every time the names of Mizo warriors are told, died in 1871 (Lalaudinga 197).

**Chawngbawla:** Chawngbawla belonged to a Chhakchhuak clan and was a best warrior of the chief of the south Seipuia (K. Zawla 253). He was a rather slim man with good behaviour, the kind of person who was often mistakenly undermined. Once during drinking, local wine with friends one guest mistook him for someone else and asked him, “You, my friend, tell me how many animals you have killed.” He replied, “I have not killed that much as to count them.” On hearing this the guest scornfully challenged him again. Chawngbawla replied, “Once I’ve captured the leg of a wild bear, and I’ve captured the leg of a wild tiger. Those are my only captures. I have not killed as many as the three stones of a trivet.” The guest then regretted challenging him and walked away timidly in silence (K. Zawla 254). He was a very famous warrior and the men loved to go hunting with him, for they felt secure and were at peace. His character was of cool and calm and he was never proud.

Once on their attack on Sialhmur village, the villagers had heard beforehand that they were going to be attacked and they all ran away. On their way back home the village’s warrior Nghatebaka, who was on his way home from fishing, chased them along with other warriors. Chawngbawla and his men were fleeing, and one man among them cried out not knowing Chawngbawla was among them, “O how we miss Chawngbawla! If he was here we would not run this tired.” Chawngbawla replied, “Chawngbawla cannot haunt on this kind of day, just move forward.” But later Chawngbawla lay in ambush for Nghatebaka and shot him dead. It is said that the pursuers later went back to their village.

**Khuangchera:** The name of Khuangchera is to be mentioned in the first place if we are to talk about the true account and contribution of any patriot of Mizoram. He is remembered for his die-hard valor against British imperialism. Like many other Mizo heroes, he lived during the turbulent times when the British were drawn into the Lushai Hills for the protection of their tea estates in the plains. While the exact dates of his birth and death are not traceable, he would have lived around the period of 1860 – 1890, as can be inferred from his being a patriot with chiefs Lianphunga and Sailianpuia.

Khuangchera was killed in a battle with the British expedition force near Changsil on September 10, 1890, during the final phases of the British expedition called Vailian (the Mizo term for the occupation of their land by the British). Captain Browne, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills was also killed in this battle, a few days before the death of Khuangchera and his close friend Ngurbawnga. He was born in one of Lianphunga's villages. We may say that he was a wanderer for moving from the village he was born in Chhippui first to Parvatui, then to Kanghmun, and finally to the influential village of Reiek (Khangte 106). When he was a boy, Khuangchera once followed a wounded bear into its cave, leading his apprehensive elders who then killed the bear. Khuangchera's acknowledged skill in wrestling was put to good use when he was ambushed and captured by a raiding party of Pawis.

To prove his valor there was a forbidding cave between the villages of Ailawng and Reiek. At the Ailawng end was a narrow cleft in a cliff, with a stream gushing out. One could barely walk in at the entrance and no one dared to move in deep down the cave. But Khuangchera alone explored the long tunnel of the cave and found that the long cave, which took at least 45 minutes to walk through and at some places crawl through, had openings at both the Ailawng and Reiek ends. After the explorer of this cave, it is known as Khuangchera Puk, which tourists and adventurers enjoy visiting these days.

Khuangchera has countless stories and it may not be possible to tell all of them. He would venture where fainter hearts would hesitate to tread and rescue people at considerable risk to his life.

There is a superstition that a man must not kill any living being or animal during the first week of his wife's delivery of a baby. When the British punitive expedition burned down some villages on 17th March 1890, a call from Lianphunga who had fled his village without giving a fight, went out for help to fight against the British (108). Khuangchera, whose wife was giving birth to a child, did not volunteer because of this taboo. But as the situation grew worse, he put aside personal considerations and accepted the dangers of violating the taboo, joined other warriors in the battle against the British stockade at Changsil and was shot dead while he was trying to extricate his friend Ngurbawnga, who was lying wounded on exposed ground.

Khuangchera's life reflects the diversity of characters of the famous heroes. Although he was a humble and modest man, sometimes he wanted recognition. However,

his valor and chivalry were much stronger than his ego and provided inspiration to the young men and soldiers.

**Taitesena:** Taitesena Khiangte was born in 1880 in Khawrihnim village. His real name was Ralthatchhunga (K. Zawla 291). During his childhood, his face would blush red, and this is supposedly why he had been called Taitesena. His father was Khalthvunga and his mother was Dovi. He was famous throughout Mizoram for his hospitality. Apart from being a warrior, his hospitality is always quoted every time his name is mentioned. In the olden days, children and youngsters were used to running errands by the older people of the village, which was an unofficial custom of the society. Due to this, they did not have sufficient time to hang out with friends. Taitesena strongly objected to this. When he considered the life of children he felt it would be very unpleasant for them and thought of ways to stop it. Whenever children were sent to run errands while he was in Zawlbuk he would go before them saying, "I shall go." It appeared every time they sent children they were sending Taitesena. It is said that older people eventually stopped their habit of sending children to run errands (291).

Moreover, if anyone talked about his wants or desires in the presence of Taitesena he would try to do it for him. He was hospitable enough to try to satisfy others' needs no matter how hard or easy the road was. Once when they went hunting in the jungles one of them spoke out how he found a good stone and wanted it for a hone. Taitesena heard this and took home with him a quite heavy stone in his bag and gave it to the speaker after reaching home. As the stone was quite heavy, the speaker received it with a feeling of unease and regretted ever mentioning it.

Let us take a glance at one of his touching life stories which shows the intensity of his hospitality. One night the chief of their village with an intention of finding out the most hospitable person in his village woke one of his ministers in the middle of the night to go to Zawlbuk and inform the young men sleeping there that there was a need to send an urgent message somewhere and ask if anyone felt like going. On hearing the chief having urgency the young men stayed silent, but Taitesena got dressed and gave himself as the messenger. When he went to the chief's house to ask which village he would be going the chief told him there was no need to go anywhere and that he merely intended to find out who was the most hospitable person in his village. The chief then delighted on Taitesena (293).

Once when the villagers fought a wounded tiger, the tiger bit three warriors of the village. Taitesena hurriedly arrived at the scene and jumped right into where the wounded tiger was. He felt it was not right to have stayed unhurt while his friends were injured. It is said that he could not be stopped when the others tried to stop him. Then he fought the tiger with a knife. The tiger surely bit him like his other friends, and Taitesena was not able to endure the wound and eventually died.

**Neuva:** Neuva belonged to the village of Zawngtah and his father was Darzaliana. He was famous for his ability to endure pain. He was a rather big, strong, and handsome man. He and his elder brother loved to go hunting, and it is said they were crazy about it. Neuva was brave and his mind was undaunted. He often said that if anyone would carve out his eyeballs he would kill that person. At one time he was so daring when fighting a wounded bear that his elder brother Thangsavunga had to restrain him. He was a very brave man with an unusual tendency to endure pain. Once he accidentally stepped on a thorn with his foot and the wound became ulcerated. Due to his lack of care, the ulcer became septic and spread to his whole foot. Ants and flies would envelop the wound, but he continued to till his cultivation as if he did not have any wound. He could carry on his daily work as though he paid no attention to it (261). He had an unusually high threshold for pain as if his person did not feel pain at all.

Once while chasing a wounded tiger, the tiger suddenly pounced on him from up a mound in his unready state. The tiger bit Neuva on his hind neck around the nape of the head. The wound was sufficient to kill him. But Neuva held his head with both his hands and his friends walked him home because he did not want to be carried. He asked his brother Thangsavunga to thrust his hand into the wound and found out that a major part of the bones of his neck was broken to pieces! He did not live long after that and consequently died. Even though the bite of the tiger almost broke his neck he never even once groaned in pain. It is said that when he died his body turned sideways while his head remained locked in its position. There could not be many persons to be said more enduring than he.

**Zampuimanga:** Zampuimanga was from Zampui village, his father belonged to the *Ralte* clan, and his mother Hualngo clan. He was an unfortunate son whose father had died during his childhood. He and his mother migrated to Lalsavunga's village and in this



village there was one person named Manga, who had the same name as himself. He was then called 'Zampuimanga'. Strangely one-night Zampuimanga had a dream and in his dream, he saw an old lady. The old lady told him he would not die of wild animals and enemies. Once there was a wicked tiger who killed as many as ten people and endangered several villages. As the tiger finally came face to face with Zampuimanga's village Zampuimanga fought it and chopped off its tail. The others meanwhile fired at the tiger and were finally able to kill it. Once on another occasion fighting a tiger, the tiger crawled among the thick bushes and remained there. Zampuimanga could not bear the situation and headed for the bushes. He then chopped the tiger dead all by himself! It is said this made his name famous all around. Every time the society had to face wild beasts; they would feel ill at ease without Zampuimanga.

Once when fighting another tiger Zampuimanga charged at the tiger again on his own. The tiger opened its mouth wide and Zampuimanga believed he saw a rainbow inside its mouth. Thinking it was a bad omen for mankind he insisted on heading home. Since nobody paid attention he went home all by himself. But as they fought the tiger after Zampuimanga went home it wounded most of the men. Here it is seen that Zampuimanga's belief proved to be right. Besides being brave it is said he was also famous for being a strong man.

Patriotism in another sense does not only mean protecting the country from human enemies but also from various kinds of enemies that could harm the well-being of the land and its people. The above warriors we have highlighted had their unique ways of defending their lands in their own ways. They defended their lands not only from wild beasts but also from neighbouring rivals. It is seen from their characters so far that in order to protect their villages and fulfill their duties as warriors they were all willing to lay down their lives in the process. We can also see that these warriors were not in a fight with the British like Khuangchera did, however, it is to be noted that these are all warriors of the past and they all did not happen to co-exist in the same period of time. The British did not appear in the scenes during the times of all of these warriors, and moreover, most of the paths of these warriors did not cross with the British.

There is a belief that Mizo warriors performed their tasks solely to please their chiefs and to earn the appreciation of society. But as far as Mizo hospitality and love of the land are concerned, the former is proved to be wrong. We do not see from the above stories where warriors performed their tasks in society for their own gain. We do not see

any kind of mischievous attitude. We on the other hand see some of the warriors giving up their lives in the process of defending their lands. It is also proof that the Mizos of the past were not so much uncivilized and ignorant on grounds of the knowledge of protecting their villages. Whether a warrior or regular citizens, they do their utmost ability and available resources to guard and defended their land from any enemy infiltration.

They taught their young people since they were children to protect their land and to stand firm in the face of enemies and wild beasts. They even waged minor wars with their neighbouring villages to settle land problems. It was on the occasions of protecting the security of the village that the warriors were of extremely important. As it was their duty and enthusiasm to defend their land from any outside attack, they were ever ready to fight wild beasts and neighbouring rivals, so as to protect it from bigger and mightier opponents like a foreign expedition.

From the above description, it can be seen the beginning of patriotism in the life of the Mizos and the general situation of the Mizo society on the ground of patriotism. It is evident that the brave persons who were willing to lay down their lives for their land were respected and praised. They were hospitable and daring, and they would set out for society willing to die in times of war and unfavourable circumstances. Mc Call commented, "The Mizos are brave and skilled in battles and functioning in jungles and forests and they are enduring and unflinching," (Lushai Chrysalis 45).

The tribes of Mizoram remained unaffected by foreign political influence until the British annexed Assam in 1826 under the Treaty of Yandabo. During the next decades, Mizo raids into the British territory led to occasional punitive expeditions by the British. By the 1870s the region had come under British control. In 1873 it fell under the Inner Line Regulations of the British administration, which prohibited the movement of people from the plains onto the hills. However, the region was not formally annexed until the early 1890s.

The region initially was administered as the North Lushai Hills (in the province of Assam) and the South Lushai Hills (within the Bengal Presidency). In 1898 the region was united as the Lushai Hills District of Assam. The district was declared an "excluded area" in 1935, whereby the provincial legislature was stripped of its jurisdiction over the area, and responsibility for the district's administration was placed directly in the hands of the governor of Assam.

Following India's independence from the British in 1947, the district remained a part of Assam. Increasing discontent among the Mizos, however, led to a declaration of independence by the Mizo National Front in 1966. The ensuing armed rebellion compelled the central government of India to assume Mizoram's administration and to make it a union territory in 1972. The insurgency continued until the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986. As a result of this accord, Mizoram has granted statehood in 1987 (Mizoram History).

Mizoram, one of the fabled Seven Sisters of the northeast covers an overall area of 21,087 sq. km. It's the width from east to west is 121 km. Mizoram shares its borders with three states - Assam, Tripura, and Manipur. Its border with Manipur is extended over 95 km. The states have also common borders with two foreign countries, Burma (now Myanmar) and Bangladesh. The total length of Mizoram's International border adds up to 722 km.

Situated between 21.58° north to 24.35° north latitude and 92.15° east to 93.29° east longitude, Mizoram is shaped like a narrow triangle. The route of the Tropic of Cancer passes near Aizawl, the capital. Mizoram is divided into eight districts namely, Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Mamit, Chhimitupui, Lawngtlai, Serchhip, Saitual, Hnahthial and Kolasib.

Mizoram is the land of hills, rivers, and lakes. As many as 21 major hill ranges or peaks of various heights run through the length and breadth of the state, some plains scatter occasionally here and there.

The average height of the hill to the west of the state is about 1,000 meters which rises to 1,300 meters to the east. Blue Mountain, situated in the southeastern part of the state, is the highest peak in Mizoram.

There are plenty of rivers, both big and small. The Tlawng (Dhaleshwar), which is considered the most important river in northern Mizoram, flows north to join the Barak in Assam's Cachar district. The Chhimitupui (Kolodyne), which originates in Myanmar, is an important river in the south of Mizoram. Lakes are scattered all over the state, but the most important of them are Palak, Tamdil, Rungdil and Rengdil.

The fabric of social life in Mizo society has undergone tremendous changes over the years. Before the British moved into the hills, for all practical purposes the village and the clan became units of the Mizo society. The Mizo code of ethics moved around

“*Tlawmngaihna*” an untranslatable term meaning on the part of everyone to be hospitable, kind, unselfish, and helpful to others. *Tlawmngaihna* to a Mizo stands for selfless service for others. A gregarious and close-knit society, they evolved some principles of self-help and co-operation to meet social obligations and responsibilities. Constructive social works were executed through voluntary community works known as *Hnatlang*. Every family was expected to contribute labour for the welfare of the community and participate in *Hnatlang*. The spirit of *Hnatlang* combined with *Tlawmngaihna* made it mandatory for the Mizos to render all possible help on occasions of marriage, public feast, accident and death.

The Mizos were a distinct community and the social unit was the village. Around it revolved the life of the Mizos. Mizo village was generally set on top of a hill with the chief’s house at the center and the bachelor’s dormitory called *Zawlbuk*, prominently located in a central place. In a way, the focal point in the village was the *Zawlbuk* where all the young bachelors of the village slept at night. *Zawlbuk* was the training ground and indeed the cradle wherein the Mizo youth was shaped into responsible adult members of society. No class distinction and no discrimination on grounds of sex were seen in Mizo society. Most of them were cultivators and the village existed like a big family. The birth of a child, marriage in the village and death of a person in the village, or a community feast arranged by a member of the village were important occasions in which the whole village was involved. The Mizos had three main festivals- *Mim Kut*, *Chapchar Kut* and *Pawl Kut*. These festivals or *Kuts* as they called them were in one way or another associated with their agricultural activities.

*Chapchar Kut*: Among many other festivals, *Chapchar Kut* or Spring Festival, was the most popular festival, celebrated after the completion of their most arduous task of jungle clearing for “jhum” operations. On this day, people of all ages, young and old, men and women, dressed in their respective colorful costumes and head gear, assembled and performed various folk dances, and sang traditional songs accompanied by the beating sound of drums, gongs, and cymbals.

*Mim Kut*: *Mim Kut* or Maize festival was celebrated during the months of August and September, after the harvest of maize. *Mim Kut* was celebrated with great fanfare by

drinking rice beer, singing, dancing and feasting. Sample of the year's harvests were consecrated to the departed souls of the community.

The Mizos gradually gave up their old customs and adopted a new mode of life that is greatly influenced by western culture. Many of their present customs are mixtures of their old tradition and western patterns of life. Music is a passion of the Mizos. The most colorful and distinctive dance of the Mizos is called *Cheraw*. Long bamboo staves are used for this dance, hence many people call it the 'Bamboo Dance'.

The Mizos are of Mongoloid origin, speaking a dialect of Tibeto-Burman origin. The Mizos came under the influence of British missionaries in the 19th century and today the majority of the Mizos are Christians by faith. The literacy rate of the state is the second highest in the country. The people are mostly non-vegetarian and their staple food is rice. The Mizos are a close-knit society with no class distinction or discrimination on grounds of sex, status, or religion. They are hospitable, and sociable and love music, singing, and dancing. They are agriculturists, practicing what is known as "Jhum Cultivation" or slash-and-burn system of cultivation. They cut down the jungles, burn the dried trunks and leaves, and then till the soil. All their activities revolve around this cultivation and their festivals are connected with such agricultural operations.

Poetry in Mizo Literature thereby has various themes, among which sorrow is a very crucial commodity. Death is an unavoidable enigma designed by the Creator, and death should have been carrying with it disasters to humans even before we became aware of its existence. The Mizos also face this death from time to time and therefore present their seasons of difficulty in the form of poetry.

Death is in fact one of the biggest mysteries, questions, and problems for human beings. Apparently, it is so simple to say that whoever lives must die one day but as a matter of fact this is not as simple a phenomenon as this simple statement implies. There are so many questions associated with the apparently so simple but actually the most bitter reality of life. Everyone knows that he is to die but at the same time he is curious to know what lies after death. What will happen to him when one is dead? If one ultimately has to die then why is he born? Is death the ultimate destination or the end of one's life or is it only a matter of transference from one world to another and from one phase of life into another phase? These and so many other questions are there strike every thinking and sensible person at one or another stage of life. Philosophers, thinkers, writers, poets, and

even common people have been discussing the subject of death ever since the dawn of self-consciousness in man. They have discussed the matter so much so that one will hardly find any literature in any part of the world written in any language and by people belonging to any school of thought that has not discussed death from one point of view to the other.

Death is in fact one of the universal themes and phenomena. Each and every person is bound to confront it irrespective of any sort of religious creed or ethnic affiliation. It has taken Adam, the first man on earth, into its iron grip and eternal possession, and since then it has been taking away all living things one by one. But the paradox is that the “wisest creature” has totally been unable to probe into and reveal the reality of death because once you experience it, you are no longer there to reveal its mysteries to others.

Life and death bring together philosophical and literary works representing the many ways—metaphysical, scientific, analytic, phenomenological, and literary—in which philosophers and others have reflected on questions about life and death. Neither scientists nor philosophers nor poets have succeeded to resolve the mystery of death. Scientists have tried to explain it in terms of something concrete and observable and to give a biological explanation thereof, but they have failed to grasp it yet. On the other hand, artists in general, and poets, in particular, have given vent to their flight of imagination, their intense feelings and sensibilities about things around but they also could not come up with some solid results save something that is based on pure guesswork.

Some poets have imagined death taking it sometimes as a friend and yet on other occasions the greatest foe of man. Some say that death is a source of relief from the worries of this world and some oppose them saying that death is a cruel thing that deprives man of the joys and pleasures of the world and this glittering life.

The discussion has been going on since ever and will go on forever. This will enhance the capacity for world peace by convincing people who enjoy ending the lives of others by throwing them into deep and dark valleys of death for the mere satisfaction of their inner and vicious wishes and to prove their superiority over others and to subjugate them. This juxtaposing of the views of poets who belong to different parts, cast, religions, and civilizations of the world is hoped to be a source of understanding others and resultantly by giving others room to live and lead a life of their choice.

Let us examine the African beliefs regarding the concept of death, which bear some similarities to the Mizo society. These similarities highlight the process of converting traditional beliefs to Christianity. Concepts of the afterlife and the journey of the soul hold significant importance within African cultures, and rituals and practices are employed to facilitate this transition. This section will explore the diverse beliefs and traditions surrounding the afterlife and the journey of the soul in various African cultures, shedding light on the rituals and practices associated with these concepts.

African cultures exhibit a rich tapestry of beliefs regarding the afterlife, reflecting the vast diversity of ethnic groups and spiritual traditions across the continent. While specific beliefs may vary, many African cultures share a common view that death is not the end but rather a transition to another realm of existence. The afterlife is often perceived as a continuation of life, where the deceased maintain a connection with their ancestors and play a role in guiding and influencing the lives of the living.

In African cosmologies, the journey of the soul after death is seen as a process of transition and transformation. It is believed that the soul embarks on a journey to reach the ancestral realm or the spiritual world. This journey may involve overcoming obstacles, crossing rivers, or passing through gateways guarded by spiritual beings. The soul's successful navigation of these challenges is crucial for reaching its destination and joining the community of ancestors.

To facilitate the journey of the soul, African cultures employ various rituals and practices. These rituals often include specific burial customs and ceremonies performed to ensure a proper send-off for the deceased. For example, in some African cultures, elaborate funeral ceremonies are conducted, involving community gatherings, music, dance, and prayers. These rituals serve not only to honor the deceased but also to provide guidance and support for the soul's journey.

Ancestor veneration is a prominent aspect of African afterlife beliefs. Ancestors are revered as guardians and intermediaries between the living and the spiritual realm. Rituals are performed to maintain a connection with the ancestors, seeking their wisdom, protection, and blessings. Offerings, libations, and prayers are often presented to the ancestors during ceremonies, reinforcing the bond between the living and the deceased.

African cultures also recognize the significance of communal mourning and collective support in facilitating the soul's journey. The community comes together to grieve, support the bereaved, and provide a nurturing environment for the deceased's loved

ones. Mourning rituals may involve wailing, wearing specific mourning attire, and observing periods of mourning, during which certain activities and celebrations are restricted.

Furthermore, African cultures often believe in the cyclical nature of life and death, with the notion of reincarnation or the continuous existence of the soul. Some cultures hold the belief that the soul of the deceased may be reborn into a new life, carrying with it the wisdom and experiences gained in previous incarnations. Rituals and practices are sometimes performed to guide and protect the soul as it transitions into a new existence.

In Northeast India, various tribal communities, including the Angami Naga, Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Ao Naga, and Karbi tribes, have distinct approaches to dealing with death.

The Angami Naga tribe, residing in Nagaland, practices a unique tradition where the deceased is placed on a platform called a "morung" or "altar" within the village. The body remains on the morung for a specific period, during which rituals and ceremonies are conducted to guide the soul to the afterlife. After the designated period, the remains are taken to a specific location in the forests, where they are scattered.

Among the Khasi and Jaintia tribes in Meghalaya, both cremation and burial are practiced. Traditional funeral ceremonies involve a series of rituals, including prayers, sacrifices, and communal meals. These tribes also hold sacred groves where ancestral spirits are believed to reside, and rituals are performed to seek their blessings and guidance.

The Garo tribe, found in Meghalaya and Assam, also practices both burial and cremation. Burial takes place in family or community cemeteries, and funeral ceremonies involve traditional rituals, songs, and dances to honor the departed soul.

The Ao Naga tribe in Nagaland practices both burial and cremation, depending on family preferences and social standing. The funeral ceremony, known as "Süngrüne," includes rituals, sacrifices, and communal feasting. Ancestor veneration holds great significance among the Ao Nagas, as they believe that the spirits of the deceased continue to influence the lives of the living.

The Karbi tribe in Assam primarily follows burial as their method of final disposition. The burial ceremony involves specific rituals performed by a designated priest, including prayers and animal sacrifices. Mourning rituals may extend over several days, during which the community provides support to the bereaved family.



These diverse practices and beliefs surrounding death in Northeast Indian tribes reflect their rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted connections to their traditions and spiritual beliefs. While general patterns can be observed within each tribe, it is essential to acknowledge that customs and practices may vary among different subgroups and geographical regions.

The Greek philosophy of death has a profound and complex history, with various schools of thought offering different perspectives on the nature and significance of death. This section will provide an overview of the Greek philosophical beliefs surrounding death, focusing on three prominent philosophical traditions: the Pre-Socratic philosophers, the Platonic tradition, and the Stoic philosophy.

### **Pre-Socratic Philosophers:**

The Pre-Socratic philosophers, including Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles, contemplated the nature of death in relation to the eternal and ever-changing cosmos. They emphasized the idea of cosmic cycles, where life and death were seen as natural and necessary components of the world's processes. Death was viewed as a transformation or dissolution of the individual into the larger cosmic order.

### **Platonic Tradition:**

Plato, one of the most influential philosophers in Greek history, presented a complex view of death in his dialogues, particularly in "Phaedo" and "The Republic." Plato believed in the immortality of the soul and posited that the body and the soul are distinct entities. According to Plato, the body is temporary and subject to decay, while the soul is immortal and exists before and after bodily existence.

Plato regarded death as the liberation of the soul from the constraints of the body, allowing it to return to its true form and engage in a higher realm of existence. He viewed death as a transition to a realm of Forms or Ideas, where the soul attains knowledge and eternal truths.

### **Stoic Philosophy:**

Stoicism, a philosophical school founded by Zeno of Citium, held a pragmatic and accepting view of death. Stoics believed in the harmony of the universe and the

inevitability of fate. They advocated for embracing death as a natural part of life and cultivating inner tranquillity in the face of mortality.

Stoics emphasized the importance of virtue and the development of one's character. They encouraged individuals to live in accordance with reason and nature, accepting their mortality while focusing on leading a virtuous life.

The Greek philosophical traditions presented diverse perspectives on death. The Pre-Socratic philosophers viewed death as a natural process within the cosmic order. Plato emphasized the immortality of the soul and the liberation it experiences through death, while the Stoics advocated for accepting death as an inevitable and harmonious part of life. These philosophical ideas influenced subsequent Western philosophical and religious thought and continue to shape our understanding and contemplation of death today (Philosophy Studies 45-47).

### **Mizo Concept of Death**

The Mizo understanding of death is deeply ingrained in their cultural and spiritual convictions, encompassing a multifaceted comprehension of the passage from earthly existence to the afterlife. Death is perceived not as a conclusion, but as a transition to another realm, where the soul continues its journey in a spiritual sphere. While the precise nature of this realm may vary across different Mizo communities and religious beliefs, a general belief in the perpetual existence of the soul after physical death prevails.

Mizo customs and practices related to death are intricate and imbued with profound veneration for the departed. When an individual passes away, the community unites to conduct funeral rites and ceremonies. These rituals serve diverse purposes, including paying homage to the deceased, consoling the bereaved, and guiding the soul on its path to the afterlife.

An essential facet of the Mizo concept of death is the belief in ancestral spirits. According to this belief, the spirits of departed ancestors continue to watch over and safeguard their living descendants. Ancestor reverence assumes great significance in Mizo culture, as evidenced by offerings, prayers, and rituals aimed at honoring and nurturing the connection with these ancestral spirits.

Mizo poetry and folklore often reflect the profound emotions associated with death. Poets employ poignant imagery and metaphors to articulate the complexities of grief, loss, and the yearning for departed loved ones. Through their verses, they delve into themes of mortality, the fleeting nature of life, and the enduring bond between the living and the deceased.

To conclude, the Mizo perception of death reflects a profound comprehension of the human experience and the transition from earthly life to the afterlife. It encompasses beliefs in the everlasting nature of the soul, the veneration of ancestors, rituals, and the interconnectedness between the living and the departed. Through their rich cultural heritage and poetic expressions, the Mizo people pay homage to the mysteries of death, navigate the complexities of grief, and explore the spiritual dimensions of existence.

The Mizos had well-ordered beliefs on the notion of death and life after death. They categorized death into five main types, which are as follows:

*Hlamzuih* : Death of infants who are younger than three months old. The body of the infant is covered with a cloth and placed in a clay vessel. They are mostly buried under their houses.

*Raicheh* : When a woman dies at the time of delivery, it is called *Raicheh*. This type of death is considered disastrous.

*Sarathi* : *Sarathi* is any type of accidental death which are considered unnatural in compliance with their custom.

*Zachhamlak* : The Mizo ancestors believed there had to be a hundred people die each year. If the number did not come up to a hundred, there would occur a sudden unnatural death. They referred to this term as *Zachhamlak*.

*Awmlai* : All the other types of death, including death by old age, are generally amounted to *Awmlai* (Mizo Chanchin 398).

In pre-colonial Mizo society, the death of a person was accompanied by an atmosphere of profound sorrow within the deceased person's family. The impact of the

death was felt not only by the immediate family but also by the larger society. The mourning process followed customary laws and traditions, reflecting the cultural norms of the community.

The loss of a loved one evoked strong emotions and deep grief among the bereaved family members. The death of individuals who held significant roles in the social order, particularly those involved in functional and moral activities, was particularly disruptive to the community. The passing of a husband or wife, for instance, was considered highly undesirable and often mourned with intense sorrow. The saying "Koki sah thlak ang a ni," meaning "the loss of a husband or wife is as painful as cutting off one's shoulder," exemplifies the deep emotional impact such deaths had on the bereaved.

During the mourning period, Mizos observed various practices to express their grief and sorrow. They refrained from partaking in meals, avoided bathing, and neglected hair care, such as washing and oiling their hair. These actions symbolized their mourning and served as outward expressions of their deep sorrow and emotional distress.

The Mizos' response to death reflected their cultural values and beliefs, emphasizing the significance of familial bonds and the profound impact of losing a loved one. Through their mourning practices, they sought to honor the deceased and process their grief within the framework of their customary laws and traditions. In response to the loss, the bereaved individuals went to great lengths to express their mourning. This included refraining from washing their faces, resulting in a dull and unkempt appearance, symbolizing their profound grief and sorrow. Particularly, women who experienced the loss of their children or husbands would engage in daily mourning rituals, crying every morning for an extended period, often lasting at least three months. These mourning practices conveyed the deep emotional impact of death, signifying the end of the deceased's presence in the physical world.

In the traditional Mizo understanding of human existence, the belief is held that the soul or spirit continues to exist even after the physical body has perished. Upon death, it is believed that the soul departs from the body through a fissure in the skull. According to K. Zawla, it is believed that the soul of a woman first visits the Zawlbuk, which is a dormitory for young men, while the soul of a man visits a water point within the village

(57). Similarly, among the Hmars, it is believed that the soul initially travels to Thlanpial and then proceeds towards Rih Dil. It is further believed that upon death, the soul remains in the village rather than immediately proceeding to the afterlife. At times, the soul is thought to transform into a creature known as "*khawimu*" or carpenter's bee, which wanders in search of sustenance. This wandering *khawimu* is believed to be the soul of a departed parent seeking nourishment. Consequently, the Mizo people engage in a practice known as "*chhiah*," where they offer food to their deceased parents. This ritual is performed to provide nourishment for the wandering soul. After this wandering period, which typically lasts for approximately three months, the soul is believed to continue its journey towards the realm of the dead. Rih lake, situated just beyond the eastern border of Mizoram, holds significant importance in Mizo beliefs as it is considered the passage leading to "*mitthi khua*" or the village of the dead. The origin of this belief can be traced back to a Mizo folktale, the details of which are as follows:

The story goes that during a hunting expedition, a group of hunters decided to spend the night near Rih Dil. While most of them were fast asleep, one hunter remained awake. As he listened attentively, he began to discern familiar voices that grew clearer with time. To his astonishment, he recognized his own wife's voice engaged in a conversation about their household matters. She spoke of their children, mentioning how she had left dried meat on the fire shelf and eggs in a container of rice husks. Upon their return to the village, the hunting party discovered that the man's wife had passed away in their absence. Intrigued, the husband checked their house and found that everything was exactly as his wife had described the previous night. From that point forward, the Mizo people came to believe that every departed soul must pass through *Rih Dil* on its way to either *Mitthi Khua*, the village of the dead, or *Pialral*, a paradise for the *Thangchhuah*. (Malsawmdawngliana 83)

Similar to numerous tribal cultures around the world and neighboring tribes, the Mizo people hold a belief in the existence of an afterlife. Their perception and conceptualization of death are greatly influenced by their traditional religious belief system. Their beliefs on life after death and the notion of death were related to a great

extent. But the actual relation is somewhat difficult to classify. The Mizos had a systematic belief on death, but this belief was not particularly seen in what they call religion. The greatest achievement in the Mizo religion was *Thangchhuah*, and the *Thangchhuah* man and woman were believed to attain a superior place in the land of the dead called 'paradise'. Malsawmdawngliana writes about the view of the Mizos on life after death:

The Mizo believed in life after death and the soul's way to *Mitthi Khua* (Village of the death) ...they believed that the soul had to pass through *Rihdil* Lake which is identified as a location in Chin Hills, Myanmar bordering present-day Mizoram...The Mizo believed that when a person died. The soul breaks open from the body at the top of the skull. Following the pole of the wall, the beam, and the roof of the house, and from the back-corner side of the house the soul went straight to *Rih Dil*. (108)

The Mizos believed that there is a village of dead people, and that their souls settled together in some unknown place. Challiana writes regarding this, "We believed the dead had a village beneath the surface of the earth. All the dead people would go the village of the dead, they would have their human form of the body again, and they would have settlements just like they did before they died," (qtd.in Pi Pu Zunzam 199).

R.G. Newport also states:

It is said there were two places to go after death. One was called '*Pialral*' which can be related to paradise. The other one is '*Mitthi khua*' the 'village of the dead,' and it is not clear whether this place was supposed to be inhabited by people who did no desirable good and was in no position to attain paradise, or that it was hell. There flowed a big river betwixt these two places called '*Pial Lui*' which was impossible to swim through. Only the great warriors and the highly esteemed (*Thangchhuah*) would go to *Pialral*, and they would face no hardship and settle luxuriously (200).

Apart from these, the Mizos took the occasions of death seriously. They would practice *Awmni kham*, which means they would relieve themselves of their work and stay at home.

K. Zawla says the Mizos would practice *Awmni kham* on occasions of *Sarathi*, *Raicheh* and death caused by abdominal problems (138-139). Zairema states they practised *Awmni kham* on occasions of *Sarathi*, *Raicheh* and death caused by their relevant enemies (127-128). C. Laitanga says they usually practiced *Awmni kham* on occasions of death as a whole (Seminar & Important Papers 140). Moreover, when the death occurred, they were hesitant to bury the dead person on the same day. All the bachelors and maidens would practice '*Lumen*' (which means they would spend the whole night waking in the house of the dead person) (Zairema 126). If the death occurred in the wild due to drowning, attacks by wild animals, or any other reason, the whole community would organize a search that lasted for seven days (Mizo Chanchin 481). C. Laitanga, in addition, states that it was a typical trait of the Mizos to take death seriously. When a member of a family has died, they did not want to cleanse themselves as a token of their grief, they would portray all their actions as sorrowfully as they possibly could (Seminar & Important Papers 140). The Mizos took death superficially, they have been practicing *Lumen* and comforting the family of the dead by going to their house continually even to this day.

Due to the absence of a written record as to the exact time when the Mizos started composing poetry, there has been a number of ideas for the same. Let us at first look into the problem. K. Zawla states that the Mizos had never composed poetry before they settled at *Len tlang* in the course of their migration from Burma (306). Zatluanga tells that the Mizos had already composed a poem before they arrived at *Run* river (qtd. in Mizo Poetry 31). Meanwhile, Hrangthiauva argues that the Mizo ancestors had composed poems during AD 750 while settling at *Chhinlung*<sup>1</sup> (*Awksatlang*) (Hmanlai leh Tunlai Mizo hlate 7). R.L. Thanmawia believes that their settlement at *Len* range was during the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Century (33), According to the *Mizo Hla Hlui* book, "Poetry of the Mizo ancestors can be categorized into four periods, the first period being told as the *Thântlang Upa hla* (Thântlang Upa's poem). It can also be called poetry prior to settlement at *Run* river, and this period is believed to be 1300 – 1450 AD," (5). Among the many ideas ever being developed, C. Chhuanvawra believes the exact time of the origin of Mizo poetry is untraceable. He does not believe the idea that the Mizos started composing poetry during their settlement at *Run* river. He further states that it would be most accurate to believe they had had poems before they migrated to *Chhinlung* (750 AD) (Hmanlai leh Tunlai

Mizo Hlate 8). Although its origin is difficult to trace, it is evident that the Mizos had had several poems before they arrived at Mizoram.

The concept of "*pialral*" holds immense cultural and symbolic significance within Mizo society, permeating various aspects of their lives, including their art, literature, and spiritual practices. *Pialral*, often referred to as the "heavenly realm" or the "abode of the divine," represents a metaphysical and transcendental plane that holds a profound place in the collective consciousness of the Mizo people.

*Pialral* is deeply rooted in the spiritual beliefs and traditions of the Mizo community. It embodies their understanding of the afterlife, serving as a destination for the souls of the departed. In Mizo cosmology, it is believed that upon death, the soul embarks on a journey to *pialral*, where it finds eternal peace, joy, and fulfilment. This concept brings solace to individuals and offers a sense of hope and continuity beyond the physical realm.

In Mizo poetry, *pialral* is depicted as a realm of unimaginable beauty and serenity. Poets employ vivid imagery and evocative language to describe the enchanting landscapes, ethereal beings, and celestial wonders that define *pialral*. These poetic descriptions transport the reader into a realm beyond earthly limitations, evoking a sense of wonder and awe.

Beyond its role in individual spirituality, the concept of *pialral* also serves as a moral compass within Mizo society. The belief in *pialral* instils a sense of accountability for one's actions in the present life. Mizo people strive to lead virtuous lives, guided by the belief that their conduct will determine their destiny in the afterlife. *Pialral* thus reinforces the importance of compassion, righteousness, and communal harmony, shaping the ethical framework of the Mizo community.

Moreover, *pialral* plays a pivotal role in cultural identity and the preservation of Mizo traditions. The concept is deeply woven into Mizo folklore, oral traditions, and rituals. Stories and songs are passed down through generations, recounting the journeys of souls to *pialral* and conveying the wisdom and values associated with this spiritual realm. Through these cultural expressions, the Mizo people celebrate their shared beliefs and strengthen their sense of unity and collective identity.



It is essential to note that while *pialral* holds great significance in Mizo society, interpretations of this concept may vary among individuals and communities. Personal beliefs, religious affiliations, and regional customs can shape the understanding and portrayal of *pialral* in Mizo poetry and culture. Nevertheless, the concept remains a central and cherished element of Mizo spirituality, providing solace, moral guidance, and a connection to the transcendent for the Mizo people.

In summary, *pialral* stands as a profound and multifaceted concept within Mizo society. It represents the heavenly realm, a place of eternal peace and fulfilment, and holds a significant place in Mizo art, literature, and spirituality. The concept of *pialral* offers comfort, inspires moral conduct, and fosters a sense of cultural identity, allowing the Mizo people to navigate the complexities of life, death, and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

According to Aristotle, the object of art is an imitation of life (77). Writers have always used the situations and events of everyday life in their writing, and since death is just as much a part of life as anything else, it is arguably one of the most recurring themes in all of literature. In poetry, fiction, and drama, death is seen as a central theme that gives way to other themes ranging from justice to rites of passage to grief. Death is a crucial fact of life, and from the emotional response to death to the various religious frameworks through which it is interpreted, it is obvious why death is used as a theme in literature so extensively. Likewise, death is not new to Mizo poetry. The first appearance of death as assumed in Mizo poetry is in *huthmun Zai*. We see this in *Mizo Hla Hlui*;

A tlung e, thim khaw zin a tlung e,

*Khua* tinah thim khaw zin a tlung e.

*Khua* tinah thim khaw zin a tlung e,

Thalai leh dawntuai an tliak zo ve (1-4).

Keini riak kan fam lo, mi lai an fam zo ve,

Mi lai an fam zo ve, laikhum a thim reng e.

Thi lovi *khua* awm maw? Fam lovi *khua* awm maw?

Laiah Suanglungpui e, fam lote'n awm na ngai. (Thuthmun zai)

It has come, thus death,

To every door, it marcheth,

To every village, it marcheth,

The youth and the young thus withereth (1-4)

Not only us, other people also die,

People die, the bed is left unslept upon,

Is there a place where nobody is dead?

And rocks, they remain, immortal are they (15-18).

The above poem was composed due to a severe famine. All the big trees became dry, there was deficiency of food, and every family had a dead member. No one was able to help the other, they suffered a great deal of pain, and for this deep agonizing sorrow, *Thuthmun zai* had evolved, as according to R.L. Thanmawia (11). This is their poem of consolation, represented their life experience in the form of a poem.

We also find this in an old Mizo poem, *Salu lam zai*:

Va ko u, va ko u, ka pa Hminglian,

Rihchin tlangah va ko u, ka pa Hminglian.

Rihchin tlangah va ko u, ka pa Hminglian,

Phulzingah ngam zo rawh e, koh theih phung loh.

Phulzingah ngam zo rawh e koh theih phung loh,

A hrai lawi ang ka than ni khawia'n thei maw .(Salu lam zai)

Call him, do call him, my father Hminglian,

Call him back from the mount of Rih, my father Hminglian,

Call him back from the mount of Rih, my father Hminglian,

Hath he acquainted himself in the village of the dead,

Hath he acquainted himself in the village of the dead,

All I have achieved, no wonder he reckons not (3-8).

We see in this poem how a warrior is missing his dead father. In the meantime, his father has made his settlement in the village of the dead, we can see that he cannot be called back to the living. According to Mizo belief, when a person is dead if he hails from the average family, he goes to the village of the dead, but if the person is from a higher background known as *Thangchhuah*, he goes to paradise (Malsawmdawngliana 107). In this poem, the father is depicted to have been living a peaceful life, which is rather unusual.

The earliest Mizo songs are those which can be called nursery songs or cradle songs, most of which are nonsensical repetitive mnemonic rhymes but on closer look, they reveal the imprint of the simple milieu of yesteryears of Mizo society. Mothers carrying their babies on their backs would put their darlings to sleep with a lullaby-like this:

A khiah khian lungpui a lo lum dawn e,

Ka nauvi kha a del hang e, suan rawh u (Nau awih hla)

High up from the hill is a rock rolling down

Remove my little darling, lest the rock will crush him

A khiah khian rammu an kal dial dial e,

Ka nauvi pa tel ve maw, ral that ve maw? (Nau awih hla)

Yonder o'er there go the warriors

Does my darling's dad join there, did he too kill an enemy?

*Lengkhawm hla* is a form of poetry where the notion of death is prominently used in Mizo poems. In these poems, we find the expressions of sorrow and lamentations more widely used than joy or happiness. It is a form of poetry where the dead are missed and grieved over like *Thuthmun zai*, but a new kind of solacement can be found. In Saihnuna's poem, "*Hrinhniang an liamna thlafam khua*" we see as follows:

Hrinhniang an liamna thlafam *khua* chu e,

Ka thlir ngam lo hawilopar thliak a,

Lunglohtui an dâwn tur ka ngai ngam lo ve.

.....

Chatuan Elsadai vangkhaw tual nuam chu,

Hmuh ka nuam dawntuaipâr an vulna,

Rianghleite chûn ngai lova an leng tur chu. (Saihnuna, *Hrinhniang an liamna*)

Where they lay their beds, our young beloveds,

Where they pluck the flower of no turning back,

Where they drink the fountain of no more longing, I dare not conceive.

.....

El Shaddai, the eternal heavenly place,  
 How I wish to see the children blooming,  
 No more longings for mothers in their abode.

There appears solacement in this poem, which is Heaven. Perceiving the dead to find their way to heaven, the poet imagines that even the children take joy in heaven, no more missing their mothers. He can now say he wishes to see them happy. It is clear from the poem that it was composed following their conversion to Christianity, but its difference from *Thuthmun zai* is its solace. In *Thuthmun zai*, they console themselves because every other person eventually dies, but here we see that the dead becomes contented in heaven without missing his mother. In many of the Mizo Christian poems in this manner, although they immensely miss the dead, the perception of their spending time happily in Heaven appears numerously.

On the contrary, in R.L. Kamlala's poem, death is presented as the bringer of the curse. It is mischievous, but it can be defeated, and we see that it will eventually be defeated. In the poem "*Kian i rel si lo*" Kamlala somewhat underestimates death:

Kian i rel si lo, lei a ngui zo ta;  
 Lawmna au râwlten tah zai an chang thin,  
 Thihna, nang vangin.  
 .....

I lal lai niin kâwl a liam ang a;  
 Tlante an leng dawn lawmin i chungah-  
 Thihna lo ngai rawh. (R.L. Kamlala, *Kian i rel si lo*)

For you choose to stay, and the world has become gloomy;

Shouts of joy sometimes turn to tears of pain,

Because of you, Death.

.....

Thy reign shall go down as the sun;

The saved shall rejoice above you-

Death, behold thus.

From the various poems we have examined, we see how the Mizos have differed perceptions of the notion of death. In some poems, they believe they cannot avoid the sufferings of death, while in other poems death is presented as the one to be defeated. As poetry is an important medium for the presentation of the mind, it is essential to evaluate how the Mizos have their views on life and how they face it, how they accept death in their concept, and how it is represented in their poems. It is essential to investigate their views on life after death. It can be believed that death is the source or forerunner of the first and the oldest poems of the Mizos. P.B. Shelley's lines in *To A Skylark*, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought," (The Oxford Book of English Verse 609) can be related to a number of poems of the Mizos.

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## Chapter - II

### Theme of Death in Mizo Folk Poetry

The significance of the theme of death in folk poetry is profound and multi-faceted. It allows for contemplation of existence and the transient nature of life, prompting individuals to ponder the meaning and purpose of human existence. Through the lens of death, folk poets delve into existential questions, offering insights into the essence of being. Additionally, the theme of death in folk poetry is intimately connected to cultural beliefs and practices. It reflects the customs, rituals, and spiritual perspectives surrounding death within specific communities. By exploring this theme, folk poetry becomes a repository of ancestral knowledge, preserving and transmitting cultural values and perspectives from one generation to the next.

Emotionally, the theme of death provides an avenue for catharsis and expression of grief. Folk poets articulate the depths of sorrow and loss through their poetic language and imagery, offering solace and validation to those experiencing the universal human experience of losing loved ones. Moreover, death in folk poetry acts as a boundary that defines human existence, prompting contemplation of the possibilities beyond physical life. Folk poets often explore concepts of the afterlife, the journey of the soul, and notions of transcendence. Through the theme of death, they delve into the mysteries of the human spirit and its potential beyond the constraints of mortality.

The significance of the theme of death in folk poetry extends beyond the individual, reflecting broader social and historical contexts. Folk poets use death as a means to comment on societal injustices, political upheavals, or the impact of war and conflict. By intertwining death with social and historical narratives, folk poetry becomes a powerful tool for understanding the human condition within specific times and places. In this way, the theme of death in folk poetry serves as a window into the collective consciousness of a community and provides insights into its challenges, struggles, and triumphs.

The theme of death in folk poetry holds immense significance. It invites contemplation of existence, connects to cultural beliefs and practices, allows for emotional



catharsis, explores transcendence, and reflects social and historical contexts. Through the exploration of this theme, folk poetry offers a timeless and profound exploration of mortality, the mysteries of life beyond, and the enduring human quest for meaning and understanding.

Every tribe has its own song. And those songs are usually passed down orally from generation old. The Mizos also have a number of these kinds of songs, and it is necessary to thoroughly understand how these folk poems talk about death. Most people use the term folk song, but we will use Folk Poetry in this research.

Before we talk about folk poetry, we will discuss the subject of Folklore. Kishore Jadav says that all the works of literature of the world prior to the coming of 4000 B.C. were folk literature. And then time went on, and the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians began to learn to write between 4000 B.C. and 3000 B.C (13). After these two nations, the knowledge of writing began to spread to Asia, North Africa, and the Mediterranean. Since they were beginners in learning, it can be assumed that their works were rather trifling in the beginning. Then came the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and history writers began to write interesting stories and accounts of their tribes told to them by storytellers which had been passed down to them.

This could be the dawn of folklore, although its literature was not yet organized. Interesting tribe stories that became written are invaluable, and it is not inappropriate to credit these as the beginning of folklore with its ongoing competence. The first rather structured written folklore that can be traced back is dated around the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The early analysis/anthology on folklore, particularly that of stories is supposed 'Kinder Und Maurmarchen' (Grimms' Fairy Tale), a collection of stories by the German philologist brothers Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, its first volume being released during 1812-1814. The term folklore had not been in use around this time. This work is noteworthy due to the fact that it is the first and foremost anthology on stories.

Furthermore, one notable work in this regard is the book written by James George Frazer, 'The Golden Bough' which was published in 1890. This book brilliantly illustrates folklore while correcting or rectifying vague and unestablished beliefs of old that had been verbally passed down. What largely comes to mind when discussing folklore are stories.

After these certain people, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson contributed greatly in the fields of folklore and fables. New trends arose at the coming of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. People began to emphasize their acknowledgment of the concept of ‘folk’. They consequently tendered and qualified folklore, which had been passed on to them under the category of ‘folk’. According to them, their occupation, language, place of residence, age, religion, and everything that took part in their origin are incorporated into folk. They also began to engage more of their effort in defining its meaning rather than scrutinizing its context.

‘Folklore’ gained popularity in a concrete sense only in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The accounts of historical tribes had been studied in the past. For the most part, old stories, and various folklore, which had been passed down verbally from generation did not have a particular name but had been termed ‘popular antiquities’ or ‘popular literature’, joining two words together. However, William John Thoms derived a replacement for the words ‘popular antiquities’ or ‘popular literature’ and called it ‘folklore’ in 1846 (William John Thoms and Folkloristics). He felt it was more suitable than the terms in use, and therefore sent a letter to a magazine. His suggestion was applied consequently, and people began to use the term ‘folklore’ in any study or work related to the subject. This letter was sent to a London Journal called *Athenaeum*. Let us take a look at the definition as written in the Oxford Dictionary of English Folklore.

Folklore (the word). Writing in *The Athenaeum* on 22 August 1846, the antiquarian W.J. Thoms invited readers to record ‘the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs...of olden time...what we in England designate as Popular Antiquities or Popular Literature though by-the-by it is more a Lore than a Literature, and would be more aptly described by a good Saxon compound, Folk-lore—the Lore of the People).” We can see that the said letter was sent on 22 August 1846. Thoms’s legacy will always be important in the field of folklore, his name is called out whenever folklore is talked about. (130)

*Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* says, “Folklore is literature passed down verbally from generation to generation. It is a popular tradition that is kept alive by people at all times” (Folklore). Upon further explanation, fairy tales, ballads, epics, proverbs, and riddles fall under the definition of folklore. Benjamin A. Botkin explains:

Folklore comprises traditional beliefs, customs, and sayings that have distinct features and spread widely, and are passed on verbally. Each tribe and/or nation has literature that binds us together and brings forth benefits for each of us. It matters not if one is literate or illiterate, nor if he resides in a village or a city. We can say that traditions and customs that unite people can be called folklore. (xxi)

Jan Brunvand, in his book, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction* writes, “Folklore embraces all of these: any of the testaments without a written record, that consist of their tradition and style passed down from person to person” (7) In his further elaboration he adds, “Folklore is old and unofficial, a form of learning tradition. It includes all of their values, priorities, knowledge, and wisdom, and beliefs that are handed down verbally” (7) *Thuhlaril*, a Mizo book that is consulted the most in the subject of literature brilliantly describes in simple words, “Folklore is literature that has been bequeathed verbally from our ancestors. Literature of old that is willed, which people inherit to their descendants what they used to sing, profess, say, do and listen to” (269). Last, but not least, let us take a look at Richard A. Waterman’s definition, “Folklore is that art form, comprising various types of stories, proverbs, sayings, spells, songs, incantations, and other formulas, which employs spoken language as its medium” (Folklore). Now we can assume that we can understand what Folklore is from the definitions we have discussed so far.

The meaning of folklore being defined, it should be noted here that what we have studied so far is important in the definition of folk poetry. Folk poetry is categorized under Folklore, and can also be called a folk song. Most people use the term folk song to define what folklore is. Folk poetry can also be called Folksong. Most people use folk songs in writing and saying. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* describes, “The term ‘folk poetry’ can be properly used for texts which have some characteristics marking them as poetry and belong to the tradition of the common people, as against the dominant ‘polite’ literary culture of the area,” (66). *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* states:

The universal characteristics of folk poetry are, substance, repetitions, interjections, and refrains; and, as to form, a verse accommodated to the

dance. Frequent also is the call to the dance, question and answer, and rustic interchange of satire. Though no one song illustrates all of these characteristics, they are all to be found in the songs taken collectively (Characteristics of Folk-poetry).

*The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* states, “Folk song comprises the poetry and music of groups whose literature is perpetuated not by writing and print, but through oral tradition,” (1032). Folk song and Folk poetry can be said as interchangeable, both are of oral traditions. With the advancing development in learning, poetry and song have been differentiated. For this reason and viewing from the perspective of the modern world, folk songs and folk poetry may be assumed to be unsociable. However, the folk song is similar to folk poetry; especially in the case of Mizo literature, the tune matters more than the lyrics do in the oral traditional folk songs, but this does not mean that the songs lack meaning without their tunes. On this account, though the name folk poetry is different, they are more or less the same because what we are about to discuss falls under the genre of folk songs, and therefore our vocabulary or usage of terms will only be different. Hence, in this research, it should be known that when we use folk poetry, it does not mean we are going to talk about other unrelated matters.

Folk poetry is a vibrant and rich form of artistic expression that emerges from the traditions, experiences, and cultural fabric of a community. It embodies the collective wisdom, beliefs, and values of a society, passed down through generations in the form of oral narratives and songs. Folk poetry transcends the boundaries of time and geography, connecting people to their cultural roots and providing a glimpse into the collective consciousness of a community.

One distinguishing feature of folk poetry is its accessibility and inclusivity. It is a democratic form of expression, often created and performed by ordinary individuals within the community. Folk poets draw inspiration from their daily lives, personal experiences, and observations of the world around them. Their verses resonate with authenticity and reflect the aspirations, struggles, joys, and sorrows of the people. Folk poetry serves as a powerful medium for storytelling, social commentary, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Another characteristic of folk poetry is its versatility and adaptability. It can take various forms, such as ballads, lullabies, work songs, epic narratives, and lyrical verses. The themes covered in folk poetry are diverse and encompass a wide range of human experiences, including love, nature, mythology, history, moral teachings, and, of course, the contemplation of life and death. Folk poets employ vivid imagery, metaphors, and rhythmic patterns to captivate the audience and evoke deep emotions.

Folk poetry thrives in communal settings, where it becomes an integral part of cultural celebrations, rituals, and social gatherings. It serves as a unifying force, bringing people together, fostering a sense of belonging, and reinforcing shared values and identity. Whether performed at festivals, weddings, or during everyday activities, folk poetry becomes a means of collective expression, connecting individuals and strengthening social bonds.

Folk poetry is a powerful form of artistic expression that encapsulates the essence of a community's heritage, values, and experiences. It is an inclusive and accessible medium, reflecting the authentic voices of ordinary individuals. Through its versatility and adaptability, folk poetry captures the diverse range of human emotions and experiences. It serves as a cultural touchstone, preserving traditions, transmitting knowledge, and fostering social cohesion. Folk poetry, with its timeless relevance and ability to resonate with people across generations, continues to inspire, entertain, and provide a window into the collective soul of a community.

Folk poetry is the backbone of ethnographic research. It helps a person in getting to know the culture of primitive societies. It also helps in finding the identity of a person, of a race, and of an ethnic group. The true identity of an ethnic group or a particular race lies much in the culture and tradition of the primitive age. Therefore, ethnographic research depends much on folk literature. Mizo folk literature plays an essential part in recording historical activities. It tells stories that are immensely significant to Mizo artistic and psychic life. Mizo folk song is mainly composed in couplet, triplet, and quatrain. Many historians and writers trace back to the primitive age in order to find out the first song by doing thorough research, yet the results or what they claimed to be the first song are all different. Also, the time when primitive people began to compose songs could not be clearly stated. So, it is not easy to ascertain the first song and the exact period when

they began having songs. Therefore, starting the first song is still like a mirage, and putting Mizo folk poetry in chronological order became one of the hardest tasks due to the lack of written records.

Mizo folk songs have subjectivity as one of their most significant natures. It plays the role of a vehicle for the song-composers to carry what they wanted to express, dispose of, and pour forth. It is a venture into the poet's life, thought and feeling. For instance, Hlado (a chant performed by a hunter when slaying wild animals) and Bawhhla (the Chant of a warrior to celebrate his victory over enemies) are all about the victory of a warrior or a hunter who he boasted his heroic deeds. They loved to put their deeds, their emotions, their pains and sorrows, and their thoughts into their songs. In the broadest and easiest sense, Mizo folk songs can be distinguished into three categories- *tlar hnih zai* (Couplet), *tlar thum zai* (Triplet), and *tlar li zai* (Quatrain). Yet, regarding or based on its names and themes, the category could be expanded to more lists. One certain characteristic is that each stanza is complete on its own, meaning thereby that, they are hardly divided up into stanzas. One song generally contains one stanza. Even if it is divided up into stanzas, one stanza is wholly and completely distinguished from the following stanza in its theme. Mizo folk songs bear different names and have different themes. Thanmawia writes:

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

“Simplicity is one of the main traits of Mizo folk songs; they are characterized by simplicity of musical and poetical devices, and marked by the absence of embellishment,” (66) states Lalremruati in her article “Oral tradition: Nature and Characteristics of Mizo Folk Songs”. Mizo folk songs are simple and easy to understand, and there is straightforwardness in their use of language and figures of speech. Next to the simplicity of its language comes its simple tune. The tune mainly circles around a few musical notes which means that it can be sung lazily without having to give much effort. Lalremruati

writes in regard to this tune, Most of the Mizo folk songs mainly circle around three to four musical notes. Thanmawia writes, ‘One of the musical instrument songs called *Dar hla* consists of only three notes... The earlier tunes are simply constructed in a very straightforward character, having the note of mostly ‘d’ ‘r’ and ‘m’ (66). Regarding the tune of Mizo folk songs, Thanmawia states, “Even though there are numbers of folk songs, there exist merely hundreds of them if categorized it based on its tune.” (7) The meaning is that, when one composed a song with a beautiful and melodious tune, others including the composer himself would compose other songs using that same tune. So, it, therefore, shows that within one single *zai*, there are usually a number of songs, and there can also be more than one composer. Lalhlimpui writes:

Love, nature, patriotism, and boasting of one’s heroic deeds are the major themes of Mizo folk songs. Hlado (a chant performed by hunters when slaying wild animals) and Bawhhla (chant of the brave warriors to celebrate their victory over the dead body of the victim/enemy) are all about boasting of one’s heroic action. Nevertheless, among the major themes, love is the principal theme, so would be worth taking into account, first of all. (6)

All *zai* that bear the names of individuals do not always bear the names of the composers. For instance, the one who composed all the songs of Darlenglehi *zai* is not Darlenglehi, but a blind man, Lalkhawdina. She herself never composed a song though this particular song was named after her. She was a good-looking and well-figured widow. Her nurtured character and beauty were talked about a lot. Lalkhawdina, though blind, really longed to be able to see her, so he used to court her. He then started composing songs for her and also about her. All these songs were called Darlenglehi *zai*.

Some folk song bears the name of villages. One of the appropriate exemplars is *Tlangkhaw zai*. It came into existence when the Mizo forefathers resided in *Tlangkhua* before they crossed *Tiau* river. According to hearsay, Luaisiali and Saingova of *Tlangkhua* had an intimate relationship. They made a vow to spend one whole day together. But, Luaisiali’s parents prevented her from doing so by sending her away to their field. Then, Saingova sang in melancholy, "Tlang khuaah Saingo ka kual reng e/ Siali feh kirin ka ring lo ve," (lines 1-2). (I, Saingo hover around Tlangkhua/ I do not think she will return).

It is said that from the above song, *Tlangkhaw zai* appeared. Even without external evidence, it is sufficiently reliable from the internal evidence of its lyrics that this *zai* had begun when they resided in *Tlangkhua*.

One whole song is summed up in two or three lines, having its own message within a single stanza. But there can be many stanza-like songs, in one '*Zai*'. For instance, *Darpawngi Zai* has three different *zai* in which each *zai* has more than 15 songs. The meaning is that when one composes a song wholly independent from an existing *zai*, he or she can simply compose another song using the same tune. Hence, within one *zai*, there can be many composed songs having the same tune but different lyrics. So, when a new *zai* comes into existence, anyone can compose another song using the same tune but those who simply uses an existing tune cannot bear the name of that *zai*, or a song that has an existing tune cannot bear the name of the one who composes.

For example, *Darpawngi*, besides her original *zai*, composes some songs using the tune of *Saikuti Zai* and others. Those songs cannot be included in *Darpawngi Zai* since *Darpawngi Zai* has its own tune. Many historians and writers trace back the primitive age in order to find out the first Mizo folksong having thorough research, yet the results or the claimed-first songs are all different. Also, the time when primitive people began composing songs cannot be clearly stated. So, without a mere supposition, it is not easy to ascertain the first song and the period when they began having songs. The first known Mizo songs are, according to one writer, *Zaithanmawia* in his "History of Mizo Hla" composed at the bank of *Chindwin*.

The late nineteenth century plays a crucial role in the development of Mizo folk songs. During this era, their religion, or rather, their ritual practices became more precise than before; the chieftainship or the society improved a bit; furthermore, literature became more improved. There are numerous female poets in Mizo folk songs, and most of them came to appear during these years. In some other parts of the world, women were barred from writing in the early periods. *Lahlimpuii* states that:

A look at gender issues shows that Mizo women possessed a very low status in Mizo society during the bygone years. They were seldom treated at par with men. They were simply taken for granted and even their



sufferings were thought to be neglected and ignored. Yet, they were not hindered to compose a song, nor their songs are treated as petty or lightly. Rather, they were valued and esteemed not only by the whole village, but also by their neighbouring villages to where their songs spread. So, Mizo women might possess a very low status and they might never be treated as human, but when it comes to composing songs, there was not such a vast gap between man and woman, no partiality between man and woman since Mizo people were always impartially fond of singing. That may be the reason why there were numerous female poets in Mizo folk songs. (13)

Mizo folk songs bearing the names of females which prevailed during the late nineteenth century are- *Darmani zai*, *Aikhiangi zai*, *Thanghniangi zai*, *Thangnunnemi zai*, *Laltheri zai*, *Lianchhiari zai*, *Saikuti zai*, *Chhingpuii zai*, *Lalchhungi zai*, *Rualchhingvungi zai*, *Darlenglehi zai*, and *Darpawngi zai*. There were eight female poets during this time except Darmani, Thangnunnemi, Chhingpuii, and Darlenglehi who simply bore the names of it but not the composers.

The late nineteenth century saw a crucial development of Mizo life and society. During these times, their religion and ritual practices had more certitude, the chieftainships, and the society too, improved a lot. Their way of living and cultivation also took a big leap, and their communications too became more standardized. Most importantly, literature had grown numerously. It seems like every village had its own song-composers and almost everywhere a new song emerged spontaneously in numbers. This era had brought improved nature and characteristics to literature.

Folk poetry is the first literary genre in Mizo literature. Thanmawia says, “The oldest Mizo poetry recorded are usually couplet.” (5) As mentioned earlier, the accurate origin of poetry among the Mizos cannot be determined, but as far as evidence goes, every earliest poetry of the Mizos has two lines. Thanmawia did a thorough study on the poetry of Mizo ancestors, and he found that the poetry of Mizo ancestors can be classified into four main time frames, such as the poetry of *Thantlang Upa* at Lentlang residence, poetry after crossing Tiau river, and the various poetry composed in harmony with the poetry of our ancestors during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (5, 6). According to Thanpuii pa, the beginning of poetry for the Mizos occurred during their residency between the Run and Tiau rivers (Zo

Nun 141). On the other hand, Hrangthiauva evaluates that the origin of poetry among the Mizos is untraceable, *Thuthmun zai* being the oldest referable poetry of the Mizos (Mizo Chanchin 300). C. Chhuanvawra believes Hrangthiauva's assessment to be most consenting than the rest (8). Thanmawia also writes, "K. Zawla believed that the Mizos did not have any kind of song before they occupied Len range. . . . Zatluanga, on the other hand, noted that simple verses had already been made before they crossed the Run River of the Than range," (33).

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

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

Shan fa tlang khua pu tling tling e,

In do thlunglu bakin chhah;

Kan mi thah, ka laimi do,

Tual thatin lan eih de ning. (qtd.in B. Lalthangliana, 3)

On the other hand, Lalthangliana opposes this assumption: It is contradicted by Mizo History saying that the first Mizo songs are composed at the bank of Chindwin based on "Shan" word in the supposed first Mizo song, which is "Shan fa tlang khua pu tling tling e". We all believe that our forefathers migrated westward on the route of the Chindwin River. Yet, Shan State of Burma is not at the bank of Chindwin River but on the eastern side of Irrawaddy River, so, geographically proved to be wrong." (6) According to *Mizo Pi Pute leh an Thlahte Chanchin*, written by K. Zawla and Zatluanga, their first song is:

Heta tang hian kha kha a lang a,

Khata tang khan hei hi a lang a.

That place can be seen from here,

And here can be seen from there.

However, assuming the above songs to be the first Mizo songs is thought to be wrong by other writers for it does not contain any archaic words. All these contradictions show that Mizo folksongs cannot be put in chronological order till today. Writes Thanmawia, “It is acceptable that the Mizo ancestors might have forgotten their earliest songs due to the absence of a record, and it would really be difficult to arrange the chronological sequences of their earliest songs.” (33) Lalthangliana opines, “We believe that amongst the Mizo folksongs we can have a record of, “*Tlar Hnih Hla*” (couplet) is the oldest.” (8)

Therefore, it is evident that the oldest known Mizo poetry is *Thuthmun zai*. The earliest poetry of the Mizos that could ever be recorded has an unusual aspect of being songs about death and its consolations. This gives us the thought that the first songs composed by our ancestors could be songs about death. Ruth Lalremruati writes about *Thuthmun zai* as follows:

In the olden days while the Mizo settle in the *Than* range they were affected by famine. Several people starve to death, diseases spread widely and families have to part with tears. Families, friends, and, close ones sit together to mourn and console each other. At this time, they began to utter mourning which takes the form of songs later. As the mourners sit while reciting these mourning songs, it continues to bear the name *Thuthmun zai* (which means songs sung while sitting). They were the songs of the lamentation of the dead ones. The origin and composers are not known but are regarded as one of the earliest folk songs. As time went by, more songs about death and loneliness were composed, and later on, personal names were given to the songs. Many bereavement and lamentation songs are largely scattered in society so they have become a part of the tradition.

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*Thuthmun zai* has been outlined in a number of books, and R.L. Thanmawia points out the most. In his book *Mizo Hla Hlui*, he presents 19 songs, the all and only *Thuthmun zai* that can ever be retrieved. Due to its unobtainable old age, it can be assumed that a number of songs might have vanished. *Thuthmun zai* is a couplet song, about death and lamentations as mentioned earlier. C. Chhuanvawra states, “It is a song about death and the sorrow it brings; sung mainly in the occasions of death to mourn with the dead’s family at their home, at the place of drinking to while away pleasant feelings, and at the conclusion of *chapchar kut*. They usually did not dance while singing this song.” (13).

How death is depicted in the songs of *Thuthmun zai* are usually identical. We can see how painful they took death and how they viewed death itself. In one of the songs of *Thuthmun zai* we see this, “Destruction is everywhere / Our young ones have been made broken.” This song means the trouble that fell on them did not take place in one place only but on every village. It also reveals that this trouble was taking the lives of their youth. In one other song it is read, “We are not the only ones who are dead, but others also do / Others are also dead, and the bed is wasted away.” The first song we mentioned talks about trouble taking place everywhere, and the lives of their young ones being taken. The second song talks about everyone capable of death and how death spares no one. They both talk about one similar thing, that death roams about every village, passing over none. It pardons no single family and reigns over everyone equally.

*Thuthmun zai* demonstrably portrays how death affected the people. Although they knew they could not avoid death, it is clear that it tremendously affected them nonetheless. In one song it is written, “I built a house that is dear, for me and my child / But we all live there never, ill-fated as I am,” (lines 1-2) Using the vocabulary of bad fortune, the composer talked about building a house for him and his child to live, and yet he lived there alone without his child. It can be seen that he deeply lamented the death of his child. In one of the songs, we see this, “The Mithun wails and pounds about its stall missing its baby / I pace about the bed missing my child,” (lines 1-2). It is clear that the composer extremely missed his dead child. Although it appears they believed death would befall them eventually, they certainly missed the dead and their presence among them. As we have said before, famines would come about, taking innumerable lives, we see that those left to live profess their unutterable grief in the form of songs. They used *Thuthmun zai* to

express their feelings and emotions thus far, conveying their agonies and the painful effects of death on their lives using lyrics.

One aspect we see in *Thuthmun zai* is *Mitthi khua*, the village of the dead. The Mizos believed there should be a village for the dead after their departure from life. We have discussed this account at the beginning of this paper. They did not know how to approach this village, but we can see that this village of the dead was always on their minds. “Lurhpui is high enough, to look over every village / If I could reach the top, would I see the village where the one I miss dwells,” (lines 1-2) is found in *Thuthmun zai*. As a consequence of missing the dead, they imagined if they could reach the top of Lurh mountain and look over from there, the village of the dead ‘*Mitthi khua*’, the land where their dear dead ones they missed so much might be visible. Although it was just an imagination, the spirit world does not seem to be able to be seen from any mountaintop of this world. Given the truth of this knowledge, their desperate longing and wish to see the village of the dead depict their vivid imaginations in their time. It also confirms how seriously they took death, and death is the force that parted the humans. Death was the problem of their world, which was annoyingly unavoidable, making them tremendously uncomfortable throughout their lives.

The Mizos have different kinds of folksongs, namely, lullabies, children’s play songs, songs of music like *Dar hla* (song of gongs) and *Tingtang hla* (song of strings); songs about the rising of the sun, and other songs composed for special occasions, but almost none of these songs mention anything about death. One particular lullaby mentions something like this, “The dead have all gone, crossing run river / They crossed over *rih* mountain, do they miss us, I wonder,” (lines 1-2). The songs talk about how the dead left, leaving their home to be no more, towards the village of the dead (*Mitthi khua*), and the remaining people wondered if the dead missed the world of the living. Although the Mizos have various types of folksongs, the songs are usually short-lined and rather inarticulate. Apparently, death mentioned here reveals the natural human imagination. We find no description of death in the songs we are currently looking.

Two prominent folksongs of Mizo are *Bawhhla* and *Hlado*. Lalnunzira believes *Bawhhla* and *Hlado* were composed before 1500 AD (147). They came into being before the ancestors entered Mizoram. *Bawhhla* and *Hlado* were composed to show self-

appreciation and victory. *Bawhhla* was sung on occasions of victory, when they killed their enemies, whereas *Hlado* was sung when they killed wild animals, to show their victory as well. Both songs were sung separately. In *Bawhhla* we see stories of battle, the killing of their enemies, how they became victors in the battle, and their tactics in battle. There is no distinct mention of death in these songs. In most cases of *Hlado*, we see their heroism, their killings of various wild animals. There is no mention of death here as well.

One mention of death in one of the songs of *Hlado* is found in *Fahrah Hlado*. We find no indication of death other than this in any of the songs. In one of *Fahrah Hlado*, we find this, “As for me, in young childhood / I have been fatherless and lost”, here we see a story of a pitiful person, orphaned due to the death of his father when he was just a little boy. This song further narrates the story of the father being gone to the village of the dead (*Mitthi khua*), and no longer conscience of his son growing up and gaining victories from his place in the village of the dead. This tells us the fact that they believed the dead did not have any knowledge of what happened in the living world. We also find consolation from death here:

Ka nu e, tap tuk hlah law,

Billhpuan e, khum lai rak hlip u law;

Thlafam e, nghilh nakah e,

Kawli e, vuitum lian a rak tlung e (Fahrah Hlado)

Don't cry, mother,

Take your cloth off, get out of bed;

The dead are gone, remember them no more,

A joyful day has finally arrived at our home.

In the above song, the son comforts his grieving mother. He encourages his mother to stop crying, take off her shroud, and to cease being troubled for the death of her husband. He begs her to be content in his victory, and to stop missing his father and weeping for him. Certainly, they did not take death painlessly. They did not easily forget about their dead family members, they got lonely remembering them whenever the family attained success and victory. This song reveals they missed their dead tremendously. One thing we gain from *Fahrah hlado* is the knowledge that they singularly felt terrible to be fatherless which was caused by death. We see in the song the dead father was missed by the son, he remembered him when he gained victory and never forgot about him. We also see their feeling of inadequacy among other people due to their unfortunate state of being fatherless and husbandless. It is evident from this song death had a great impact on families, leaving them lacking and incomplete in society.

Folk poetry in different tribes and nations was usually composed while people were still simple-minded, where the world was not yet as developed as it is now. The various folksongs are also simple in their lyrics and imaginations. *Folklore, An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art* says, "...lyric folksongs almost always adopt the first-person point of view, so that the circumstances, the worldview, and most prominently, of course, the feelings are all offered from the perspective of the speaker himself or herself..." (546). Their perspective alone depended largely on personal opinion. It is obvious that personal vocabulary and the use of self were in vogue, and we find heavy employment of verbal formulas. We find this kind of practice in different folklore (547). This is also true in the case of Mizo folk songs. In *chawngchen zai* we find this, "Ever since my father died, troubles came at our doorstep / Dark clouds hang over our days and days," (lines 3-4). These two lines talk of a family whose father had died, and how the family suffered economically following the tragedy. It expresses the notion that it is tiresome to be human sometimes, and from the song, we learn that it is possible for death to bring about poverty. As said above, we see the personal view and opinions in this song. Let us look at another one of *chawngchen zai*, "The drums are laboriously beating / I wonder if my father's spirit dances tonight," (lines 1-2). The Mizos have a custom of dancing with drums. In this song, the drums were heavily beaten, and someone was wondering if his father's spirit was present there with him and joined him in dancing. Like we have said before, we find a personal view in this song too.

We find several sons missing their dead fathers in Mizo folk songs, while it is almost impossible to find sons missing their dead mothers, let alone mentioning them. The Mizos follow a patriarchal system of society. From what we can learn from the various folk songs we come to the question asking if it was harder for them to survive without a father and made their world more uncomfortable. In one of *chawngchen zai*, we see this, “Father wake up from your death, as I am in need of a wife,” (lines 1-2). He missed his dead father extremely when he was about to take a wife, so the son wrote a song to express his wish to revive his father. We have seen in the earlier song how terrible they felt when the father of the family died. It is unusual in the various folk poetry of the Mizos to learn that in any of the songs that deal with death, the mothers are not mentioned. Perhaps the cause lies in their tradition of heeding the father in the family, that the whole family bent under the father’s dominion. It is evident they suffered tremendously when their fathers were dead, and composed songs to express their feelings. It can be safely assumed the mothers would also die, but there is no evidence of them being missed and dead.

*Chawngchen zai* in its various songs does not talk about death that much. Let us take a look at those songs that do. These lines are from one of *Chawngchen zai*

Ai che, Phulzinga mi kha

Phulzinga mi kha,

Vanduai Lera nu thai lo lam u;

Hring lam a nghilh nan (*Zai Lam Hlapui*).

O dear dead one

The one from the village of the dead,

Come take with you, the unfortunate Lera’s wife,

So he can forget the living.



Unlike the songs we have studied so far, this song was composed for others. It is slightly different from other songs that expressed personal opinion, where the opinion giver expressed his thoughts using songs. The composer of this song is not known, but whoever he was, the song addressed anyone from the world of dead spirits to come and bring Lera's wife. He begged them on behalf of Lera to make him forget the world of the living. Who in particular was it addressed to is not shown, but since *Phulzing* was used to name the village of the dead (*Mitthi khua*), it simply means it was addressed to anyone who had dwelled in the village of the dead. We can say this was how the Mizos imagined things. He requested someone from the village of the dead to bring another person with them. Whether he begged them to take her alive or kill her first and then bring her spirit to the village of the dead cannot be comprehended from the song. However, he imagined Lera might get lonely at the village of the dead, so he requested them to come and take his wife with them for him. To address the dead who lived in the village of the dead is an unusual practice. It may be that he truly believed they could come and bring her with them, but since the song does not say anything further than what we have described above, how they would come and take her with them cannot be actually known.

We can assume folk poetry in their prime would be invaluable for the composers. There was no other platform for confession and letting out of their feelings in Mizo folk literature than folk poetry. It was the only means for them to reveal their deep sorrow, sentiment, and even their view on the world. We see love being talked about in *Chawngchen zai*. The notion of love was not discussed much in their composing, but in one song we find this:

Ka lungdi nuam che maw,

Thangvanah kai ila,

Si-arah to ila,

*Khua zain sêl rawh se (Nilen Zai)*

My dearest, if you would,

Reach the skies with me,

Let us become stars there,

Let many man say what they should say.

The song is brief, yet deep. There are numerous stories about being transformed into stars after death in Mizo folktales, and this kind of rendering in folk poetry is very remarkable. Many may believe that if love lasts a lifetime, it means it is a true kind of love. But the song above talks about an invitation to transform into stars in the universe beyond this world. It does not even end here, we find indifference toward people talking behind their backs. Love in this song reaches beyond death and after, it cares not to die together, and its desire is to transform into stars together. There is no other song in folk poetry that talks about being together after death, we even find in this song willingness to die for the cause of love. In other songs that deal with death, we find they were usually pained by death and missed the dead terribly. Death was depicted as the most sorrowful experience. But we can see that they dreaded death less in the matter of love. There are a number of romantic love in Mizo folktale, a number of them sorrowful and even ended with death. From this, we can assume the Mizos since the olden days took love seriously to the point of death and beyond.

One form of the song we cannot miss in the genre of folk poetry of the Mizos is *Chai hla*. *Chai hla* was sung accompanied by dancing. R.L. Thanmawia believes it originated before (166). It is believed this song was most widely sung at one of the festivals of the Mizos, Chapchar Kût. One distinct feature of *Chai hla* is that the songs of *Chai hla* carry with them stories that actually happened, which they composed and sang in songs. A single *Chai hla* can have a lengthy story. Mizo Folk poetry usually comprises of the exhibition of personal opinion and demonstration of sentiment, but *Chai hla* is different in the quality that it originated on the basis of actual happenings. Since our purpose here is not a study about *Chai hla*, we will only investigate what we can find about death in the poetry of *Chai hla*. In one of *Chai hla* songs we see this, "He that hanged on sahlam of Bualte village / I believe not Mangkhaia shall return" (lines 1-2). In the story, Mangkhaia was a prince, a handsome lad, and his father was a rich chief. But other chiefs coveted his father's wealth. Mangkhaia was captured by Tuichhin's chief

Dara, demanding a large sum of money for ransom. His father paid the ransom and took him home, but he was killed nonetheless on their way home by the village people of Bualte village (171). Some of Mangkhaia *zai* were composed by himself, while others were composed by others. The above stated song was composed by another person. The song is about Mangkhaia being killed by the people of Bualte village and how they hanged his head on a tree, he will not come back into this world. It is evident that the Mizos knew quite well that death is the end of humans. Every human believes death is the end for humans, but some belief in reincarnation. However, the Mizos knew there was no way back to this world, and we can safely assume from the above song about Mangkhaia's death that this was how they looked at life and death.

In Lalvunga *zai* we find the eponym of the song, Lalvunga's death, and in the story, Lalvunga was killed by Palian chiefs (175). Lalvunga's death is told like this, “ “Stop crying Lalvunga's mother, 'tis your weakness / That hangs Lalvunga on sahlam,” (lines 1-2). It is clear this song was composed after Lalvunga's death and looks like a satirical song, a mockery of Lalvunga's mother. The accusation that the mother could not save the life of her son Lalvunga, and because of her weakness Lalvunga had lost his life could be excruciating for the mother. Death is not a subject to joke about, and from the various folk poetry of the Mizos we can see that talk about death, and satirical songs about death are not much in number. Moreover, looking at the lyrics closely the song appears strongly to be composed by their enemies. It is rather unimaginable for the chief's subjects and allies to compose a satirical song on the event of his death. His enemies however remembered their enmity, even composing songs about Lalvunga's death following his departure.

Other mentions of death in Mizo folk poetry are Darpawngi *zai* and Laltheri *zai*. These two can be considered the most prominent women in Mizo folk poetry. Darpawngi *zai* has many songs but we will look into the subject of death only. The exact date of birth of Darpawngi is not known. Perhaps, it was around 1845 as recorded by Thanmawia. Darpawngi did not hail from a well-to-do family, yet she was born with a gift that is one of the most admirable traits in the minds of the Mizo people, Mizo society ever since the primeval era. She had to shift from one place to another ever since her childhood. The reason why she had to live like this is not mentioned in any published book. Yet, we can

assume that she was not born with a silver spoon in her mouth like Laltheri, who was an offspring of one of the famous chiefs. In her early stage, she lived in the house of the chief of Laisawral, Lalchema. Then, in her adolescent period, she lived in Lalkhuma's house, whose father is Vuta, one of the famous Mizo chiefs. Darpawngi belonged to the clan of Ralte Bungsut, her mother belonged to Khiangte clan. She was very fond of singing, and had quite a good voice. So, she used to sing with Lalkhuma, also known as Tuchhingpa or Hniarvungpa, who was also very fond of singing. There, her master's son, Lalbuta fell in love with her and married her. But soon after they had a daughter, Lalnikungi, Lalbuta's parents objected her to be the bride of the chief and separated them. Then she moved to Rullam.

Darpawngi was one of the poets who laments in Mizo folk poetry. Despite her poverty, she has a high sense of self-worth and never disappoints. Lalhlimpui writes:

In her poetry, Darpawngi portrayed herself as a woman who faced conundrums which are not the mundane problems, and that made her bold and straightforward in her expression. As recorded by Thanmawia in his *Mizo Hla Hlui*, she had been married to three husbands, Lalbuta, Daipawla, and Chawngbawnga; divorced by Lalbuta and Daipawla; abandoned by Thanglianpuia right after she conceived a baby, mourning three of her children's death, and justice was denied upon her. (93)

Her *Lusun zai* has emerged right after she lost her first child. She had her first child from Thanglianpuia. Even though she was left alone by Thanglianpuia, she still had a child to assuage her loneliness. But, that child of hers too left her to worsen her misfortune. She personalized death that took away her child and poured out her anger upon it, "Ka tuai chawnban a kai Manghauva'n/ Suanglung tih lo ngunhnam chawi ing e/ Zunfeiin sial ang chhun nang i", (Manghauva<sup>15</sup> takes my baby's hands/ Let me hold the pike that could pierce through a rock/ And stab him as a gayal) (96).

Darpawngi lost her three-year-old son Bawihbangpuia, and she expresses her grief in the poems. Like other Mizo folk poets, she occasionally expresses in most of her laments her concern that death is not the one that can be conquered and that it does not have an exclusion for every household or every village. From her poetry, it can be inferred

that she occasionally considered how her deceased kid could think about and miss his mother from the other side. She writes:

Ka awih lai, ka puak lai ve kha,  
 Lungrawn a liam zo ve zing phulah,  
 'Ka chun ka ngai' ti ve maw?

My baby, the one I dearly held,  
 Has gone to the place of the dead,  
 Would he say 'I miss my mother'?

It was concluded by asking if her dead child from the village of the death would miss his mother. It is evident that Darpawngi laments have travelled through the fictitious afterlife. Because no other Mizo folk poetry has ever mentioned the dead people's longing for their living family, this gives her poetry value in terms of expressing life after death.

She was a particular kind of mother, as was already mentioned, but when death entered his family and took away her son, this woman sobbed and felt sorry for herself. She laments the loss of her son and claims that she is unfortunate and feels alone in the world. She let out her thoughts like this:

Ka riang ber e, van dum chhinah,  
 Mi khawhlui hnu, an dailung rawnah;  
 Ni tin nau ang ka tap e.

I am the most unfortunate one under the sky,  
 On the deserted outskirts of a village;

I cry every day.

She cried and sobbed every day as she mourned her lost son. She acknowledges that she was a mother who mourned her firstborn child's passing deeply. She cried and sobbed every day as she mourned her lost son. She acknowledges that she was a mother who mourned her firstborn child's passing deeply.

Another Mizo folk poet who wrote about death was Laltheri. Her real name is Lalchawngpuii, daughter of one of the most famous Sailo chiefs, Lalsavunga. The exact date of birth is unknown, yet as assumed by some historians; it may be around the late 1830s. She had three brothers and two sisters. Her ancestors were known for their bravery and courage; and so, she and her siblings bore a semblance of their ancestors. Even though she was just a woman, she possessed a male character like her father, bold and stubborn. Says Zawla, “Due to the deceased of her father, Lalsavunga at Darlawng range, with her brother, Vanhnuailiana, they shifted to Saitual in 1842” (265). Here at Ruallung, her interesting story begins. She, as a daughter of Chief, was not supposed to mingle with the commoners. Yet, she fell in love with Chalthanga. During these times, it was strictly prohibited to have an affair with the chief’s family with the commoners. But, Laltheri, being bold and stubborn, did not give a damn about those rules. She just hung around with him very often with no intention to hide it from the public. Many a time, she was rebuked and warned by her family, but to no avail. Laltheri loved and favoured Chalthanga a lot that she never wanted to drink wine or eat meat without Chalthanga. If she could not find him, or he was not around her, she would send someone to look for him and bring him to her.

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

But the barrier between them got killed Chalthanga. Some of their enemies tried to kill Chalthanga and he ran away for his life and was at the point of death, followed by some men, get ensnared and killed in the jungle. Her lover's head was hanging on Sahlam where enemies' heads used to be hung. The demise of Chalthanga caused a great fury in Laltheri she was full of anger towards her family who gave orders and towards those who killed her lover. In lieu of living a normal life, she chose to lament her loss and composed mournful songs. Before the tragic loss of her lover, Laltheri was never known as a song composer. As an old saying goes, her adversity paved the way for her songs. She might never have a song, and we might never have her name erected in Mizo folksong if she had not lost her lover.

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

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

Ka chun leh zua suihlung in mawl lua e,

Kan sumtualah Thangdang thlunglu hawihte'n in tar le.

How thoughtless are you, mother and father

Displaying the head of my beloved in our court yard?

Chalthanga's demise made her stripped off her clothes and walked around naked on the streets. She looked miser and dirty day by day as she did not maintain her physical Mahlimi<sup>64</sup> appearance. Out of sympathy, her mother asked her to clothe herself and eat at least some food. But Laltheri replied her with a sad song:

Ka nemte puan ka chawi lo vang ka nu,

Ka di thangdanga zalna mah, chhimhlei tual daiah.

Chhunrawl lovin thla ka fam lo vang ka nu,

Suihlunglengin Sailo ngurpui fam lo awl na e.

I will not clothe myself, mother,

Even my lover lies dead beneath the earth.

Will I not die of hunger, mother,

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

Laltheri's poetry depicts death as something that strengthens the speaker's character and elevates her will. Her lover's passing renders her impossible for anybody, not even the chief, to defeat.

One thing that is found in Mizo folk poetry is the fact that when they compose songs about death they do so only in times of the death of their close relatives or loved ones or when there is a mass death in their village. Apart from these reasons, they don't



compose songs regarding death. Death upon them puts them in an unavoidable situation of composing songs about death.

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## Chapter - III

### Theme of Death in Mizo Religious Poetry

The theme of death holds a significant place in religious poetry, offering profound insights into the human understanding of mortality, the afterlife, and the spiritual journey. Religious poetry, across various traditions and cultures, explores the theme of death in multiple dimensions, reflecting the beliefs, rituals, and teachings associated with the divine and the eternal.

In religious poetry, death is often depicted as a transition from the temporal realm to the spiritual realm. It is viewed as a passage to the afterlife or a reunion with the divine. Religious poets contemplate the nature of the soul, its immortality, and the ultimate purpose of human existence. Through their verses, they seek to offer solace, guidance, and a deeper understanding of the mysteries surrounding death.

One recurring theme in religious poetry is the idea of death as a transformative experience. Poets often emphasize the notion of spiritual growth and purification through the process of dying to the self and embracing a higher spiritual reality. Death becomes a metaphorical journey towards enlightenment, liberation, and union with the divine. Religious poets use vivid imagery and metaphors to convey the transcendental aspects of death and the soul's quest for spiritual union.

The theme of death in religious poetry also highlights the importance of moral conduct and the consequences of one's actions in the afterlife. Poets explore concepts of judgment, accountability, and the eternal implications of one's choices. The poetry often serves as a reminder of the impermanence of worldly attachments and the significance of leading a righteous life in preparation for the hereafter.

Religious poetry offers a space for contemplating the meaning of suffering, loss, and grief in the face of death. Poets delve into the emotional and existential dimensions of mortality, addressing the human struggle to find meaning and hope in times of bereavement. Through their verses, they offer consolation, encouragement, and a sense of divine presence that transcends the boundaries of life and death.

Religious poetry acts as a vehicle for praising and glorifying the divine amidst the inevitable reality of death. Poets' express devotion, awe, and reverence for the divine attributes, presenting death as a gateway to eternal bliss and divine communion. The poetry becomes a form of worship, an act of surrender, and a celebration of the divine majesty and mercy that prevail beyond the confines of mortality.

The theme of death in religious poetry encompasses a rich tapestry of beliefs, emotions, and spiritual contemplations. It explores death as a transition, a transformative experience, and a journey towards spiritual enlightenment. The poetry emphasizes moral conduct, accountability, and the eternal consequences of one's actions. It provides solace in times of grief, reminding individuals of the eternal presence of the divine. Above all, religious poetry in its exploration of death serves as a form of worship, praising the divine and celebrating the mysteries of life, death, and the eternal realm.

Prior to the advent of Christianity in Mizoram, the Mizos had already been preoccupied with the idea of religion. Mizo society is characterized by community life and council, but religious activities were commonly practiced within the family, and community practices were less popular. In ancient religious practices, the common folk did not sing or chant songs, but the religious tantras were chanted by the *Sadawt*.

Some historians claim that the old religion of the Mizos was already in existence when they settled in *Sepuikhur* around AD 1600-1700 (Pi Pute Sakhua leh an Thlarau Khawvel 13). On the other hand, Hrangthiauva opines that the aforementioned settlement dates back to AD 1530 (Aw *Pialral* 45). On the idea of religion, Liangkhaia writes:

The Mizos are purported to be 'demon worshippers' by Western thinkers, but in reality, that is not so. The practice of worshipping the spirit/demon occurs only in the case of an illness when sacrifices are made to appease the spirit, and this is in no way religion...The Mizos mostly worshipped SA and *KHUA*; SA is worshipped by sacrificing a male pig, *KHUA* with an ox. We followed this practice, and is simply considered as religion. (153)

According to G.C. Newort, "The Mizos believed in the existence of two gods, *Khuavang* and *Pathian*" (qtd. in Pi Pute Biak Hi 201). On the idea of God Zairema states:

In their study of the religions of backward tribes, scholars of religious studies assert that these people believe they have an ultimate God, and under him there are other smaller Gods. Otherwise, they believe in the existence of different gods, whom each enjoy sovereign power, they compete with each other and wage war against each other. If we ask an old man from 100 years ago who he thinks is the most powerful, *Pathian*, *Khuavang* or is it rather Sa? he might choose *Pathian*. (209)

J. Shakespear writes about the idea of *Pathian* in the following words:

The Lushai-Kukis believe that there is a God who creates everything; but, they do not think that he interferes in the lives of men. They also believe in the existence of many spirits. They believe that rivers, mountains, and trees have spirits, and worship them. However, they do not worship the sun and the moon. (61).

As mentioned earlier, there is a belief in the existence of *Mitthi khua* in Mizo religion, next to this land, the river Pial flows, and beyond that, there is a land known as *Pialral*. They believed that most people go to *Pialral* when they die, *Pialral* is not a place where good people who have led untainted lives go but rather, it is a place for those who have offered sacrifices, killed enemies at war, slain and entrapped an allotted number of wild animals, slept with women in their lifetime. People who reached *Pialral* are welcomed with clean clothes/linen, an endless supply of alcohol and meat, and they are extremely happy” (62). Mizo religion is inextricably linked with the afterlife and can be said to be connected with *Mitthi khua* and *Pialral*. *Pialral* cannot be reached unless one is *Thangchhuah*, so one has to attain *Thangchhuah* both within the domestic sphere as well as in the wild. Domestic *Thangchhuah* is called *Khuangchawi*, and one must feed the community with alcohol and meat. But if one is to attain *Thangchhuah* outside the domestic realm/in the wild, he must kill a deer, serow, wild boar, bear or wild ox, or elephant without fail (Aw *Pialral* 46). The Mizo recognized *Pathian* in their religion, but they lack deep understanding, they believed that there is a being who has authority over everything, and they worship this being in the best way they know. They apparently did not worship demons as a religious practice, but they offered sacrifices as they believed

that he is responsible for causing illnesses and suffering, and they offered these sacrifices to appease the spirit to take away their illnesses.

In the Mizo religion, there is no song that is meant for the common folk. The priest has a tantra that he chants, but no one else chants these songs. Among the different tribes/clans of Mizos, the Lusei tribe uses the swine/pig as a sacrificial offering to God (Pi Pute Biak Hi 196). Noting the difference in religious practices between the Mizos and other nations, Zairema states, “What we see in the Bible is that people pray to God when they are sick, or else they would look for medicines, but they never sacrificed animals to cure them from their sickness. However, they make such offerings as a means to show gratitude once they are healed. They never offer sacrifices as the Mizos did” (7-8). Thus, the old religious practices of the Mizos is quite different from those that are adopted by other cultures. It has been established that in the Mizo religion, that is the pre-Christian era, the common folk did not have any songs to sing, but on the contrary under Christianity, religion and song culture go hand-in-hand.

J. Malsawma states, “In the old religion of the Mizos, we never hear about songs that were sung in unison by the community. When one practises religion, the *Sadawt* would simply chant the religious mantras,” (138). It has been mentioned earlier that the Mizos have a firm belief in the afterlife when it comes to religion, however, since the common folk did not have any religious songs, their ideas on death and the afterlife cannot be gleaned through songs.

As time goes on, a new religion, Christianity entered Mizoram. The first Christians were confined totally to the rules and restrictions that the missionaries made in the beginning. But it lasted only for a while. When the third spiritual revival which was considered the most prominent revival ever occurred in Mizoram, the Christians could not suppress their real nature, that is, suppressing themselves to sing without the beat of a drum and sing only foreign songs which had quite a different tune compared to the Mizo songs and that did not fit to arouse the sentiment of the Mizo people; there was a renaissance among the Mizos.

The new songs with all the tunes actually could not arouse their emotions nor could it quench their thirst. Their sentiment lay in the tunes of their old songs. Then, either

by the end of 1919 or beginning of the 1920, *Lengkhawm zai* came into the light of Mizo literature. In its characteristics and wordings, it has a resemblance to English songs but its tune is very similar to the pre-colonial songs. So, it is a confused mixture of two different songs, that is, the new and the old songs. Apart from Christianity, there is no known record of the Mizos following any other major religion except their indigenous religious practices.

In the year 1894, on January 11<sup>th</sup> J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge arrived in Sairang, Mizoram. The two men came to Mizoram as Christian missionaries. They spent seventeen days to reach Sairang from Silchar and arrived in Aizawl, which is now the capital of Mizoram on 16<sup>th</sup> January 1894 (Zofate Chanchin Tha Rawn Hlantute 103). The first missionary among the Mizos is Thangzika, who had been detained in Silchar jail for killing Chhingpuii, a maiden from Ruanzawl. Accompanied by an interpreter/translator J.H. Lorrain and his friend made acquaintances with him, and eventually baptised him in the river. The missionaries continued to preach the Gospel and finally converted the Mizos to Christianity. The impact of Christian missionaries on Mizo society and religious poetry has been profound, significantly shaping the cultural and spiritual landscape of the community. With the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century, Mizo society experienced a transformation that left a lasting imprint on various aspects of their lives.

One of the most significant impacts of Christian missionaries was the widespread conversion of the Mizo people to Christianity. Missionaries introduced the teachings of Christianity and established churches, leading to a substantial portion of the Mizo population embracing the new faith. As a result, Christianity became a dominant religion in the region, influencing religious practices and beliefs.

The impact of Christian missionaries on Mizo religious poetry has been significant, bringing about a transformative shift in its themes, content, and style. With the arrival of Christian missionaries in the 19th century, Mizo society underwent a cultural and religious transformation that left an indelible mark on their poetic expressions.

### **Christianization of Themes**

One of the primary impacts of Christian missionaries on Mizo religious poetry was the introduction of Christian themes and narratives. The missionaries introduced the teachings



of Christianity, including biblical stories, parables, and moral lessons, which gradually found their way into Mizo religious poetry. The poetry began to explore concepts of sin, redemption, salvation, and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

### **Transformation of Symbolism**

Christian missionaries also influenced the symbolism employed in Mizo religious poetry. Traditional indigenous symbols and metaphors were reinterpreted and adapted to convey Christian concepts. For example, the image of the cross, representing the crucifixion of Jesus, became a powerful symbol in Mizo religious poetry, representing sacrifice, salvation, and divine love.

### **Integration of Christian Hymns and Verses**

Christian missionaries introduced hymnody and Christian verses to the Mizo community. These hymns and verses, often accompanied by Western musical styles, were embraced by the Mizo people and became an integral part of their religious poetry. The incorporation of Christian hymns and verses added a new dimension to Mizo religious poetry, enriching its lyrical and devotional aspects.

### **Shift in Language and Literary Forms**

The arrival of Christian missionaries also brought changes to the language and literary forms used in Mizo religious poetry. Missionaries played a key role in developing and standardizing the Mizo script, which facilitated the written preservation and dissemination of religious poetry. This led to the emergence of written forms of poetry, such as hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs, alongside the traditional oral poetic traditions.

### **Preservation and Documentation**

Christian missionaries played a vital role in the preservation and documentation of Mizo religious poetry. They actively collected and recorded Mizo poems, hymns, and spiritual songs, ensuring their continued existence and accessibility. This documentation helped in the preservation of Mizo cultural and religious heritage, as well as facilitating the transmission of religious poetry across generations.

The impact of Christian missionaries on Mizo religious poetry was profound and far-reaching. Their introduction of Christian themes, symbolism, hymnody, and literary forms transformed the content and style of Mizo religious poetry. While this brought changes to traditional indigenous poetic expressions, it also facilitated the preservation and documentation of Mizo cultural and religious heritage. The influence of Christian missionaries continues to shape and inspire the religious poetry of the Mizo community, reflecting the interplay between Christian teachings and indigenous poetic traditions.

### **Cultural Transformation**

Christian missionaries also played a pivotal role in bringing about cultural changes in Mizo society. They emphasized education, leading to the establishment of schools and educational institutions. As Mizo individuals became more literate and educated, their literary expressions, including poetry, evolved to reflect new ideas and perspectives influenced by Christian teachings.

### **Promotion of Written Language**

Missionaries contributed to the development and standardization of the Mizo script, which was previously an unwritten language. The written script enabled the preservation and dissemination of religious poetry, allowing it to reach a wider audience and be passed down through generations.

### **Impact on Worldview**

The Christian worldview introduced through missionary teachings influenced Mizo religious poetry by shifting the focus from traditional beliefs in local deities and spirits to monotheistic concepts centered around the Christian God. This shift in worldview is evident in the themes and symbolism present in religious poetry composed after the spread of Christianity.

In summary, the impact of Christian missionaries on Mizo society and religious poetry has been multi-faceted. The widespread conversion to Christianity led to the incorporation of Christian themes in religious poetry, reshaping its content and themes. While certain aspects of traditional folk poetry evolved, the arrival of missionaries also contributed to the preservation of Mizo cultural heritage through the adaptation of Christian narratives to indigenous poetic forms. The interplay between Christian influences and traditional Mizo expressions continues to shape the rich tapestry of religious poetry in Mizo society.

This chapter focuses on the theme of death as seen in the various songs composed after the Christianization of the Mizos. By the end of 1899, the missionaries had published the first Christian hymnal, and it was four and a half inches in length and it had thirty-six pages to it, with as many as eighteen songs to the same. “It seems certain that the first hymn in Mizo was ‘Isua Vanah a om a’ (Jesus Resides in Heaven),” (Mizo Poetry 66). According to Thanmawia, this first Mizo Christian song was composed by J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, but Margaret L. Pachuau on the other hand, alleges that the song is not composed by them, but translated (IJELLH 138). The song is believed to have been composed toward the end of 1894 or the beginning of 1895 (Mizo Poetry 66). The tune of this hymn was taken from the “Come, Ye Sinners” (Sacred Songs and Solos No.376) and it is about the life history of Jesus, starting from his first coming to earth and concluding by his resurrection (66). Christian hymns were increasing in terms of composition and by 1904 the Mizo hymn book was reprinted and as many as 44 songs were added to the same. *Kristian Hla Bu* was published in 1908, and there were two hundred and seventy songs at the time. *Kristian Hla Bu* has been revised from time to time, and the most recent revision happened in 2005 when the 18<sup>th</sup> revised edition came out containing 600 hymns.

As mentioned before, the Mizos did not have songs in their old religion but started to have religious songs after their conversion to Christianity. However, their early religious songs were not composed by Mizos, but by the missionaries. These missionaries borrowed the tunes of Western hymns, and translated a number of songs to Mizo, which became the earliest Christian songs in Mizo. On this regard, R.L. Thanmawia writes:

The study of early Christian poetry must begin with the settlement of the Christian missionaries in Mizoram. The earliest Mizo Christian poetry were contributed by the non-Mizo people. The languages they employed

were simple and crude. They were mostly in form of sermons and moral lessons in verse. For research convenience, the years between 1894 and 1920 may be called ‘Missionary Age’. (65)

When talking about Mizo religious poetry, one cannot help but refer to the hymns. But since the Mizos do not have separate Mizo terms to distinguish poetry from song and simply uses the term “hla” to refer to both styles of writing, the use of the term “poetry” in its place will not be unacceptable. Greg Caramenico says:

Religious poetry is one of the oldest genres of literature, and consists of many different types, depending on the culture and era in which it was written. In the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, many of the earliest works of literature are poems with religious content. Classical Islamic literature had a type of religious poetry featuring mystical uses of love poems and standardized rhymes and imagery. A major form of English poetry of the 17th century was the devotional poetry written by many authors, including John Donne. (What Are the Different Types of Religious Poetry?)

The early Christian songs, that is, the translated ones rarely had poetic diction because the missionaries were not familiar with Mizo poetic language. Even when the first converts composed songs of their own, they never used poetic language for they were influenced and guided by the missionaries and using poetic language in their hymns was considered paganism. As written by Thanmawia,

Reviewing the Christian poetry, Rev. Liangkhaia remarked that the missionaries used the common language for their hymns because they were not acquainted with the Mizo poetic diction. The early converts, on the other hand, considered common language the best way to praise God, as poetical words would suit the pagantic poetry. (78)

But the wording of *Lengkhawm zai* contains some poetical words which are why they were considered not to fit to be included in the first published *Kristian Hlabu*. A glance at Patea’s song “Dam lai thil zawng kan ngaihtuahin” will be worth mentioning,

Thuro angin thlawkin leng ila,  
Damlai khawvel kalsanin;  
Kanaan thing zarah chawl turin,  
Buaina ram pelin ka leng ang.

What will it be to fly like a dove  
Leaving this life on earth  
To rest on that tree of restful Canaan  
I shall wander 'yond this weary land (Trans. Mizo Poetry, 81)

Saihnuna (1896-1949) also composed a song like this, "Kan tlang ram thing rihnim lerah lelte a kiu/ Thal favang tlai ni a tla eng riai hian/ Ka nghah Pialral ram mawi min ngaih tir", "The sweet songs of cicadas of the trees/ And the splendid of this autumnal sunset/ Arouse my love for the beautiful heaven" (Trans. Mizo Poetry).

These song-composers did not reject the metaphors and similes which they got from the missionaries, but they brought back poetic language which best suited their emotions and sentimentality, and the tunes were much nearer to the traditional ones than the western songs.

The various religious poetry composed by the Mizos did not conform to any technical style, and they use simple words that can be easily understood. Instead of employing metrical verse form, they are mostly written in the quatrain. Mizo religious poetry is mainly based on Christian doctrine. Communicating their needs to God, and praying to abide with them, stating their sufferings in the world, and their yearning to reach heaven after death are the themes of most of their poetry. Sone Enongene Mirabeau states that:

Religious poetry is generally considered the fruit of a people's long reflection on their relationship with their gods, with the ancestors, and with the partly seen and unseen universe. It is used to celebrate events in the life of the individual and the community, to express fellowship, and as a powerful means of communication. Thus, religious poetry is an integral element of a people's heritage. (308)

It is quite difficult to determine the exact number of Mizo Christian poetry, but there are 600 songs in *Kristian Hla Bu*, and new songs keep coming out so it would be best to assume that there is about 1000 Mizo Christian poetry at present. However, there has not been any well-known academic research or analysis done on most of these songs. As mentioned, both the early Mizo Christian poetry as well as contemporary poetry are mostly translations of western hymns and songs. Laltluangliana Khiangte traces the origin of authentic Mizo Christian poetry composed by Mizos and states:

Many compositions of Christian literature appeared right from the turn of the twentieth century at the hands of early Christians and that missionary. When we look closely, Awithangpa and Thanga started composing poems and songs at the beginning of the twenty-first century, followed by the Rev. Liangkhaia, who contributed a good number of hymns for the official hymn book. The three poets mentioned can be considered the pillars of Mizo written language and literature, because they made an extensive impact on other writers who followed them at their heels like L. Siamliana, R.L. Kamlala, Hrawva, and Damhauhva in the 1920s. (10)

In the post-Christian era, poetry composed by the Mizos include their concept of heaven and thus, it can be felt that the Mizos have a deep yearning for heaven as it is reflected in their poetry. In one of the poems that she composed, Zumi writes about her longing for the afterlife:

Ka hmaah lui ral khaw mawi chu a awm,

Thlen ka nghakhlel khawpui mawi chu;

Lungduh zawng zawng an kimna hmun,

Hmuh chàk hian ka thlir bang thei lo (Ka Hmaah Lui Ral Khaw Mawi Chu)

The beauteous land beyond the river is before me,

I cannot wait to reach that beautiful city;

Where all our loved ones will gather,

I cannot cease my longing to see it.

The poetess who authored this poem Zumi married Perkunga, which ended in divorce, and her child later died, and Zumi also died at the young age of 30 in the year 1929. In her poem, she uses the metaphor “beautiful city” to denote the place that she anticipates, heaven. Although she does not directly mention death, her poem clearly depicts her eagerness to reach heaven, a place that the departed goes to according to Christian belief. In various Mizo Christian poetry, the desire to leave earthly life and reach heaven is a recurrent theme, and perhaps the most prominent. However, their motives to reach heaven are quite diverse. Zumi yearns for heaven because she believes that all her friends, family, and relatives will be present in heaven which is why she anticipates it. Heaven is believed to be a beautiful place, devoid of pain and suffering. While in the old Mizo belief, they were convinced that *Pialral* is not for everyone, but the Mizos became Christians, they started believing in heaven which is open to everyone, and their ideal vision of heaven is often reflected in their poetry. Lines such as “There is no place for peace/ ‘til I reach God’s side.” (lines 11-12), “Take me to your beautiful land/Where joy will never cease” (lines 19-20) are some examples of their representation of heaven. They believe that they will have eternal happiness which is why they long for this place.

A prominent aspect of Mizo religious poetry is their preference for heaven to earth. Since they believe that they could reach heaven only after death and the latter becomes a link that connects them to heaven, they perceive death with ease. Mizo religious poetry may be broadly divided into two types. The first consists of poetry that are presently discussed and can be sung in accordance with the solfa tune. The other type of poetry is the traditional Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* which is usually sung by playing two types of

indigenous drums. Even though these songs are composed using the solfa tune, the two drums are always used when performing these songs. Mizo religious poetry can be understood well enough from the two categories we have discussed so far. Looking closely into their lyrics it is clear that composers investigate human life and their imagination digs deep down into the essence of being human. It looks as if they have comfort over death itself. It appears some consider the life of man to be nothing. Luaia writes in his song:

Khawvel nunna hi eng nge ni?

Natna leh lungngaihna chauh;

Hlim leh lawmna zawng zawngte hi,

Hlobet pangpar ang a ni. (Ka nunna hi pangpar angin)

What is life on earth?

Only pain and sadness;

All the Joy and happiness,

Are merely grass of the field.

The poet feels that man's life on earth is constantly plagued by pain and suffering, the joy and happiness that man experiences are momentary/temporary, and compares it to the grass in a field. The poet's use of "grass" to compare with life while there are plenty of other beautiful flowers to choose from, shows how ephemeral life is. The other verses of Luaia's song also allude to heaven. He envisions heaven as a place where one will experience joy and happiness with friends, and as a place of rest. He imagines heaven as a place where songs of praises to God will be gladly sung, and he compares that to life on earth, "O my soul, fly to heaven/Why do you pine for this world?" (lines 5-6) He tells his soul to forget his longing for this world and strife towards heaven and expresses his desire to reach heaven to sing songs in praise of God. There is no academic research on Mizo



religious poetry, but the present study affirms that these poetry reflects their ideas and desire for the afterlife instead of focusing on death.

A prominent Mizo poet Rokunga does not talk about death but rather depicts the fate of man if the world comes to an end. When the world ends, he says that there will be separation, judgement day will come, businessmen will have to abandon their assets, and the farmer will have to abandon his field. In the words of Rokunga:

Kan khawvel ni a kin hunah,

Lei hlimna a kiang ang;

A mawina leh ropuina te,

An lo ral vek tawh ang (Rokunga, Kan Khawvel ni a kin hunah)

When our world is over

Earthly joys will vanish

its beauty and glory

Will all be gone?

Here he states that earthly joys and beauty, and all its glory will no longer matter. Perhaps, there is no other Mizo poem that details the end of the world as this poem does. Since the world itself will come to an end, men will be separated in life, and not only by death, when this day comes:

Hmangaihtu leh hmangaihte pawh,

Inthen a tul tawh ang,

Mipui sang tam tak tahna nen,

Hremhmun an her liam ang;

Mi felte chu an Pa ramah,

Ni angin an eng ang (Rokunga, Kan Khawvel ni a kin hunah)

The lover and the beloved too,

Will have to part ways,

Thousands of people with tears,

Will depart for hell;

The good will go to the Father,

And shine like the sun.

He further states that good people who believe in God will go to heaven, dwell in God's presence and shine like the sun. The simile 'shine like the sun does not seem to represent literal brightness but is rather used as a symbol to denote the beauty of life in heaven. Whenever death is alluded to in Mizo religious poetry, life beyond death always finds expression, and this too in conformity with Christian beliefs. Heaven is unfailingly mentioned in this poetry and is seen as a place where the souls of the departed go in accordance with Christian teachings. From the perspective of religion, it is quite justifiable to allude to death and heaven, and moreover to juxtapose these two ideas of death and heaven in Mizo Religious poetry.

As already mentioned, there is a dearth of the theme of death in Mizo religious poetry that is composed by Mizos apart from the traditional *Lengkhawm zai*. The theme of death is found in a number of songs in *Kristian Hla Bu*, but they are mostly translations. Poetry that is originally composed by Mizo denoting the theme of death is quite rare. Sanglianthanga writes a poem about death which is based on the verse I Corinthians 15:55 from the Bible:

Hmelma hnukung ber tihbova awm tur chu,

Thihna rapthlak tak mai hi a ni;

Isuan thihnain a tiboral ta. (Sanglianthanga, Aw Thihna)

The last enemy that shall be destroyed

Is the dreadful death.

Jesus conquered it with death.

Death is depicted as man's enemy, and in fact, as his "last enemy". Death is something that man cannot escape, and its portrayal as the enemy of man is remarkable. However, a death that is seen as the enemy of man is shown as being conquered by Jesus through death which shows that death can only be defeated by death itself. This notion is quite uncommon but it explains how death cannot be overcome by man and it requires the death of the King of heaven and earth to conquer it. He portrays death as man's enemy that he can never defeat, and as the reaper of life. In the Chorus he writes:

Aw, thihna, khawiah nge i tur chu?

Aw, thlan, khawiah nge i hnehna chu?

Thihna tûr chu sual thiltihtheihna ni mahse,

Isua zarah hnehna chu kan chang ta. (Sanglianthanga, Aw Thihna)

O Death, where is thy Sting?

O grave, where is your victory?

Though the poison of death comes under the power of evil

Through Jesus We are victorious

Death cannot be conquered by humans, and there is no man on earth who can escape death. However, the poet based his text on the Bible, the holy book of Christians, and asserts that Jesus conquered death by dying on the Cross. For the followers of Jesus, the belief in this conquest gives them victory over death. In Christian belief, despite death, man has a soul and his soul will go to heaven after his death. This belief is reflected in the second verse of this song:

Ringtu tân thihna a awm ve tawh lo,

Lalpa chu mi nung Pathian a ni si;

Ringtu tân thihna a awm ve tawh lo. (Sanglianthanga, Aw Thihna)

There will be no more death for the believer,

For the Almighty is the God of life;

There will be no more death for the believer.

He states his assurance that for those who believe in God, death is not an issue as death no longer has power over them. This is so because God is the God of life, and for believers, death has no meaning because men have souls that are destined for heaven. Therefore, death in reality is not the end for believers. So it can be safely inferred that for Christians death is not frightening at all as God has already defeated death.

When comparing their notion of death by studying their representations in various texts, there is a huge difference between Mizo religious poetry and the old Mizo religious beliefs. In the olden times, death was something dreadful. Death is especially harrowing for the common folk because they accepted that they were destined for *Mitthi khua* as they know there's no chance to reach *Pialral*. The poetry that has been mentioned are Mizo religious poetry, particularly Christian poetry, but those that do not belong to the *Lengkhawm* genre. The central focus here has been the portrayal of death and how the poets conceptualise death and the afterlife. In truth, Mizo poets seldom express their ideas on death and the theme of death in Mizo composition is mostly seen in the *Lengkhawm*

*zai*. C. Vanlallawma desperately states, “Pu Thanga’s ‘*Pialral* chawlhna tha tak a awm’ (There is a good resting place called *Pialral*) and Durra Chawngthu’s, ‘Chatuan *Pialral* ramah chuan’ (In the eternal *Pialral* land) are the only ones that I know of,” (Pi Pu Zunzam 206).

Among the various Mizo religious poetry, the kind of poetry that Mizos revere and consider as authentically theirs’ is the traditional ‘*Lengkhawm zai*’. R.L. Thanmawia describes *Lengkhawm zai* in these words:

Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* is composed in different tunes, but has a similar style, that is deemed unsuitable for Kristian Hla Bu, they are neither translations nor borrowed tunes, new compositions by Mizo Christians, sentimentally tuned to appeal to Mizo sensibility, and mostly sung in funeral wakes and hence all these new songs are categorised and continue to be considered as, *Lengkhawm zai*. (Lenghawm 175)

Joanna Heath describes the *Lengkhawm Zai*:

...the sounds of the hymns, was foreign, yet we have seen that they contained elements of compatibility that resonated with the sounds that were already familiar in the traditional Mizo songs. After a period of revivals, in which Christianity became an integral and native part of Mizo society and identity, these foreign sounds proved suitable for adaptation. The result was a new style of singing, *Lengkhawm zai*, as well as a new *Lengkhawm* and *zaikhawm* worship context which reminded the Mizo people of the musical sounds and community music gatherings of the past. They touched the Mizo sentiment in the same way, and this new tradition became and has remained a uniquely Mizo Christian tradition. (136)

The Christian Missionaries arrived in Mizoram in the year 1894 and since their arrival, the Mizos gradually converted to Christianity. They translated Western hymns to Mizo and thus the Mizos began to have religious songs in praise of God. But since the missionaries are non-Mizos, they mostly use simple diction for the songs that they composed or translated. The vast poetic diction of the Mizos that were already in existence was never utilised. Thanmawia opines that as a result, the early Mizo converts also felt

that it was best to use of simple/common language when composing religious poetry, and so the use of Mizo poetic diction was deemed as paganism or paganistic poetry (78). Amidst all these, a revival struck Mizoram in year 1919 which brought about major significant changes in the history and development of Mizo religious poetry. Thanmawia states:

Just after the great revival of 1919 broke out, three great Mizo poets appeared which soon turned the Mizo Christian songs to the traditional way. The founder and fore-runner of this movement was Patea. In those dark days when the light of nationalization of poetry had not yet been visible on the horizon of the Missionary Age, Patea anticipated the Mizo taste, and the Mizo mind. By his first song, 'Ka ropuina tur leh ka himna hmun' Patea opened a new chapter in the history of Mizo Christian poetry in 1920. (79).

*Lengkhawm zai* originated after the Mizos were exposed to the Gospel. The Mizos have been profusely composing songs and have a lively song-culture since time immemorial, but they did not have songs that are specifically composed for religious functions, especially for the common folk. J. Malsawma asserts that *Lengkhawm zai* which is currently discussed originated around the year 1920. He writes:

After the light of the Gospel was spread, around the year 1920 prolific composers who believed in God started writing songs praising God, songs with reference to the Cross and the spiritual world beyond death; and they were quite good at it. They produced songs for the grief-stricken in profusion, and there are a hundred songs of that kind in our Mizo *Kristian Hla Thar Bu*. (150)

Let us briefly discuss the origin of the Mizo *Lengkhawm zai*. C.Z. Huala states that it originated around the year AD 1922. However, Patea who is the first known composer of this traditional style of poetry is believed to have composed his first poem "Ka ropuina tur leh ka himna hmun" toward the end of 1919 or the early part of 1920 as speculated by Mizo historian B. Lalthangliana. Since there is no known record of reliable

documentation, the date of composition cannot be clearly stated (Mizo Lengkhawm Zai Zir Chianna 180). In this regard, R.L. Thanmawia concludes that:

Whatever be the case, Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* was started around the year 1920, and the major compositions took place between 1920-1935; although they continue to produce new poetry, the number became quite negligible. Songs that are remarkable and popularly sung were mostly produced during this period...even the poets who are still alive no longer compose songs of spiritual *Lengkhawm zai*. (180)

*Lengkhawm zai* is believed to be a product of the revival of 1919, and this must have a significant bearing not only on their conversion but also towards the development of their Christian life. This in turn is believed to have a significant impact on the Mizo *Lengkhawm Zai* tradition. Since time immemorial, singing or song culture is central to Mizo society/ethos, and hence singing songs in praise of God with the beat of their indigenous drum must have been quite enticing. Therefore, the birth of the traditional *Lengkhawm Zai* that evokes Mizo sentiment is a great blessing that cannot be overseen. The conflict between the old Mizo religion and Christianity is documented by Siamkima Khawlhing who states:

For those who settled around the *Rih Dil*, the River Jordan whose existence was not even known to them suddenly arrived and flowed within Mizoram. Thus, arises a conflict where the Mizos became the bone of contention between the two religions. Since the inception of this conflict, *Rih Dil* took an inferior position. The ones who came from a distant land, brought with them various weapons, that people in *Rih Dil* were unfamiliar with, and started conquering vast lands...Abandoning the land of our ancestors, we started turning towards the river Jordan, standing on its shores we looked to the land beyond the river...As the Jordan river gradually grows in the heart and minds of the Mizos, and so the *Rih Dil* slowly recedes.” (46)

Here, Siamkima skilfully uses the Jordan river and *Rih Dil* as symbols to denote Christianity and the old Mizo religion respectively, to chronicle how Christianity gradually started taking lands in Mizoram. In order to further vanquish the old Mizo

religion, the most effective weapon of the Christians became what is now known as the *Lengkhawm zai*.

In the earlier part of Christianity in Mizoram, the missionaries and the early Mizo converts as well strictly banished many of Mizo's traditional ways of living. As always mentioned, the life of Mizo and rice beer had a really strong connection to the extent that they could not even do or perform their traditional religious rites without a bundle of rice beer. However, the missionaries strictly prohibited this practice. Whenever they gathered together in any occasion, they could not spend their gatherings without singing songs along with drums. This too, considering it to be connected with a thing of paganism, drums were banished from the practice of Christians praising or worshipping God.

The life of the early Christian converts was bounded by a whole lot of restrictions they were not even allowed to sing their traditional songs because it was also considered to be a transgression against Christian belief. So, as a matter of fact, being Christian was almost likely making oneself live in a barrier. No doubt, they were amazed by the rich variety of translated songs and they really appreciated them; yet their sentiments could not always be satisfied with such strange songs from a foreign land.

R.L. Thanmawia states that there are 35 Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* composers, although there are a couple of songs with unknown composers, but there are at least 35 composers whose identity can be confirmed. Altogether, these authors have composed a total of 679 songs (181-182). As mentioned earlier, these were composed roughly between 1920 – 1935, which means that 679 poetry were composed within 15 years.

There can be a number of reasons why the new *Lengkhawm zai* is no longer produced after 1935. One of these reasons could be the influx of Western music in Mizo society. The Church gradually promotes solfa songs or western hymns. In some churches, solfa songs are more frequently sung as opposed to *Lengkhawm zai*. Secondly, *Lengkhawm zai* was an offspring of the revival. Apart from the revival of 1919, another great revival occurred sometime after 1930. Considering the years in which *Lengkhawm zai* were mostly written, it is telling that this form of poetry is influenced by revivals and the absence of such revivals since then may be regarded as the reason why *Lengkhawm zai* is no longer produced(190). Most recently in 2015, there was a revival in the town of



Kelkang in Mizoram, popularly known as the Kelkang Revival. However, no new *Lengkhawm zai* came out of that revival.

There are various aspects that are highlighted in *Lengkhawm zai*. Although there are no deserts in Mizoram, many of these poems allude to deserts, the comparison of man as a sojourner, an aspect found in songs across cultures, also finds expression in Mizo *Lengkhawm zai*. Even though the oceans are quite distant from Mizoram, they are often talked about in this poetry, and finally, there are works that depict snow despite the lack of it in Mizoram. The most prominent theme in Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* is the theme of death and the afterlife. More significantly expressed in these poems than the theme of death would be the notion of life after death. Whenever they talk about the spiritual realm, the most astounding would be their notion of heaven. There are some poets who retain the use of the old Mizo religious term “*Pialral*” as a symbol to denote heaven.

Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* are mostly poetry that reflect their longing for heaven; they seldom represent earth and life in a bright and optimistic manner according to R.L. Thanmawia, a scholar of Mizo *Lengkhawm Zai* (200). The bleak representation of life is a crucial aspect of Mizo *Lengkhawm Zai*. The change in their perspective on death and the afterlife could be the reason why many religious poets allude to heaven in their poetry. It can be assumed that the common folk has an intense desire to reach heaven, and especially for the poor and destitute families, the possibility to get there is a blissful matter. J. Malsawma strongly opines that the motive behind the mass conversion of Mizos is “the fear of hell and the desire to get to heaven.” (151)

While expounding on the theme of death in Mizo *Lengkhawm zai*, what is recurrent are commiseration and peace. One of the *Lengkhawm zai* poets who remarkably portrays death in his works is Saihnuna. He has composed 79 pieces of poetry out of which 12 can be categorized as songs of bereavement (Lengkhawm 144). In his works, Saihnuna presents death as a painful aspect of life and his depiction shows that the emotions death evoke is quite similar both in the pre and post-Christian era. But the change in the latter era is that death is no longer perceived as the end of everything. He writes about the agony that death brings about as follows:

Tap lo thei ka ni lo, aw ka lainatte kha,

Hnutiang lam sul ang an hawi tawh lo ve,  
Pialral rihsang an kai zo ta a maw,  
Kir an rel tawh lo ve. (Saihnuna, Tap lo thei ka ni lo)

I cannot help but cry, O my loved ones  
No longer desire to turn back,  
They have all reached *Pialral*,  
Resolved to never come back.

He feels that he cannot control his emotions at the death of loved ones with the awareness that they will be gone forever, never to return to earth. So he does not hesitate to show his grief over the death and bluntly expresses his true emotions in the given lines. His retention of “*Pialral*” which is an old Mizo religious term can be seen as a means to preserve Mizoness in his work. He has not adopted the term “heaven” in this poem and does not represent death in a distinctive manner. He simply states that the departed will never return to earth and for that reason, he cannot help but cry over it. But he portrays his desire to get to heaven, an aspect that was absent in the old religious beliefs of the Mizo.

Zion himthla an bel, hmangaih lungduhte nen,  
Ralmuanna tlang chung a lengin an awi;  
Ka nghakhlel e, chu ram mawiah chuan aw,  
Kan la leng za ang a. (Saihnuna, Tap lo thei ka ni lo)

They cling on to the beautiful Zion, with loved ones  
Soaring Upon the hill of peace;

I can't wait to get to that beautiful place,

Where we will be reunited.

The "hill of peace" that is seen in this poem is a symbol of heaven. Although death is a painful experience, he finds solace in his belief that he will be reunited with the loved ones that have died, and the place that he envisions here is heaven. In one of his poems, he portrays the hardships in life by comparing them to the harsh conditions in a desert saying, "Death often separates us/Until we reach your place" (lines 11-12). Here he denotes that friends are often separated by death, but death can wield its power only on earth and it will vanish by the time one gets to heaven. This shows that there is hope, even after death, that death is not the end and we will all be reunited with our loved ones in heaven and there is comfort in that hope. His imagination of heaven is similar to that of the other poets who also compose *Lengkhawm zai*:

Lal Imanuela khawpui Zionah chuan,

Thenna reng a awm lo;

Chutah lungngai fate zawng chu,

Intawh khawm ka nghakhlel. (Saihnuna, Khawvel chhuahsan ila)

In Emmanuel's city of Zion,

There is no separation;

There with all who are bereaved

I can't wait for that gathering.

Here he asserts that there will no longer be any parting or segregation in heaven, and he believes that in heaven he will be reunited with all his loved ones whom he has lost with so much grief.

Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* seldom consists of complex lyrics, although they do contain Mizo poetical words from time to time. However, most of these are words that can be easily understood when one reads them. In Bâwka's poetry, there are indications that this world is filled with sorrow and tears, and man is afflicted with these due to death. He states his hope in God in the following words:

Min hnem ang che aw Lalpa,

Thlafam, lusun rethei fa;

Min kai ang che i lenna ramah,

Buaina ram khawvel hi ka ngai tawh lo vang (Bawka, Hun leh kum te an  
ral zel)

Console me O Lord,

Bereaved, child of poverty/the poor

Lead me to your abiding place,

I will no longer pine for this troubled world.

The above lines reveal the poet's desire to leave his troubled life on earth where one is often afflicted with grief and sorrow because of death. His imagination/hope of reaching heaven where God resides is precisely expressed. He envisions heaven as a place that is devoid of sorrows and agonies. R. Thangvunga states, "The thoughts of the ancestors on life did not reach beyond *Pialral* and *Mitthi khua*," (Lenchawm 311), beyond this there is *Lengkhawm zai*, they imagined heaven, and in any of their songs about how one manages life in the realm beyond death they use different symbols to declare the notion of heaven, and they even create symbols that do not actually exist in reality to denote heaven and other subjects that are not actually heaven.

It is in every man's nature to look for repose. What is evident from the depiction of death in early folk poetry of Mizo ancestors is that when they have extremely low expectations in terms of finding rest. They believed that *Mitthi khua* is meant for the common folk. But they apparently did not seem to believe that their condition in *Mitthi khua* would be better than that of their condition on earth. They believe in *Pialral* which is not meant for everyone. They believed it is reserved only for the rich and abled and the common people did not expect to get there. The prospect of getting to heaven is especially jubilating for these people. But they also know that they can only get there once they depart from this life which makes poets of Mizo *Lengkhawm Zai* sorrowful. According to Thomas Hardy, "Happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain," (383) which shows that this world seldom provides happiness and man's life is often fraught with pain and suffering. In one of his poems, R.L. Kamlala writes, "There is no comfort for me on earth/ It's just a place where I weep and suffer" (lines 9-10), which shows how discontent he is on earth. At the same time, he is comforted by the hope that there is a heaven after the end of his miserable life:

Ka dam lai ni hi a tlak hma zawngin,

Ka tan chhum a zing thin;

Nakinah chu ram ka thlen ve hun chuan,

Ka ngai lo'ng khawvel hi (R.L. Kamlala, Tunah a thar hmangaihna)

Until the days of my life come to an end

Clouds gather around me;

When I finally reach that place

I wouldn't pine for this world

These lines reflect his hope in heaven as he announces that he will not pine for this dreadful world. Although life may seem unbearable at times, he is comforted by the

thought of getting to heaven once his life on earth comes to an end. On the life of Kamlala, Siamkima Khawlhring writes, "...his life on earth if filled with sorrow, full of sorrow," (80) but what is evident from Kamlala's poetry, as with his contemporary *Lengkhawm zai* poets, is his belief that pain and sorrow are momentary as they anticipate the end of life and look forward to get to heaven.

Tapin an rum ngai lo,

Buaina an hneh tawh e;

Van Salem khawpuia han lengte chuan,

Sualna ral an ngam ta!

Thihna an hlau ngai lo,

Aw, lawmin zai an rem e (R.L. Kamlala, Tapin an rum ngai lo)

They do not cry or groan,

They have overcome troubles

Those who have reached Salem city yonder,

Have conquered the evil enemy!

They never fear death,

O they sing with happiness

The above lines show that death has no meaning for those that have gone to heaven, and so it is no longer a dreadful thing for them.

When it comes to *Lengkhawm zai*, the perspectives of Mizos have undergone tremendous changes. Darchuailova Renthlei states, "A place that is better than *Pialral*, the new Salem that Jesus prepared just for us is in sight; the beautiful portrait of the city

instills in us the desire to fly in it. This imagery alone affirms that the new Salem is much more appealing than the *Pialral* that our ancestors conceptualized" (21). As stated before, even though composers of *Lengkhawm zai* may not solely address the theme of death, they usually employ imagery that addresses their notion of the afterlife or the continuation of life beyond death. Their portrayal of life may appear to be dreary at times, but these are overshadowed by the peace that they experience when they think about the afterlife. Patea writes:

Aw Imanuel lei leh van thar siam chu,

A dung leh vangahte han leng ve ila;

Buaina tinreng tuara ka then takte kha,

Van ropuina hain an hmel ka hmu ang (Patea, Aw Lalpa Davida leh a thlah arsi)

O Immanuel the new earth and sky that you create

I wish to wander its length and breadth;

Those who I've lost after suffering so much pain,

I shall behold them clothed in heaven's glory.

The song reflects the poet's concept of heaven that will be filled with gladness. The world beyond this life as envisioned by the poet is incomparable to the life here on earth, and the peace they enjoy there instills the desire to reach that place.

According to Darchuailova Renthlei, "...During the time of our ancestors, an aura of darkness overwhelms them when death occurs, there is no solace; there is nothing beyond the grave. The birth of *lenkhawm zai* after the awakening of 1919 sees not only representations of life beyond the grave, moreover, a world that is better and more glorious, more peaceful, an aged and beautiful city is amply presented." (21)

The advent of Mizo religious poetry abruptly changed their past opinions and imaginations on death and beyond, bringing with it an eagerness to reach the spirit world beyond death and peacefulness even upon death itself. We find repose in Kawlthawma's song as follows:

Leiah riangin hmun nei lovin,  
 Thlaler hrehawm hrut vel ila;  
 Lalpan ka tan a buatsaihah,  
 Ka chawl ve ang luipui kamah (Ka buaina ram thlalerah hian)

No place for me in this world,  
 Treading the harsh wilderness;  
 There where the Lord prepared for me,  
 Shall I rest, once I reach the shore?

The world is defined as a desert and a dreadful place in a vast number of Mizo Christian poetry, and their outlook rests on the belief that they are destitute and have no permanent place in this world in many songs. But they are at peace now because they believe all these will be gone when they reach Heaven, and although they suffer death, they have hope beyond death. They are peaceful because they now have heaven to rest from this world of toil and unrest.

We find in Mizo *lengkhawm zai* a great deal of longing to leave this world. The most prominent feature of *lengkhawm zai* perhaps is Escapism, a desire to leave this world or forsake life itself. In other words, we can describe this certain feeling as a state of mind closest to no hesitation of death, or even a fancy to be dead. There appears to be no indication of death being presented in a philosophical sense or otherwise for that matter, some composers even portrayed death as an enemy, but what they talked about the most in



their poetry was their eagerness to leave the world and go to heaven. R. Thanghuta renders his yearning to reach heaven in a song, saying those that live in that place (heaven) no longer say goodbye.

Aw chu hmun thleng turin,

Lei hrehawmna hian min dang rih;

Aw, ka nghakhlel, i ram thianghlim chu min thlir tir la,

Hnehna tumkau chawi a,

Aw, Salem thar fan hlan ka nghakhlel (Ka awm khawhar changin)

O for me to get there,

The troubles of this world keep me;

I'm waiting patiently, help me keep my eyes on your holy place,

Bearing the palm of glory,

I'm eager to wander about the new Jerusalem.

He emphasizes his desire, using the word 'eager'. We have said earlier the Mizos have poetical words, and we find those words in *lengkhawm zai*. However, they are not applied as many times as they are in love songs since *lengkhawm zai* are gospel songs. His use of a common word 'eager' here helps us see his longing to reach the world beyond death and his regret of his incapability to go there because he still lives in this world. V. Hawlla also aches the same:

Aw hun min daltu hi a bo hunah,

Hmun hlun ram chu ka pan ang;

Tah chuan ngai lovin ka chenna hi,

Buainate nen ka chhuahsan ang (Khawvelah hian mikhual ka ni)

O when the time that keeps me here shall fade away,

I shall go towards the lasting place;

There I shall miss this place no more,

I shall leave all its troubles behind.

He says time is the obstacle that keeps him from reaching heaven. We find here as in other songs a metaphor, 'lasting place' which means heaven. At the beginning of the song, he says he is but a guest in this world and does not think about staying here forever. He considers himself a guest because he thinks he is going to heaven someday. The song is quite unusual because he is not only eager to reach heaven, he emphasizes he will never miss this world.

From the various *lengkhawm zai* we have viewed, we find that it is not in the belief of the composers to reach heaven while they are still alive. It is death as a matter of fact that keeps them from going there. We find in their songs the truth that when their time in this world is over, they will die and reach heaven, where death is no more. On this account, whether they don't use the word death or don't talk about the matter of death, they all emphasize their future situation in a world beyond death, and that they will never miss this world once they reach that place, they honestly believe in their soul this world is merely a temporary place for them to stay as guests.

The portrayal of life beyond death by different composers of *lengkhawm zai* is more or less the same, in the manner of their imagination of heaven. There will be no more death in heaven, no more parting or goodbye, no more tears, the rich and the dead will live together equally, and family and friends will meet again and stay together happily. For these reasons they are eager to reach heaven, and we can see from their songs they are inordinately disturbed and uncomfortable in this world. While their measure of

eagerness is quite the same, Patea seems to be more impatient than the others, he emphasizes his yearning to reach that place as follows:

Chu khawpui mawi thlira ka rumna

Chuan, lungngaih, buaina, thihna thlen thei sela;

Tlanna thisen zara lungduhte,

Khawvelah hian aw, ka lo then tawh ang a. (Ka damlai thlipui a ral hunin)

If my agony of yearning for the beautiful city

Could bring forth sorrow, troubles, and death;

The dear ones through saving blood,

Will I part with them in this world?

Patea longs to reach that place, the heaven and adds he does not mind if his eagerness brings about his own sorrow and death. He declares that if it indeed brings him death, he will only leave his family and friends in this world. Since death is a gateway to heaven for him, it is clear that he does not mind being dead if it is going to bring him to that place. Other composers of *lengkhawm zai* do not declare their eagerness and longing to go to heaven as Patea does. Patea surpasses all the other composers in his expression of willingness to face death for his dream to come true.

We have said earlier, it is evident from their songs that the composers of *lengkhawm zai* are eager to live in the world beyond death. They deeply yearn to escape this world. R.L. Thanmawia believes that escapism is not much found in the Mizo love songs and *lenglawng*. ” In the case of *lengkhawm zai* of the Mizos, we find in abundance the longings to escape from the world and life itself,” (Lenghawm 200). We can say that the Mizo *lengkhawm zai* want to escape from this world using death as a means. There is no immortality in this world, but many may wish to live forever. Even so, the composers,

of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* barely love this world, they rather want to leave it. They know that death is the way and means, they deem death to be a blessing for the reason that it is the way that they can escape from this world.

R. Thanghuta declares, "Troubles, may you depart, let me go to my destined place / I can never be at peace in this world" (lines 1-2), Unlike other composers, he presumes this world is not a place for him to live peacefully, and declares his desire to escape from it. It looks like he genuinely wants to escape beyond this world, saying he will live happily once he reaches heaven, "Lui kam mawi zawkah chuan / Buai leh thihna hnehin ka zai ang e," (lines 6-7), "At the beautiful shore / I shall sing victoriously over troubles and death." He says he shall defeat death, and talk about his victory joyfully. R.L. Kamlala also talks about his desire to leave this world and go up to the sky amid the clouds and enter heaven:

Leng leng ila thangvan sangah,

Chhum leh romeite khumin;

Han deng ila kumtluang run nuam,

Salem thar khawpui chul lo. (Leng leng ila thangvan sangah)

If I could get to the skies high above,

Transcending the clouds;

May I reach the everlasting home,

The new and ever-fresh city of Jerusalem.

We find imagery in this song. He imagines himself flying from this world and exploring heaven. The people of that place have left this world behind and shed tears no more, "Chung turni a sa an tuar ngai lo / Duhte'n tualah an leng thin," (lines 19-20), "They never suffer the scorching sun / They contentedly live there." He portrays the people living there not suffering the fieriness of the sun and living merrily together.

The presentation of death in Mizo *lengkhawm zai* is not meant to indicate the effect of death among the Mizos to be less painful nor do they consider it to be triflingly insignificant. Death for them is still sorrowful, but due to the fact that they have become Christians, they overcome death through Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ, the giver of peace didn't exist, the theme of death for the most part in Mizo *lengkhawm zai* might be precisely different. In the Bible we see that when God brings his people to heaven, they will not suffer from troubles and pain anymore, and death also will be no more, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away," (Revelation 21:4). This is the foundation on which the Christians stand. The Mizo *lengkhawm zai* solely rest on the word of God, their perspective and imagination in a world beyond death extend to the belief in the existence of heaven which can be seen in their songs. Puna writes in his song:

Lungngaihna leh buaina piah a,

Thihna lui ralah;

Chatuan in mawi ropui tak chu a lo eng a,

Aw, Lalpa'n a buatsaih ram a ni. (Lungngaihna leh buaina piah)

Beyond grief and troubles,

On the shore of death;

The glorious everlasting home shines bright,

In the land the Lord prepares for us.

When they think about what is there beyond death, in the spirit world, all they ever see is heaven. Seeing that there will be no more grief and troubles in that place, their principal foundation is Jesus Christ. Suakliana also declares this same foundation as his own:

Kan nghak reng che kan Lalber,

Khawvel hrehawm thim hnuaiah;

I buatsaih Salem khawpui, aw, ka ngai tawh mang e.

Khawvel hrehawmna leh thim hnuaiah leng mah ila,

Hmangaiha mi zawngtu chu, ka ngai bang thei lo ve. (Kan nghak reng che kan Lalber)

We are waiting for you, our mighty Lord,

Under the darkness of this world;

The new city of Jerusalem you prepared, O, how I long for it.

Though I walk under the troubles and darkness of the world,

I cannot stop yearning for the one who found us with his love.

This verse talks about his eagerness to get to heaven and his longing for Jesus Christ, the one who lovingly searched for him and found him. Even if they don't mention the name of Jesus Christ they still talk about heaven and use different symbols to signify heaven. We can safely assume that their imagination in the matter of death ends in heaven.

There is a significant effect of peace and comfort in the mention of death or its beyond in Mizo *lengkhawm zai*, and it points to none other than one person. He is the reason for their peacefulness and willingness to face death, and that person is Jesus Christ. One matter that qualifies genuine consideration is if the Mizos are not Christians, *lengkhawm zai* might not be in existence. The Christians have heaven in their teachings, a place of rest for the believers of God, so it appears it would not be troublesome for them to go there after death. The person responsible for giving this hope is Jesus Christ. Although his name is not mentioned literally in every song, the words Jesus Christ and Mizo *lengkhawm zai* are almost always interconnected. Let us look at Thanherha's song:

Aw, chu hmuna lengte chuanin,  
Khawvel hrehawm an ngai tawh lo'ng;  
Van tingtang rimawi nen van kawthler an fang rual,  
Lal Krista hovin. (A thla hnuai daihlim nuamah)

O the people in that place,  
Will miss this maddening world no more;  
They march on the streets of heaven with heavenly music,  
Led by Lord Jesus Christ.

The names Immanuel, Christ, Jesus Christ, Lord, Jesus, Saviour, Lamb, Star of heaven, and King are used to signify God. The name of God is mentioned in every Mizo *lengkhawm zai* that has to do with life beyond death. Without the reality/existence of Jesus Christ, the question of the existence of all these songs would merit consideration. On these grounds, the existence of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* is presumably prospective because of Christianity. To prove this point, let us take a look at another song which is composed by C.Z. Huala:

Kan thian duhten he khawvelah hian,  
Min kalsanin ka rilru a ngui,  
Mahse, ka lungngai lo, mala ka lo awm hian,  
Lili par mawi Isuan min awmpui (Lei lal puan ropui chu a tlawm ang)

When our dear friends in this world,

Would leave me, I would cry in anguish,

But I don't feel dejected when I am all alone,

Jesus, the blooming Lily is with me.

In times of parting with his friends in this world by death he would be deeply saddened, but he is no longer filled with grief because Jesus is always with him. In short, songs composed concerning death in Mizo *lengkhawm zai* cannot be perfected without Jesus Christ.

One remarkable element that appears on the subject of death and beyond in Mizo *lengkhawm zai* is the fact that it does not end in the idea of heaven's pleasantness, but the truth that heaven is prepared for every believer, rich or poor; and even considered glorious and far superior to *Pialral*, a place where only the *thangchhuahpa* can enter after death according to the belief of the Mizo ancestors. Mizo *lengkhawm zai* clearly presents this conception. R.L. Kamlala composes this:

Aw i hlu e, thisen ropui,

Nangmah vangin rethei faten,

Chu hmun nuam chu an thleng zo ta,

Tunah pawh an kal zel e. (Buaina reng reng a awm ngai lo)

O glorious blood, you are invaluable,

Because of you the poor are able,

To enter that place,

They are presently going there.



The Mizo ancestors believed everyone cannot go to *pialral*, in fact, it is impossible for anyone other than the rich and the prosperous to enter into *pialral*. However, it is clearly displayed in Mizo *lengkhawm zai* that is established on the Christian creed and ideologies, that heaven, the replacement of *pialral*, is for everyone, the rich and the poor alike can all go there as long as they believe in God. Furthermore, *lengkhawm zai* emphasizes the truth about heaven by explaining that it is a place, unlike *pialral*, not prepared for certain people, nor can only be entered by powerful people, but for everyone, *chu* wants to believe in God. In Kapzinga's song we find this, "He khawvelah hian / Vakvai leh retheite min rawn zawng ta," (lines 13-14), "In this world / He came for the neglected and the poor." He uses the words neglected and poor, there supposedly can be no better words to express a depressing situation.

T. Vanlaltlani's study on Thanga's song '*Aw Lalpa chungnung ber kan fak hle a che*' tells the account of God's character where he is the God of the poor and the needy:

The composer of this song, a Mizo man, distinctly declares that God is the God of the downtrodden, the slaves and the servants, the oppressed, the abandoned, the rejected and the forsaken, the sinners who have no friends and supporters, the orphans for the sake of parents' death and divorce and all the people who are domestically backward; He is for them the living God, who is not hesitant to be their Lord...He further exclaims that according to the belief of the Mizos. (Lenchawm 374-375)

This is the same force that drove them to be eager to reach heaven. There shall be no partiality there, the rich and the poor shall live together, they shall sing songs of praise to God, and there shall be no poverty for the impoverished. Zikpuii pa mentions that the song '*Tunah a thar hmangaihna eng nuamah*' was sung at Biate village for a good period of time, and we find this chorus in this song, "We shall meet later cheerfully / With all the angels of heaven," (lines 5-6). Here we find that there shall not only be no poverty nor wealth, but also the fact that they will live happily together with the angels, singing songs of praise to God together. Zikpuii pa tells us about this period of time as follows:

The dreadfulness of the world and the longing for heaven are the sentiments of the believers during this time. These sentiments brought

forth scores of great songs. When these songs reached the different parts of Zoram, people all around the state effortlessly converted to Christianity, and from then on Zoram has never been the same. (181)

The Mizos are a young tribe, having been introduced to the gospel in 1894. Development and advancement of their world did not go with the same time as the outside world. Economic inequality between the rich and the poor did not have a seriously wide gap, every one of the community more or less share the same economic wealth. It can be assumed, if compared with other parts of the world, they were basically penurious in respect of money. Owing to their simple way of life and the development of the world not yet reaching them, they expeditiously considered themselves poor in their songs, seemingly aware of their situation. It almost looks like they presented themselves to be poor because of their habitual addressing of God, but it is practically the case of their true economic nature which was rather not wealthy. Laidenga, who was illiterate, called out:

A hmangaihna hming ropui tak chu ka tan a hlu,

Kei mi sual, riangvai, rethei, nung tlak lo tê hi;

Chatuan pialral kawng min hawnsak,

A thisen hlu thianghlim tak chu,

Thinlungin min hmuh tir rawh, aw, ka Lal Isu (He khawvel damlai thlaler)

His glorious name of love is dear to me,

For I am a sinner, an orphan, a poor man who deserves not to live;

He opened for me an everlasting way,

His precious holy blood,

Let me see it with my heart, Lord Jesus.

He declared his pathetic situation, telling that he was a sinner, a lonely and poor man who did not even deserve to live. However, he used the song to describe God's nature as being the God who opened the everlasting way to the poor and backward people such as himself, the God who qualified and was worthy to approach the poor and the rich alike. These composers emphasized the truth about heaven in such a way that it is a place unlike *pialral*, which the Mizo ancestors believed could be entered only by certain persons; a place not only for some persons but for anyone and everyone who believes in him. Sometimes they used the word *pialral* for heaven, but when they did, they used it as a metaphor.

In a number of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* there is an interconnection between the world of their ancestors' religion and their present world post Christianity. Although they got over the traditional beliefs of the ancestors concerning the description of death, they still used the vocabulary and lyrics from the olden songs in the lyrics of their new songs. Zikpuii Pa explains *lengkhawm zai* as follows:

Let me try to use Karl Marx's dialectical theory for this explanation. If the natural songs of our ancestors were the thesis, then the songs of missionaries would be the anti-thesis, but since we are unable to learn their songs thoroughly we create a different kinds of songs that meet our tradition; and this synthesis is the songs of the early Christians namely, Pates, Kamlala and C.Z. Huala. (198)

It is important to note that Mizo *lengkhawm zai* was created and born out of Mizo sentiment, having the characteristics of Mizo traditional tune and lyrics, Zikpuii Pa's account here is a definition of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* and its idiosyncrasy.

Lyrics and vocabulary that were used during the time of the ancestors were instituted in Mizo *lengkhawm zai*, the songs they composed after their conversion to a new religion, Christianity. C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau talks about this adaptation:

There is practically no vocabulary and lyrics more intense, deep, heart touching, moving and stirring than those of the ancestors to describe the elements concerning the spirit world beyond death. Their use of these

poetic dictions does not imply any indication that accuses them of being backsliding to their old religion nor of their faith is shaking. They merely combine Mizo poetic dictions with Christianity as far as possible.

(Lenchawm 361)

Despite the fact that Christianity entered Mizoram which resulted in a good deal of Christian songs, the Mizos were still Mizos, the Mizo culture and tradition could not be left aside. The use of *pialral* was still prevalent to denote heaven, *rih dil* and *pialral* were still used customarily to signify the place where the dead went. This proves that the Mizos albeit their conversion to Christianity could not let go of their culture and philosophy all at once. In one of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* composed by Tawia:

Kir zai reng reng an rel tawh lo,

Hringlang tlang an liam leh ta a;

Rauthla vangkhua an thleng ta,

Nunna lunglohtui an in a;

Hawilopar an ken tir ta a,

Nun hlun thing an vuan. (Tawn loh dar ang kan tawng em ni)

They do not want to come back,

They have passed Hringlang mountain;

They have reached the village of spirits,

Drinking the water of everlasting life;

Carrying the flower Hawilopar,

They embrace the tree of life.

R.L. Thanmawia investigates in his study of Mizo poetry and finds that although the songs that depict the Mizos' philosophy about the world beyond death during the old religion age were not similar to their new philosophy after they embraced Christianity, some composers brilliantly blended these philosophies in a beautiful and harmonized manner:

Some of our composers harmonically arrange in their songs the philosophies and imagination of the spirit world of our old religion which are found in our songs (conventional epithet) and the different perspectives of our new religion. (Lenchawm 191)

One prominent composer to use poetic dictions of the old religion about death is Saihnuna. Apart from him, L. Kamlova, Ralngama, Lianruma, R. Thanghuta, and Laidenga also continue to use the old poetic dictions. Saihnuna apparently uses the most. Nevertheless, while using these norms, they mention heaven, their new world beyond death brought to them by their new religion and the things concerning their God. Let us examine one of Saihnuna's songs:

Hrinhniang an liamna thlafam khua chu e,

Ka thlir ngam lo hawilopar thliak a,

Lunglohtui an dawn tur ka ngai ngam lo ve (Hrinhniang an liamna)

The place of the dead where they go to,

I dare not see, picking hawilopar,

I dread to think of them drinking lunglohtui.

He presents the notion of the world beyond death in Mizo sentiment, but in his last verse we see a production of the new religion:

Chatuan Elsadai vangkhaw tual nuam chu,

Hmuh ka nuam dawntuaipar an vulna,

Rianghleite chûn ngai lova an leng tur chu (Hrinhniang an liamna)

The everlasting streets of Elsadai,

I long to see it, where beautiful flowers bloom,

Where children live there needing no mothers.

He talks about heaven here and longs to see children living and playing happily without needing their mothers. Other composers also skilfully combine their imagination of the world beyond death in their old religion and the world of their new religion in their songs. This does not degrade the value of the song, there is rather some unique clarity in the hearts of the Mizos. Every person who has suffered from death knows the pain it brings and the misery of missing their dear ones who have gone. Death to humans is an end, so it is not preposterous for a normal human being to miss the dead. As we have said a few times earlier, in almost every *lengkhawm zai* that concerns death we see consolation, they console each other and themselves. Even the lyrics they use are of Mizo sentiment, "Thlafam ngaia tlai nilen chu / Thinlai a zing ri ai e (lines 1-2), which translates as, "Spending the day missing the dead / Is tiresome and sorrowful," "Piallei thuahriat hnuaia zal chu / Tawn leh ni reng a awm dawn lo khawvelah hian / Ka tap tlang rel ka dawn zo lo," (lines 15-17), which translates as, "Sleeping under the eight feet earth / There shall be no seeing each other in this world / I am crying, ignoring what people may say." Sentimental in Mizo, the rhyme and flow of their poetry are skilled and adept. However, as said earlier, they usually end their poetry with God or heaven. The song being discussed is composed by Hrangchhingi (Mizo Rohlu 130), leading us to heaven nonetheless at the last verse:

Lalpa siam thar khawpuiah chuan,

An leng e, lungduhte;

Khawvel ram reng an ngai tawh lo,

Zion Lalpa ropui fakin;

'Haleluia' tia auvin zai an rem e,

Lawmna chul lo chu an chang ta (Thlafam ngaia tlaini len chu)

At the new city the Lord has made,

Live our dear ones;

They do not miss this world,

They praise the glorious Lord of Zion;

Singing and shouting 'Haleluia',

They have been given the everlasting joy.

Starting the song with Mizo sentiment, using Mizo poetical words for lyrics, she ends it with heaven in a prosaic manner, no doubt leading us straight to heaven.

Many composers of Mizo lengkhawm zai talk about how painful death is to them, how horrible it takes its toll on them, presenting in their songs how dreadful it is for humans to suffer from it. R.L. Kamlala personifies death as human and even reprimands it. Personification of death in songs are not much to be found. R.L. Kamlala solemnly rebukes death as follows:

Kian i rel si lo, lei a ngui zo ta,

Lawmna au rawlten tah zai an chang thin,

Thihna nang vangin (Kian i rel si lo)

You desire not to leave, the world is sad and blue,

Shouts of laughter turn into cries of sorrow,

Because of you, death.

He begins with death as a habitant of this world, having no desire to leave, he says to death that people cry because of it. Let us take a look at the second verse:

Mual tin i hrut a, kawr tin dung i zui,

Lal leh a riang fa an banah kai che,

Nun i râwng ngei e (Kian i rel si lo)

You visit every valley, every low lands,

You hold the children of kings and the poor in their hands,

You are indeed wicked.

He tells death how evil it is, how it goes everywhere. He talks to it as if confronting it face to face, rebuking it for being everywhere, having no partiality on both the prosperous and the needy. He then writes the last verse:

I lal lai niin kâwl a liam ang a;

Tlante an leng dawn lawmin i chungah-

Thihna, lo ngai rawh (Kian i rel si lo)

Your reign will be over;

The redeemed will joyfully live above you-

Behold, o death.



He tells death it will be eventually conquered, its reign will be over like the sun sinks on the horizon, God's redeemed people will look down on death and will live in a place where death will no longer bother them and have a position grander than death itself. He tells death that this day will surely come. A song such as this, with its verses comprising solely of personifying death as another human being, talking to it, and even reprimanding it is found nowhere in other songs.

In the majority of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* it is found that the new religion conceives heaven, and at the same time, there are some Mizo *lengkhawm zai* that deal with the painful suffering from death but within default of indication of heaven. The notion and theory of death in poetry is a popular theme worldwide. Sudhir Kakar said, "To come to the poet first, often the forerunners of psychologists and certainly much better communicators of their insights, the theme of death is next only to that of love, which pervades some of the world's best literature," (xvi). This being the case, it is not absurd for Mizo *lengkhawm zai* to talk about death and the world beyond death.

Of all Mizo *lengkhawm zai* that concern the theme of death, there is no evidence of the journey before reaching the spirit world after a person dies, how his body decomposes after he is buried in the earth, or how his decomposed body can break down into organic matters and act as a blessing to the environment. Composers of *lengkhawm zai* on the subject concerning death mostly talk about the painful effects of death when they don't mention the spirit world after death, emphasizing the hurtful effects it wreaks on the living and how it breaks their hearts. Between 1926-27, Saipawla's mother passed away while he was in Calcutta, and his friend Durra Chawngthu wrote a song for him. He fluently writes about the world of a person in the absence of his mother:

Bawar mah hian zan tlaiah chûn a bel,

Belh tur chûn ka vai e, aw sumtual ka bel;

Lenrualte'n siang an lawi, zan a lo tlai,

Chûn lovin lai ka leng thiam lo rûn a dai (Kumsul a lo vei hian)

E'en the cock goes to its mother in the evening,  
I am in need of a mother, I look out on the street;  
Friends go to their home, the sun has set,  
The home is cold without my mother.

The song presents the unfortunate situation of a motherless person saying that even a domestic cock goes to its mother as the sun begins to set, it feels terrible to be without a mother to go to. Good friends go home in the evening, but to be without a mother is a horrible tragedy, the home is empty, and the loneliness of missing his mother gets worse in the evening.

Among the composers of Mizo *lengkhawm zai*, Saihnuna composes other songs that don't mention heaven beside his songs that mention heaven. He describes the pain, hurt and loneliness death brings:

Aawmkhawhar lunglen ka tuar zo lo,  
Ngai lo ang rengin ka awm thei lo,  
Kei ka lungkham dawntuai ngaiin,  
Nilen ka zuam lo ve. (Thlafam tluang lam zawh)

I cannot bear this loneliness,  
I cannot pretend not to be lonely,  
For I really miss my dear child,  
And I dare not spending the entire day alone.

Looking at the song it is apparent that he writes about a close relative's death, saying it is hard to endure the suffering of this child's death, a day seems long because of his

loneliness. He does not want to hide his loneliness and misery, and it is clear that he considers missing the dead to be a normal thing to do.

*Lengkhawm zai* without the content of God or heaven is not much to be found. Such kind of song is ‘Fam ngaih zunleng a tho leh e’ composed by P.D. Sena. It is important to note that in every Mizo *lengkhawm zai* that concerns death, they only mention the death of the flesh, where the death of the spirit is nowhere to be found. They imagine the spirit does not die but enters heaven when the earthly flesh dies. They dream of eternity and their vision spans to eternity. P.D. Sena talks about his suffering due to death:

Hnem thiam awm maw zaleng zingah,

Lung hnemtu tawn ka nuam mang e;

Ka tap, ka zawng hmar tlang tluanin,

Siang lawi tur ka tlei chuang lo. (Fam ngaih zunleng a tho leh e)

Is there any one able to console, among people,

I am in need of a comforter;

I am crying, searching through the north vale,

I am not whole e’en at my home.

It is evident the composer of this song deeply suffers the horrible clutch of death. He says he searches frantically to see if there were any one who is able to comfort him, crying all the way through the north vale in his search for a comforter. But the last line tells he does not find anyone to comfort him, and when he goes home, he finds no contentment as he enters the house. This song is different from other songs in the quality that while other songs tell of God’s comfort in times of death and the sorrow and pain it brings, and their invitation of God to comfort them, the composer of this song searches for comfort in man

other than God in his time of suffering, but he finds no comfort in his fellow men, and he would always go home sad and forlorn.

There are a great deal of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* out there, but in the dealings with the notion of death and beyond, only the songs we have discussed above do not mention heaven or God. This confirms the truth that *lengkhawm zai* is formed from and is based upon Christianity. They know quite well death is unavoidable for man and they believe that all their sufferings and sorrows emerging from the clutches of death will all be over once they reach heaven. They mostly talk about the death of the flesh. They do not challenge death, but they do not fear it nonetheless because of their belief in God. It is clear from their songs some are even eager to reach the world beyond death. They compare this world with heaven and their eagerness to reach heaven makes them uninterested to live their life on this earth, and some even want this world to come to an end. J. Malsawma tells of *Mizo lengkhawm zai* and its significance:

We the Mizos make a constant connection between our religion and our songs, and we utilize songs in every situation, even before we embraced the gospel and after we did...The works of our composers who write songs with materials combining from the old religion and the new are extremely interesting, their artistic presentations of the story of life beyond the grave are gloriously fascinating and we cannot tire from singing them...Other tribes who don't have this kind of song are unfortunate. I believe they covet us, but the simple truth is that it is above their understanding to even want to covet us. We are rich in songs, therefore we are exclusively fortunate. (154)

Mizo *lengkhawm zai* comfort the loneliness of the Mizos, the *lengkhawm zai* console them of their loneliness, hurt, pain, and sorrow, and apparently, there has never been a substitute or replacement of these songs up to this day. *Lengkhawm zai* is inevitably significant for the Mizos, and death being the common enemy of every family and every village still, *lengkhawm zai* for the Mizos will be valued more and more because the world, in spite of its fast pace of development, has not yet invented immortality. Until the culture of the Mizos that sing together with two drums in the homes of the dead is gone, *lengkhawm zai* will not lose its value in the hearts of the Mizos.

Marxism, a socio-political and economic theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, offers a unique perspective on the concept of death within the framework of its broader ideology. While Marxism primarily focuses on class struggle, labor, and the pursuit of a socialist society, it also touches upon the notion of death in relation to its critique of capitalism and the potential for human liberation.

In Marxist theory, death is seen as a fundamental aspect of the human experience. It is recognized that all individuals, regardless of their social or economic status, will eventually face mortality. However, Marxists argue that under capitalism, the conditions of life and death are shaped by the exploitative nature of the capitalist system.

Marxist analysis asserts that capitalism perpetuates social inequalities, economic exploitation, and alienation, which extend into the realm of death. Capitalism, according to Marxists, prioritizes profit and the accumulation of wealth, often at the expense of workers' well-being and quality of life. This includes the provision of healthcare, safety standards, and overall working conditions, which can impact individuals' life expectancy and mortality rates.

Additionally, Marxists criticize how capitalism commodifies death itself. The profit-driven nature of the healthcare industry and the funeral industry, for example, can lead to inequalities in access to healthcare services and exorbitant costs associated with funerals and burials. This capitalist commodification of death reinforces class divisions and perpetuates social injustice.

Furthermore, Marxists argue that the fear of death is often exploited by the ruling capitalist class to maintain control and social order. By instilling fear and uncertainty about one's livelihood and survival, capitalists can manipulate workers into accepting exploitative conditions and maintaining the status quo.

From a Marxist perspective, true liberation and the transformation of society would involve overcoming the exploitative conditions that perpetuate inequalities in life and death. By establishing a socialist system based on principles of equality, solidarity, and collective ownership, Marxists envision a society that prioritizes the well-being and dignity of all individuals, including their experiences of life and death.

Mizo religious poetry, often portraying Earth as a sorrowful or desolate place and yearning for a heavenly realm, can be seen as a form of escapism. This aligns with the

sentiment expressed in Karl Marx's assertion that "Religion functions as a form of psychological consolation."

Religious poets frequently employ imagery and metaphors to depict Earth as a barren desert, a realm filled with suffering and hardship. They express a deep longing for a celestial abode, where pain and sorrow are alleviated. This longing for transcendence and a better existence beyond the earthly realm reflects the escapist tendencies within religious poetry.

Marx's assertion that, "Religion functions as a form of psychological consolation," (Marx) captures the idea that religion serves as a means of seeking solace and comfort. It suggests that religion, similar to a source of psychological solace, offers individuals temporary relief from the challenges and hardships of life. By focusing on the promises of an afterlife or divine intervention, religion provides individuals with a sense of hope and reassurance, redirecting their attention away from the oppressive social and economic conditions they face.

Both Mizo religious poetry and Marx's assertion acknowledge the human inclination to seek refuge or transcendence through religious beliefs and practices. The poets express their desire to escape the perceived sorrows of Earth and find solace in a heavenly realm. Marx, in turn, offers a critique of religion's role as a source of psychological consolation, highlighting its potential to divert attention from the material conditions that necessitate social and economic transformation.

In essence, both perspectives shed light on the human yearning for escape from the challenges and limitations of earthly existence, whether through religious poetry's portrayal of a better realm or Marx's critique of religion as a psychological consolation.

Most of the Mizo religious poets desired to escape from this world and, at times, even longed for its end or demise. They compared the world to heaven, perceiving it as sorrowful, which fueled their aspiration to transcend it and reach the heavenly realm. This inclination can be attributed to their reliance on Christian beliefs, where they anticipate that upon their death, Christians will ascend to heaven. Such thoughts permeated the religious poets, eliminating the fear of death itself. This connection bears some

resemblance to the Marxist concept of death, wherein religion serves as a safeguard for those destined for heaven.

In particular, in *Mizo lengkhawm zai* the poets consistently find solace and peace by envisioning heaven during times of death. This serenity stems from their Christian faith, as they have conquered the fear of death. They firmly believe that death is not the end but rather a transition, holding onto hope that was absent in traditional Mizo religious beliefs. It is genuinely believed that without the concept of heaven, their perspective might have been different. Thus, Karl Marx's notion that religion is the opium of the people finds some reflection in Mizo religious poetry.

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## Chapter - IV

### Theme of Death in Mizo Secular Poetry

The theme of death in secular poetry offers a unique and introspective exploration of mortality, devoid of religious or spiritual connotations. Secular poets delve into the profound questions surrounding life's finitude, the meaning of existence, and the human experience of confronting mortality.

In secular poetry, death is often portrayed as an inevitable and universal human experience. Poets contemplate the transience of life, highlighting the fleeting nature of human existence and the fragility of our mortal bodies. They explore the existential questions that arise when confronted with the reality of death, inviting readers to reflect on the purpose and significance of their own lives.

The theme of death in secular poetry serves as a catalyst for contemplating the brevity and uncertainty of our time on Earth. Poets ponder the legacy they will leave behind, the impact they have had on the world, and the existential weight of their mortality. Through their verses, they strive to find meaning and embrace the present moment in the face of life's impermanence.

Secular poets also delve into the emotional and psychological aspects of death. They explore grief, loss, and the complexities of mourning, capturing the raw emotions experienced when facing the death of loved ones or contemplating one's own mortality. Through their poignant language and vivid imagery, poets invite readers to engage with the universal emotions associated with death, providing a cathartic outlet for processing grief and finding solace in shared human experiences.

Secular poetry often challenges traditional societal views and norms surrounding death. Poets may question established beliefs about the afterlife, challenge the notion of an inherent purpose in life, or explore the existential void left by the absence of religious frameworks. By critically examining prevailing ideas and philosophies, secular poets encourage readers to confront their own beliefs and forge a personal understanding of death and its significance.

Theme of death in secular poetry can also act as a means of celebrating the beauty and preciousness of life. Poets emphasize the interconnectedness of life and death, highlighting the inherent value of each moment and the urgency to live fully. They may find solace in the cyclical nature of life and death, drawing inspiration from the cycles of nature or the ebb and flow of human existence.

The theme of death in secular poetry provides a rich and introspective exploration of mortality, purpose, and the human experience. It invites readers to confront the inevitability of death, ponder the meaning of life, and grapple with the emotional complexities associated with mortality. Secular poets offer a unique perspective that challenges societal norms and provides a platform for personal reflection, allowing readers to engage with the profound questions surrounding life and death in a secular context.

Mizo poetry has a rich use of different genres of poetry other than the religious ones, such as – songs about an outlook on human life, love songs, and even satirical poems. These will be further studied as secular poetry. The term ‘secular poetry’ refers here to those works in Mizo poetry which are not concerned primarily with Christianity. A secular poem may include a reference to God or Heaven or salvation, but its primary subject is something other than scriptural narrative, a saint's life, prayer, or the like. The ensuing survey is organized broadly according to the subject matter.

The exact origin of poetry in Mizo literature is untraceable, however, from what can be uncovered, a significant ensuing that affected Mizo literature is Christianity. R.L. Thanmawia states this phenomenon as follows:

The period between 1900-20 may be called the transitional period. The seed of Christianity began to sprout. Many chiefs tried to extinguish the fire of Christianity which began to flame. The light of education was visible in the horizon which had shaken the cultures and traditions of the Mizos. The age witnessed the conflict between the two traditions. The conflict produced many satirical poems. But the composers did not like to disclose their names and that all the satirical poems of this time became community songs (98).

The Mizos were introduced to Christianity in the year 1894. They had their first Christian song during 1894-1895. Christianity slowly and eventually blended with the tradition and culture of the Mizos. What appears to be R.L. Thanmawia's transitional period is a period when Mizo culture and Christianity culture bumped into each other. As time went on from here, the years 1919-1920 gave birth to Mizo *Lengkhawm zai*, songs composed out of sentiment or nostalgia for the dead and heaven. This qualified to be a new chapter on religious poetry. Likewise, while changes in Mizo culture brought about collisions in society, *Puma Zai* and *Kaihlek Zai* were born. We can say that new ways and changes experienced by society gave birth to changes and new ways of poetry.

C. Chhuanvawra says, "No more new songs that follow the Mizo traditional poetry were born in the wake of 1900; the only songs that emerged after 1900 were *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai*." (126) *Puma zai* originated from Biata, a sub-tribe of the Mizos. They used to reside in Cachar District, Assam. Let us take a look at the text on the emergence of *Puma zai* which R.L. Thanmawia copied from Ngurliana:

An able ruler called Lalburha snatched away thirteen guns from the army in 1871. The punitive expedition led by Col. Edgar brought many porters including the Biates. The Mizos noticed their singing and learned from them. But it soon died out. In 1908, it was rekindled from one woman of the Hmar clan, and it soon spread like wild fire. (99)

L. Keivom says that *Puma zai* had emerged somewhere between 1830-1850, while the Biates resided at Vairengte village on their journey of migration southward (Mizo hun hlui hlate 174), in addition, C. Chhuanvawra named Col. Edgar as Daly. However, K. Zawla also wrote him as Edgar (174), which makes Edgar be more likely correct. *Puma* is a *Biata* dialect, which means God. The poetry of *Puma zai* are couplet, having *Puma* at the end of each line. Although *Puma* translates as God in the *Biata* dialect, the Mizos further used the song in a broader and secular sense, not quite referring to God in a strict adaptation (99). One notable detail about *Puma zai* is its consideration as the poetry of people who disobeyed God. J.H. Lorrain wrote about *Puma zai* as follows, "...the name of an anti-Christian song (also known as *Tlanglam zai*) the avowed purpose of which was to oust the Christian hymns; it becomes unbelievably popular," (371). He used *Tlanglam zai* here because of the fact that *Puma zai* was eventually altered and changed its name to

*Tlanglam zai*, as it did not mean a completely different thing, it can be considered as his reference to *Puma zai*. The book *Mizo Lam Thenkhatte*, published by Tribal Research describes *Puma zai* as, "A poetry of a demon, stemming out of a singing they heard from a demon," (12). Nevertheless, looking closely into the poetry of *Puma zai*, we do not find any indication to qualify as the poetry of a demon from the lyrics. It is rather presumably the case of some people deliberately not taking the appellation seriously due to its contrast to Christianity. R.L. Thanmawia writes a large number 45 *Puma zai*, and B. Lalthangliana' writes 25 poetry of *Puma zai*.

B. Lalthangliana writes about the account of how *Puma zai* became known as *Tlanglam zai*, "During the prime of *Puma zai* whole villages would sing and dance together, and people as a whole eventually applied *Puma zai* as a fundamental song for dance. This led to the emergence of '*Tlanglam zai*', a variant of *Puma zai*. Bearing this name further and people composing, even more, it became permanently called '*Tlanglam zai*' thenceforth" (177). *Tlanglam zai* was borne by the persisting *Puma zai*, but on the basis of style, *Tlanglam zai* was composed in triplet and quartet. It no longer carried with it the word *Puma* at the end of each line.

*Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai* are discussed in detail here because apart from *Lengkhawm zai*, they are the first poetry to be composed by the Mizos after their conversion to Christianity, and also for being exceptionally popular in their time. Besides these two, a copious amount of new poetry called *Kaihlek zai* came out. *Kaihlek* means diversion or deflection. *Kaihlek zai* is said to have two ways of labeling, one type was a profane song and the other was purely lyrical in nature (Mizo Poetry 101). It is a mockery of the Christian religion, mostly satirical poetry; where the non-Christians scorned and mocked the converted Christians. With the exception of what we have discussed, a variety of other forms such as *Awithangpa zai*, *Hrangchhawni zai*, *Mutelen zai*, *Lianrikhumi zai*, *Lengzem zai*, *Chalmar zai*, *Rêl zai*, *German run zai*, *Ramthar zai*, and *Transport zai* were also founded. Moreover, there were also many poetries composed by individuals. The different poetry we have discussed so far are mostly centered around mockery and satire, some even comical in nature. They mostly do not pertain to the subject of death. *Ramthar zai* in particular can be considered as an attack or reproach on Christianity. Apart from

these, a variety of different genres of poetry other than religious poetry have been emerging up to this day, they will be correspondingly examined further.

*Puma Zai*, as mentioned earlier, is written in the form of a couplet. Forty-five of these pieces of poetry have been documented. As *Puma zai* evolved, it influenced the birth of a new poetic tradition known as *Tlanglam zai*. There is ninety-five *Tlanglam zai* poetry in the record, which means that there is more *Tlanglam zai* poetry than *Puma zai*. *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai* are not serious poetry, and they are mainly composed to counter the new religion, Christianity, as stated earlier. This may be the reason why, perhaps, these poems are quite insubstantial. *Puma zai* in particular appears to be composed for the purpose of entertainment. The verse form of *Tlanglam zai*, as stated before, is triplet hence in terms of form and content it is more serious than *Puma zai*. However, these two types of poetry do not mention anything about death or the afterlife. *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai* are chiefly composed by the Mizos to jocularly ridicule each other. Another thematic concern of these poems is the representation of the tradition of courting between young maids and bachelors. Although *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai* are an indispensable components of Mizo poetry, the content/themes of these poems are poetically or lyrically insignificant in comparison to other forms of poetry, which is why they are seldom regarded as serious poetry/literature.

In the aforementioned poetry, the theme of death and ideas related to death are hardly presented, these themes are reflected only in *Ramthar Zai*. In German *run zai*, they express their good wishes to each other to survive the war, and their anxiousness with the thought of death when the soldiers went off to war, as they are aware that death is inevitable during wars. Some of these poems also present a pacifist viewpoint and are critical of the war, while others express their wish for the safe return of the soldiers from war.

*Ramthar zai* can be said to have stemmed from their desire to glorify God through songs that are ethnically and culturally Mizo. There are some texts that were composed to mock the rigid system of the Church at the time. These are written in traditional verse form and are all written in triplet form. There are a great number of *Ramthar zai* which have been composed by various authors. There are 786 *Ramthar zai* as recorded in *Mizo*

*Hla Hlui*. The idea of Ramthar *zai* and its characteristics are defined by R.L. Thanmawia in the following words:

Ramthar *zai* mostly express their desire for a new world, heaven. Some of these ridicule the administration and the laws of the Church. It was started by Tlira pawlte and later popularised by *Khuangtuaha pawl*. Instead of imitating Western tunes and culture, these poems were composed by people who wanted to glorify God through traditional Mizo music all the while promoting Mizo culture... This poetry are a glorification of God from the thought and imagination of a Mizo. They contain beautiful lyrics/poetic words and are proclamations of the Christian faith. (588)

Ramthar *zai* are composed by different authors and hence they present varied themes. While some of them are a glorification of God, there are some that deride Christians. Ramthar *zai* conforms to traditional Mizo composition technique with great flow, and it slightly differs from the early Mizo Christian poetry in terms of lyrics. Although they can be regarded as prosaic, Mizo poetical words are more frequently used in Ramthar *zai*. For instance, the poem states, "Do not look for the Lord in the land of the dead" (line 1). While this line speaks about '*Mitthi khua*', "*fam khua*" is used in its place although they both refer to the same place, which is the 'land of the dead'. Ideas such as, "I cannot heed/endure rumours and criticism / We will never stop pining for the land of Zion" (lines 1-2) and, "Solitude that is eight-fold / Suddenly strikes me and I am left defenseless / I groan in need of the Saviour" (lines 1-3) are frequently presented.

However, their view on the afterlife does not differ too much as compared to those that are seen in *Lengkhawm zai*. Vanram or heaven is often alluded to in this poetry and is even presented in isolation without death. Besides, they most frequently use the term "Zion" to denote heaven. One distinctive representation of death in these poems is their comparison of Christ's death on Calvary and man's death, denoting their differences.

Kalvari tlangpui ka Lal thihna,

Kei ka famna chinlai unau leh lei dan;

Tho leh fa ni hian min ring thei lo (Ramthar zai)

My Lord died on Calvary,  
 While I, in the midst of kin in earthly nature,  
 Who cannot accept my resurrection

Here, the poet states that while God died on Calvary, his death will occur in his own hometown, leaving his family behind. By comparing these deaths, he implies that he is not supposed to resurrect from death as God did. This idea has not been explored in Mizo *Lengkhawm zai*. The aforementioned idea showcases the perspective of the early Mizo Christians on the notion of death and the afterlife, as well as their faith in God. In another poem, there is a unique idea that is presented:

Lal thuthlung vanga riang zawngte'n,  
 Rihsang mual an liam e Lunglohtui dawnin;  
 Zion par an tlan e nui hiauin. (Ramthar zai)

Desolated due to God's covenant  
 Transcends life relishing Lunglohtui  
 Feed on Zion flower with great delight

This poem shows how the early Mizo Christians who believed in God underwent trials and sufferings on earth. These people led miserable lives on earth because of their faith, but when they died they are believed to have gone to heaven and experienced eternal joy and happiness. The pain and suffering endured by these people for being Christians as seen in this poem is not seen in any other poem. The poem reveals that early Mizo Christians endured punishments and ridicule from the village Chiefs and their fellow men. These hardships have been expressed by the poet through his work.

*Ramthar zai* discloses the sentiments of the Mizos when death occurs. They reveal how death torments the departed's family and loved ones, and how they continue to pine for their dead relatives. These sentiments do not change even after their conversion to



Christianity. Although the belief and hope in heaven console them from bereavement in *Lengkhawm zai*, *Ramthar zai* presents a completely different worldview :

Kawl a eng e bawarin zai an sa e,  
 Sangpui tho la piallei thuah riat;  
 I nghak rei rua kan ti e. (Ramthar zai)

There is light on the horizon, the cocks are singing

Sangpui arise from the eightfold earth

You have waited too long.

Heaven is not mentioned in this poem. This poem shows that Mizos bury/inhume dead bodies. This is seen when the bereaved family desperately calls on the departed to rise from the depths of the earth, saying that they have been lying underground for too long. The idea of calling their departed loved ones from the grave is seldom seen in Mizo poetry. Out of the 786 *Ramthar zai* poetry, there are about ten poems where this idea of death is explored. In some of these poems, their acceptance of death as something that is inevitable, and at the same time the devastation it causes to all men, as well as the futility of grieving over the death of loved ones are found. The representation of death in *Ramthar zai* does not seem to contradict the Mizos' general idea and perspective on death. Similar to the themes of death in Mizo folk poetry, *Ramthar zai* also depicts the devastation that death causes, how they long for their return, also how death separates families.

### **Hrawva and Awithangpa**

There are a number of Mizo poets who have produced remarkable poetry and the most prominent among them would be Awithangpa and Hrawva. This chapter will analyse the manner in which these two poets represent death in their works.

Carl Jung states, "When a man dies, he remains the same person he was in life, and the new self that he acquires resembles the being that he had once been" (qtd.in Death and

Dying 109). Should we discard his idea because it does not align with our Christian beliefs? Does our Christianity prevent us from acquiring deep knowledge and make us shallow? If we were not Christians, what will our viewpoint on the notion of death be? If we consider the background of Hrawva's compositions, many people will come to the conclusion that he wrote poetry because of his desolation based on his masterpiece "Rairahtea." But a closer analysis of his works shows that his poverty and desolation were a result of the deaths of his loved ones. In that sense, death becomes the motive that drove Hrawva to write poetry.

R. Thangvunga claims that Hrawva has written sixteen songs, and translated four (Mizo Hla leh a Phuahtute 296), while Siamkima states that he has written thirteen based on C.Z. Huala's record. Lalramliana, author of *Hrawva leh a Hlate* asserts that Hrawva has written and translated a total of twenty-five songs (Lalramliana 42-96). Hrawva did not compose too many songs, and it would be safe to posit that he has composed nineteen songs excluding the six songs that he has translated. Justifying Hrawva's scanty composition and the value of his works, Siamkima writes:

In many things in this world we should give more importance to the quality of something and its meaning and value instead of quantity. This is what scholars of literature pay attention to. It is for this reason that despite his exiguous composition, Hrawva occupies a special place in Mizo literature. (Zalenna Ram 188).

Commenting on Rokunga's works, Siamkima writes, "Poetry that are deemed worthy are those that wholly represent man's thoughts and characters, and the truthfulness of the message cannot be eroded with the passage of time (days, months and years)" (71). He further states, "Hrawva's songs are not conjectures or mere fantasies, but rather a revelation of one's lived experiences (poetry of experience)" (180). Although the amount of Hrawva's poetry may be considered insufficient, the value of one's works can be determined by the parameters used for judgment. Despite the fact that Hrawva has not produced many songs, R. Thangvunga is of the opinion that his songs are worthy of being considered serious as they reveal man's nature. He writes, "His poetry does not appear to be composed whimsically or as experiments; they affect man's innermost being and seem to come from the heart of the composer" (Mizo Hla leh a Phuahtute 298).

Hrawva was born on March 1893 (Hrawva leh a Hlate 12). His mother died when he was only about three years old. Four months after his mother's death, his father Thanthulha died (14). His life was impacted by death since his early childhood. The first reference to death in his poetry was when he wrote about the suffering that he endured as a result of his parent's death. His parents' death compelled him to turn to write which explains why he writes poetry. As mentioned before, his songs reveal the experiences of the poet, and this experience is death. It was his experience with death and poverty that molded Hrawva. As a consequence of the deaths in his family, Hrawva was orphaned and was destined to live a life of poverty, and his future was doomed from the beginning. It appears as though his life was constantly overshadowed by misfortunes:

Rairah riang têt, khuarei ar ang a vaih nan,

Dan rual loh kawla awmlaiin;

A chûn banah a kai e (Hrawva, Rairahtea).

A heart-rending child, for him to be desolate,

The inescapable hold of death;

Grabs his mother's hand.

Analysis of his works reveals that Hrawva considers death as man's destiny that cannot be evaded. It was a death that stole his mother from him. His mother's death is not the end of his sufferings, but it could be seen as the most tragic event for a three-year-old.

Tinkim dawn lo angin ka biak lai a lian e,

A pawî mang e, rairah riang te'n;

Belh lai zua a then tur chu. (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

'Tis as if the Almighty has turned inconsiderate,  
 How awful it is for the poor child;  
 To part with his father.

Tu'n nge hnem ang rairah chûn ngai tlei lo chu,  
 Kian rel lo kawla awmlain;  
 A zua tui ang a la e (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

Who will comfort the child who misses his mother,  
 When the inescapable death;  
 Takes his father's life too.

Death causes pain and suffering, and no one would want his mother, father, or relatives to die. The loneliness and isolation that Hrawva experiences with the death of his parents are matters of deep anguish that even death itself would mourn over. Thomas Gray, the author of "An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard," was the sole survivor among twelve siblings. For him, death is no stranger. His father was an abusive and violent man, and his mother was no better. Later in life, he left his father and lived with his mother. One of his closest friends, Richard West, passed away, and the death of his aunt Mary Antrobus was mourned by his whole family. His friend Horace Walpole was violently attacked by bandits and almost lost his life as a result. All these events resulted in the birth of his great elegies (Britannica). Death affects the heart of the poet by claiming the lives of their friends and loved ones, and their lives are deeply touched by these deaths; therefore, their thoughts are preoccupied with the notion of death. If it were not for the deaths of their loved ones, the best elegies and poetry, however, would not have been produced.

In his poetry, Hrawva highlights how children react to and cope with death. For a three-year-old, death is not something that can be fully comprehended. They do not understand that the departed will be gone forever; therefore, they believe that when their parents die, they will return home after some time. The world as conceived by an innocent child is clearly depicted in Hrawva's poetry, drawing from the author's own experiences.

A dawn thiam lo, a chûn rih tlang liam tur chu,

Lenrual chhai lai karah rairah;

Hlim ten tual a leng liai e (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

He cannot comprehend his mother leaving him,

A pitiful little boy;

Plays happily with loving kins.

A zua zatlang mual liam lai a thlir lo ve,

Senlai lungmawl rairah riang te,

Lal lai tualah a kai e (Hrawva, Rairahtea).

He is nowhere with his dying father,

For he is an ignorant pitiful boy,

Playing happily outside.

Hrawva uses the phrases like *'Zing zin'* *'tui ang la'* *'zamuall liam'* *'rih tlang liam'* *'awmlaiin banah kai'* and *'thlafam dairial chang'* when he speaks about his parent's death

and his finesse with words is evident here. One thing that is apparent in Hrawva's work is that it centers around the bereaved young child and his reaction to his parents' deaths, instead of focusing on the parents' supposed experiences in the afterlife. Hrawva mentions his mother's death more frequently than the death of his father in his poetry. In his work "Rairahtea" his mother is mentioned thirty times. He believes that his mother would definitely long to be with him and writes:

Kei zawng ka pi, thinlai reng a dam lo ve,

Lungloh tui ralah ka chunnu'n;

"Bawihthe ka ngai" a ti ang. (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

As for me, grandmother, my heart cannot heal

Beyond the Lunglohtui my mother

Declares, "I long for my child"

When Hrawva recounts the death of his parents, his sense of self-pity is evident which is not unusual when one looks at his personal experiences. Perhaps that is why his works do not reflect his imagination with regard to his parents' life beyond death but focuses on his own plight. The line "Bawihthe ka ngai" which means "I long for my child" when roughly translated, is the only line in his work that directly portrays his parents' point of view. Hrawva wrote his poetry after reaching adulthood. When he wrote about the death of his parents in retrospect, he focuses on the devastating impact these deaths had on him as a young child. And it is apparent from his works that his priority lies in his personal ordeals rather than dwelling on the afterlife. Death is devastating and difficult to comprehend and when Hrawva retells the traumatic experience he underwent when his parents died, it brings tears to the readers' eyes.

Choui lêngkel mah pawn in hliaptiang zàrah,

Rairah riang tê rûnin hnuaiah;

Vawk lêng chûn ang a bèl e. (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

E'en the dog and the goat sleep on the porch,

But as for me, my bed is under the house;

Where the swine dwell.

Many thinkers agree that, “Women perceive death seriously, and they contemplate about it, men too are affected by past experiences, but they suppress these thoughts,” (Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying 54). Hrawva meanwhile has undergone too much sufferings which is why he expresses these through songs. His inability to continue producing new poetry might be his decision to withhold his thoughts instead of expressing them through poetry. His daughter Lalsangliani, born in 1837, passed away at just eight months old, while his son Lalruma, born in 1839, died when he was two years old (32). Hrawva who has been orphaned and afflicted with poverty attempted to write poetry on the deaths of his children, but it was a futile attempt as he was unable to materialize the effort. On one hand, Death can be considered the motive behind Hrawva’s compositions, but on the other hand, it was also a death that halted his literary pursuits. According to Siamkima, Hrawva is alleged to have said, “It is too distressing, I just can’t do it, I’ve wept too much” (qtd.in Zalenna Ram 188). His discontinuation of the art of writing is not because of the lack of talent, but his decision to reserve his emotions to himself.

Analysis of Hrawva’s works shows how lonesome and dejected he feels. These themes are seen not just in “Rairahtea” but in most of his poetry which expresses his sense of isolation in life. In “Baichi Khaw Hlui Tlawh Thu” he does not explore themes that vary from the aforementioned themes, it focuses on issues related to his parents. He begins with the lines “Devoid of a father, I get lost among people/Amidst the rule of the great white man/Orphaned while growing up”, he continues, “I summon the winds from the horizon/the cock who serenade all men too/Will they be able to awake my father.” Although Hrawva is certain that his mother and father will never return to earth, he desires to have them back which reflects man’s nature. He often puts forward these rhetorical questions in his songs:

Lo hrilh ang che ka zua hrai ngai i tawn chuan,

“I hrai zua ngaiin a lo vai,

Mual a liam leh ta," tiin. (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

When you see my father who misses me,

Tell him “His son who misses him,

Is about to be lost and dead too.”

It is apparent that Hrawva understands death and accepts it. But this knowledge that he would never see them again on earth could also be the reason why he is deeply affected by the death of his mother and father. His poetry shows that regardless of what he does or where he wanders, the memory of his parents never leaves his thoughts.

Mizo *Lengkhawm zai* composer Kawlthawma views that the world as a place of suffering and loneliness.

Leiah riangin hmun nei lovin,

Thlaler hrehawm hrût vel ila;

Ka chawl ngei ang luipui kamah,

Lalpan ka tan a buatsaih e. (Ka buaina ram thlalerah hian)

Having no permanent place in this world,

Roaming the dreadful wilderness;

I shall surely rest on the shore,



The Lord has prepared for me.

Analysis of Mizo poetry, particularly R.L. Kamlala's poems, reveals that the reason why they perceive the world as a place of suffering and desolation is that they compare life on earth to that of heaven. In Hrawva's work, the term '*riang*' and '*rairah riang*' is presented forty-eight times while the term '*rairah*' appears thirty-two times (Zalenna Ram 184). What could've led Hrawva to regard himself as "isolated" when he was an educated man, which was a rarity back then and had the opportunity to become the chief of Aizawl? In the poetry that he wrote while he was a student studying outside the state, he continues to use the term "*riang*" to denote his state of being even though he was perceived as being fortunate and propitious. The connotation of the term in Hrawva's poetry is not similar to that in R.L. Kamlala's poetry as the latter uses the term metaphorically to denote his longing for heaven. On the other hand, Hrawva uses the term to express his literal anguish over the loss of both his parents, and his sadness over being left an orphan due to their deaths. Instead of alluding to the term to voice his search for peace, Hrawva uses the term to highlight his plight as an orphan, and the feeling of dejection that he experiences as a result of his parent's death.

Rabindranath Tagore was once unable to do or feel anything for a period of sixty hours because he was in a coma. The doctors could not be called and thus they could not attend to him immediately as there was no telephone back then. It was the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1937. When he finally awoke on 15<sup>th</sup> September, the first request he made was to give him a pen and ink. Then, on 25<sup>th</sup> September 25 his first poem from a collection of eighteen poetry on the theme of death and the afterlife was composed (Death and Dying 93). In one of his poetry, he talks about death in this:

Why do you whisper so faintly in my years, O Death, my Death?

When the flowers droop in the evening and cattle come back to their

stalls, you stealthily come to my side and speak words that

I do not understand.

Is this how you must woo and win me with the opiate of drowsy

murmur and cold kisses, O Death, my Death?

Will there be no proud ceremony for our wedding?

Will you not tie up with a wreath your tawny coiled locks?

Is there none to carry your banner before you, and will not the

Night be on fire with your red torch-lights.

O Death, my Death?

Come with your conch-shells sounding, come in the sleepless night,

Dress me with a crimson mantle, grasp my hand and take me.

Let your chariot be ready at my door with your horses neighing  
impatiently.

Raise my veil and look at me proudly,

O Death, my Death (The Gardener)

Tagore's philosophy on death is quite profound that he personalises death and has conversations with death. Hrawva's understanding of death is also quite extensive as seen in his work. His understanding of death strengthens his belief in God and he accepts that he has been raised by divine providence. If it had not been for his philosophy on death, Hrawva might not have graduated from college, and his poetry would not have seen the light of day because he had so many reasons to give up on life before he produced his great masterpiece. But instead of giving up on life, he could sing, "Ami Chûnnu'n lung duh hraileng an awi e/ Kei ka chûnnu *khuanu* lengin/ Awmhar riang tê min awi e," which translates as, "Other mothers soothe their children / Whereas God as my mother / Soothes and takes care of me." Although he was devastated by the deaths in his family, his works show that he has a deep understanding and acceptance of death.

In one of Hrawva's works, death is portrayed in such a manner that suggests it has the power to select and claim the lives of anyone it chooses. In 'Thirhrui Hmuh Thu' he

writes, "Duh tin par ang lawr nau ang kan tahna/ Cho ngam leng sat daitu kan vai/ Van Lal thang sakhming lo chu," which translates as, "While others are happy we are crying / Having no one to stand for us / Save for God above." The idea that death does not discriminate is a widely accepted statement with regards to death. On the contrary, Hrawva depicts death in his poetry as a force that has the power to do and kill as it pleases.

It is evident from his work that Hrawva finds solace only in God. However, in his poem "Rairahtea" he subtly shows his discontent towards God when he says:

A pawi mang e, kan biak lai *khua* nuar angin,

Chûnnu chawiin rairah riangte;

A len *khua* a rei lo ve (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

How sad it is, as if God is against me,

The forlorn son with his mother;

Were together only briefly.

Tinkim dawn lo angin ka biak lai a lian e,

A pawi mang e, rairah riang te'n;

Belh lai a zua a then tur chu (Hrawva, Rairahtea)

'Tis as if the Almighty thinks less,

For the pitiful little boy;

To lose his father before long.

From the perspective of a Christian, God's plans are flawless, and he does everything for man's own good. But could it be that God fails to consider what is best for Hrawva when he allows the death of both his parents? In the poem 'Kan Dam Chhan' the author expresses his thoughts in the following lines:

Eng dâwn ang maw hmana *Khuanu* hian,

Hringnun hi a duan lai khan;

Hrai leng awm hlei dung a thul em ni,

Hringnun hi a lo duan le (Lalduhzuala, Kan Dam Chhan)

What did God think in the years past,

When he designed life;

Did he pretend to play a game like a child,

In his creation of life.

From this side of the river, we are unable to comprehend even a small part of God's plans, and from the viewpoint of man, could it be that God ignores some people's plight? It is sometimes easy to question the plans of God when things are unfavourable for us. But in Hrawva's case, the successes that come later in his life, becoming one of the first Mizos to get access to higher education and even becoming the chief of Aizawl can be seen as pieces of evidence of God's plans for his life.

Rabindranath Tagore says that if leaving this world is as real as our capacity to love the world, meetings, and partings in life will have meaning. If love is only like being ensnared in a delusional trap, the bruise will eat everything and the stars will fade into darkness when death comes (qtd.in *Death and Dying* 96). In the case of Hrawva as well, since death is not merely an imagination, it has meaning. Not only that it has meaning, it is

the reason he is poor, the reason he sleeps with pigs, the reason he runs to his brother in agitation, the reason he is lonely and alone and calls himself desolate. It is clear that his mind often wanders to every corner of his thought thinking if there was any way to see his mother and father. If we consider his hope of seeing his mother and father after their death in this world as his imagination of the world beyond death, Hrawva would be a person who has been thinking like a philosopher, a person who thinks not in terms of the world but outside of its norms and ideas.

Chan ka nuam e, chung leng murva têah e,

Riang te'n lungduh tlang tin thlirin;

Chûn leh zua ka tawng mahna (Hrawva, Khuanu Leng Chawi)

If I could turn into a little bird,

I'd fly over the dear vales and mounts;

I might see my mother and father there.

Thlafam lenkaw l khumin ka ring lo ve,

Ka zawng leh dawn Leitlang daiah,

Ka chûn *khua*rei min hne mtu (Hrawva, Khuanu Leng Chawi)

I don't believe she is actually dead,

I will go on looking for her at Leitlang,

My mother who is my comfort.

Hrawva's poetry can be broadly classified into two categories, poetry that reflects his lamentations and poetry where he explores other themes. The latter category of poetry consists of religious poetry as well as poetry that dwells on life in general. However, apart from his religious poetry, most of his works centers around his desolate "self". When he refers to himself as being raised by divine providence, he tries to portray his sense of isolation that results from the loss of his parents. 'Pianna Lam Thu Ka Chhui Lo' is a clear expression of his worldview which is influenced by the death of his mother and father and the sense of deprivation and desolation that he experiences.

Hrawva's yearning for heaven apparently stems from his belief that God will wipe away his tears and suffering of his past, "Hmana tuarna lungchhiat mittui", and that life's problems "Dam chhung harsatna" and worldly ordeals "He khawvel nun ngam zo" will finally be overcome. In most of his poetry, Hrawva repeatedly mentions his mother and father and the impact their deaths have on his life. But one notable aspect in his poetry is that when he talks about heaven, he never expresses his longing to see his parents in heaven or his anticipation for a reunion with his parents in the afterlife. While his ideas on death and the afterlife, as seen in his poetry, may not be regarded as contradictory, it gives the impression of being composed by two different composers.

Thihna thihnaah an ngai lo,

Lalpa hmangaihte chuan;

An van kawngkhar a ni,

An Pa hmel an hmuhna. (Hrawva, Kan lung duh ber kan lawmna ber)

Those that love the Lord,

Do not consider death as death;

It's their gateway to heaven,

Where they will see the face of their Father.

Tunah tapin then mah ila,

Lawmin kan tawk leh ang;

Chatuan hmun nuam reh lohnaah chuan,

Lungngaih tuar tawh lovin (Hrawva, Kan lung duh ber kan lawmna ber)

Though we now part with tears,

We shall meet them again;

In the everlasting place of comfort,

Where sorrow is no more.

The title of this poem is 'Kan Lungduh Ber Kan Lawmna Ber'. It was written by Hrawva at the request of Pu Vaia (Ranger) on the occasion of his son's death (Mizo Hla leh A Phuahtute 307). In the poem, 'Vanram' he presents the idea that he will get to heaven very soon:

Rei lotea'n ka kai ve ang,

Chu hmun ram nuamah chuan;

Dam chhung harsatnate ka pel ang,

Lungngaih hnutiang chhawnin (Hrawva, Vanram)

I will get there soon,

On that pleasant land;

I will overcome life's hurdles,

Averting despair. (lines 9-12)

Hrawva's concept of heaven as reflected in his poetry is quite unsettling. His parents who have been at the center of his literary Works are never mentioned in his poetry about heaven. Perhaps he has decided to focus his attention on himself. Although he seldom writes about the afterlife in his poetry, he concludes his literary career by saying that he is bound for heaven in his last poem. He replaces 'Khuanu' with 'Lal ropui', and 'Khuanu lêng chawi' with khan 'Pathian'! Just as in R.L. Kamlala's 'Mihrin Hla', there are two different ideas presented in Hrawva's poetry. The circumstance that propelled him into the world of poetry was the death of his mother and father, but his preoccupation later transitions to Christ's sacrificial death, and the latter forms the theme of his poetry at the end.

Hmarlutvunga, popularly known as Awithangpa, meaning Awithanga's father which is taken from the name of his firstborn 'Lalawithanga' was born on January 1887 in Kanghmun village (Lalruanga 29). His father is Dothanga and his mother is Thuampawli. He came to prominence for his poetry in the 1900s and he apparently started composing poetry in 1907 or 1908. (Hmanlai leh tunlai Mizo hlate 136). Awithangpa wrote his *lusun zai* after the loss of his son. Lalruanga gives an account of this as follows:

In 1904 when he was 18 years old, he married a renowned Bawlte maiden named Laltuahpuii, who belongs to the Chalbawk tribe. In 1905 they had a son. As planned, he named his son Lalawithanga. Unfortunately, Lalawithanga died when he was only a year old. He was devastated, and he composed many *lusun zai*. (29)

Awithangpa's poetry can be divided into five different types. These are *lunglen zai*, love song, poetry about life, *lusun zai*, poetry dedicated to men and mock-epic poetry (31). Awithangpa's poetry were not composed exclusively for his son but some of his elegies were written to commemorate others as well. He is believed to have produced a total of nineteen *lusun zai*. We will focus solely on his *lusun zai* and will analyse his poetry to highlight the theme of death as presented in his poetry.



Awithangpa is a great poet and his *lusun zai* were written in memory of her mother, his son, Suakhnuna's son Lalhuliana, Lalrinthanga, and there are some less personal works that are not dedicated to anyone in particular. The majority of Awithangpa's poetry are written in triplet form, also known as the Mizo traditional verse form, but there are some that are written in quartet form. Awithangpa is a writer in transition. The traditional Mizo poetry was undergoing major changes as a consequence of the influx of Christianity and Awithangpa's poetry was produced during this transitory period. His use of both the triplet and quartet forms in his poetry can be seen as evidence to confirm the aforementioned statement. He was extremely unfortunate as he lost four of his children - Awithanga, Nikhûmchhinga, Zaithantluangi and Hmingthanzauva. Death visited him quite frequently. In his poem for his mother, he wonders if his mother and his son Awithanga will meet each other in the afterlife.

The kind of poetic imagination that Awithangpa explores in his poetry where he contemplates on the afterlife and wonders if his departed loved ones will reunite, is never seen in Mizo folk poetry. However, in religious poetry, the hope and belief in a reunion in heaven are expressed. Awithangpa does not use the Word heaven, however, he alludes to a heavenly place beyond life and wonders if his mother and his son will be together in that place. So in Awithangpa's poetry, both elements of Christianity and Mizo folk poetry converge. In his poem, he wrote,

Zu in tawng maw, vankhua zu hmu ang maw e,

Leng za ang maw, chun riangi leh

Awithang ka hrinhnianga e. (Awithangpa *lusun zai*)

Will they meet, will they meet there in paradise,

Are they together, his mother and

My beloved son.

The Mizo ancestors' concept of, or belief in the existence of the city of the dead "*mitthi khua*" is shown in this poem. At the same time, he also envisions his mother and child reuniting in a heavenly place called "*vankhua*" which implies that the Christian concept of heaven is expressed in the poem. Thus, in theme and form, Awithangpa's poetry combines both the old and the new Mizo traditions.

C. Chhuanvawra states, "Aside from modern poetry, there is no one who has composed traditional Mizo poetry as much as Awithangpa...he is believed to have written 300 poems," (138). According to Lalruanga, "His poetry is extremely profound. He skilfully plays with simple words, and he has the ability to use common words to beautifully express new ideas" (30). He is a great poet, and may be regarded to be a "born poet". Considering the great amount of poetry that he produced, he only wrote a few poems that can be categorized as "*lusun hla*" or songs of mourning. However, a Reading of his poetry suggests that these "*Lusunna hla*" have come from the heart of the poet. J. Malsawma writes:

...Awithangpa experienced so many tragic events as his beloved son, and his wife died, on occasions when we meet and have conversations he would express his grief over the loss of his loved ones, if he had not endeavoured to stay strong, he would have been humiliated. He was not satisfied with chanting his poetry so his poetry were mostly sung... (277)

Pegg Patricia says, "Mystery, fascination, and anxiety about death has been with man since his first awareness of its reality for him," (qtd. in Theme of Death 35). Awithangpa experienced so many tragic deaths in his family, he lost his wife and children, and it seems as though death has been personally cruel to him. Since he was an adolescent, Awithangpa reserved names for his future children saying that if he has a son. He would name him Lalawithanga, and if he has a girl child, she would be named Lalawithangi. His firstborn was a male child and he gave him the name Lalawithanga. Awithanga was extremely excited to have a son who became his source of joy and happiness. But unfortunately, Lalawithanga passed away when he was only one year old. Awithangpa was deeply hurt as he mourned the loss of his son which became a source of inspiration for most of his "*lusun hla*" (lamentation poetry) (Mizo hla leh a phuahtute chanchin 35). On the death of his son Lalawithanga, he states:

Ka sa maw nuar ka chuni nu,

A i emaw kan sual le?

Ka tuai duhlai banah a kai;

Awmlai a nunrawng mang e. (Lalawithanga sunna)

Is my god turning against me, or is it my mother,

Have I provoked them?

That my beloved son would die;

How wicked is death?

It is apparent that Awithangpa is deeply hurt by the loss of his son that he even asks God if he had offended Him which led him to experience such a tragic event. On top of questioning God, he asserts the cruelty of death. Despite the knowledge that death is every man's destiny, he was so wounded by his son's death that he looks for someone to blame, and has trouble coming to terms with his loss. In his poem, he confronts God and this kind of confrontational tone advanced towards God is not seen in any other Mizo poetry that explores the theme of death. Perhaps it is too harsh to say that he confronts God. But when he asks what he has done wrong and what religious crime he has committed to deserve the death of his beloved son, it can be said that he indirectly confronts God and it is difficult to interpret his work otherwise. But it must also be noted that this particular poem was composed before he became a Christian, therefore, the God that he alludes to over here does not appear to be the Christian God.

Awithangpa envisions his son heading toward *mitthi khua*, and longs for his return. He dreams that his son would only visit *mitthi khua*, but cheats death by resisting to stay there and return to earth. He writes:

Puini chu lem ang zu der teh la,

Nang chu Awithang, ka tuai lungrun;

Hring lamah lo kir leh la. (Lalawithanga sunna)

Fake the day of your death,

My beloved Awithang;

Come back to the living.

In Awithangpa's elegy for his son, the concept of *mitthi khua* as often presented in Mizo folk poetry is seen. In this concept, *mitthi khua* is believed to be situated where one can see it from a hilltop. He hopes to see his departed son at *Rihdil* and expresses his desire to see his son in these lines: "Awithang thlafam rihli-an / Kan va tawng dah law maw e" (lines 3-4), which translates as, "If we go to rih river / We may see my son Awithanga." As mentioned before, he converted to Christianity in the year 1918 and the poem was written before his conversion (Mizo hla hlui 370). In his poem, it is apparent that he still held his pre-Christian religious beliefs and the Christian concept of heaven is not represented in his work.

In traditional Mizo belief, as also expressed in their folk poetry, death is accepted as the destiny of all men. This is perhaps the only consolation that they find when they allude to the theme of death. Awithangpa too explores this idea in his work:

Tap tap lo la, nu chûn lali,

Nang chang a rûn bil lo che;

Fam lo tur chung an awm lo ve (Awithangpa lusun zai)

Stop your crying, mother Lali,

Death invades not only you;

No family is exempted from death.

In these lines, he denotes that death is powerful and has the authority to afflict anyone without partiality. He expresses the futility of mourning as it unfailingly effects everyone and tries to find solace in the certainty of death instead.

Most of Awithangpa's *lusun hla* are written in traditional Mizo style and are elaborated with Mizo poetical words. In terms of theme, he does not deviate from the traditional Mizo religious ideology, but his works are unique in that they question or confront God upon the death of his son which is not found in other religious poetry of that era.

Let us analyse the theme of death in the poetry of other Mizo composers. It would be an arduous task to analyse every poet and their works, so we will streamline this analysis to select works by various poets and highlight their exploration of death in their works.

When exploring the theme of death, fathers are often alluded to in Mizo folk poetry, while mothers are never mentioned. But in secular poetry, the death of their mothers are often expressed. Mizo society is a patriarchal society and in the era of the Mizo ancestors, the patriarchal system was observed more rigidly which may explain the significance of the father and the death of the male head of the family is taken quite seriously as compared to the death of a female member. With the changes and development of society, women begin to occupy more importance in the family and society. The change in the position of women in society is reflected in Mizo secular poetry. L. Biakliana wrote two poems "Ka nu thlan" and "Chun nu" on the death of his mother. Let us analyse the theme of death in these works.

L. Biakliana's mother Ngurchhuani died when he was only five years old. His father is the renowned Pastor Liangkhaia who spends most of his time traveling and therefore Biakliana was solely taken care of by his mother. This is apparently why Biakliana was devastated by his mother's death and his sorrow is concisely depicted in his poetry. "Chun nu" is written in couplet, the traditional Mizo verse form, couplet. The impact of his mother's death on the poet is clearly shown in his work:

Khawvel i then ni te ka hau dawn e,

Min tawngtaisakna te ka'n dawn zel a (Chunnu, L. Biakliana)

I will rebuke the day you parted this world,

I remember your prayers for me.

Here he expresses his sorrow and deep anguish over the loss of his mother. He declares the day of his mother's passing as the most tragic and dreadful day but at the same time a day, that would also remain memorable in his life. He also expresses his desire to admonish this day. However, his mother's endless prayers never abandon him and even though he wants to reprimand the world for taking his mother from him, her prayers remain a constant companion which is a paradox that is seen in the poem. He juxtaposes his anger towards the world with his mother's prayers, and there is no indication in his poem that he actually reprimanded the world. His grief over his mother's death leads him to have disdain for the world, which is a unique idea seen in his works that are seldom presented in Mizo poetry by other poets.

Death and grief are two aspects that are deeply interconnected. The combination of these is seen in Biakliana's poetry and his recollection of the grief that he experienced as a young child over his mother's death is reflected in his work:

"Khaw'nge ka chun lungduh" tiin ka tap,

"Bawihthe lungngai suh" tiin min khap (Chunnu, L. Biakliana).

I cry saying, "Where is my dear mother?"

They told me, "Do not worry, beloved child."

Here he employs a beautiful rhyme scheme to reflect on the aforementioned grief caused by the loss of his mother. In this poem, an innocent child, who has yet to understand life's

complexities, cries for his mother and asks where his mother is. His inability to comprehend the matter despite their consoling words '*lungngai suh*', meaning "do not worry", can be gleaned. At the same time, it appears that he is being restrained by his family from asking the whereabouts of his mother, which shows that he must have raised that question quite frequently. The reason behind his family's action however does not appear to be caused by their irritation towards the child, but rather, the lack of words to explain the situation to a mere child who does not seem to grasp the harsh reality. This particular instance also reflects the drastic impact that the loss of a mother has on the young child.

L. Biakliana is a prolific poet and is regarded as the first among the Mizo poets who compose poetry with technical finesse. In Mizo poetry, meter and rhyme scheme are seldom prioritized and in this sense, Mizo composers do not follow the tradition of poets who are globally recognized. However, all Mizo poetry cannot be generalized or said to belong to the aforementioned category. There are some poets who give importance to meter and rhyme schemes and poets such as Hrawva and L. Biakliana may be considered as the frontrunners. On the account of L. Biakliana's poetry H. Lalrinfela states:

In his poetry we find elements that feed the heart, water the thought and challenge the mind that the new generation or the old has never seen. He is the pioneer of new poetic technique and style in his usage of lyrics, choice of title and pattern of the song...In all of his songs we can find true liberation from the old songs of our ancestors. The evidence of this lies in his songs such as 'Ka nu thlan' (My mother's grave) where he uses the 'aaba' rhyme scheme, popularly known as 'Rubaiyat Stanza' which follows the pattern of Omar Khayyam's poetry; a mourning song for his mother called 'Threnody' in nine couplets (rhyme scheme -aa) and 'Chunnu' written in two quatrains. (196)

H. Lalrinfela asserts that L. Biakliana is 'Father of Mizo Poetry' (198) which alone is evident of his skills in the art of poetry. As stated earlier, death has impacted his life from a young age beginning with the death of his mother. In 'Chunnu' he shows his hopelessness in achieving peace by recalling his family's reply when he enquired about his mother: '*lungtat par hunah a lo haw ang*'. The phrase when roughly translated means

”when the grindstone flowers” implying the non-existence or impossibility of an event to occur. He finds solace in their consoling words for a while until he came to understand its connotation. He finally comprehends the truth by saying:

Chun nu ka ngai thiam ta,

I chenna ram nuam kha,

Karawn pan ve hun chuan,

Aw, min lo hmuak ang che (Chun nu, L. Biakliana).

I have understood now, mother,

Your bountiful abode,

When I reach there,

Wait for me at the gate.

The lines above denote that the poet finally understands the reality of the situation, meaning that his mother will never return to this world. Thus, he concludes by stating his wish that his mother awaits him until he reaches the land beyond death. He does not mention Paradise or heaven in this poem, but his vision of a beautiful place beyond this world can be seen as his concept of heaven.

In 'Ka nu thlan' (My Mother's Grave) he talks about the grave where his mother is interred and states his longing for his dead mother. In his work, he does not refrain from expressing his longing for his mother and is rather adamant to continue doing so which is reflective of the admiration he has for his mother:

Tahzai sain ka awi zel ang,

Chun riang piallei kar laikhum ang;



Chham ang zala zan mu a chhinna hmun,

Tuara'n nghilh zai ni reng a awm lo vang (Ka nu thlan, L. Biakliana)

I will always cry and sing,

Upon the grave of my mother;

The bed where she now sleeps,

I will never forget it.

Here he indicates that he is not reluctant to show his emotions over his mother's death. He states that the grave has become a resting place for his mother, and it is a place that will remain in his memory for eternity. The Mizos have a custom of burying the dead, and so each locality has its own graveyard. In one of his poems, L. Biakliana reveals that he visits his mother's grave whenever he feels desolate and melancholic, and he conveys his feelings to his mother. Confiding his problems and dejections to his dead mother instead of turning to his fellow men is quite unusual and shows the uniqueness of the poet.

Suang lungpui, sai lovin ding la,

Nau ang nuar changa zualko ka tlanna,

Ka chun nemte chham ang zalna,

Chatuan thlengin thangtharte hril zel la. (Ka nu thlan, L. Biakliana)

Do not fall, stand firm, o gravestone,

You are the place I turn to when I feel sad,

The place where my mother sleeps,

Remain here forever, for all generation to see.

After the death of his mother Ngurchhuani, L. Biakliana's father remarried his mother's younger sister Ngurliani. The remarriage took place less than a year after Ngurchhuani's death but it does not seem to fill the void in L. Biakliana's life that stemmed from the loss of his biological mother.

L. Biakliana suffered from tuberculosis, which at the time was an incurable disease. He was convinced that he would die soon and wrote about it in his poem where he reveals that he was awaiting his own death. This is yet another unique feature of L. Biakliana's poetry. He writes:

TB vanga ka fam tur chu,

Ka ngai mang e, chun zua lenrual,

Tawn leh ni awm ta dawn si lo,

Dam takin aw, ka fam tang e tih hi. (Ka fam tur chu, L. Biakliana)

For me to die of TB,

How I shall miss my family,

We shall see each other no more,

Farewell, now let me die.

His ability to peacefully express his farewell to his friends and family is a remarkable trait in L. Biakliana. Although he knew that he was dying, he was at peace and does not seem to be troubled by the thought of death. He conveys his peacefulness in one of his works:

Chatuan Lili leh rose parmawi,

Rimtui vulna hmunah;

Khawvel lei hrehawm ngam zovin,

Hlimin ka leng tawh ang. (Chatuan Lili, L. Biakliana)

Where the everlasting lily and rose,

Bloom with the majestic fragrance;

Defeating all the troubles of the world,

I shall live there happily.

The belief that death is a bridge that leads them to heaven as often seen in Mizo *lengkhawm zai* is also explored by L. Biakliana in his poetic work. He believes in the existence of heaven which is better than this world, just like his predecessors, and this belief diminishes their fear of death. The desire to transcend this world where death is invincible kindles his hope to reach the afterlife where death will finally be conquered. The belief that there will be everlasting joy in heaven is also seen in his poetry. The juxtaposition of the miseries on earth with that of endless happiness in heaven and the exploration of the impact of death is seen in L. Biakliana's poetry.

Mizo poetry underwent major development since 2016. This is an impact of the rise in popularity of social media where poets can now publish their works using these platforms, according to H. Lalawmpuia (Tunlai Mizo poetry than chhoh dan). In 2016, Mizo Poetry Society (Mipoty) was founded and they publish volumes of poetry written by members of their society titled *Zaikung Thar* and as of now, five volumes have been published. More than two hundred poems are published in each volume. This contemporary poetry explores different themes according to scholar H. Lalawmpuia who states:

The central themes of these poems are varied, and it is impossible to sum up these poetry in one or two points. Love and courting, nature and environment, human behaviour, life lessons, politics, nation and tribe, tribe studies, new issues and trends, education, food culture, relationships,

there is no issue/theme that they do not explore. (Tunlai Mizo poetry than chhoh dan)

It is apparent that these poetry explores different themes, but more significantly, a number of these are subjective and confessional in nature. It is quite unusual that the theme of death or the afterlife is not highlighted as a common theme in these poetry despite the centrality of death in Mizo religious poetry. However, we will try to analyse these poems in order to highlight the theme of death and how they explore it in their works.

In Mizo poetry where death is alluded to, some poets express their desire to leave this world soon. Religious poetry to a large extent, sports with this idea because of their belief in the afterlife, and the peace that their faith gives them. On the contrary, contemporary poets render their passion for life, and their poetry expresses their unpreparedness to die. Lalvensangi posits that this world is filled with problems, worries, and hopelessness and conveys the harshness of living. She claims that she feels as if she is being tortured by life. However, she suggests her reluctance to leave the world as follows:

Chuti taka har chuan hre mah ila,  
 Aw! Thihna tirhkoh, mi fam tir lul suh;  
 Ka mittui far zat nuh ka la duh a,  
 Hnehchhiah hnu hian hnehtu nih ka duh. (Lalvensangi, Thihna Tirhkoh tan)

Though I know it's a hard thing to do,  
 O angel of death, let me not die;  
 I still want to laugh as much as my tears,  
 Being conquered, I want to conquer.

This poem, despite its bleak portrayal of life, maintains that there is hope. However, the hope that is expressed here differs from the kind of hope that is found in religious poetry. While the latter's hope stems from their faith in God, faith in man's capability and strength despite life's ordeals seems to be the motive in the poem quoted above. While conveying her reluctance to die throughout the poem, the poet writes in the last stanza:

Tawrhna ruam khawk rawih rawih a,  
 Nuih ni ka chhiar ve hma hi chuan,  
 Beiseina chhawm zel ka la huam asin,  
 Aw! Thihna tirhkoh, mi la ko rih suh aw! (Lalvensangi, Thihna Tirhkoh  
 tan)

Until I laugh so hard that,  
 My laughter echoes in the valley of suffering,  
 I am willing to cling on to hope,  
 O angel of death, do not call my name!

In this poem, hope is perceived as the force that drives man, and the significance of man's hope is highlighted. Although they are torn and devastated by the endless challenges that experience in life, their desire to experience equal proportions of happiness and sorrow on earth inspires them to stay strong and it is their hope to conquer life's ordeals that gives them the courage to move forward.

In Mizo religious poetry, heaven is portrayed as a desirous place that the poets long to reach. It is shown as a place that can only be accessed after death. Jennifer Zothansangi has a differing view on death and express her reluctance to get there. While most Mizo poets portray heaven in a positive light and reveal desire to go to heaven, her poem voices an opposing view which is quite remarkable. She writes:

Vur sur seng seng te ka hmu chak a  
 Thlaler zau tak leh tuipui cham put te nen  
 Nipui thawta thingnah chawr no hlep te  
 Thlasika thingnah tla kawlh rel rul te  
 Fur laia ruah leh rial tla ri tek tek te  
 Thal laia ni tla tur eng sen paw chia te  
 A mawi ka tiin hmuh vek ka duh a  
 Vanramah hmuh tur a awm ve loh chuan

Vanram ka kai peih lo (Jennifer Zothansangi, Vanram ka kai peih lo)

I want to see the snow fall  
 The vast desert and the grand ocean  
 Tree leaves sprouting in the spring  
 Leaves scattering in winter  
 The sounds of rain and hail  
 The crimson sunset during summer  
 I want to see all of these beautiful things  
 If they are not to be found in heaven  
 I do not want to go there.

It is evident from her poem that she has taken Mizo death poetry to the next level by her innovative and radical view. While majority of Mizo poets envision heaven as a place of eternal happiness where there will no longer be sorrow, sadness, pain, and death which is the reason they anticipate heaven. On the contrary, this poet holds the idea that in heaven, worldly pleasures and the beauty of nature that she experiences on earth will no longer be seen. On top of these, She is hesitant to go to heaven because she is not enticed by the notion that heaven will be a place devoid of suffering and tears as she accepts life with all its ordeals. Instead, she is content with life on earth and the thought these worldly experiences will disappear in heaven makes her reluctant to go to heaven. This reveals that man's ideas and worldview are altered with the changing times which is also seen in Mizo poetry, including their concept of heaven. In this particular poem, God is not mentioned as the poet only yearns for the simple gifts of nature, and is not enticed by the grandeur experiences that heaven holds for man.

The personification of death is often seen in Mizo poetry. Some poets of both religious and secular poetry even go to the extent of admonishing death and converse with death while some convey their feelings about it. The poems featured in *Zaikung Thar* where death is a major theme are mostly written by young poets and it will be safe to assume that their notion of death represents the ideas of today's youth. These poets do not

incorporate Biblical teachings when addressing the theme of death. In his poem, Vanlalhrilha speaks to death and even invites it to take his life:

Aw, thihna, lo ngaithla ta che ka awrawl hi,  
 Aw, thihna, ka hlau lo che mi liampui tawh rawh.  
 Duhsam damna tlang kan thuam mawi ka mangphan hi,  
 A rei lua e ka ti, a tak ram thlen tawh rawh,  
 Lo kal la, ka duhsam ram chu min thlen ta che. (Vanlalhrilha, Thihna  
 kohna)

O death, listen to my voice,  
 O death, I'm not afraid of you, take me with you now.  
 This dream of remedy that we decorated,  
 Has been long enough, make it a reality,  
 Come, take me to the place of my dream.

In this poem, the cruelty of death is presented and is seen as the source of man's miseries. Despite this, the poet is not scared of death and urges death to take his life. He is convinced that he will get to his destined place through death which is why he persuades death to quickly claim his life. However, the desire to leave behind the world of suffering does not seem to be the motivation for the poet's anticipation of death, but rather his endeavour to reach his destined place seems to be his motive. The death that is dreaded by everyone does not seem to be horrifying as he converses with death in a friendly manner and even invites it to take his life. Toward the end of the poem, he writes:

Chatuan nun chan nan i kut vawtin mi chelh la,  
 Thlan thim tak hnuaiah chuan mi zalh tawh rawh.  
 Ka tah mittui a hul theih nan mi kai thuai la,  
 Hmangaih par vulna ramah, aw, mi thlen lul rawh,  
 Lei hringnun vahvaihna ram hi ka ning tawh e. (Vanlalhrilha, Thihna  
 kohna)

Grasp me with your cold hand that I receive eternal life,  
 Make me lie down under the dark grave.  
 Take me soon that my tears go dry,  
 Lead me to the land where love blooms,  
 For I am tired of this world of suffering.

He personifies death and speaks to it as a normal human being, and addresses his contempt for life. It is evident that his destined place can only be accessed after death although he does not expound on it. And this place could be seen as heaven though he does not specify it in his work. What is apparent is that he wants to go there and has made the necessary preparations to leave this world behind. He patiently awaits death to take him. His technique of personifying death, the friendly manner in which he addresses death and invites him to take his life is a tradition that is extremely rare in Mizo poetry.

Contemporary poets, as mentioned earlier, are young poets who facelessly expound on the theme of death in their works. Their tone is different from that of religious poets because seldom allude to God in their poetry and rely on man's courage and capacity with regard to the idea of death. In Mizo folk poetry, death is seen as an inevitable destiny of man. Although the manner in which they explore this idea is not similar, the inevitability of death is also found in secular poetry. In his poem, Ramlawt Dinpuia writes:

A tir atang reng khan  
 I thlenna tur hmun chu hauh lawk a ni a,  
 I hum tur ruahman a nihna hmunah khan  
 I chanai chu dah that a ni a,  
 I tana dawhkan buatsaih lawkah chuan  
 I dawm atan no pawh chhawp a ni (Ramlawt Dinpuia, Pialral Kawng)

Ever since the beginning



Your destination was engaged,  
 Where your portion was prepared  
 Lies your share,  
 On the table that was arranged for you  
 Is a cup for you to drink.

The poem suggests that from the moment of his birth, man is destined to die. It explores the idea of pre-destination and contends that "a table and cup is prepared" in advance for him, which is apparently a Biblical allusion and it implies that man's destiny is planned right from his birth. This poem gives no indication that death will lead him to eternal happiness, nor does it say that his tears will be dried. It only argues that death will lead him to his destined place. The poem suggests that life will continue in the afterlife, just as it is in this world. In the end, he denotes: "Pialral chu tiam i ni ngei a / A hnuha hnuh luh erawh i ni lo ang," (lines 27-28), which translates as, "You are indeed promised paradise / But you will not be dragged inside." Although the poem suggests that a place is prepared for man in the afterlife, it does not support the idea that it is for everyone as that will depend on man's willingness to get to his destined place. This in turn implies that the destined place that is seen in the poem is heaven, because heaven is promised to everyone but in Christian belief, only those who believe in God will enter the place.

In one aspect of secular poetry, where we encounter elements of death, the question of existence in the afterlife arises, which is rather unconventional. Lalduhzuala expressed this viewpoint.

Khawi lamah tuan rel tak ang i maw?  
 Hringnun hi a ral hunin,  
 An sawi pialral hi awm tak ang maw?  
 Tahchuan engtin zel ni maw? (Lalduhzuala, Kan Dam Chhan)

Where do you journey when life's course is run?

Does a realm called Pialral await, as some have said?

Oh, what mysteries unfold beyond the setting sun?

Pray, tell me, what lies ahead?

In this poetry, the folk poetry term 'pialral' is employed as a symbol to denote 'heaven.' The poet poses a question that no other poet has dared to ask: Does the afterlife truly exist? Furthermore, even if it does, it raises the query of how one would endure there. Mizo religious poetry consistently refers to heaven as the destination after death, but this poem questions the very existence of the afterlife and speculates on what might transpire there. The poet presents a challenging inquiry, one that is rhetorical in nature and deviates from Christian doctrine, introducing fresh inquiries absent in folk poetry and, especially, religious poetry.

Mizo secular poetry has never ventured beyond the boundaries of Christian doctrine in its compositions, yet this poem surpasses established doctrines and beliefs to probe into the mysteries of the afterlife. It can be concluded that in Mizo secular poetry, this composition attains and maintains the utmost prominence. The poet's departure from traditional beliefs, and the broader implications for Mizo secular poetry as a genre that challenges conventional notions and embraces existential contemplation.

This poetry possesses the ability to resonate with the depths of an existential crisis. Its unique essence and thematic exploration set it apart from other Mizo poetry, making it a distinct and unparalleled artistic expression in the Mizo literary landscape. An existential crisis is a profound and often unsettling period of introspection and questioning regarding the fundamental nature of one's existence, purpose, and place in the world. It is characterized by a deep sense of unease, a loss of meaning or direction, and an intense contemplation of existential realities such as mortality, identity, freedom, and the search for meaning.

During an existential crisis, individuals may grapple with existential questions that challenge their beliefs, values, and perceptions of reality, leading to a profound re-evaluation of their lives and the choices they have made. It is a transformative experience that often arises from a heightened awareness of life's uncertainties, the limitations of human existence, and the confrontation of existential truths. Existential crises can occur at

any stage of life and may be triggered by significant life events, personal setbacks, philosophical or religious disillusionment, or a deep yearning for a more authentic and meaningful existence. The resolution of an existential crisis often involves a process of self-reflection, self-discovery, and the pursuit of a personally meaningful and purposeful life.

Yalom states that, "The existential crisis is a moment when one questions the very foundations of their life: whether their life has meaning, purpose, or value. It is a deep and pervasive state of unease that can lead to a profound re-evaluation of one's beliefs, identity, and relationship to the world," (15). The poet may not be questioning the meaning of life, but he does question his belief in life after death. All other Mizo poetry never questions life after death beyond the Christian doctrine, but the poet himself not only asks whether there is a life after death but also delves into how life will unfold in that realm. This indicates that the poet may or may not fully accept the life he currently possesses, but his inquiry about life after death serves as evidence that Mizo secular poetry is philosophical, profound, and universal in nature.

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## CHAPTER - V

### Conclusion

Death is a recurring and significant theme in Mizo poetry, offering a glimpse into the cultural and spiritual beliefs surrounding mortality within the Mizo community. Mizo poets explore death from various perspectives, capturing its essence through vivid imagery, metaphors, and emotional depth.

In Mizo poetry, death is often depicted as a natural part of the human journey, an inevitable transition that marks the end of earthly existence. Poets convey a sense of acceptance and resignation towards death, viewing it as a part of the cyclical nature of life. They draw inspiration from the close connection between the Mizo people and the natural world, using imagery from the environment to portray the transient and ephemeral nature of human life.

Mizo poetry reflects a strong spiritual and religious foundation, and death is often viewed as a passage to the afterlife or a reunion with ancestral spirits. Poets explore concepts of the soul's journey beyond the physical realm, delving into beliefs about the existence of a spirit world and the influence of departed souls on the living. They use metaphorical language and symbolism to convey the spiritual significance of death and its connection to the larger cosmic order.

Grief and mourning are also prominent themes in Mizo poetry when it comes to death. Poets express the deep emotions experienced upon the loss of loved ones, depicting the pain, longing, and sense of emptiness that accompanies bereavement. Through their verses, they offer a means of catharsis and a way to process and share the universal human experience of grief. Mizo poets draw on cultural rituals and customs associated with death and mourning, portraying the collective mourning process within the community.

Mizo poetry often intertwines the themes of death and nature, portraying death as a return to the earth and a merging with the natural elements. Poets use natural imagery, such as flowers withering, leaves falling, or the setting sun, to depict the cycle of life and death. They emphasize the interconnectedness between humans and the environment,

highlighting the idea that death is a transformative process where individuals become part of the natural world once again.

Mizo poetry portrays death as an integral part of the human experience, weaving together cultural, spiritual, and emotional dimensions. It reflects the Mizo community's beliefs in the afterlife, the influence of ancestral spirits, and the profound impact of loss and grief. Through their verses, Mizo poets provide a lens into the complex and nuanced understanding of death within the Mizo culture, inviting readers to contemplate the mysteries of life and mortality.

The subject of death has never been studied in the genre of Mizo poetry, and one prominent finding of this research is the change in the philosophy of the Mizos in the matters of death and the world beyond death. The cause that drives the Mizos to alter their belief is Christianity, and the situations before the Christian era and post-Christian era are completely different. C. Chhuanvawra tells how the Mizos before their conversion to Christianity excruciatingly suffered the effects of death:

In the olden days, they took death painfully and agonizingly. In times of death, they would skip meals, unable to eat as a matter of fact; even the persons able to eat refrained from eating out of shame from eating, they would pass the time doing other things. They did not want to take a bath nor wash their hair, nor give it oil, they would wear their hair loose and disheveled; and would not even wash their faces (2).

It is evident in times of death that the family of the dead suffered immensely, for death meant an end to everything and they had no hope of seeing their dead relative in a world beyond death. Moreover, there is a distinct dreadfulness of death for them. The Mizos used to say that there is a person called Pu Pawla at the gate of the village of the dead carrying a large pellet bow with a stone as big as an egg. This man would ask the life story of everyone who was about to enter the village of the dead, he would not shoot the ones who were *thangchhuah* and the ones who killed a man or an animal in their lifetime, but would shoot at any one who was otherwise. His shot was extremely painful and would scrape and bruise for a whole three years (Pi pu zunzam 201). This being the case of their belief, it can be assumed that death for the common people would not be very welcoming.

If there were a way to escape death, they would surely take it. But they were introduced to Christianity, and for the Christians heaven is approachable to any and every human being, and death became less dreadful than in the past.

In Mizo folk poetry we find only their sufferings from death, but we see it clearly how they were less affected by a death in their religious poetry after their conversion to Christianity. They still ached badly from death, but as they now had a new hope, a hope to enter heaven, some composers even wished for the world to be over soon. V.T. Kappu writes, "Ka ngaih Lalpa, min lo hruai rawh" (line 4), "I miss thee Lord, take me home," thinking aloud his desire for God to take him home, for he yearned for heaven, and this made him welcome even death itself.

Christianity completely altered their philosophy on the world beyond death, the village of the dead and *pialral* no longer existed. There existed only heaven where every one can enter and apparently there can be no better news than this. In Mizo folk poetry this was their consolation, "Keini riak kan fam lo / Mi lai leng an fam zo ve" (lines 1-2) which translates as, "Tis not only us who suffer death / Everyone is facing death." But in religious poetry it is found that their consolation was heaven where they would rest eternally:

Leiah riangin hmun nei lovin,

Thlaler hrehawm hrût vel ila;

Ka chawl ngei ang luipui kamah,

Lalpan ka tan a buatsaih e. (Ka buaina ram thlalerah hian)

In this world we are guests with no permanent place,

We tread the harrowing wilderness;

I shall surely rest on the shore,

The Lord has prepared for me.

Mizo folk poetry hardly depicts the world as a dreadful place, but in religious poetry, there is a good deal of songs that present the world as a dreadful and dull place! This difference is none other than their conversion of faith, and since they compared the world with heaven, they came to believe the world to be a calamitous place. There is evidence of their eagerness to rest in heaven in their songs which results in their acknowledgment of the world is terrible for them. This is due to the fact that Christianity completely altered its old theory concerning the world beyond death.

Mizo folk poetry presents death to be experienced and reacted upon according to the time it happens by the whole world. This portrayal simply means that death is unavoidable, which falls upon everyone, cannot be ignored at one's convenience, and enters everyone's home and family. Since all of the Mizo folk poetry are couplet and triplet, there can be no lengthy description of matters, composers disclose their feelings in brief lines. We are told that they don't deem death is to be considered an enemy, they just cope with it as it comes.

It appears in Mizo folk poetry that their only comfort from death is the undeniable truth that it happens to everyone. Whether this qualifies to be a ground for comfort is another matter, it does not seem to be a rewarding comfort. It is rather ironic. Moreover, they don't portray a good amount of life and settlement beyond death. They mention the old belief of the Mizo ancestors that the dead go to *Mitthi khua* and *Pialral*, but there is almost no evidence of how they will fare at that place once they reach there. They did not know how to approach this village, but we can see that this village of the dead was always on their mind. "Lurhpui is high enough, to look over every village / If I could reach the top, would I see the village where the one I miss dwells," is found in *Thuthmun zai*. As a consequence of missing the dead, they imagined if they could reach the top of Lurh mountain and look over from there, the village of the dead, the land where their dear dead ones they missed so much might be visible. Although it was just an imagination, the spirit world does not seem to be able to be seen from any mountaintop of this world. Given the truth of this knowledge, their desperate longing and wish to see the village of the dead depict their vivid imaginations in their time. It also confirms how seriously they took death, and death is the force that parted the humans. Death was the problem of their world,



which was annoyingly unavoidable, making them tremendously uncomfortable throughout their lives.

It is found that a number of sons missing their dead fathers in Mizo folk poetry, while it is almost impossible to find sons missing their dead mothers, let alone mentioning them. The Mizos follow a patriarchal system of society. From what we can learn from the various folk songs we come to the question asking if it was harder for them to survive without a father and made their world more uncomfortable. In one of *chawngchen zai* we see this, “Father wakes up from your death, as I am in need of a wife.” He missed his dead father extremely when he was about to take a wife, so the son wrote a song to express his wish to revive his father. We have seen in the earlier song how terrible they felt when the father of the family died. It is unusual in the various folk poetry of the Mizos to learn that in any of the songs that deal with death, the mothers are not mentioned. Perhaps the cause lies in their tradition of heeding the father in the family, that the whole family bent under the father’s dominion. It is evident they suffered tremendously when their fathers were dead, and composed songs to express their feelings. It can be safely assumed the mothers would also die, but there is no evidence of them being missed and dead. It has been mentioned earlier that the Mizos have a firm belief in the afterlife when it comes to religion, however, since the common folk did not have any religious songs, their ideas on death and the afterlife cannot be gleaned through songs.

In the post-Christian era, poetry composed by the Mizos include their concept of heaven and thus, it can be felt that the Mizos have a deep yearning for heaven as it is reflected in their poetry. Whenever death is alluded to in Mizo religious poetry, life beyond death always finds expression, and this too in conformity with Christian beliefs. Heaven is unfailingly mentioned in those poems and is seen as a place where the souls of the departed go in accordance with Christian teachings. From the perspective of religion, it is quite justifiable to allude to death and heaven, and moreover to juxtapose these two ideas of death and heaven in Mizo Religious poetry.

It is found that in Mizo religious poetry God is always put in the front when death comes into their poem. With comparing to Mizo folk poetry there is one peculiarity in religious poetry, there are so many lines that portray life beyond death. In Mizo folk poetry most of the poets only write about death when it comes to their family or their

society. But in religious poetry especially in the *Lengkhawm zai*, there are so many lines that draw life beyond death. The study also finds out that in Mizo religious poetry, death is not scary enough and sometimes they called God to take their life, and they depict beyond death there is a place called home, i.e., heaven! Most religious poets compare this world to heaven, and they thought that this world is like a desert where they cannot find a place to rest! So, they find comfort in God and it can be said that they are ready to die and go to heaven. With compare to folk poetry and secular poetry, it can be found that religious poetry the most that talks about life after death.

Despite the fact that Christianity entered Mizoram which resulted in a good deal of Christian songs, the Mizos were still Mizos, the Mizo culture and tradition could not be left aside. The use of *pialral* was still prevalent to denote heaven, *rih dil* and *pialral* were still used customarily to signify the place where the dead went. This proves that the Mizos albeit their conversion to Christianity could not let go of their culture and philosophy all at once. In one of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* composed by Tawia:

Kir zai reng reng an rel tawh lo,

Hringlang tlang an liam leh ta a;

Rauthla vangkhua an thleng ta,

Nunna lunglohtui an in a;

Hawilopar an ken tir ta a,

Nun hlun thing an vuan. (Tawn loh dar ang kan tawng em ni)

They do not want to come back,

They have passed Hringlang mountain;

They have reached the village of spirits,

Drinking the water of everlasting life;

Carrying the flower *Hawilopar*,

They embrace the tree of life.

Mizo poetry has a generous use of different genres of poetry other than the religious ones, such as – songs about an outlook on human life, love songs, and even satirical poems. These will be further studied as secular poetry. The term ‘secular poetry’ refers here to those works in Mizo poetry which are not concerned primarily with Christianity. A secular poem may include a reference to God or Heaven or salvation, but its primary subject is something other than scriptural narrative, a saint's life, prayer, or the like. The ensuing survey is organized broadly according to the subject matter.

C. Chhuanvawra says, "No more new songs that follow the Mizo traditional poetry were born in the wake of 1900; the only songs that emerged after 1900 were *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai*." (126). *Puma zai* originated from Biate, a sub-tribe of the Mizos. They used to reside in Cachar District, Assam.

*Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai*, apart from *lengkhawm zai*, were the first poetry to be composed by the Mizos after their conversion to Christianity and were exceptionally popular in their time. Besides these two, a copious amount of new poetry called *Kaihlek zai* came out. *Kaihlek* means diversion or deflection. *Kaihlek zai* is said to have two ways of labeling, one type was a profane song and the other was purely lyrical in nature (Mizo Poetry 101). It is a mockery of the Christian religion, mostly satirical poetry; where the non-Christians scorned and mocked the converted Christians. With the exception of what we have discussed, a variety of other forms such as *Awithangpa zai*, *Hrangchhawni zai*, *Mutelen zai*, *Lianrikhumi zai*, *Lengzem zai*, *Chalmar zai*, *Rêl zai*, *German run zai*, *Ramthar zai* and *Transport zai* were also founded. Moreover, there were also many poetries composed by individuals. The different poetry we have discussed so far are mostly centered around mockery and satire, some even comical in nature. They mostly do not pertain to the subject of death. *Ramthar zai* in particular can be considered as an attack or reproach on Christianity. *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai* were exceedingly popular in their time, but they both did not mention any reference to death or the world beyond death.

Among the many varieties of poetry that emerged, only *Ramthar zai* deals with death and what lay beyond death. In *German run zai* we find compliments and well wishes to stay alive during a battle, a little reference to the possibility of parting during a war, as war involves death. The songs are mostly comprised of their idea of war being disastrous and their hope for the warriors to come home safely.

*Ramthar zai* was composed by different composers. Because of its variety of composers, the songs are also of different themes. We find the gospel and worship songs as well as the ones that practically mock the Christians. Their imagination of life beyond death on the other hand is more or less corresponding to *lengkhawm zai*. They talk a great deal about heaven. They emphasize heaven even without mentioning the matter of death. Moreover, they most commonly use the word 'zion' to talk about heaven. Their distinctly unusual portrayal of death is the difference between the death of God on Calvary and the death of man:

Kalvari tlangpui ka Lal thihna,

Kei ka famna chinlai unau leh lei dan;

Tho leh fa ni hian min ring thei lo. (Ramthar zai)

Mount Calvary, the place where my King died,

As for me, my death is in this world, besides my kin;

They believe not I shall live again as my God does. (Ramthar zai)

The composer says that God's place of death is Mount Calvary whereas his place of death is with his family and in his village. For this reason, he adds that people don't think he will rise again like God. We don't find this kind of song in *lengkhawm zai*. It can be said that the above song depicts the way the pioneer believers showed their method of believing in God and their imagination of life beyond death to their fellow human beings.

Apart from *Ramthar zai*, two prominent persons in the stream of secular poetry are Hrawva and Awithangpa. These two talk about death being few and far between. Looking closely into Hrawva's songs we can be certain that since his poverty was caused by death, his reason for composing songs was indeed death. By the same token, Awithangpa was in an unavoidable situation to compose passing songs due to the death of his wife and three children. Hrawva believes that death is supreme and which can cause trouble for human beings. Death cannot exclude an innocent person like him and it does not care about the life of an innocent child. He portrays death as the one who makes the wall between the living and the dead one, and when death separates a child from his mother, there is only God that he can have hope and live for. He describes himself as '*Khuanu leng chawi*' which means he was living only because of the guidance and care of God.

The study finds that not only in religious poetry, but in secular poetry, God plays a significant role in the context of death. In Awithangpa's poetry, it is evident that sometimes, especially when death comes and takes an innocent child, men always find the answer and ask God why death came into that particular family. Asking God questions in the situation of death is not new in human life, but composing and adding it to the line in poetry is peculiar and it is not common here in Mizo secular poetry.

According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, "A poem is an instance of verbal art, a text set in verse, bound speech. More generally, a poem conveys heightened forms of perception, experience, meaning, or consciousness in heightened language, i.e., a heightened mode of discourse" (938). P.B. Shelley also said, "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds" (*A Defence of Poetry*). The two definitions of poetry—Mizo and English—can undoubtedly be combined in some way. Dylan Thomas writes, "Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision" (qtd. in Dylan Thomas). Edwin Arlington Robinson also said, "Poetry is a language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said. All that poetry, great or small does this" (*New York Times*, p. 12, April 9, 1916). The last description seemingly describes Mizo poetry best.

In secular poetry, there is an ample amount of personification of death where it is presented to be tyrannous and ruling over man to meet its desires. Over and above that, in

some of the song's death is addressed as a human being who can be confronted face to face, telling him how he is the bringer of pain and sorrow to man. Some composers even accuse death to be a fearless being who reigns over the lives of people and according to them, if this accusation happens to be true, they request death to take their lives. Folk poetry or religious poetry do not talk about death directly, but instead, they talk more about the sorrows and pain resulting from death. In religious poetry, there is a great deal of hope that the existence of heaven produces.

Secular poetry however uses a different approach by unambiguously talking about death, considering it not greater than man and chatting with it as if it mingles around them. They don't fear it like in the past and whether this is due to their better understanding of death or the ongoing change of man's thoughts and ideas in accordance with the changes and development of the world is hard to understand. Furthermore, the presentation of heaven in secular poetry is not solely based on the idea of heaven being a comfortable place where there shall be no more tears. In some of the songs, there is evidence of their hope in God but at the same time, there is an assumption of heaven being a place they are not so eager to enter if some people create problems for other people in their lifetime are not there, or if they cannot find the joyful things of this world there.

Secular poetry presents hope in God in a matter of death, asking questions on the purpose of the existence of man. They ask God why he created man and his purpose to create him just to die eventually. We find in their songs their conscience of the truth that death is an unavoidable enigma, and this being the case, their hope for lovers to continue knowing each other after death, and lovers who cannot be together in this world to wait for each other at *Pialral*. They unite love and death together.

In Mizo poetry, the recurring mention of heaven and the absence of references to hell can be attributed to the predominant belief and cultural inclination towards finding comfort and hope in the afterlife. The Mizo people hold a deep faith in the concept of a benevolent and rewarding afterlife, where the souls of the departed will find solace and eternal bliss.

The absence of explicit references to hell in Mizo poetry may stem from the emphasis on positivity, optimism, and the belief in divine mercy. The Mizo society places

great importance on spiritual harmony and the pursuit of a virtuous life. As such, the focus of their poetic expressions often centers around the aspiration for a heavenly existence rather than dwelling on the notions of punishment or damnation.

The Mizo poets have a strong spiritual connection to their ancestral roots and a belief in the continued presence and guidance of their departed loved ones. They find comfort in the notion that their ancestors, who have led righteous lives, have attained a place in heaven, where they enjoy eternal peace and happiness. This belief instills a sense of reassurance and serves as a source of inspiration for Mizo poets to express their longing for a similar afterlife.

Furthermore, Mizo poetry reflects the cultural inclination towards finding solace in the divine love and protection of a benevolent deity. The poems often portray a close relationship between the individual and a higher power, depicting a sense of divine providence and care. This relationship fosters a belief that the souls of the departed will be embraced by divine grace, leading them to an eternal heavenly abode.

The absence of explicit references to hell does not necessarily imply a denial of its existence, but rather a focus on the positive aspects of the afterlife. Mizo poetry tends to explore themes of love, joy, and spiritual enlightenment, aligning with the belief that a righteous life will lead to a blissful existence in heaven.

In conclusion, the prominence of references to heaven and the absence of mentions of hell in Mizo poetry reflect the cultural and spiritual outlook of the Mizo people. Their deep-rooted belief in a benevolent afterlife and the emphasis on positivity, divine mercy, and the pursuit of righteousness shape their poetic expressions. Mizo poetry focuses on finding solace, hope, and reassurance in the belief that departed souls will be embraced by divine grace and experience eternal peace and happiness in heaven. While the absence of explicit references to hell does not negate its existence, it highlights the cultural inclination towards emphasizing the positive aspects of the afterlife. Mizo poetry serves as a testament to their faith, offering comfort and inspiration through the portrayal of a close relationship with a higher power and the longing for a blissful existence beyond earthly life.

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Notes :

- Mitthi khua* : Land of the dead. It is an ordinary spiritual place, where all deceased must eventually enter and the hardships of earthly life still remain, forever
- Pialral* : An imaginary paradise especially of the pre-Christian world which is equivalent to heaven. *Lushai-English Dictionary* explains it as “the Lushai Paradise, the further side of the Pial River.”
- Sadawt* : Priest
- Hlado* : This is the chant or cry raised by the hunters when a successful hunting has taken place.
- Pasaltha* : Brave warrior and hunter.
- Rihdil* : The name of a lake to the east of Mizoram, said to be passed by departed spirits on their way to Mitthi khua.
- Zawlbuk* : A bachelor ‘s barrack or dormitory.
- Hawilo par* : The name of a mythical flower which grows on the road to Mitthi khua beyond Hringlang tlang. The spirits of the dead pluck and wear these blossoms in their hair and ears, and after that have no desire to turn and look back upon the earth which they have left behind.
- Hringlang tlang* : The name of a mythical mountain on the way to Mitthi khua from which the spirits of the departed look back and view with longing the world of man which they have left behind.
- Lungloh tui* : The name of a mythical spring on the way to Mitthi khua beyond Hringlang tlang of which the spirits of the departed drink and lose all their longings to return to earth.

- Chawngchen* : To join or take part in a Chawng feast and festival.
- Sadawt* : A priest, especially such as are employed by ruling chiefs.
- Zai* : Equivalent to a book of songs in which all songs have the same tune.
- Hnamchawm* : Ones who belong to the lowest status in Mizo society.
- Sahlam* : A place where they used to hang an enemy's head.
- Lusun zai/hla : Songs of lamentation.

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16. Editor, College Magazine, Government Aizawl College, 2008-2009
17. Editor, BaptistS, Weekly Newsletter of BCM Chanmari, Aizawl, 2015–2016
18. Editor, Koinonia, Monthly Journal, Aizawl East Pastorate Christian Fellowship, 2016-2017
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30. Three Day National Seminar on Writing in Mizo Manuscripts

31. National Seminar on Mizo Lengkhawm Zai : Significance, Role and Impact on Mizo Literature
32. National Seminar cum Workshop on Mizo Novel
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ABSTRACT  
THEME OF DEATH IN MIZO POETRY

AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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THEME OF DEATH IN MIZO POETRY

BY

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SUBMITTED

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT

OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN MIZO OF

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY, AIZAWL

## Theme of Death in Mizo Poetry

(Abstract)

### **Introduction**

The composition of poetry has been one of the most popular genres in Mizo literature. It can be assumed that its origin can be traced far back in time. Poetry is basically a platform where events and incidents in human life are presented, wherefore poets compose poems resulting from their experiences in life and how they deal with their current situation, or from their imagination alone. Poetry in Mizo Literature thereby has various themes, among which sorrow is a very crucial commodity. Death is an unavoidable enigma designed by the Creator, and death should have been carrying with it disasters to humans even before we became aware of its existence. The Mizos also face this death from time to time and therefore exhibit their seasons of difficulty in the form of poetry. In poetry, fiction, and drama, death is seen as a central theme that gives way to other themes ranging from justice to rites of passage to grief. Death is a crucial fact of life, and from the emotional response to death to the various religious frameworks through which it is interpreted, it is obvious why death is used as a theme in literature so extensively. Likewise, death is not new to Mizo poetry. This study analyzed the theme of death that appears in Mizo poetry.

### **Chapter - I : Historical Perspective - Mizo Poetry and Society of the Mizos**

The Mizo people are an ethnic group primarily residing in the north-eastern region of India, particularly in the state of Mizoram. They are also found in the neighboring states of Manipur, Assam, and Tripura, as well as in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and Chin State in Myanmar. In the olden days, there was a saying that the Mizos emerged from a big cave

called '*Chhinlung*'. The Mizos could be characterized as the race of the Mongolians. Following the conceptualization, the Mizos then came under the Tibeto-Burman tribes. One of the Mizo historians Liangkhaia said,

(Circa 900 A.D.) The Mizo forefathers believed that human beings came out from Chhinlung, but nonetheless, it seemed Chhinlung is a hole in the ground covered by a flat rock. Some gossip regarding China that people nowadays talk about can come to a close relation with the concept of Chhinlung (13).

The Mizos lived in hilly areas, having one chief to rule over each village. The Mizo society was a chief-centered society. The chief was not only the head of the village, all powers including the matters of life and death were in his hands. It can simply be said that complete authority was vested in him. He attained a high and respectable position in society. The economy of the people was based on agriculture, where most of them practiced shifting cultivation. The Mizos habitually invaded one another, mainly due to land issues. Sometimes the conflict between chiefs also caused the war.

Due to the absence of a written record as to the exact time when the Mizos started composing poetry, there has been a number of ideas for the same. Let us first look into the problem. K. Zawla states that the Mizos had never composed poetry before they settled at *Len tlang* in the course of their migration from Burma (306). Zatlunga tells that the Mizos had already composed a poem before they arrived at *Run* river (qtd. in *Mizo Poetry* 31). Meanwhile, Hrangthiauva argues that the Mizo ancestors had composed poems during AD 750 while settling at *Chhinlung'* (*Awksatlang*) (Hmanlai leh Tunlai Mizo hlate 7). R.L. Thanmawia believes that their settlement at Len range was during the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Century (33), According to the *Mizo Hla*



*Hlui*, “Poetry of the Mizo ancestors can be categorized into four periods, the first period being told as the *Thântlang Upa hla* (Thântlang Upa’s poem). It can also be called poetry prior to the settlement at *Run* river, and this period is believed to be 1300 – 1450 AD,” (5). Although its origin is difficult to trace, it is evident that the Mizos had had a number of poems before they arrived at Mizoram.

## Chapter - II : Theme of Death in Mizo Folk Poetry

Every tribe has its own song. And those songs are usually passed down orally/verbally from the generation old. The Mizos also have a number of these kinds of songs, and it is necessary to thoroughly understand how these folk poems talk about death. Most people use the term folk song, but we will use Folk Poetry in this research.

Folk poetry is categorized under Folklore, and can also be called a folk song. Most people use the term folk song to define what folklore is. Folk poetry can also be called Folksong. Most people use folk songs in writing and saying. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* describes, “The term ‘folk poetry’ can be properly used for texts which have some characteristics marking them as poetry and belong to the tradition of the common people, as against the dominant ‘polite’ literary culture of the area,” (66). *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* states, “The universal characteristics of folk-poetry are, as to substance, repetitions, interjections and refrains; and, as to form, a verse accommodated to the dance. Frequent also is the call to the dance, question and answer and rustic interchange of satire. Though no one song illustrates all of these characteristics, they are all to be found in the songs taken collectively,” (Characteristics of Folk-poetry).

*The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend* states, “Folk song comprises the poetry and music of groups whose literature is perpetuated not by writing and print, but through oral tradition,” (1032). Folk song and Folk poetry can be said as interchangeable, both are of oral traditions. With the advancing development in learning, poetry and song have been differentiated. For this reason and viewing from the perspective of the modern world, folk songs and folk poetry may be assumed to be unsociable. However, the folk song is similar to folk poetry; especially in the case of Mizo literature, the tune matters more than the lyrics do in the oral traditional folk songs, but this does not mean that the songs lack meaning without their tunes. On this account, though the name folk poetry is different, they are more or less the same because what we are about to discuss falls under the genre of folk songs, and therefore our vocabulary or usage of terms will only be different. Hence, in this research, it should be known that when we use folk poetry, it does not mean we are going to talk about other unrelated matters.

How death is depicted in the songs of *Thuthmun zai* are usually identical. We can see how painful they took death and how they viewed death itself. In one of the songs of *Thuthmun zai* we see this, “Destruction is everywhere / Our young ones have been made broken” (lines 1-2) This song means the trouble that fell on them did not take place in one place only but on every village. It also reveals that this trouble was taking the lives of their youth. In one other song it is read, “We are not the only ones who are dead, but others also do / Others are also dead, and the bed is wasted away” (lines 1-2). The first song we mentioned talks about trouble taking place everywhere, and the lives of their young ones being taken. The second song talks about everyone capable of death and how death spares no one. They both talk about one similar thing, that death

roams about every village, passing over none. It pardons no single-family and reigns over each and everyone equally.

*Thuthmun zai* demonstrably portrays how death affected the people. Although they knew they could not avoid death, it is clear that it tremendously affected them nonetheless. In one song it is written, “I built a house that is dear, for me and my child / But we all live there never, ill-fated as I am.” Using the vocabulary of bad fortune the composer talked about building a house for him and his child to live in, and yet he lived there alone without his child. They used *Thuthmun zai* to express their feelings and emotions thus far, conveying their agonies and the painful effects of death on their lives using lyrics.

The Mizos have different kinds of folksongs, namely, lullabies, children’s play songs, songs of music like *Dar hla* (songs of gongs) and *Tingtang hla* (songs of strings); songs about the rising of the sun, and other songs composed for special occasions, but almost none of these songs mention anything about death. One particular lullaby mentions something like this, “The dead have all gone, crossing the Run river / They crossed over Rih mountain, do they miss us, I wonder” (lines 1-2). The song talks about how the dead left, leaving their home to be no more, towards the *mitthi khua*, and the remaining people wondered if the dead missed the world of the living. Although the Mizos have various types of folksong, the songs are usually short lined and rather inarticulate. Apparently death mentioned here reveals the natural human imagination. We find no description of death in the songs we are currently looking into.

Folk poetry in different tribes and nations were usually composed while people were still simple-minded, where the world was not yet developed as it is now. The various folksongs are

also simple in their lyrics and imaginations. *Folklore, An Encyclopaedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music and Art* says, "...lyric folksongs almost always adopt the first-person point of view, so that the circumstances, the worldview, and most prominently of course, the feelings are all offered from the perspective of the speaker himself or herself..." (546). Their perspective alone depended largely on personal opinion. It is obvious that personal vocabulary and the use of self were in vogue, and we find heavy employment of verbal formula. We find this kind of practice in different folklores (547). This is also true in the case of Mizo folk songs. In *chawngchen zai* we find this, "Ever since my father died, troubles came at our doorstep / Dark clouds hang over our days and days" (lines 1-2) These two lines talk of a family whose father had died, how the family suffered economically following the tragedy. It expresses the notion that it is tiresome to be human sometimes, and from the song we learn that it is possible for death to bring about poverty.

We find a number of sons missing their dead fathers in Mizo folk songs, while it is almost out of the question to find sons missing their dead mothers, let alone mentioning about them. The Mizos follow patriarchal system of society. From what we can learn out of the various folk songs, we come to the question asking if it was harder for them to survive without a father, and if it made their world more uncomfortable. In one of *chawngchen zai* we see this, "Father wake up from your death, as I am in need of a wife" (lines 1-2). He missed his dead father extremely when he was about to take a wife, so the son wrote a song to express his wish to revive his father.

We can assume folk poetry in their prime would be invaluable for the composers. There was no other platform for confession and letting out of their feelings in Mizo folk literature than folk poetry. It was the only means for them to reveal their deep sorrow, sentiment, and even their

view on the world. We see love being talked about in *Chawngchen zai*. The notion of love was not discussed much in their composing, but in one song we find this:

Ka lungdi nuam che maw,

Thangvanah kai ila,

Si-arah to ila,

Khua zain sêl rawh se (Nilen Zai)

My dearest, if you would,

Reach the skies with me,

Let us become stars there,

Let many men say what they should say.

The song is brief, yet deep. There are numerous stories about being transformed into stars after death in Mizo folktales, and this kind of rendering in folk poetry is very remarkable. Many may believe that if love lasts a lifetime, it means it is a true kind of love. But the song above talks about an invitation to transform into stars in the universe beyond this world. It does not even end here, we find indifference toward people talking behind their backs. Love in this song reaches beyond death and beyond, it cares not to die together, and its desire is to transform into stars together. There is no other song in folk poetry that talks about being together after death, and we even find

in this song willingness to die for the cause of love. In other songs that deal with death, we find they were usually pained by death and missed the dead terribly. Death was depicted as the most sorrowful experience. But we can see that they dreaded death lesser if love is involved. There are a number of romantic love in Mizo folktale, a number of them sorrowful and even ended with death. From this, we can assume the Mizos since the olden days took love seriously to the point of death and beyond.

### **Chapter - III : A Study of Death Theme in Mizo Religious Poetry**

Prior to the advent of Christianity in Mizoram, the Mizos had already been preoccupied with the idea of religion. Mizo society is characterized by community life and council, but religious activities were commonly practiced within the family, and community practices were less popular. In ancient religious practices, the common folk did not sing nor chant songs, but religious tantras were chanted by the *Sadawt*.

Some historians claim that the old religion of the Mizos was already in existence when they settled in Seipui khur around AD 1600-1700 (Pi Pute Sakhua leh an Thlarau Khawvel 13). On the other hand, Hrangthiauva opines that the aforementioned settlement dates back to AD 1530 (Aw Pialral 45). On the idea of religion, Liangkhaia writes:

The Mizos are purported to be ‘demon worshippers’ by Western thinkers, but in reality, that is not so. The practice of worshipping the spirit/demon occurs only in the case of an illness when sacrifices are made to appease the spirit, and this is in no way religion...The Mizos mostly worshipped SA and KHUA; SA is worshipped

by sacrificing a male pig, KHUA with an ox. We followed this practice and is simply considered as a religion. (153)

J. Malsawma states, “In the old religion of the Mizos, we never hear about songs that were sung in unison by the community. When one practices religion, the *Sadawt* would simply chant the religious tantras,” (138). It has been mentioned earlier that the Mizos have a firm belief in the afterlife when it comes to religion, however, since the common folk did not have any religious songs, their ideas on death and the afterlife cannot be gleaned through songs.

This chapter focuses on the theme of death as seen in the various songs composed after the Christianization of the Mizos. By the end of 1899, the missionaries had published the first Christian hymnal, and it was four and a half inches in length and it had thirty-six pages to it, with as many as eighteen songs to the same. “It seems certain that the first hymn in Mizo was *’Tsua Vanah a om a’* (Jesus Resides in Heaven),” (Mizo Poetry 66). According to R.L. Thanmawia, this first Mizo Christian song was composed by J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, but Margaret L. Pachuau on the other hand, alleges that the song is not composed by them, but translated (IJELLH 138). The song is believed to have been composed toward the end of 1894 or the beginning of 1895 (Mizo Poetry 66). The tune of this hymn was taken from the “Come, Ye Sinners” (Sacred Songs and Solos No.376) and it is about the life history of Jesus, starting from his first coming to earth and concluding with his resurrection (66). Christian hymns were increasing in terms of composition and by 1904 the Mizo hymn book was reprinted and as many as 44 songs were added to the same. *Kristian Hla Bu* was published in 1908, and there were two hundred and seventy songs at the time. *Kristian Hla Bu* has been revised from time to time, and

the most recent revision happened in 2005 when the 18<sup>th</sup> revised edition came out containing 600 hymns.

As mentioned before, the Mizos did not have songs in their old religion but started to have religious songs after their conversion to Christianity. However, their early religious songs were not composed by Mizos, but by the missionaries. These missionaries borrowed the tunes of Western hymns and translated a number of songs to Mizo, which became the earliest Christian songs in Mizo. On this regard, R.L. Thanmawia writes:

Our study of early Christian poetry must begin with the settlement of the Christian missionaries in Mizoram. The earliest Mizo Christian poetry was contributed by the non-Mizo people. The languages they employed were simple and crude. They were mostly in form of sermons and moral lessons in verse. For research convenience, the years between 1894 and 1920 may be called the 'Missionary Age'. (65)

When talking about Mizo religious poetry, one cannot help but refer to the hymns. But since the Mizos do not have separate Mizo terms to distinguish poetry from the song and simply use the term "*hla*" to refer to both styles of writing, the use of the term "poetry" in its place will not be unacceptable. Greg Caramenico says:

Religious poetry is one of the oldest genres of literature, and consists of many different types, depending on the culture and era in which it was written. In the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, many of the earliest works of literature are poems with religious content. Classical Islamic literature had a type of religious



poetry featuring mystical uses of love poems and standardized rhymes and imagery. A major form of English poetry of the 17th century was the devotional poetry written by many authors, including John Donne. (What Are the Different Types of Religious Poetry?)

It is quite difficult to determine the exact number of Mizo Christian poetry, but there are 600 songs in *Kristian Hla Bu*, and new songs keep coming out so it would be best to assume that there are more than 1000 Mizo Christian poetry at present. However, there has not been any well-known academic research or analysis done on most of these songs. As mentioned, both the early Mizo Christian poetry as well as contemporary poetry are mostly translations of western hymns and songs. Laltuangliana Khiangte traces the origin of authentic Mizo Christian poetry composed by Mizos and states:

Many compositions of Christian literature appeared right from the turn of the twentieth century at the hands of early Christians and that missionary. When we look closely, Awithangpa and Thanga started composing poems and songs at the beginning of the twenty-first century, followed by the Rev. Liangkhaia, who contributed a good number of hymns for the official hymn book. The three poets mentioned can be considered the pillars of Mizo written language and literature, because they made an extensive impact on other writers who followed them at their heels like L. Siamliana, R.L. Kamlala, Hrawva, and Damhauhva in the 1920s.

(10)

In the post-Christian era, poetry composed by the Mizos include their concept of heaven and thus, it can be felt that the Mizos have a deep yearning for heaven as it is reflected in their poetry. A prominent aspect of Mizo religious poetry is their preference for heaven to earth. Since they believe that they could reach heaven only after death and the latter becomes a link that connects them to heaven, they perceive death with ease. Mizo religious poetry may be broadly divided into two types. The first consists of poetry that are presently discussed and can be sung in accordance with the solfa tune. The other type of poetry is the traditional *Mizo lengkhawm zai* which is usually sung by playing two types of indigenous drums. Even though these songs are composed using the solfa tune, the two drums are always used when performing these songs.

As already mentioned, there is a dearth of the theme of death in Mizo religious poetry that is composed by Mizos apart from the traditional *lengkhawm zai*. The theme of death is found in a number of songs in *Kristian Hla Bu*, but they are mostly translations. Poetry that is originally composed by Mizo denoting the theme of death is quite rare. Sanglianthanga writes a poem about death which is based on the verse I Corinthians 15:55 from the Bible:

Hmelma hnukung ber tihbova awm tur chu

Thihna rapthlak tak mai hi a ni

Isuan thihnain a tiboral ta (Aw Thihna, Sanglianthanga)

The last enemy that shall be destroyed

Is the dreadful death.

Jesus conquered it with death. (Aw Thihna, Sanglianthanga)

Death is depicted as man's enemy, and in fact, as his "last enemy". Death is something that man cannot escape from, and its portrayal as the enemy of man is remarkable. However, a death that is seen as the enemy of man is shown as being conquered by Jesus through death which shows that death can only be defeated by death itself. This notion is quite uncommon but it explains how death cannot be overcome by man and it requires the death of the King of heaven and earth to conquer it. He portrays death as man's enemy that he can never defeat, and as the reaper of life. In the Chorus he writes:

Aw, thihna, khawiah nge i tur chu?

Aw, thlan, khawiah nge i hnehna chu?

Thihna tur chu sual thiltihtheihna ni mahse

Isua zarah hnehna chu kan chang ta. (Aw Thihna, Sanglianthanga)

O Death, where is thy Sting?

O grave, where is your victory?

Though the poison of death comes under the power of evil

Through Jesus we are victorious. (Aw Thihna, Sanglianthanga)

Death cannot be conquered by humans, and there is no man on earth who can escape death. However, the poet based his text on the Bible, the holy book of Christians, and asserts that Jesus conquered death by dying on the Cross. For the followers of Jesus, the belief in this conquest gives them victory over death. In Christian belief, despite death, man has a soul and his soul will go to heaven after his death.

R.L. Thanmawia states that there are 35 *Mizo lengkhawm zai* composers, although there are a couple of songs with unknown composers, but there are at least 35 composers whose identities can be confirmed. Altogether, these authors have composed a total of 679 songs (181-182). As mentioned earlier, these were composed roughly between 1920 – 1935, which means that 679 poems were composed within 15 years.

They believed that *mitthi khua* is meant for the common folk. But they apparently did not seem to believe that their condition in *mitthi khua* would be better than that of their condition on earth. They believed in *Pialral* which was not meant for everyone. They believed it is reserved only for the rich and abled and the common people did not expect to get there. The prospect of getting to heaven is especially jubilating for these people. But they also know that they can only get there once they depart from this life which makes poets of *Mizo lengkhawm zai* sad and sorrowful. According to Thomas Hardy, "Happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain," (383) which shows that this world seldom provides happiness and man's life is often fraught with pain and suffering. In one of his poems, R.L. Kamlala writes, "There is no comfort for me on earth / It's just a place where I weep and suffer" (lines 9-10), which shows how discontent he is on earth. At the same time, he is comforted by the hope that there is a heaven after the end of his miserable life:

Ka dam lai ni a tlak hma zawngin,

Ka tan chhum a zing thin;

Nakinah chu ram ka thlen ve hun chuan,

Ka ngai lo'ng khawvel hi. (R.L. Kamlala, Tunah a thar hmangaihna)

Until the days of my life come to an end

Clouds gather around me;

When I finally reach that place

I wouldn't pine for this world. (R.L. Kamlala, Tunah a thar hmangaihna)

When it comes to *lengkhawm zai*, the perspectives of Mizos have undergone tremendous changes. Darchuailova Renthlei states, "A place that is better than *Pialral*, the new *Salem* that Jesus prepared just for us is in sight; the beautiful portrait of the city instils in us the desire to fly in it. This imagery alone affirms that the new *Salem* is much more appealing than the *Pialral* that our ancestors conceptualized" (21). As stated before, even though composers of *lengkhawm zai* may not directly address the theme of death, they usually employ imagery that addresses their notion of the afterlife or the continuation of life beyond death. Their portrayal of life may appear to be dreary at times, but these are overshadowed by the peace that they experience when they think about the afterlife.

## Chapter - IV : Theme of Death in Mizo Secular Poetry

Mizo poetry has a rich use of different genres of poetry other than the religious ones, such as – songs about an outlook on human life, love songs, and even satirical poems. These will be further studied as secular poetry. The term ‘secular poetry’ refers here to those works in Mizo poetry which are not concerned primarily with Christianity. A secular poem may include a reference to God or Heaven or salvation, but its primary subject is something other than scriptural narrative, a saint's life, prayer, or the like. The ensuing survey is organized broadly according to the subject matter.

The exact origin of poetry in Mizo literature is untraceable, however, from what can be uncovered, a significant ensuing that affected Mizo literature is Christianity. R.L. Thanmawia states this phenomenon as follows:

The period between 1900-20 may be called the transitional period. The seed of Christianity began to sprout. Many chiefs tried to extinguish the fire of Christianity which began to flame. The light of education was visible in the horizon which had shaken the cultures and traditions of the Mizos. The age witnessed the conflict between the two traditions. The conflict produced many satirical poems. But the composers did not like to disclose their names and all the satirical poems of this time became community songs (98).

*Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai* are discussed in detail here because apart from *lengkhawm zai*, they are the first poetry to be composed by the Mizos after their conversion to Christianity, and also for being exceptionally popular in their time. Besides these two, a copious amount of new poetry called *Kaihlek zai* came out. *Kaihlek* means diversion or deflection. *Kaihlek zai* is said to

have two ways of labelling: a profane song and a purely lyrical song (Mizo Poetry 101). It is a mockery of the Christian religion, mostly satirical poetry; where the non-Christians scorned and mocked the converted Christians. With the exception of what we have discussed, a variety of other forms such as *Awithangpa zai*, *Hrangchhawni zai*, *Mutelen zai*, *Lianrikhumi zai*, *Lengzem zai*, *Chalmar zai*, *Rél zai*, *German run zai*, *Ramthar zai*, and *Transport zai* were also founded. Moreover, there were also many poems composed by individuals. The different poetry we have discussed so far is mostly centered around mockery and satire, some even comical. They mostly do not pertain to the subject of death. *Ramthar zai* can be considered an attack or reproach on Christianity. Apart from these, a variety of different genres of poetry other than religious poetry have been emerging up to this day, they will be correspondingly examined further.

Mizo poetry underwent major development since 2016. This is an impact of the rise in popularity of social media where poets can now publish their works using these platforms, according to H. Lalawmpuia (Tunlai Mizo poetry than chhoh dan). In 2016, Mizo Poetry Society (Mipoty) was founded and they publish volumes of poetry written by members of their society titled *Zaikung Thar* and as of now, five volumes have been published. More than two hundred poems are published in each volume. This contemporary poetry explores different themes according to scholar H. Lalawmpuia who states:

The central themes of these poems are varied, and it is impossible to sum up these poetry in one or two points. Love and courting, nature and environment, human behaviour, life lessons, politics, nation and tribe, tribe studies, new issues and trends, education, food culture, relationships,

there is no issue/theme that they do not explore. (Tunlai Mizo poetry than chhoh dan)

It is apparent that these poetry explores different themes, but more significantly, a number of these are subjective and confessional in nature. It is quite unusual that the theme of death or the afterlife is not highlighted as a common theme in these poetry despite the centrality of death in Mizo religious poetry.

### **Chapter - V : Conclusion**

The subject of death has never been studied in the genre of Mizo poetry, and one prominent finding of this research is the change in the philosophy of the Mizos in the matters of death and the world beyond death. The cause that drives the Mizos to alter their belief is Christianity, and the situations before the Christian era and post-Christian era are completely different. C. Chhuanvawra tells how the Mizos before their conversion to Christianity excruciatingly suffered the effects of death:

In the olden days, they took death painfully and agonizingly. In times of death, they would skip meals, unable to eat as a matter of fact; even the persons able to eat refrained from eating out of shame from eating, they would pass the time doing other things. They did not want to take a bath nor wash their hair, or give it oil, they would wear their hair loose and dishevelled; and would not even wash their faces (2).

It is evident in times of death that the family of the dead suffered immensely, for death meant an end to everything and they had no hope of seeing their dead relative in a world beyond



death. Moreover, there is a distinct dreadfulness of death for them. The Mizos used to say that there is a person called Pu Pawla at the gate of the village of the dead carrying a large pellet bow with a stone as big as an egg. This man would ask the life story of everyone who was about to enter the village of the dead, he would not shoot the ones who were *thangchhuah* and the ones who killed a man or an animal in their lifetime, but would shoot at anyone who was otherwise. His shot was extremely painful and would scrape and bruise for a whole three years (Pi pu zunzam 201). This being the case of their belief, it can be assumed that death for the common people would not be very welcoming. If there were a way to escape death, they would surely take it. But they were introduced to Christianity, and for the Christians, heaven is approachable to any and every human being, and death became less dreadful than in the past.

In Mizo folk poetry we find only their sufferings from death, but we see it clearly how they were less affected by a death in their religious poetry after their conversion to Christianity. They still ached badly from death, but as they now had a new hope, a hope to enter heaven, come composers even wished for the world to be over soon. V.T. Kappu writes, "Ka ngaih Lalpa, min lo hruai rawh" (line 4), "I miss thee Lord, take me home," thinking aloud his desire for God to take him home, for he yearned for heaven, and this made him welcome even death itself.

Christianity completely altered their philosophy on the world beyond death, the village of the dead and *pialral* no longer existed. There existed only heaven where everyone can enter and apparently there can be no better news than this. In Mizo folk poetry this was their consolation, "Keini riak kan fam lo / Mi lai leng an fam zo ve" (lines 1-2) which translates as, "'Tis not only us who suffer death / Everyone is facing death." But in religious poetry it is found that their consolation was heaven where they would rest eternally:

Leiah riangin hmun nei lovin,

Thlaler hrehawm hrût vel ila;

Ka chawl ngei ang luipui kamah,

Lalpan ka tan a buatsaih e. (Ka buaina ram thlalerah hian)

In this world we are guests with no permanent place,

We tread the harrowing wilderness;

I shall surely rest on the shore,

The Lord has prepared for me.

Mizo folk poetry hardly depicts the world as a dreadful place, but in religious poetry, there is a good deal of songs that present the world as a dreadful and dull place! This difference is none other than their conversion of faith, and since they compared the world with heaven, they came to believe the world to be a calamitous place. There is evidence of their eagerness to rest in heaven in their songs which results in their acknowledgment of the world is terrible for them. This is due to the fact that Christianity completely altered its old theory concerning the world beyond death.

Mizo folk poetry presents death to be experienced and reacted upon according to the time it happens by the whole world. This portrayal simply means that death is unavoidable,

which falls upon everyone, cannot be ignored at one's convenience, and enters everyone's home and family. Since all of the Mizo folk poetry are couplet and triplet, there can be no lengthy description of matters, composers disclose their feelings in brief lines. We are told that they don't deem death is to be considered an enemy, they just cope with it as it comes.

It appears in Mizo folk poetry that their only comfort from death is the undeniable truth that it happens to everyone. Whether this qualifies to be a ground for comfort is another matter, it does not seem to be a rewarding comfort. It is rather ironic. Moreover, they don't portray a good amount of life and settlement beyond death. They mention the old belief of the Mizo ancestors that the dead goes to *Mitthi khua* and *Pialral*, but there is almost no evidence of how they will fare at that place once they reach there. They did not know how to approach this village, but we can see that this village of the dead was always on their mind. “Lurhpui is high enough, to look over every village / If I could reach the top, would I see the village where the one I miss dwells,” is found in *Thuthmun zai*. As a consequence of missing the dead, they imagined if they could reach the top of *Lurh* mountain and look over from there, the village of the dead, the land where their dear dead ones they missed so much might be visible. Although it was just an imagination, the spirit world does not seem to be able to be seen from any mountaintop of this world. Given the truth of this knowledge, their desperate longing and wish to see the village of the dead depict their vivid imaginations in their time. It also confirms how seriously they took death, and death is the force that parted the humans. Death was the problem of their world, which was annoyingly unavoidable, making them tremendously uncomfortable throughout their lives.

It is found that a number of sons missing their dead fathers in Mizo folk poetry, while it is almost impossible to find sons missing their dead mothers, let alone mention them. The Mizos follow a patriarchal system of society. From what we can learn from the various folk songs we come to the question asking if it was harder for them to survive without a father and made their world more uncomfortable. In one of *chawngchen zai* we see this, “Father wakes up from your death, as I am in need of a wife.” He missed his dead father extremely when he was about to take a wife, so the son wrote a song to express his wish to revive his father. We have seen in the earlier song how terrible they felt when the father of the family died. It is unusual in the various folk poetry of the Mizos to learn that in any of the songs that deal with death, the mothers are not mentioned. Perhaps the cause lies in their tradition of heeding the father in the family, that the whole family bent under the father’s dominion. It is evident they suffered tremendously when their fathers were dead, and composed songs to express their feelings. It can be safely assumed the mothers would also die, but there is no evidence of them being missed and dead. It has been mentioned earlier that the Mizos have a firm belief in the afterlife when it comes to religion, however, since the common folk did not have any religious songs, their ideas on death and the afterlife cannot be gleaned through songs.

In the post-Christian era, poetry composed by the Mizos include their concept of heaven and thus, it can be felt that the Mizos have a deep yearning for heaven as it is reflected in their poetry. Whenever death is alluded to in Mizo religious poetry, life beyond death always finds expression, and this too in conformity with Christian beliefs. Heaven is unfailingly mentioned in those poems and is seen as a place where the souls of the departed go in accordance with

Christian teachings. From the perspective of religion, it is quite justifiable to allude to death and heaven, and moreover to juxtapose these two ideas of death and heaven in Mizo Religious poetry.

It is found that in Mizo religious poetry God is always put in the front when death comes into their poem. With comparing to Mizo folk poetry there is one peculiarity in religious poetry, there are so many lines that portray life beyond death. In Mizo folk poetry most of the poets only write about death when it comes to their family or their society. But in religious poetry especially in the *Lengkhawm zai*, there are so many lines that draw life beyond death. The study also finds out that in Mizo religious poetry, death is not scary enough and sometimes they called God to take their life, and they depict beyond death there is a place called home, i.e., heaven! Most religious poets compare this world to heaven, and they thought that this world is like a desert where they cannot find a place to rest! So, they find comfort in God and it can be said that they are ready to die and go to heaven. With compare to folk poetry and secular poetry, it can be found that religious poetry the most that talks about life after death.

Despite the fact that Christianity entered Mizoram which resulted in a good deal of Christian songs, the Mizos were still Mizos, the Mizo culture and tradition could not be left aside. The use of *pialral* was still prevalent to denote heaven, *rih dil* and *pialral* were still used customarily to signify the place where the dead went. This proves that the Mizos albeit their conversion to Christianity could not let go of their culture and philosophy all at once. In one of Mizo *lengkhawm zai* composed by Tawia:

Kir zai reng reng an rel tawh lo,

Hringlang tlang an liam leh ta a;

Rauthla vangkhua an thleng ta,

Nunna lunglohtui an in a;

Hawilopar an ken tir ta a,

Nun hlun thing an vuan. (Tawn loh dar ang kan tawng em ni)

They do not want to come back,

They have passed Hringlang mountain;

They have reached the village of spirits,

Drinking the water of everlasting life;

Carrying the flower *Hawilopar*,

They embrace the tree of life.

Mizo poetry has a generous use of different genres of poetry other than the religious ones, such as – songs about an outlook on human life, love songs, and even satirical poems. These will be further studied as secular poetry. The term ‘secular poetry’ refers here to those works in Mizo poetry which are not concerned primarily with Christianity. A secular poem may include a reference to God or Heaven or salvation, but its primary subject is something other than

scriptural narrative, a saint's life, prayer, or the like. The ensuing survey is organized broadly according to the subject matter.

C. Chhuanvawra says, "No more new songs that follow the Mizo traditional poetry were born in the wake of 1900; the only songs that emerged after 1900 were *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai*." (126). *Puma zai* originated from Biate, a sub-tribe of the Mizos. They used to reside in Cachar District, Assam.

*Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai*, apart from *lengkhawm zai*, were the first poetry to be composed by the Mizos after their conversion to Christianity and were exceptionally popular in their time. Besides these two, a copious amount of new poetry called *Kaihlek zai* came out. *Kaihlek* means diversion or deflection. *Kaihlek zai* is said to have two ways of labeling: a profane song and a purely lyrical song (Mizo Poetry 101). It is a mockery of the Christian religion, mostly satirical poetry; where the non-Christians scorned and mocked the converted Christians. With the exception of what we have discussed, a variety of other forms such as *Awithangpa zai*, *Hrangchhawni zai*, *Mutelen zai*, *Lianrikhumi zai*, *Lengzem zai*, *Chalmar zai*, *Rêl zai*, *German run zai*, *Ramthar zai*, and *Transport zai* were also founded. Moreover, there were also many poetries composed by individuals. The different poetry we have discussed so far is mostly centered around mockery and satire, some even comical. They mostly do not pertain to the subject of death. *Ramthar zai* in particular can be considered as an attack or reproach on Christianity. *Puma zai* and *Tlanglam zai* were exceedingly popular in their time, but they both did not mention any reference to death or the world beyond death.

Among the many varieties of poetry that emerged, only *Ramthar zai* deals with death and what lay beyond death. In *German run zai* we find compliments and well wishes to stay alive during a battle, a little reference to the possibility of parting during a war, as war involves death. The songs are mostly comprised of their idea of war being disastrous and their hope for the warriors to come home safely.

*Ramthar zai* was composed by different composers. Because of its variety of composers, the songs are also of different themes. We find the gospel and worship songs as well as the ones that practically mock the Christians. Their imagination of life beyond death on the other hand is more or less corresponding to *lengkhawm zai*. They talk a great deal about heaven. They emphasize heaven even without mentioning the matter of death. Moreover, they most commonly use the word 'zion' to talk about heaven. Their distinctly unusual portrayal of death is the difference between the death of God on Calvary and the death of man:

Kalvari tlangpui ka Lal thihna,

Kei ka famna chinlai unau leh lei dan;

Tho leh fa ni hian min ring thei lo. (Ramthar zai)

Mount Calvary, the place where my King died,

As for me, my death is in this world, besides my kin;

They believe not I shall live again as my God does. (Ramthar zai)



The composer says that God's place of death is Mount Calvary whereas his place of death is with his family and in his village. For this reason, he adds that people don't think he will rise again like God. We don't find this kind of song in *lengkhawm zai*. It can be said that the above song depicts the way the pioneer believers showed their method of believing in God and their imagination of life beyond death to their fellow human beings.

Apart from *Ramthar zai*, two prominent persons in the stream of secular poetry are Hrawva and Awithangpa. These two talk about death being few and far between. Looking closely into Hrawva's songs we can be certain that since his poverty was caused by death, his reason for composing songs was indeed death. By the same token, Awithangpa was in an unavoidable situation to compose passing songs due to the death of his wife and three children. Hrawva believes that death is supreme and which can cause trouble for human beings. Death cannot exclude an innocent person like him and it does not care about the life of an innocent child. He portrays death as the one who makes the wall between the living and the dead one, and when death separates a child from his mother, there is only God that he can have hope and live for. He describes himself as '*Khuanu leng chawi*' which means he was living only because of the guidance and care of God.

The study finds that not only in religious poetry, but in secular poetry, God plays a significant role in the context of death. In Awithangpa's poetry, it is evident that sometimes, especially when death comes and takes an innocent child, men always find the answer and ask God why death came into that particular family. Asking God questions in the situation of death is not new in human life, but composing and adding it to the line in poetry is peculiar and it is not common here in Mizo secular poetry.

According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, "A poem is an instance of verbal art, a text set in verse, bound speech. More generally, a poem conveys heightened forms of perception, experience, meaning, or consciousness in heightened language, i.e., a heightened mode of discourse" (938). P.B. Shelley also said, "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds" (*A Defence of Poetry*). The two definitions of poetry—Mizo and English—can undoubtedly be combined in some way. Dylan Thomas writes, "Poetry is the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision" (qtd. in Dylan Thomas). Edwin Arlington Robinson also said, "Poetry is a language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said. All that poetry, great or small does this" (*New York Times*). The last description seemingly describes Mizo poetry best.

In secular poetry, there is an ample amount of personification of death where it is presented to be tyrannous and ruling over man to meet its desires. Over and above that, in some of the songs death is addressed as a human being who can be confronted face to face, telling him how he is the bringer of pain and sorrow to man. Some composers even accuse death to be a fearless being who reigns over the lives of people and according to them, if this accusation happens to be true, they request death to take their lives. Folk poetry or religious poetry do not usually talk about death directly, but instead, they talk more about the sorrows and pain resulting from death. In religious poetry, there is a great deal of hope that the existence of heaven produces.

Secular poetry however uses a different approach by unambiguously talking about death, considering it not greater than man and chatting with it as if it mingles around them. They don't fear it like in the past and whether this is due to their better understanding of death or the ongoing change of man's thoughts and ideas in accordance with the changes and development of

the world is hard to understand. Furthermore, the presentation of heaven in secular poetry is not solely based on the idea of heaven being a comfortable place where there shall be no more tears. In some of the songs, there is evidence of their hope in God but at the same time, there is an assumption of heaven being a place they are not so eager to enter if some people create problems for other people in their lifetime are not there, or if they cannot find the joyful things of this world there.

Secular poetry presents hope in God in a matter of death, asking questions on the purpose of the existence of man. They ask God why he created man and his purpose to create him just to die eventually. We find in their songs their conscience of the truth that death is an unavoidable enigma, and this being the case, their hope for lovers to continue knowing each other after death, and lovers who cannot be together in this world to wait for each other at *Pialral*. They unite love and death together.

Notes :

*Mitthi khua* : Land of the dead. It is an ordinary spiritual place, where all deceased must eventually enter and the hardships of earthly life still remain, forever

*Pialral* : An imaginary paradise especially of the pre-Christian world which is equivalent to heaven. *Lushai-English Dictionary* explains it as “the Lushai Paradise, the further side of the Pial River.”

*Sadawt* : Priest

*Hlado* : This is the chant or cry raised by the hunters when a successful hunting has taken place.

*Pasaltha* : Brave warrior and hunter.

*Rihdil* : The name of a lake to the east of Mizoram, said to be passed by departed spirits on their way to Mitthi khua.

*Zawlbuk* : A bachelor ‘s barrack or dormitory.

*Hawilo par* : The name of a mythical flower which grows on the road to Mitthi khua beyond Hringlang tlang. The spirits of the dead pluck and wear these blossoms in their hair and ears, and

after that have no desire to turn and look back upon the earth which they have left behind.

*Hringlang tlang* : The name of a mythical mountain on the way to Mitthi khua from which the spirits of the departed look back and view with longing the world of man which they have left behind.

*Lungloh tui* : The name of a mythical spring on the way to Mitthi khua beyond Hringlang tlang of which the spirits of the departed drink and lose all their longings to return to earth.

*Chawngchen* : To join or take part in a Chawng feast and festival.

*Sadawt* : A priest, especially such as are employed by ruling chiefs.

*Zai* : Equivalent to a book of songs in which all songs have the same tune.

*Hnamchawm* : Ones who belong to the lowest status in Mizo society.

*Sahlam* : A place where they used to hang an enemy's head.

Lusun zai/hla : Songs of lamentation.

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