ACTS OF DOMINATION IN SELECT MIZO FOLKLORE: AN ECOFEMINIST STUDY

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In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis entitled "Acts of Domination in Select Mizo Folklore: An Ecofeminist Study" written by Lalruatmawii for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D. UGC Regulations 2009 of Mizoram University. The thesis incorporates the student's bona fide research and no part of it has been submitted for award of any degree in this or any other University or Institute of Learning.

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I LALRUATMAWII, 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 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.

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Drastic climate change, deforestation, nuclear power, poverty, terrorism, militarism, capitalism, racism, and speciesism pose a serious threat to the continued survival of every living being on earth, as well as the survival of the earth itself. Humans, as one of the many species on this planet, have been carelessly and greedily taking gross advantage of natural resources which included land, animals, and forests. Various animal species have gone extinct due to human actions such as poaching, deforestation caused by lumber companies, clearing the forest for cultivation, and so on, all of which have devastating effects on the natural habitat of animals. Vast areas of land across the globe are also being turned into deserts and semi-deserts as a direct result of the various activities of man. All these things added up have caused drastic changes in the climate, which in turn caused tsunamis, hurricanes, draughts, and landslides all of which left horrible destructions in their wake.

The destructive behaviour of man, in his quest for wealth and power, has caused ecological and environmental degradation all around the globe. The ecological crisis has brought with it a different unprecedented social crisis in its wake. Ecofeminism, as a theory and practice, has provided a lens through which these various problems around the world can be examined and has concluded that these destructive behaviours of man are deeply rooted in the patriarchal worldview and system. Ecofeminism developed its roots in French feminism and started spreading from there. The term Ecofeminism was first used and coined by Francoise d'Eaubonne (1920-2005) a French civil rights activist and feminist author in the year 1974, urging women to lead an ecological revolution in her book titled *Le Feminisme ou la Mort.*

Trish Glazebrook in her article “Karen Warren’s Ecofeminism” traced the beginnings of Ecofeminism in French feminists starting with Simone de Beauvoir who famously stated that women and nature appear as ‘other’ when compared to men. Luce Irigaray in 1974 also diagnosed a philosophical ‘phallic logic’ that allowed men to dominate women (Glazebrook 12). Glazebrook further explained that Francoise d’Eaubonne in her 1974 essay identified the root of the climate crisis as the phallic order that resulted in overpopulation due to the exploitation of women’s

reproductive abilities, and the excess production at the cost of depleting natural resources to the point of their destruction (12). Rosemary Radford Ruether defines how ecofeminism is a coaction between feminism and ecology “Ecofeminism brings together these two explorations of ecology and feminism, in their full, or deep forms, and explores how male domination of women and domination of nature are interconnected, both in cultural ideology, and in social structures” (2).

The oppression of women, people of colour, animals, and nature is, according to Ecofeminism, justified by the worldview that idolizes and glorifies manhood. Greta Gaard has attempted to explain this trail of thought:

> Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Its theoretical base is a sense of self most commonly expressed by women and various other nondominant groups—a self that is interconnected with all life. (1)

Thus, simply put, where women are dominated by men, other beings are also dominated as a result. Roger J.H. King commented that “According to ecofeminism, the failures of moral perception and thought that can be found in human relations to nature are symptomatic of similar failures to be found in the relations between women and men” (75). Different kinds of oppression thus arose out of the fact that men were considered better than every other living being, including different species as well. This outlook has been used throughout the history of mankind to justify the exploitation of ‘others’ by man, who is considered to be far superior in every aspect. Janis Birkeland also defined Ecofeminism as:

> …a value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a *political analysis* that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is "an awareness" that begins with the

> realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures. (18)

Ecofeminists believed that Dualism is one of the main causes of oppression for others who were not men. A dualistic worldview and its consequent human behaviour and attitude towards others have caused irreparable harm to those who are considered 'less than' men. While Ecofeminism was started in the western world, it has spread its roots in other countries as well. In India, the Chipko movement in 1974 heralded the era of women's environmental activism. In her book, *Ecofeminism Revisited: Introduction to the Discourse*, Chhaya Datar mentioned the brief history of the movement. In 1970 and 1973, the flooding of the Alaknanda River destroyed several houses and dwellings. Through their relief efforts, C.P. Bhatt and his co-workers realized that the heavy flooding was caused by lumber companies that clear-cut mountain slopes, causing significant soil erosion in the area. When the forest department announced their plan to auction trees in 1974, in the Reni Forest, C.P. Bhatt informed the villagers and reminded them that the previous floods has been caused by the same action – the cutting down of trees in the surrounding forests. The women of the village were organized by a woman called Gaura Devi and they hugged the trees as suggested by C.P. Bhatt to save them from getting cut down by the lumber companies, and they managed to save the trees without any violence (Datar 44-45).

This incident started environmental activism in different parts of the country, with women taking an active role in the movement, as they realized that environmental degradation has direct negative impacts on their everyday life and survival. The destruction of nature has always had a far more devastating impact on women than men, especially in third-world countries where necessities of life such as food and water are scarce. As women and children collect firewood and water for the household, the depletion of natural resources like forests, made it necessary for them to walk several miles every day to collect water and firewood (Warren 7).

The basic tenets of Ecofeminism are based on the western patriarchal system which subjugated 'others' who are not men; its forms of oppression and ideas have translated to different cultures across the world, especially in other patriarchal societies. Patriarchy is a social structure where men have all the power and authority

over everyone else. Patriarchal societies are male-dominated societies where manly attributes are celebrated and encouraged while feminity is seen as a weakness. Janis Birkeland has discussed how this line of thought and belief system is harmful to the 'others' who are not men:

> In the dominant Patriarchal cultures, reality is divided according to gender, and a higher value is placed on those attributes associated with masculinity, a construction that is called "hierarchical dualism." In these cultures, women have historically been seen as closer to the earth or nature (perhaps due to childbirth and menstruation). Also, women and nature have been juxtaposed against mind and spirit, which have been associated in Western cosmology with the "masculine" and elevated to a higher plane of being. Although we can only speculate about how Patriarchal consciousness evolved, it is clear that a complex morality based on dominance and exploitation has developed in conjunction with the devaluing of nature and "feminine" values. (18-19)

The various kinds of oppression of women and nature, some subtle, others quite overt, can be seen in the Mizo society as well. Mizoram is one of the north-eastern states of India; it covers a total area of 21,081 square kilometers. As per the 2011 census, it has a population of 1,097,206, made up of 555,339 males and 541,867 females; the literacy rate is one of the highest in the country at 91.33 %. The inhabitants of Mizoram are generally known as *Mizo,* a generic term comprising different tribes dispersed throughout the state. Mizoram is divided into eleven districts – Aizawl, Lunglei, Siaha, Champhai, Mamit, Lawngtlai, Khawzawl, Saitual, and Hnahthial. The state's capital is Aizawl, the biggest city in the state.

There have been various theories and debates on the origin of the Mizos and how they came to settle in Mizoram. One of these origin theories of the Mizos holds that the Mizos originally came out from a huge cave called Chhinlung, however, when the *Ralte* tribe came out; they were so loud that the authorities of the cave closed the door after them. Another theory suggests that 'Chhinlung' was a misnomer of a Chinese king's name, Chinlung, thus, claiming that all Mizo tribes are the descendants of this Chinese king (Zatluanga 12-13). In his book, *Mizoram:*

Society and Polity, C. Nunthara has written that since there was no written history, as the early Mizo society did not have a written language, different interpretations, and versions of the origin of the Mizo people have been given by Mizos from different regions. He concluded that whatever version might be given, it was clear that Mizo people originally came from somewhere in the east (39).

Whatever their origin might be, Pre-Christian Mizo society seemed to have an idyllic existence where communities harmoniously lived side by side with nature. But a closer inspection reveals cracks in this picturesque existence. Living in a patriarchal society, early Mizo women and children were at the mercy of the men in their lives which leads to a power imbalance. Masculine traits such as physical prowess, hunting skills, and bravery in the face of wild animals and enemies were encouraged and celebrated as they were warring factions. The celebration of all things deemed masculine unfortunately meant that they rejected the traits associated with women.

As a community, one village was like a big family run by a benevolent father, their chief[1]. At first, people used to fight for the chieftainship, but after a while, it was inherited by the sons of the chief. They did not stay for long in one place, they moved from one village to a new place sometimes due to the threat of an invasion by a neighbouring village, and other times they shifted their village to find more fertile lands or better water sources. By the eighteenth century when most clans and tribes that were to settle in Mizoram had settled, chieftainship was already recognized as an institution, and "In the event of much inter-clan rivalry, the Sailos emerged as a ruling Lushai clan, and came to be regarded as possessing the vital qualities needed in war and governance" (Singh 6). If the chief of a village had sons, his sons would inherit a new site from his father after his marriage, and set up a new village where he became the chief and ruled as an independent chief. As they were a patrilineal society, the youngest son of the chief would inherit his father's village (Ray 71). The chief might be very powerful; however, the villagers had the freedom to move away to another village if their chief's rule was thought to be unfair. The villagers had to help the chief in times of need, and every man from each household was "bound to

[1] Chief: The ruler of a village. In Mizo, they were called "lal", translated to "king" in English.

labour for the chief three days in a year. Each house in the village contributed its share of any expense incurred in feeding or entertaining the chief's guests" (71).

Villages were organized in such a way that the house of the Chief was surrounded by the houses of his *khawnbawl upa*[2], and *Zawlbuk*, the traditional bachelors' quarter was usually built in the middle of the village, where all the young and unmarried men of the community slept and gathered at night. While the common folks were scattered around the villages, the poor families, especially widows built their houses in the periphery. Jhumming was their main livelihood, and except for the village blacksmith, every household had to cultivate the land divided by the chief. Having no currency, they used a barter system for trading with each other. Every household was engaged in their own labour the whole year and duties were clearly divided between men and women:

> The men cleared the jungle for cultivation, worked on the *jhum,* and hunted in the forest. Periodic visits were paid to the nearest markets in neighbouring Cachar and Chittagong to purchase salt, brass cooking pots, and iron for implements, which were bartered for cotton, beeswax, ivory and, in the late nineteenth century, rubber. Apart from working with the men on the fields, women undertook all household chores, fetching water from the stream or spring, cooking, cleaning, tending to the livestock, spinning, weaving, and sewing for the family. (Singh 7)

Many folktales depicting the life of the early Mizo society portray a typical patriarchal society where a community was ruled by its Chief, who, along with his council of advisors, was solely comprised of men. In fact, these village Chiefs were so powerful that they had the power to kill or save the life of their subjects. The magnitude of his power is explained as follows:

> The power of the chief was absolute, for he owned all the land in the village, led his people in raids in the plains and villages of rival chiefs, set up new habitation, distributed plots for jhumming among his subjects, and adjudicated all civil and criminal disputes...As the owner or controller of all resources in the village, the Lushai chief received rent on their use and

[2] Khawnbawl upa: A member of the chief's advisers collectively known as "lal upa" or elders

> assumed certain privileges, both of which varied to some degree across clans and villages...To advise and assist him in governance, the chief appointed elders, or *upas*. While the word of the chief was law, he was normally guided in his decisions by the views of the *upas*. (Singh 8)

In addition to the chief's appointed officials for the administration of the village affairs, every village had a "tlangau"[3] appointed by the chief. This "tlangau" played a very important role in the village as an intermediary between the chief and the people. For his services, he was given one basket of paddy from every household, since he was unable to work in a jhum the whole year like the other villagers. The village would also have a "thirdeng" or a blacksmith who made agricultural tools and repaired them for the villagers, like the "tlangau", he was also given a basket of paddy from each household. In addition to this basket of paddy, he was also given "a fixed share consisting of the spine and three ribs of every animal shot or trapped by any village" (Ray 73). Other officials were as follows:

> To perform village ceremonials there would be a village priest, the *puithiam*. He conducted all sacrifices to propitiate the spirits. For his services he would get paddy from the villagers. Then there were the *ramhuals* who advised the chief where *jhum* for the year should be done…As remuneration, the *ramhuals,* would get, after the chief, the first choice of their jhum plot in the site selected…they paid higher tax (fathang) to the chief…The *zalen* would assist the chief when the chief's household ran short of paddy and help him in other similar difficulties. For his services to the chief he was exempted from payment of *fathang*. There were two other officials to assist the chief in his own personal matters. The *sadawt* was the private priest of the chief to conduct his sacrifices and ceremonials. He would be assisted by the *tlahpaw*i, who was usually a friend of the chief. (Ray 73-74)

All these important roles and positions in the village were given only to men. Women were not given any important position in society, and their gender roles were confined to the house, child-rearing, and at the jhum. This power structure where

[3] Tlangau: village crier

women had no seat in the council responsible for the decisions that decided the fate of the entire community is also seen in a smaller version within the family. In a Mizo household, every important decision was made by the man of the house. Women virtually had no power both inside and outside the house. In fact, she is expected to be subservient, quiet, and hardworking. Expected to work tirelessly from dawn till dusk, an unmarried young girl is expected to entertain suitors who came to her house after dinner.

The young girls were also expected to welcome each and every visitor she had and to treat them all alike. She was not supposed to show any undesirable manners to any boy and make no one discontented. If she behaved unbecomingly, the young man and his friends had the right to cause trouble to the girl's family by dismantling or damaging their home which the community could not but accept it. And if such things happened, it was considered very disgraceful for the girl and her parents that they had to apologize for the cause. The girl's parents would then placate the angry young men with pots of rice beer as a token of submission (Lalfakzuali 6).

She could not sleep or rest no matter how tired she was until all her suitors went back to the Zawlbuk to sleep. Women were expected to be courteous and polite to everyone and be dutiful and hardworking as well. Traits which are very important especially once they were married: as they had to move in with their in-laws and she could always be divorced and forced out of the house in the blink of an eye. All a man needed to say to her was "I divorce you", and would be officially divorced. And in society, divorced women were not respected and were not particularly welcomed back at their own parent's houses, especially if she has children with them. As her brothers would normally have their own wives and children living in the same house. These social norms and traditions of early Mizo people can be seen reflected in the rich folktale passed down orally from one generation to the next.

The term "folklore" was coined by William John Thoms and used for the first time in 1864 in his letter to *Athenaeum* (Emrich 355). Folklore consists of various genres though not limited to them, such as folktales, songs, poems, legends, myths, and so on. "The folktale has often been used in English to refer to the 'household tale' or the 'fairy tale'. In its broadest sense, it can be defined to include all forms of

prose narrative, written or oral, which have been handed down from generation to generation" (Elaine Goh and Lily Kong 261).

For this study, Mizo folktales will be studied and analyzed, selected from various authors. Since folktales are orally transmitted, there have been various versions of the same story. However, their essence more or less remained the same. Alan Dundes wrote that "folklore is autobiographical ethnography—that is, it is a people's own description of themselves" (55). As social realities are reflected in folklore, folktale, one of the many genres of folklore, is a great source of information about the life, traditions, practices, and ideals of a particular society. Elaine Goh and Lily Kong described how folktales are related to the reality of the people, put forth by Rohrich in his book *Folktales and Reality:*

> 'Fictive reality ' is a construct of the narrative imagination and is bound by the rules that govern each genre. In the folktale, this fictive reality is presented as apart from the narrator's world. However, far from being purely imaginative, fictive reality can be a part of transformed 'historical reality'. Past customs, beliefs and social organisation 'survive' as fictive reality inthe folktale, although to the narrators, they may have eased to be either historical or current social reality. Hence, they may have undergone a transformation from history into fiction, from reality into fantasy. Apart from historical realities, a third kind of reality-' projected reality '-results when the present is incorporated into folktales. This projected reality can be seen in the variations that occur in the same tale told by different narrators who project their own culture, social class and personal psychology into the fictive realities of the folktale. (261- 2)

'Fictive realities' make the study of folklore meaningful and give it a sense of purpose. It helps in building the idea that folktales are not just tales created to entertain children; but have deeper significance and values for the society it belongs to. For the Mizo society, as stories have been passed down orally from one generation to the next for a long time, these folktales are one of the most valuable sources to understand how the Mizo worldview, aspirations, governance, etc.

The folktales selected for this study are as follows:

1) Chemteii
2) Kungawrhi
3) Rimenhawihi
4) Sichangneii
5) Mauruangi
6) Chawngchilhi
7) Ngaiteii
8) Rahtea
9) Tualvungi and Zawlpala
10) Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga
11) Zawltlingi and Ngambawma
12) Duhmanga and Dardini
13) Liandova and Tuaisiala

"Chemteii"[4] is a folktale about a wise and beautiful young woman named Chemteii. The tale starts with how Chemteii's father and brother fought over ownership of a cow left to them by their deceased father. Since they could not agree by themselves, they approached their village chief. The chief could not decide whom to give the cow to easily either, so he assured them that the person who could answer his question would be given the cow. His questions were, "What is the fastest thing in the world?" "What is the fattest thing in the world?" and lastly, "What is the most precious thing in the world?" Chemteii managed to come up with an appropriate answer every time and told her father the answers. The chief was impressed by her and decided to marry her after testing her wisdom again. However, he told her that she was forbidden to involve herself in his administrative role as a village chief as it was not the place for a woman; if she ever broke this one rule, she would be allowed to take one thing from their marital home and go back to her father's house as a divorcee. She accepted his terms and they married. Unfortunately, Chemteii had to break her promise to save one of the chief's advisers. So, he divorced her, but

[4] Folktales written in Mizo from *Mizo Thawnthu* (P.S. Dahrawka) and *Serkawn Graded Readers: Mizo Thawnthu* (Nuchhungi) are translated into English and summarized by me for this thesis.

Chemteii outwits him and his rule by giving him a sleep potion and have him carried to her father's house while he slept (Dahrawka 93-99).

"Chawngchilhi"[5] is a tale about a young woman who had an affair with a snake and fell pregnant with his babies. They would woo each other at their *jhum*[6] where Chawngchilhi and her younger sister worked every day. Her younger sister became thin over time as Chawngchilhi fed the lunch their father packed for them to her lover every day. Their father became worried and coaxed the truth out of the younger sister. Upon learning the reason, he was livid and killed the snake at the jhum as he pretended to be Chawngchilhi; he then killed Chawngchilhi as well. But, Chawngchilhi was already pregnant at this time. When he cut her body, her babies crawled out of her body and he killed them too except the one that slipped away. It grew into a huge snake and fed on humans (Pachuau 63-68).

"Mauruangi"[7] is an orphan tale named after the female protagonist, Mauruangi. Her father killed her mother by pushing her into a river and married a single mother, with a daughter named Bingtaii. Mauruangi was starved and abused by her stepmother. Miserable, Mauruangi visited the river where her mother drowned. Her mother has turned into a huge catfish and fed her, and soon, Mauruangi became healthy and hearty. Her stepmother became suspicious and sent her daughter to spy on her. Once she learned her secret, she encouraged her husband to catch the fish and with the help of the other villagers, they captured it. Mauruangi collected her bones and buried them and a beautiful tree grew from it. So, when Mauruangi was neglected and abused again, the tree fed her with its nectar and Mauruangi became healthy again. The same thing happened and the tree was cut down.

When they grew up, Mauruangi and Bingtaii were both given their own jhums to work in. Mauruangi was diligent, kind, and skilled in weaving while Bingtaii was lazy, selfish, and unskilled, unlike her stepsister. Impressed by her

[5] "Chawngchilhi": Summarised from *Folklore from Mizoram* only for the purpose of this thesis
[6] Jhum: Agricultural site where rice and other crops are grown.
[7] "Mauruangi": Summarised from *Folklore from Mizoram* only for the purpose of this thesis

kindness and diligence, a ruler married her. Out of jealousy, her stepmother poured boiling water on her and put Bingtaii in her place. Mauruangi was restored to life by a wild goat and let her babysit its babies. She was found by her husband's servants who brought her back and she fought Bingtaii to the death to take back her place (Pachuau 69-80).

"Ngaiteii" is a tale about a young girl who lives with her grandmother. Her father's spirit demanded she comes and lives with him in his watery abode. He flooded parts of the village when she refused to join him. After dropping Ngaiteii's belongings like her comb, her father's spirit would not be appeased for long. Fearing he might flood the whole village, Ngaitei was thrown into the water to satisfy her father and drowned (Nuchhungi 49-51).

"Kungawrhi*"* tells the story of a baby conceived from her father's injured thumb, a tale very familiar to "Thumbelina". She grew up to be a beautiful young woman beloved by many. One of her admirers was a *keimi*[8] who stole her footprint, wrapped it, and placed it over the stove. This made Kungawrhi fall ill and her father was desperate to save her life. So he promised her hand in marriage to anyone who could save her life. The *keimi* cooled the footprint before visiting Kungawrhi, and she appeared to get better. Then one day he destroyed the footprint altogether and Kungawrhi was cured, and they married. When her father found out that he was a *keimi*, he offered to marry her again to any man brave enough to rescue her from him. Two brothers, Phawthira and Hrangchala set out to save her. They managed to get her out of the *keimi's* village, but on their way back, she was taken by *Khuavang*[9] and while they saved her Hrangchala betrayed his brother who got stuck underneath with the Khuavang as he cut off a root that they climbed to get out. Thus, the less heroic brother married Kungawrhi and her father made him the chief of a village. However, after some time, Phawthira climbed out too and killed Hrangchala, and married Kungawrhi (Dahrawka 100-111).

[8]Keimi: Half-tiger, half-man; "kei" stands for "tiger" and "mi", a shortened form of "mihring" for "person".
[9]Khuavang: the name of a guardian spirit (Lorrain 267)

Another folktale named after the heroine is “Rimenhawihi”. Rimenhawihi was a beautiful woman married to Zawlthlia. Rimenhawihi also has thick, long hair like Rapunzel. She was also locked inside their iron house while her husband was away on business trips. He was afraid that her beauty might attract the attention of other men who would not hesitate to kidnap her. Despite his precautions, she was still captured by the servants of a chief. Zawlthlia then followed the clues left by her and saved her from her kidnappers (Pachuau 39-42).

“Sichangneii*”* is a folktale about a heavenly maiden who dwells in the sky. A man captured her from behind while bathed with her sister; he took her home, plucked off her wings, and hid them so she would not escape. Sichangneii bore seven sons for him; but flew back to the sky when she found her hidden wings as her youngest son spilled his father’s secret (Dahrawka 76-85).

“Rahtea*”* is about an orphan who ran away from home as he overheard his stepmother and father discussing their plans to use him as a sacrifice. This was to cure her various illnesses invented by her and force her husband to agree to her plans, to get rid of Rahtea permanently. Even before this incident, Rahtea was starved, forced to work, punished, and beaten by his stepmother. He was not even given proper clothes. However, when he ran away, he refused to return home when his family members came one by one to call him back. He then turned into a cicada and flew away (Nuchhungi 29-31).

Another famous orphan tale is about Liandova and his brother Tuaisiala. Their mother married a man from a different village. When they were on their way to follow him back to his village, their mother told Liandova to drown his little brother. Since he was still young and speaking whatever was on his mind, she was afraid he might embarrass her and her newlywed husband in front of the other villagers. Liandova refused to do this and returned to their village with him, thus starting their journey as poor orphans. However, with his wit and perseverance, a treasure inside a python’s stomach, help from a fairy godmother, and the favours of the powerful chief, Lersia, Liandova turned their fortune around (Dahrawka 60-75).

Another folktale that ends in tragedy is "Duhmanga and Dardini". Duhmanga was good-looking, strong, wise, and the son of a powerful chief of a big village. His father, the chief, and his advisers did not allow him to woo other women. They ordered him to focus on Saikii, a woman they approved to marry. But one night, Saikii's family could not receive guests due to their sacrifice. He followed other young men on their way to Dardini's house. They fell in love that night despite Dardini's mother's best efforts to keep them apart. His parents also worried and pushed him to marry Saikii. However, that did not stop him from visiting Dardini's house at night. One thing led to another and Duhmanga took in Dardini as his wife. However, the day after that his friends invited him on a hunting trip and he left Dardini with his family. His family promptly divorced her and took back Saikii, his first wife. But when he came back, he was very angry to see Saikii in his house and decided to stay at Dardini's house instead. Even though they faced many problems and interventions from his parents and her mother, they always stayed together. Eventually, the chief divorced her again while Duhmanga was away on a hunting trip and even banished them from his village. Dardini's mother, afraid of the chief's wrath moved to a village far away with Dardini. Duhmanga searched for her as soon as he came back from his trip. Unfortunately, Dardini died in childbirth just before he reached her village. He refused to leave her grave and cried himself to death upon her grave (Dahrawka 170-183).

Continuing with the tragic theme, "Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga" also has a sad ending. Lianchhiari was the daughter of a chief and Chawngfianga "could not reciprocate her love for him because he was a mere commoner" (Pachuau 49). As time passed and Chawngfianga proved himself to be a capable young man, and since their daughter was besotted with him, the chief and his wife told Chawngfianga's emissary, Thura, that they would accept any bride price they could afford. However, Thura became very jealous of Chawngfianga's good fortune and kept lying to both families. When the chief finally demanded that Chawngfianga come by himself, Thura told Chawngfianga that the chief was going to kill him and advised him to run away. Fearing for their lives, his family fled to another village in the dead of night to

avoid detection. Even though they still loved each other, they both ended up married other people (Pachuau 49-58).

"Tualvungi and Zawlpala" is another folktale that ends with tragic deaths for both protagonists. They were a loving couple, but when a travelling *vai lal* saw her, he asked whether she was his wife or sister, and Zawlpala told him she was his sister. He asked him what he would demand as her bride's price, and Zawlpala quoted a huge amount of goods. However, he did not know that Phuntiha was a great sorcerer and he soon returned to their village with his demands. He married Tualvungi and took her back to his village. Missing his wife, Zawlpala soon visited their village and Phuntiha poisoned his food. Tualvungi told him to return to their old village as fast as possible and he had reached it before dying. The villagers sent a bird to relay the news and Tualvungi decided to visit his grave. Phuntiha kept finding excuses to stall her and even put a sharp knife on the door to cut her feet. Despite her injuries, she wrapped her wounds in a cloth and headed for his grave anyway. When she finally reached his grave, she lay beside his bones and paid an old woman to stab her to death. Their spirits turned into butterflies, and Phuntiha, who followed after her, also killed himself, turned into a moth, and followed the couple wherever they flew (Dahrawka 126-132).

"Zawltlingi and Ngambawma" is a tale about two lovers whose families did not allow them to marry. Exasperated, they ran away into the forest and live in a cage. They even had a baby together when the villagers found them. They coaxed them to go back to the village but when they returned, their parents broke their promises to let them get married and even refused to let them see each other. Ngama decided to take her footprint as the *keimi* did in *Kungawrhi.* However, one night, it caught on fire and Zawltlingi passed away. Ngama planted *Zamzo*[10] in her grave, but when they bloomed, they were stolen every night. Ngama decided to catch the culprit and caught an animal couple named *sa-fia*[11]. They told him that they were sent by

[10] Zamzo: amaranthus- a family of brightly-coloured flowering plants including the cocks-comb and love-lies-bleeding (Lorrain 558)
[11] Sa-fia: the name of a small animal resembling a marten (Lorrain 397).

their mistress Zawltlingi from *Mitthi khua*[12]. He followed them back and decided to stay with her, however, as a living human, he could not fit into her world. Therefore, Tlingi told him to go back to the land of the living and took his own life so that he may live in harmony with her. He did what he told her to do and finally reunited with her in Mitthi khua, and they stayed together happily (Dahrawka 156-163).

These folktales have been selected from the rich and varied folklore of the Mizos. In addition to these selected tales, other tales might be mentioned or used if they might help to make a certain point come across clearer. Even though these folktales have been translated by different writers and translators, their essence more or less remained the same. Skimming through these stories, they seem to be simple stories created to entertain children, however, on closer inspection; these tales carry within them the various mores, attitudes, outlooks, and values of the Mizo people. The hidden meanings of these folktales are buried beneath the obvious, Dawkins writes about this in his article "The Meaning of Folktales":

> But what I want to suggest is that many folktales, at least among people of quickwits and intellectual capacity, have not merely the surface meaning of the narrative but contain also a less explicit, perhaps in the main unconscious meaning, which we may call allegorical or symbolic, of value as a general myth bearing some relation to human nature and experience: something very much wider and deeper than the plain surface meaning of. (418)

The folktales selected for this study can be divided into different groups such as orphan stories; love stories and stories named after the heroines can also be grouped together. For stories about children, especially orphans, tales such as "Mauruangi", "Liandova and Tuaisiala", "Ngaiteii", and "Rahtea" are chosen as they portray the lives of orphans and their struggles to survive. In pre-Christian Mizo society, the birth of a child was considered a blessing, and both male and female children were both celebrated. However, orphans and children born out of wedlock were different cases. Reading through the folktales, it was clear that orphans were

[12] Mitthi khua: Hades; the abode of departed spirits. (*Lit* dead man's village) (Lorrain 318).

not given much thought and space in society. Liandova and Tuaisiala basically had to take care of themselves, through his ingenuity and hard work, Liandova was able to take care of his younger brother. As a society, that seemed to value the good of the whole over individuality, it is shocking to see that orphans are neglected in such a way that they literally were starving and struggling just to stay alive. Orphans and widows literally lived on the periphery of society as they did not have the protection of the male – their fathers and husbands, to validate their existence and value in society.

The love stories among the selected tales are – "Tualvungi and Zawlpala", "Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga", "Zawltlingi and Ngambawma", "Duhmanga and Dardini", taken from. These stories are very much like love stories from around the world. Two young lovers, whose parents or society stood in their way of happiness somehow found a way to be together. But these stories are tragic in the sense that they did not end with a 'happily ever after' like most popular fairy tales of the west. Through these love stories, one can see that Mizo women did not have a lot of power when it comes to marriage. In fact, in most cases, it was the parents who have the final say. Once they were married, the power of the father over his daughter transferred to the husband; thus, for a woman, her comfort and safety, as well as her life were completely dependent on the man she married. The choices made by her family, mainly her father, as it was a patriarchal society; had far-reaching consequences in her life as she had much less freedom and choices as compared to a man.

Tales named after the heroines such as- "Chemteii", "Kungawrhi", "Rimenhawihi", "Mauruangi", "Chawngchilhi", and "Sichangneii" will also be used to shed light on how women were treated in the pre-Christian era, their position in the family and in the society as well. A closer examination of these tales revealed that women in these folktales had gone through a lot of hardships and discrimination due to their gender. Her duties in the family, obedience, silence, and patience, as well as her role in society, were pre-determined by society. These gender roles, according to Shefali Moitra, are a social construct and they are discriminatory and these gender roles always put women at a disadvantage (7-8).

Even though women were exempted from really arduous labour like clearing the forest for cultivation, and protecting the village from marauders, yet, life was not a walk in the park. As mentioned before, women had no power over community governance. At home, the patriarch has absolute authority and everyone is kept in line by him. Despite all her hard work "her status was insignificant and she had to obey and accept her husband's words" (Lalrinawma 33). Their hard work and sacrifices that they have made for the family remained unrecognized while diligent young men were publicly acknowledged for their bravery and valour. It is clear that womanly activities and duties are considered secondary to the exploits of men and their actions. Deborah L. Madsen discussed Ecofeminism as a feminist theory and how gender roles facilitate:

> ...the domination of disempowered groups: women, men of colour, children, the disabled, animals, nature. Within a centralised, hierarchical society, groups are divided into 'masculine' and 'not-masculine'. Power is centralised and focused in the masculine ruling class, with the 'not-masculine' requiring protection, control, guidance…In return for this protection, the feminine serves the interests of the male: nature sacrifices 'herself' to culture. (124)

Hunting and inter-village wars further propagated the domination of men over the 'others'-women, children, and animals. The masculinity of a man was measured according to his skills in hunting and warfare, both acts of violence and destruction. Furthermore, as women had never taken place in the act of hunting animals, it cemented the belief in their inferiority. This line of thought was explained by Lori Gruen as follows:

> Theoreticians, by creating a history in which man is separate from and superior to animals, establish a mechanism in which a separation from woman can be grounded. In this account of human social evolution, woman's body (being smaller, weaker, and reproductive) prevents her from participating in the hunt, and thus relegates her to the arena of non- culture.
>
> Woman's nonparticipation is conceived as naturally inferior. Her reproductive capacity and life-bearing activities stand in sharp contrast to the

death-bringing activities that underlie culture. Constructed in this way, human social evolution establishes the subservient status of woman and animals. (62)

Some Ecofeminists also believed that the connections made between nature and women have harmful effects on both. Janis Birkeland wrote, “The categories "woman" and "animal" serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society. Their construction as dominated, submissive "other" in theoretical discourse (whether explicitly so stated or implied) has sustained human male dominance” (61). In Western culture, women have been compared to and associated with nature and animals in various ways. She is called catty, a bitch, cow, and so on; and ‘virgin’ timbre is felled, nature is called ‘mother nature’ (Warren 12). These are just a few examples of how women and nature have been categorised together as ‘others’ which justified their domination and oppression by men. Talking about the harmfulness of linking women and nature linguistically Joan Dunayer has written:

> Likening women to nonhuman animals undermines respect for women because nonhuman animals generally receive even less respect – far less. In most (if not all) contemporary human societies, the status of non-human animals is much lower than women’s...While only some non-human animal pejoratives denigrate women, all denigrate non human animals. (16)

While examining these tales regarding the issues of women and children, this study will not be complete without looking into how nature- land, trees, and animals, fared in the hands of the same society. Pre-Christian Mizo society was an agrarian society. As an agricultural society, they manipulated the forest and land by felling trees and clearing the area, burnt it, and using the land for cultivation as long as it was fertile; and then moved on once it has dried up. This practice called shifting cultivation has resulted in deforestation, which created innumerable ecological problems that directly affect the animals, as they were robbed of their natural habitat. However, jhumming, for the Mizos in those days was their only constant source of livelihood.

Lori Gruen argued that agricultural practices which are “founded on a belief that the natural world could be controlled and manipulated- permitted the conceptualization of animals as sluggish meat making machines and reluctant

laborers, and women as breeders of children" (60). Thus, for women, the ability to bear a child is a very important aspect of womanhood in society, and there have been cases where a husband divorced his wife due to their inability to have children together.

Like women, land has also been manipulated for its ability to nurture life. This would have been fine had the human race treated it with respect and not manipulated it with harmful chemicals and left it to dry out on its own once her natural resources were exhausted. In the Mizo society, the practice of jhumming cultivation had eaten up the fertility of the land, as "Tree forests, it was believed, needed at least 8-10 years for regeneration, and if continually felled and burnt, gave place to coarse grass, rendering the land useless for cultivation" (Singh 13). And the farmers would move on to a different location when that happened. Or, in another case, the whole village would move to find greener pastures once their surrounding area turned infertile.

Besides jhumming, hunting was a big part of Mizo society. Different parts of animals were used for various things, and they were another source of meat besides livestock. As they had to live side by side with nature, they had many encounters with wild animals in their fields and in the village as well. Sometimes, animals would come and steal their livestock, which necessitated the men to follow them. Sometimes, they were also attacked by these animals as they came face to face with them in the thick forests. Hunting and killing of animals was deeply rooted in their culture and societal practices:

> Prowess in hunting commanded deep respect, and ensured admission to *Pial-ral,* the Lushai paradise after death, or its Mara equivalent, *Piera*. To bring luck in the venture, a sacrifice (*lashikhal*) was offered to the spirit owning all wild animals, and his servant, before setting off. A ceremony (*kawngpui siam*), supposed to facilitate success as well as foretell the result of the hunt, was performed before a large party started out and also annually, around April. A successful hunt was followed by a ceremonial sacrifice, giving the ghost of the performer powers over the ghost of the animal when entering paradise. (11)

In addition to all these accolades and benefits, successful hunters were also honoured by letting them drink *zu* before anyone else in some festivals and public gatherings, which was a very high honour in those days, only bestowed upon very successful hunters and warriors. Thus, animals were seen as trophies and targets that were meant to be hunted and displayed. Hunting was sometimes a necessity and a sport to them which propagates the dualistic hierarchy that gives power to men over "others".

The patriarchal worldview of the pre-Christian Mizos, most of the time was not overt and accepted as patriarchy was the accepted norm and different societal institutions were not known to them. Many writers, after the advent of Christianity thus claimed that Mizo women are not oppressed and never have been. However, these claims were made due to the fact that most of these acts of domination were accepted as normal social practices. These different arguments and claims about the treatment of women, the 'other', as well as the counterpoints put forth by ecofeminists will be further explored and analyzed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 studies how women were portrayed and presented in Mizo folktales. As 'fictive realities', the chapter studies how the characters of women were used to influence the attitudes of its people about women, what kind of qualities were admirable, and what qualities were not. Narrated from patriarchal worldviews, these folktales serve the aims and goals of what the patriarchal society deemed acceptable or not acceptable in women's behaviour. The selected folktales are studied from an Ecofeminist lens, which, as mentioned before, finds the correlation between the domination of women and nature.

Chapter 3 examines how children, animals, and nature were portrayed in the selected folktales. As Ecofeminism has linked the domination of women and nature, it is not a stretch to think that, since women were dominated by the patriarchal society, children and animals would be oppressed and dominated as well. This chapter studies the treatment of children, nature, and animals by the adults in the stories. The relationship between humans and animals, and nature has not always been harmonious; the altercations, however, were mostly caused by human activities like deforestation, aggressive hunting practices, and so on. These human activities are studied from an ecofeminist's point of view and will try to make sense of

humanity's actions that has led to the destruction of forests and the extinction of so many animal species.

Building from the previous chapters, Chapter 4 focuses on how the ethos and values of the Mizo people as reflected in the folktales still influenced the modern Mizo society. As the modern world brings many changes within the Mizo community, the physical and social landscape of the Mizo people has gone through dramatic changes as well. It analyses how women, children, animals, and nature have fared in the hands of modern Mizo society. These issues are analysed using Ecofeminist theory and will try to determine whether or not they are still dominated by the patriarchal society. The final chapter summarizes the previous chapters to have a clear answer to the research question if there were acts of domination in the ways women, children, animals, and nature were treated in the pre-Christian Mizo society. And if so, attempts to understand the present, modern Mizo society within these parameters.

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Throughout history, women had to fight for things that have been taken for granted by men and - the rights to vote, the right for autonomy over their own bodies, equal pay and the right to inherit property. Dominating and oppressing women is so commonplace that "it is accepted around the world by most men and many women as "natural," as something that somehow cannot be changed" (Kelly 112). Ecofeminism has found the connection that linked the oppression of women and nature in the framework of patriarchal culture as Janis Birkeland explained:

> In the dominant Patriarchal cultures, reality is divided according to gender, and a higher value is placed on those attributes associated with masculinity, a construction that is called "hierarchical dualism." In these cultures, women have historically been seen as closer to the earth or nature (perhaps due to childbirth and menstruation). Also, women and nature have been juxtaposed against mind and spirit, which have been associated in Western cosmology with the "masculine" and elevated to a higher plane of being. Although we can only speculate about how Patriarchal consciousness evolved, it is clear that a complex morality based on dominance and exploitation has developed in conjunction with the devaluing of nature and "feminine" values. (18-19)

Sherry B. Ortner in her article "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" has identified how women in most patriarchal societies are devalued and treated as inferior to their male counterparts:

> What do I mean when I say that everywhere, in every known culture, woman is considered in some degree inferior to man? First of all I must stress that I am talking about cultural evaluations; I am saying that each culture, in its own way and in its own terms, makes this evaluation. What would constitute evidence, when we look at any particular society, that it considers women inferior? Three types of data would be evidence: a) elements of cultural ideology and informants' statements that explicitly devalue women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products, and their social milieu less prestige than men and the male correlates; b) symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as making a statement of inferior valuation; and c) social rules that prohibit

> women from participating in or having contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside. These three types of data may all of course be interrelated in any particular system, but not necessarily. Further, any one of them will usually be sufficient to make the point of female inferiority in any given culture. Certainly female exclusion from the most sacred rite or the highest political council is sufficient evidence. Certainly explicit cultural ideology devaluing women (and their tasks, roles, products, etc.) is sufficient evidence. Symbolic indicators such as defilement are usually sufficient, although in a few cases in which men and women are equally polluting to one another, a further indicator is required--and is, as far as my researches have ascertained, always available. (7-8)

These three data provided by Ortner explains how women were and still are treated as inferior being by men.

Ecofeminists have realized that the systemic oppression of women and animals have at one of its roots – speciesism and sexist language. The language that we choose and its connotations have much deeper meanings than one would ever believe as "the language we use mirrors and reflects our conception of ourselves and our world" (Warren 12). In white western culture, language is used to put women in the same place with animals which have a very negative impact as, from an angle of speciesism; animals were much lower than humans in the power hierarchy. Warren has explained how this is harmful for women:

> The language used to describe women, nature, and nuclear weaponry often is sexist and naturist. Women are described in animal terms as pets, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, mother hens, pussycats, cats, cheetahs, birdbrains, and harebrains. (12)

This linguistic practice of animalizing women have a devastating effect on women, and animals, as they were both branded as inferior to men which in turn gave men more power over them. Dunayer has stated, "Applying images of denigrated nonhuman species to women labels women inferior and available for abuse; attaching images of the aggrandized human species to men designates them superior and entitled to exploit" (11).

The western culture's dualistic thinking that constructs women and animal to be inferior to men is also present in Mizo society; one among the many ways in which women were subordinated was the use of language in which women were made out to be less than men. There are many famous Mizo sayings that denigrated women by comparing them to animals; E.J. Thomas has made a list of some of these sayings in his book –

> "As the meat of crab is no meat, so the word of women is no word"
>
> "The wisdom of a woman does not extend beyond the limit of the village water source"
>
> "Let women and dog bark, it pleases them"
>
> "Bad wife and bad fence can be changed. Unthreatened wife and unthreatened grass of the field are both unbearable." (Thomas 16)

According to these common sayings, a woman is compared to a crab, a barking dog, a bad fence, and an unthreatened grass. While some people might argue that these are just sayings, not a reflection of reality; this could not be further from the truth. As we go deeper into the chapter, we will find that women are considered to be much inferior to men, how easily they were replaced, fought over like an object, threatened, and their wisdom challenged and denied by the male-centric society. Furthermore, when people think that a man was acting cowardly and unmanly, they used to say that that person should wear a skirt, which is a garment worn only by women. This basically means that wearing or putting on a woman's garment is shameful and embarrassing; as women were considered inferior to men. Men were given preferential treatment in the house and in society as they were considered to be more important than women and women, animals, and, nature were there to serve his needs; this belief is especially prevalent in patriarchal societies, which is the most common type of societal system in the world.

In the article titled "Feminism, Future Hope, and the Crisis of Modern Humanity", Rosemary Redford Ruether explains the meaning of patriarchy as:

> The term "patriarchy" means "the rule of the father." This refers to male power over females but a comprehensive social system based on the domination of the patriarch or male head of family-clan over all the human persons and things over whom he rules, who are defined in various ways as

> dependent on him and serving him: wife (wives), children, clients, dependent relatives, servants, slaves, animals, and land. Classical patriarchal societies linked such clans together in a political system in which the patriarchs formed a ruling class in public assemblies, with a king ruling over the whole. (70)

Pre-Christian Mizo society, as a patriarchal society had drawn a very clear line between men and women, and their roles and responsibilities in society and family as well. The division of labor in pre-Christian Mizo society was noted by E.J. Thomas:

> Clearing and burning of the vegetation mainly bamboos was carried out by men folk. Cultivation was the responsibility of womenfolk, but the final gathering of crops was carried on by all…The division of labour was restricted on the basis of sex rather than on skills. Thus, Mizo women employed themselves in fetching water, having wood, cultivating and helping to reap crop besides spinning, cooking and brewing. Men engaged themselves chiefly in making forays upon weaker tribes or in hunting and at home they only cleared the ground and helped to carry the harvest and build the houses. (14)

There is a clear definition of gender roles in society as social norms, and everyone adheres to this as an unwritten rule. This practice is not only limited to Mizo society, as it has been seen and practiced in other cultures as well too. Rosemary Redford Ruether writes that across cultures men generally "situates themselves in work that was more prestigious and more occasional such as hunting larger animals, war and clearing fields, which demanded bursts of energy, but allowed them more space for leisure" (38). Many have argued that Mizo men did all the dangerous and hard labour while women were exempted from these dangerous assignments. However, Ruether argued that these exemptions are then used to denigrate women whose work and duties are never-ending like men's occasional roles as this kind of division is "the primary social base for the male monopolization of culture, by which men reinforced their privileges or leisure, the superior prestige of their activities and the inferiority of the activities associated with women" (38).

This division of labour according to gender is strictly practiced in pre-Christian Mizo society. For example, Women are not expected to go to the blacksmith's house to sharpen or repair their tools, just as men were not expected to fetch water at the source. And if one showed up at these places, a man at the water source, or a woman at the blacksmith's; everyone would understand that there was no one else to carry out these roles and they would let them get their tools repaired first or carry the water first. These norms further solidified both women and men's position in society.

A typical Mizo woman's day started at dawn. She would carry water from the water source which will be used by the family for the whole day and night, thus, she would carry as much heavy load as she can. Then she would prepare the rice which would be eaten for breakfast and packed as lunch for the adults when they go to work on their jhum. First, she would pound the rice in the mortar with a heavy wooden pestle called *suk* and then wash and cook the rice in a large pot. She would clean and wash after the meal, and then prepare to go to the jhum. On their way, she would carry extra clothes, lunch for the whole family, and materials needed for work in the jhum like hoes in her bamboo basket called *em*. She would work all day at the jhum, and on their way back, she would carry home vegetables and seasonal fruits for the family in her 'em'.

When they reached home, she would prepare dinner for the family, feed the pigs and the chicken, and clean up after they had dinner. After dinner, the men of the family would congregate at Zawlbuk, where they might wrestle with a traveler from another village or discuss important issues regarding the village; then they would go out to court women where they would stay as long as they would like, and go back to Zawlbuk to sleep.

Therefore, the working day of a man mainly started when they reached their jhum and stopped as soon as they finished their work there. Women, however, did not have time to meet up with their friends, as there was no female version of a "Zawlbuk" for them. In fact, after they cleared the dinner pots and pans, they would prepare and cook food for the pigs, mend the family's clothes if needed, roll tobacco, and spin her wheels to make clothes for the family all the while entertaining the young men who came to court her. Since there is no fixed time for the young men to

go back to Zawlbuk to sleep, some overzealous men sometimes stay very late, and even if she was tired from waking up and working from dawn that morning, she had to keep him entertained as long as he was there. And if a man felt slighted or disrespected by a young woman, he could complain about it to his fellow men and if the other men agreed with him, they would gather in a group, go to the woman's house and dismantle their house. This is considered to be one of the most humiliating events that could happen to a young woman's life, and sometimes, her whole family would move to another village to start over. After the group of young men dismantles their house, the girl's parents would give them a pot of alcohol as a form of apology.

There is no law or authority that could defend her in this particular case, as even the chief is dependent on the young men for the protection of his village and the ensured continuity of his position as a chief, in case of an attack from other villages. Therefore, the chief is indebted to the young men for their protection and would normally respect their collective decisions and actions. Since women did not fight during inter-village wars, they were considered to be dependent on men for their protection. Kemmerer wrote that in return for this protection, women were thus expected to provide service to their protectors – services such as cooking, cleaning, and, sexual satisfaction (69). These inter-village wars between different tribes also created a space for the Mizos to enslave each other. In addition to taking the spoils of war like goods and jewellery, survivals from the defeated villages were brought to the victor's village and were kept as slaves. Ruether commented that in most cultures, these slaves are usually "women and their children for labor and sexual service. Women's work becomes identified with slave work. The women of the family are defined as a higher type of slave over a lower category of slaves drawn from conquered people" (39). Thus, warfare and the practice of slavery further ensured the symbolic subjugation of women.

As explained in the previous chapter, every village or a group of villages has its own chief, who ruled over them, acted as their collective 'father'; and has absolute authority over them. The chief made all the important decisions such as what land to cultivate, whether or not they go to war with another village, settle the disputes of the villagers, and even had the authority to take their life or save it, and so on. The chief executed all these duties under the advisement of his council of men,

however, the final decision lays in his hands only, if he so chooses to ignore their advice and suggestions. For such an important administrative role, women were not allowed a position in the chief's circle of elders.

The man of the house ruled over his household much like the chief ruled over them. As in a typical patriarchal family, the father had absolute authority over his family. Even though mothers/women played a very important role inside the house and in their livelihood, they had no authority. In fact, the folktales included in this study praised docility and obedience in women in regard to their relationship with their male counterparts, thus reinforcing the social norm of meek and docile women as the perfect model of womanhood.

In the folktale "Mauruangi", there was no mention of an uproar from the villagers about the murder of Mauruangi's mother by her father. In many versions, it was only mentioned that she was pushed off of an unstable bridge by her father only because he said that the person who is afraid to cross the bridge on their way back would be pushed off. Naturally, carrying a heavy load, Mauruangi's mother was afraid to cross it, and her father simply pushed her off the bridge. We can assume that he murdered his own wife so he could marry another woman. The murder and disappearance of a woman did not cause any waves in the villagers; they seem to simply forget her existence and readily accept her disappearance. The folktale did not mention any instance at any point where the villagers rallied against Mauruangi's father to question his wife's fate, or to get justice for her. Then, shortly after he murdered his wife, he simply replaced her with another woman, like one of those sayings mentioned before; he replaced his wife like one replaces a bad fence.

Even though the plight of women who were cruel towards other people has always been well documented in folktales, Mauruangi's father did not suffer any consequences for his act of cold-blooded murder. The discrimination between men and women who committed crimes or evil deeds reflected society's attitude towards both. The actions of a man have gone unchallenged throughout the whole tale, while Mauruangi and Bingtaii, her stepsister and her step-mother were pitted against each other to educate the masses about the socially acceptable behavior of a woman who is expected to be industrious, kind, and obedient. While there was no mention of any hardships suffered by Mauruangi's father throughout the tale, Mauruangi and her

mother went through inhumane treatment from their own family. In the tale, it was mentioned that Mauruangi was tormented by her stepmother, barely fed her and at one point managed to kill her by pouring boiling water on her. While her mother, who came back to life first as a big catfish and a tree to help Mauruangi, was hunted, caught, and eaten by the villagers who were led by her husband at the instigation of his second wife; and was cut down by the same as well when her bones turned into a beautiful tree called *Phunchawng*.

Throughout the story, Mauruangi was portrayed as a diligent young woman, who worked hard at her jhum; and impressed the servants of a foreign king with her diligence and hospitality, so much so that their king decided to marry her. Her good fortune led to her end, as her jealous stepmother invited her to visit, and when she did so, one day, her stepmother pretended to lose her comb under the house while Mauruangi was grooming her hair for her. She sent Mauruangi to search for the comb, and while she was down there, she poured boiling water from above and killed her. She was brought back to life by a wild goat, which nursed her back to health and used her as a babysitter. She was then found by her husband's servants when they heard her sing about her previous life in the forest.

While she was gone, her stepsister, Bingtaii posed as her and was living with her husband; like her mother, she was literally replaced by another woman. The king then tested them according to the skills of Mauruangi before her death, and after that, he made them fight each other; and gave Mauruangi a sharp sword and good armor that couldn't be penetrated by a sword. On the other hand, he gave Bingtaii a blunt knife and armor made of banana leaves. Thus, Mauruangi had an easy victory, killing Bingtaii easily and taking back her place as the king's wife.

The tale of Mauruangi has shed light on the brutality of men towards women, and how women, in their attempts to win the favor of men, would do horrible things to each other and even commit murder. Men hold the key to survival, and they made the rules of survival as they go along; while women had to do everything in their small and limited power to stay in their good graces. Thus, this power hierarchy had given men unlimited power over women, as the weaker sex, and they abused this power over and over again. The crimes committed in the tales always focus on the women: Mauruangi's mother was killed because she was afraid to cross a bridge;

Mauruangi was killed because her stepmother was jealous of her fortunes, and Bingtaii was killed by Mauruangi when they fought to prove their identity. All these violent events were set off by the decision of a man, who one day, decided to kill his wife for reasons best known to him, even though the blame was never pointed towards him as tragedy after one tragedy befalls upon the women in his lives.

In another folktale, Sichangneii, a beautiful woman who dwells in the sky was captured by a man while she was taking a bath, in another word, he kidnapped her. He plucked the feathers from her wings and hid them, so she couldn't escape, basically imprisoning her. He had seven sons by her – Kaptheia, Dotheia, Haitheia, Chhintheia, Mantheia, and Tlumtea. Whenever she left to work on their jhum and he took care of the kids, he would take out her wings and let their children play with them. One day, when it was her turn to babysit the kids, her youngest son told her that their father used to give them those wings to play with. When she learned where he hid her wings, she put them on and flew back to the sky where she's from, despite her sons' protests. Capturing someone and keeping them hostage should have been a serious crime; however, there was no mention of any opposition from anyone about this incident. Kemmerer points out that since women are considered to be lesser than those who hold power, men, whom she identified as, "A" individuals, were exploited for their reproductive abilities. According to her, men were not held accountable for their actions against their spouses as they held the power in the relationship:

> A husband's long-held authority over his wife, and her historic inability to accuse him of rape or to claim her children against her husband's will, exemplify "A" control over "Not A" individuals. Women and children have long been treated as the exclusive property of husbands – his woman, and therefore his vagina to access, his womb to fill, his sons born to carry on his name, lineage, work, and property. (Kemmerer 70)

In a society dominated by men, their actions often go unchallenged because men has power over those who are not men. This seems to be the reason why these men got away with their questionable acts like kidnapping a woman and impregnating her over and over again; even murder of one's own wife. According to Ecofeminist theory, being identified as the "other", someone who is not a man, led to the exploitation and subjugation of women as well as nature.

As the absolute authority in the household, fathers also had the final say in their daughters' fate especially when it comes to marriage. In the tale of "Kungawrhi", her fate was sealed by her father's decisions. According to the tale, Kungawrhi's father hurt his thumb while he was working on a bamboo. His thumb got infected and when they drained the fluid, a tiny baby came out as well. He took care of the baby, fed her with half a grain, then a full grain when she got bigger, and added the grains as she got older and bigger. When she grew up, Kungawrhi was so beautiful that whenever she played outside with her friends, all the young men gathered around to watch her.

Among these young men, there was a young *Keimi* (half man/half tiger – that can shift into a human or a tiger form when they want). This *Keimi* was so in love with Kungawrhi, but he had no idea how to win her over, as she had so many suitors and admirers. In his desperation, he lifted her footprints and dried it over the fireplace; Kungawrhi became so sick that her father promised to marry her off to anyone who could cure her illness.

She was visited daily by her friends and her young admirers, and whenever the *Keimi* visited her, he would cool off her footprint a bit, so that Kungawrhi would seem better whenever he came over. Kungawrhi told her father that she seemed to get better when a particular young man visited her, but her father brushed her off. He offered many sacrifices to cure her but she could not get better, he then offered her hand in marriage, for free, to anyone who could cure her. The *Keimi* offered to try and cure her; he would place her footprint further and further from the fireplace, bit by bit, and one day, he placed her footprint back into the earth. Kungawrhi recovered after he released her footprint back. And they got married soon after. Her husband took her back to his village, but on their way, they had to cross a river that was swelling up. It was impossible for them to cross, so, he turned into a tiger and told Kungawrhi to hold onto his tail, and swam across the river.

This incident was witnessed by an old woman and she ran home to tell her father. When her father heard that he married off his daughter to a *Keimi,* he got very worried; and then promised to marry her off to anyone if they managed to save her from her husband. Two brothers, Phawthira and Hrangchala decided to save her. They managed to get her away from him, but the tiger came after them as soon as he

found out that his wife was gone. After a harrowing chase, Phawthira fought and killed him. However, during the night, they were disturbed by *Khuavang*[13], but Phawthira managed to chase them away with his bravery whenever they asked them who they were. But, when it was time for Hrangchala to keep watch, the *Khuavang* could tell that he was afraid of them, so, they came and took Kungawrhi away. They went after her under earth, but on their way back up, Hrangchala cut off the vine they were climbing, and Phawthira was stuck. Hrangchala took her back to her father, and her father made them the ruler of their village. Phawthira managed to come back after a while and killed Hrangchala while they were hosting a feast for the village. The villagers tried to kill him for killing their chief, but when he explained his story, they understood and then, he married Kungawrhi and he became their chief.

Even though the tale is named after her, her opinion about her father's promise and whether or not she wanted to marry the *Keimi* was never included in the story. In fact, she was silent for most the story while her life and her safety depended on the men in her life, who were in fact the ones who threatened her existence in the first place. Her fate was decided by the men in her life; first, when her health was compromised by the *Keimi*, who made her so sick that, she was in danger of losing her life. Her body autonomy was taken away and controlled by him, the only reason being he was too insecure to confess his feelings for her. Secondly, her father blindly promised to marry her off to anyone who could cure her; and anyone who would save her from the *Keimi*, without considering what kind of a person they might be, at the same time, taking away her choice from her as well. Due to the choices made by the men in her life, her life was in danger many times, and she got married thrice to three different men.

A recurring theme in these folktales is endangering women's lives and their subsequent deaths. In a folktale named "Zawltlingi and Ngambawma", readers get a glimpse of how the lives of women were controlled by their parents even in their choice of husbands. When they were babies, Tlingi and Ngama's mothers used to help each other in their jhums. They would put their sleeping babies far away from each other in the jhum hut and leave them while they work. When they went back to

[13] Khuavang: The name of a guardian spirit (Lorrain 267)

the hut to take a break, the babies would always be sleeping together side by side. When they grow up, they fell in love with each other. However, Tlingi's parents would not let them marry each other despite Ngama's efforts. They decided to run away and live in a cave in a mountain, wore leaves when their clothes fell apart, and even had a baby together before they were found. When their baby became a toddler and started to walk and got too close to the edge of the cave, they would beat a bamboo tube on the floor, and the baby would come back to safety.

People heard this sound and realized that they were hiding in a cave and finally found them. Tlingi's parents promised to let them get married if they came home, so, they went back to their village. However, when they went back, Tlingi's parents would not let them get married just like before. Ngama would try to see her and invite her to work on their jhum, but her parents never allowed her to go with him; and they hardly ever see each other anymore. In his desperation, Ngama took Tlingi's footprints and put them above the hearth like one would put dried meat, just as the tiger did in "Kungawrhi". Like her, Tlingi fell ill and was on the brink of death many times. Whenever Ngama would visit her, he would take down the footprint on the floor, and let it cool down, so that Tlingi would get much better while he was at her house. He would always put the footprint back when he got home. One night, the string that he used to tie the footprint accidentally got burned and the footprint fell into the fire. Tlingi got worse and passed away soon after the incident. Her parent's control over her physical body and choices that clashed with Ngama's actions to take back his power resulted in her death. It was ironic that she died at the hands of her lover, someone who loved her so much that he was willing to risk her life many times before finally killing her, albeit accidentally; all of which happened because her parents would not let them get married. Had they respected her choice for a partner, their daughter would not have died in her prime, leaving behind a small child.

For women like Kungawrhi and Sichangneii, their beauty became the source of their troubles. Rimenhawihi was also a beautiful woman, with long luxurious hair. She was married to a man named Zawlthlia. Rimenhawihi used to take a bath in the river and wash her hair. One day, while she was washing her hair, a strand of hair fell and washed down the river which was eaten by a fish. Unfortunately for her and the

fish, it was caught by the servants of a chief. They were very curious as to why that particular fish had such a big stomach, and when they cut it open, they found that the stomach was bloated because it was filled up by a very long strand of hair. Their chief was very much intrigued by such a long strand of hair that he sent his servants back to find the owner of the hair. So, they went back to the river and kept going to find her. When they got to her house, she was locked inside an iron house by her husband while he was away on business. So, they asked what her name was from the outside and she answered them with a song. However, on their way back, they kept slipping and kept repeating her name, in case they forgot it, and kept repeating "Men, Men, Men," which was just a part of her name. By the time they reached their chief's house, none of them could remember her name correctly. Enraged by this, he sent them back with orders to bring her back with them. So, when they reached her house, she was locked inside her house again and they found an opening on top of her house. In order to lure her under the opening, they dropped the choicest and juiciest fruits that they brought with them. However, Rimenhawihi would not be tempted to reach for these fruit baits until they dropped a very rare and tasty orange, which she just couldn't resist reaching out for. So, as soon as she reached for the orange, they grabbed her from the roof, and Rimenhawihi was afraid to lose a strand of her hair if she struggled; thus, she let them capture her.

When Zawlthlia returned from his travels, he found that his wife was gone, and set out in search of her. He followed the clues left by Rimenhawihi and found her. He killed the chief and his servants and got his wife back.

Being a woman means being subservient and at the mercy of men. So, even though many folktales were named after the heroine, most of the time, they were told from the perspective of the male. From that male perspective, men were portrayed as brave heroes, great hunters who were the protector of women and children against all harm. However, most of the time, it was men themselves who made it necessary for physically weaker women to seek their protection and help. The dangers and hardships that these women had to endure were mainly caused by the male-centric society.

As previously mentioned, Sherry B. Ortner wrote that the exclusion of women in the sacred rites and political institutions is enough to indicate the lower

status of women as compared to that of men. In “Chemteii”, we can clearly see how women were relegated to a secondary position, not because they were not as wise as men, but as a patriarchal society, the realm of logical thinking was considered to be the domain of men and men only, while women were given the responsibility of taking care of the needs of men, cooking, cleaning and bearing children for the continuation of their husband’s family line.

Chemteii’s father and his brother were fighting each other over a gayal left to them by their father. In order to decide who gets to keep the gayal; they went to the chief to settle their dispute. Since there were no other witnesses while their father was alive and gave them the instruction, even the chief did not know how to make a ruling. So, he asked the brothers to think about the answer to the question “What is the fastest thing in the world?”, he told them to think about it during the night, and promised to give the gayal to whoever gave him the correct answer. One of the brothers went home, saw his strong and swift horse, and was convinced that there was nothing faster than his horse. Chemteii’s father, on the other hand, went home dejectedly because he had no idea what the fastest thing in the world could be. When his daughter asked him what the king said, he told her about the question; Chemteii told him to go to sleep and that he would think of an answer in the morning when his mind is clear. Morning came, and Chemteii told his father to tell the king that the mind is the fastest thing in the world, because one can travel around the world in the blink of an eye with one’s thoughts. So, off they went to see the chief. His brother told the chief that his horse was the fastest thing in the world, while Chemteii’s father said that the human mind is the fastest thing in the world. The chief was impressed and asked who told him that answer. He replied that it was his daughter, Chemteii.

So, the chief asked them one more thing “What is the fattest thing in the world?”, and promised to give the gayal to the one who knew the correct answer. When the older brother went home and saw his fat pig, he was once again convinced that there was nothing fatter than his pig on earth. Chemteii’s father went home and told his daughter that they had no chance to get the gayal as he had no answer to the chief’s question. Like before, Chemteii told him to go to bed and that the answer will come to him in the morning. The next morning, Chemteii told his father that the

fattest thing in the world is the earth, as every human being and living animal lives off of its fat and it still has not run out of it and gets skinny from feeding everyone. The chief was very impressed with the answer again and asked the man who told him the answer. As before, the man told him that it was his daughter Chemteii.

The chief then posed a third question like before, “What is the most precious thing in the world?”; the older brother thought that wives are the most precious things in the world, while Chemteii told his father the next morning that the most precious thing in the world is sleep. Chemteii explained while we are sleeping, everyone is equal, and no one is jealous of anyone while they are sleeping. Once again, when the man told his answer, the chief once again asked who came up with the answer, and he told him that it was his daughter, Chemteii.

The chief then decided to test her wit and she stumped him every time. He was so impressed that he decided to meet her in person and when they met, she also turned out to be a beautiful woman and the chief decide to marry her. However, before they got married, he told her that under no circumstances should she get involved in his role as the ruler as that is the responsibility and realm of men only and that a woman is only the helper of a man; and that if she did get involved somehow, she would be allowed to take one thing with her from their house and go back to her father’s. For a man who married a woman, because he was impressed by her intelligence before he even saw her face, he had made it impossible for her to exercise her intelligence or help him in the administration of his land and people. Rather than treating her like a partner and an asset since she was so smart, he’d rather have her as one of the inanimate decorations that enhanced his prowess as a man and a ruler.

However, one of the chief’s advisors was wrongly accused by the other members of the council and he was even given the death penalty as he could not prove his innocence against their accusations. He begged Chemteii to plead for his case who decided to help him because she knew all along that the others were lying and conspiring against him. The chief decided to pardon the accused and the case was resolved. But as per their agreement, even though Chemteii stopped him from executing an innocent and valuable advisor, the chief still decided to divorce and told her to take one item that she wanted the most from the house and leave. But he was

no match for her as she drugged him and ordered the servants to carry him to her father's house while he was asleep.

"Chemteii" differs from other folktales that were named after the heroines. She has her own voice while many heroines were just portrayed as beautiful objects that could neither think nor speak for themselves. She was the master of her own fate and the prejudice of her husband was not enough to stop her. From this tale, it became very clear that the realm of administration was solely reserved for men and the involvement of women was never encouraged, in fact, they were purposely kept away from politics where power resides. This folktale truly resonated with the reality of the Mizo history; chieftainship was reserved only for male heirs, with the exception of Lalnu Ropuiliani, who became the chief of Denlung village after the death of her husband, Vandula.

There are a number of folktales that tells the tale of lovers which most of the time ended in tragedy. Even though these stories sound like simple love stories between star-crossed lovers, close analysis sometimes reveals the inequalities between the genders and the vulnerability of women at the hands of men.

We must however keep in mind that the experiences of women are different even though they were all under the oppression of a patriarchal society. Women who were born into rich families or the daughters of rulers had more freedom than the common folk. In the story of "Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga", Lianchhiari was the beautiful daughter of the chief of Dungtlang, who was madly in love with a young man named Chawngfianga, who was a commoner. Lianchhiari did her best to win him over and they soon became lovers. However, when they decided to get married, Chawngfianga's family sent an emissary named Thura; who became insanely jealous over the fact that Lianchhiari's family was very keen and open to marrying their daughter off to Chawngfianga. In his jealousy, he kept lying to both parties which eventually led Chawngfianga's family to run away at night because their emissary told them that the chief was planning to kill him. This story, more than anything revealed the terrifying absolute power of the chief upon the villagers, as he had the power to take their lives.

In the story titled "Duhmanga and Dardini", Duhmanga was the son of a chief while Dardini lived with her widowed mother. When Duhmanga followed some

young men to her house one night to court her, they liked each other at first sight. But, Duhmanga's parents were against it as they believed that their son was too good to marry a poor widow's daughter. They also heard rumors that Dardini's parents covered her in cow dung when she was a child because they were afraid that she would be too beautiful when she grows up. As mentioned before, beauty was the source of trouble for women as men were entitled to do what they want when it comes to women, especially ones who is very beautiful. They married off their son to the daughter of a rich noble man which did not stop him from visiting Dardini at night. He even brought her home but every time his parents sent her back while he was away on his many hunting trips as he was a great hunter.

After a while, Dardini's mother was scared that her daughter's relationship with his son might cause him to take drastic actions against them, and fearing for their lives when the chief's family told her to keep her daughter away, she moved to a village far away with her daughter. When Duhmanga came home from the war, he found out that his lover had been chased away with her mother and he immediately left to find them. But as he reached the village where they lived, he learned that Dardini died in childbirth. He was so bereft and heartbroken that he soon cried and starved himself to death over her grave.

In this tale, Duhmanga was basically left alone to do whatever he wanted as he was the son of the chief, and in addition to that, he was a great warrior and hunter as well. Even though his parents forced him to marry someone who was socially acceptable, it did not stop him from seeing his lover or bringing her to his house even though he was married. In pre-Christian society, women were not seen as logical, independent beings but illogical, emotionally and physically weaker than the opposite sex, and they were forced to stay under the protection of their fathers, brothers, and husbands. A woman, without a husband, whether through divorce or death, was not respected by the community. In fact, they ranked so low in the social chain that they literally lived on the edge of the village. As they were no longer under the protection of men, their values dropped, and were an easy target for predators-both man and animals. The actions of a married man courting his lover while he was married did not cause him to censure by the villagers. He was celebrated for his prowess as a hunter and warrior.

In another folktale, titled “Tualvungi and Zawlpala”, Tualvungi was taken from her husband by a king who was enamored by her beauty. When the king saw her and her husband together, he asked her husband who she was to him and he foolishly told him that she was his sister, as if she could not speak for herself. When the king asked Zawlpala what he would demand her bride price, Zawlpala named a ridiculous number of treasures and valuables which he thought the king would never be able to come up with. However, the king, Phuntiha was a sorcerer who had no difficulty meeting his demands with his magic and soon returned to claim her as his bride. At this point, Zawlpala was too afraid, to tell the truth and basically sold his wife to another man for a king’s ransom.

This is one of the many examples of how women in those days were at the mercy of the men in their lives. Their lives were dictated by the decisions made by the men in their lives, their happiness and even their lives depend upon whether or not they made the right decisions for them, which was not always the case. Their opinions in these matters never mattered as men do all the talking. They were not treated like a person who has their own preferences, opinions, and ideas. They were treated like inanimate objects that were devoid of feelings. They were bartered or bought and passed on from the ownership of one man to another like commodities.

Tualvungi was taken by Phuntiha to his village and soon, Zawlpala came to visit her. Phuntiha was very jealous of him, and Tualvungi warned him to be careful whenever he was alone with him. However, one day, while Tualvungi was away collecting firewood, Phuntiha was alone with Zawlpala. Phuntiha served him “bahem” and “zu fang”, which were not mentioned by Tualvungi among the things she told him to avoid eating. So, thinking they were safe, Zawlpala ate and drink it. When Tualvungi came back, she asked him what he ate with Phuntiha, and she understood that he was poisoned. She told him to go back to his village as fast as he could. He got a severe stomach ache when she reached his home and passed away soon after. The villagers decided to inform Tualvungi of his demise. They asked several animals if they could deliver the news to Tualvungi, but, when they asked what they would say to Tualvungi, their answers did not satisfy them, and punished each of them. They stepped on the crab, which they said made it walk sideways to this day; they threw a black dye on the crow, turning it into a black color; then, they

impaled the bul-bul on a fence, which is why it has a red color under its tail till this day. At last, a wood pigeon came and they liked its answer, so they sent it to deliver the message to Tualvungi.

When the news of his death reached her, Tualvungi prepared to visit his grave to say goodbye. Phuntiha did not allow her to leave and, the next morning, he placed a very sharp knife for her to step on if she decided to go while he was not at home. Tualvungi cut her foot on the knife but instead of letting that stop her, she covered the wound with cloth and leave anyway. This incident revealed the toxic relationship between a man and a woman, where the man did not hesitate to physically injure and harm the woman if she dared to go against his wishes.

Upon reaching his grave, Tualvungi asked an old woman to kill her promising her to give all her clothes and jewelry if she did. Phuntiha also killed himself when he found them. In the end, due to the foolishness and selfishness of the men, they all died in vain. This is another example of the vulnerability of women at the hands of men who proclaimed to love them. After they all passed away, Zawlpala and Tualvungi became butterflies and they were forever chased by Phuntiha in their wake.

Inter-village wars were one of the reasons why pre-Christian Mizo society was very hard and unsafe. These wars could be triggered by seemingly small and insignificant events, or they could be started by the chiefs who wanted to widen their territory, and sometimes wars could be caused by villages fighting over a good pasture, fertile lands, and water source. Whatever the reason might be, these wars necessitate men to be trained as warriors from an early age. Boys were taught to be tough and all able-bodied young men slept at Zawlbuk which is situated near the chief's house so that they could easily assemble and act when there is a threat against the village, be it their enemies or wild animal attacks. This lifestyle necessitated the women to take care of the household chores. They had to feed their family and their livestock, collect water and firewood, go to the jhum and work there the whole day, then come home, cook, clean and weave clothes and beddings for the whole family, entertain young men who came to woo her every night. And she had to wake up at dawn the next morning to do it all over again. The load of women and their inferiority in society was mentioned by J. Meirion Llyod in his book:

> By tradition women enjoyed considerable freedom in Mizo society. A woman named Pi Hmuaki was remembered as one of the earliest Mizo poets. Verses composed by her formed part of their precious oral tradition. Generally, however, men thought women to be inferior creations. It was the women who did the burdensome chores, carried the heaviest loads, rose earliest in the morning and if they had any opinions those were never regarded as important. (109)

Commenting on the heavy workload of women around the world, especially in third world countries and rural areas, Petra Kelly has written about how these 'duties' oppress women:

> Besides housework and child care, many heavy chores are universally relegated to women. For Masai women of Kenya's Rift Valley, fetching up to fifty pounds of water at a time can take up to five hours a day. Gathering a similar weight of wood for cooking may be a two-hour job, and much longer in areas of extensive deforestation. The notorious "double day," in which women work as a full unit of economic production and also do all the unpaid housework and child care…is one of the longest lasting of women's oppressions. (116)

The work of women for their families and society has never been acknowledged unlike celebrating brave young men who were good hunters or warriors. As women did not contribute to the administration, protection of the village, and hunting for food/meat, they were seen as frail and their contributions inconsequential. Even though women did not go to war like their men, they were more vulnerable during wartime as they could not wield weapons and fight back, meanwhile, the enemy won't hesitate to kill an unarmed woman. In fact, these wars cemented the superior position of men due to the helplessness of women and children who needed their protection. Deborah L. Madsen discussed the power of men over women and others:

> Within a centralised, hierarchical society, groups are divided into 'masculine' and 'not-masculine'. Power is centralised and focused in the masculine ruling class, with the 'not-masculine' requiring protection, control,

> guidance…In return for this protection, the feminine serves the interests of the male: nature sacrifices 'herself' to culture." (124)

Successful hunting trips and raids were celebrated by the whole village, who would wait for them at the entrance of the village. Young women would wait for them with their home-brewed beer. Young men with exceptional character were also acknowledged and given their due respect in society while the contributions of women in the house and jhum were considered to be trivial and unimportant; even though her activities serve as the backbone of the society that holds it together. Her duties and chores were the foundations of their daily lives without which the whole fabric of society would fall apart.

While most folktales talk about the great deeds of brave men, they rarely talk about women in the same way. Beautiful women were celebrated and famous for their beauty but in most folktales, their beauty seemed to attract the wrong attention, which ended up putting their lives in danger as is evident in the stories of "Rimenhawihi", "Tualvungi", "Sichangneii", and "Kungawrhi".

Besides being represented as beautiful creatures that inspired men to do great or evil things, women were also portrayed as evil stepmothers, a literary trope that is commonly practiced all around the world, not just in Mizo folktales. The vilification of stepmothers is a common occurrence and theme in literature across various cultures. While their evil acts might be exaggerated at times, abusing orphans is also rampant in reality as well. Marianne Dainton has explained how theorists and writers explain the myths and misconceptions of stepmothers. First of all, she mentioned that scholars used the term 'myth' to define a "recurring theme or character type that that incorporates information about cultural standards" and that myth "represent a way of viewing the world that embodies a culture's beliefs, regardless of whether these beliefs are accurate" (93). She then explained the two types of myths about stepmothers as proposed by Schulman; the first type of myth is the evil stepmother, and the second is that of 'instant love', "wherein a stepmother is expected to immediately assimilate into a family and to love the children as if they were her own" (93). She went on to explain that the evil stepmother myth is a global phenomenon found in literatures across cultures regardless of their geographical location.

Evil stepmothers are portrayed as villains as a foil to the innocent and kind orphan heroine of a tale who will eventually come out victorious. As a poor agricultural family, where resources are scarce, it is possible that Mizo folklorists chose stepmothers as villains to represent the struggle and the stress that comes with the responsibility of feeding a family. Her character could be interpreted as a scapegoat that is used to mirror society's attitude towards orphans and helpless children, laying blame on women while minimizing the part played by men in the victimization of children. Since men are the ones who brought another woman into the household while children are still mourning the loss of their mothers; and leaving them to their own devices in the household. However, in most tales, society's sense of morality was reflected in the way the orphans triumphed against the evil acts of their stepmothers.

Mizo folktales seem to use the character of the evil stepmother to draw a contrast between her and the heroine. On one hand, Mauruangi represented the ideal woman-hardworking, skilled at weaving, generous and kind; on the other hand, her stepmother and step-sister, Bingtaii was the opposite. Bingtaii was lazy, terrible at weaving, thus unworthy of a rich and powerful husband; and her mother was unnecessarily cruel and a liar. Their polar personalities draw attention and are used to teach the listeners about the acceptable behaviour of women.

Women are portrayed in these aforementioned folktales as most of the time, silent and under the control of men. Most of them suffered under the hands of these men instead of benefitting from their association with them. Ngaitei's father demanded her life and threatened the lives of villagers in order to get his daughter. Mauruangi's father murdered her mother and left her at the hands of her stepmother who killed her. Tualvungi was basically sold to another man by her husband, and her life was cut short due to the events that followed. Dardini died in childbirth because she had to flee from her home as her lover failed to protect her from his family. Rimenhawihi was captured by the servants of a king who fancied her because she has extraordinarily long hair, even though he had never seen her or interacted with her. Sichangneii was also captured by a man while she was bathing, and forced to birth

seven of his children before she could escape from him. Kungawrhi's life was put in constant danger due to the men in her life.

A little different from how these women are portrayed in these tales, Chawngchilhi seemed more fearless and sexually liberated than the rest of them in a folktale named after her. Chawngchilhi and her sister went to work at their jhum every day to keep an eye on their crops. Their father would pack them delicious lunches every day; however, he noticed that his younger daughter is getting thinner despite him packing their lunch regularly. So, he decided to find out why she was growing thinner and asked her if she was pining for a boy. But, the young girl confessed that it was her sister that was having an affair; and after much cajoling from her father, confessed that Chawngchilhi's lover was a snake. She had been keeping the affair a secret because her sister has threatened her that the snake would swallow her if she ever revealed it to their father. She told her father that Chawngchilhi made her call the snake every day and that the snake would come to their jhum hut and the lovers would spend the whole day together inside the hut and eat their lunch, while she stayed outside in fear without eating anything.

Enraged, their father told Chawngchilhi to stay at home, and that he and the younger daughter would go to the jhum for the day. He dressed up like a woman by wearing Chawngchilhi's clothes to fool her lover. Then he made his daughter call for him as she used to, and the unsuspecting snake came to the jhum hut to spend time with Chawngchilhi. However, upon confirming that his older daughter was indeed having an affair with a snake, he killed the snake with his freshly sharpened *dao*, and cut him into three pieces. He also killed Chawngchilhi as well, but she was pregnant with the snake's babies, and when her father cut her open, many baby snakes crawled out from her stomach. They were all killed by her father except one, which managed to crawl away and grew up to be a giant snake that stole and eat livestock regularly from the villagers.

When their livestock kept disappearing, and even children after a while, the villagers started to wonder how this happened and the whole village grew scared of this unknown monster that stole and probably ate eggs, chicken, goats, pigs, and children. An old woman told them that a large snake was responsible for the missing livestock and children, in return for which she made them promise to give her the

choicest parts of the snake when they killed it. As promised, they gave her the head of the snake when they killed it, but it still talked from inside the pot and the meat won't cook. Exasperated, she threw the whole pot away with the snake's head. That night, after the roosters warned them to let their guests leave the village, the whole village shook after their guests reached a safe place, and every house that ate the meat of the snake fell and was destroyed. The old woman's house was the only house that wasn't destroyed as she didn't eat the meat. The head of the snake then grew into a giant gourd. The gourd then produce only one fruit and people would wonder how many seeds it must contain as it was a large gourd. Chhura, a famous character in Mizo folklore, happened to pass by that village and said that it only has one seed. They did not believe him, but when they opened the gourd, it only has one seed inside as Chhura had predicted.

This tale has been probably created in order to warn young girls about the dangers of promiscuity and having sex before marriage. In a typical patriarchal society, young girls were expected to be meek and virtuous, and in this tale, a young woman who dared to break this unwritten law was violently killed by her own father, for daring to bring shame upon his good name and family by having an affair with a very unsuitable partner, represented by the snake. The killing of a daughter by her own father was not condemned nor commented on further in the tale. Once again, it was mentioned almost conversationally that it was very commonplace for a father to kill a daughter who dared to go against his wishes or his expectations of her, just like the murder of Mauruangi's mother by her father.

In those days, young women were courted at their homes at night, under the watchful eyes of their parents, and if the woman is famous for her beauty, she would've many suitors who came to court her. Thus, even if she secretly liked someone, a wise young woman would never reveal her crush whether with her words or behavior. All the young men who came to court her must be equally entertained and welcomed into her home lest she provoked their resentment and anger.

Entertaining a lover, alone in a jhum hut was too scandalous and amoral and starkly contrasted with society's rules and expectations of what was considered proper behavior from unmarried young women. On the other side of the spectrum, no one bats an eye if a young man managed to successfully seduce a young woman,

while young women were taught to suppress their sexuality and remain ‘innocent’ until she was married off. Chawngchilhi has managed to violate these rules – she took a lover and even got pregnant by him, and by the way the tale is narrated, she seemed to be very independent and the person in charge when it comes to her relationship with her lover. Her lover had never come to their jhum hut to visit her, until and unless he was summoned by the younger sister, at the behest of her older sister whom she dare not disobey. Even on the day, her father came pretending to be her, her lover did not make the mistake of accidentally revealing himself to the father, he only came to the hut after he was called as usual by the younger sister.

A woman like Chawngchilhi, who embraced her sexual side, took on a lover and even got pregnant before marriage straying too far from what society dictated to be ‘proper’ for a young woman. Just like society rejects independent, strong-willed women like this, it also had no mercy for a baby born out of wedlock. After hacking Chawngchilhi to death with his dao, her father also killed all her babies that crawled out of her stomach, and only one of them survived. The surviving snake was then revealed to be a menace to the village, causing trouble for the villagers. Children born out of wedlock were, on the social hierarchy, probably placed at the bottom. Orphans and stepchildren had awful experiences growing up; however, these ‘bastard’ children had it worse. In the tale, they were instantly killed by the angry ‘grandfather’, and in reality, they were just as metaphorically dead to their mother’s families as well. The portrayal of the surviving snake as a menace and a burden for the villagers is a clear indication of how society regarded these children, who were unlucky enough to have unmarried mothers, as burdens, unwanted and intrusive to their peaceful and uniform existence where everyone follows the rules dictated by the patriarchal norms.

In one way, “Chawngchilhi” also exposes the hypocrisy of pre-Christian Mizo society regarding chastity. It encourages women to stay virtuous and pure, while young men tried their best to sleep with them. If a married woman commits adultery, she would be swiftly punished and publicly scorned; she also has to return her pride-price to her husband. Even after the death of her husband, a woman was still bound by the expectation to remain chaste. And if she committed adultery while living in her dead husband’s house, she has to perform three ceremonies. Lalzikpuii

and Prof. Atul Chandra Talukdar mentioned this practice in their article, "Women Empowerment and Customary Law – with reference to the Mizo society": The first ceremony is "thlaichhiah (sacrificial ceremony for the dead husband)", the second one is called "thlahual (ceremony performed to express deep anguish over her immoral act, so as to quieten her husband's spirit), and the third ceremony is called "mitthi chaw pek", in which the wife would put aside a portion of her meal for her dead husband (20). They further stated that if a man did these things, he was not expected to perform any of these ceremonies. In addition to this, women were also not allowed to claim their children in case of a divorce, it was customary for the father to be awarded full custody rights, and women had no legal rights over their children (20).

One might have thought that these folktales would have happy endings and beautiful love stories as they were named after the female characters; instead, these tales are violent and full of death and sufferings for the female characters. They were treated like commodities by the men; they were bartered, replaced, and disposed of as easily as one would their belongings. The patriarchal society in which they live did not appreciate their values and contributions to society, and in fact, gave all the power to the men, whose activities and duties were considered to be much more important than the duties assigned to women. This hierarchical framework gave men to oppress those under them, thus, women were considered fair game to them. Women were viewed and portrayed as theirs to control, own, capture, impregnate, and even kill without any consideration for their wishes.

For these women, there was no safe haven for them to run to. Their lovers had become their downfall; their fathers who were expected to protect them became their killers instead. Even if they survived their childhood and young adult life, some of them still died at the hands of their husbands, or the actions of their husbands would directly lead to the loss of their lives. In a few tales, some heroines seem to win the day and the tales suggested that they live happily ever after with their male counterparts.

Upon closer study, these few women did not seem to win at life, even though they survived their troubles intact. Chemteii, for example, outwitted her husband after he divorced her by disobeying his directive not to interfere in his duties as a

chief or else he would divorce her. After Chemteii broke her promise not to get involved in his duties, he, true to his words, divorce and graciously allowed her to take her favourite thing from their marital home back to her father's house. So, she got him drunk and added some sleeping agents to his food the night before she left, and then instructed the servants to carry him to her father's house where he woke up the next morning. Chemteii seem to win the final round, but, what did she really win? A misogynistic husband who was so conceited and egotistical that he would not, even secretly, listens to her ideas or consults her on important matters, even though he witnessed first-hand, how intelligent and smart she was even before he married her. From this tale, it became very clear that women were seen as not as smart as men and considered to be not good enough to sit in an administrative position like men. As mentioned before, this is a clear act of domination practiced by men in their exclusion of a woman in the highest governing body in the society.

Much like Chemteii, Kungawrhi was married twice before her final husband, Phawthira. He was portrayed as a hero in the tale. Both her previous husbands died at his hands, he had been married to a female *Khuavang* and had children with her while he planned his escape from their dwellings, and he abandoned them as soon as he could escape. Then, when he finally managed to come back to the village, many years has passed, but still, he killed his brother without any hesitation or even without trying to negotiate with him first. Kungawrhi's fate has never been in her own hands, the only time she took control of her life was when she hid the brothers from her tiger husband and ran off with them as soon as they got the chance to do so. Her whole life was controlled and manipulated at times, to serve the needs of the men in her life.

The helplessness of women against the actions of men in these tales is a clear indication of women's subjugation by the patriarchal society that warrants power to men over everything else. For example, it may be argued that women did not participate in tribe wars, and that it was the men who sacrificed their lives for their clans. However, this only means that women were not the aggressor, however they were fully involved in these clashes. As mentioned before, while men died in these

fights, women were also killed and most of the time taken as *sal*[14]. Being a captive of war meant that their captors have absolute power over them; they "might own, sell, kill or marry off as he pleased" (Hrangchal 43). Shakespear wrote that sometimes *sal*s were exchanged for guns when guns first became available and that "one strong *sal* was worth two guns. If not being traded off, women were sold off in marriage and the bride price was collected by the captor, while children were brought up as the children of the captor "and as a rule were so well treated that they seldom wished to return to their former homes" (50). However, a *bawi* is still a *bawi*, someone who is on the periphery of society, someone that lives in the house with their owner, and takes part in the household activities; but was never truly considered as a family member.

In conclusion, pre-Christian Mizo society was not a safe haven for women. During peace time, women worked from dawn till late into the night, but were not given any power in society. Village administrations were all handled by men while women were relegated to their household chores, which was considered to be a secondary role. She could not inherit property from her father and even her husband since inheritance goes to the male members of the family, even though all the household chores were considered to be her duty. Women were also captured during inter-village wars to be kept as a "sal", bartered or killed by their captors. As seen from the tales, a man could easily divorce and left her destitute. She was expected to be obedient, subservient and chaste and to serve everyone else tirelessly while virtually having no power in the political and social sphere of her community, thus affirming Ortner's theory. As mentioned before, Ortner has written that excluding women from participating in important rites and political powers affirms their domination. As such, she was dominated in the public and private sphere by patriarchal social norms that gives men "power over" women.

[14] Sal: A captive taken in war; a slave (of war) (Lorrain 401).

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The destruction of the natural world due to over-logging, excessive commercial fishing, intensive industrial farming of animals, trophy hunting, burning down rainforests for agriculture, experimenting on animals in laboratories and so many more atrocities have been subjected to nature and animals by man. The atrocious actions of man over nature have had a devastating effect in return. Uncontrollable wildfires have spread all over the world due to extreme dry spells; while on the other hand, there have been massive floods and hurricanes that tear through towns in other parts of the world. Millions of people have been displaced and are forced to vacate their homes and immigrate to other countries due to extreme weather conditions that have made it impossible for them to live in their native country.

These man-made social and natural disasters have direct and devastating effects on children. Children depend on adults for their survival; for them to thrive and exist in this world, and to successfully navigate the challenges of the modern world, they need the guidance and protection of adults more than ever. In contrast to this increasing need, the world has become increasingly chaotic in every aspect of our daily lives. While children have the least power to combat these threats against their very survival, the impact it has on their lives is immeasurable.

While children faced all these ecological disasters on a global scale with a grim future, their private lives have not fared that well either. According to WHO (World Health Organization) “Nearly 3 in 4 children – or 300 million children – aged 2-4 years regularly suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers” (who.int). Child maltreatment, according to WHO may be defined as-

> ...the abuse and neglect that occurs to children under 18 years of age. It includes all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.” (who.int)

Be that as it may, there are not many studies and research done on behalf of children and their oppression which might be because “the social restrictions

imposed on children's lives are often justified in terms of protection, affection, and assistance. Age-based discrimination can be subtle-difficult to name and therefore difficult to challenge" (Kurth-Schai 194-195).

The subtle discrimination faced by children may be very hard to identify, especially in the Mizo community where a lot of things used to control and dominate children would be seen as measures to protect them and discipline them to mold them into responsible adults. In most folktales, parents seem to exert complete authority over their children. In pre-Christian Mizo society, the birth of a girl and a boy was equally celebrated. Mizo children were taught responsibilities from a young age. Young boys of a certain age were expected to collect firewood for Zawlbuk every day, and those who slacked off in this duty were brought to task by some young men and their leader from Zawlbuk. Young boys did not seem to have a lot of responsibilities besides this particular duty. Boys who neglected their duties were disciplined by the young men.

On the other hand, young girls were expected to carry water from the water source, help their mothers with the myriad household chores, and are expected to babysit their younger siblings while the adults were at the jhum. The responsibility of taking care of younger siblings could become a heavy burden for children. Childhood is supposed to be a time when kids can be themselves and play with other kids freely. However, babysitting their siblings was and still is a burden that young children should not be subjected to. Taking care of young children is a nonstop chore, while young boys were free for the rest of the day except when they had to collect the firewood. Thus, even from childhood, we can see that the duties of young boys and girls were clearly different from each other which will determine the role they would play in society once they are old enough.

The emotions and opinions of children were not given much importance. Obedience was instilled from an early age. Disobedience, as seen in some of these selected folktales resulted in the loss of their only living parent, for Liandova and Tuaisiala. While Liandova's wife lost a finger for choosing him over the other eligible suitors that her father favored. Mauruangi suffered starvation and physical abuse from her stepmother as well, which was made possible largely due to her

negligent father who did not interfere in the family dynamics which was his role and duty as a father.

Children and women have one thing in common, they are not men. This lack of manhood puts them at a disadvantage in society. If we read these folktales carefully, children were abused in different ways; they suffer emotional, physical, and verbal abuse at the hands of the adults; who were supposed to be their protectors. The oppressive system and framework that justifies the oppression of women, according to Ecofeminism, is the same system that is being used to justify the domination of children. The different features of this framework which will help us identify the oppression of children can be explained in the following ways:

> First, it is centered in value hierarchical dualisms-"up-down disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional (rather than complimentary) and exclusive (rather than inclusive), and which place higher value (status, prestige) on one disjunct rather than the other." Val Plumwood notes that the overall effect of adopting a value-laden, dichotomous world view is alienate and to polarize, for "traits taken to be virtuous and defining for one side are those which maximize distance from the other side...Similarly, noted child psychologist Jerome Kagan identifies a cross-cultural tendency to ascribe categorically to adults those qualities valued by society and then to project onto children the opposite. (Kurth-Schai 195)

According to Warren, this conceptual framework is not enough to prove that children are oppressed, it must be accompanied by the presence of a "second distinguishing feature, a logic of domination-an argumentation structure which supplies the moral justification that sanctions subordination" (Kurth Schai 196). This feature becomes very harmful when adults make political, social, and private decisions that will inevitably hurt children further down the line. Children live in a world that is designed and ruled by adults. Thus, decisions regarding rules, profits, and proper behavior were made with the adults in mind who most benefitted from these exercises. As a result, children often find themselves failing to successfully navigate a world that is adult-centric and young children, especially little girls suffered terribly at the hands of adults who made up the rules as they see fit.

This kind of oppressive power exercised over children by adults is very much present in the story of a little girl, named Mauruangi, a seemingly innocent tale of how a poor orphan girl escaped her hardships through hard work and being nice to strangers. If we look at this rather wholesome tale from an Ecofeminist lens, the power structure that places children as the lesser adjunct became clearly visible as the story unfolds.

In the story of Mauruangi, her own father murdered her mother in cold blood which led to a chain of events that made Mauruangi's life a living hell. One day, on their way to get some *pumphir*[15] they crossed an unsteady bridge which scared Mauruangi's mother. Instead of reassuring his wife's fears, her father commented that whoever got scared on their way back would be pushed off the bridge by the other one. Unbeknownst to his wife, he made his load much lighter than hers and ensured that her load was heavy enough to make her scared to cross the old bridge. Just as he had secretly hoped, his wife was scared to cross the bridge on their way back, and he actually pushed her off the bridge and killed her. When he went home without his wife, Mauruangi kept asking him where her mother was, and after giving her some excuses, he finally told her that he had pushed her off the bridge. Mauruangi was devastated and mourned her mother; however, her father soon married a widow who lived next door. His new wife had a daughter named Bingtaii, and they all lived together once they got married. In the beginning, her stepmother was very kind to her but as time passed; she began to treat her horribly.

Mauruangi was treated like a servant in her own home, forced to do all the housework, and still, her stepmother would not even give her decent meals, and due to lack of nutritious food, Mauruangi was wasting away. Her mother's spirit came back as a fish and feed her delicious meals, but when Mauruangi became healthy and hearty; her stepmother became suspicious and told her daughter to spy on her. When Bingtaii reported to her mother that Mauruangi has been fed by her mother, she told her husband to gather the villagers and hunt the fish.

When her father and the villagers gathered to catch her mother, Mauruangi ran to her and told her to swim in the opposite direction of whichever way she told

[15] Pumphir: The name of a supple, hollow, creeping reed. Sometimes it stands erect instead of creeping. Lushai boys make it into long twisted tobacco pipe stems (Lorrain 371).

her to swim. Thus, when Mauruangi shout at her to swim upstream, she swam downstream and vice versa. When the villagers got tired of chasing the catfish unsuccessfully, they gagged Mauruangi, literally silencing her, and they finally caught her mother. The villagers had a feast but Mauruangi refused to eat with them and instead asked for her bones. She put the bones in a pot and they turn into a beautiful necklace. Mauruangi wore the beautiful necklace, but her stepmother told her to let Bingtaii wear them as well. But, as soon as Bingtaii wore the necklace, the stones turn into charcoals. Mauruangi buried her mother's heart as well, which grew into a beautiful tree called 'Phunchawng' after a while.

When her stepmother started to starve her again, Mauruangi went to the tree and asked her mother to bend down and feed her with the nectar from her flowers. Soon, Mauruangi became hale and hearty again which made her stepmother suspicious like before. She then sent Bingtaii to spy on her, and soon, Bingtaii reported that Mauruangi was fed by her mother that turned into a tree. Once again, her stepmother tasked her husband to cut down the tree with his friends. However, Mauruangi followed them and began to chant a song that gave her mother strength as they were trying to cut her down. But they took her away far enough from the tree, and they soon cut the tree down. Without her mother's support, Mauruangi was soon abused by her family again.

The act of hunting the fish and the felling of the tree, in a way, symbolizes man's attitude towards animals and nature. There was no opposition from anyone except Mauruangi, who tried to save the fish and the tree; and was gagged in the end by the villagers. Her voice, the only thing that kept her mother alive was literally silenced and Mauruangi had not only once lost her mother, but thrice at the hands of the other adult villagers. Nobody saw any problem in cutting down a tree and killing a fish as they were both seen as 'less than' human beings, whose existence is solely for the benefit of man. The disregard for other beings was clearly seen in these events.

Mauruangi's efforts to keep her mother safe from harm - the tree and the fish, were a very rare instance in Mizo folktales where a human being tried to save other living beings from harm. In fact, in most folktales, nature is depicted as something that existed to serve the needs of the human species only, the "lesser adjunct". As

mentioned before, examining this from an Ecofeminist lens, this dynamic has caused endless problems for all species.

The terrible treatment of a stepdaughter by the stepmother and her children is a very common theme in children's literature around the world, for example, the famous tale of Cinderella; thus, it is not a theme that is only seen in Mizo folktales. However, they reflect society's general views towards orphans and women who remarried no matter the country or society to which they belong to.

In the tale of "Rahtea", his stepmother was horrible to him as well. Like Mauruangi, Rahtea was neglected, given terrible food, inadequately clothed, and yet was expected to do many chores and hard labor. Even though he had earned more than his keep from all the chores that they made him do, his stepmother still tried to find a way to get rid of him. She then pretended to suffer from a terrible stomach ache. In order to cure her illness, his father sacrificed a mithun, a goat, a pig, a dog, and a fowl. Still, her pain won't subside, and his father did not know what else to do for her. Then, his stepmother suggested that they sacrifice Rahtea, which will cure her. His father was very upset and surprised at her suggestion. Rahtea overheard their conversation and fearing for his life ran away.

When they realized that he ran away into the forest, they send his older brother to call him, but Rahtea was smart enough to not follow him back. He replied to his brother's pleas to come home by saying that he was better off, drinking the nectar of a tree than coming home and getting killed. Then, his stepmother sent his grandmother to coax him. However, Rahtea's answers to her calls were still the same, and she returned without Rahtea. After his grandmother, his father then set out to try and bring him back, but still, Rahtea refused to come home with him as well. After everyone else failed to coax him to come home, his stepmother came as well, but still, his reply was the same. Rahtea then turned into a cicada and flew away.

If Rahtea had been confident that his father would protect him from any physical harm, he wouldn't have run away. However, Rahtea was smart enough to figure out that he could not depend on his father for his safety, and had to take matters into his own hands. His father has neglected his needs, and failed to even make sure that Rahtea received the basic necessities like food and clothing.

While Rahtea and Mauruangi suffered because of their fathers' negligence, Ngaiteii, on the other hand, was sacrificed by the villagers due to her dead father's demand to let her go to him; one child suffered due to her father's negligence while another was sacrificed because her father could not let her go even from the realm of the dead. Ngaitei's father drowned in a deep pool beside their jhum. One day, Ngaitei and her grandmother were working on their jhum, and Ngaitei became very thirsty. So, her grandmother went to the river where her father drowned and fetch water for her. But Ngaitei soon got thirsty again and again, so her grandmother got very tired of fetching the water. At last, she sent Ngaitei to fetch the water herself but told her not to exclaim and say "E khai!"[16] when she reached the water. However, forgetting her grandmother's advice, Ngaitei said "E khai!" when she reached the water and promptly fell in.

Her grandmother got worried when she didn't come back and went searching for her. On her way, she met with a couple of deer and then, a pair of partridges and asked them if they saw her granddaughter. They all told her that she was taken by her father's ghost. When she reached the river, she found Ngaitei by herself and asked her where her father was. Ngaitei told her that he went to work on the jhum and that he would be back later. Soon, Ngaitei's father transformed into a snake and slithered back in the evening. After he turned back into a human form, Ngaitei's grandmother asked for his permission to take her home. He let them go with the condition that Ngaiteii would return to him after a few days. So, they went back. However, Ngaiteii was very happy living with her grandmother and did not want to return to her dead father and live with him.

But, when she refused to return to him, her father's spirit became very angry and he started to flood the village, with the waves calling out her name "Ngai, Ngai, Ngai". Still, Ngaitei refused to return with him. Afraid of the rising water that threatens to flood the entire village, the villagers threw Ngaitei's clothes into the water. The waves subsided for a while but they soon rose again. Then they threw in her comb, which soothed her father's spirit for a short while, but soon, the water level rose again. Thus, they threw in her belongings one after another, but they never

[16] E khai! : Expressing surprise and regret, or annoyance (Lorrain 122).

kept the waves down long enough. At last, afraid that the whole village will drown in the waves, they regretfully threw Ngaiteii into the water and finally, the water receded and the villagers were safe from her father's wrath.

Both fathers were responsible for the death of their daughters, one, because of his negligence and the other because of his possessiveness and sense of entitlement. These daughters' fate was decided by their fathers as they have the 'power over' their daughters and they both had abused this power. Ngaitei was considered as a property by her father instead of respecting her wishes to stay with her grandmother with whom she was thriving with. But, even from the realm of the dead, Ngaitei's father still had more power over his daughter.

In another tale, Liandova and Tuaisiala were abandoned by their mother when she remarried after their father's death. She did not want to take Tuaisiala with them because he was still very young and have no social filter who speaks exactly what he was thinking. So, she asked her older son, Liandova to push him in the river and drown him as they were crossing the river on their way to her new husband's village. Liandova refused to drown his brother and instead chose to lose another parent knowing full well what their future holds as orphans. Tuaisiala's only fault was his innocence, which in the world of adults was a disadvantage as they were governed by rules that were beyond the understanding of a young child. Thus, being different from adults was cause enough for his mother to want to murder him. This grossly unfair treatment and judgment of a child according to the sensibilities of a parent/adult can be examined from an Ecofeminist point of view:

> Adult centrism further tends to define children as a distinct social category or "singularity," thereby obscuring differences among children while emphasizing characteristics which supposedly separate or distinguish children from adults. In a society where traits associated with childhood are devalued, focusing on adult/child differences can perpetuate injustice. (Kurth-Schai 196)

Tuaisiala's trait of childhood innocence became the reason his mother tried to murder him by telling his older son to drown him. His brother refused to obey his mother and thus began their journey as orphans in a society that constantly sidelined them due to their situation. Tuaisiala was still too young to earn his own keep, so,

while Liandova was able to get jobs working for other people, Tuaisiala was regarded a nuisance. The villagers did not give any effort to raise or feed Tuaisiala who clearly needed their help and kindness. Instead, he was shunned by society. People were willing to feed Liandova as he was capable of physical work, since he was big enough to work in their jhums; but they refused to feed Tuaisiala as well, they did not mind letting a child go hungry as he has no value to them. Thus, when they realized that Liandova was feeding his brother in secret, they always let him go. Tuaisiala's youth and naivety, though, not his faults at all, were a big part of why they were outcast by society. At one point, they were said to be so hungry that they found a piece of corn and they split it between them.

The brothers were always discriminated against as they were orphans. For example, during a hunting trip, Tuaisiala said that he saw a huge python; that what they thought was a huge tree was indeed a giant python. The others did not believe him but he insisted that he saw it blink. The hunting party decided to check out his story and threatened to thrash him if they went back and it turned out to be a lie. When they went back, it was, in fact, a python. They killed it and unfairly divide the meat amongst themselves, giving only the stomach to the brothers, the least desired part of the animal; an unfair treatment and act which deeply hurts the feelings of Liandova, who was old enough to understand the discrimination.

However, as Tuaisiala was still too young to understand the slight, he kept on trying to slice open the stomach with a blunt knife given to them by the other hunters. It turned out that the python had swallowed a merchant with all his merchandise and Liandova and Tuaisiala became extremely rich overnight. The brothers bury their treasures under the fireplace and only took out the instruments out to play from time to time, while locking themselves inside their house. Through their actions to keep their wealth a secret, it was very clear that they no doubt knew the villagers would forcibly take it away from them if they knew.

This incident alone reflected the power dynamics of the community, where children without adults were in constant fear of abuse from those with power. Tuaisiala was lucky compared to Mauruangi as he had an older brother to protect him and look out for him. Mauruangi had no protection from the cruel treatments she suffered at the hands of her stepmother, even though her own father was still alive.

He could have prevented so many things that had happened to Mauruangi had he wanted to or cared enough for her.

These treatments seem to reflect an old Mizo saying “Naupang tete uite rim in nam”, which roughly translates to “You kids stink like dogs”, which they used to chase children away. This comparison is significant in that it shows the attitude of adults towards children. In a patriarchal society, since men have power over everyone else, these children are especially vulnerable to threats and harms when they have no man to protect them or in the case of Mauruangi, and Ngaitei, when that man refused to acknowledge his child’s needs and focused only on his own needs, the consequences could become deadly. And Mauruangi was literally killed by her stepmother who poured boiling water on her. And in the case of Liandova and Tuaisiala, Liandova had to protect his brother from people all the time as the grownups around them refused to understand his brother’s naivety. Innocence was a hindrance in a world run by adults, where the norms and rules had been created by the adults who mostly benefitted them.

As an agricultural society whose livelihood depended on the produce from their jhum, those who cannot work at the said jhum, like children were not valued that high in the society. Children were left under the care of old people while all the able-bodied members of the society went to work to tend their crops. During day time, children were thus mostly left to their own devices. Children were basically seen as future farm hands and free labor for the parents; thus, they did not have much value until they were old enough to work.

The same framework that allows adult to oppress small and defenceless children is also the same framework that oppresses women, nature and animals. Ecofeminist theory, as mentioned before has made the link that allows all kinds of oppressions. The western white man’s concept of dualism has caused a lot of grieve among those who are on the wrong side of the scale- culture/nature, man/woman etc. The believe that humans are superior to animals has led to unimaginable sufferings of thousands of the animal species, as Joan Dunayer has stated in her article, ‘Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots’:

> Through massive and sustained exploitation, humans inflict enormous suffering on other animals. Humans generally justify their exploitation of

> other species by categorizing "animals' as inferior and therefore rightfully subjugated while categorizing humans as superior and naturally entitled to dominate. (11)

In western culture, this dualistic thinking and speceism has devastating effects upon the animal kingdom. Ecofeminists has found the connection that links the oppression of women and animals, Lori Gruen explained that the connection "is not to be understood as a "natural" connection – one that suggests that women and animals are essentially similar – but rather a constructed connection that has been created by the patriarchy as a means of oppression" (61).

In her attempt to trace the connection between the oppression of women and animals, Lori Gruen has suggested four theoretical frameworks that "serve to justify the oppression of women and animals...my presentation is not meant to be a reflection of some true, progressive history" (62).

In her proposed framework, Gruen wrote that the first story used to perpetuate the oppression of women and animals started with the emergence of male hunters in hominids, whose "destructive, competitive, and violent activity directed toward his prey is what originally distinguished man from animal and thus culture from nature" (62). The belief in the superiority of man over animals was thus based on the fact that man was capable of destroying animals which was proven by the discovery and continued use of nuclear weapons by western countries. Consequently, the "Myth of Man the Hunter" was created, negating the importance of animals and women in the rising cultural importance of man, as they cannot participate in the destructive behaviour which elevates the importance and position of man in the social hierarchical order.

In the second framework, Gruen theorized that as human societies advanced from hunting and gathering to agrarian communities with the development of agriculture; which led to the practice of domesticating animals that further distanced man from those he took under his control- woman, nature and animals. The advancement of agriculture led to the increase in demand for laborers to tend the fields, and women were soon treated as breeders, to produce more laborers which were growing in demand. Gruen thus concluded that:

> The shift from nomadic existence to agricultural practices – practices founded on a belief that the natural world could be controlled and manipulated – permitted the conceptualization of animals as sluggish meat-making machines and reluctant laborers, and women as breeders of children. (63)

In the third framework, Gruen suggests that with the advancement of agriculture, man started to develop religious beliefs out of their fear of natural weather conditions like droughts, heavy rainfall and storms that devastated their crops. Thus, the desire to control nature has intensified in man, and women, who were likened to nature with their distinctive ability to create life, were also feared. To appease their fear of women and nature, Gruen stated that man often sought "divine intervention" to control them both and had thus taken the following steps in their effort:

> In order to enlist the help of the "gods," various rituals were devised. By removing themselves from the natural activities of daily life, men believed they would be in closer touch with the "supernatural" powers that would protect them from nature. In religious mythology, if not an actual practice, women often served as symbols for the uncontrollable and harmful and thus were sacrificed in order to purify the community and appease the gods. Animals too were sacrificed, and it has been suggested that many animals were first domesticated not as food sources but as sacrificial creatures. Religious belief can thus also be seen as a particularly pernicious construction of women and animals as "others" to be used. (64)

In the fourth framework, Gruen pointed out that the scientific revolution of the sixteenth century "established what Carolyn Merchant describes as the "mechanistic world view," a view that, in combination with the development of the "experimental method," laid yet another conceptual foundation for the manipulation of animals and nature" (64):

> Detaching themselves from their study subjects, scientists used their supposed superiority to experiment on animals without any consideration for them: Domination and the imposition of order were formalized through the scientific objectification of reality. Objective scientists rely on an

> epistemology that requires detachment and distance. This detachment serves as justification for the division between active pursuer of knowledge and passive object for investigation, and establishes the power of the former over the latter. By devaluing subjective experience, reducing living, spontaneous beings to machines to be studied, and establishing an epistemic privilege based on detached reason, the mechanistic/scientific mindset firmly distinguished man from nature, woman, and animals. (64)

These four theoretical frameworks thus shed light on how women, animals, and nature was subjugated and oppressed in different stages of the history of mankind. Gruen went on explain how these theoretical frameworks were used to justify the horrific practices enforced upon animals and women all in the name of scientific progress, which in the end benefitted man the most. Gruen argued that most researches done in laboratories are redundant and that "billions of dollars and countless animal lives have been spent in duplicative, often painful, and generally insignificant animal experiments" (65). And for these experiments, Gruen wrote that up to 17-70 million "animals are killed in U.S. laboratories every year...A majority of the experiments are conducted to satisfy curiosity rather than to improve anyone's health" (65). Researchers detached themselves from the animals they've used as test subjects into "objects devoid of feelings, desires, and interests...Conceiving of an experimental subject as inferior, "subhuman" other – as a "specimen" meant to serve – lightens the burden of justifying the infliction of pain and death" (66).

This kind of detachment that researchers used while experimenting animals is also seen in the research for female contraceptives. Gruen mentioned that contraceptive companies in the U.S. have a tendency to produce and sell contraceptives that were harmful and dangerous for women as "women and animals are judged unable to comprehend science and are thus relegated to the position of passive object, their suffering and deaths are tolerable in the name of profit and progress" (67).

The practice of eating meat, according to Gruen, has also further relegates the position of women in society. It relegated them to the kitchen as they "prepare and cook; animals are prepared and cook. Both play subservient roles in the male-

dominated institution of meat eating" (72). Gruen also mentioned that female animals suffered the most in man's attempt to industrialize the production of meat-hens, pigs, and dairy cows suffer immeasurable cruelties at the hands of the industrialists. These animals suffer greatly as they are reduced to objects rather than living beings, incapable of feelings and rational thoughts like humans. This meat producing and eating culture has reduced and lessened the value of animals and women in a male dominated society as they are "reduced to objects to be consumed" (74).

These four theoretical frameworks that Lori Gruen argued are being used to justify the oppression of women, animals and nature can also be used as frameworks to study the power structure in the Mizo society as presented in the folktales, albeit on a much smaller scale. Mizo society, as seen from the selected folktales was an agrarian community with a very symbolic 'male chief' in every village to rule over them. As a patriarchal society, women, children, animals, and nature, are secondary to men. As Gruen mentioned in one of the frameworks, Mizo society has also domesticated animals for consumption and for religious sacrifices. Before the arrival of Christianity in Mizoram, the Mizo people have their own religious belief system. Every village has its own *Puithiam*[17]or *Bawlpu*, who would perform various rites, chanting different incantations, according to the needs of the villagers, and they used different domesticated animals for sacrifice. Dr. Laltluangliana Khiangte has explained this ritual and how the name "Sakhua" came to be:

> One of the pioneer Mizo pastors, Liangkhaia believed that the religion of the Mizos had its origin in the consciousness of their need for deliverance from physical illness and from other misfortunes which they attributed to evil-spirits. The earliest known sacrificial incantation indicates a time when they did not know whom they should invoke in time of need...At a later period the sacrificial incantation was addressed to "sa" and "khua". Liangkhaia, again, believed that the two objects of worship were eventually combined and became sakhua, a term which has been used for translating the English word 'religion.' 'Sa' indicates animal life and a male-swine (pig) was sacrificed for

[17] Puithiam: An exorcist; a priest (Lorrain 371).

this; and ‘khua’ means ‘nature or weather,’ for this, domesticated cow- gayal (mithun) was necessary. The combination of the words into ‘sakhua’ may mean, ‘life principles or basis of the Mizos. (17-18)

Therefore, looking at their religious beliefs through the lens of Ecofeminism, animals were subjugated in the Mizo society, where they were, domesticated in the first place; which only served the purpose of the humans. And secondly, they were used as sacrificial animals in their efforts to control the weather and nature according to their needs. Thus, confirming their belief that they had regarded animals as ‘others’, to be manipulated and used which justifies their oppression.

Since meat was hard to come by, good hunters were an asset to the community especially for the chief who would get a choice cut of the meat as a tax every time someone from his village killed an animal. Thus, successful hunters were applauded and adulated by the people and they were given a high rank in the society. Hunting was also directly linked to their religion as a hunter, who managed to kill a number of specific animals were allowed to perform a ceremony called, ‘khuangchawi’ and were thus believed to have a place in ‘Pialral’, a place where the spirits of the dead rested in the afterlife. This is especially significant since ‘khuangchawi’ was such an elaborate ceremony that only the richest men in the village could perform it, which sometimes was a feat possible only for the chief in a small village. They believed that ‘Pialral’ was the resting place or “the Paradise for the rich, mighty, brave or skillful. There everything was luxurious and abundant. Above all there was plenty of husked rice in Pialral, ready to be cooked” (Lloyd 13).‘Khuangchawi’ is one of the ceremonies performed in order to achieve the title of ‘thangchhuah’, a title which will ensure their access into ‘Pialral’ after their death. The man trying to achieve this title would perform elaborate rites with the priest, sacrificing a great number of animals and providing at least seven or more feasts for the whole village (Llyod 14). After these ceremonies and feasts, the man will be awarded the title ‘thangchhuah’ and “was allowed various privileges – to wear a Mizo cloth of a certain pattern, to put a window in the side of his house and build an extra room on the verandah. He would be distinguished among his fellow villagers and be qualified for happiness in the world to come” (Llyod 15).

The only other way to achieve this great title “thangchhuah” was through one’s prowess in hunting. The first way is only possible for a man of great wealth, like the chief of the village or one or two of his ministers, since many domesticated animals were needed to be slain, a large number of rice for the feasts and for making the alcohols to be served during the festivities, jewelries and even a gun to be given away to the villagers and so on. A successful hunter, on the other hand, might be able to achieve the title without all these extravagant feasts and Lloyd has written what it takes to become one:

> The other way of becoming a thangchhuah and obtaining these rewards and privileges was through skill in hunting. Mizos love to hunt, have abundance of jungle lore, and prize hunting skills very greatly. The task was to kill seven wild animals each of them dangerous and some of them very elusive. The list of animals varies. It is said to differ from place to place and from time to time. Here is the list of names given me by Zairema. The first four are included in every list as far as I know. They are a bear, a wild boar, a ‘gayal’ (a kind of buffalo), an eagle (muvanlai-the hawk in the middle of the sky!), a big snake, a barking deer and a flying lemur (vahluk)...The task of thangchhuah was a formidable one, especially in view of the primitive weapons they had until recently...Both kinds of thangchhuah went to Pialral. The cruel Pu Paula and his wife hid in terror as the thangchhuah went by especially from the “jungle” thangchhuah, for he would be escorted by the wild animals he had killed. (16)

For the common man, becoming a successful hunter was a must if they wanted to end up in Pialral after death. Hunting therefore became a very necessary and important part of their existence. Hunting expeditions were conducted by hunting parties during autumn when most of them were finished with their jhum works. For young men, it was a rite of passage to kill an animal in these hunts, which marked their entry into manhood. Hunters who killed a lot of animals were lauded by the community and were considered as heroes. In many of the folktales selected for this story, hunting scenes were depicted in them as it was a big part of their life. In Liandova and Tuaisiala’s story, we saw that the hunting party killed the python that was presumably resting after it swallowed a rich merchant. In another tale, titled

"Duhmanga and Dardini", Duhmanga was said to be a great hunter and warrior who travelled far and for long stretches of time to hunt animals and raid other villages, which was taken advantage of by his family and used it as a chance to divorce his wife, Dardini in his absence.

The fate of people in the afterlife, who did not manage to become "Thangchhuah pa" or "Thangchhuah nu", was depicted in the folktale, "Zawltlingi and Ngambawma". As mentioned in the previous chapter, Zawltlingi died when her lover accidentally burned her footprint in the hearth. As time passed after her death, monsoon came and *Zamzo*[18]began to spring up, he planted them on her grave. They began to bloom, but, every night, the flowers were picked by someone. So, Ngambawma decided to stake out the grave and catch whoever was stealing the flowers he had planted for his wife. Night came; two animals called Sa-fia (small animal resembling a marten), came and pick the flowers. Ngambawma caught them and threatened to kill them for picking the flowers. The animal couple begged him to let them go, but he refused and told them that he was going to kill them. The couple told him that they were sent by his wife, Zawltlingi.

Upon hearing this, Ngama decided to follow them and see his wife. The couple told him that a living person would not be able to go where they were going, as they would be going through steep mountains and rocky areas where he might not fit. However, he wasn't deterred by their protests; he told them that he would manage to follow them if he holds on to their tails. At last, they reached the place where the dead lives in the afterlife, "Mitthi khua" (mitthi-dead, khua=village, which literally translates to 'dead people's village'). When they reached the outskirts of the village, they saw people struggling to split *Telhawng*[19]with an axe. He asked what they were doing, and they told them that they were trying to split the wood for their mistress, Tlingi's floor. For a human, they were just a plant, so he offered to split it for them,

[18] Zamzo: Amaranthus - a family of brightly-coloured flowering plants including the cocks-comb and love-lies-bleeding. The Lushais have a tradition that these flowers dazzle the eyes of the evil spirits so much that they cannot see human beings standing near the plants. It was probably this belief which originally influenced the people to cultivate the Zamzo in the vicinity of their –jhoom-houses (Lorrain 558)

[19] Telhawng: The name of a wild plant with a stem which exhibits snake-like markings...the tuber is edible (ibid 442).

and did so easily with his bare hands. When they reached Tlingi's house, they were very happy to see each other.

However, in the realm of the dead, things were different as compared to the world of the living. For example, when they sleep at night, Tlingi slept facing the end of the bed, while Ngama slept facing the head of the bed. When Ngama accompanied a hunting party that hunted a bear, what appeared as a bear for the dead people was a small, furry looking caterpillar. When they circled the bear, and it ran towards Ngama, he crushed it with his foot. The dead folks were very impressed by his prowess and they hang the head of the bear at Tlingi's house. One day, they went to catch fish in the river, but, to Ngama's amazement, they just swept leaves from the river, as they were fish to them. So, Ngama easily caught the leaves and still has no idea they were fish for them. Soon, they caught enough fish and it was dark when they prepared to go home. They asked whether they should walk slow or fast, and let him choose either way. Without understanding what they meant with the choices, Ngama chose the faster way. But then, they all jumped at once and left him, thinking he would jump with them. When they reached home, Zawltlingi asked them where Ngama was, and they told her that he was the one who chose to jump. Knowing that he was probably lost in the dark, Tlingi sent the others to bring him home. Then they went back to him, turning into fireflies and light up the way for him. When he reached her house, she asked him if he had seen the people who came back for him, he told her that he did not, but followed fireflies to find his way back. She told him that those were his friends who came back to find him. Ngama then took out the many fish that he caught, thinking that they were leaves. When Tlingi roast them in the fire, they would get slightly roasted like a real fish would, but when Ngama did the same; they would burn up like real leaves would when exposed to a fire.

Exasperated by their differences, Tlingi told Ngama to go back to the world of the living, kill himself and then come back to live with her in the world of the dead. Thus, Ngama went back home, lied down in his bed and killed himself with a sword. When he went back to Tlingi's house as a dead man, he could finally see how she saw things. Amazingly, her house and bed were made of wood, which Tlingi told him were made possible by him. There was a bear's head in her house, which Tlingi told him was killed by him. The surprise did not end there, when they sat down to

dinner, Tlingi took out many dried fish. Ngama was amazed by all these things as he now saw everything like her, and they live happily ever after. From this folktale, one can see that pre-Christian Mizo society believes that the afterlife was not that different from their normal lives. They were still engaged in the same activities that they used to do before their death.

Therefore, in order to live a life of leisure in the afterlife, with no earthly responsibilities like jhum work, foraging in the forest, hunting dangerous wild animals and the many chores that inflicted their human lives; one need to achieve that status of "Thangchhuah". Which would not only improve their social status for the rest of their lives, it would also mean they would rest in the lap of luxury in the afterlife. Hunting was thus, not only necessitated by their need for food, but they were also driven by their desire to improve their social status, thus they not only hunt out of need but also out of their 'desire' and it was a sport for them as well as animals were seen as targets to be hit, and those who hit the most successfully are considered to be skilled and looked up to in the society. Marti Kheel highlighted the problem with this kind of hunting:

> Yet, there is a major logical flaw in the notion of hunting as a voluntary activity, in that only one of the "participants" has chosen to compete. The hunter selects a "wild" animal as his target in order to create the illusion of freedom, but the animal does not consent to play, or be, his "game." The experience of the animal is rendered nonexistent or morally irrelevant. (32)

Hunting wild animals thus in part, is an act of dominance over animals by men. The animals are considered as 'others' and they have absolutely no say in the entire process. The whole thing was orchestrated by men. Thus, killing these animals is justified on the fact that they are identified to be lower in the hierarchical structure where man is at the top. In the first theory of the four theoretical frameworks, Lori Gruen has explained that the hunting culture developed by man has been used as one of the frameworks that has been used to justify the oppression of animals as "the act of killing was what established the superiority of man over animal and that the value of such behaviour was naturalized and exalted" (62).

However, this is not the only aspect of nature dominated by men. Ecofeminism has identified the link between the oppression of women and nature as man has control and power over both, which he manipulates to meet his own needs. As an agricultural society, every year, land was distributed amongst the villagers by the chief, and each household slashed the trees, burn them and used the land to grow rice and vegetables. This practice is called jhumming or shifting cultivation. After a few years, when the land is no longer fertile, they will move on to the next untouched forest and started the process all over again. This practice devastated the natural land and turned them into bare lands.

As seen from the folktales in the previous chapters, agriculture was the main occupation of the people and their lives revolved around it. During the months of December and January, forests were evaluated and distributed among the villagers. Trees were cut down and vegetation was also cleared during these months as well. During February and March, the rest of the debris in the fields was burnt, and the next two months were used to sow the seeds of various vegetables and rice. From the folktales, we can see that all able-bodied members of the society were engaged throughout the year in their fields. Mauruangi and Bingtaii were both given plots of land to work, Liandova used to work at people's jhum to earn a living before they had their own plot, Sichangneii flew back to her home in the sky while her husband was working at their jhum, Ngaiteii and her grandmother were working together at their jhum beside the river where her father drowned; their stories and lives were intertwined with their agricultural activities.

The acceptance of man's superiority over nature has often led to natural disasters that were preventable. Cutting down trees, manipulating the earth for cultivation thus robbing wild animals of their natural habitat has proven time and again to have dire consequences. Even though there has been contrasting views about the impact of shifting cultivation, it is undeniable that it has caused soil erosion, deforestation, air pollution due to the burning of the land, loss of local flora and fauna, and loss of natural habitat for animals. Man has dominated nature by transforming and manipulating the physical landscape to serve his own needs.

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The previous chapters have established that folktales and folklores reflected the norms and values of a society, which has been passed on from one generation to the next. The values of the people that are reflected in the tales are still at the root of modern Mizo society's values and thought processes. One could argue that Mizo society transitioned to a modern society with the arrival of the Welsh missionaries who brought Christianity and later created the alphabet for the people. This is possible due to the British government's colonial presence in India:

> The history of modern Mizoram begins rather late in the nineteenth century, 1898 to be precise, when it was added to the British empire. Thereafter, it was relegated to virtual oblivion lasting well into the post-Independence years. After 20 long-drawn out years of insurgency, Mizoram became India's 23rd state in 1987; Aizawl is both its capital, and the headquarters of a district bearing that name; the other two districts are Lunglei and Chhimtuipui. (Singh, Intro.)

Chieftainship was replaced by a democratic society where the people elected their own leaders. The chief and his council of advisors were replaced by the Chief Minister and his ministers. In the history of Mizoram, there have been five Chief Ministers in office who have held office from 1972 till date:

1. C. Chhunga: 03.05.1972 – 10.05.1977

2. Brig. T. Sailo: 02.06.1978 – 10.11.1978

3. Brig. T. Sailo: 08.05.1979 – 04.05.1984

4. Lalthanhawla: 05.05.1984 – 20.08.1986

5. Laldenga: 21.08.1986 – 19.02.1987

6. Laldenga: 20.2.1987 – 07.09.1988

7. Lalthanhawla: 24.01.1989 – 07.12.1993

8. Lalthanhawla: 08.12.1993 – 03.12.1998

9. Zoramthanga: 04.12.1998 – 9.12.2008

10. Lalthanhawla: 11.12.2008 – 12.12.2018

11. Zoramthanga: 15.12.2018 – Till Date.

As we can see from this list, even though Chieftainship has been replaced, the person who remained at the top of the governing body remained the same, a man, for a span of 44 years. Even though the number of female electorates has been mostly the same as male electorates, there has been a glaring lack of female politicians in a sea of male politicians. The governance of the state and drafting and enforcing policies are completely in the hands of men. The short history of women's participation and success in the political world is mentioned as follows:

> After India gained independence, the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was created under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India on April 25, 1952 (Lushai implies Mizo in Colonial documents). It was upgraded to a Union Territory in 1972 and granted statehood as Mizoram in 1987. From the time of the creation of the Lushai Hills District Council in 1952 until 1986, a few women became legislators by nomination and election. The Constituent Assembly fixed the strength of Lushai District Council at 24 members of which 18 were elected and six nominated. Mrs. Lalziki Sailo and Mrs. Hmingliani were nominated as legislators during the District Council period from 1952 to 1957. During this period, this region was a Union Territory and the Legislative Assembly was comprised of 30 elected and three nominated members. Four women were nominated and elected to the Legislative Assembly during the Union Territory period. Miss Saptawni and Mrs. Rokungi occupied nominated seats in 1972 and 1984. Mrs. Thanmawii, elected in 1978 as well as 1979, became the first female elected member of the Legislative Assembly while Mrs.Thansiami was nominated in 1978 and later elected in 1984. The post-1987 Mizoram State Legislative Assembly has had only two female legislators during the 27 years of statehood. Mrs. Lalhlimpuii was elected in 1987 and Miss. Vanlalawmpuii in 2014. (Mary Vanlalthanpuii 52-53)

There was a gap of 30 years between the first female Minister, Mrs. Lalhlimpuii and the second one, Miss. Vanlalawmpuii. Even though their achievements are important milestones for women in the world of Mizoram politics, they are still very small compared to the achievements of the male politicians through the years. The lack of female representatives in the state government is a telling indictment that women are still regarded as secondary to men in Mizo society. Young women are not encouraged enough to take up a political career, since politics is still regarded as a man's domain. The political practices of the pre-Christian society where women were never expected nor allowed to take a seat in the chief's council are still the guiding principles of modern Mizo political sentiments.

Besides the state government, one of the biggest social institutions in modern Mizo society is the church. The first missionary who visited Mizoram was Rev. William Williams in on March 15, 1891. He was a missionary from the Welsh Presbyterian Church. After this came the two most well-known missionaries from the Arthington Aborigines Mission, Rev. J.H. Lorrain and Rev. F. W. Savidge on January 11, 1894. After the initial introduction to Christianity by these missionaries, different denominations such as – Presbyterians, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Roman Catholics, the Salvation Army, United Pentecostal Church and many other smaller denominations have cropped up in the state. In her book, *Being Mizo*, Joy L.K. Pachuau explains how Mizo life is inextricably interconnected with the church as she mentioned that "Time in Mizoram is governed by church time, in the span of both a day and a lifetime" (140). She explained that for a Mizo Christian, their life is centred on the church activities, from morning prayer meetings to night congregations except on Thursday and Friday nights. On a Sunday, all weekly activities are paused and most church members attend the morning, afternoon and night services. The calendar of any church is filled through the year with activities and events culminating with the celebration of Christmas. Therefore, churches serve as the main centre of not only religious activities "but also the focal point of socio-cultural interaction, in the virtual absence of any other facilities for public entertainment…or other non-religious social gatherings" (143). Among these churches, one of the biggest is the Presbyterian Church with 620,311 members

during the year 2019-2020. An administrative body called the Mizoram Synod, known and referred to mainly as 'Synod' by the locals run the church with its headquarters at Mission Veng, Aizawl. The decisions and rules made by the Synod has directly influenced the lives of its members which is almost half of the population of the whole state estimated at around 1.2 million; the population of Mizoram according to the 2011 census was 1,091,206.

With the arrival of Christianity, and the Christian missionaries advocating for the education of women, it looked like women's position in society was finally going to be uplifted. Before the arrival of the missionaries, there was no formal educational system in the Mizo society. Children were taught by their parents in their homes, while young men received knowledge and traditions of the community from the older men inside Zawlbuk. History was passed on to the next generation through stories and tales. The Mizo alphabet was then created by the missionaries in their effort to convert the people to Christianity. They also opened a small school, which was attended by the chiefs and their sons, with the exclusion of women (Lalthansangi 37). After this initial effort to introduce modern education to the people, the new missionaries started schools in 1898, but the majority of the students were boys, while girls were kept at home to help their mothers with household chores. Lalthansangi has explained the reasons why the literacy rate of girls was much lower than boys for a long time:

> Despite the activities of the missionaries towards education, there was slow progress for women. This maybe mainly the parents' attitude that women were meant for domestic chores only...The main factors responsible for this negative attitude were the responsibility shouldered by women and the girl child in the family related to household chores and looking after the younger siblings respectively. Another factor responsible for this attitude is the ignorance of parents about the benefit of educating their daughters. (37-38)

Education was thus, for a long time considered to be for boys, and most young girls were excluded from the field. Another misconception of the parents was that since daughters will get married and live with different families, some of them

consider it a waste of time and money to educate a girl who would soon become a daughter-in-law. Thus, women were seen as properties, whose owners would soon change, and the previous owners felt that it was a waste of resources to improve their skills and quality as the hands of ownership would soon change. Most parents hedge their bets on their sons who would carry on their name, especially the youngest who would inherit the house and take care of them in their old age.

With the passing of time and the efforts of the missionaries, more and more girls started to attend school. Women were given education and trained as nurses and midwives becoming important instruments to spread Christianity in the communities. They also collect rice from every household which they then sell, becoming one of the most important sources of revenue for the church to date; hundreds of women missionaries spread across the country. However, Mary Vanlalawmpuii writes that gender disparity and inequality are still prevalent in the church (57).

One of the most glaring examples of gender inequality in the church is that pastors in the Presbyterian Church have been predominantly male, and even though there has been no written rule that forbids women to enter the profession, it is socially accepted that men be the religious leaders. Thus, women who have finished their B.D. degrees have opted for teaching positions in various institutions. The most prominent theological college in Mizoram is called Aizawl Theological College, started by the missionaries in 1907. Women were given admission to the college in 1968, sixty-one years after the college was opened, but, female students who completed the course were denied ordinations as pastors unlike their male counterparts (Mary Vanlalawmpuii 57). Till today, there never has been a serious pushback from women about this issue even though the lack of female perspective and voice in so many decisions made by the church that directly influenced the lives of so many people is harmful to those termed as “others”. The suggestion to ordain female pastors was rejected by the Church Assembly in 2001 and again in 2011 “on the grounds that society is not ready to accept females as pastors; there was also a strong opinion among the majority of the delegates in the Assembly, the whole Mizo society might not be ready to accept female pastors” (Mary Vanlalawmpuii 58).

This sentiment is ironic in the sense that the combined effort of the female members of the church has been one of the largest income generators for the Presbyterian Church. A practice called “Buhfaitham” or “a handful of rice”, where every household puts away a handful of rice every time, they cook a meal in a tin or storage box. This was collected weekly by a female member appointed by the leaders, and they will be sold to the community after every appointed collector submitted their portion. The whole process, from saving a handful of rice before cooking to collecting and selling the rice has been the efforts of female members only without any involvement from the male members. This practice was started in Mizoram by Mrs. Williams in 1904 who borrowed the idea from Khasi women and the initial sum collected from the practice was used to fund the building of a chapel and society for Bible Women (Mary Vanlalthanpuii 79). This project has generated so much income for the church that it has been used to fund other projects as well. Mary Vanlalthanpuii has explained how it is one of the most important sources of income for the church:

> ‘The handful of rice’ project produces more than the estimated budget proposed by the Synod every year...The capital income for the project, submitted to the Synod headquarters was utilized to support the church and its workers, missionary fields and different Synod departments...Therefore, the project constitutes a primary resource for the Synod. (83)

It would not be an exaggeration to say that this project; which has been kept alive due to the collective efforts of the female church members, is the backbone of the Synod. Sadly, their contributions still have not earned them a seat in the highest decision-making bodies of the church.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Sherry B. Ortner has proposed three types of data to use as evidence that women are treated as inferior to men:

> a) elements of cultural ideology and informants’ statements that explicitly devalue women, according them, their roles, their tasks, their products, and their social milieu less prestige than men and the male correlates; b)

> symbolic devices, such as the attribution of defilement, which may be interpreted as making a statement of inferior valuation; and c) social rules that prohibit women from participating in or having contact with some realm in which the highest powers of the society are felt to reside. (Ortner 7-8)

Ortner argued that the presence of one of these is sufficient enough to prove that women are considered inferior to men in society. Thus, if we look at today's Mizo society, it is still very hard for women to break the walls that guarded the realm of men, where the highest power of the society resides, for example, the church, as explained in the previous points. Even though the Government of India has taken steps to include more women in politics, this movement is still in its infancy and women are still at the periphery when it comes to making policies for the people. Many have claimed that women are treated equally in the past and in today's Mizo society. However, if we look at this from a different angle, it is clear that women have never really entered the haloed space where the most important decisions have been made.

Another example of male dominance could be seen in the Zawlbuk tradition. As mentioned earlier, *Zawlbuk* was a dormitory for young men, led by *Val Upa*, or Elder, who was appointed as the leader by the village chief. A *Val Upa* was someone who was respected by the community, especially by the young men he had to lead in the chief's stead. Every village has Zawlbuk (a dormitory for young men) located near the chief's house which is in the middle of the village. Every young man even married ones slept at *Zawlbuk* so that in case of a sudden attack from other villages or a wild animal attack, they would be easily assembled to protect the villagers against any threats. Besides the chief's house, *Zawlbuk* is the most important place where matters regarding various issues of the village were discussed and decisions were made. Women were never included in these discussions as they were not allowed to enter *Zawlbuk* in the first place. Thus, for every decision made inside Zawlbuk, the decisions were made according to the opinions and perspectives of men only. There were no female representatives in any of these discussions. And the chief rarely intervened in these discussions and decisions made inside Zawlbuk.

In modern society, the institution of Zawlbuk is replaced by an NGO called the Young Mizo Association (YMA). YMA was established on 15th June 1935 with the main headquarter at Aizawl, it was initially called the Young Lushai Association. Today, it has branches and members outside Mizoram such as Tripura, Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya. The first president of the organisation was Rev. Lewis Evans. The Central YMA (CYMA) has established their main office and headquarter at Aizawl, and from there controls the various activities conducted by the sub-headquarters and the branches all over the state and outside Mizoram state. Next to the church, YMA has one of the biggest influences in the daily lives of the Mizo people. At times, it acts as an intermediary between the government and the citizens, and the daily lives of the Mizo people is intricately interwoven with the association. In her article, "Towards Understanding Civil Society-Government Relationship: the Study of Young Mizo Association (YMA) in Mizoram," Laldinpuii Ralte has mentioned the different roles played by YMA in the Mizo community:

(1) The Social roles

(2) The Economic roles

(3) The Cultural roles

(4) The Political roles.

YMA has played a vital role in the social life of the people. In her article, Laldinpuii Ralte has highlighted the various activities performed by YMA to improve the social life of the people, such as teaching the masses the importance of hygiene and organising debates and group discussions to enlighten and broaden the views of the youth. In the case of a devastating famine in 1959, YMA stepped up and helped those that were starving to its best ability. YMA also repaired and build houses for the less fortunate or when homes were destroyed by natural disasters. It is also the members of the YMA that stepped up when natural calamities happened in the community. When a member of a community passed away, YMA members arrange the house, and the benches and make the tea for the mourners, they also dig the graves for the burial (27).

Economically, YMA has taken steps to impart the importance of self-reliance to the community. In order to achieve this aim, Laldinpuii Ralte has written that in 1938, YMA has taken steps to popularise Mizo tobacco and the campaign became so successful that in those days, one could not find tobacco products from another states in Aizawl. Additionally, YMA also once passed a resolution in one of their conferences that every Mizo must learn spinning and wear clothes made by them. In order to keep the Mizo youths abreast with the modern world, YMA also offered free computer courses and free Mason training to improve their earning capabilities (28).

She also mentioned that YMA has played a very important role in keeping the traditional dances of the Mizo people alive. It has also taken steps to popularise the Mizo traditional costume and encourage women to wear the traditional 'puan' on social gatherings such as weddings, funerals or cultural festivals. Moreover, YMA has taken several steps to preserve the Mizo language especially since it has been declared as one of the endangered languages by UNESCO (28).

Finally, Laldinpuii Ralte has also mentioned that YMA has played an important political role in society. With the proactive actions taken by the educated leaders of the association, the first political party called the Mizo Union was formed in April, 1946. YMA has also taken steps to make sure that elections in the state are clean and democratic by teaching the public proper behaviours during elections and making sure that people turned up to vote (29).

Thus, from Laldinpuii Ralte's article, one can see that every aspect of the lives of the Mizo people is deeply connected with the activities of YMA. Like the church, YMA is one of the wheels that keep the Mizo society in motion. One can argue that it has wielded a lot of power and control in Mizo society. Unlike its predecessor, Zawlbuk, which was only meant for young men, any Mizo above the age of 14 can be a member. The inclusion of women in the membership, their contributions, and their efforts in the activities of the association seemed promising for the female members. Nevertheless, a woman has never been voted as its President in its 86 years of history, even though female members made up half of the association. Women still occupy a secondary position in this organization even

though the activities and goals would not have been met without the contributions and support of its female members.

Another NGO, Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) was established on July 6th, 1974, the main headquarters is at Treasury Square, Aizawl. Like YMA, it is one of the biggest voluntary organizations in Mizoram, with seven sub-headquarters, 16 blocks, and 700 branches. It is an organization comprised solely of women, with the aim to empower women as one of its main goals. In the article titled, "Emergence of Women from 'Private' to 'Public': A Narrative of Power Politics from Mizoram", Anup Shekhar Chakraborty mentioned the various steps taken by the MHIP to uplift the position of women in the Mizo society:

> The MHIP declared the period 1997-2001 as 'Women's Year' in Mizoram for creation of awareness on issues such as 'the low status of women in the society' and 'to review the Mizo customary law'. In this regard, the MHIP had been touring the length and breadths of the state covering even the most remote and interior villages and conducting workshops, seminars and group discussions. These women's organisations attempt to consolidate the position of women in the Zo/Mizo society and resurrect them from the common disadvantages scripted by the patriarchy...and in different degrees have fought for women's rights ranging from Customary Rights, Property Rights to Rights of Inheritance etc. These organisations also reflect the mustering of women's voices on the lines of common victimhood and common disadvantages in the Zo/Mizo society against the dictates of the patriarchy. (34)

Modern Mizo women have made much progress in various fields and have proven to be just as capable as their male counterparts in most fields. MHIP has also been working tirelessly to uplift the position of women and children in Mizo society, and some of their goals have been achieved through the years. Women are everywhere, in government offices, markets, academic institutes, and so on. However, with all the activities and steps taken by MHIP to improve the position of women in the economic, social, and political fields, women are rarely elected in the

position of a decision maker, in any organization, social and religious institutions, which will be the true testament of their success in their efforts to uplift women.

In the tale of "Duhmanga and Dardini", even though Duhmanga made it very clear that he chose Dardini over the girl that his family chose for him, his family constantly throw her out of their house whenever he was absent for a long time. In those days, young men used to hunt for many days deep in the forest or raid other villages and be gone for a long period of time. Dardini had no power over her life as a wife and as a daughter-in-law. Her position as a married woman was respected by her in-laws only when her husband was physically present with her. Her dignity as a woman, a wife and a human being did not mean anything without her husband's presence. Duhmanga's family easily divorced her as soon as he was away, and took in the girl that they chose for him just as easily. However, as soon as Duhmanga came back from his trips, he just as easily took Dardini home with him. After a while, her mother was worried for her safety and feared for her life when she was once again, kicked out of her marital home by her in-laws while her husband was away; she moved away to another village with her. And when Duhmanga came back from his trip, he found that his wife had been forced out of their village and went in search of her. But he was too late because Dardini had already passed away in childbirth, presumably from all the stress she had to endure during her pregnancy. She was treated like this because she was a woman and her value is in direct relation to her husband, "Women and children have long been treated as the exclusive property of husbands- his woman, and therefore his vagina to access, his womb to fill, his sons born to carry on his name, lineage, work, and property" (Kemmerer 70).

In modern Mizo society, a woman has relative freedom over her choice of husband. However, since society still practiced a joint-family system, most daughters-in-law have trouble adjusting to their new life with a new family, in a different environment away from her own family that she has lived with until then. For a married woman, as long as she lived with her husband in his family home, she will never have any claim on the property. She will not be treated like their real daughter; she will forever be the daughter-in-law, not exactly an outsider but not a 'real' family member. She could be told to go back to her parent's house at any given

time due to an argument with her husband or any other family members. There was no security about her position in her in-law's house; it could change at any moment in time. Married women, who went back to their parent's home due to a disagreement with their in-laws, their husband, or divorce, are not that welcome anymore, especially if she does not have any income. She would mainly be considered a burden for her aging parents and her brother, who inherited their parent's home. Due to this, many women stayed with their abusive in-laws and abusive husbands. The plight of Dardini in the folktale is still a sad reality for many modern Mizo women.

In the case of divorce and inheritance, women still didn't fare that well as compared to the old days. For example, even if the daughter-in-law spent her own money and contributed to building a house for her in-laws, the house will never be in her name, unless it was under very special circumstances. Her efforts and contributions would probably be taken for granted, and if she happened to get a divorce, she would be lucky if she could walk out with the goods or furniture that she brought with her at the start of their marriage. MHIP has taken the initiative to improve the position of women regarding inheritance and divorce laws but has failed to make much progress in that area. This is why women representatives are necessary for the legislation as the two women who had been elected has made some progress during their short career:

> For instance, Mrs. Hmingliani, in the Second District Council in 1957, worked for changes in the customary law. Because of her efforts, women can inherit property if wills are properly executed although inheritance, under Mizo customary law, passes through the male line. Similarly, the representation of Miss Vanlalawmpuii in the Legislative Assembly in 2014 paved the way for the implementation of 'The Mizo Marriage, Divorce, and Inheritance of Property Act 2014,' which gave women greater property rights than existed in customary law. (Mary Vanlalthanpuii 53)

Thus, in order to make changes that will make deep impacts in the lives of women regarding their rights, it is clear that women's rights still need a champion at

the legislative level. However, as a patriarchal society, women have never been encouraged to take part in politics; it still remained the domain of men till this day, even though women proved to be just as capable as men in many other fields.

The practice of men congregating in places where women are not welcome, like, the chief's house and Zawlbuk, where they discussed policies and make decisions that influenced the lives of the rest of the villagers; without any representative to voice the opinion of women is still the norm in today's society, not just in Mizoram. The modern Mizo world still functions mainly on the thoughts and ideas of a male centric ideology. If one looks at different countries around the world, most world leaders are also male, with a few women who occupied important positions in the political world. If we look at India, the only female Prime Minister is Indira Gandhi (1917-1984) and no other woman has managed to achieve this feat for more than a hundred years. In an amazing feat, Droupadi Murmu has become the President of India since 2022, fifteen years after Pratibha Patil who hold the office from 2007 to 2012.

From the folktales mentioned in the previous chapters, it is very clear that the value of women was weighed according to their physical beauty, their ability to do hard labour, and their skill in weaving and handloom. She was expected to work tirelessly for her in-laws, woke up at the break of dawn to cook, clean and collect water; work all day at the jhum with the men, and then cook dinner for the rest of the family. After dinner, the men of the family went to Zawlbuk and from there went on to court the young ladies of the village. Thus, a woman's life was centred on the hearth. Her opinions and thoughts were never put into consideration as there were never any women present when important decisions were made, since her daily life was confined inside the house, with unending chores and childcare. When she did go outside, she went to fetch water and firewood or go to work in the family jhum. She did not have "leisure" time like the men- who congregate after dinner at Zawlbuk, then went to court young women, or go hunting with their friends during autumn when they had already harvested their crops and they no longer have any pressing work at their jhums anymore. However, for women, this season was used to work on

their handloom and prepare clothes for the coming winter, or for their wedding dowry.

This belief that we have seen in these folktales is still the driving force behind modern Mizo society. Even in a household where both the husband and wife are office workers with more or less the same workload, the wife is still expected to do most of the housework- cleaning, cooking, washing, and taking care of the children. It could also be argued that daughters and sons are treated differently due to gender when it comes to certain chores and roles in the household. Girls were expected to help their mothers with different chores in the house, while most parents never find it necessary to teach those skills to their sons. Lisa Kemmerer has explained this dualistic thinking that divides male and female or male and not-male, as category "A" and "Not A", which resulted in "a hierarchy favouring those in the "A" category, who thereby gain esteem, power, and control in relation to those in the "Not A" category" (68).

Thereby, even in a relatively modern Mizo society, women are still considered to be inferior to their male counterparts:

> All beings and things that have been lumped together in the "Not A" category – women, nature, nonhuman animals – are unjustly denigrated and oppressed by, on behalf of, and in relation to those in the "A" category. This situation simultaneously invites and justifies "A" control. Those in the "A" category are apt to be thought to be *rightly* in charge, to *rightly* gain advantages, and to *rightly* exploit "Not A" individuals – to be sexist, anthropocentric, and speciesist. For example, if women are understood to be more about bodies than minds, and more about emotion than reason, it makes sense that males are favoured for higher education and many job opportunities. It thereby makes sense that women be relegated to the home, domestic labor, reproduction, and to child bearing. If women are less cultured and less civilized, it makes sense that men control their lives. Similarly, if cows and chickens lack reason and culture, and are more about bodies than minds, they are also rightly controlled by those in the "A" category, and used for "higher" purposes by those in the "A" category. (Kemmerer 68-69)

Thus, animals, who are in the "Not A" category were easily oppressed and manipulated as well. Large-scale industrial farming of domesticated animals is not yet practiced in Mizoram. However, domesticated animals like pigs, cows, chickens, goats, and lambs are being bred solely for human consumption. And the way these animals are slaughtered is still very questionable.

Even though hunting is not practiced for religious beliefs like before anymore, it is still very prevalent, especially in rural areas. Different NGOs and the government have taken steps to create awareness among its citizens about the protection of wildlife and the preservation of nature in general. If one travels to rural areas, it is not an uncommon sight to see men carrying guns on their way to hunt. In their article, *Wildlife Rehabilitation in Mizoram, Northeastern, India,* Lallianpuii Kawlni and Chhandama Chhakchhuak has stated that in their efforts to save and rehabilitate injured wild animals, that hunting is rampant in the state of Mizoram (3). In the article written by Vanneihthanga Vanchhawng on 16thFebruary, 2016, the association for Environmental Preservation even request the State Board for Wildlife to control the imprudent use of unlicensed Air Guns to hunt birds. According to the president of ASEP at the time, K. Lalmuansanga, Air Guns were freely sold in Mizoram without proper licensing, and these guns were used in villages around Aizawl by hunters who came to these nearby villages to hunt as sport (zoarchive.wordpress.com).

As Ecofeminists has stated that there is a direct correlation between the subjugation of women and nature, the treatment of nature in modern Mizo society still has a long way to go, in terms of ecological friendly behaviour and practices. In Mizoram there are two national parks –

1. Murlen National Park: Total Area (km2) -100
2. Phawngpui National Park: Total Area (km2) -50

There are eight wildlife sanctuaries in addition to these two national parks:

1. Dampa Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 500
2. Khawnglung Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 35
3. Lengteng Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 60
4. Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 110
5. Pualreng Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 50

6. Tawi Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 35.75
7. Thorangtlang Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 50
8. Tokalo Wildlife Sanctuary: Total Area (km2) – 250

According to SOER 2016, Mizoram forests have suffered serious degradation in both quantitative and qualitative aspects due to shifting cultivation, forest fires, unregulated felling, over-exploitation of forest resources, and changes in land use patterns (27). The Dampa Tiger Reserve has been dubbed "a tiger reserve without tigers" as no tigers have been spotted since 2014. An image of a tiger was captured in a camera trap in June 2021 for the first time in several years (sentinelassam.com). Animals are being hunted with air rifles, homemade traps, slingshots, etc. In his book "A Pocket Guide to the Birds of Mizoram", noted ornithologist, Dr. Anuwaruddin Choudhury has mentioned that out of more than 500 bird species found in Mizoram, there are four critically endangered species, one endangered, five species are under the 'vulnerable' category, seven species near threatened and nine restricted (oneindia.com).

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This study examines various acts of domination in Mizo folklore from an Ecofeminist point of view. For the purpose of the study, thirteen (13) folktales have been selected and analysed. These folktales were carefully selected to shed light on the position of women, children, animals and nature in pre-Christian Mizo society. As a patriarchal society, the society was governed on male-centric ideals which celebrated the accepted male behaviours and activities while denigrating anything associated with women. Seen by many as a somewhat idyllic society where the villagers were seen living in peace under the benevolent rule of the chief, those who were unfortunate enough to be 'not men' did not share the same privileges that men enjoyed in the society. From this basis alone, one can say that women were dominated by men in the pre-Christian Mizo society.

Folklores are a reliable source of information about the people's culture, religious beliefs and societal practices. Mizo people have used the oral tradition to passing on information, knowledge and stories to the next generation. These oral stories became one of the most important historical documents to gain insight to the society of pre-Christian or pre-colonial Mizo society. The folktales of the community have been passed down orally from one generation to the next, and even though some of these tales vary according to the region, their essence remains the same. Mizoram is one of the eight north-eastern states of India – Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Assam, Sikkim, Nagaland and Meghalaya; that comprises of more than 200 different tribes across these eight states. Excluding Meghalaya, which is a matrilineal society, the rest of the north-eastern states are patriarchal societies.

As one of the patriarchal societies, pre-Christian Mizo society functioned according to masculine ideals and thoughts. Male attributes such as hunting skills, skills in warfare were celebrated, men were expected to be bold, fearless; and womanizing skills made them the envy of other men. They believed that if they managed to sleep with a woman before they got married, the fearsome *Pu Pawla* would not injure them at the gate of "mitthi khua" (village of the dead) when they die. And if they succeeded in this venture to bed women, they became the envy of other men, and were considered to be the 'man'. On the other hand, women were expected to be meek, silent, obedient, and hardworking and to remain virtuous until

they got married. While these male attributes were celebrated in the society, for example, if a man showed exceptional skills in hunting or warfare or show a great feat of *tlawmngaihna*[20], his efforts would be acknowledged, and during feasts, he would be given *Nopui*, a cup which is given only to extraordinary men, and be the first to drink in a crowd. This is considered to be a great honour in the society. On the other hand, female attributes and her roles given to her by the society were never publicly acknowledged. Women were given no opportunity to prove themselves or to be recognized for their special skills, no public space was spared for them. She was expected to silently and tirelessly work for the family in the house and in the jhum, raise the children and take care of the domesticated animals.

Ecofeminist theory is then applied to identify the various acts of domination in society. Ecofeminism was a term first used by Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, urging women to rise up to the challenges faced by women and nature in the face of patriarchy, as it was already a matter of death and life. Ecofeminism is a combination of 'ecology' and 'feminism'; it is a social movement and a theory that finds that there is a strong link in the ideas used to justify the domination and oppression of women and nature. Ecofeminists believed that the patriarchal thoughts and practices of the western white man were responsible for the oppression of those considered to be beneath them. Carolyn Merchant has written how the concept was popularised as a movement in her book Earthcare:

> Developed by Ynestra King at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont about 1976, the concept became a movement in 1980 with a major conference on "Women and Life on Earth" held in Amherst, Massachusetts and the ensuing Women's Pentagon Action to protest anti-life nuclear war and weapons development. During the 1980s cultural feminists in the United States injected new life into ecofeminism by arguing that both women and nature could be liberated together. (5)

Ecofeminists rejected the ideologies of western patriarchal worldview, which oppresses women and nature simultaneously, and women all over the world

[20] Tlawmngaihna: To practice self-sacrifice, unselfishness, self-denial, etc. (Lorrain 514).

challenges the destructive and mechanistic practices that systematically destroyed the environment. Instead of one group of human species having ‘power over’ every other living being, Carolyn Merchant proposes a more peaceful approach:

> My own approach is a partnership ethic that treats humans (including male partners and female partners) as equals in personal, household, and political relations and humans as equal partners with (rather than controlled-by or dominant over) nonhuman nature. (8)

Thus, Ecofeminism rejected androcentric worldview and actions, which have been proven to be harmful, and fight against a dualistic worldview that pitted man against women, man against nature and so on. This dualistic worldview has been used to justify the domination of those who were considered to be less than ‘man’, those that were considered to be not rational like women and nature. Ecofeminists vehemently fought against the use of nuclear power that often-caused unmitigated disasters, militarism that took the lives of millions of people over the course of history which has its roots in androcentric worldviews, capitalism, colonialism, materialism and other man-made practices and inventions that are systemically used to oppress those considered to be ‘less than’ man.

Folktales are chosen for this study as they are great archives for the culture, practices and beliefs of a particular society at a particular time, as folktales are created by the individuals living in that society. As Roger J. Davies and Osamu Ikeno have written, reading folktales help people connect to their “history, traditions and spirit of their culture...Folktales also reflect the national characteristics of a people...” (175). For this reason, these folktales are used as a reflection of the morals and characteristics of the pre-Christian Mizo society, and their treatment of women, children, animals and nature.

One can agree up to a certain point that Mizo women enjoyed relative freedom in the pre-Christian Mizo society. Unlike many societies in other parts of India, that practice female infanticide, girl babies were very accepted in the society.

They work alongside men in their jhum, in a practice called *lawm*[21], where they help out each other on their jhum on different weeks or alternate days. In those days, the Mizos have three important festivals – *Chapchar Kut*[22], *Pawl Kut*[23] and *Mim Kut*[24], and even during these festivals, men and women freely spend time together and collaborated on the various activities demanded by the festivals. As mentioned before, men also courted women at their home after dinner, mostly in groups; and if the woman is very beautiful and entertaining, it is very possible that she might have full house most nights. In case of marriages, women have relative freedom over their choice of spouse, as long as the parents approve of their choices.

Even so, these freedoms enjoyed by women in the Mizo society are rather limited and restricted. From an Ecofeminist point of view, these surface freedoms enjoyed by women did not go too far. Ecofeminism has identified various ways in which women are dominated by the patriarchal society. These traits of dominations are sometimes physical, ideological, social, economic, psychological or verbal at times.

Since these different traits of dominations are generally hard to spot for a casual observer, Chapter II studied in depth if women were dominated or oppressed in pre-Christian Mizo society as represented in the folktales. Out of the fourteen folktales selected for this study, twelve folktales were used in this chapter to analyze how women were portrayed in the folktales. The lives of eleven women were portrayed in these tales- Ngaitei, Chemteii, Kungawrhi, Mauruangi, Sichangneii, Rimenhawihi, Chawngchilhi, Tualvungi, Lianchhiari, Dardini, Zawltlingi.

Among these women, Ngaitei was the only one who did not get married, in fact, in the folktale; Ngaitei was portrayed as a young girl. After the death of her father, she lived with her grandmother and followed her to their jhum. Which meant

[21] Lawm: To assist a person in any kind of work or occupation in exchange for similar assistance received or to be received (Lorrain 288).
[22] Chapchar Kut: The name of the Lushai spring festival, held between the cutting and the burning of the jhooms (Ibid 60).
[23] Pawl Kut: The name of a Lushai feast after harvest; the Lushai harvest feast or festival (Ibid 354)
[24] Mim Kut: The name of a Lushai feast or festival held in honour of the dead, at which the first fruits of certain vegetables, etc., and **chhang**, which is eaten at the feast, are presented to them (Ibid 315)

that she was old enough work in the jhum; thus, Ngaitei could probably be a young teenage girl. These women have gone through many hardships, endured violence and life-threatening events and some of them even lost their lives in the end.

As mentioned before, women in the pre-Christian Mizo society were not given much space in the public arena. As their gendered roles did not give them a chance to impress the community like men, their beauty was their most valuable attribute that the society appreciates. Therefore, in the folktales, the main female characters were always portrayed as beautiful. Kungawrhi was so beautiful that young men used to watch her play with her friends when she was growing up, and unfortunately for her, a *Keimi* (half man-half tiger) became so infatuated with her that he deliberately made her sick in order to get closer to her. He then married her, and she was later saved by two brothers, and barely made it out alive.

Rimenhawihi's beauty and her source of pride, her beautiful long hair also became a source of trouble for her as well. She was captured and taken from her home for the amusement of a foreign king, who was fascinated by her long hair that managed to fill up a fish's belly. Dardini's beauty caught the attention of their chief's son, Duhmanga, who started a love affair with her, much to the dismay of her parents, as she was the daughter of a widow; unlike the daughter of a rich *khawnbawl upa* (a member of the chief's council of advisors) who was chosen to be his bride by his parents.

As a man and the son of a chief, Duhmanga was bold enough to keep courting Dardini even though he was engaged to another woman. Dardini, on the other hand was mocked and humiliated at every turn by his family. Even though he brought her home, whenever he went away to war or to a hunt, his family threw her out of their house every time. After a while, her mother, scared for her daughter's life, moved to another village with her when she was warned to keep her daughter away from the chief's son; she died in childbirth in the end. From this folktale, one can clearly see that the freedom enjoyed by the women when it comes to relationships was indeed limited.

Sichangneii had suffered a fate even worse than the other women. Although Rimenhawihi was captured, she was swiftly saved by her husband. Kungawrhi was saved from the tiger by two brothers, even though one of them was much less brave than his brother. The coward brother even managed to outwit his brother and left him at the place of the *Khuavang* where he was stuck for a long time. Kungawrhi seemed happy enough when he finally found them, as they were in the middle of giving a feast for the village as rulers. Sichangneii was a beautiful woman who dwells in the sky. She was captured by a man who caught her while she was taking a bath in the village water source. He kept her imprisoned-on earth for a long time by taking away her feathers so that she wouldn't be able to fly home while he was away. He had impregnated her seven times before she finally managed to escape from him.

Women were portrayed in these folktales as beautiful objects, objects that can be manipulated and moulded to meet the desires of the men. They were portrayed as things, men who desired them tried to own them, and in their efforts to own them, they did not hesitate to harm them, or kill those in their way. Sometimes, the actions of these men put the lives of these women in danger, and at times, became deadly for them. The *keimi* had put the life of Kungawrhi in grave danger when he stole her footprint and dried it on the fireplace.

In the tale of "Zawltlingi and Ngambawma", it can be seen that marriages are controlled by the wishes of the parents. The tale did not mention why Ngama was not accepted by Tlingi's parents, but, they had effectively stopped them from marrying each other, which pushed them to run away in the forest. Living in a cave, they even had a baby together when they were discovered. Convincing them to come home with a promise to let them get married, they once again dug their heel and refused to even let them see each other. Exasperated, Ngama dried the footprint of Tlingi to make her sick, and accidentally killed her in the process.

In another folktale, Tualvungi was sold to another man by her husband, because he was too much of a coward to correct himself, when he told a stranger that his wife was his sister. The stranger, a very powerful ruler asked him what he would ask for her bride price; instead of just telling the truth, Zawlpala then stated an insane

amount of bride price which he believed would never be afforded by anyone. However, he had unwittingly sold his wife to a sorcerer who easily came up with the price. At the end of the tale, Tualvungi killed herself to join him in the afterlife.

Mauruangi's mother was murdered by her father, who suspiciously got remarried soon after; her new stepmother tortured and even killed Mauruangi at one point. Mauruangi had to fight her step-sister, Bingtaii, to death in order to win back her position as a king's wife. Ngaitei's life was demanded by the spirit of her dead father, and she was sacrificed and thrown into the swelling river alive, to placate her father's spirit.

Every woman in these folktales has experienced violence and some even met death at the hands of those closest to them. These incidents have shown that the lives of women in those days were rough and their safety was always under threat, most of the time, not from their enemies, but from the men in their lives as they were treated like their properties, not their equal who has independent thoughts and reason. Their lives were controlled, either by their fathers, brothers or their husbands. These folktales reflect how women were expected to behave in the society, silent and obedient to the core. In the whole tale, Kungawrhi never spoke, Tualvungi did not want to marry the foreign king, but she dared not disobey her husband.

Those who did take control of their lives had paid the price of their bravery with their lives. Dardini defied society's expectations and openly carried on a love affair with the chief's son, whose family considered her to be beneath them. However, her defiance in the end cost her life and of her baby's. Chawngchilhi also defied the norms set for unmarried young women and carried on with an affair for quite a long time. For what was considered an act of impunity by her father, he mercilessly killed her and chops her body up. These women had dared to go beyond what society had considered being the norm for young women and they paid heavily for their actions.

They could be considered to be society's warning for young girls not to test the waters. These women explored their sexuality and showed their independence by daring to forge their own path, but the price for daring to do those things was too

high. Ironically, men who had done much worse than these women did not suffer any consequences. Mauruangi's father had committed a cold-blooded murder, but there was no retribution for his actions. He went on to marry another woman, and his life went on as smoothly as it did before he murdered his wife. Sichangneii was caught and kept by her kidnapper, and he impregnated her over and over again. Still, no one came forward to question his actions or tried to free her from his grasp. Her wings were literally clipped and hidden by her captor. This incident could be seen as a representative of how men dominated and controlled the lives of women in the pre-Christian society. Given a chance, a woman could have gone past the village's water source, but gender norms would not let her explore her capabilities past the village, where she was under the control of the chief and her father. And the same society that did this would say, "The wisdom of a woman does not extend beyond the limit of the village water source" (Thomas 16). The misogynistic culture had literally hindered women's mobility to keep them in their lower, separate position and mocked her for it.

From the 'crimes' committed by women and men in the folktales, one could see that the punishments for these various crimes were different according to their gender. Women were killed for disobeying their fathers and expressing their individuality while men got away with murder and kidnapping.

Ecofeminists has identified how patriarchal culture has used language to dominate and belittle women and nature. In western culture, women were equated with animals that were considered to be lower than human in the hierarchical order. Thus, humans justified the exploitation of animals due to their lower position in this order, and equating women with animals also justified their domination and exploitation as well. Calling women "cow" "foxy" "catty" and so on has sexualized and denigrated women in the western culture.

This practice of using language to dominate women is also practiced in pre-Christian Mizo society. Women were compared to crabs, dogs, and a fence and so on, thus justifying their domination and control by the men in their lives. In the article titled, "Gender and Environmental History: From Representation of Women and Nature to Gender Analysis of Ecology and Politics", Melissa Leach and Cathy Green voiced this concern, "In 'patriarchal' thought, it is argued, nature is seen as

inferior to culture, and hence women are seen as inferior to men. The domination and oppression of women and the domination and exploitation of nature have thus gone together" (346). With the use of sexist words that were derived from speciesist attitudes, man has caused irreparable harm to animals, nature and women. Joan Dunayer has explained how these are interconnected:

> With contemptuous words, humans establish and maintain emotional distance from other animals. This distance permits abuse without commensurate guilt. Humans blame their nonhuman victims. Physically unable to fly away, having no prior experience of predators from which to learn fear, dodos were massacred by humans, who labeled them fools…Naturally inquisitive and sociable, with a great capacity for affection and joy, pigs suffer intensely from imprisonment. Using pig as a pejorative lends acceptability to their massive abuse. (18)

In western patriarchal world, nature is plundered and dominated for the benefit of the human species, while systemically destroying the environment. Trees are felled indiscriminately by logging companies, forests are burned and cleared for agriculture, earth is mined and manipulated to extract its resources, and animals are hunted for their body parts and for sports, and cruelly experimented on in scientific laboratories, while their natural habitats are being destroyed, endangering their survival every day. While domesticated animals are crammed and killed in overcrowded factories where they spent their short and miserable lifespan. Militarism and the race to attain nuclear weaponry have also endangered the continuity of life on earth as well. Stephanie Lahar has written how dominating and exploiting "others" lead to serious consequences:

> Alongside human and cultural negations and extinctions runs the parallel of animal and plant extinctions and exploitation. Exploitation is a one-way, nonreciprocal relationship. It is exemplified in "green revolution" intensive agriculture that ruins soils, in the ivory trade's decimation of African elephants for luxury items, and in such subtle everyday practices as discharging sewage into streams and turning scarce wildlife habitat into lawns. Human exploitation of nonhuman communities is not a phenomenon

> confined to the modern age; the earliest impacts of humans on the North American continent occurred in prehistoric times. (94)

The actions of humans when driven by materialism, capitalism and consumerism have far reaching, and often devastating consequences on the natural world, as the effects of human actions upon nature has often been ignored. Sustainable development has often been rejected in favor of massive profits by the corporate world.

Likewise, the domination of nature and animals alongside women can be seen in the folktales selected for this study. Nature was dominated by clearing forests for cultivation every few years, since agriculture was their main source of livelihood. It was the center of their lives; the stories were interspersed with their agricultural activities. The servants of a king came across Mauruangi while she was working at her jhum, which led to a turning point in her life, as she went on to marrying their king and lived a much better life than before. Chawngchilhi used the cover of going to their jhum every day to carry on her love affair with her lover. Ngaitei and her grandmother were working together at their jhum, Liandova worked for other people at their jhum in exchange for food. Thus, the lives of these characters in these various folktales proved that agricultural activities were the main occupation of the people in those days. Even though their agricultural practices were on a much smaller scale as compared to the modern world's intensive agriculture practices, their effects upon the environment were more or less the same.

Forests were burnt down, trees were felled, land was manipulated, animals were driven away from their habitats; after a while, the soil has lost its richness and animals became the enemies when they came back to eat the crops, which were grown on land that used to be their home. In those days, guns were luxury items that only a few households could afford. So, in order to hunt animals, slingshots were popularly used by young men and boys. As a patriarchal society, hunting animals and repeated success at killing them was considered to be a great achievement. Animals were viewed as targets and food sources, their rights to exist in their habitats were not given much thought. Successful hunters were given an exalted place in the society as the procurers of meat for the community and especially for the chief who always got a good portion of every hunt in the form of a meat tax. Animals were also

hunted because they believe that will accompany them when they die and serve them in the afterlife as servants. This belief clearly showed that animals were considered to be inferior to man in the pre-Christian Mizo society. Successful hunting parties were welcomed into the village with alcohol by the young women, and the whole village would gather to celebrate their success.

Ecofeminists criticize the killing and hunting of animals stating that animals do not consent to be hunted, or consent to participate in the hunting game. All the animals did was tried to survive the hunt. Since they enjoyed hunting and hunters were placed in such an exalted position, one could argue that they were more than subsistence hunters. Due to the activities of these hunters, in those days and the present days, many species of birds and animals were and still are endangered in the state of Mizoram. People did not hesitate to kill animals as they were seen as "less than" man, and were thus considered to be fair game.

Ecofeminists also criticize the domestication of animals to serve the needs of humans as this practice led to a short life and horrible death for the animals such as chickens, pigs, goats, sheep etc. They were also used as sacrificial animals in those days, and were chosen according to the religious ceremony. Chicken, pigs and even dogs were popularly used for these religious ceremonies. Their body parts were later distributed and eaten by the family and the priest.

Being driven out of their natural habitat, hunted, domesticated for food, being used in religious ceremonies as sacrifices- these things are enough proof that animals were dominated by men. In the folktales, men like Duhmanga, who was a 'great' hunter and warrior were respected in the society. Hunting party in the tale of "Liandova and Tuaisiala" killed a giant python; a great number of domesticated animals were slaughtered in the various feasts given by the rich man in his quest to become a "thangchhuah." Considered to be secondary to men, the lives of women and animals tend to end violently in the folktales.

As seen in the folktales, children, especially girls and orphans were considered to be inferior to men, and were treated as such. Many writers and historians tend to paint the village chiefs as benevolent fathers, who took care of his subjects like they were his own children. However, this interpretation of the role of the chief is not entirely true as one could see from how children, especially orphans

were treated in the society. Liandova and Tuaisiala were rejected all the time because they refused to feed Tuaisiala, who was too young to work, knowing full well that they had no parents to take care of them. And even the fact that they had to hide their treasures from the other villagers proved that they were not safe and free in the community. The tragic stories of Rahtea and Mauruangi have clearly demonstrated the fact that children were also abused physically and emotionally as well. The refusal to feed them properly to the point they were physically emaciated by their stepmothers, the refusal to properly clothe Rahtea by his stepmother, the plot to use him as a sacrifice to cure his stepmother's illness, Mauruangi's death at the hands of her stepmother; all these incidents had shown that children were in a very vulnerable position in the society, especially since they were not capable of defending themselves against bigger and smarter adults.

Considering all this evidence collected from these various folktales, we can conclude that "others"- women, children, animals, and nature were dominated by the patriarchal society, with its androcentric worldview. This study confirms that the various ethos and practices seen in these folktales still influenced the modern Mizo society.

Women are still considered to be "less than" their male counterparts. In pre-Christian Mizo society, its women were not allowed to go inside Zawlbuk under any circumstances. This social rule can be interpreted as an act of dominance since Zawlbuk was the most influential social institutions at the time as it was the center of organization and administration of the village. By excluding women from this institution, it ensures their lack of knowledge about news from other villages and words of wisdom passed down from older men to younger men. A social institution that takes the place of Zawlbuk in modern Mizo society is the Young Mizo Association (YMA) established on 15th June 1935 at Aizawl. Even though women were allowed to be members, they were not given leadership positions for more than eighty years. In 2010, Teresa Rothangpuii was elected as the president of Sairang locality for the first time in YMA history; and in 2022, Rebecca Lalruatkimi was also elected as the branch president in Sakawrtuichhun. However, in the organization's center, CYMA (Central Young Mizo Association), located at Aizawl that controls all

the smaller branches in different localities, men still dominate the important positions.

The exclusion of women from important positions do not stop at YMA, it is also prevalent in religion and politics as well. In the past, priests were male and occupied a very important role in society. In the pre-Christian society, priests were needed for many occasions such as death, marriage, sickness, festivals, and as such "occupied an important position in the village hierarchy and they were officials in the village administration next to the chief's elders" (Rokhum 35). Modern Mizo society also gives much respect to its pastors and church elders, and the decisions made by them has much authority and influence over the people. Despite the influence of the church being such a great presence in Mizo society, women are still not allowed to take part in its highest governing bodies, since women are not ordained as pastors. Social norms still dictate that women do not become religious leaders, even though many women have the qualifications to become pastors. Church elders are all male as well. In the political field, the participation of women is still underwhelming as compared to the participation of men, even though half of the entire population of voters are women. Since political institutions made all the important policies and laws with regards to the lives of the people; it is imperative that women represent the interests of women; however, this still looks like a herculean feat.

The government has taken one important step towards uplifting women's position by passing The Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014 in its assembly winter session. The MHIP (Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl) has been instrumental in this bill being finally passed since it has fought tirelessly for almost 40 years. This new act is a positive change in the fight for uplifting women's secondary position in Mizo society. It gives couples a legal right to seek for a divorce in case of adultery, irreconcilable incompability, physical abuse and cruelty towards one spouse, serious mental health for more than three years, contraction of incurable diseases that posed a threat to the other spouse, in case of a missing person case that lasted for more than 7 years, the wife refused to live with her husband, refusal to consummate the marriage by either party, deserting spouse for more than two years before filing a divorce case, by mutual consent. These are the terms with which couples may file for a divorce in a court of law. In addition to

these reasons, either spouse may file for a divorce if the other spouse is guilty of rape, sodomy or bestiality (Govt. of Mizoram). Under this act, the court may order the respondent to pay his or her spouse alimony, the amount which the court deemed fit according to the income of the respondent, thus, protecting the rights of either spouse who is unemployed or poorer as compared to the other spouse.

Special provisions for the safety of children are also made under this act. Unlike the customary law that gives full custody to the father, the court under this act will make the decision regarding custody of the children with the child's best interest at heart. The child's or children's wishes will be considered as well. Children under three years old will remain in the custody of the mother unless she is found unfit to provide the best care for the child.

In case of inheritance, the act also made it possible for women to inherit property from their fathers. Women who willingly divorce their husbands will have no right to inherit his acquired property. However, if she was forced to leave the marriage by the husband's domestic abuse or cruelty, wantonly unfaithfully, insanity of the husband or refusal of her conjugal right except on health ground, she will have a right to inherit his acquired property. If the husband divorced her on grounds of adultery and or refusal of conjugal rights except on health ground, she will be entitled to a share of acquired property not exceeding 25% along with her own properties, which cannot be given to anyone else. If the husband divorces his wife by bringing another woman into the house (kawngka sula mak), the wife will be entitled to 50% of the husband's acquired property. Under this new act, daughters will also inherit property from their fathers as well. This act is a right step into building an inclusive society and promoting gender equality; however, the question still remains on how much the state government is going to be involved in ensuring and monitoring that everyone involved followed the law and that laws are rightfully implemented.

The government needs to make systematic changes in the agricultural field as Mizos still practice jhumming system that is one of biggest causes of deforestation in the state. In order to find a more sustainable way of farming, the government needs to find a better farming practice for the farmers so that farmers would no longer need to slash and burn forests every few years. Finding sustainable method of farming will

not only benefit farmers, it will immensely improve the lives of wild animals as it will preserve their natural habitats. The New Land Use Policy (NLUP) was introduced by the state government in 1985-1992 and again in 2011-2015, with the aim to introduce local farmers to alternative livelihoods and farming methods to mitigate jhumming. According to Alexander Lalliantluanga Pachuau, before making radical changes, government agencies and other stakeholders must first try to understand jhumming practice as it is constantly changed by political policies and a wider perspective is needed to understand it, and this includes looking at

> …population pressure on land, market integration and policy interventions, rural-urban dynamics, food and livelihood security of the farmers, conservation of forest and biodiversity, land degradation concerns as well as the traditional and cultural values instilled within the society by shifting cultivation practice. (59)

In addition to this, hunting is still quite rampant in Mizo society. The government needs to take more proactive steps in educating and creating awareness among the people about wildlife protection. Punishing illegal hunters by making them pay a few hundreds of rupees for shooting animals is evidently not enough. The people need to be made aware of the importance of wildlife protection and their necessity in our survival; that humans and animals need each other to thrive and survive. In the ever-changing modern landscape, children also need better protection and much better laws as easy access to the internet, with the growth of social media; children are more vulnerable than ever. Parents, family members and the society at large need to be made aware of this new threat that comes with modernity and how to protect our children from it. Children are still one of the most vulnerable members of society, made even more so by the advancements in technology. Sexual abuse on children, committed by family members is also a big problem in Mizo society. In 2015, Mizoram scored the highest in the crime rate of sexual abuse of children with a rate of 30.7, while the national crime rate was 3.3, according to the data provided by rate of cases filed under the POCSO Act (Parashar).

In conclusion, examining modern Mizo society from an Ecofeminist lens make it clear that “others” are still being dominated in Mizo society, even though the means and ways in which they are dominated has changed as compared to the pre-

Christian Mizo society. It is undeniable that contemporary Mizo women have equal opportunities in the fields of education and career opportunities, as compared to the pre-Christian society. Women are just as involved as men in every stratum of social and public spheres. There are also structures and rules in place to protect children from abuse harm and even homes for abandoned children. The government also made different laws and rules to protect the environment.

However, child abuse of various kinds is still committed, one only need to listen or read the news to verify this is still happening even with all the laws that has been passed and enforced to keep children safe. Women still find it hard to break into the highest policy making bodies in society as pre-Christian social norms are still prevalent in modern Mizo society. The environment is increasingly on the decline due to human's actions. Sustainable agricultural practices are still not popular as jhumming is still widely practiced in Mizoram, and illegal hunting practices are still quite popular. The government has yet to make agricultural reforms and concentrate on environmentally friendly practices to protect wildlife and the flora and fauna. In addition, it is important to educate the public on these issues and how they are harmful; so that all members of a society can work together toward a better, more peaceful, and more inclusive society. Government policies and laws work best when the people are well-informed. People from all walks of life need to come together to fight climate change as it has now become one of the biggest threats to our survival. From an Ecofeminist point of view, since adrocentric practices are the main causes of this decline, we all must work together to create a social system that does not give anyone or any particular group or species "power over" others; and instead build an inclusive world where every living being is honored and given a chance to thrive and live in harmony with nature.

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ABSTRACT

ACTS OF DOMINATION IN SELECT MIZO FOLKLORE: AN ECOFEMINIST STUDY

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Submitted

In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.

This thesis studies the position of women, children, and nature in Mizo society as depicted in select Mizo folklore, primarily folktales. It focuses on how a patriarchal social system dominated them in the public and private spheres. It aims to identify how this was accomplished through social and cultural norms. Additionally, this thesis examines how these societal and cultural norms persist in modern Mizo society and perpetuate subjugation. For this study, Mizo society is divided into two time periods: pre-Christian Mizo society or the pre-colonial period and modern Mizo society. Pre-Christian Mizo society covers the period from when Mizo people settled in Mizoram as reflected in the selected folktales, and the modern period counts from the arrival of Christian missionaries during the colonial period as Christianity brought major changes to the Mizo psyche and social practices. As the study includes how nature has also been subjugated to satisfy humans' needs at the cost of its eventual destruction, Ecofeminist theory is used to analyze and understand how the different subjugations interconnect with each other.

The folktales selected for this thesis are "Chemteii", "Chawngchilhi", "Mauruangi", "Ngaiteii", "Kungawrhi", "Rimenhawihi", "Sichangneii", "Rahtea", "Duhmanga and Dardini", "Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga", "Liandova and Tuaisiala", "Tualvungi and Zawlpala", "Zawltlingi and Ngambawma". These folktales are collected from four primary texts since no book contains all the folktales. The primary texts are *Handpicked Tales from Mizoram* (2008), *Folklore from Mizoram* (2013) – both a collection of folktales curated and translated into English from Mizo by Margaret L. Pachuau, *Mizo Thawnthu*, a collection of Mizo folktales by P.S. Dahrawka, first published in 1950; and, *Serkawn Graded Readers: Mizo Thawnthu*, written by Nuchhungi, published for the first time in 1938 as a textbook for primary students. Nuchhungi credited Zirtiri with co-authorship to acknowledge her involvement in the creation of the book.

"Chemteii"[1] is a folktale about a wise and beautiful young woman named Chemteii. The tale starts with how Chemteii's father and his brother fought over

[1] Folktales written in Mizo from *Mizo Thawnthu* and *Serkawn Graded Readers: Mizo Thawnthu* are translated into English and summarized by me for this thesis.

ownership of a cow left to them by their deceased father. Since they could not agree by themselves, they approached their village chief. The chief could not decide whom to give the cow to easily either, so he assured them that the person who could answer his question would be given the cow. His questions were, "What is the fastest thing in the world?" "What is the fattest thing in the world?" and lastly, "What is the most precious thing in the world?" Chemteii managed to come up with an appropriate answer every time, and she told her father the answers. The chief was impressed by her and decided to marry her after testing her wisdom again. However, he told her that she was forbidden to involve herself in his administrative role as a village chief as it was not the place for a woman; and if she ever broke this one rule, she would be allowed to take one thing from their marital home and go back to her father's house as a divorcee. She accepted his terms, and they married. Unfortunately, Chemteii had to break her promise to save the life of one of the chief's advisers. So, he divorced her, but Chemteii outwitted him and his rule by giving him a sleep potion and having him carried to her father's house while he slept.

"Chawngchilhi" is a tale about a young woman who had an affair with a snake and fell pregnant with his babies. They would woo each other at their jhum[2] where Chawngchilhi and her younger sister worked every day. Her younger sister became thin over time as Chawngchilhi fed the lunch their father packed for them to her lover every day. Their father became worried and coaxed the truth out of the younger sister. Upon learning the reason, he was livid and killed the snake at the jhum as he pretended to be Chawngchilhi; he then killed Chawngchilhi as well. But, Chawngchilhi was already pregnant at this time. When he cut her body, her babies crawled out of her body and he killed them too except the one that slipped away. It grew into a huge snake and fed on humans.

"Mauruangi" is an orphan tale named after the female protagonist, Mauruangi. Her father killed her mother by pushing her into a river and married a single mother, with a daughter named Bingtaii. Mauruangi was starved and abused by her stepmother. Miserable, Mauruangi visited the river where her mother

[2] Jhum: Agricultural site where rice and other crops are grown.

drowned. Her mother turned into a huge catfish and fed her, and soon, Mauruangi became healthy and hearty. Her stepmother became suspicious and sent her daughter to spy on her. Once she learned her secret, she encouraged her husband to catch the fish and caught it with the help of the other villagers. Mauruangi collected her bones and buried them, and a beautiful tree grew from them. So, when Mauruangi was neglected and abused again, the tree fed her with its nectar, and Mauruangi became healthy again. The same thing happened, and the tree was cut down.

Mauruangi and Bingtaii were given their own jhums to work in when they were older. Mauruangi was diligent, kind, and skilled in weaving, while Bingtaii was lazy, selfish, and unskilled, unlike her stepsister. Impressed by her kindness and diligence, a ruler married her. Out of jealousy, her stepmother poured boiling water on her and put Bingtaii in her place. Mauruangi was restored to life by a wild goat who let her babysit its babies. She was later found by her husband's servants, who brought her back, and she fought Bingtaii to the death to take back her place.

"Ngaiteii" is a tale about a young girl who lives with her grandmother. Her father's spirit demanded she come and live with him in his watery abode. He flooded parts of the village when she refused to join him. After dropping Ngaitei's belongings like her comb, her father's spirit would not be appeased for long. Fearing he might flood the whole village, Ngaitei was thrown into the water to satisfy her father and drowned.

"Kungawrhi*"* tells the story of a baby conceived from her father's injured thumb, a tale very familiar to "Thumbelina". She grew up to be a beautiful young woman beloved by many. One of her admirers was a *keimi* who stole her footprint, wrapped it, and placed it over the stove. This made Kungawrhi fall ill and her father was desperate to save her life. So, he promised her hand in marriage to anyone who could save her life. The *keimi* cooled the footprint before visiting Kungawrhi, and she appeared to get better. Then he destroyed the footprint one day, Kungawrhi was cured, and they married. When her father discovered he was a *keimi,* he offered to marry her again to any man brave enough to rescue her from him. Two brothers, Phawthira and Hrangchala set out to save her. They managed to get her out of the

keimi's village, but on their way back, she was taken by *Khuavang*[3] and while they saved her Hrangchala betrayed his brother who got stuck underneath with the Khuavang as he cut off a root that they climbed to get out. Thus, the less heroic brother married Kungawrhi and her father made him the chief of a village. However, after some time, Phawthira climbed out too and killed Hrangchala, and married Kungawrhi.

Another folktale named after the heroine is "Rimenhawihi". Rimenhawihi was a beautiful woman married to Zawlthlia. Rimenhawihi also has thick, long hair like Rapunzel. She was always locked inside their iron house while her husband was away on business trips. He was afraid that her beauty might attract the attention of other men who would not hesitate to kidnap her. Despite his precautions, she was still captured by the servants of a chief. Zawlthlia then followed the clues left by her and saved her from her kidnappers.

"Sichangneii*"* is a folktale about a heavenly maiden who dwells in the sky. A man captured her from behind while bathed with her sister, he took her home, plucked off her wings, and hid them so she would not escape. Sichangneii bore seven sons for him; but flew back to the sky when she found her hidden wings as her youngest son spilled his father's secret.

"Rahtea*"* is about an orphan who ran away from home as he overheard his stepmother and father discussing their plans to use him as a sacrifice. This was to cure her various illnesses invented by her and force her husband to agree to her plans, to get rid of Rahtea permanently. Even before this incident, Rahtea was starved, forced to work, punished, and beaten by his stepmother. He was not even given proper clothes. However, when he ran away, he refused to return home when his family members came one by one to call him back. He then turned into a cicada and flew away.

Another famous orphan tale is about Liandova and his brother Tuaisiala. Their mother married a man from a different village. When they were on their way to

[3]Khuavang: the name of a guardian spirit (Lorrain 267)

follow him back to his village, their mother told Liandova to drown his little brother. Since he was still young and speaking whatever was on his mind, she was afraid he might embarrass her and her newlywed husband in front of the other villagers. Liandova refused to do this and returned to their village with him, thus starting their journey as poor orphans. However, with his wit and perseverance, a treasure inside a python's stomach, help from a fairy godmother, and the favours of the powerful chief, Lersia, Liandova turned their fortune around.

A folktale that also ends in tragedy is "Duhmanga and Dardini". Duhmanga was good-looking, strong, wise, and the son of a powerful chief of a big village. His father, the chief, and his advisers did not allow him to woo other women. They ordered him to focus on Saikii, a woman they approved to marry. But one night, Saikii's family could not receive guests due to their sacrifice. He followed other young men on their way to Dardini's house. They fell in love that night despite Dardini's mother's best efforts to keep them apart. His parents also worried and pushed him to marry Saikii. However, that did not stop him from visiting Dardini's house at night. One thing led to another and Duhmanga took in Dardini as his wife. However, the day after that his friends invited him on a hunting trip and he left Dardini with his family. His family promptly divorced her and took back Saikii, his first wife. But when he came back, he was very angry to see Saikii in his house and decided to stay at Dardini's house instead. Even though they faced many problems and interventions from his parents and her mother, they always stayed together. Eventually, the chief divorced her again while Duhmanga was away on a hunting trip and even banished them from his village. Dardini's mother, afraid of the chief's wrath moved to a village far away with Dardini. Duhmanga searched for her as soon as he came back from his trip. Unfortunately, Dardini died in childbirth just before he reached her village. He refused to leave her grave and cried himself to death upon her grave.

Continuing with the tragic theme, "Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga" also has a sad ending. Lianchhiari was the daughter of a chief and Chawngfianga "could not reciprocate her love for him because he was a mere commoner" (Pachuau 49). As

time passed and Chawngfianga proved himself to be a capable young man, and since their daughter was besotted with him, the chief and his wife told Chawngfianga's emissary, Thura, that they would accept any bride price they could afford. However, Thura became very jealous of Chawngfianga's good fortune and kept lying to both families. When the chief finally demanded that Chawngfianga come by himself, Thura told Chawngfianga that the chief was going to kill him and advised him to run away. Fearing for their lives, his family fled to another village in the dead of night to avoid detection. Even though they still loved each other, they both ended up married other people.

"Tualvungi and Zawlpala" is another folktale that ends with tragic deaths for both protagonists. They were a loving couple, but when a traveling *vai lal*[4] saw her, he asked whether she was his wife or sister, and Zawlpala told him she was his sister. He asked him what he would demand as her bride's price, and Zawlpala quoted a huge amount of goods. However, he did not know that Phuntiha was a great sorcerer and he soon returned to their village with his demands. He married Tualvungi and took her back to his village. Missing his wife, Zawlpala soon visited their village and Phuntiha poisoned his food. Tualvungi told him to return to their old village as fast as possible and he had reached it before dying. The villagers sent a bird to relay the news and Tualvungi decided to visit his grave. Phuntiha kept finding excuses to stall her and even put a sharp knife on the door to cut her feet. Despite her injuries, she wrapped her wounds in a cloth and headed for his grave anyway. When she finally reached his grave, she lay beside his bones and paid an old woman to stab her to death. Their spirits turned into butterflies, and Phuntiha, who followed after her, also killed himself, turned into a moth, and followed the couple wherever they flew.

"Zawltlingi and Ngambawma" is a tale about two lovers whose families did not allow them to marry. Exasperated, they ran away into the forest and lived in a cave. They even had a baby together when the villagers found them. They coaxed them to go back to the village but when they returned, their parents broke their

[4] Vai lal: (also Vai lalpa) the name of a great mythical chieftain who was as powerful as a god, was skilled in witchcraft, slew whom he would, and possessed an innumerable slave (Lorrain 540).

promises to let them get married and even refused to let them see each other. Ngama decided to take her footprint as the *keimi* did in *Kungawrhi.* However, one night, it caught on fire and Zawltlingi passed away. Ngama planted *Zamzo*[5] in her grave, but when they bloomed, they were stolen every night. Ngama decided to catch the culprit and caught an animal couple named *Sa-fia*[6]. They told him that they were sent by their mistress Zawltlingi from *Mitthi khua*[7]. He followed them back and decided to stay with her, however, as a living human, he could not fit into her world. Therefore, Tlingi told him to go back to the land of the living and take his own life so that he may live in harmony with her. He did what he told her to do and finally reunited with her in Mitthi khua, and they stayed together happily.

Folklores are the "autobiographical ethnography" (Dundes 55) of the people consisting of various genres such as folktales, songs, poems, legends, myths, and so on. Out of these various genres, folktales are selected as they are one of the best representatives of one's cultural ethos. Embedded in these narratives are the attitudes and mores of the people at a particular time when these stories are being created. Folktales are no longer considered to be childish stories made up by old people to entertain children. They are now seen as an important source of material for studying the history and mindset of people in a particular time.

Even though pre-Christian Mizo society, as we have seen briefly in the summaries of the folktales was described by many as a very harmonious society, closer inspection has revealed cracks in this idyllic existence. The Mizo people, during this period, lived a nomadic life, moving from one village to another seeking water sources, fertile lands, and safety from raiders from other villages. Even if they settled in one village for a long time, some villagers would move to other villages to escape their chief's tyranny. Every village had a chief who wielded power and authority over his subjects. In return for his protection and management of the village, the villagers paid different taxes to the chief. The society being patriarchal, they were ruled by a man, with the help of his council of advisors, which was made

[5] Zamzo: amaranthus- a family of brightly-coloured flowering plants including the cocks-comb and love-lies-bleeding (Lorrain 558)
[6] Sa-fia: the name of a small animal resembling a marten (Lorrain 397).
[7] Mitthi khua: Hades; the abode of departed spirits. (*Lit* dead man's village) (Lorrain 318).

up entirely of men, called *khawnbawl upa*[8] or elders. With the help of his council, the chief made critical decisions regarding where to cultivate, when, or where to start a new settlement and settle disputes brought to him by the villagers.

The social problems hidden in the simplistic rural life of the pre-Christian Mizos can be brought to light using Ecofeminist theory. Since the problems are not necessarily overt and often multifaceted, Ecofeminism- a combination of feminist and ecological concerns, proved invaluable in understanding different acts of domination in Mizo society.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter gives a detailed introduction to the term Ecofeminism, its beginnings, and how it is interpreted in various parts of the world in the present time. It also introduces various Ecofeminists and identifies various kinds of domination and oppression. The patriarchal society's justifications of actions against 'others' and its claim of superiority of men through various tactics and campaigns are also discussed. It also explains how this justification has proven to be harmful and toxic which has caused violent crimes committed against women and animals by men, and the destruction of the natural world with toxic chemicals as a result of man's attempts to accumulate wealth.

It also introduces the selected folktales with a summary of each tale and explains why these particular tales have been chosen for study. Further, the importance of the study of folklore to understand the lives of the people living in that time frame has also been analyzed.

The term "Ecofeminism", "l'eco-feminisme", was coined by Francoise d'Eaubonne, a French author, environmentalist, feminist, and labour rights activist in 1974, when she urged women to lead an ecological revolution to stop the devastating ecological consequences of the patriarchy (Glazebrook 12). Roger J.H. King commented, "According to ecofeminism, the failures of moral perception and thought that can be found in human relations to nature are symptomatic of similar failures to be found in the relations between women and men" (75). Ecofeminists

[8] A member of the chief's council was called 'khawnbawl upa'. They act as the chief's advisers on the administration of the village (V.L. Siama 19).

claim that the domination of women and nature is justified by the hierarchical and dualistic nature of the patriarchal society, which assumes that men are superior to women and nature. In this type of hierarchical society, where a man is considered to be superior to women, other dualisms are created in the interest of men as well- male/female, human/nature, and culture/nature. In this setup, the former justified dominating the latter by claiming their superiority over them.

Janis Birkeland has explained this patriarchal framework:

> In the dominant Patriarchal cultures, reality is divided according to gender, and a higher value is placed on those attributes associated with masculinity, a construction that is called "hierarchical dualism." In these cultures, women have historically been seen as closer to the earth or nature (perhaps due to childbirth and menstruation). Also, women and nature have been juxtaposed against mind and spirit, which have been associated in Western cosmology with the "masculine" and elevated to a higher plane of being. Although we can only speculate about how Patriarchal consciousness evolved, it is clear that a complex morality based on dominance and exploitation has developed in conjunction with the devaluing of nature and "feminine" values. (18-19)

The glorification of the masculine over the feminine has been proven to be harmful to those who fall into the 'not male' categories. Birkeland has also stated that this androcentric worldview is connected with environmental destruction and that Ecofeminism begins with an awareness that recognizes "that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures" (18).

Due to this belief in the superiority of humans over nature, the natural world has been shaped and exploited to serve the needs of human beings overriding the needs of other species; as a result of this, climate change has become one of the biggest threats against the survival of every living being and even planet Earth itself. Scientists have warned against the grave threats posed by rapid climate change such as global warming, violent natural disasters like cyclones, tsunamis, landslides, etc., and extinction of various animals, and water scarcity caused by deforestation, etc.

One of the most recent examples of this is the official declaration of the iconic Australian koalas as 'endangered' due to various bushfires and the destruction of their natural habitat due to urbanization and deforestation.

Chapter II: Critique of the Portrayal and Status of Women

The second chapter analyzes how women were portrayed in the selected folktales and how it reflects their secondary position in society as compared to their male counterparts. An Ecofeminist examination of these tales suggests that the patriarchal system has been used against women to make them subservient and inferior to men. The 'hierarchical dualism' has hurt those who are considered as 'others' by men. The chapter also examines how the destruction of the environment has a more direct influence over the lives of women than men.

In the pre-Christian Mizo male-dominated society, women were relegated to a subordinate position and could not take part in various social activities performed by men. With clear-cut gender roles assigned to them, women were expected to take care of the house and do all the household chores: cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood, feeding the livestock, making and mending clothes for the whole family, brewing alcohol, and many other miscellaneous duties involved in running a household. In addition to shouldering all these responsibilities they also had to work as hard as the men in the jhum; which made it impossible for them to pursue their interests. Women were expected to be obedient and submissive, first to their fathers, and later to their husbands.

On the other hand, men constructed houses, cleared forests for cultivation, and did not involve themselves in the daily household chores. After dinner, the menfolk would gather at *Zawlbuk*[9], meeting with their friends and heading out in groups to court young women in their houses. Thus, for the unmarried woman, even though she had many chores during the day, she still had to entertain these young men every night. This was done while spinning, weaving yarn, or cooking food for

[9] Zawlbuk was a large structure used as a dormitory for young men, strategically built close to the chief's house for an emergency like sudden raids from other villages or attacks by wild animals. All the young unmarried men of the village slept here, and married men until they had a child. Women were not allowed to enter Zawlbuk. It was even thought that seeing a woman enter Zawlbuk in a dream meant she would die in real life (V.L. Siama 24).

livestock. This practice, even though it was tiring for women, was one of the ways young men decided who to marry. Therefore, it was a significant social practice to find a life partner.

Ecofeminists have argued that relegating women to the household sphere, and performing these various tasks works in favor of men, who believe that their works are more meaningful than those of women. It solidifies the belief that women are secondary to men and that men are superior to women in every way. While women cared for the house, livestock, and children, men roamed freely in and out of the village. They traveled to other villages to do business, hunting animals in the wild and raiding other tribes; as seen in the tale of "Duhmanga and Dardini". The ability of a woman to give birth to a baby was considered less significant than a man's ability to hunt and kill other living beings. Lori Gruen has explained this radical difference in how patriarchal societies view women and men:

> Theoreticians, by creating a history in which man is separate from and superior to animals, establish a mechanism in which a separation from woman can be grounded. In this account of human social evolution, woman's body (being smaller, weaker, and reproductive) prevents her from participating in the hunt, and thus relegates her to the arena of non-culture. Woman's nonparticipation is conceived as naturally inferior. Her reproductive capacity and life-bearing activities stand in sharp contrast to the death-bringing activities that underlie culture. Constructed in this way, human social evolution establishes the subservient status of woman and animals. (62)

Raiding parties and inter-village wars increased women's and children's dependence on men for protection, which solidified their dominance. Her contributions to society and to her family were not celebrated nor publicly acknowledged, while the actions of men who succeeded in their hunting trips or raiding trips, who came home with meat or the spoils of their raids were celebrated and given the utmost respect in society. Deborah L. Madsen has explained this unequal power division between women and nature compared to men:

> Within a centralised, hierarchical society, groups are divided into 'masculine' and 'not-masculine'. Power is centralised and focused in the masculine ruling class, with the 'not-masculine' requiring protection, control, guidance…In return for this protection, the feminine serves the interests of the male: nature sacrifices 'herself' to culture. (124)

Women were treated as an extension of their husbands' and fathers' property, something to be given off to someone else, much like trading their properties. E.J. Thomas has written on women's lower status in early Mizo society:

> In the field of economic activity, with minor exceptions, women could not possess property. They had no property rights…The freedom in the matters of sex, marriage, and divorce given to women was in order to gain advantage for men than rendering higher social status. (16)

Men's general attitude towards 'others' in society can be seen in how they equate women with objects and animals, which were all thought to be inferior to men. There are common Mizo sayings that reinforce the secondary status of women in a society like: "A woman's mind does not reach across the stream". "Neither crabs nor women have any religion." "A fence can be changed; so can a wife" (Lloyd 109).

Ecofeminists have claimed that these kinds of languages are very harmful to women and animals, as it is one of the ways men assert their superiority over women, animals, and nature. Karen J. Warren has called out how Western men use this sexist language to assert their dominance over 'others' mainly women and non-human nature:

> Women are described in animal terms as pets, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches…mother hens, pussycats, cats…bird brains and harebrains. Animalizing or naturalizing women in a (patriarchal) culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans (men) thereby reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status…" Mother Nature" is raped, mastered, conquered, mined: her secrets are "penetrated" and her "womb" is to be put into service of the "man of science." Virgin timber is felled, cut down; fertile soil is tilled, and land that lies "fallow" is "barren," useless. The exploitation of nature and

> animals is justified by feminizing them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing them. (12)

Chapter III: Children and Nature in Mizo Folklore

This chapter examines how the same justifications used to dominate women were also used to oppress nature and children as well. Wild and domestic animals were also hunted and raised to benefit man. In this male-dominated society, women and animals were treated as the means for economic gains which did not favor animals in return, and women as well, since they could not own property in the first place. As a different species, animals were hunted, killed, captured, and domesticated without regard for their rights as living beings. They shared the same planet as humans.

Just as women's labor helped men to increase their wealth, animals were also used to improve social status. A successful hunter or marksman who killed an animal regularly was considered a great hunter or *pasaltha* and his social status was elevated above other men without the same talent. In addition to this, men who bravely fought in the inter-village wars were also celebrated and respected. During festivals or other public gatherings, these men were given "Nopui", wherein they were given a cup of *zu*[10] by "Val Upa" (the leader of the young men) or the chief, and made to drink before anyone else. This is one of the highest honors a normal person could receive from the community. In the article, "An Overview of Ecofeminism: Women, Nature and Hierarchies", Yildiz Merve Ozturk commented on how Ecofeminism explains how men's actions oppress women and animals:

> Men hunt and kill animals in order to make a profit. Thus, humans exploit animals because they perceive animals as inferior beings. In this way, Greta Gaard suggests herbivorous diet…consuming meat is another form of oppression because it approves the superiority of humans over nature. Ecofeminists also fight against the system that treats animals and nature as objects. Therefore, all the non-males and commodities in the society. (708)

[10]Zu: an alcoholic drink

Like women, animals were also treated as commodities in society. Pre-Christian Mizos also believed in the afterlife. They believed that after death, normal people would reside in "Mitthi khua", as depicted in "Zawltlingi and Ngambawma". Here, they would lead a life similar to the one while they were alive. They would still cultivate and gather their food and build their own houses. However, men who earned the title of *Thangchhuah*[11]during their lifetime would go to "Pialral" where they lived in luxury and abundance. As Lloyd wrote in his book, "History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills", Pialral was their version of heaven where "there was plenty of husked rice…ready to be cooked" (14). This *Thangchhuah* title could be achieved in two ways; firstly, a rich man could host several feasts, sacrificing many domestic animals with various rites performed by the village priest. Another way was through killing specific wild animals- a bear, a wild boar, a gayal, an eagle, a big snake, a barking deer, and a flying lemur (Lloyd 16). This can only be accomplished by the most experienced hunters.

If any man managed to attain the title of *Thangchhuah*, the dreaded and much feared *Pupawla*[12] would not dare hit them when they entered the realm of the dead and cowered in fear. This is especially true when the hunter is escorted by all the animals that he has killed (Lloyd 16). Their belief in the afterlife came at a price for the animals, who had to die violent deaths, just so that these men would rest in *Pialral*. These animals, like the exploited women, did not have any say nor could they consent to involvement in the process. They were needed to improve men's status, and they were taken and used accordingly.

It can be said that men are hunters not out of necessity for food alone, but also due to what Marti Kheel called a "culturally constructed desire" (30). Even though they could be classified as subsistence hunters, they also hunt to be praised by the community and improve their social status. The pre-Christian Mizo society encouraged young men to become good hunters. Hunting parties frequently went on

[11]Thangchhuah: The title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear thangchhuah puan…The possession of this title is regarded by the Lushai's as a passport to Pialral or Paradise. (Lorrain 447)

[12] Pupawla: the name of a mythical personage who lives at the junction of the roads leading to **Mitthi-khua** (or Deadman's Village) and shoots with his pellet-bow at the souls of the departed as they pass on their way thither (Ibid 372)

hunting trips, especially during the autumn season, when they had already harvested their crops and the demands of their jhum works lessened. Taking part in hunting was considered an important rite of passage for a young boy, this is not just a specific Mizo societal practice, as Marti Kheel explained:

> The association between hunting and masculine self-identity has been a recurring theme throughout history. Many cultures require a young boy to hunt and kill an animal as a symbolic rite of passage into manhood. Significantly, the young boy is frequently sequestered from the world of women as well. (38)

In pre-Christian Mizo society, young boys old enough to fight in inter-village wars were also sequestered from the home, their mothers, and their sisters and made to sleep in Zawlbuk. The act of hunting and killing animals was not just for their survival, it was a need constructed by society for a man to find his place in society. Mizo society has treated young boys and girls differently since childhood. Young girls were expected to help their mothers with various household chores like fetching water from the water source. They were also expected to babysit their little siblings while their parents were at the jhum during the day. Young boys were required to collect firewood for the "Zawlbuk" and were supervised by young men old enough to sleep in the dormitory. These duties were indicative of the gender roles assigned to them when they became old enough to work in the jhums.

Children, being under the "others" category, were also treated as second-class citizens and belittled. People used to say "Naupang leh haite te chu an awm leh zel alawm" which can roughly be translated as "Children and fruits will grow back", meaning that children are easily replaceable, and even if one dies, like fruits, another one will easily take its place. Children were also told they "smell like dogs" to chase them away. Equating children to an animal that is often abused and treated as secondary to humans is a clear indicator of dominance from an Ecofeminist point of view. Orphans suffered the brunt of these mistreatments. They were starved, beaten, abandoned, and sometimes even murdered as seen in orphan tales like "Mauruangi", "Rahtea", "Liandova and Tuaisiala".

Nature also falls under this "others" category. As previously discussed, animals had suffered greatly at the hands of humans, especially men, who hunted

them for sport and status. Besides animals, the land was also manipulated to serve the needs of human beings - cutting down a vast area of the forest, destroying the natural habitat of the animals living there, turning the land into fallow land after a few years, and moving on to a different section of the forest to start the process all over again. This practice called 'jhumming' has various ecological consequences like deforestation, landslides, and destruction of the natural habitat of various animals which threatens their survival and in turn, threatens the livelihood and survival of human beings.

Chapter IV: Folktales and Modern Mizo Society

This chapter explores how the ethos of the pre-Christian Mizo people reflected in the selected folktales is still prevalent in contemporary Mizo society. While much progress has been made in the efforts to empower women, in the realms of politics and religion, women still struggle to overcome the barriers created by societal norms. Like the pre-Christian Mizo society, men are still the decision-makers, and almost all-important positions in society are still mostly occupied by them. In the context of religion, women are still not allowed to be ordained as pastors and from being elected as elders since public opinion generally supports the idea that these positions should only be held by men. This is especially significant since religion and the church are one of the most influential institutions in a state like Mizoram, as Joy L.K. Pachuau has rightfully observed, "Time in Mizoram is governed by church time, in the span of both a day and a lifetime" (140). She further commented, "Pastors and elders are much respected within Mizo society and are very often accorded equal status with political leaders and bureaucrats to whom much honour is also given" (146). As a result, gatekeeping these positions from women ensures their domination and secondary status in society.

As seen in the folktales, in the pre-Christian Mizo society, there were no agencies that protected children from abuse. However, in contemporary Mizo society, government agencies like the District Child Protection Unit, Child Welfare Committee, and the Juvenile Justice Board for example, and many laws have been passed to ensure their safety. Besides these, different churches and NGOs like YMA

(Young Mizo Association) and women's groups like MHIP (Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl) have taken steps to protect children by opening homes for orphans and kids who are abandoned by their parents. Likewise, steps have been taken to protect and conserve the natural environment, wild animals, and forests using government agencies, and NGOs are also involved as well. However, these efforts are still not enough to ensure the safety of children and the natural world in the hands of adults.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The final chapter sums up the various gender issues and problems created by the patriarchal society and concludes that women, children, and the 'non-human world' were indeed dominated by men in the pre-Christian era. However, women in modern Mizo society are still facing some of the problems faced by women in the pre-Christian or pre-modern era; despite various efforts and policies of the government. This is mainly because women, children, and nature cannot thrive under the androcentric worldview. Two of the most important institutions in Mizo society - politics, and the church are still dominated by men, which resulted in women being left out of important discussions and decision-making bodies that directly affect their lives. As Petra Kelly has written, "The liberation of women and men from the bonds of patriarchy is essential to the work of building a peaceful, just, and ecological society" (118-9).

Modern Mizo society still has room to grow in its efforts to uplift women from secondary positions. A greater effort could be spared on inclusivity, particularly in the sphere of religion and politics, as these two institutions make the majority of important decisions in Mizo society. Women's participation in politics is still relatively early, and only a small number of women have participated in elections.

Even though data has shown that women are sometimes more diligent in casting their votes in elections; they are still under-represented in the political field. Inheritance laws and practices still favour the sons of the family, and women still get the shorter end of the stick concerning inheritance from their fathers. Systematic changes need to happen to change the general public's opinion. The government and

the people also need to come together to tackle climate change as environmental degradation is one of the biggest threats to humanity.

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