

**GENDER DYNAMICS IN MIZO SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS OF
MIZO FOLKTALES**

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**GENDER DYNAMICS IN MIZO SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS OF MIZO
FOLKTALES**

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In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled ‘**Gender Dynamics in Mizo Society: An Analysis of Mizo Folktales**’ submitted by Enid H. Lalrammuani has been written under my supervision.

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

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DECLARATION

I **Enid H. Lalrammuani**, 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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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The Mizo society is a patriarchal and patrilineal society. All the supreme power and authority of the village administration and social system were in the hands of men. Patriarchy permeated the village administration, social structures, family, social life and cultures of the people. The social structure of Mizo society largely depends upon the village administration and other social institutions like *zawlbuk*, family, religion and economy (occupation). These social institutions played a pivotal role in preserving and imparting societal norms and traditions to younger generations.

H.L Malsawma put forth the importance of social life in Mizo society by saying that,

The Mizo society was deeply community based. It is true that the individual and the family enjoyed certain prerogatives but the net balancing force was such that both had to submit unquestioningly to the demands of group life anchored in their social structure” (74-75).

Thus, Mizo society being a communitarian society put more stress and concern to the interest of the community preceding the interest of individuals. Mizo society is established on a socio-political ideology that values the needs of common good over the needs and rights of individuals. A person’s social identity and sense of place is given importance within the community rather than the individual’s rights. Each member or every individual is given responsibility to serve for the common good of the community. These can include laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashion, rituals and all the cultural rules that govern social life. The aspects of social life are taught and passed on to younger generations through the social institutions prevailing in the society.

Mizo society can be broadly divided into two, namely – pre- Christian society (Traditional society) and post-Christian society.

Pre-Christian Society:

Pre-Christian Mizo society is the traditional Mizo society which is the earlier Mizo society prior to the emergence of Christianity or before the interference of other cultures. It lived a semi-nomadic life and practiced shifting (jhum) cultivation without any knowledge of modern technology (Ralte 2). It is pre-literate in nature and had a well-developed culture, customs and traditions of its own. Their cultures and traditions are generally influenced and developed by the patriarchal ideals or ideology. Mizo traditional society is basically dependent on the village administration and various social systems prevailing in the society.

The people lived in villages and the village administration rest on the village Chief (Lal) who was entirely independent. Sangkima wrote the position of a chief as one,

...who, in theory was a despot within his own jurisdiction. His words were law in his own territory. All that was in the village belonged to him. He could call upon his subjects to furnish him with anything that he needed. All disputes and cases were to be decided by him. In short he was supreme in his own village. But in real practice, the chief was a benevolent ruler. He treated his subjects like his own children and in return they too looked upon him as their saviour in time of their difficulties...The position of the chief among his subjects was debatable because he was to a certain extent dependent on the allegiance of his subjects (Sangkima 35-36).

Each village is governed by a chief with the assistance of the *upas* who formed his council of advisers who were appointed by the chief himself (37). The chief selected men among his subject as his counsellor or adviser who are known as *khawnbawl upa* (village elders), who would help him in governing the village and give advice to the chief. The supremacy of the chief is no less powerful than a dictator, but the chief is more likely of a benevolent ruler. The villagers are free to migrate or moved to other villages and this prevents the chief to become a tyrant. Even though the chief's decision is the law of the village and that he is an absolute ruler, he cares for his people

and the welfare of the village so much that his subjects will become faithful and obedient to him.

Chieftainship is accounted to the son and it is handed over to the next male lineage. Writing about the nature and inheritance of Chieftainship in Mizo society Malsawma claimed that,

It was originally not a hereditary one but voluntary to be a head of the clan. It is said that the people had adopted the Chief system so that they could be guided and governed in all activities of life. In course of time the eldest son of the former chief became a Chief. In case there was no male issue in the family it was a custom for younger brother of the former chief to succeed (4).

When a chief died, his eldest son will take his father's place as chief and the other son (if any) would be given region along with subjects and become a chief in the new village.

The beginning of chieftainship was traced back to the time when people began to felt the need for a king/leader for village security against the invasion from other villages. Mizo society was segmentary society like most tribal societies, inter-clan feud became a common conflict between villages. Raids frequently happened and due to the frequent raids by other village in the absence of men who worked in their jhum or unexpected invasions that can happen anytime, people started to feel that safety and security against enemies and foes was needed. So, they request Zahmuaka who happened to be strong and reliable to be on guard while they were working and vice versa, and that they will give his share at the time of harvest. And so, Zahmuaka by the advice of his wise spouse Lawileri has accepted the request as well as the offer. Thereafter, Zahmuaka became the chief of the village, and his sons were later the ancestors of the Sailo clans, who continued to rule majority of villages, and later they were known as chief clans. In the passage of time, chieftainship evolved into heredity. Sangkima wrote,

The Mizo chieftainship was an integral part of the Mizo political life. The chieftainship was, in the beginning, an evolution but in course of time it

became hereditary. The right to succession was reserved only to those sons who were potent and gifted with capacity (34).

In the traditional Mizo society, village administration and political system is consisted of men only. There were very few chieftess who ruled over their subject due to some particular reason. For instance, Ropuiliani, the chieftess of Denlung village occupied her position as a chieftess at the death of her husband chief Vandula. Other than these, women were not given the position to interfere in the village administration. The Mizo sayings “Hmeichhe finin tuikhur ral a kai lo” (The wisdom of women does not extend beyond the village water point) refers to the condition of women regarding their subordinate position in the village administration and it also reflected the limitation of their roles beyond domestic and household duties. The administrators that consisted male members only would rule and contemplated according to men’s perspectives. Thus, village administration is in itself founded and formed under the influence of patriarchal ideology.

The administration of Mizo society consists of other village officials appointed by the chiefs like the *tlangau* (village crier), *thirdeng* (blacksmith), *puithiam* (priest) and *ramhual* (Kipgen 60). Kipgen further states that,

The office of Ramhual was coveted because quite a few could be appointed to it. They were experts in agriculture, and for the service thus rendered to the community they were given the privilege, next only to the chief, of choosing the choicest plots to cultivate themselves. Of course they also had to pay a heavier tax called Fathang to the chief than other cultivators... They were respected citizens, friends of the chief, who helped him whenever he needed to entertain guests (60- 61).

The village officials who had helped in the administration and functioning of the society were all occupied by men.

Zawlbuk played a very crucial role in the traditional Mizo society. It serves as one of the most important features of social institution in Mizo society. *Zawlbuk* is a bachelor’s dormitory. It is a big house which is situated at the centre of the village. All

young men in the village sleep at *zawlbuk*. It is not only a dormitory for the youths, but was indeed an instrument for social control and organisation (Lalzama 24). It is a place of informal education specifically for male. Women were forbidden to enter *zawlbuk*. Bachelors and young married men sleep in *zawlbuk*, and older men who had ceased to sleep in it also came day and night to discuss and talk of whatever incident or things that is happening or had happened in and outside the village. They talked about great warriors, and of those men who have extraordinary characters like strength, courage, valour and virility of the past and present. They also talked about women with extraordinary talent and beauty. It is a place for social information not only for the inmates but for the whole village. There were no subjects that does not fit in for the discussion topics. It is also a place where historical events of the past were delivered and passed on to younger generation.

Boys were entrusted with duties to collect firewood, which they have to bring every evening. When boys (*thingnawifawm*) brought firewood for *zawlbuk* in the evening, he is supposed to have an eye-witness, in the absence of which the boy is charged with a penalty of lying, which is fined with a double work next evening. When a boy reached puberty he is freed and relieved from the task of *thingnawifawm* and became a full member of *zawlbuk*.

Zawlbuk plays a very crucial role for the formation and maintaining of Mizo culture and traditions for it is a meeting place as well as a discussion platform. They report, discussed and talked about everything that is happening in and outside the village and the meeting's decision of the *zawlbuk* inmates or their views and attitude is carried out by themselves. It is a place where everything regarding village security and war strategy and plans against their enemies or hunting of wild animals are discussed and resolved. They are ever ready to encounter any attack from enemies or ready to run after wild beasts that come at night to eat their domestic animals at all times. A leader of *zawlbuk* inmates known as *val upa* is highly respected and looked upon, without whose approval any activities or plans could not be taken up. He is a wise and respectable man who looks into the matter and condition very carefully and gives direction accordingly. No one dare to object or violate his voice. Even the chief

usually sought for his opinion in regard to the welfare of the people, warfare and activities of young men.

Zawlbuk is a place where informal education is carried out. Boys were told stories of prominent heroes who by their courage and heroic deeds have proved their valour and virility. These stories have been induced into the minds of young boys. Thus, *zawlbuk* is an important institution where masculine traits such as - courage, perseverance, boldness, dedication and self-sacrifice for the village were instilled into the minds of young boys and young men. It is a place where boys were taught the traditional masculine traits and behaviour and were trained to become men. Boys or men who lacks these masculine traits and behaviour are even called as *nuthai* or *tuai*, which is a derogatory term for effeminate men or men with feminine traits.

The chief knew that men are his sources of security and development, he would not normally come into their way. The *zawlbuk* inmates along with *val-upa* can even make decisions to stigmatized woman and their family, for not hospitable to those who court them. They can even *thiat* (disassemble) their veranda or massively pushed their house. If this kind of incident happened, it was so shameful for the victim's family that they usually migrate to other villages. Other than the chief, the men of the village were so powerful and esteemed that their attitude and opinions are regarded to be of great importance.

Even when the member or inmates of *zawlbuk* is found to be misconducting, they taught him such a lesson that he would not dare to attempt it again. If they were caught with misconduct, they were punished and no one in the village, even their family or the chief will not dare to intervene in those acts. An act of cruelty against humanity and violation of social norms and society or sexual abuse such as *mi nu lawithlem*, rape and sodomy are taken as a very serious offend, that punishment of any degree is given by young men under the guidance of *val-upa*. Even they can show their agitation against the chief at times.

The Mizo socio-cultural norms and traditions is largely influenced by their religion. They were highly religious people, and their religion is deeply connected with

their everyday life and in all aspects of their life. The Mizo sayings such as proverbs and maxims, their superstition expressed in the form of the do's and don't's, are the outcome of their religious belief. In short, religion serves as the main foundation and formation of the socio-cultural life and practices in traditional Mizo society.

B. Lalthangliana posited that the Mizo religion (the worship of Sa and Khua) had been originated during 1300 – 1700 A.D while they were living between the Run and Tiau river. (Lalthangliana 225). They worshipped *sa* and *khua*, who they believed is the supreme Creator who is known as *Pathian* or *Khuanu* (Liangkhaia 153). Every family have their own *sakhua* which was worshipped by performing several religious rituals and sacrificial ceremonies. When a married man left his ancestor's home and started to live in a separate house with his wife and children, he can have his own *sakhua*, meaning that he can start to perform certain traditional religious rituals and sacrificial ceremonies for his own family. It is believed that every family have to worship God as family. They believe in one supreme God who is named as *Khuanu* or *Pathian*. *Pathian* or *Khuanu* is used synonymously and sometimes in Mizo folktales, they are referred to as a couple who resides in heaven, seeing and looking at everything that is happening in the earth. They are worshiped with profound respect, asking or expecting blessings and guidance in every aspect of their life. Mizo people are religious people, and hence religion played a crucial role in the functioning of traditional Mizo society. From birth to death, certain rituals have to be performed. Their life in every matter has been connected in one way or the other to their religious belief, which in turn serves as the formation of their traditions, customs, and culture.

The traditional Mizo religion can be said to be dominated by men. There are two type of priests (*puithiam*) namely - *bawlpw* and *sadawt* in Mizo religion. *Bawlpw* is a priest who performed rituals and offer sacrifices to bad and evil spirit at the time of illness. They believed that all sickness and illness are caused by these evil spirits. In order to please them, they have to sacrifice various domestic animals like chicken, hen, dogs, goats, pigs to the evil spirits according to their illness. *Sadawt*, on the other hand is a priest, whose role is to perform ceremonial religious rituals and sacrifices to

God for his blessings, guidance and protection. The role of a *sadawt* or *puithiam* was performed only by men.

Women have no role in religious activities other than looking after and taking care of the domestic animals, to be used for religious rituals and sacrifices. There has even been a saying that defined how women have no place and role in religion, “Hmeichhia leh chakai in sakhua an nei lo” (Women and crab have no religion). Thus, Mizo traditional religion (*Mizo sakhua*) can be said to be a religion dominated and formed by patriarchy, under which women take part only as helper so that men can fulfil their religious duties and obligations. The patriarchal structure in traditional Mizo society can be said to be framed and formed by the ideology of male supremacy in their religion.

Family formed the smallest social unit in Mizo society, which is patrilineal in nature whereby lineage is accounted only through male descent. The father is the head and owner of the family, everything - even children and wife belongs to the father. In case of divorce, it is the wife that should leave the house even though the wife's contribution to the establishment of the family is no less important than the father. Writing on the patriarchal structure and poor status of women in the family, Malsawma said,

Since time immemorial the Mizo family system was purely patriarchal, in which the father or any other oldest male member dominated the whole life of the family. With the subordination of women to the maximum extend, the Mizo family system is extremely patriarchal. Therefore in the family, women held a very low position in the Mizo society. They were regarded as moveable property bought with a price to be thrown away if she disobeyed the order of male authority (Malsawma 52).

Women could not claim anything other than the *thuam*, dowry which was brought by her at the time of marriage.

Inheritance of family property was solely reserved for male descent. Stating how the family property is inherited or divided among the sons, Harendra Sinha and B. Lalrinchhani wrote,

The property of the deceased is divided among the sons; the youngest, however, getting the lion's share. The reason is that it is anticipated the youngest son will look after his parents in their old age when the elder brothers established themselves on their own separately. Failing a son the nearest male members of the deceased relative would inherit the property (15).

Women were not normally included in the inheritance right, but only on some rare cases. For instance, if there is no male heir on the father's side, his daughter could inherit his property, and still if there is no daughter his wife will inherit.

Family is the first institution of gender stereotyping that starts right from birth. It plays a significant role in the preservation and for the proper functioning of the traditional culture and social mores in Mizo society. It serves as the first institution where children and youths are taught various societal norms and traditions. Children are guided, taught and treated according to their gender. The birth of a baby is warmly welcomed and considered a blessing by the family, irrespective of their gender, but starting right from birth, a baby is treated differently according to his or her gender. A baby boy is welcomed with a blessing *ral that tur* (one who will kill the enemy) or *ral in hal tur* (one who will burn the enemy's house). A baby girl on the other hand will be welcomed and blessed to become *nula hmeltha, se man tur* (a beautiful woman whose bride price will cost a mithun). These blessing words are the ideals of the family, that prestige and status for the family will be achieved by their sons, and that their daughters will also bring in precious treasure for them through their bride price. Women of beauty are highly adorned and sought for; women who have good skills and talent in hand loom, and other feminine works are also greatly admired. Thus, girls are confined in the house, helping their mothers in domestic works and household chores at a very early age, so that they will learn from their mothers and developed their skills in whatever is considered as a girl's work. Boys on the other hand, are relieved from

almost all the domestic works. They spend most of their time with their friend, wandering and exploring around the villages and forests. They are expected to be courageous, brave and strong in order to become great warriors. Their early participation in *zawlbuk* and their boyhood experience helped them to acquire the masculine traits. Therefore, boys and girls are nurtured by the family in such a way that they would grow and develop into becoming an ideal man and ideal woman.

The family strictly adhered to patriarchal ideology by preserving and nurturing traditional gender norms. The father is the owner and head of the family whose word is the rule and law of the family. Everything that belongs to the family, even his wife and children are owned by him. A wife is expected to be obedient, respectful and submissive to her husband, children are also taught and guided in accordance with the traditional gender roles. Boys are taught to be brave and strong, whereas girls are taught to be tender and kind. Boys are expected to be brave, socialized, and adventurous, whereas girls are confined to home and domestic life. Since household works and domestic chores are considered to be women's job, girls are expected to help their mother at home. Carrying water from the village water point and collecting firewood for the family, babysitting, and the like are considered to be the duty of girls. Boys on the other hand, are not engaged in domestic works, and that they have more free time to wander and roam around the village, exploring the jungle and rivers. They also played raid and wars, hunting of wild animals, *in se lem chaih*, building *bukte* (small jungle hut), and so on. The only duty that is strictly assigned to them is to bring firewoods to *zawlbuk* every evening. They listen to stories of great and brave warriors, which inspire and motivated them to become one. The different expectations and different treatment of a child according to their gender, moulded them into becoming man and woman.

Men and women were assigned different roles and status in the family. Apart from house construction and jhumming works, men's job is mainly associated with social issues like village security, such as war, hunting, fishing and the like. Women were also engaged in jhumming work, and at the same time all household chores are entrusted to them. At night, they will cook food for pigs and do spinning work, while

attending the men who come to their house to court them. She should be very hospitable to those who court her. Next morning from dawn, she starts the day with pounding rice or collecting water from the village pond. Cooking and feeding of domestic animals, preparing breakfast and making lunch for the family was her job. After returning from the jhum, the various domestic works again falls on their hands.

Marriage in Mizo culture take place after negotiation is made between two families through *palai* (intermediary or negotiator). The boy's family would send *palai* to the girls family to woo for their daughter into marriage with their son. If the girl's family agree, they will demand a bride price, which traditionally is rupees four hundred twenty. Since money is scarce in olden days, the girl's family will sometimes ask or accept something in place of money like gun, gong, etc. If both families can negotiate with the bride price, marriage can take place. Since Mizo society is patrilocal in nature, a girl will leave her family to live with her husband and his family after marriage. She will become a *mo* (daughter in law) to her husband's family, and have to live a life that is expected of a *mo* (daughter-in-law).

There are many things that a *mo* should do and should not do in order to become a good wife and good daughter-in-law. For instance, frequent visit to her parent's home is considered immoral, whereas kindness, gentleness, obedience, submissiveness and hospitality was considered as moral. Women with skills and talent, kind, diligence, perseverance, dutiful and good health are esteemed and favoured. A *mo* (daughter-in-law) for instance, should wake up early in the morning, doing all women's work, like carrying water from the village water point (*tuikhur*), pounding of rice and cooking breakfast, etc; she will work in the jhum with her in-laws for the entire day. At night, she has to cook food for pig, spin cotton thread for the family. She is expected to work hard and eat less, she should try to adapt and adjust herself to her husband's family and should be willing to serve the family without any complain.

The main occupation of the traditional Mizo society is agriculture which depends on subsistence farming. Their agriculture depends on shifting and jhumming type of cultivation, which needs fresh and fertile soil after every five or ten years, and they have to migrate for more fresh and fertile land for agriculture. The role of man

and women in jhum cultivation is more or less the same, except that tough work like clearing of the forest by cutting trees and burning the dried trees and leaves are regarded as men's work. Building of small hut in the jhum (*thlam sak*) is also considered to be men's job. But women also played an important role by collecting *di* (straw) for the thatch roof. Apart from this, jhumming works are collectively done together throughout the year. A girl usually has *lawm* or *lawmpa* which literally means exchange of labour with boys, who used to court her and visit her house frequently. Her *lawm* or *lawmpa* will work in their jhum and in return she will repay their labour by working in their jhum the other day. A girl can have more than one *lawmpa*. The *inlawm* system is the advantage of having daughters in the family. The duty of the *lawmnu* (a girl) is to carry all the working materials of her *lawmpa* to and fro; washing, drying, mending and stitching of their torn clothes. At nighttime, a girl has to repeat the routine of cooking food for pigs, spinning cotton and attending men who court her. It is only after all her courtiers went home that she had time to rest.

Women's role and contribution in agriculture is more or less the same with men. But women were already loaded with a burden of all domestic chores from dawn to dusk. The responsibility of making clothes for the entire family, and making of quilts are considered the task of women which are all handiwork, done manually from raw cotton collected from the forest. This is a very long process that requires hard and timeless labour. Women with extraordinary skills in spinning and weaving are highly valued. The economy and survival of the family in traditional Mizo society depends on both men and women.

The highest achievement in Mizo society is to attain the status of *thangchhuah*, which could be obtained by *Inlam Thangchhuah* (domestic or within the village) and *Ram lam Thangchhuah* (outside the village or in the forest). The acquisition of *Thangchhuah* not only grants a man a high honour and status in his lifetime but also after his death that he will be entitled to enter *pialral* (paradise) with his family (Malsawmdawngliana 133-136).

Malsawmdawngliana in his book *Negotiating the Past: Memory History and Culture of Mizo* discussed about the title and how to earn the status of *thangchhuah* in Mizo society,

The title *Inlama Thangchhuah* was perhaps the most difficult to achieve and certainly clearer implications in the belief system of the Mizo. To earn the status of *Inlama Thangchhuah* one has to give a series of feasts of merit in a prescribed order...A person who is an aspirant for the title of *Inlama Thangchhuah* must possess adequate and sufficient material wealth to render a series of community feasts and perform significant ceremonies, known as *Khuangchawi*(133).

In order to complete the whole process of *Thangchhuah* status, a huge amount of rice, number of pigs and mithuns for several feasts were required. Women's role and contribution in this matter is no less than that of men, for their hard work in the jhum and for looking after domestic animals. Attaining the status of *Thangchhuah* was considered the achievement of the father and that his wife and children became the mere privilege of his status. *Thangchhuah* status could also be attained through getting 'all fame' from the forest which is a difficult task even for a sharp and skill hunter. For *Ramlam Thangchhuah*, one has to kill one each of the following – barking deer, sambhar, bear, wild boar, wild Mithun, and elephant. Besides these animals one must kill a large snake called king cobra, a flying lemur (*vahluk*) and an eagle (*muvalnai*) to gain great honor (Malsawmdawngliana 136).

Post- Christianity:

After the advent of Christianity in Mizoram, Mizo society has come across a tremendous changes. Prior to the coming of Christianity, Mizos have no written form of language on their own. As the Mizo had no scripts for writing, the two pioneer missionaries –F.W.Savidge and J.H.Lorrain prepared the Mizo alphabet in Roman script in the year 1894. "The formulation of Mizo alphabet by the missionaries was the beginning of written literature of the Mizo" (Lalzama74-77).

Rohmingmawii in her article 'Social Economic and Political History of the Mizo' also mentioned the positive impact and changes brought by the missionaries through the invention of the alphabet in Mizo society,

Thus, the introduction of script by the pioneer missionaries was revolutionary for a society that had a tradition of transmitting knowledge down to generations through oral traditions. It opened a door for further exploration into the wider world which the Mizos did not even know it exists (Rohmingmawii 69).

Along with the new religion, Christian missionaries have introduced formal education as a tool for evangelism. With the introduction of formal education and establishment of schools in various places, the traditional social institution *zawlbuk* began to lose its importance and functions in the society. The informal education system practiced in *zawlbuk* had been replaced by the formal education system in schools. Formal education has changed the social systems and social structures in many ways that not only boys but girls were also included in the formal education. At the beginning, girl's education does not gain much favour in the society due to the specific gender roles ascribed to them. The notion at work was that, since girls have to do all the work at home, there was no point in educating them (Sangkima 168). Men would feel repugnant to marry educated women but gradually education has brought changes in the occupation, economic, cultures and social lives of the people. The early educated men became conscious of the low and poor status of women in Mizo society and campaigned for the emancipation of women folk through their writings. For instance, in the works of Biakliana, the first Mizo novelist, the poor and lowly condition and sufferings of women in the family and society is clearly reflected in his novel *Hawilopari* and *Lali*. Focus on topics such as women and their poor status in Mizo society, have been written by the missionaries as well as Mizo educated men. In the print media, such as *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, many writings that concerns and criticized the status and positions of women in Mizo traditional society were contributed by male writers. The acknowledgement of women's subordination and the

need for emancipation of women from the bondage of traditional patriarchy, became one of the agenda found in the earlier Mizo literature.

The establishment of school for girls has brought about changes and development in the lives of women in Mizo society. Girls were taught and trained to become good wives and good mothers in such a way that they would become more reliable, useful, resourceful and beneficial for the family. Looking into the context of girl's education, L.V. Lalsangkimi wrote,

The coming of Christian missionaries and the availability of education among the female students brought about a new form of conformity towards patriarchy from the lessons taught at school itself. Education in the Lushai Hills was used as a centre by the missionaries to define the gender roles as female students were taught the rudimentary steps of basic cleanliness and medical education as a homemaker it was their duty to take care of their husband and children...Through education the domestication of women was accepted by women themselves as they regarded it as a form of following the religion brought by the missionaries that led to acceptance of patriarchal norms." Thus, education introduced by the missionaries has brought about positive changes and development in Mizo society, however, reinforced the gender roles and subordinate position of women already prevailed in the traditional society (102).

The introduction of education has also developed and uplifted women in many ways but it was not focused on gender equality. Women's education was basically meant to train and educate women so that they will be more equipped and skillful and become a better mother, daughter and wife.

In the post-Christian Mizo society, the Church is not only a religious institution but it also functions as a social and cultural institutions that upheld and sustained the Mizo cultural identity. The old culture and social structure of the traditional society had been replaced by the Mizo Christian culture. With the initiatives of the Christian missionaries, the cultural organisation - the Young Lushai Association, now known as

Young Mizo Association was founded with a view to provide cultural aspect of *zawlbuk* (Nag 172). The Y.M.A is not only the biggest and most powerful social organisation but also an effective social institution, governed and influenced by the Christian ideology.

The church itself is a patriarchal church where only men occupied all the high posts in the church, and women are rarely included in the church committee as they could not be elected by the people for committee members (Vanlalruata 178-179). Zothanchhingi Khiantge in her paper 'Gender Equity in North-East India : The Paradox Within' has wrote,

The church is man's domain. The pastor is male and so are the members of the Deacon Boards. In 1978, Saptawni was elected as "*Upa*" (church elders) from the Mission Veng Presbyterian Church of Mizoram but she was refused ordination on the grounds that the Presbyterian Church was not ready to have women as priests. In 1989, the issue of women's ordination was brought up again at the Presbyterian Assembly but the Synod refused again. It was again rejected in 2000 and 2002 (192).

Till today, most of the Mizo churches have not ordained women in their own respective denominations except few exceptional cases in Baptist church (Vanlalruata 178). In the post Christian Mizo society, the status and position of women have been developed to such an extent that they are not restricted to participate in social, economic and religious activities. There is no discrimination on grounds of sex in the field of education and government jobs. But in reality, the role of women in the political spheres, social and religious institutions is still at the periphery. The traditional belief of the supreme Creator *Khuanu* or *Pathian* has also came to be defined as *Pathian* in the Christian religion. Liangkhaia claimed that, in Mizo traditional religion, *Khuanu*, who is feminine and have equal power to *Pathian*, is worshipped as *Pathian* (God) (Liangkhaia 153). Christianity which is founded upon Judeo patriarchal cultures, and the missionaries who were strongly influenced by the western patriarchal ideology, relegated the position of *Khuanu*, and *Pathian* became more dominant in Mizo Christianity. Gender became more prominent and dominant in

the Christian religion. The emancipation and development of women is not focused towards gender equality. The societal norms on gender that of male supremacy and women's subordinate position in the pre-Christian society is approved and endorsed by the Christian religion and the western patriarchal attitude of the Christian missionaries.

Gender and folklore are deeply connected. Folklore which deals with the lives of the people reflects the social reality and nature of a society. The major components of folklore are related to the lives of men and women. Through the study of folklore gender issues such as - the position of gender, the role and status of men and women, and the power upon which gender is constructed could be brought out through the analysis of the texts. Folklore is the cultural repository of the people to whom it belonged. It preserves and transfer culture to generations and also validates the various institutions that help in the formation of culture. Thus, folklore is an important tool for the study of the people's culture and their society.

The traditional Mizo society has a rich oral tradition which is expressed in the form of folk songs, folktales, proverbs, maxims, and jokes. In his work *Oral Tradition as History* (1985), Jan Vansina postulates the importance of oral tradition as messages of the past which are preserved in the memories of successive generations and claims that "memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past human experience and explain the how and why of present day conditions" (Vansina xi). He posited that the messages of the oral traditions are 'part of culture' and that 'culture shapes all messages', which is an important process of establishing collective representation. The Mizo oral tradition is significant for the study of their culture and their society, as it is a record of their past that has been preserved in their memories and handed down through generations. A Taylor, an eminent American folklorist, has defined folklore as, "the material that is handed on by traditional either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other materials preserved in words" (12).

The word folklore is a compound word of 'folk' and 'lore'. English word 'folk' comes from the German word 'volk' meaning 'people'. Although folklore is likely to

be as old as human society, the term folklore itself is comparatively of recent origin (Thoms 4). The English word folklore is coined by William John Thoms, the English antiquarian only in the year 1846. In his letter to the periodical *The Athenaeum*, William John Thoms, who writes under the pseudonym of Ambrose Merton, proposed and used the word folklore to replace the terms such as ‘popular antiquities’ or ‘popular literature’ used during his time. The English word folklore coined by William Thoms is apparently a translation of the German term *Volkskunde* introduced in 1787 (Bauman 29). The concept of folk as has been propounded by Thoms himself, means the peasant, the rural people or specifically of people of olden times. The word ‘lore’ means the accumulated knowledge or beliefs held by a group, while ‘folk’ describes the group itself, typically living in isolation passing along this knowledge by word of mouth (Folktale).

Folklore is the storehouse of the cultural ideas, wisdom, values, beliefs and traditions of a particular group of people that have been restored and handed down through generations. It is an important tool for the study and understanding of the social life and customs, cultural values and traditions of people. As quoted in *The Analytics of Alan Dundes*, it can be understood that in folklore, more than in other forms of human evidence, “one finds a people’s own unselfconscious picture of themselves” (xi). Major A.J. McCall, a former Superintendent of the Lushai Hills had also claimed the reason of his recording Mizo folktales as, “...the objective in giving these tales being to clarify the real feelings and hearts of the people...” and emphasized on the importance of folklore in Mizo society as “...an essential force in influencing the conduct of its individual...they are part and parcel of all that has gone to create Lushai” (McCall 74-76).

Folklore is broadly classified into different types, such as oral folklore, social folk customs, material culture and folk arts. Oral folklore is also known as oral literature, that includes folk narrative, folk song, proverbs, riddles and folk speech. As its name suggests, the traditional or cultural activities that solely depends on, or done through word of mouth is oral literature. Oral literature is the literature of the preliterate, which is preserved and handed over to generations through words of mouth.

The preliterate Mizo society has a rich oral folklore or literature, which represents and reflects their cultures, customs and traditions.

Folklore is the cultural repository of the people to whom it belonged. It preserves and transfer culture to generations and also validates the various institutions that help in the formation of culture. William R. Bascom has given the importance of folklore for the study of culture as,

...since folklore serves to sanction and validate religious, social, political, and economic institutions, and to play an important role as an educative device in their transmission from one generation to another, there can be no thorough analysis of any of these other parts of culture which does not give serious consideration to folklore (26).

The term ‘folktale’ has always been used loosely to cover the whole range of traditional oral narrative (Thompson21). According to M.H. Abrams, “The folktales are short stories in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally; many of these tales eventually achieve written form” (Abram 112). ‘Folktale’ according to Dan Ben Amos,

Refers to oral narrative in general or to a particular genre of oral tales. Folktale is a translation of the German *Volksmarchen*, which appeared first in *Volksmarchen der Deutschen* (1782-1786), by Johann Karl August Musaus. The term, like other German compounds such as *Volkslied* (1778) and *Volkskunde* (1787), derives from Johann Gottfried von Herder’s thought, use, and coinage, particularly his formulation of the concept of *das Volk*. Folktale, hence, is an oral narrative told by peasants, lower classes, or traditional people whose literacy, if existing, is minimal. In their verbal art these groups were thought to embody the spirit of a nation. Today the term extends to tales of groups with strong traditional, ethnic, or regional base or their literary imitations (Amos 101).

Folktales are fictional stories that deal with the everyday life and common issues of the world and of human life. The characters in folktales are primarily

common people, animals, magical creatures and supernatural beings. In folktales, things which do not normally happen in real life frequently happened. It functions as a form of entertainment, while at the same time contains and conveyed cultural norms and traditions. It helps in the understanding of societal norms and cultural values of people. These stories were shared among generations and serves as an important tool for informal education.

Mizo folktales have been reduced to writing before the formulation of Mizo alphabet. In 1874, Lt. Colonel T. H. Lewin (Thangliana), the Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Hills has recorded three Mizo folktales, namely – Chemtatrawta, Lalruanga and Kungawrhi in his book *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in the Lushai Dialects of the Dzo or Kuki Language* twenty years before the existence of Mizo alphabet. In 1898, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills, J. Shakespear, published *Mizo leh Vai Thawnthu* in which ten Mizo folktales along with other non-Mizo tales were included. One of the Christian missionaries Frederick J. Sandy (Pu Di-a) published *Legends of Old Lushais* in 1919 which contains twenty-two Mizo folktales. Again in the works of Major A. G. McCall in *The Lushai Chrysalis* which was published in 1949, thirteen Mizo folktales have been included. All these four books were the works of non-native speakers. They were collected and written mainly with the intention of studying Mizo culture and their language.

In 1938, a Mizo woman, Nuchhungi collected thirty folktales in her *Serkawn Graded Reader Book*, which were the first Mizo folktales ever written by the natives in Mizo Vernacular. P.S. Dahrawka also published a book, *Mizo Thawnthu*, in the year 1964, which contains twenty-one Mizo folktales. After 1970, works on Mizo folktales by native writers gradually increased. R.L. Thanmawia has published a collection of Mizo folktales *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu* in three volumes in which he categorizes the folktales into myth and animal tales, romantic tales and tales of women as protagonist. K. Zawla also wrote *Mizo Pi Pute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin* (1964) and another prominent authors who collected and published Mizo folktales includes C. Vanlallawma, Lalhmachhuana Zofa, Lal Rinawma.

Mizo folktales have been translated to English by narrative writers. Laltluangliana Khiantge has published *Folktales of Mizoram* (1997) in English, *The Mizo Heroes* (2003) and *The Mizo Folk Tales* (2006) were published by Tribal Research Institute, R.L. Thanmawia and Rualzakhumi published *Mizo folktales* (2017), Margaret Pachuau has published *Handpicked Tales from Mizoram* (2008) and *Folklore from Mizoram* (2013).

The study of Mizo folk literature has become a topic of interest in the academic field. Researchers and academicians have taken up studies of Mizo folk literature through different approaches. Mizo writers, who were documenting Mizo Folktales had done general categorization of folktales based mainly on themes. Lalrinmawii Tochwawng discuss about the classification of Mizo folktale as,

P.S. Dahrawka, who has collected forty-two Mizo folktales has sorted the tales of the compilation into three category such as – Popular Mizo Folk Tales, Tales of Romance and Tales of Chhurbura. The classification made by Dahrawka was not based on any scholastic method but with the intention of simply organising the tales for easy readability. The ten tales under the first category comprise of an assortment of tales with varying themes and motifs. The second and the third set of tales are better clubbed together; the former based on the theme of romance with each tale name after the two main characters while the latter comprises of tales with a common motifs character of Chhurbura (Tochwawng 60).

Laltluangliana Khiantge who collected sixty-six tales in his book *Folktales of Mizoram* has also made a classification of these tales into five groups such as –

1. ‘An inexhaustible hero of Mizo Folktales’, which is an account of Chhurbura and his adventures.
2. ‘Memorable Accounts of Men Folk’, stories that consists of male heroes.
3. ‘Pathetic Life of Women Protagonist / Heroine’, tales of women and their sufferings.

4. 'Story of Love and Compassion of Men and Women',

5. Animal as Character Besides Man. (Khangte 10-13)

The basis of Khangte's classification of the folktales into five categories is the thematic content rather than motifs.

A remarkable attempt in the classification of Mizo folktales has been made by Mizo historian, B. Lalthangliana in his book 'Culture and Folklore of Mizoram'. He divided Mizo folktales in chronological order into two broad categories or period, naming the first period as 'Tiau kan hma a chhuak te', containing tales which are believed to have originated during the period when people were living in the eastern part of Tiau River. The second period included tales, which are believed to have evolved after the people migrated to Mizoram, crossing the Tiau river. Even though his classification is not supported by any historical evidence, and that no systematic study had been made, it is the first and only attempt that has been made in categorizing Mizo folktales into a historical approach.

B. Lalthangliana has argued that in Mizo folktales, a number of songs which are very much related to the stories have been included, and in these songs only the name of 'Run river' had been mentioned, which made it presumable that Mizo folktales might have already existed at the time when the people were living at the coast of Run river around A.D. 1250 (30). He made his attempt to classify Mizo folktales along the Mizo migration route and the names of rivers and mountains that had been mentioned in the folktales.

The origin of the Mizo people is still shrouded in mystery. It is the generally accepted belief that the people came from Chhinlung or Sinlung somewhere in the China Province. They first settled in the Shan State. From there, they moved to Kabaw valley. They again moved on to Khampat and settled there for a period of time. From Khampat they again moved to the Chin Hills sometime in the middle of the 16th Century. By the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th Century, they slowly started to migrate to Mizoram. On their way to migrating to Mizoram, they have to cross the Tiau river. B. Lalthangliana asserted that he does not use any systematic or scientific

method in his work, and that the classification is made on the basis of the historical setting - the names of places, rivers and mountains found in the tales itself. During the process of telling and re-telling of tales to generations, folktales often take hold of the characteristics of time and place in which they are told.

Lalruanga, in his book *Mizo Thawnthu Zir Zauna*, has also made Mizo folktales classification based on a systematic method propounded by folktale scholar worldwide. He classified Mizo folktales into six categories – Animal Tales, Tales of Supernatural beliefs, Jokes and humorous tales, Tricksters tales, Cumulative tales and Romantic tales.

Lalrinmawii Tochwawng, in her doctoral thesis ‘Tell me your stories, a study of Mizo folktales’ has made a further classification of Mizo folktales into seven categories following the form of folktales that have been recognized and identified by different folklorists around the world. They are – Animal tales, Marchen or Tales of Magic, Noodlehead Story, Realistic Tales, Cumulative tales, Romantic tales, Human Tricksters Tales. The folktales classification was done on the basis of themes and motifs found in the tales. She argued that the common motif found in Mizo folktales eluded a water-tight classification according to the popular types of the folktales as have been propagated by Western folklorists.

She further attempts Mizo folktales classification based on the most recent revision made by Hans - Jorg Uther (The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson) wherein she has expanded and rewritten the descriptions of the plots. For her study, Tochwawng selected sixty Mizo folktales which she placed into a well-established classificatory system of folktales. The classification is done in accordance to the themes found in each folktale. However, she posited that the classification system itself too “cannot be comprehensive, for the dynamic nature of folktales themselves defies the imposition of absolutes” (88). A tale may have more than one motif which makes it difficult for exclusive classification under one head. The attempt made by Tochwawng is nevertheless an important development in the scholastic study of Mizo folktales.

Folk narratives are generally conceptualized to be those narratives which circulate primarily in oral tradition and are communicated face to face (Oring 122-123). It is a prose narrative or stories told by word of mouth, that has been passed down to generations to generations. It is one of the many verbal arts that exist in a pre-literate society, that forms the oral tradition. The place and time of its origin and authorship is unknown. It belongs to the folk, reflecting and representing their cultures, customs and traditions. Folk narratives have an enormous function in the society, it is a kind of entertainment for the people and it is also an important medium of informal education in the preliterate society.

Like all other societies in the world, story- telling plays a very important role in Mizo traditional society. It is one of the basic needs in preliterate Mizo society for its enormous functions in preserving and teaching Mizo cultures, cultural ethics, values and beliefs. The origin of Mizo tales or the art and practice of story- telling is impossible to locate, but it can be strongly asserted that it evolved out of human experience and ideas, to suffice the needs of individuals and society. As Thompson has rightly said,

This oral art of tale telling is far older than history, and it is not bounded by one continent or one civilization. Stories may differ in subject from place to place, the conditions and purposes of tale telling may change as we move from land to land or from century to century, and yet everywhere it ministers to the same basic social and individual needs (5).

The preliterate Mizo society has a rich oral tradition which is expressed in the form of folk songs, folktales, proverbs, riddles, anecdotes and jokes. This oral tradition is the literature of the preliterate people, which has been passed on to generations through word of mouth. In the absence of writing, the oral tradition functions as the record of the people's culture and history reflecting the condition of their life. Before the invention of Mizo alphabet in 1894 by the British missionaries, folklore played a very important role in the Mizo society by preserving and transmitting Mizo cultural norms and traditions.

Folktales have also played a very important role in Mizo traditional society as they serve as entertainment for children and youngsters. Story telling is a popular practice and common cultural practice in Mizo society. Parents or elders usually narrate stories to children at nightfall or at bed time. Stories are told at home, and at other places like *zawlbuk* and at any other convenient places. Young men and boys were entertained with stories of legendary heroes and great historical events or historical persons at *zawlbuk*. The social folk customs like festivals and celebrations, social gatherings such as *sechhun*, *khuangchawi*, *salu lawm*, *ral lu aih* were considered as a social entertainment with all the festive spirits of joy and laughter and social participation. Story telling is another such entertainment as it eludes the audience into the world of imagination and ideals. When night falls, children will be entertained with stories by their parents or grandparents. Children will sometime approach person who love or willing to tell them stories and children also tell stories among themselves. One of the characteristics of a good bride in Mizo society is even said to be those who have talent in story-telling. Children would simply approach and ask a new bride to tell them stories. A new bride who shows tender care and kindness to children, good at telling stories are loved by children and are considered as a good woman.

Folktales also function as an important tool for informal education. It functions as a useful source of education by inducing cultural ethics, traditions and social values into the minds of younger generations. The oral tradition of storytelling is a very important way of teaching cultures and tradition, morals and values, social ethics, and gender norms to younger generations. The Mizo cultural ethics and ideals are induced into the minds of children through folktales. Characters in folktales symbolize good and bad, and that good always prevails over evil. Thus, through folktales the socio-cultural norms and ideals are taught and induced into the mind of younger generations.

Folktales are also a useful tool for recording and recollecting the past that helps in creating or building cultural identity. It was Jan Assmann who developed a theory of cultural memory as a creation of cultural identity which he put forth in his work *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity* (1995) based on the concept of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's 'collective memory'. His concept of cultural memory "comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each

society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image” (132).

For instance, due to the absence of written record, the origin of Mizo or their history is often traced back through the use of folk tales or folk songs. Thus, it also played a great role in the reconstruction of the Mizos and their history, such as their probable migrations and important historical events. For instance, the Mizo origin ‘is a constructed concept grounding its formation on collective past memory and myth’, which, however, is not the sole basis of Mizo identity. They claimed themselves as *Chhinlung chhuak* which means people who came out from Chhinlung. All the Mizo ethnic groups regarded Chhinlung or its equivalent names as their origin. Chhinlung is believed to be a hole in the ground covered with a big stone from which all the ethnic tribes emerged from it. ‘This myth of origin has been one of the strongest points in defining the sense of ‘Mizo-ness’ (Vanlalruata 130). Thus, folktales, the unwritten text of the pre-literate which have been told and re-told through generations, function as a collective memory of the people, which plays a significant role in establishing the Mizo cultural identity.

The Mizos proudly claim themselves as *hnam tlawmngai leh huaissen*, which means ‘a brave and altruistic tribe’, *thian chhan thih ngam* which means ‘one who dared to sacrifice his life for a friend’ and also as *sahrang hma a zam ngai lo* which means ‘one who would never feel fear in the face of wild beast’. This self-inscribed notion of Mizoness or Mizo cultural identity is founded upon their historical past and stories of great legendary heroes that have been preserved in their oral traditions. Through the repeated telling of these tales, their cultural identity is reconstructed and revalidated through generations. Thus, Mizo cultural identity could be postulated to be framed upon the ideas of masculinity that led into the subjugation of women in Mizo society. In Mizo society, patriarchal ideology permeated all aspects of their individual and social lives. Men played the role of protector and dominance, whereas women are the ones who need protection and thus relegated to subordinate position.

The preliterate Mizo society had a well-organised culture and rich oral traditions which found its expression in their folklore. Folktales mirrored the

traditional gender roles and gender relations of Mizo society. The dominance of men's and women's passivity is one of the themes found in Mizo folktales. Patriarchy that advocates men's supremacy and women's subordination is preserved and protected in their folktales.

The role of patriarchy that legitimizes the superiority of men over women has been challenged by feminism. The difference between sex and gender has become the major concern of feminism. From antiquity to middle-ages, women were regarded as inferior to men. Women were relegated to the subordinate position of daughters, sisters and mothers who needed the protection of men and who need to be looked after by men. The superiority of man is believed to be natural and is ordained by God.

The scientific accounts of the biological differences of the sexes also tried to prove male supremacy and women's subordination. Feminism is the outcome of challenging the sexist ideology which claims the subordinate position of women based on science and biology. According to Neeru Tandon,

Feminism basically is a critique of male dominance and of male point of view which has forced itself upon the world...the biological distinction between male and female is an accepted fact, the notion that women is inferior to man is no longer accepted to women in general and feminists in particular (Tandon 26-27).

Looking at the history of feminism, the shifting movement of feminism has been classified into waves, each dealing with the same issue but with different aspects. The first wave of feminism is the movement that occurred during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, which was focused on the fight for equal rights, dealing mainly with the suffrage movement. The second wave feminism is the movement during the 1960s and 1970s, which is labeled as the 'women's liberation movement,' demanding not only political and legal equality but insisted control over sexual roles and reproduction. The third wave of feminism is the movement allocated to 1990s till date, which arose out of the perceived failures of the second wave,

questioning the binaries of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’, ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ inherent in patriarchal structure.

Quoting Estelle B. Freedman’s *No Turning Back : The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, Arpita Mukhopadhyay wrote,

Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies” (Feminisms 9).

Feminism thus argues the inequalities between men and women in a society, objecting to the theories that support the disparities as natural and normal. It seeks to study and examine the reality of the lives of women to understand and explain the cause of women’s oppression.

Kath Woodward posited that, “The development of feminist thinking about gender has been widely enmeshed with another key concept, notably that of ‘patriarchy’, which was developed to provide an explanation of some of the inequalities of gender relations and their historical emergence” (Woodward 15). It was Kate Millet in her work *Sexual Politics* who perceived patriarchy as the fundamental oppressive force and argued that it is a system of power which encompasses and underpins all other forms of social relations (Whelehan 15-16). According to Kate Millet, “Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or ‘masculine’ roles and that women always have the subordinate, or ‘feminine ones’” (Millet 84). Proposing the concept of patriarchy Kath Woodward also wrote,

Patriarchy is a social system in which older men dominate younger men and all men have power over women. The concept of ‘patriarchy’ has been central to feminist theories and practice as a social and political system in which men operate as an oppressive class (Woodward 123).

It could be asserted that the role and function of patriarchy in a society is the basis of women's subordinate position.

The research will use folktales as texts and take feminist perspectives as theoretical tools, in order to bring out the nuances of gender relations in Mizo society. Reiterating Bhatia's claim, feminism is not simply about women, but more about how gender inequalities and subordination of one sex by another are challenged and confronted (Bhatia 43). Although social theorists like Marx, Weber or Engel, had studied inequalities in human society, little or no attention had been paid to inequalities between genders. It was Simone de Beauvoir's seminal book *The Second Sex* (1949) that opened up new grounds on the subject of gender relations and inequalities. Beauvoir's work became a major influence during the second wave feminist movement and her famous statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 293) became the foundation of feminist perspectives on gender. The feminists argued that the study of society that focussed on men alone is no justice and they "...sought to understand society through individual experiences. They attempted to understand the 'public' through the 'private'. They advocated a methodology through which women's everyday experiences would help them better understand the structures of society. The feminists argued that it was important to understand these structures from a woman's perspectives, as the power relations are embedded and institutionalized within these structures. The belief is that analysis of the person helps us understand the structures through which gendered inequality is perceived to be natural: "Facts that we study have to be explained and cannot be taken for granted" (Bhatia 47).

It was R. W. Connell, the Australian sociologist, who claimed "gender as a structure or a system of social inequality" (Wedgewood 330). Connell's theory of masculinity had an extensive impact on the field of gender studies "which also provides a critical feminist analysis of specific masculinities whilst at the same time acknowledging the varying degrees to which individual men play in its reproduction" (Wedgewood 329-330). It also challenges hegemonic masculinity and looks at the relations and inequalities between genders. She claimed in *Masculinities* that,

‘masculinity’ could exist only in contrast with ‘femininity’ (Connell 68). Her ideas of hegemonic masculinity as ‘the most honoured or desired’ and ‘currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy’, which ‘guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’, have been taken into consideration while examining heroism in Mizo folktales.

The thesis has been divided into five chapters, with an introduction in the first chapter and conclusion in the fifth chapter. The second chapter is entitled ‘Women in Mizo Cultural Imaginary’. Eleven tales are selected for the study, in order to bring out the positioning of women in the Mizo cultural imaginary. A short summary of the selected tales and thematically based analysis will be done, focusing on women’s passive victimization that had been reflected in Mizo folktales. Through the study, I will try to highlight how the Mizo socio-cultural worldview has been apparently constructed through patriarchal ideology in Mizo society, and how folktales act as the medium of reinforcing the patriarchal notion of male supremacy.

Chapter III is entitled ‘Women as Sacrificial Lamb’. For this chapter, thirteen tales that contain women characters, who are obediently suffering under the dominance of men will be selected. Through the analysis of the tales, the study will try to bring out how the power and victory of men is exposed on women, and how women’s passive submission to male dominance made them into becoming a sacrificial lamb, who sacrifice themselves for a good cause. This chapter will attempt to highlight the patriarchal notion of women’s subjectivity as the root cause of women’s victimization, and how their sufferings and obedience are valorized as good deeds or as something that should be done.

Chapter IV, which is entitled ‘Masculinity in Mizo folktales’, will be a study of women’s position in the Mizo cultural identity, which is constructed upon the ideas of masculinity. Five legendary heroes such as – Vanapa, Chawngbawla, Taitesena, Khuangchera and Neuva will be selected for the study. This chapter will focus upon the role and status of men in Mizo society, and how hegemonic masculinity is framed and constructed upon the legendary heroes, who proved their masculinity through their heroism, such as, their courage and *tlawmngaihna*. The patriarchal social structure in

Mizo society encouraged men to achieve for great achievement, and enabled them to acquire social status through their masculine traits, whereas women were subjugated to the position of good daughters and housewives. This chapter will examine the role of patriarchy and gender relations in the formation of Mizo cultural identity, and how the masculinity of male heroes is portrayed as Mizo ethno-nationalist ideals, which are re-inforced and re-enacted by the tales of legendary heroes.

The objective of my research is to study the role of patriarchy in constructing the gender hierarchy that led into the subordination of women in Mizo society. To analyze the position of women in the Mizo cultural imaginary, and how folktales functions in validating the patriarchal norms of women's subordination in Mizo society, and examine Mizo masculinity as the formation of Mizo cultural identity, and how folktales were used as tools in reinforcing the ethno-nationalist ideals of Mizo in contemporary society.

The research will utilize primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are documented text, such as - *Mizo Thawnthu* by P.S. Dahrawka (1981), *Mizo Pi Pute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin* by K. Zawla (2011), *Folktales of Mizoram* by Laltluangliana Khiantge (1997), *The Mizo Heroes* (2003) published by Tribal Research Institute, *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu Vol.3* (2011) by R.L. Thanmawia, *Handpicked Tales from Mizoram* (2008) and *Folklore from Mizoram* (2013) translated by Margaret Pachuau, *Mizo Thawnthu Zir Zauna* by Dr. Lalruanga (2019). Secondary sources will include relevant published works, theses, research papers and journals. Folktales selection for the study will be taken out from the primary sources mentioned above and detailed analysis of the tales will be done in order to bring out how the function and dynamics of gender in the tales is a reflection of Mizo society.

Glossary

1. *Zawlbuk*: the large house in a Lushai village where the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.
2. *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 the ‘thangchhuah puan’. The possession of this title is regarded by the Lushais as a passport to Pialral or Paradise.
3. *Thingnawi fawm*: to collect twigs, sticks, small branches or brushwood for fuel- especially for the zawlbuk fire. Every boy from a certain age until reaching young manhood has to perform this duty daily if there is a *zawlbuk* in the village.
4. *Val upa*: an oldish young man, a middle- aged man who is a leader of *zawlbuk* inmates.
5. *Lawithlem*: to commit adultery with a woman by force or stratagem.
6. *Sa leh Khua*: an object of worship, a god, ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushai.
7. *Sakhua*: religion, religious rites and ceremonies.
8. *Sechhun*: sacrifice of mithun by killing with spear.
9. *Salulawm*: to celebrate success in the chase of animals with a feasts and dance.
10. *Ralluaih*: a ceremony to celebrate a wild creature killed in hunting by sacrificing a domestic animal.

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CHAPTER II

WOMEN IN MIZO CULTURAL IMAGINARY

Looking at cultural identity as a “collective self-image” (Assman & Czaplicka 125-133), the Mizo cultural identity involves a collective memory of a people who wish to come under a common identity of a shared past. The self-image is not produced simply by re-claiming a glorious past but involves, as Fanon said, “a passionate research... directed by the secret hope of discovering... some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others” (Fanon 170). To this view of Fanon, Stuart Hall adds that the cultural identity project does not end with the ‘rediscovery’ but rather, the “production of identity” which is grounded not “in archaeology, but in the *re-telling* of the past.” It is therefore pertinent to recognize the positioning in the imaginative re-discovery of the past that produces Mizo cultural identity. The “profound research” into the “shared” Mizo past leading to the collective self-image is mediated by a re-discovery of cultural heroes (and heroines). Traditional Mizo society, in the absence of written literature and history, relies much on the collective memory of the past through folklore. The telling and re-telling of the past in the form of folktales is a powerful element in the conception of Mizo identity. Speaking on the relation between folklore and Mizo cultural identity, Margaret L. Pachuau says that the Mizo identity is “located intrinsically within the parameters of Mizo folkloristics” (9). However, these tales do not remain static; they are given to changing and shifting narratives. She explains that the centrality of the animal world in the pre-colonial narrative has shifted to God and man in the postcolonial era.

The concept of ‘identity formation’ within the pre-colonial era was significantly interlinked with that of nature and animals as well as human beings. This was in sharp contrast to the postcolonial Christian domain where the Christian parameters provided in terms of identity formation, where God deemed that man was supreme in terms of all creation...the Bible became the legitimate parameter within the post-Christian ethos (Pachuau 13-14).

Significantly, in the postcolonial re-telling of the Mizo myths, the role of *Khuazingnu* as the creator assumed a relegated position. *Khuazingnu* or *Khuanu* used to be given a central position in the Mizo cosmology. “Every village worshipped a female deity, *Khuanu*” (Thirumal 10). *Pathian* became a more dominant figure in the postcolonial and Christian cultural imaginary. The relegated position of the mythical creator *Khuazingnu* in the postcolonial re-telling is the touchstone of women’s position in postcolonial Mizo society. A re-reading of folk narratives is therefore significant to the study of the Mizo self-image or cultural imaginary.

H. Laldinmawia also highlighted the significance of *Khuazingnu* and *Chulteinu* in Mizo folktales, and wrote,

When *God Was a Woman* written by Merin Stone in 1976 attracted a lot of attention and was studied by many. In the beginning, the creator of the earth is supposedly a woman according to this book. There are a lot of folklorists studying mythology from different parts of the world who agree with this theory. Mizo myth also consists of female deity called ‘*Khuazingnu*’ as the creator and ‘*Chulteinu*’ as the curator (Mizo 30).

Gender division in Mizo society started right from birth. Work distribution based on gender has created gender roles and duties in the family and in social life which subordinated women. Dr. Laltluangliana Khiantge also wrote in *Mizos of North East India* as,

The fact is that there was a good division of labour, and women’s and men’s roles were clearly demarcated. From household work to the public water point, women could deal with almost all duties, whereas men could take care of all other hard work beyond the public water point like searching of jhum plot, clearing of thick forests, making traps for wild animals, fighting with foes etc (81).

There were clear cut division of labour between men and women. Rualkhuma Colney who has discussed about women and their working conditions also wrote,

As soon as a girl became the age of 12- 14 years, they learn to do domestic chores and help their mother. Domestic chores like baby-sitting, cooking, fetching water, cleaning, and tidying the household were at their hands. Then, they soon learn to weave the traditional weaving technique. Therefore, they lend a helping hand whenever there was a bereaved family (31).

Domestic work like preparing cloth for each family members, preparing *pawnpui* (traditional blanket), collecting firewood, fetching water and husking of rice were all at the hands of women. Lalhmuaka also denotes the responsibility of women at the community level, “to collect firewood for the deceased family, fetching water for lungdawh and death ceremony, se chhun and to husk rice for beer for Khuangchawi, and to be present at Chai lam...” (*Zoram Thim Ata Engah*, 25)

Dr N. Chatterji describing the gender roles of a male and female child in the family, also wrote,

As the female child grew in years she was meticulously initiated into adult responsibilities of keeping the home. Unlike the male child who, by custom and convention, had to move very early in his life to the ‘zawlbuk’ discipline, the female child continued to exist in the family constellation. This, by itself, provided a greater psychological reinforcement to the parents in favour of the female child. Besides, her greater closeness to them as also the availability of her help more abundantly and continuously went a long way to establish for herself a secure position in the society’s structure (2).

AG McCall also recorded the narrative of one of a Lushai woman in his book *Lushai Chrysalis* and asserts that,

There was not so long ago a case, where a mother was about to deliver her child, though she was alone in the house. She had sent word to some friends, but they delayed coming till they had finished the evening meal, which they were taking. By the time they appeared the child had been born, and they arrived in time to take charge of it, the mother being at her ordinary work the next day (176).

The roles and duties of women in the family and society in traditional Mizo society is apparently shown from the above statement. Mizo women were really hard working and were assigned specific roles based on their gender. Their work starts from dawn till dusk, having no time to rest. H. L. Malsawma wrote the everyday daily life routine and work done by women as,

The daily life cycle of a Mizo woman was full of tribulation and drudgery. A Mizo woman had to rise early in the morning, fill her basket with empty bamboo tubes, and trudge off before daylight down to the spring, which is generally someway down the hill and the supply of water is frequently so scanty that it takes her sometime to fill her bamboo tubes. Having conveyed her basket full to the house, she has to set to work doing different kinds of household chores simultaneously the whole morning (72).

The role and contribution of women in the family is so invaluable, that an eminent Mizo poet Rokunga, also expresses the importance of women in the family in his poem 'Chunnemi',

Chhungtin run in lumtu chu chunnemi,

A tel lo chuan chhung tin rel a kim si lo;

Rinpui ber tangkai ber chu chunnemi

A tel lo chuan chhung tin rel a kim thei lo (*Thalai Hla Bu* 64).

(A mother creates the warm embrace of home, Home is not whole without her; Mother is the most dependable and helpful, Home is not perfect without her.)

Women's roles and duties are so important that family can not function properly in their absence. Their invaluable contributions in the family do not make them less inferior under patriarchy. It is always men who hold power and authority, and everything belongs to them, while women have nothing to claim as their own, in spite of all the hard work and duties they have done for the family.

A girl child spends most of her time with her family from birth, adolescence, and till motherhood. She sacrificed most of her time looking after the family. The boy, on the other hand, spends a lot of time in the community. He gathered firewood around the ages of seven to ten. They participated in the communal work, like digging graves and rendered help in the making of *khaukhurh*. Protecting the family and society is the duty and responsibility of men.

Chatterji elaborates how Mizo women need men's protection and support, in his work *The Earlier Mizo Society*, "Gaining whatever education she needed in a simple preliterate agriculture based primitive society through living participation in the activities of the family during her childhood she continued her existence under the overall protection of her parents" (3). Meanwhile, the role of men and women in agricultural sector is more or less the same since they work together in the paddy fields everyday. Dr. Laltanpuui Ralte posits that, "Men and women are equally involved in sowing of paddy seeds which is done by dibbling with the help of a small hand hoe at appropriate intervals" (Ralte 327). However, women were still considered as dependent and inferior to men.

Thus, from the above writings, in Mizo society, men and women received different treatment from birth to death due to their gender roles and gender identity. While Mizo women are engaged with work from early morning till nighttime, men on the other hand, had leisure time since they were not involved in any household or domestic work. At night, women still continue to work spinning thread and making yarn while attending the men who came to court them. The night routine of a woman as stated by Lalhmuaka in his work *Zoram Thim Ata Engah*, "To accompany male suitor at night was their pleasant work at night" (26).

A close examination of Mizo folktales will reveal patriarchal bias and hegemonic structures in the construction of Mizo cultural identity. Representations of women in Mizo folktales are indicative of women's position in the new formulation of Mizo identity. A recurrent theme that runs through most folktales is women's passive victimization. Women are seen as passive victims who are in need of rescue. A few tales have been selected to be examined for this purpose. They are Rimenhawih, Rimenhawih,

Ngaiteii, Thailungi, Mauruangi, Darthiangi leh Chertuala, Sichangneii, Chawngtinleri, Kelngoteii, Zawngte leh Nula, Kungawrhi and Tualvungi leh Zawlpala.

Tale 1: Rimenhawihi

Rimenhawihi and her husband Zawlthlia lived in an iron house. She has very long and beautiful hair, which was her pride. One day, while washing her hair in the river, she dropped one strand of her hair into the river which was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught by the servants of a powerful king. When they took out the very long hair from the fish, the king thought that the woman who the hair belonged to would be very beautiful. He sends his men to find the woman and bring her to him. Rimenhawihi's husband, Zawlthlia, was out of village and made his wife locked herself inside the house. The king's servants came and forcibly caught Rimenhawihi by her hair. She valued her hair so much that she did not want to lose even one strand of her hair. So, the king's servants easily caught her and brought her to their king. But Rimenhawihi asked their dog and hens to tell their master, Zawlthlia, to follow the thread which she would drop on the way. So, Zawlthlia immediately followed the thread and was able to rescue her wife, and they lived happily together again.

Tale 2: Ngaiteii

A girl named Ngaiteii lived with her grandmother. One day, they went to their paddy fields and threw weeds together. It was so hot that Ngaiteii felt thirsty very often. Her grandmother, who was tired of carrying water from the pond, asked her to go and fetch water herself warning her not to say 'E Khai' (Oh My), when she looked into the pond. The pond was the spiritual abode of Ngaiteii's father, who had drowned in the pond years ago. When she saw the huge dark pond, Ngaiteii said, 'E Khai', forgetting the warning of her grandmother and all of a sudden fell into the pond. When it took her so long to return, her grandmother hurriedly went to look for her. She saw Ngaiteii at the bottom of the pond, and she also jumped into the pond. They were very happy to see each other again.

The spirit of Ngaiteii's father used to turn himself into a big snake and went out of the pond to work in the field and changed back into human form when he came

back into the pond. In the evening, the big snake came home and changed into human form again. Her grandmother asked him to allow Ngaiteii to return to the human world. He allowed but insisted that Ngaiteii should stay only for a short period of time.

Ngaiteii does not want to go back to her father's place. Her father, who felt that she stayed too long created flood all over the village. The sound of the flood even said, 'Ngai, ngai, ngai'. The people understood that it was done by Ngaiteii's father and that he wanted to take his daughter back. People loved Ngaiteii as she was good-natured and kind. They felt sorry for her, so they did not want to let her go. But the flood began to cover the village, creating more and more chaos. Some people out of distress threw Ngaiteii's belongings one after another into the flood and the flood subsided, but only for a short time. The people, feeling that they had no other choice decided to drop Ngaiteii into the water. They were very reluctant and felt sorry for her. But instead of the death of the whole village, they decided to give her to the flood. With grief and anguish, they put her into the flood and the flood slowly began to subside and later relented.

The people missed her and felt sorry for her that they sang a mourning song for her,

Ngaite hip,

Chhimthlipui maw i tuar a'

Khuangruahsur maw i tuar a'

Ngaite hip

Ngaite hip

You suffered the severe storm,

You suffered the heavy rain,

Ngaite hip

Tale 3:Thailungi

Once there lived a girl named Thailungi. Thailungi and her brother lived with their stepmother and father. Thailungi's stepmother did not like her and always wanted to get rid of her.

One day, Thailungi was silently playing under her mother's weaving loom unnoticed by her mother. A *pawi* trader happened to sell things, shouting "Thirhlum kan zuar e, lei rawh u" (we are selling iron ball, buy it) in the street and then from house to house. When they came to their house, Thailungi's mother replied, "We want to buy it very badly, but we do not have money for it. If you would accept something in exchange, we have a little girl."

Thailungi was struck with surprise and fear but remained silent and pretended to sleep. The *Pawi* trader was curious and came inside the house. They made an agreement and settled for the trade with her mother. Thailungi's mother said that she will send her stepdaughter to fetch water to the village pond so that they could catch her and take her away.

Thailungi was so frightened but could do nothing. Soon after, her stepmother asked her to fetch water from the village water pond. She was afraid and reluctant to go since she overheard everything. She thought of running away into the jungle at first, but she was afraid of the wild beast. Feeling desperate and helpless she had no other choice but to obey her mother's orders. She hesitantly and slowly walked towards the water point and was suddenly caught by the *pawi* trader and was taken away.

Thailungi's younger brother used to play with the iron ball. His friends used to tease him with a song, "Mahni u te thirhlum a hralhtu tu ni maw?" (Who is the one who sold his sister for an iron ball?). When he heard the terrible story, he was shocked and filled with shame. He went out in search of his sister. Finally, he happened to come to the village of the *pawi* trader who had taken his sister. He arrived at the village chief's house. Luckily, Thailungi was the wife of the chief's son. At first, they both failed to recognize each other. Her brother wanted to take her back to their home but Thailungi refused since she was already tied in a wedlock. She chose to remain with

her husband. With heavy hearts and grief, they have to bid farewell. Thailungi gave her a *chempui* (doa) for cutting their mother's head and a *pawndum* (traditional black cloth) for wrapping their stepmother's head. She sang a farewell song to her dear brother, asking him to take her revenge –

Ka takin la zui na law,

Ka man sial sawm haw law new

Hnamchem pha tak pa pia a,

Na nu lu tan nang ka ti.

Puannum pha tak ka pia a,

Na nu lu chun nang ka ti.

(I could not come with you myself,

I gave you a good sharp dao

For which to cut my mother's head.

I gave you a nice black cloth,

For which to wrap her head.

Tale 4: Mauruangi

Once there lived a couple who had a daughter named Mauruangi. Her mother loved and cared for Mauruangi. One day her parents went to the jungle to collect *pumphir* (kinds of forest plants). On their way to the jungle, they have to cross an old bridge. The father decided that on their way back, one who dared not cross the bridge should be thrown down. He bundled his load lightly but bundled his wife's load far more heavy than his. When they came back to the bridge, the husband easily cross the bridge without difficulty since his load was very light. The mother, on the other hand could not cross the bridge because her load was too heavy. Then the father pushed her

down from the bridge. The mother died and turned into a big fish called *Thaichhawninu*.

Mauruangi's father married a widow who had a daughter named Bingtaii. Her stepmother began to treat her badly and Mauruangi's life became miserable. She would not allow Mauruangi to eat good food and instead feed her *favai chiar* (food meant for pig). Mauruangi's stepmother would make her work all day while her daughter Bingtaii would lazily sleep and mumble at Mauruangi. Due to hard work and malnutrition, she became weak, pale and thin day by day.

One day, she went to the river and her mother, whose spirit had changed into *thaichhawninu* (a big fish) saw her and fed her good food and told her to come to her whenever she feels hungry. From then on, she gradually became healthy, looking more and more beautiful day by day. Bingtaii's mother was surprised and told Bingtaii to spy on Mauruangi in order to find out whoever was helping her. After they found out what was happening, Bingtaii's mother asked her husband to kill the fish. After they killed the fish, the meat of the fish was distributed among the villagers. Mauruangi would not eat but collected the bones and heart of the fish. She put the bones inside a clay pot, which after three days changed into a beautiful necklace. Mauruangi also buried her mother's heart in the ground and from there sprang a beautiful *phunchawng* tree.

Mauruangi again began to suffer as before. But when the *phunchawng* tree blooms it bends down its branches and Mauruangi feeds on the sweet juice of the flowers. Whenever she is hungry she would go to her mother – the *phunchawng* tree and would sing –

Ka nu kur diam diam

Ka nu Phunchawng Darhniangi

Ka nu kur diam diam.

Mother gently bend down

My mother *Phunchawng* Darhniangi

Mother gently bend down

Then, she began to grow healthy and beautiful once again. When they found out, they cut down the tree again and Mauruangi started to suffer under her cruel stepmother.

As time passed, her stepmother let the two daughters have a separate jhum. She provided fine vegetable seeds to Bingtaii but gave bad and unfine seeds to Mauruangi. Bingtaii would lazily sleep in the jhum house, and eat up the seeds while Mauruangi would work diligently and sincerely. Soon after, Mauruangi began to harvest fruits and vegetables.

A group of servants of *Vai lal* (Raja) were searching and looking for their king's bride, and one particular day they happened to come across Mauruangi's jhum. They were tired and hungry. Mauruangi willingly fed them with her harvests. They were very grateful for her hospitality and generosity. They asked her to be their king's wife. She advised them to ask for her stepsister, Bingtaii, instead, and that they would take her in place of Bingtaii when they were about to leave the village. The servants did exactly as they were told and took Mauruangi to be their king's wife.

Bingtaii nu, filled with rage, planned to kill Mauruangi. She invited Mauruangi to attend the feast that she had prepared for her. When Mauruangi came, she asked her to look for lice in her hair. Then she pretended to drop her *sakuh* (hair pin). When Mauruangi went down to look for it she poured boiling water on her and Mauruangi died. *Sazate* (wild goat) happened to find her death body and brought her back to life. She stayed in the house of *Sazate* as a nanny. The stepmother handed Bingtaii to the servants who came to bring back their queen.

One day, the servants went hunting again, and happened to hear the voice of their queen Mauruangi singing a lullaby in a nearby cave.

Hmanlai chuan, hmanlai chuan,

Vai lal nupuiah ka awm;

Tunlai chuan, tunlai chuan,

Ka pu Sazaa nau ka awi;

Ai i e, u aw e.

There was time

When i was a king's wife;

But now and then

I babysit my master Sazatea's child,

Ai i e, u aw e

They asked Sazatepa to let them take their queen home. Sazatepa demanded a bunch of bananas for her price. The king was very happy to find his beloved wife again. After he came to know the truth, he ordered the two wives to have a fight and whoever won the fight would be his wife. He covered Mauruangi with a brand-new quilt and gave a sharp dao, whereas Bingtaii was wrapped with an ordinary cloth and was given a blunt dao. The two women began to fight and Mauruangi killed Bingtaii. Then, Mauruangi and the king lived happily ever after.

Tale 5: Darthiangi leh Chertuala

Once in a village, there lived a well-to-do man named Chertuala. He married a beautiful woman whose name was Darthiangi. The couple loved each other dearly. Unfortunately, they were childless even after years of marriage. Although they did not know who was infertile, they simply assumed that it was Darthiangi. Chertuala felt very sad at the thought of having no offspring. He finally divorced his wife and married another woman.

Darthiangi could barely lead a normal life for quite some time. But as time passed, she got suitors as she was a beautiful woman. She could not forget Chertuala as she loved him dearly. She would often say that she would not marry one who could

not bear her mentioning the name of Chertuala. One of her suitors compelled her to marry him, promising that he would not care even if she would often talk about Chertuala. After they married, they moved to another village.

Soon after, Darthiangi gave birth to two beautiful kids. They became rich and lived comfortably and planned to prepare a great traditional feast to attain a noble status of *Khuangchawi*. Chertuala, on the other hand, remained childless. One day, he came to their village selling clay pots and happened to see Darthiangi and her kids.

Chertuala soon realized that he had divorced a woman he loved so much for no fault of hers. Filled with grief and regret, he broke all his pots and went back to his village the next day. With resentment and shame, he locked the door and shut himself inside his house along with all his domestic animals. All of them died.

Tale 6: Sichangneii

Once there was a man who lived alone. He used to fetch water from the pond early in the morning. For some time, the water was polluted before he reached the pond. He was very surprised and angry since he could not find out who had done it. An old woman told him that Sichangneii and her sisters flew down from the sky and took a bath in the pond every morning. She told him that she was a very beautiful woman and that if he could catch her, he could have her as his wife and advised him to catch her from the back.

Later, he caught Sichangneii and took her home to be his wife. She plucked off all her feathers and kept them in a hollow bamboo which he hid in the chimney (*rappui chung sang*). Later on, the couple had seven sons. When the children stayed at home with their father, he would bring down Sichangneii's feathers which he hid away and decorated their heads with it. They will dance merrily and have lots of fun. But when they stay at home with their mother, they will do nothing.

One day, the youngest of the sons, Tlumtea, told his mother how they used to put on beautiful feathers and dance happily with their father. Sichangneii curiously asked where their father had hidden those feathers. Even though all his brothers were

trying to stop him, Tlumtea told his mother everything. Sichangneii happily put on her feathers and hop on the window. She asked her sons whether she look beautiful or not. All the sons except Tlumtea told her that she was ugly and shameful. But Tlumtea, the youngest told her that she was very beautiful. She then hopped further and flew away high up in the sky and never returned.

Later in the evening, their father return from work. When he came to know that his wife had left them, he killed himself.

Tale 7: Chawngtinleri

Long ago, Chawngtinleri and her brother Lianchea lived together after their parents died. Chawngtinleri was so beautiful that all the men admired her and dreamed of marrying her. The fairy king, Lalchungnunga, who lived in the ‘Tan’ mountains, also dreamed of marrying her. So, he used to send his servants *lasi nula* (fairies) in the dreams of her brother Lianchea to allow his sister into marriage. They promised to bless him abundantly. But many time Lianchea ignored and resisted their offer. One night, in his dream, the *lasi nula* showed him a huge number of wild animals which would be given to him if he gave his sister into marriage to their king Lalchungnunga. When Lianchea saw a huge number of wild animals and how his reputation would rise if he happened to kill all of them, he was filled with joy and enthusiasm that he happened to say “Yes” out of excitement.

One evening, while they were working in their jhum, Chawngtinleri went up to the jhum hut roof to collect dried leaves laid out in the sun. As soon as she reached the roof, she cried, “*Awi, ka nu!*” (Oh Mother!) Lianchea rushed out hastily, but she was already gone. He shouted and called her but there was no reply. Lianchea felt terrible and sorry for saying “Yes” in his dreams. But nothing could be done. They searched for her everywhere. but it was all in vain.

After some time, the fairy king Lalchungnunga allowed his wife to visit the world of human with their child. She would often visit her brother with her child. Whenever Chawngtinleri was about to do something or had to leave her child alone for some time, she asked her brother not to have a look at her child. One day, Lianchea,

out of curiosity, took a look at his sister's child. He was filled with horror that the baby had the head of a goat and a human body. When the *lasi* came to know that their physical features had been revealed to a human, they forbade Chawngtinleri to visit the human world. Chawngtinleri felt sorry for the human world. The *lasi* then turned her eyes upside down. After that her longings and nostalgia for her brother and the human world gradually decreased.

Chawngtinleri later became the queen of all the wild animals. She used to weave looms between the mountains of Tan and Lurh.

Tale 8: Kelngoteii

There lived a skillful bracelet maker, and many people went to his village to get beautiful metal bracelets from him. Kelngoteii and her friend also went to the village and asked him to make a metal bracelet for them. The man insisted that they should sleep with him if he was to make them bracelets. Kelngoteii refused to sleep with him, but thinking of all the effort that they had made, her friend agreed. So, he made a good metal bracelet for Kelngoteii's friend while he made a fake metal bracelet out of *Berawchal hnai* (latex of a beraw plant) and clay for Kelngoteii.

On their way home, Kelngoteii, not knowing that her bracelet was fake, dipped her bracelet in the water and began to rub it for shine. Then it started to dissolve in the water. Kelngoteii felt sorry for her bracelet and cried bitterly. She rubbed her eyes and the *berawchal hnai* got into her eyes which made her eyes swell up that she could not see anything.

She was left behind by her friend. Some men saw her and carried her back to the village and on the way, the men who carried her repeatedly slept with her. When they reached the village, they left her at the outskirts of the village. When Kelngoteii's brothers came to take her home, she mistook them for the men who raped her and asked them whether they were trying to sleep with her again. Her brothers then realized that those men had repeatedly raped her.

Kelngoteii became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. They named him Zauhranga. (*Zau* means wide or vast) Finding out who the father of the baby was impossible because she was raped by several men.

Tale 9: Zawngte leh Nula

One day, a woman was taking a bath in the river. A monkey came and took away all her clothes while she took a bath. When the woman asked for her clothes, the monkey insisted that she should promise to marry him. The woman was furious, but out of fear of social humiliation and disgrace she finally decided to marry him. The monkey was living with his mother. He took his new wife to his house. One day, while the monkey went out, she killed her husband's mother and put on her skin and pretended to be her. When the monkey came home, he asked for his wife. Imitating his mother's voice, she told him that she might have run away and that she did not know where his wife had gone. The monkey was furious that he beat her and told her to run away too.

The woman was very happy but acted as if she was very reluctant and sad to leave the house. She walked slowly and gloomily, but as soon as she was out of sight, she ran as swiftly as she could and reached her home safely. She told everything to her brothers, and when they came to know what he had done to their sister, they were furious. But nothing could be done.

She gave birth to a baby monkey boy who looked exactly like his father. Her brothers wanted to kill the baby, but she did not allow them since she loved him dearly.

After the baby monkey had grown up, his mother asked her to go to his father in the forest for good. He sadly went towards the jungle but suddenly heard the sound of her mother's spinning machine and could not continue to go any further. He finally returned to his mother, although he was quite afraid of his uncles. She hid him and secretly let him sleep in the house at night.

On the next day, his mother, having no other choice, had to lead her son once again to the forest. She did not want to do the spinning work that day. The monkey

vainly waited and listened for the sound of his mother's spinning machine for quite some time. Then, he slowly and sadly went off to the jungle to live with his father.

Tale 10: Kungawrhi

Kungawrhi was a beautiful girl. She fell sick and could not recover for a long time. Her father announced that anyone who can cure her daughter can marry her without any bride price. A *keimi* (tigerman) who hid his true identity was the one who caused her illness by collecting Kungawrhi's footprint and putting it in the chimney. After he put the footprint back in place, Kungawrhi was healed. So, he married her and took her home. When they found out that he was no ordinary human being and that he was a *keimi*, Kungawrhi's father again announced that those who could rescue his daughter from him would marry her. Phawthira and Hrangchala set off to rescue her. After they rescued her, Kungawrhi was abducted by *khuavang* (a kind of spirit) while Hrangchala was on the night watch due to his cowardice. But Phawthira, who was bold and wise, managed to rescue her again from the *khuavang*. But Hrangchala, with bad intentions, cut the wild rope while they were climbing out of the *khuavang* village and Phawthira was stuck in the *khuavang* village. Hrangchala made up stories that he was the one who rescued Kungawrhi and married her. After many years, Phawthira managed to come out and went home hurriedly and killed Hrangchala. Phawthira revealed everything that had happened and Kungawrhi was given to him as his wife, and they lived happily ever after.

Tale 11: Tualvungi leh Zawlpala

Once there lived a young couple, Tualvungi and Zawlpala, who loved each other dearly. Tualvungi was very beautiful. One day, while the couple were sitting together on their *leihkapui* (veranda), a man named Phuntiha saw Tualvungi. Being enchanted and attracted by her beauty, he asked Zawlpala if she was his wife or sister. Zawlpala, out of pride and for fun, claimed her as his sister. Phuntiha asked to let him marry her. Zawlpala teasingly asked for a huge bride price in exchange which he thought could never be paid. Phuntiha promised to come back with the bride price.

Tualvungi was so afraid that Phuntiha would really come back. But Zawlpala, on the other hand, felt so sure that he would never be able to pay that much.

Unfortunately, after some time, Phuntiha, who happened to be a magician, came back and paid off the bride price. Nothing could be done since Zawlpala had to keep his word. Phuntiha took Tualvungi and married her. Filled with resentment, shame, and loneliness, Zawlpala could neither eat nor sleep. After some time, Zawlpala went to visit Tualvungi. Tualvungi secretly warned Zawlpala not to eat anything given by Phuntiha. Zawlpala unfortunately ate the wild yam (*bal*) and *zufang* (liquor) given by Phuntiha. Tualvungi felt very sorry, but nothing could be done. She asked him to go back to their village as fast as he could. Zawlpala went back to his village and died soon after.

When Tualvungi came to know of his death, she was filled with sorrow and planned to visit the village as soon as possible. Phuntiha made several excuses and kept on delaying her. After some time, Tualvungi, unable to bear it any longer, decided to leave while Phuntiha was away. Phuntiha, assuming that his wife would try to leave in his absence, put a sharp dao at the door. Unknowingly, she stepped on it and the dao cut her foot very deeply. But she tightly wrapped it up with a cloth and hurriedly went off towards Zawlpala's village. She went directly to his grave and cried desperately. An old woman came by and tried to console her. But Tualvungi asked the old woman to kill her. They dig the grave and after Tualvungi lay down beside Zawlpala's bones, the old woman killed her.

Their spirits changed into a beautiful butterfly. Phuntiha also came after his wife, and when he saw that their spirits were happily flying together, he killed himself out of jealousy, and his spirits also changed into a big black butterfly and kept on chasing them.

Women characters in Mizo Folktales:

Women characters in Mizo folktales can be classified into two types, namely - ideal women and detestable women. Women who are portrayed as ideal woman, normally play the major role of the protagonist, suffer and victimized, but chooses to

remain silent till they are rescued by men. They never crossed the boundary of a female space constructed by society. They are shown as doing either domestic work or women's work in jhum. They played the role of a good daughter, good mother and good wife, who never complained or fought for their own right, freedom and dignity. Selet Thanga, in his book, *Pi Pu Len Lai*, describes Mizo women, "Mizo women carried out works like fetching water, husking and cleaning rice, domesticating pigs and poultry, cooking and washing and looking after the children. They were always busy and tired, having inadequate time to sleep" (17).

As mentioned above, it can be concluded that Mizo women work hard all day without having free and leisure time. The definition of a good woman strongly rests upon hard work, passivity, and a submissive who can be controlled by men. Lalrinmawii Tochwawng states that, "The image of a good woman seen in Mizo folktales were of obedient women who never oppose and argue" (71). K.C. Vannghaka also highlight women representation as kind and passive in folk tales and its reason as, "...to marry a beautiful girl is one of the main competitions of men" (151). It can be assumed that K.C. Vannghaka's good and kind characters of woman are written from the perspective of men. He posits that good and righteous women are defined as submissive to men, submitting to men's judgement and decisions without expressing their wishes and opinions, and that women's beauty are for the pleasure of men. He further elaborates women having qualities that are far more different than the ordinary women who have a bad character and writes, "Normally all women are wise, some includes cleverness who bring harm to other people. They often break and split one's family and such bad character are humiliated and disgraced at the end (164- 165).

In one of the Mizo folktales, Mauruangi, Mauruangi or her mother, for instance, were not given any chance to speak for themselves. They were voiceless and remained silent throughout the story. But good women who are obedient, kindhearted, forgiving, humble and hard-working are the ideals of men that they are often rescued or rewarded in the end by good and heroic men who change their tragic fate forever.

Detestable women, on the other hand, were the antagonist or the villain from whom the complications of the story began. They were filled with hatred, envy, and

selfishness that they instigated a plan or made up lies to harm and cause suffering to the protagonist. The suffering of Mauruangi began under the tyranny and sinful deeds of her stepmother and stepsister, Bingtaii. But in the end, the good are always rewarded, and the bad are always punished. The stepmother and her daughter Bingtaii are representatives of bad and detestable women, who are lacking the ideal feminine qualities. They are aggressive, cruel, envious, dominating, and full of hatred. The stepmother gives orders around the house and have no respect for her husband. Even her husband seemed to be afraid of her. It was her initiatives that led to her marriage with Mauruangi's father. Bingtaii, her daughter, is ugly, lazy and a liar. They both represented the negative gender stereotype women. In Mizo folktales, the stepmother is often depicted as cruel and cunning, possessing all the negative gender qualities, but there is hardly a stepfather who becomes hostile towards their stepchildren.

Even though the stepmother is dominating and controlling Mauruangi's father, she in the end suffered by losing her own daughter Bingtaii and all that she plans, desire and dream for her own daughter belongs to Mauruangi. Thus, Mauruangi, the good and innocent woman and passive victim, is rewarded with the high position of a queen by becoming the wife of a great chief. In the story of Thailungi also, the stepmother has to face the vengeance of Thailungi's brother. Obedient and submissive women like Chawngtinleri, who is a dependent on her brother, also became the wife of a fairy king and was later considered a great fairy queen, who created and took care of all the wild animals. But her high status of being a fairy queen is acquired through her submission and obedience to her brother and husband. Similar is the case with Kungawrhi, who obeyed her father and married thrice, but remained silent all through her life.

The stereotypical women characters found in Mizo folktales symbolize the ideal women in the Mizo traditional culture. Mizo society and culture are framed by a patriarchal ideology with the notion that men are superior, and women are inferior to men; that men should decide and women should obey. In the preliterate society, folklore plays an important role as it is the only available way of recording and preserving their history and culture. It is the literature of oral society. The literature of

the people, which is the record of their history and also a reflection of their society, cultures, customs and values, is very important for the formation of cultural identity. The collective identity is learned and acquired through literature and, hence, folktales, the literature of the preliterate Mizo society, is an important tool in framing and constructing the Mizo cultural imaginary.

In Mizo folktales, patriarchal dominance is very obvious that men are usually portrayed as heroes, whereas there is hardly any concept of women as heroes. Women, even protagonists, are in the shadow of men, waiting to be rescued. The recurrent theme that runs through Mizo folktales is the passive victimization of women. Women are shown as victims who suffered silently, having no choice or options other than to bear their sufferings without any complaints. They did nothing to save themselves, they are powerless to claim their rights and dignity, they are beautiful but weak, and have to be rescued by heroes. They are dependent on men and their fate also changes according to the action of men.

H. Lalawmpuia in his book *Ziakfung Zalen* wrote about women's inferior position in Mizo folktales,

Women in Mizo folktales who were beautiful and kind, diligent, brave and altruistic person have never been rewarded in any form. Acknowledging how men were given reward and honour, women deserve the same. The fact that women do not possess a good position just because they are female is already a form of women's discrimination (41).

In an attempt to bring out the cultural identity of women reflected in Mizo folktales, a thematic based analysis of women's passive victimization of the selected tales is done.

In the tale of Rimenhawih, the heroine, Rimenhawih, is portrayed as a beautiful wife who is completely dependent on her husband. In her husband's absence, she had to be locked inside the house for her safety. They are rich enough that they live in an iron house. But without her husband she was so powerless and helpless, that even their iron house could not protect her from the enemy. The helplessness of women

without men is clearly depicted in this story. Her beauty and her beautiful hair, symbolized the feminine quality she possessed, but it also made her vulnerable that she became a victim of a powerful man. She is shown as too vain to be more afraid of losing some of her beautiful hair that she could not defend herself from them even though she locked herself safely inside their iron house and that the intruder could not enter the house. The importance of men in the family is shown that, without them, women are too vain or weak to defend themselves from enemies. In traditional society, man played the role of village defense against enemies and wild animals. This story also stressed upon man as one who could defend and would rescue women from enemies. While she is portrayed as very vain and foolish, she is also shown as a wise woman who is able to leave a trace by dropping threads on their way so that her husband can keep a track on them. She is also an important agent to reveal the superiority and heroism of her husband.

The title of the story is named after Rimenhawih, but she was only the passive victim who did nothing to save herself and simply waited to be rescued. The story was more of a fight between two powerful men over her. Women were often considered as commodity that could be owned, bought or sold like other valuable items. The theme of this story can be said to be the subordinate position of women or the superiority of men over women.

In Kungawrhi's tale, the heroine, Kungawrhi, is also passive, obedient and submissive. She had no voice on her own, and did nothing at all to speak out the truth. Her father married her to the *keimi* as he had promised. Again, she was married to Hrangchala after he had falsely claimed himself as the hero who rescued her. After Phawthira killed Hrangchala and disclosed the truth, she was again given away to him. Kungawrhi married thrice to three different men but without any decisive role on her part. It was her father who made all the decisions, and she was simply like a puppet who moves according to the one who controlled her. Her father's decision had to be obediently fulfilled. She needed to be rescued from two of her husbands who happened to be tricksters. The dominance of the father over his daughter, the heroism of

Phawthira and the passive victimization of Kungawrhi are the main themes of this story.

In Ngaitei's tale, the dominance of patriarchy or power of men over women could be regarded as the main theme. The powerlessness of women in a patriarchal world is the dominant idea obviously shown in the story. Ngaitei's grandmother, who had experienced and understood the patriarchal world, was very cautious and afraid to arouse the power of Ngaitei's father. She was shown as a protective agent against patriarchy but also as one who failed in every attempt to escape from it. She was quite aware of the fact that she could not stand against the power of Ngaitei's father, but courageously did everything to save her grand daughter from him. She dived straight into the pond and faced the spirit of Ngaitei's father, asking him to let her daughter go. She did everything she could, but in the end, she was powerless, and they never heard from her again. Her love and care, her courage and wisdom were all futile.

Ngaitei had all the characteristics of a traditional stereotypical woman's character. She was beautiful, good-natured, gentle, and kind. The people of her village adored her and loved her a lot. She was weak and unable to defend herself, and later became a poor suffering victim of her father. She had no freedom to choose what she wanted in her life. Her true desire and personal choice were to stay in the human world and live with her grandmother. But she could not decide what she should or should not do; she was not in a position to make her life choices; she instead had to submit and sadly fulfill her father's demand. There was no place in the human world that was safe for her, there was nothing that could stand for her or change her fate.

Ngaitei's father is shown as having two forms of shapes. It could also be interpreted as the dual nature of man outside and inside the home. He wears his natural and human character when he is outside the house, but became a terrifying snake with all the powers vested in him in his own house, or that he is authoritative such that other members in the family have no say in his house. The rule of the father is not to be objected to or violated. The consequence of violating it could even lead to tragedy. The dominance of patriarchy, which is accepted as a natural phenomenon, is unquestionable. The rule or decision of the father in his jurisdiction may not get the

approval of society at large, but people have no intention or have no way to interfere in family matters, since it is believed and generally accepted that man is the owner and ruler of his own family. Although the people in the story wanted to save Ngaitei in every possible way, they could not save her. They were powerless to change the attitude of Ngaitei's father. The only thing they could do was to let Ngaitei face her tragic fate.

The song sung by the people after Ngaitei was taken away by her father in the flood may also signify the harshness of patriarchy. "Chhim thlipui maw i tuar a, khuangruah sur maw i tuar a, Ngaite hip" could also mean that Ngaitei is suffering from a severe storm and heavy rainfall to which nobody could possibly do nothing at it. The severe storm and heavy rain itself symbolize the law of nature, which often causes destruction. There is nothing that could change the course of nature and, likewise, nothing could alter the powers of men. The dark pond, which is the spiritual abode of her father, could also be interpreted as the power of patriarchy. The very stillness and quietness itself doubled the terror of the pond. Similarly, patriarchy, which is silently believed to be a natural phenomenon, can turn into a terrible nightmare for women and looks as horrible as the dark pond itself.

In the tale of Thailungi, Thailungi was a victim of a cruel stepmother. She possessed the ideal character of an innocent, obedient and submissive girl, which was believed and accepted as normative behavior of a good girl. Women in Mizo society are taught at a very early age that they should follow cultural normative behavior. Girls are confined to domestic areas and help their mothers with household work. Thailungi was silently playing under the weaving loom of her mother while her younger brother and her father were nowhere to be seen inside the house. Her mother did not even know that she was there, which shows her passivity and silent nature. Women who are talkative, outgoing and noisy are regarded as imperfect or flawed. One of the most prominent features in Mizo folktales is the reflection of the gender identity of femininity and masculinity. Characters in folktales are shown as either good or bad; women with feminine qualities are portrayed as good, while women who possess masculine qualities such as being ambitious, aggressive, brave, dominant, strong and

powerful are shown as bad or detestable women. The good women suffer and silently endure their pain and situations, but they are often rewarded in the long run, whereas the bad women who are dominant, selfish, and cruel usually die or suffer in the end. In this story, Thailungi also simply endures and passively suffered her stepmother's cruelty, but in the end, she was rewarded by being married to a chief's son and also that her brother went home with a feeling filled with vengeance against their stepmother.

The conflict in the stories of most folktales is often instigated by characters who have negative gender-normative behavior. For instance, women who are authoritative or dominant in the house would create problems and suffer in the end. For instance, the character of a stepmother is usually designed as the one who dominates the entire household, who plays the role of a father by making decisions on her own. In Mizo folktales, stepmothers are represented as problem makers, lacking love and care, filled with hatred and envy, whereas there is hardly any stepfather who causes harm or suffering to their stepchildren. This representation of the stepmother may be deeply connected with the patriarchal ideology that women or wives should not rule over the family, and also that men should know the roles and duties of a father. In this story, Thailungi's father is not heard or seen in the whole story. He remained silent and invisible throughout the whole story. The tale of Thailungi could also be interpreted as a warning to women as well as men, about the tragedy or suffering from violating patriarchy.

The reflection of Mizo society is also obvious from the fact that women suffered under the bride price system. In most Mizo folktales, the suffering of women is deeply connected with the cultural marriage system. Parents would normally select the highest bidder among those who woo for their daughter. Lalengruai Sailo describe men's view on women and marriage, "Women were considered as 'White domestic animals' subjected to be sold and bought," (9) and affirms that Mizo women were like a commodity that could be bought and sold. She further illustrates that, "In marriage, Mizo women are purchased like property by men" (9).

In the tales of Thailungi, the way Thailungi's stepmother sold her in exchange for an iron ball could signify how women were seen as objects that could be bought or sold, whereas men were seen as subjects or owners. In Mizo folk songs also, there are a number of songs which talk about the painfulness of marrying without love and the bitterness of a forcible marriage due to the bride price. Thailungi's brother proudly used to play with the iron ball among his friends. When he understood the story of the iron ball, he was filled with shame and felt pity for his sister. His masculine traits are revealed when he made his own decision to find his sister. The stepmother too could not do anything to stop him. The status of men and women in the family is quite different, in terms of the freedom of choice they can make.

Thailungi who was wedded to a husband and could not go back home as she was already tied in a wedlock. She had no freedom of choice as a girl, owned as a daughter by the *pawi* trader, and as a wife after marriage. Throughout her whole life, Thailungi was owned or rather dominated by powerful agents and could not make any decisions for her own life. She had to follow orders and simply accepted the fate that had befallen her. The passivity and silence of Thailungi was the most esteem and highest moral values attributed to women in Mizo society. Thailungi was fortunate that she married the chief's son, and also that her brother came to rescue her. Although she was the victim, it was her brother who could take revenge for her. Thailungi could do nothing, but waited, till her brother look for her and found her in the end.

The story of Mauruangi portrays two stereotypical women characters – the ideal women and detestable women characters. Mauruangi and her mother represented the ideal woman type. They are loving, self-sacrificing, obedient, gentle, weak, submissive, diligent and hardworking and the like. Although they have suffered endlessly under the cruelty of those who dominated them, they remained silent and passively endured their tragic life. For instance, Mauruangi would do nothing to save herself from her miserable life. She would passively suffer and silently bear the cruelty of her stepmother. It was only when she married the *Vai Lal* (chief) that her miserable life ended, and the stepmother could not do anything to her while she was under the care of her husband. When she was away from her husband, she suffered the tyranny

of her stepmother again and even died in her hands. After she was killed by her stepmother, it was again a Sazaa (a male serow) who brought her back to life. She stayed at Sazaa's house and dutifully served him by looking after his child while he was working. She had no other alternative than obeying or serving her new master Sazaa. The king's servants luckily found her and paid her price, which was a bunch of bananas to Sazaa as he demanded, and brought her back to her husband, the king. Her husband, the king, let her fight with Bingtaii and helped her win the fight and after that they lived happily together.

The whole life of Mauruangi clearly shows women's subordination in a patriarchal world. She is dependent on others throughout her whole life. But her very weakness or feminine qualities rewarded her for being married to a great king. Without her male counterpart, she is nothing but a desperate victim. She has no heroic qualities such as courage or strength but patiently waits till she is rescued from her horrible life. Like Cinderella, who also suffered the stepmother and stepsister's cruelty but was rewarded by marrying a handsome prince in the end, Mauruangi also suffered the same fate and was finally rewarded by becoming a queen of a great king. These stories clearly showed the patriarchal concept of gender ideology that women are object while men are the subject. Her song "There was a time when I was a queen; But now I take care of my master, Sazaa's child..." also clearly shows that she was always dependent upon men, and that she played the role of a helper all her life.

Women with feminine characters and those who follow the gender norms are highly valued, and they are the choice of men. Mauruangi, possessing all the ideal women characters, has attained the high status of a queen in the end. Here, it is also obvious that the status of women changes in relation to their male counterparts. On her own she could not do anything, but after being married or owned by the king, her title also changed from a stepdaughter to a queen.

Mauruangi's mother also suffered the tyranny of her husband. She was killed by her husband as she could not cross the old bridge. She was trying to cross the bridge, but when she walked on it, her load was so heavy that the bridge made a striking sound as if it was going to break. Filled with fear, she retreated from it. The decision that one

must be pushed off the bridge itself was the idea of her husband. The heavy load she carried was also made by her husband himself. The old bridge may be referred to as the cultural norms in the Mizo patriarchal society under which women had to strictly adhere to the existing traditional gender norms. The patriarchal construction of the gender hierarchy that man is dominant over women and that women are subordinate to men is clearly revealed in this story. Mauruangi's mother was not able to fulfill the expectation of her husband that he pushed her off the bridge and killed her. The Mizo has the saying 'Hmeichhia leh palchhia chu thlak tur' (Women and worn-out fences should be replaced), which means that, just like old fences need to be changed, women who are useless or who can not please her spouse should be replaced as simply as replacing old fences. A women's role and duties are to perform and fulfill the normative gender roles of a daughter, mother and wife. Her heavy load prepared by her husband may also mean the role and obligations of a wife or a mother in the family and society. The patriarchal ideology which had existed for a long time could be represented by the old bridge. Women who could not obediently or blindly walk on the old bridge are likely to be unaccepted by their spouse. Similarly, in the case of women, who do not oblige with the patriarchal norms are likely to be despised or marginalized by society. Women are expected to follow the traditional patriarchal ideology. Otherwise, they would not fit into the gender-normative roles that they would have to pay the price for and become an outcast in society.

In the tale of Darthiangi leh Chertuala, Darthiangi, the wife is simply assumed to be barren as she did not conceive for several years. In earlier times, when medical science was not known at all, infertility or barrenness would simply be regarded as the fault of the wife. Women can not do anything when the husband is divorcing her on account of her infertility. Many men whose wives could not produce a child would often try to have a child with other women. Even those who have only daughters will sometimes try to have a son with other women. As lineage is accounted for from the male side only, it is very important to have a son so that the family lineage will continue. Men who have daughters only could not yet be called a father at all, because lineage would likely cease to go on without a son. In Mizo society, the husband is regarded as attaining fatherhood only when he has a son. It has often been said, "Tunah

chuan pa tak tak i ni ta e” (Now you become a real father). Chertuala felt very sad when he had lost hope of having children with his wife. So, he married another woman very much younger than himself with the hope of having children.

In this story, Darthiangi is simply considered to be infertile because she is the wife. Women who could not produce children are useless and are often divorced by their husband, which is a very reasonable cause for divorce. The expected role of a wife is to produce children. Barren women in Mizo society are looked down upon as they are unable to fulfill the role of woman. Although Chertuala loved his wife very much, infertile women were so worthless that he had decided to marry another girl. Darthiangi had to pay the price of the existing concept of barrenness as she was a woman. But it was proved later that it was Chertuala who was infertile, that he could not have a child even with his new wife.

Mizo society is patrilocal that women leave their ancestral home and live with their husband’s family after marriage. She becomes a new member of the family and even frequent visits to her parents’ house would be immoral. She belongs to her husband and has to obey him. For instance, when Darthiangi remarried, her husband took her to another village because he knew that Darthiangi was still in love with Chertuala. Although Darthiangi, before she remarried, would always talk about her husband, Chertuala, and even said that she would only marry the one who could tolerate her often mentioning of Chertuala’s name. But after marrying again, she could only obey her husband that they migrated to another village. This story clearly depicts men as rulers, whereas women are shown as their subjects. Men decide and women must obey and follow their decisions. Chertuala, in the end, decided to end his life by shutting himself up in his own house along with all his domestic animals. His new wife was not mentioned in the story, so he must have divorced his new wife after he realized that he himself was barren. Thus, this story reveals how men ruled by making decisions in the family. Women often suffer imperfect assumptions or unreliable judgement made by the husband or head of the family or even by society.

The tale of Sichangneii also portrays the powerlessness of woman or the loss of freedom after a woman married. The husband, in order to control or keep

Sichangneii as his wife, plucked off all her feathers and hid them away from her. Without her feathers, Sichangneii could do nothing but to remain as his wife. The plucking off of the feathers may be interpreted as the powerlessness of women as a wife or a symbol of the restrictions and duties implied upon the married woman. It could also be interpreted as the dominance and authority of man over his wife.

A man may marry any girl of his choice if he can fulfill the demands of the girl's parents. Sometimes, the girl's parents may insist on something like the bride price and if it could be given by the man, he could marry her even if she had no intention of marrying him. In this story, it was only from behind that he could catch her. Beautiful women are men's ideals and dreams that they are willing to pay high bride prices for them. Without the girl's consent or willingness to marry, the parents may make an agreement with the boy's family through the bride price. Just like the man who could catch Sichangneii only from the back, women can also be captivated as a wife through the traditional marriage system.

The beautiful maiden who used to fly freely and happily with her wings is now a captive under her husband. The wings may symbolize the dreams, desires and ideals of a woman. But when she becomes a wife, those dreams and desires and ideals are plucked from her. She must follow what is expected of her by the traditional gender norms. She is given a new identity as a wife, a wingless woman. She should perform the roles and duties of a wife and a mother. She is not supposed to look for her true self other than her identity of a wife and a mother.

Her husband is aware of the fact that Sichangneii with her powerful wings could not be captivated forever. In order to prevent her from flying away, he has to hide away those wings from her. Without her wings, Sichangneii could not do anything on her own but became totally dependent on her husband.

But one day, luck fell on her when her youngest son told her where their father had hidden her wings. Sichangneii put on her wings and began to feel freedom. Feeling her true self again, she flies away high up in the sky once again.

After Sichangneii fled into the sky, her husband killed himself, thinking that his role as a husband is futile, in the absence of a wife who would respect and obey him. It may also be interpreted as a man who could not control his wife is losing his power of masculinity in the family. The patriarchal notion of men's superiority and women's subordination is clearly reflected in this story. Men failing to maintain supremacy or control over their wives in the family are doomed to pay the price of shame or even death.

In the tale of Chawngtinleri, after their parents died, Lianchea took the role of the father, taking responsibility and authority over the family and particularly over his sister. The fairy king, Lalchungnunga, also asked for his permission to marry his sister. They could do nothing without his permission. But the word of Lianchea was significant enough and considered to be the final decision, that one day they forcibly took Chawngtinleri away when he accidentally or unintentionally said 'Yes' to the fairies. This story reveals the subordination of woman to man. She is completely dependent upon her brother, and she has no voice on her own. Everything that happened to her was through the decision made by her brother. The fairy king did not try to win her heart and, instead, he tried to win over the heart of her brother so that he would give her into marriage. The fairy offered and promised to give him wild animals. Men who could kill wild animals and beasts are regarded as heroes in traditional Mizo society. Men's desire and ambition to attain the high status of *Thangchhuahpa* could be obtained by killing specific wild animals that are prescribed for *ram lamathangchhuah*. Lianchea also wanted and often dreamed of the social status he would gain by giving his sister into marriage to the fairy king. But his love for her was so dear that he suppressed his desires and rejected their offerings. But when he saw the huge numbers of animals in his dream, he was so excited that he, out of excitement, accepted their offers. In traditional Mizo society, women are often given into marriage to those who could give a valuable price even without their consent. When a baby girl is born, they are blessed to be beautiful that they will cost a mithun, mithun being the most valuable domestic animal.

Chawngtinleri was under the dominance of her brother. She totally depended on him. And even after she became the wife of the fairy king, she was again under the control of her husband. She could visit her brother, only when her husband allowed her to. And when their physical structure was revealed, the fairies forbade her to visit her brother and the human world. Although she pines and longed for her ancestral home, she had no way or power to fulfill her desires. Her whole life was constantly under the control of men. She had no voice, could not make any decisions in her own life, she had to follow and accept the rules made by men.

She became the queen of wild animals as she was the wife of the fairy king. But her role as a wife is shown as no different from other wives. She took care of domestic animals, took care of their children and even continued to do weaving like other women. Her position as the king's wife may be slightly different, but the actual role and status of a mother and wife is more or less the same for all other wives.

The tale of Kelngotei is a story, which represented women as sexual objects. The bracelet maker insisted on sleeping with women in return or as a price for the bracelet. Women who agreed and submitted themselves to him got their bracelets and returned home without any problem. Kelngotei, who resisted him, was given a fake and bad-quality bracelet that did not even last for a wash. It made her helpless and she became a rape victim of those men who carried her home. Kelngotei could not do anything as she was weak and unable to defend herself from those men. They continuously raped her throughout the journey. When her brothers realized that she had been raped by those men who carried her home, they did not try to take revenge against those men or demand justice for the sinful act of rape that happened to her. They simply acknowledged and understood that their sister was raped repeatedly by those men but did nothing.

Men in Mizo society hold a prestigious and dominant position as they play an important role in village defense against their enemies as well as wild beasts. The chief also relies upon them in many ways, the village status and pride rest upon them. If a woman or a family member or even the chief himself is displeasing them, they could turn their back against them or show agitation towards them, which is so unbearable

that they have to do something to calm them down. A man holds a superior position individually as well as in a group. They play a valuable and significant role in the field of village economics, political warfare and village defense.

Kelngotei who was repeatedly raped by men could only remain a silent victim, as she was in no position to take revenge, or do anything without the help of her brothers. She simply had to accept what had happened to her.

The tale of Zawngte leh Nula is a story of a woman who, due to fear of public humiliation and disgrace, is left with no other choice than to marry a monkey. Going home naked would bring rumors and disgrace to the girl, and people would make assumptions as to whatever happened to her. Fear of losing public acceptance led the girl to marry a monkey. From this story, it is obvious that girls, out of fear of getting bad names and bad remarks, often indulge in surrendering to male dominance and men are aware of the fact that they can control and dominate the girls by mocking and blackmailing them.

The monkey is symbolical of men or the power of men over women's sexuality. Men could take advantage of women as they are prone and vulnerable to getting a bad reputation and humiliation regarding their sexuality. In Mizo society, females showing their sexual desire or having high sex drive is never tolerated, and the chastity of women is held in high esteem. The monkey blackmailed her and took advantage of her by elaborating on how she would lose her reputation and become the talk of the town by going home naked.

This story may reflect the real-life situation of women in traditional Mizo society. Even though raping and sexual abuse of women are considered as something evil and condemned by society, the status of women who have undergone or suffered rape and sexual abuse are somehow often looked down upon as having improper behavior. They were often placed in a disreputable status and would bear a bad reputation anyway. The girl in this story is also too afraid to become a contemptible or disreputable person by going home naked. Thus, her fear of disgrace is used by the monkey to compel her into marriage with him. When a woman loses her reputation or

self-esteem once, it is very difficult to erase it, and it will even make her unwelcome and unwanted as a wife or daughter-in-law.

The family is ruled or dominated by the father in a patriarchal society. In the absence of a father, the son takes charge of authority in the family. Thus, the old mother monkey (in disguise) was scolded and thrown out of the house by her own son. The decision makers in the house are always male members of the family.

The woman gave birth to a son, a baby monkey, who looked exactly like his father. Here, lineage that has been accounted for through men in Mizo society is obviously reflected and projected. Her brothers wanted to kill her son and she had no other choice than to let him go. She could not decide or make a choice on her own. Submission to male domination is the only way to stay away from suffering. Women are not considered as significant as men regarding kinship in patrilineal society. They are simply regarded as mothers or procreators who give birth and nurture their children. They are regarded as reproductive agents or helpers to men.

Tale 11 titled Tualvungi and Zawlpala reflect a woman who suffered under the tragedy of a bride price system. In Mizo society, men are free to court any woman, and they will woo any woman by sending *palai* (mediator) to the girl's parents. If he could pay the bride price demanded by the girl's parents, he could marry her. The girl has no choice if such an agreement is made by her parents. Many girls have been forced to marry a man not of their choice. The most tragic stories found in Mizo folktales relate to the bride price system. Tualvungi could do nothing when Phuntiha paid off her bride price but to become his wife. Her husband, Zawlpala, had unintentionally sold her to him. Being a woman, she is in no position to challenge the agreement made by men. This story clearly portrays the subordinate position of women. She could not make any decisions in her own life but had to fulfill what had been said by her husband. Being a man, Zawlpala has to keep his word. After she is married to Phuntiha, she has no freedom to do what she wishes to do. She has to ask permission from her new husband. She became an object that was bought and owned by men. After the death of Zawlpala, in order to be liberated from the bondage of Phuntiha, she has no other

choice than to take her own life. In the absence of male heroes who come to their rescue, death is the only way to freedom.

The Mizo socio-cultural worldview is constructed through a patriarchal ideology of male supremacy. The Mizo traditional administrative system consisted of men only – the chief and the elders were male. Women had no part in the village administration since they were not included in the system. Social institutions like *zawlbuk* and family play a pivotal role in structuring and enforcing cultural norms and values. *Zawlbuk* is a place where boys are trained to become men, whereas family is a place where girls are taught to become women. Women's lives are centered around the house and on household and domestic work, whereas men are seldom at home and spend most of their time outside and at *zawlbuk*. Next to the chief and his elders, *zawlbuk* is a place where all matters that concern society are discussed and resolved. Even the chief would consult the *val upa* (the leader of *zawlbuk*) and the inmates of *zawlbuk* for their opinion on important social matters at times. It is the most powerful and useful institution for social education. Thus, *zawlbuk* "... helped in preserving the most significant oral traditions, traditional values...It provided a very potent group setting in the absence of any formal social device for educating the youth for the functional support of the traditional society. It was indeed a super institution of the Mizo society, which succeeded in building up their unique style of life" (Lalrinawma 41). *Zawlbuk* plays an important role in preserving, functioning and strengthening the Mizo cultural values.

Family is another important social institution in traditional Mizo society wherein the culture, social values and ethics are taught to children from a very young age. It is the first and most important institution in Mizo society. The family structure is purely patriarchal, and the father is the supreme head of the family. His word and rule are the law of the family and nobody could intervene or interfere in their family matters. Everything that belongs to the family is his property. Descent and lineage are also accounted for only through the father. It is a place where children are taught to become boys and girls and later to become men and women. Work distribution, roles and duties based on gender is strictly practiced in the family. Folktales play a very

important role in indoctrinating cultural and social values and ideals into the minds of children.

Mizo traditional religion known as *sakhua* is the worship of *Sawho*, the Creator of a clan and *Khua* or *Khuanu* is the village God, the Creator and one who look after the people (Liangkhaia 153-154). *Sakhua* according to Hminga and Zairema “was the family or clan God” (Lalrinawma 77). In Mizo mythical tales it was the *Khuazingnu* who created the earth. (Thanmawia 29 -32). But in the religious rites and rituals women never took the major role, it was performed by men - father, *sadawt* or *thlahpawi*. Laltluangliana Khiantge asserted that the dominance of patriarchy in Mizo traditional religion by saying that,

The ancient Mizos believed that women and crabs have no religion. It meant a woman simply followed the religion of her husband or her father. It was the *sakhua* of her parents or her husband which was responsible for her welfare and existence. Children took after the *sakhua* of their fathers. Social conventions and legal matters were clearly built on patriarchal system” (Khiantge 10).

Although women were simply performing the role of a helper to men in religious matter and that they have no *sakhua* on their own, their importance is no less important to men since they were the ones who took care of all the domestic animals for religious performance. T. Vanlaltlani said that women may not take the major role in religious functions, but it is obvious that it will be somewhat incomplete in their absence (*MizoHmeichhiate* 72).

Patriarchy has permeated the whole social, cultural and religious aspects of the Mizo society. Mizo historians and writers have argued that women hold a lower and inferior position in the society. J. Malsawma describe the women’s status in *Zo-Zia*, “the position of women in traditional Mizo society were like a slave, and their status were extremely inferior” (66). James Dokhuma also states that, “The way women were treated can be regarded as despicable, denoting men’s view of women as inferior and lower, and their ideas were not given interests” (269). H.L. Malsawma also wrote,

“The society being an extremely patriarchal one, women had no place in it. The status of women was pathetically low. There was hardly any society in which women had lower status than among the Mizos” (71).

The supremacy of men and the inferior position of women is formed under patriarchal notions that women are subordinate to men. The Mizo sayings that reflects or refers to the secondary status of women such as “Hmeichhe finin tuikhur ral a kai lo” which literally means ‘the wisdom of women does not extend beyond the village water point’, “Hmeichhe thu thu ni suh, chakai sa sa ni suh” (the word of women is not to be considered as important as the meat of the crab is not considered meat at all), “Hmeichhia leh uipui chu lo rum lungawi ve mai mai rawh se” (let women and dog groan as they wish to pleased themselves), “Hmeichhe vau loh leh vau vau loh chu an pawng tual tual”, (A woman never reprimanded and the edge of a jhum not maintained soon become intolerable) (Khangte 69) clearly highlights and affirmed their subordination in Mizo society.

There had been a remarkable change in Mizo society with the introduction of Christianity, which began in the year 1894. The Mizo contemporary society is a Mizo Christian society which is determined and established according to Christian teachings. Many traditional systems and practices were replaced by the Christian religion. The Church played a very significant role in changing the Mizo socio-cultural life by introducing education. The life of women was also changed to some extent. Lalrinawma highlighted the impact of education for the emancipation of Mizo women as,

Introduction of education paved the way for women to come out of their usual way of life. It is education that provided confidence, knowledge and intelligence to women...It is education that lifted up the status of women in Mizoram. Women with the help of knowledge gained through education have begun to see their condition from a women perspective. Development can be seen in all areas of women life. They are free in society as well as in their families after receiving the Gospel. But the decision-making power is still in the hands of men” (193-194).

Since Christian teaching is based on Judeo patriarchal culture, the supremacy of men and subordination of women could not be completely changed. The patriarchal system was retained with rigidity (Lalrinawma 193). Thus, Christianity that advocates men as the supreme creation who is next to God and women as only the shadow of men has strengthened the Mizo patriarchal attitude.

The advent of Christianity has changed the status of Mizo women and the introduction of education elevated the position of women. Lalfakzuali illustrates the economic participation of women, affirming the significance of women's role in the economy in *Changing Position of Mizo Women*,

Mizo women played a very active role in the economic life till today. Among the respondents 17.5% married women are found to have earned more than those of their husbands. Besides, 28% families have more female earners than their male counterparts. It is also not uncommon in many of the families where it is the woman who maintains the family's economy even though the husband may also be economically contributing (15).

Even though women's status has been uplifted and their contribution to the economic field as bread earners for families has increased, they still hold an inferior and subordinate position and status in the family and social life.

The oral literature of the past has also been reduced to writing. The role of folktales in oral literature as a tool which is used in transferring and teaching cultural values and ethics, is reinforced by reading the documented text. The stories of Mizo legendary heroes and heroines in folktales, conveyed a message, or retold the traditional norms and behavior to the reader. Mizo society is a communitarian society, and social identity is valued and highly esteemed. The cultural identity of Mizoness is taught, retold and preserved through folktales. Folktales play a pivotal role in reinforcing and reconstructing cultural identity and social values in contemporary society. Mizo folktales and their message have often been reproduced in the form of songs, drama, novels and in prose. It has also been acted in drama and in films. Writers, poets, church leaders, politicians and social activists have often quoted folktales to

revive and regenerate the Mizo code of ethics. For instance, the biggest and most effective Non-Governmental Organization, i.e. the Young Mizo Association (YMA), also used the names of legendary heroes for different groups or sections in their respective branches. The legendary heroes are exemplified and honored, and they are portrayed as ones who have proved themselves heroes, and who possess the ideal character of Mizo men. The role and status of women in family and society, the ideal women in the Mizo cultural imaginary, is also reaffirmed through folktales. Gender division and gender hierarchy in Mizo society, which can be noticed in the folktales, still exist in contemporary Mizo society.

In the Mizo folktales, women are usually stereotyped as submissive and obedient who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their families. Stereotypes in folktales are cultural mechanisms by which representations are legitimized. Therefore, stereotyping women as figures of self-sacrifice in Mizo folktales, reiterates and legitimize their roles in society, and this shall be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Glossary

1. *Khuazingnu* : A name of god in Mizo myth who is the creator of the earth.
2. *Pawi* : A name embracing all the tribes (such as Chin, Lakhers, Fanais, etc) who do not wear their hair knot at the back of the head as the Lushais do.
3. *Pawndum* : Pawndum is an essential traditional cloth of the Mizo community mostly worn on days of mourning and death.
4. *Berawchal hnai* : A sap of a tree
5. *Sadawt* : Clan or chief's priest
6. *Thlahpawi* : Assistant priest
7. *Khaukhurh*: The recess or loculus made at the bottom of a Lushai grave to receive the corpse.

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CHAPTER III

WOMEN AS SACRIFICIAL LAMB

Marvin Carlson's study of the theatre's function as reiterative and preservative memory, which gives in to the phenomenon of forming stereotypes, can be applied to folk tale's functions as well. For traditional societies like Mizo society, folk tales and songs act as custodians of collective memory. These narratives do not only act as records of people's past but also function as media of representatives. As stated by Bronner in the introduction to *The Meaning of Folklore*,

Folklore holds psychological and cultural significance because, as an often momentary and a socially sanctioned outlet of expression, it uses symbols in elaborated narratives and in rituals to encapsulate (or intensify) experience and provide a release from reality. Folkloric evidence is different from historical documentation because it often constitutes fantasy, but that does not detract from its truthfulness or significance (3).

The presentation of female subjectivity as silent figures of sacrifice in Mizo folk tales like Zawlpala and Tualvungi, Mauruangi, Thailungi, Ngaiteii, Kungawrhi, Chawngchilhi, Chawngtinleri, Kelngoteii, Kawrdumbela, Khuangchera and Chhurbura, seems to sanctify women's suffering as sacrificial and therefore meaningful. These suffering women characters are portrayed as ideal women. Their sacrifices are either for the good of their family, their husbands or for society, but it is important to understand the underlying patriarchal structures within the tales that underwrite female suffering. The sufferings of women are often sanctified since they are deemed as sacrifice.

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary define sacrificial lamb as, "someone or something that is given to people in authority and is expected to be harmed or destroyed, especially in order to prevent other people or things from being harmed or destroyed," (1356). A sacrificial lamb is a metaphor for a person or animal sacrificed for the greater good. The term derives from Abrahamic religious traditions in which a lamb is a highly prized gift.

In politics, a sacrificial lamb candidate is a candidate picked to run in an election with little prospect of winning. As a result, the political party appoints the individual as a 'sacrifice' to the stronger opponent. In the field of literature, the term 'sacrificial lamb' refers to a supporting character whose main dramatic function is to die, to encourage the protagonist to action while also emphasizing how awful the enemy is. Pauline Scott, in her study of Shakespeare's comedy, asserts that there is a limited group of characters, that is created solely for the purpose of being a sacrificial lamb (1). The sacrificial lamb is frequently a family member, lover, or "old buddy" of the protagonist with whom he or she has assumed intimacy, necessitating no genuine character growth. The term is nearly typically used negatively, implying that the character was clearly used as a story device. As Beauvoir called women 'the other', the sacrificial lamb also plays the same role as 'the other'.

The tales that have been selected for the study contain women characters, who passively accepted and suffer silently and thereby represent the proverbial sacrificial lamb. The phrase 'sacrificial lamb' is used here in the metaphorical sense as a person sacrificed for the common good and well-being. Sacrificial lamb is thus symbolical of extreme selflessness, but it is also indicative of women's victimization through a social discourse that promotes women's subjugation. Women characters found in Mizo folktales are defined by their roles as passive victims who could do nothing but sacrifice themselves for a good cause. They obediently accept the cause of their suffering as something which is needed or should be done. Analyses of the women characters of the above-selected tales for the study will be examined, in the hope of bringing into light the dominance of patriarchal culture in Mizo society and its impact on the lives of women in their becoming to be a mere sacrificial lamb and also focusing on the ways as to how Mizo patriarchal social conditioning has molded, controlled or affected their lives.

Folktales are a source of information about the history and culture of people. Folklorists often use it to study the culture of the people as it mirrors and reflects the lives of the people who own it. In the preface of *Interpreting Folklore*, Alan Dundes states that,

I am interested in folklore because it represents a people's image of themselves. The image may be distorted but at least the distortion comes from the people, not from some outside observer armed with a range of a priori premises. Folklore as a mirror of culture provides unique raw material for those eager to better understand themselves and others (viii).

In agreement with Alan Dundes, folklore, like other literary pieces, consists of the thoughts, ideas, mental state, traditions, manners, and customs and even wit, wisdom and the creative imaginative power of the people of that region.

K. C. Vanngbaka describes that the influence of folktales has extended not only to the people but has the influence to shape the entire culture. He states that the cultural and societal norms and values of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo were reflected in 'U Sier Lapang'. In this story, a weeping mother who lost her son is helped by the gods called 'Lei Shillong', which portrays the deepest love of the mother. The great love of the mother is highly valued, and this guides the mindset of the people and, as Vanngbaka claims, "From this story, it can be understood that the mother had a never-ending love and care for the children, which empowers women to have power in the family" (42). This, however, reflects the matrilineal social structure of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo.

Folktales are handed down from one generation to the next generation, which become an agent for teaching cultural and social values. Lalrinmawii Tochhawng states that,

Oral narratives, as we call it, which were orally passed down to the next generation cannot be considered as pure history. But there is no doubt that the oral narratives that are handed down also teaches and passed down the social values to the future. Some of the feminist critics agrees that the images that are seen in this folk tales has negatively impacted the minds of younger generations pertaining to female subordination which results in re- reading and re- writing the tales (74).

The images of Mizo women in folktales depict women as passive and inferior, subordinated, and powerless in the face of man. As Tochhawng pointed out, it is significant to understand that the status and identity of women as mirrored in the tales reflect the women's condition of their times.

In Mizo society, women have often been used as tools for the cause of war or for winning wars. The most famous and one of the most tragic wars that have happened in Mizo history was ‘the war between the two chiefs - Lalsavunga and Manga’. The war was known as *Chhak leh Thlang Indo* (the war between the East and West). One of the reasons for the cause of this war was a fight over a beautiful woman (Liangkhaia 127). Chief Vanhnuailiana sent some of his men to seek for a beautiful woman named Tuali Chenkual, the daughter of a Chenkual chief, to marry his son, Liankhama. They made negotiations and went home happily. However, unbeknownst to Vanhnuailiana’s family, Kalkhama (one of the chiefs of the western region) married Tuali while preparations were on for her marriage with Liankhama. This angered Chief Vanhnuailiana so much, and he felt so dishonored that he told his son, Liankhama, to never tolerate or forget the disgrace they had been made to face and that he should take revenge for what they had done (127).

Looking at the situation, it can be observed that the parents of Tuali had no objection to her marriage to Liankhama. But when Kalkhama, a great king of the Mizoram western region, wanted to marry her, they preferred him more than Liankhama, who was the chief of the eastern region. Tuali was given to the chief Kalkhama, whom they thought was more reliable and more desirable for them. Stories about Tuali are not mentioned much in history and the only thing that can be read is that her parents married her to the second suitor, Kalkhama, which may be interpreted as being given to the man for good causes like security reasons and for strengthening their chieftainship. Her choice and consent are thrown out of the narrative. History itself testifies that kings often married away their daughters to establish political alliances.

It was during this war, *Chhak leh Thlang indo*, that the tragic death of a beautiful woman, Chhingpuii, at the hands of the enemy took place. The story of the brutal killing and death of Chhingpuii was one of the most tragic stories in Mizo history that has been told over ages. Chhingpuii was a beautiful woman from Ruanzawl village. Her beauty was known far and wide. While they were on their way to the jhum, they were ambushed and attacked by the men of Tachhip village. They killed Chhingpuii and cut off her head and proudly composed a satirical song to derogate and disdain the Ruanzawl men who are unable to protect their beautiful woman –

Zawl khua in ka hrang in ti,
 In lawm lai Chhinghermawii;
 Pualchang hmul ang in thlau ve doralah. (Zawla, 342)
 Zawl village claimed they are warriors,
 Your adorable Chhinghermawii;
 Has been left behind in the war.

The eastern allies were angered by this song. They also composed a satirical song that reflects the cowardice act of the Tachhip men by attacking women, telling them it is not a manly act at all and that it is not something to boast about -

Chhip khaw hran rel nuthaiah,
 Hran lai a kai zo lo ve;
 Mautam tam ang chhunrawl in vai em ni? (Zawla 342)
 Chhip village men were brave like women,
 Not to be considered as brave at all;
 Are you too hungry like the Mautam famine?

In this story, the power and victory of men in war is exposed to women. Killing innocent and defenseless women and children, and even capturing them as slaves is a part of war that signifies the victory of men at war. Women often become targets or trophies in war. In this particular tale, the killing of Chhingpuii was boasted of by the Tachhip men as proof of their power and valour over their rival - the Ruanzawl men. They took her head and claimed their superiority over their enemy. They boasted about their success with the trophy that they won in the war. The innocent victim, Chhingpuii, was not an ordinary woman, she was extremely beautiful and a well-cultured woman, who represented a typical Mizo ideal woman. The beauty of women is highly valued, and it is the pride of the family and the village. If a man marries a beautiful woman, his status will be looked upon as a man who stands above the ordinary men. The Tachhip men who killed Chhingpuii also felt that they were far superior to the Ruanzawl men, as they were able to take away the valuable treasure that belonged to them.

The theme of Mizo folktales is often men fighting over women. Men are always represented as heroes, while women are presented as suffering victims who could not save themselves or those who need to be rescued by men. Looking at the story of

Chhingpuii, she is a shadowy figure who suffers a tragic death at the hands of the enemy. It is always men who are heroes and claim the trophy, while women are passive victims who always remain in the shadow of men. In Mizo folktales, there is hardly any conception of women as heroes. Women who possessed wisdom and power could only become useful helpers to men in order to display them as heroes. For instance, in the story of Chepahakhata and Aithangveli, Thlihrangthanga, the extraordinary women were wives who helped their husbands in times of need and became a minor character in the tales. The superficial position of women in Mizo society is apparent in folktales.

In the tales of Hrangkhupa and Hawnglaia also, the beginning of their enmity which developed into war between the two chiefs started with the unreasonable killing of Hrangkhupa's wife by Hawnglaia.

Hrangkhupa is the adopted son of a famous and great king, Hawnglaia. When Hawnglai and his men were hunting in the forest, they happened to find a baby boy in the middle of the forest. Hawnglaia adopted him as his son. When he grew up, Hawnglaia let him rule over a village which was still under his jurisdiction. Hawnglaia used to collect fathang (rice tax) in Hrangkhupa's village. Hrangkhupa would often ask him to exempt his people from the fathang. Hawnglaia was angered by it and thought that Hrangkhupa had to be taught a lesson. So, he killed Hrangkhupa's wife (Dahrawk 1-3).

Hawnglaia felt that he had to put Hrangkhupa under his control. In order to prove his power over him, he killed Hrangkhupa's wife. By killing the wife, Hawnglaia was taking away the most valuable treasure of Hrangkhupa. It was not that the woman was a threat to him or the problem of their issue, the focus was likely because she was the beautiful wife of his rival Hrangkhupa. Women were objectified as trophies, and they were often married away to a king who defeated his opponents. In this tale, the wife of Hrangkhupa was not captured or captivated, but she was killed. It was done with the intention of claiming victory over Hrangkhupa just as the Tachhip men who killed Chhingpuii had proudly declared themselves as winners.

Rinawma has interpreted the possible reason of the cause of war between the two chiefs and as to why Hawnglaia killed the wife of Hrangkhupa -

The most famous battle in the history of Mizo folktales was between Hrangkhupa, protector of Zialung village, and Hawnglaia. Right after he was

born, Hrangkhupa was raised by the Khuavang but was found by Hawnglaia at the hunting ground and grew up at his house. He was an extraordinary man, unable to compete with the ordinary. But his lovely wife was murdered by Hawnglaia, which angrily compelled him to shift to other places where his reign was most glorious. Then, the war between him and his master began. This was probably because of jealousy. Hrangkhupa's wife was more beautiful and kinder than Hawnglaia's wife, which aroused the conscious mind of jealousy and envy. This could be the reason that led to a brutal war (Rinawma 137- 138).

Rinawma has argued that the reason why Hawnglaia killed the wife could be his envy of the great beauty of Hrangkhupa's wife, who was more beautiful than his wife. Beautiful women are every man's ideals and, in the case of a chief, it is a way of showcasing their power and greatness to marry the most beautiful woman. So, Hawnglaia, who wanted to protect his superiority and power over Hrangkhupa, might have felt the need to take away the most precious treasure from him.

In revenge, Hrangkhupa dressed himself as a woman and went inside Hawnglaia's house, fooling them in broad daylight. He killed Hawnglaia's mother, an old woman who was sitting in the kitchen near the hearth. After this, he again warned Hawnglaia to take a good watch that he was planning to kill his biggest mithun in the name of Hawnglaia's mother, whom he had killed. As he had said, Hrangkhupa, without much difficulty, was able to kill the mithun. Again, he warned Hawnglaia that he was going to plant pumpkin seeds in his mother's grave and be on watch. But without their notice, he succeeded in planting the seed again. Hawnglaia then began to understand that Hrangkhupa was far superior to him in every way, and that he could not do anything to stop him. So, he wanted to make peace with him (3-5).

In this tale, we see the tragic sufferings of two innocent women under the tyranny of powerful men who wanted to prove their superiority over each other. Women are used by these men as tools for showing their superiority and power as well as tools for winning wars. In this particular story, the names of the two women victims - Hrangkhupa's wife and Hawnglaia's mother were not even mentioned, which may be connected to their subordinate positions and how they were viewed and merely

shown as sacrificial lambs for the benefit of men. They were just a shadowy figure – nameless, voiceless, and passive victims.

Hawnglaia came to Hrangkhupa's house to make peace. Hrangkhupa prepared a pot of liquor ready to be enjoyed at the corner of the house. He then displayed the skull of Hawnglaia's mother and a mithun and said "Master, you will never meet your mother in this world again, but as for me, I am already married to a beautiful girl again". They both drank the very night and Hrangkhupa uttered, "The night is dark, and this mother of yours will light a lamp for you". He then lit a candle and stuffed it inside the nose of his mother's skull and said, "Drink as much as you can, you seldom drink under the candle lit by your mother". Hawnglaia shed his tears in silence and could not finish the drink that night (Dahrawk 5).

By hanging the skull of Hawnglaia's mother on the wall and using it as a light post, Hrangkhupa is trying to show and prove his superiority over his enemy. Hawnglaia has lost his mother, who could never be replaced by any other woman; while Hrangkhupa, who has also lost his beautiful wife, has married a new wife in no time. The death of Hrangkhupa's wife, has been compensated with a new wife whereas Hawnglaia's loss is not compensable. He had lost his mother, his pride and his power in the war. The two women were killed or rather sacrificed by the enemy as a way of showing their superiority and power.

In the tale of Kawrdumbela, the daughter of a village chief is compelled by her father to marry the ugliest man in the village named Kawrdumbela. The girl has no other choice, since it is believed to be the only way to save the whole village from great destruction.

Once upon a time, there lived an ugly man called Kawrdumbela. He was also very dark in complexion. One day, he caught a small bird which turned out to be very gifted. The bird then told him to go near the Chief's house at midnight for three successive nights and cried out that Kawrdumbela should marry his daughter, or else, the chief would face disaster. Kawrdumbela carried out the instructions of the bird and subsequently married the chief's daughter and lived very happily. However, the wife was far from being happy, and found

all sorts of excuses to stay out of the house, much to the embarrassment of her husband (Khiangte 32).

In this story, Kawrdumbela, who never could have found a wife for being too ugly, is able to marry the beautiful daughter of the chief. The chief, who was afraid of facing the disaster as had been foretold and warned by the voice at night, sacrificed her own daughter to an ugly man, Kawrdumbela, in order to protect his village. Instead of the suffering of the whole village or the village being destroyed by a great disaster, the chief decided to give his beautiful daughter to Kawrdumbela as told and advised by the voice. The daughter has no other choice other than to obey her father for the safety of the village. The daughter is symbolical of a sacrificial lamb which is sacrificed for a good cause so that people will be sanctified from their sin. In order to save the village, the chief sacrificed his daughter to the most ugly man in the village which was far from her daughter's choice. In patriarchal society, the protection of the family or, for this matter, the village is in the hands of men. In this tale, the Chief decided to sacrifice his daughter in order to protect his village. Men are claimed to be rulers and protectors of the family and society, under which women are considered as subordinates who need protection. To quote Iris Marion Young,

Central to the logic of Masculine protection is the subordinate relation of those in the protected position. In return for male protection, the woman concedes critical distance from decision-making autonomy. When the household lives under a threat, there cannot be divided wills and arguments about who will do what, or what is the best cause of action. The head of the household should decide what measures are necessary for the security of the people and property, and he gives orders that they must follow if they and their relations are to remain safe (5).

The chief who forced her daughter into marriage with the ugliest guy in the village, in order to save his village might look like a benevolent ruler, who wanted to do everything to protect his people from destruction. But his order to save the village was very tyrannical to the daughter. The daughter has to pay the price of marrying the ugliest man in the village. The dreams, desires and ideals of the daughter have been given away for the safety of the village. But in the end, the daughter is rewarded for

her obedience and her selfless sacrifice for a good cause and her ugly husband changed into the most handsome man in the village.

This story has a message that women who are obedient to their father or who are self-sacrificing for a good cause will be the ones who get blessings in the end. Thus, this tale can be regarded as having a patriarchal theme of male superiority and the justification of male supremacy by rewarding the obedient and submissive daughter in the end. The sacrifice of the daughter, which was necessary for the sake of the protection of the village, has turned into a fortune for the daughter in having the most handsome husband.

The same theme of women as a sacrificial lamb who has been sacrificed for the good cause of society or for the safety of the village is also found in the tale of Ngaiteii. The protagonist, Ngaiteii, is given to the angry flood so that the people of the village will be saved from the flood. After throwing her into the water, the flood subsided and she relented. Ngaiteii had to fulfill her father's demand so that the problem and chaos would end and that they could live in peace. The absolute supremacy and the power of the father are clearly depicted in this story. The children belong to the father and the father's family, and in the case of divorce also the wife has no right to claim the children. In this tale, Ngaiteii is living with her grandmother, who tries to save her granddaughter from her father. But when the father came to claim his daughter, there was no way that could prevent him from taking away his daughter. The Mizo traditional customs of the father over his children are male-oriented and male privilege. The villagers in this story could do nothing to resist the right of the father in claiming his child. So, Ngaiteii has to be given away to her father, who has full authority over her for being her father. In this tale, male dominance over their children as the rightful owner is revealed.

In Mizo society, many innocent and helpless children suffer the tyranny of their father, who claims their rights by forcibly taking them away from their mother. This may be the reason why orphans in Mizo folktales are always suffering the tyranny of their step-mother and that there are hardly no characters of the step-father. Ngaiteii could not run away or hide away from her father since she belonged to her father. In Mizo society, children belonged to the father. The gender hierarchy of male supremacy

in Mizo society is supported by the cultures and customs which are prevalent in their folktales.

In the tale of the Mizo legendary hero Chhurbura, the protagonist Chhurbura fools his mother-in-law that sleeping with her is the only remedy, that could cure his pain caused by a crab's bite. The mother-in-law had no other option, so she slept with her own son-in-law to help him cure the pain.

One day, Chhura set out to catch a crab with his mother-in-law. While trying to catch the biggest crab, Chhura was suddenly tempted to fulfill his carnal desire with his mother-in-law. He therefore asked her to go and ask the goddess of the stream. He himself ran to the other side of the big rock and responded, "To sleep with your mother-in-law is the only remedy". She was quite reluctant to fulfill the suggestion, but eventually had to do as suggested. The pain caused by the bite of the crab was automatically healed after the copulation (Khiangte 48-49).

In this story, the mother-in-law becomes a victim who is forced to sacrifice herself against her choice so that her son-in-law will be cured from the terrible pain. This tale is symbolical of the patriarchal domination of men in Mizo society. Chhurbura is a trickster who tricked his own mother-in-law to fulfill his sexual desire. He, the protagonist, is able to do whatever he wants, and is even shown as the hero of the story. The mother-in-law, on the other hand, is shown as a passive and defenseless victim who suffered the evil deeds of her son-in-law Chhurbura. But when one thinks about this particular story, what would be talked about, or the very fun of the story, is often related to the wisdom of Chhurbura by his ability to trick his mother-in-law into sleeping with him. But the mother-in-law who suffered a tragedy of forced sexual abuse is not compensated in the story or even in the minds of the reader. But when we dwell deeper into the meaning of this tale, this tale is a showcase of men's power over women and that women are viewed as objects and are often used as tools for fulfilling men's desires.

In another tale of Chhurbura, he again happened to fool all the men of the village into drowning them in the river. He told them that there was a lot of treasure on the bank of the river and that they had to tie a pot in their waist and jump into the river to get those treasures. All the men drowned in the river. He went back to the

village and told the women to help their husbands who were on their way carrying lots of treasures they collected from the river. After all of them were gone, he went to every house and put out their fire by spilling water over them. He lit the fire in his house. When the women came back home, they asked him for fire, for they could not cook without it. But he insisted that he should sleep with them one by one. In return, the women could not do anything but let him sleep with him.

Chhura is again seen as a trickster who fooled all the men in the village by drowning themselves in the river. He then fooled all the women into sleeping with him. His main reason for killing the village men and compelling the women to sleep with him was out of vengeance, as they had tried to kill him. His main reason for killing the village men and compelling the women to sleep with him was out of vengeance, as they had tried to kill him. Chhura is the hero who could kill a lot of village men and who could sleep with all the women in the village. His way of showing superiority to men and women is different. He killed the men to become a hero but slept with the women to be a real hero, i.e., the victor in this rivalry.

Laltluangliana Khiangte considered Chhura as ‘the undisputed hero’ of Mizo folk tales. He said,

The most interesting and memorable personality of Mizo folklore would undoubtedly be Chhurbura. A reading and study of Mizo tales would be incomplete and much less meaningful if Chhurbura was unmentioned, who must be considered as the undisputed hero of Mizo folk tales. There is a great paradox in his character, which makes him all the more interesting to the young and the old. He may be considered, without doubt, as the ‘silliest of all simpletons’ among the Mizo folk protagonists. Yet on the other hand, he can be considered as the cleverest of all (Khiangte. *Mizo* 79).

Margaret Pachuau also claimed Chhura as an ‘unsung hero’, and said,

Chhura was considered a fool and a trickster in the Mizo community. There are many tales that are filled with wit and humour regarding his ways... Chhura was remarkably clever even though he was often portrayed as a fool... Chhura has been regarded as a fool by the Mizo community till today. However, many folklorists feel that Chhura was actually very clever and an unsung hero in many dimensions (35-36).

Folklore encompasses the culture and traditions of the folk. Margaret Pachuau has rightly said, “Mizos have a lot of lore that is both interesting and reflective of the ethos of the Mizo community. Amidst these, the adventures of Chhura are regarded to be among the most fascinating and celebrated” (35).

There are quite a number of tales about Chhura. On a close study of his character, one can find that he represented a typical Mizo man in many ways. He is brave, fearless, wise, unselfish, humble, helpful, and self-sacrificing for others, while he is also depicted as a ‘simpleton’ in some tales. Some of his stories depicted him as a fool and simpleton could also prove his masculine ideals by reminding his wife of her roles. For instance, in one of his tales, ‘Chhura Fears spotted Colors’ his wife told him “Fear all things spotted in color”, when Chhura mistook a tiger for a dog. Chhura, the typical man, goes to the extreme by mockingly obeying his wife, who advised him to ‘fear all things spotted in color.’ One day his wife dried her spotted apron in the open air. When Chhura saw it, he made a sharp and pointed spear and all day long he it pierced into pieces.” When his wife shouted in anger, he replied, “I did it because you said all spotted colors are dangerous” (Khangte 39). From this story, we can see that Chhura, who is acting like a fool, is actually a wise man who humorously proved the wife’s illogical and senseless advice.

Chhura could be claimed as representative of a typical Mizo man. In Mizo society, men are not restrained from having sexual relations even outside marriage. If a married woman sleeps with another man, it is adultery, but there is no such thing if a married man sleeps with another woman. It meant that man could not be claimed as an adulterer. So, in Mizo society, restraint on sex and sexuality regarding men and women is completely different. It could be said that the Mizo cultural concept of sex is designed from male attitudes and ideals. Sleeping with women is one way of showing manliness, which is not at all considered as immoral on the men’s side. Thus, the act of Chhura in fulfilling his sexual desire by forcing his mother-in-law to sleep with him and sleeping with all the village women shows men’s attitude to sex and women. It is a men’s way of showing victory over a woman if he sleeps with her.

He despised the women whom he had sexual intercourse with and referred to them as ‘ka tlawm hnu’, which means ‘the one I have defeated’. All the village women that he had slept with became adulterers. He had not only killed the men but also took

away the fidelity and values of their wives. So, Chhura was truly the undisputed hero in the war between him and the village men.

The tale of Khuangchera also reflected the power of men over their wives in Mizo society. Khuangchera was the village blacksmith. He worked all day in a smith which was located near his house.

One day, two men came and asked him to make a *dartawnsuk* (a traditional headgear for men). He needed a small hammer to make it. He sends the men to his house to bring him the small hammer, telling them to get it from his wife, who is at home. The men plan to fool the wife. They told the wife that her husband had sent them to sleep with her and to take 500 rupees which he hid in their *thul*. The wife did not believe them and called out to her husband from the house asking him, “I ti tak tak em ni?” (Did you really mean it?). Her husband replied “Yes”. Feeling doubtful, she asked again, “Do you really mean it?” Khuangchera answered “Yes” again in a rather rude voice. Even though she found it hard to believe she had no other choice, since she feared her husband, who seemed to feel irritated for asking the same thing. The men slept with her and, she also gave them five hundred rupees. After the two men left, Khuangchera came to know that he was fooled by those two men. He was so furious and went to take revenge. He was tired and exhausted after a long walk and fell asleep under a tree. The two men found the old man, Khuangchera, and exchanged him for goods with the *pawi* trader. Khuangchera was never heard of again. The Mizo phrase ‘Khuangcher bo’ originated from his story, which means ‘vanished into thin air.’

This story reflects the complete submissiveness of a wife to her husband. “In the Mizo family and society, the word submission is a very important criterion for a woman to become a good wife” (Sinha 52). She did not believe the men in the first hand that her husband would give her such kinds of orders. The wife is seen as the one who will always obey and fulfill the words of her husband. After her husband gave her the same answer twice and also sounded impatient, she had no other choice than to follow what was told. The wife in this story represents the status of a woman in the family, where the father is the dominant authority whose words are the rule of the family. He is the one who should make the decisions. In this tale, the wife is questioning whether he really meant it. His answer ‘Yes’, is strong enough that she reluctantly sacrificed herself to them. This story may contain humor but the reality of

women's subordinate position and the superiority of men in the family is revealed. The wife is obedient, submissive, and completely devoted to her husband. She is very humble, and her modesty and humility make her a sacrificial lamb who will do everything for her husband.

The sexual objectification of women, that women are looked upon only as mere sex objects, is also one of the themes that highlighted the subordinate position of women in Mizo society. Although rape in Mizo society is something which is strongly despised by society, it is the women who would suffer the silent pain and often restraint to speak out for justice. When a rape occurs, people begin to have so many assumptions as to whose fault has caused the rape. For instance, when a girl is raped, people will start guessing about the cause of the rape. Some people will blindly put fault on the victims for having loose characters or as the ones who provoked the men. Women who are victims of rape are also looked down upon or stigmatized by society and that continual reminder of their mental pain from being raped will be brought out often, again and again. Although it was not her fault, society would mark her as a victim of rape, which brings shame on herself and to her family that she would have faced difficulties in choosing a partner as well.

Zothanchhingi, in her study of military rape during the Mizo Freedom Movement known as *Rambuai*, has written quoting *Saikia*, "the memories survive only in the private sphere and are dealt with as private matters by the victims' families and often solely by the victim who hides in 'shame' (Saikia 63). Zothanchhingi further elaborates on how rape victims are suppressed to remain silent and hide the truth for fear of social stigma –

The ordeal of a rape victim, whose suffering is doubled by her need to hide the truth, is seen in Zorami when the narrator tells us that Zorami 'kept her mouth shut', and that she never spoke out because 'such a thing is not for telling'. Zorami, who according to the author, is drawn as the 'prototype' of all victims who suffered the same kind of fate, learned to be ashamed. And to keep quiet (quoted in Khiantge 6).

Zorami, the protagonist who was raped by the military men, has chosen to remain silent for fear of public humiliation. Similar is the case with Kelngoteii, who was repeatedly raped by men is figured as a silent victim who has no power to vent

out her pain or take revenge on those men. In order to avoid public humiliation, women who were sexually abused or raped often choose to remain silent, and to stay unnoticed by hiding their pain and suffering. Kelngoteii's brothers also did not do anything or even try to take revenge on the men who raped her, as rape could bring a bad reputation to the victims and their families. Kelngoteii's brothers chose to keep quiet and allowed her to suffer her pain alone so that they would be saved from losing their honor. No consolation or compensation for her pain is given by the brothers or by the family. Quoting Brown Miller, Jan Jordan wrote, "Our first laws on rape were born deep within the core of patriarchy. From what early records we have, rape emerged as a not uncommon act and one for which women traditionally had little hope of legal redress," (qtd. in Jordan 38). And she further stated that,

For centuries, they rendered the victim of rape invisible, her voice unheard. A logical extension of patriarchal beliefs determined that the woman who was raped was not recognized as the victim. Nowhere is women's subordinate status so abundantly clear (38).

The Mizo traditional way of punishing a rapist could be implemented by the chief along with his elders. When a woman files a complaint to the village court that she is raped by a man, they both must stand before the court of the village chief, where any villagers who would like to hear their words during the trial can come and listen to the court. It is so shameful, especially for women, that vulgar words and derogatory words are often used during the trial.

Between young men and women who are familiar with each other, it was unlikely to be closed as a rape case. They often pronounce it as merely refusing in fear of losing their reputation. But however, if a man succeeds in having sexual intercourse with a woman, he never courts, it is considered as rape and the perpetrator must pay a fine of a full-grown gayal worth forty rupees (Dokhuma 88).

So, many women would mostly shut away from filing a case against the rapist and choose to keep their mouths shut and suffer silently for a good cause. It is not only the victim who is pointed at but also the honor of the family too could be at stake.

It was shameful and a disgrace. The crowd was filled with hilarious laughter. And the trial put to light all the scandal and vulgar words that were shameful

to even retell. So, instead of facing this kind of rule, many women often ignore their suffering and choose to keep silent (Dokhuma 155).

In contemporary Mizo society, although the rights and privileges of women have been extensively protected under the laws, rape victims were still treated differently. Even as a victim, women are always blamed and often hear words that are hurtful. In this case, the victims and their families often prefer to remain silent. Women are not only the victims of these crimes and sexual harassment, but they also choose to suffer silently for fear of losing their reputation and also due to family restrictions. They choose to remain silent rather than fight for their rights. In this situation, rapists and criminals are often safer. Women's refusal to fight back against those criminals is not because they are stupid, but because they are afraid of being reproached and humiliated in society. Rapists are safe because the victims do not dare to speak out. The reason why perpetrators often avoid punishment and are safe is that society's attitudes and behaviors towards rape victims are unjust and biased.

Female sexuality is never tolerated in Mizo society. They are expected to be sexually passive and remain chaste before marriage. Chastity of women is highly valued in Mizo society, whereas there are no restrictions or expectations on men for chastity. Men are free to have sexual intercourse with any girl, which is not at all considered to be shameful or disapproved of by society. It was regarded as an extraordinary quality of a man that showed his superiority and manliness. But women having sexual intercourse with a man would be despised by men, and even the man with whom she has sexual relations would boast over her (*Tunhma Mizo Nunphung*, 71). Men who have no sexual relationships with a woman during their lifetime and die a virgin will be hit by Pawla with his big pellets on their way to Pialral. It was so painful that it would take three years for the wound to heal. But men who had slept with women would be exempted from Pawla's pellet. A man who happened to have sexual intercourse with two sisters will be honored at his death by putting two tails of a hen as his headgear. So, male sexuality has been sanctified by their religious belief (Dokhuma 175-176).

On the other hand, women who reveal their sexual desires are regarded as sexually abnormal or perverted and their sexuality has to be curbed down. In traditional Mizo society, women who are considered as having unacceptable sexual behavior are

often gang-raped (mihur zawn) by men in the village in order to restrain their sexuality. Dokhuma asserts that, “A girl who is said to have unaccepted sexual behavior is forced outside the village and gang-raped by men. This practice controls women’s behavior to fear the same thing happening to them” (36).

The tale of Chawngchilhi could also be interpreted as highly depictive of female lust, which was not at all tolerable and needed to be restrained. In the story, Chawngchilhi was killed by her own father, who happened to find out about her sexual relationship with the snake.

Chawngchilhi and her sister would go to the jhum every day, and because of this their father was very pleased and would pack a midday meal for them, consisting of rice and dried meat. In the midst of all this, Chawngchilhi and the snake that lived near their jhum fell in love. Chawngchilhi would send her sister to call the snake. The snake would slither out as soon as Chawngchilhi’s sister called out for him and would crawl out of the snake pit. The snake would spend the entire day with Chawngchilhi. The sister was very scared of the snake. She did not eat her midday meal very often. On the other hand, Chawngchilhi would be cavorting with the snake whom she had taken as her lover, and they would also enjoy the midday meal together. The younger sister told her father about Chawngchilhi and the snake. Her father was enraged, and he decided to kill the snake. Chawngchilhi’s father hacked away at the snake with his sharpened dao and cut the snake into three different pieces. As soon as they reached home, he called Chawngchilhi, and, when she appeared he began to hack away at her with his dao, and soon she too was dead. However, he did not know that she was pregnant with the snake’s children, and when he cut away at her stomach, there were hundreds of little snakes that crawled out of her womb. This enraged him all the more, and he began to kill them. He killed all but one snake, who slithered away to the lower part of the house and hid in the mound of dung beetle (Khangte 63-67).

This story may be interpreted as a story that testifies about the condition of women in Mizo society regarding their sexuality. Women are forbidden to indulge in a pre-marital sexual relationship, and they should remain chaste till marriage. Women who violated the societal norms of the family and society by engaging in sexual

activity became a threat to the honor of the family. Chawngchilhi, who violated the social standard of sexuality and her shameful act of having a lover, must be destroyed instantly. So, Chawngchilh has to be killed to protect the family honor. The actions of her father, who brutally and mercilessly killed the snake, and her own daughter were portrayed as the one who had made the right decision and had done the right thing. Chawngchilhi was pregnant with the snake's children, who were likely to grow up and become a threat to society. At the end of the story, the only snake he missed killing, who slithered away to the lower part of the house, grew up and became a big snake who brings terror to the village. If her father had not killed her at that time, the whole village might have been eaten up by her snake children. The justification of the father's action could be symbolical of the father's rule in the family. It can be interpreted that the father should be obeyed, and his decision is for the betterment of the family. His rule is the law of the family and anyone who would violate him would bring humiliation to the family and that she would pay the price. Chawngchilhi's shameful act of her sexuality and disobedience towards her father must be put to an end so that the family and their honor will be saved and protected.

As Alan Dundes has rightly claimed that,

Folklore reflects (and thereby reinforces) the value configurations of the folk, but at the same time folklore provides a sanctioned form of escape from these very same values.... Folklore provides socially sanctioned forms of behavior in which a person may do what can't be done in real life (Dundes 59).

The sexual intercourse with a snake and pregnancy with the snake's baby may not be possible in real life. But as Alan Dundes has argued that it provides socially sanctioned forms of behavior.

In the story of Zawlpala leh Tualvungi, Tualvungi is compelled to marry Phuntiha, the *Vai lal* (a foreigner chief) who proved his wealth and power by giving a huge bride price to Zawlpala. Zawlpala could not do anything but to give his wife to *Vai Lal*. Tualvungi has to be given away because the bride price demanded for her by Zawlpala has been handed over to him. It was due to the proud and insensible decision made by Zawlpala. He had demanded an excessively high bride price for his wife, who

he proudly and mockingly claimed to be her sister. Since the word of a man is considered as the final decision in Mizo society, the decision made by Zawlpala is not likely to be changed in his honor. What Zawlpala had spoken was regarded as final and Tualvungi was left with no choice other than to fulfill what had been said by her husband. Thus, she is given to the *Vai lal* and that too, for the sake of her husband's honor. If Tualvungi has objected to marrying the *Vai Lal* after he has eagerly paid the bride price, the anger of the *Vai lal* will fall upon Zawlpala or that if Tualvungi is to reveal her real identity that she is Zawlpala's wife, the *Vai lal* will surely be angry with Zawlpala for deceiving him. So, there is nothing she could do, but she must sacrifice herself to marry the *Vai lal* against her will for her husband's safety. She had to remain the wife of the *Vai lal* and served him throughout her life.

Tualvungi is objectified as a commodity that could be bought or sold. Although Zawlpala had no bad intention of selling her for a good price, the *Vai Lal*, on the other hand, looked at her as a valuable commodity which could be bought and owned as other materials. So, when Zawlpala claimed her as his sister and demanded a huge price in exchange, the *Vai Lal* was willing to pay her price as she would become his valuable possession. After giving her the price, he took her to his home. Through their marriage, she is in the hands of the new husband, the *Vai Lal*, who is also her owner. Giving up on one's own desire and dreams or giving up on oneself for the benefit of the family members on the part of women is a common theme found in Mizo tales.

Looking at other folktales like Chawngtinleri and Thailungi, the same pattern of women's suffering due to bride price is also obvious. For instance, in the tale of Chawngtinleri, it was an unthoughtful and unintentional decision made by her brother Lianchea to allow the fairy king, Lalchungnunga, to marry his sister. Lianchea agreed with the offer made by the fairy king that they would give him many wild animals as a bride price for his sister, Chawngtinleri. The fairies forcibly took her away into their kingdom, and she became their queen after she was married to the king. She had to remain and live in the fairy world forever, and she had lost all her dreams, ideals and even her human identity so that her brother would be able to achieve what he had dreamt for his whole life. It was for the masculine desire of her brother to become a *pasaltha*, which was the epitome of masculinity that she had been given to the fairies. Although Lianchea came to realize and truly regretted that he had sacrificed his own

sister for his masculine desire to kill a number of wild animals and beasts, he could not take them back. Lianchea would become a *pasaltha* (a hero) who would kill a lot of wild animals and beasts, which would bring him name and fame in the village in exchange for his sister. Thus, his status would be such that the chief and the people of his village would highly admire and respect his virility.

In the other tale, Thailungi, a little girl, was sold by her greedy step-mother to the *pawi* trader for an iron ball. This iron ball was later used in the story by her brother as a play toy, which he proudly played with among his friends. This may be symbolical to the bride price system in Mizo society. Incest marriage is not advocated in Mizo society. Marriage has to be with a person outside one's own family. The main reason for approving marriage outside the family is that the father wanted to increase the wealth of the family through the bride price (Shakespeare 49). Women became a commodity through bride prices. They could be traded off or sold off for bride price. A woman is married to a man after a negotiation is made by the two families on her price. After marriage, the girl left her paternal home forever and remained in the house of her husband. The bride price that is given to the girl's family belongs to the family which is the property of the father. This could be handed down to the son by the father through inheritance. Men are regarded as the descent of the father through which the father's genes will remain protected. Women, on the other hand, are regarded as ones who will belong to another man. As the descent of the father was acknowledged only through the male line, women are not at all entitled to inherit the family property. It means that a woman has nothing that she could claim on her own despite her enormous contribution to the family. Virginus Xaxa, in her study of tribes in India, rightly remarked, "Women were treated as mere commodities to be easily procured by men through bride prices... Bride prices thus became a convenient justification for men to abuse their wives and treat them as disposable commodities" (355). These two women were representatives of a sacrificial figure in Mizo society who were sacrificed for the welfare of their family, or for this matter, their brother, that men will enjoy and benefit through women who are forced to bring in fortunes for the family.

In contemporary Mizo society, women who diligently and tirelessly work hard for the family have to become an outsider after they are married, since everything that belongs to the family is the property of the father and male successors in Mizo

customary law. Women have no share in the house even if it was earned and acquired through their labour and hard work. Women could inherit the family property only for some special and in exceptional cases. The superficiality and subordinate position of women in Mizo society in the inheritance and property rights can also be seen from these tales.

The tale of Kungawrhi reveals the power of the father in the family. It is a story of a father and a daughter in which the supremacy of the father is apparently shown. The protagonist, Kungawrhi, has been given away to three men as a prize or reward for their deeds and action. As she could not recover from her sickness, her father announced that she would be rewarded to any man who could cure her. The *Keimi* (a tiger man) who hid his true identity cured her and, as her father had promised, she was married to him. When Kungawrhi's father found out that the man who married his daughter was no ordinary man but a *keimi*, he once again announced that any man who could save her from the *keimi* could marry her. After she was rescued, she was married to Hrangchala, who falsely claimed himself to be the rescuer. But when Phawthira came back to the village, he instantly killed Hrangchala and again claimed that Kungawrhi should be his wife as he was the real hero who saved her from the *keimi*. Then Kungawrhi once again became the wife of Phawthira.

The story of Kungawrhi being given as a reward three times to three men by her father clearly shows the powerlessness and subjugation of women in the family. She remained silent all through the story. It was his father who decided to give her away to these men. Never once was Kungawrhi shown as protesting or objecting to her father and his decision. It was an old woman who revealed the identity of her first husband – the *keimi* that he was a Tigerman. So, it was the duty of the father to take action to save his daughter from the *keimi*. The repetition of handing over his daughter as a prize to men who proved their ability to win her is like handing over a trophy to the winner. She is like a running trophy that should be given to the last winner over and over again. Kungawrhi is a lifeless character who is so passive and obedient that she falls into the trap of bad men and who is rescued by a real hero in the end. She is a sacrificing figure who would fulfill all her father's decisions. She is submissive to her father from the beginning to the end of the story. She is totally submitting herself to her father, who decides what she should do and who should have her. Her very

obedience, her silence, her submission to male dominance is the very essence that made her become a sacrifice.

Kungawrhi is shown as nothing more than a trophy. Trophy substantiates a person's achievement. They signify the power which the winner holds. Women were often relegated to the position of trophies who were married off to a king who defeated his opponents or to men who prove their excellence by defeating their enemies. Winning the trophy has elevated the status of the man, but it abolishes the woman's worth. The beauty of a woman is the pride of her husband. The quality of a woman and her beauty or perfection has raised and uplifted the status of the man she marries. The men who marry Kungawrhi have all proved their worth to be her husbands in one way or another. Her third and last husband Phawthira, is shown as the real hero, who, by his courage and wisdom saved her and rescued her from her two husbands. The first husband had fooled Kungawrhi's father with a bad intention of causing illness to Kungawrhi and wickedly proved himself to be the one who could heal her illness. The second husband Hrangchala also falsely claimed himself a hero, to which Kungawrhi did nothing but remained silent and voiceless. The silence and voicelessness of Kungawrhi may also be reflective of the subordinate position of women in Mizo society.

In the tale of Mauruangi, Mauruangi's mother was killed three times. The first killing was by her own husband for a very petty reason that she was afraid and could not cross the old bridge on their way home from the forest. It was due to the heavy load that her husband himself had made for her. Her husband then pushed her off the bridge, hence she died. The reason for the killing is for such a trivial thing that it looked like he wanted to get rid of her wife for good. Her husband soon married a widow who lived next door. This could relate to the Mizo saying 'Hmeichhia leh pal chhia chu thlak theih' which means 'woman and a damaged fence can be changed' (Khangte 68). That tells how a man could divorce or change his wife if he so finds it necessary or if he feels if his wife is of no use anymore. In this story, the husband is searching for fault in his wife so that he has a reason to do away with her. The very reason why he wanted to get rid of his wife for such a petty reason could be assumed that he wanted to marry another woman. The Mizo saying 'Nupui nena hmarcha sawh bawl fo ai chuan inthen a tha zawk' (Dokhuma 318) which means "It is better to divorce a wife

who often needs help in the kitchen', a wife who is not able to fulfil a woman's job in the house and could not serve her husband well is such a useless wife that she should be divorced. Mauruangi pa had planned a way to get rid of his wife while at the same time all the faults would be put upon his wife, so that he remains clean in this matter. Mauruangi nu is trapped and killed for not being able to satisfy her husband's expectation. In this way she became symbolical to the sacrificial lamb which is killed to cleanse the sin of the one who do the sacrifice.

Looking at the suffering of Mauruangi, the orphan heroine, who has severely suffered under her cruel step-mother is a stereotype character who possesses all the ideal characteristics of an ideal woman. She is passive, submissive, obedient, gentle and diligent, who was also a very weak character who could not save herself from her miserable live. She passively bear the sufferings till she was married by the *Vai Lal*. After she was murdered, she was brought back to life by the male animal Sazaa, and she continued to serve him until she was found by the *Vai Lal's* men. Mauruangi's character is very typical of the role and status of women in Mizo society. She was dependent all through her life on men and that she was powerless on her own. A daughter during her childhood is under the care and protection of her parents and brother(s), as woman she has to abide and obey them. She could not do anything on her own even if it is a good thing without the permission of her parents and brothers (Vanlaltlani 21). Unless and until she was saved by a man, she continued to be a passive victim to the one who dominated them. The theme of women's passive victimization, like Mauruangi, who is submissive to those who rule over them, who can not free themselves or who are too weak to fight back for their liberation and freedom, is the major theme found in Mizo folk tales.

The characters of women as passive victims and submissive women are the characteristics of the heroine not only in Mizo folktales but also in Mizo contemporary novels. For instance, in the novel of Zikpuii Pa's *Nunna Kawngthuam Puiah*, the heroine Ngurthansangi was forced to marry the Indian army officer, Captain Renade, in order to save her family, who later sold her for prostitution. She remained a passive victim who was trapped as a sex slave until she was rescued by Chhuanvawra. Zothanchhingi Khiangte wrote,

It was Chhuanvawra who later rescues her from the “depth of debauchery” (suahsualna khur)... While Chhuanvawra is painted as a flawless character, Ngurthansangi’s weakness and vulnerability is intended to remind women’s failings and therefore their need for protection by Mizo men (11).

The woman’s character who has been pictured as passive and weak in the folktales and novels, is representative of the gender hierarchy of male dominance and female subordinate position in Mizo society.

Mauruangi’s miserable life began when her father killed her loving mother and brings in her cruel step-mother and her daughter Bingtaii. It was because of her father’s selfishness in fulfilling his desire to marry another woman that made her suffer all through her life until she was saved by a *Vai Lal* who married her. The character of step-mother in folk tales are always shown as contradictory to the feminine character. The hidden agenda of giving negative stereotyped women character to the step-mother could also be implied as a motive of patriarchy to defend the cultural masculine and feminine ideals.

Women in Mizo society are often said to have more freedom in comparison with women of other tribal societies in India. A prominent academician of the region, in his writing, goes to the extent stating that “a Mizo woman is as free as her male counterpart” (qtd. in Khiangte 191). A topic of gender disparities and gender discrimination in Mizo society is often retorted by a claim that women are free to participate and take part in social activities and social life, and in the church, and that there is no gender discrimination as in other societies. It is mainly because men and women play an important function in the family and at social level, and that they both have cultural and economic values. But the reality lies to the fact that gender division and gender hierarchy in Mizo society starts right from birth, which controlled and nurtured them to become a gendered person. At the time of birth, a boy and girl child are both happily welcomed in the family. A baby girl is welcomed with a blessing word ‘Nula hmelta, sial man tur’ (a beautiful woman who will cost a mithun) whereas a baby boy will be blessed with a word ‘pasaltha, ral that tur’ (a brave warrior who will kill the enemy) marking him to become a great warrior. Right from birth, different expectation with regard to their gender have already started. Girls are confined at home and trained by their mothers to become a women, while boys are engaged more to

social life and social institution like Zawlbuk. Women occupied a very important position in the family, for the tremendous work and service they did for the family. All the household work, like cooking, winnowing of rice, spinning and weaving, making of clothes, weaving quilts and making of mattresses, collecting firewood and water, looking after children and older member in the family, tending and caring of the sick and many more are characterized as a woman's job. All the domestic animals are also looked after by them. They have no free time at night as they have to cook food for pigs, attending men who come to court them, while at the same time, they do spin works. Their job is a never-ending work, and they have to work from dawn to dusk. The Mizo household could not function properly in the absence of women.

In jhumming works, their value is no less important than that of men. Tough works like clearing of jungle and preparing of the jhum is considered as men's work, but all the other agricultural works from sowing to harvesting are done both by men and women. The economy of the family also depends on women in the sense that they can engage work in the jhum with men who court them. This exchange system of work by women with men, known as *in lawm*, is very valuable for the girl's family, as men are stronger and more beneficial in the agricultural works. Women with beauty are more likely to have many *lawmpa*. So, the role and contribution of women in the agricultural field is important for the family too.

In Mizo society, women also play an important role in acquiring wealth for the family through bride price. The reason why girls at the time of birth are blessed that they become beautiful women who would cost a mithun is chiefly connected with the marriage and bride price system. Mithun is the most precious animal in traditional Mizo society for it is required for religious purposes and in the process of attaining *Thangchhuah* status. The wealth of a family is also accounted for the number of mithun they possess. The girl's parents could also ask for other valuable items like gong and necklace, gun, etc. in exchange of their daughter. The girl's parents would normally select the highest bidder and give their daughter into marriage. In the tales of Chawngvungi leh Sawngkhara, Chawngvungi's mother was persistently demanding the *dar huai* (a sacred gong) of Sawngkhara's family. Sawngkhara's family were very reluctant as it is a sacred gong not to be given away as bride price, but they have to

agree as Chawngvungi's family would not accept any other thing for her price. Therefore, the value of women could not be underestimated in the Mizo society for the function they play in the family.

In social life women never took a leading part but they play an important role of a helper and partner. For instance, traditional festivals like Chapchar kut, Pawl kut and Mim kut and ceremonies such as *sechhun*, *khuangchawi*, *ral lu lam* are inclusive of men and women. Women along with the men participated in all the various social entertainments. Both men and women help in collecting firewood for feast and pounding of rice for beer for the ceremonies. Women also played an important part in welcoming the successful raiding party. They would welcome them with *arkeziak*, which is a beautiful plait of red and black cotton thread and tied them round the knots of the young men's hair, done with purpose to glorify and in the honour of the raiding party (*Mizo Women Today* 3). They take part in religious rituals and sacrifices also, but the major or leading role in all these kinds of social or religious activities is occupied by men only and women took a role of helpers and partners.

The Mizo Code of ethics revolves around *tlawmngaihna* (Lalrinawma 131). R.L. Thanmawia has said that the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* eludes literal translation (Thanmawia 15). All the Mizo cultural virtues and values centered around *tlawmngaihna* and it is the life of the Mizos which create their identity of Mizoness. "The people are very disciplined in Mizo society. The social customs are based on very strong ethical principles of self-help and co-operation of one with another (Lalrinawma 124). Quoting K.C. Lalvunga's definition of *tlawmngaihna*, R.L. Thanmawia wrote, "an ideal of life in which a man could not be outdone in doing good to others, and that self-sacrifice sometime demands life itself" (Thanmawia 15).

Tlawmngaihna is so valued and esteemed in Mizo society that men and women are taught to be a *tlawmngai* person. Every Mizo was expected to respect and abide by this code of conduct. Men competed each other to be the most *tlawmngai* person in every way. Men are awarded or recognized due to their *tlawmngaihna*. For instance, man who was recognized as the most *tlawmngai* person is awarded 'nopui' (special cup of beer) at the time of drinking *sumdeng zu*. Men's volunteerism and competition

is mainly outside the family such as hunting, raiding expedition and urgent messenger about death. Their volunteerism is known and seen in the community, so they earn reputation and honor in the society.

Men can also achieve another honourable title of *pasaltha* (traditional heroes) which is a very respectable position and prestigious title, through which common men could achieve high social standing in the society. Men compete and try to attain this great and high esteemed position of *pasaltha*, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Women on the other hand were not given any chance to great achievement and honour for social status or public recognition. Even if they are very *tlawmngai* like their male counterpart, there is no public reward or recognition for their good and selfless deeds. The qualities and virtues of an ideal women is same characteristics of *tlawmngaihna*. The roles and duties entrusted upon women are endowed with the spirit of *tlawmngaihna*. They are nurtured to become a good woman and they are taught at a very early age to learn and practice all the feminine virtues in the family. But even if they possessed all those positive feminine traits, or if they are very *tlawmngai* or helpful for the family and for the society there is no reward on account of their good deeds and virtues. They will be simply regarded as *nula fel* (good woman) or *nula chhuanvawr* (ideal woman), but there is no prize or reward for them to give them a social status as such. The highest reward or status they could achieve in their life is that they become men's choice and ideal that they will become a wife of great or wealthy men. Men's action in regard to achieve *tlawmngai* or *pasaltha* title is in connection to the social service or activities that is recognised as men's job like hunting, raiding, war and the like, whereas women and their virtue or *tlawmngaihna* is something which is connected to domestic life and works. For instance, the making of a traditional quilt known as *pawnpui* is a work which is tough and which needs great skills and talent. *Pawnpui* is a big family quilt made from cotton thread and cotton balls.

A quilt is made by passing every fourth or fifth thread of the warp and small role of raw cotton and drawing both ends up, A raw of these cotton rolls is put

in after every fourth or fifth thread of the wool, so that one side of the quilt is composed of closely placed tufts of cotton (Mizo Women Today 9).

The preparation of *pawnpui* is a difficult task which requires a lot of energy and hard work. Since a single person cannot handle the process, three or four women combine to finish the work. It is also not an ordinary weaving that can be done by one person. A strong and energetic woman held the loom at the centre while the other two held the loom at the sides. Because of this complicated process, skilled and strong women are invited to weave the *pawnpui*. This task is also an important way for Mizo women to show their 'tlawmngaihna' in their lives (Sailo 7).

A single *pawnpui* is shared by all members of the family and as it requires a lot of hard work, the family rarely replaces or changes it. Since every married girl takes it with her to her husband's home, it is one of the most burdensome works for women. But these women were never acknowledged or given reputation in the community. Thus, the women's virtue and good deeds are accepted as normal and are taken for granted for which there is no reward and recognition as *tlawmngai nopui* which men are entitled to achieve.

The Mizo legendary hero Vanapa, who was famous for his *tlawmngaihna*, earned the title given to the most selfless and altruistic person called *tlawmngaihna nopui* which was the most noble and renowned trophy during their times and has a huge impact on the present day. Vanapa's actions and deeds which stem out from the essence of *tlawmngaihna* are still told as an interesting and delightful story, which demonstrates the ethical norms of Mizo culture - *tlawmngaihna*. The largest hall in Aizawl is named after Vanapa and is called Vanapa Hall. His statue is also in the heart of the city at the front of Vanapa Hall. One day as they went for hunting, Vanapa heard that their leader wanted a large pebble for a grindstone but was unable to take it home since it was still a long way, and the stone was too heavy to carry. When they reached the village, Vanapa took out the stone from his pocket and gave it to him. All along the road, Vanapa quietly took the stone and carried it home with him. The people were surprised to see Vanapa's *tlawmngaihna* and praised him for being dedicated and helping others. His story is used as a lesson to teach the younger generation about Mizo *tlawmngaihna*. His narrative is

often included in school textbooks, and he is an inspiration to the poets and writers who proudly resuscitates his image in their writings.

Other Mizo legendary heroes such as Taitesena, Khuangchera, Chawngbawla, Neuva, Zampuimanga and many others were employed as a good example for educating Mizo youth about patriotism, honesty and integrity, and many other Mizo ethical norms and standards till today. Their names and narratives are often mentioned and repeated in Mizo literature to mirror, define and teach about Mizo identity.

Women's actions, however, are not always remembered or repeated. Women's greatest glory can be regarded as to be submissive to men, respectful and to be an honor to their husbands, obedient to them, a good housewife and skilled in weaving. Mothers or women who talk too much are never respected. Women are very important in the family and society, but there are no awards or honour for being a good woman. A righteous mother, a good and beautiful wife is the greatest position for Mizo women.

In Mizo society women have always been looked upon as symbols of sacrifice. Through the analysis of Mizo folktales, it is evident that the patriarchal structure is the underlying factor that developed the subjugation of women. Women having weak, obedient, and submissive characters who need the protection of men and needed to be rescued by men are portrayed as an ideal woman or as heroines in the folktales. The superiority of men and the subordinate position of women in Mizo patriarchal society is uphold and protected in the folktales. The social conditioning of women as a sacrificial lamb has been preserved with a motive of strengthening and enforcing patriarchy. Sonika Sethi, in *Women as the Sacrificial Lamb on the Altar of Honour : A Feminist Perspective* wrote,

Life for a woman has never been easy. Time and again they have been assigned the role of the 'sacrificial lamb' whose destiny is decided by the men controlling the power structure of the social set-up. She has been, in all the ages, forced to make sacrifices either in the name of Honour or Glory. Her dignity, her virtuousness as well as her honour (40).

This emphasizes that women were at the web of patriarchy, tending to male needs and sacrificing their self to protect the male oriented society created by men.

In the contemporary Mizo society, the position of women has been developed and uplifted in many ways comparing to the lives of women in the pre- Christian Mizo society. The advent of Christianity and the introduction of education had brought about tremendous changes to the roles and status of women. Women are free to take part as men in almost all social activities and other social life. There is no gender discrimination in the field of education and economic, that women enjoy the same privilege and same treatment as men in and outside the family. The mindset of the people regarding gender has also changed to a great extent. Even though the perspectives and attitude towards women and their position has changed in many ways, the role of women as sacrificial lamb is still prevalent which conditioned women to be obedient and sacrificial to men. The social conditioning which is based on the patriarchal concept of men's supremacy has restricted or necessitated women to live in a certain way and relegated them to a subordinate position. This trend of women's subordination is enforced by the teaching of Christianity that helps in validating the fact that women should be self-sacrificing and obedient to men.

The patriarchal thought of the Judeo-Christian culture which had already existed in Mizo society is believed to strengthened patriarchy and thus enforcing women's subordination to men. The teaching of the Bible that advocates the submission of wife to their husband is often claimed and reiterated to approved men's supremacy over women. Even though women are included, and they could take part in all religious functions, the major role of church elder and pastor is inclusive of men only. Women are not allowed and entitled to be ordained as elder and pastor except in one denomination known as Baptist Church of Mizoram. In politics also, "it is very surprising that the position of Mizo women in politics has always remained at a low level (Lalhnezhovi 68). In the biggest and most effective social organisation YMA (Young Mizo Association), although women are also playing a significant role as men, the high post of the Central YMA like the Office Bearers are held only by men. The subordinate status of women in the present society is apparently shown in their position in the religion, political and social organisation level.

The role of women in the economic sphere is no less significant than men. They hold important offices in the governmental job, and in the business sectors. There is

no discrimination on account of gender in the economic field. If a woman is found fit for the work, she could be recruited in any kind of job. Women in many families are also becoming the bread earner of the family. They are not confined in the house anymore and they are free to work as bread earner as men. However, the role and status of women in the family is more or less the same in the sense that they are expected to sacrifice herself for the family. The father is esteemed as the supreme head of the family and all decision about the family is made by him. He is the owner and representative of the family in the society. Women are considered as inferior to the husband that they should be obedient and submissive and devote to her husband. Women should play the role of nurturer and care giver; all the domestic works are put upon her shoulder. Even if she is playing the role of the bread earner, the responsibility and duties of the domestic works has to be done by her. If the wife is working in the domestic spheres only, she is regarded as unemployed. The service and hard work that she had done in the family is not considered as a job since it is unpaid job. All the family property and assets, and even children are the possession of men. In case of divorce, it is the wife who would leave the house. Work distribution is still based on gender. Girls are expected to do the domestic work while boys are not expected as much or even exempted from it. But in case of children, it is the boys who would inherit the family property while girls are to be married away to a husband. There are many girls who are bread earner and worked hard even abroad for the family. But when they were married all the family property would be owned by the brother and they could inherit the family property in the absence of male members in the family.

The social conditioning of men and women are formed under patriarchal structure. Women should play the role of good wives, good daughters, and good sisters. The stereotypical character of a good woman such as - obedient, submissive, passive, gentle, kind, humble and self-sacrifice for the family is still the feminine quality she must possessed to become a good woman. In order to be labeled as a good wife and daughter, she has to give up many things such as – her dreams, desires and even her career at some point because it is less important in the eyes of men. Men's work are considered as important while women's job are considered as less important. She has so many things that she has to surrender for the family and women who are sacrificing

themselves for the family are considered as ideal woman. In the contemporary society, women continued to play the role of a sacrificial lamb in the family.

The trend of women's subordination continued till today and it is Christianity that uphold the fact that women should be self-sacrificing. The patriarchal thought of women as a sacrificing figure is internalized by the women themselves that they continued to be the one who preserves patriarchy. The fear of being labeled as bad woman prevent them from fulfilling their dreams and desire and make them into becoming a sacrificial lamb.

Folktales, which is the literature of the folk themselves is the record of their culture and society. Alan Dundes has said the interconnection of folktales and the people to which it belongs "... folklore is autobiographical ethnography – that is, it is a people's own description of themselves" (55). And he further stated that –

With symbolic systems, it is never a matter of one isolated instance. Within a given culture, there are whole consistent patterns of symbolism. The symbolism of a culture will be manifested in the folklore of that culture. Folklore is a collective fantasy and as fantasy, it depends upon the symbolic system of a given culture... (64).

Folktales which is replicated with a symbolism of culture is so important for the study of a particular culture that,

...as a subject of study can be a most rewarding one. It does serve as a mirror of culture and it is a mirror well worth looking into it... We need to use every available means to better understand ourselves and our fellow men and women (66).

Therefore, through the study of Mizo folktales, it is evident that gender played a crucial role in Mizo society by representing the patriarchal concept of masculinity and femininity through the tales. Women are objectified to the position of passive victims and sacrificial lamb while men are portrayed as masculine heroes. The patriarchal concept of gender hierarchy and gender division in the family and society

is securely surrounded in Mizo folk tales thereby preserving and conveying the patriarchal structure of Mizo society to the people till date.

Glossary

1. *Pawla*: A supernatural person in Mizo mythology who lives on way to deadman's abode and used to shoot people.
2. *Pialral*: A Lushai paradise
3. *Tlawmngaihna*: Altruism, sacrifice without expecting reward, a Mizo code of morals and good form of life
4. *Sum deng zu*: beer supplied to the young men and maidens who husk rice for a *chawng* feast.
5. *Vai lal*: A foreign chief.

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CHAPTER IV

MASCULINITY IN MIZO FOLKTALES

The Mizo ethno-identity is built on the collective memory of a people who choose to be identified under a common identity based on a shared past. Unlike history, which comes with an idea of being ‘fixed and stable’ once established and sustained by evidence, memories are created and fluid, and affected by the context and concerns of the present. This chapter shall examine women’s place in the Mizo cultural identity built upon ideas of masculine chivalry and heroism as reflected in the legendary tales of Mizo heroes. The folk tales and legends selected for this chapter reveal how in the Mizo ethno-nationalist consciousness, memories of a glorious past are created but these memories of a collective past are often masculine in nature. In these tales, while some characters who show masculine traits are glorified, some who are seen to be lacking in masculine aggression or those who do not subscribe to notions of manhood are vilified. The study reveals how folklore can act as a medium with persuasive potential in creating an ethno-nationalist Mizo identity which is essentially masculine and patriarchal. The tales to be taken up for study are Khuangchera, Taitesena, Vanapa, Chawngbawla and Neuva.

Masculine is defined by Merriam Webster as “of, relating to, or suited to men or boys, of or belonging to the class of words (called a gender) that ordinarily includes the words that referring to males, a word or form of the masculine gender” (1003). Masculine or masculinity is a term that is quite common in the study of gender and social theory. The term is closely related to hegemony or power which is used and performed from times immemorial and became almost universal.

Studies on masculinity argue that although male and female are just the two main biological and gender identities of people, male and female identities are sociocultural behaviours developed through activity. Due to will or socio-cultural conditions, by male and female bodies, wholly or in part or even alternately, in different forms, and wherever and whenever secured by a male or female. Performances by gender, as distinct from bodies by gender, have given rise to concepts of masculinity/feminine cohesion, masculine femininity etc. (Connell 7).

R. W. Connell, an enlightened masculinity theorist who theorized and studied masculinity, recognized that masculinity has always been defined by its difference from femininity. The 2005 edition emphasizes the recognition that there are many types of masculinity and femininity, and that masculinity is a configuration of practices structured by gender relationships, clearly defining that masculinity exists only in relation to femininity. In his famous book *Masculinity*, R.W. Connell identified four types of masculinity in the current gender order, such as hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization which is seen as how men exercise hegemony over women. Arthur Brittan also argues that,

Masculinism is the ideology that justifies male domination. As such, it is the ideology of patriarchy. Masculinism takes it for granted that there is a fundamental difference between men and women, it assumes that heterosexuality is normal, it accepts without question the sexual division of labour, and it sanctions the political and dominant role of men in public and private spheres (53).

Therefore, masculinity is deeply rooted and influenced by ethnicity in very important ways. From this perspective, the theory of masculinity is rooted in the studies of ethnicity as well.

The term hegemonic masculinity is derived from the assumption that there is a hierarchy of male behaviour, meaning the fact that most societies encourage men to express dominant versions of masculinity and dominate. Hegemonic masculinity is a competing entity that exhibits a tendency for men to try to dominate other men and subordinate women. Domination, exploitation, oppression, power, and social control present a broader description of the constraints that operate in personality and in social organization and of the way in which the two levels are articulated during remanufacturing. As proponents of this theory suggest, it is not primarily the most conventional form of female expression, but the most socially accepted masculinity that contributes to the inferiority of women. Sociologists appreciate some traits associated with male idealization such as motivation, autonomy, ambition, aggression,

and heterosexuality, but underestimate these traits in women in contemporary Western society.

Marginalized and subordinate masculinity is seen as the primary form of subordinate masculinity over the dominant and dominant form of masculinity, i.e., hegemonic masculinity. The distinction of these subaltern forms in the theory of masculinity is based on their relationship to other constructs such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, which are shaped by ethnicity. Subordinate masculinities emerge as the product of a particular relationship that some men have in the structure of sex, which reverses the Catholic hegemonic focus on femininity (such as heterosexuality) versus masculinity (such as homosexuality). The hegemonic conception of homosexuality emphasizes gender differences rather than actual differences in sexual orientation. In other words, the characteristics inherent in homosexual behaviour mark these men with a visible form of non-masculine or effect, blurring the necessary clear boundaries (Connell 79). Thus, for example, sense of dress, speech and behaviour, and overt sexuality, are overt symbols that contain traits such as expressiveness and emotion, passivity and tameness, weakness and lack of authority that are a curse to male hegemony.

Subordinate masculinity is distinguished from one another by the social relationships that define them. Subordinate masculinity is associated only with purgative relationships structured around sex. These relationships were labeled as anomalous and excluded from the hegemony domain. Although men as a group enjoy legal rights, they do not share the benefits of those rights equally.

Complicit masculinity is another category often seen as an inferior version of the hegemonic ideal. Unlike subordinate and socially marginalized masculinities, the ability of men to complicitly challenge the tenets embodied in hegemonic masculinity, even at the affiliated or political level, is weaker. more than other male subordinates. there is always the possibility that they assume and manifest characteristics that clearly reduce the viability of a hegemonic plot, especially at the individual level. Connell and Schmidt states that,

Men who acknowledged the benefits of patriarchy without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance could be regarded as showing a complicit masculinity. It was in relation to this group and to compliance among heterosexual women, that the concept of hegemony was most powerful. Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions and persuasion. This was the element of optimism in an otherwise rather bleak theory. It was perhaps possible that a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man might become hegemonic, as part of a process leading toward an abolition of gender hierarchies (832-33).

Masculinity in Mizo Society

The dominance of patriarchy and gender relations in Mizo society has played a significant role in the formation of Mizo cultural identity. Mizo society is based on a strict patriarchal structure where men held the dominant roles in the family, society and in all other public domains. The place of women is confined to household and domestic sphere other than their economic roles. Although social festivals and community feast are inclusive of men and women, the role of women is only that of a partner. It is men who hold the major and leading role in religious and social functions and ceremonies and in the family.

There is a specific gender roles and work distribution within the family and society which resulted in the subordinate position of women. Man would not interfere in any kind of works which is considered as a women's job. And if a man is doing a women's job he would be ridiculed and degraded as *thaibawih* (henpecked) by the society. A woman who does not respect her husband or who is not dutiful and self-sacrifice for the family and in her role as a mother would also become a despicable person. Women are considered to be physically and intellectually inferior to man. The Mizo saying 'Hmeichhe finin tuikhur ral a kai lo' which means 'The wisdom of women does not reach beyond the village water pond' apparently highlight their low status in the society. Laltluangliana Khiangte stated,

...there was a good division of labour, and women's and men's roles were clearly demarcated. From household work to the public water point, women could deal with almost all duties, whereas men would take care of all other hard work beyond the public water point like searching of jhum plot, clearing of thick forests, making traps for wild animals, fighting with foes etc. Even if women tried to have a say on those things, men-folk would say that 'Let them grumble and be satisfied by saying whatever they would (81).

The social functions of Mizo society is completely dependent and dominated by men. The village administration is constituted of male members such as - the village chief and the village elders; the social institutions like *zawlbuk* is also inclusively male and the family too is headed and governed by the father. The role of men in Mizo society is so important that Mizo cultural identity could be said to be basically formed upon male ideas and ideals.

Men in Mizo society played an important role in the society as a village defence force. Like other tribal societies, inter-feud wars with other villages took place very often. So, defending the village from the enemy is one of the important and major role of men. Protecting villagers and their domestic animals from wild animals is another tough work for men since the village and the forests are abound with wildlife. All the works that is considered as tough work which needs physical strength and valour are entrusted upon men. Domestic and household works, minor and menial works are considered as women's job. So, women's dependency on men in terms of economic, security and power were due to the patriarchal social set up that leads to the subordination of women. The social relations are seen in variety of gendered practices in the society such as division of labours, gender hierarchy and gender normative behaviour.

Men in Mizo society are respected and honoured for their service and dedication to the society – their act and zeal as a defensive force who protect the village from the enemy and from ferocious wild animals, and their important roles and duties in several social functions and in times of need in the society (Lianthanga 35-36). The

chivalry and heroism of *pasaltha* and their esteemed status is deeply connected to the patriarchal structure and cultures of Mizo society.

Being in the midst of constant fear of enemies and fearful beasts as well as evil spirits and ghosts, brave and courageous men who became heroes for their exceptional courage and valour are very much needed in the society in order to maintain peace and security (The Mizo Heroes ii). Thus, the cultural customs and traditions, beliefs and values are centred and focused on the menfolk and men occupied a high and honourable position in the society whereas womenfolk are designated to a less important and secondary place in the formation of the Mizo cultural identity.

Culture can be defined as what is common in the minds of a given group of people; it refers to a community of society. People in a community share many ideas, values and images, in short, representations which are collective to them and differ from others... Such cultural contents are transmitted to children in the process of learning the language and in learning how to behave. Communication of oral tradition is part of the process of establishing collective representations (Vansina 124).

The Mizo concept of cultural identity is constructed through collective identity. R.L Thanmawia has posited that, “Their values and beliefs along with the various social religious practices that interspersed their pattern of life gave them a distinct Mizo identity” (9). Mizo society is a communitarian society whereby the interest of the community is given more importance than the individual interest. The identity of the Mizo community was founded on the basis of the ‘chief’ and ‘tlawmngaihna’ as the structural and functional elements. (Lalrinawma 124). Mizo society being a close knit and communitarian society favours collective consciousness and collective identity. This collective identity is based upon the cultural ideas of masculinity and femininity representing stereotype characters for men and women.

Femininity and masculinity are acquired social identities; as individuals become socialized, they develop a gender identity, an understanding of what it means to be a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’. How individuals develop an understanding of their gender identity, including whether or not they fit into these prescribed gender roles, depends

upon the context within which they are socialized and how they view themselves in relation to social gender norms.

At the heart of some of the world's most enduring myths and legends are heroes, who overcome obstacles. Heroes are not omnipotent, immortal beings. Instead, they represent the highest meaning of what it means to be human, demonstrating great strength, courage, wisdom, cleverness, or devotion. Throughout the ages, cultures have produced different types of heroes representing a wide range of virtues. For example, the male-dominated civilization of ancient Greece admired strong warrior heroes. In contrast, in ancient Egyptian mythology, where religion played a central role at all levels of society, heroes were often priests and sorcerers. In many cultures, women became heroes by using their intelligence and strong personalities to outwit their opponents. Some heroes of myth and legend are completely fictional. Some historical figures have grown into legendary heroes, others have been given such status by writers or the public. Some myths are about gods, others are not, such as Oedipus, Daedalus, and Gilgamesh. In researching myths and legends around the world, scholars have identified a pattern that continues to emerge - stories of universal heroes.

In Mizo society, men are expected to possess masculine traits like -courage, strength, wisdom and any other manly characters, whereas women are expected to be beautiful, gentle, kind, passive and submissive. The highest standard of Mizo masculinity is to become a '*pasaltha*' (heroes). Therefore, the concept of heroes can be understood to be closely intertwined and interrelated with masculine traits in Mizo society. To identify the heroes, one must first understand the word itself. The word 'hero' may have multiple definitions and interpretations based on the context of the situation and cultural background.

Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus define 'hero' as "a person admired for courage, outstanding achievements" (Elliot 348). *Merriam Webster* also define hero as "a person who is admired for great or brave acts or fine qualities, a person who is greatly admired" (774). A hero thus is an individual of elevated moral stature and superior ability who pursues his goals determinedly in the face of powerful antagonists. Because of his unswerving devotion to the good, no matter the opposition,

a hero attains spiritual grandeur, even if he fails to achieve practical victory. An uncompromising commitment to morality is the foundation of heroism.

Heroes hold rational life- promoting values and in the attempt to create or defend these values, they are willing to expend all their energy, engage in any struggle and take on every foe. The hero is one who holds rational values and fights for them, if necessary, against every possible form of opposition. Heroism is a moral concept. By its nature it is reserved for the man set apart – for the select few who tower above the rest. It is a sparsely populated classification. To attain this status, one must reach the zenith of human morality – an undeviating commitment to rational values, in action, against opposition that would dismay a lesser man.

The most esteemed and highly valued person in Mizo society is '*pasaltha*' (hero) who held an important and dignified position in the society. JH Lorrain has defined '*pasaltha*' as, "a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter" (352).

Lalnunpuii Ralte writes the characteristics of a Mizo '*pasaltha*' in *Reflections on Mizo History*, denoting the quality of a hero in the Mizo context.

Heroes are generally associated with qualities or attributes that Mizo traditional society embraced in high esteem, such as heroism in hunting, gallantry in the face of the enemy, battles, altruism, courage, brevity, diligence, chivalry, humility, etc (80).

Laltluangliana Khiantge also state that,

The Mizos greatly cherished the brave efforts and tireless activities in all events of their patriots (*pasaltha*) right from the days of our forefathers. Their unending zeal for the society to which they belong and their activities of selfless acts are used as living examples which every parent would hand down to their children. Tales of Mizo heroes are told whenever time permitted them. One will notice the erection of memorial stones of those brave heroes in different villages (Khiantge 87).

Khiangte highlights the necessity and importance of '*pasaltha*' in a traditional Mizo village. Such traits of '*pasaltha*' were orally handed down from generation to generation, so that those qualities may live forever in the memory of the Mizo people. And that the next generation might carry on the legacy of the infamous '*pasaltha*'.

A '*pasaltha*' can be recognized as having the quality of '*tlawmngaihna*' in every sphere of life. This so called '*tlawmngaihna*' can be defined as altruism, selfless acts or helping others without expecting rewards. Lalthansangi Ralte also wrote about the interconnection of '*pasaltha*' and '*tlawmngaihna*' in her article 'Women in Mizo Society',

Among the Mizos, the 'Braves' (always men) of the village were called Pasaltha. The term Pasaltha is closely linked with the word Tlawmngaihna, which when roughly translated means being humble in all respects and at the same time, to always be ready to help. A Pasaltha is considered to be a man who is self-less and brave and wise and is always ready to sacrifice his life for others. Tlawmngaihna is a quality which is always found in a Pasaltha. A Pasaltha was the epitome of masculinity in earlier Mizo society (122).

Tlawmngaihna is an ethical code and all the other Mizo code of ethics revolves around *tlawmngaihna* (Lalrinawma 131) The Mizo moral ethics and values are part and parcel of *tlawmngaihna* and it was through the principle of *tlawmngaihna* that guided and compelled them to do good and selfless deeds. The Mizo identity is built upon it and Mizos are expected to be a *tlawmngai* person. The word *tlawmngaihna* eludes literal translation (Thanmawia 15). It was the principle of *tlawmngaihna* that supplied and guide the people to perform good works. *Zawlbuk* is an institution that defines, taught and compelled boys and men to understand the meaning and value of *tlawmngaihna* and internalize the *tlawmngaihna* as the Mizo way of living and to lived practically. There was great competition among the youth because *tlawmngaihna* itself demands it (Lalrinawma 131).

Tlawmngaihna is the basis and root cause of all the cultural moralities. It is a practical life character of the people which is very difficult to explain in words. K.C Lalvunga has defined *tlawmngaihna* as -

An ideal of life in which a man could not be undone in doing well to others. When a man is *Tlawmngai*, one cannot defeat him in doing well to others, and that self-sacrifice sometimes demands life itself (Lalvunga 32).

According to J. Zorema and B. Lalrinchhani,

Tlawmngaihna was a unique traditional institution practiced among the Mizo. The *tlawmngaihna*, through *Zawlbuk*, an educational institution in the past Mizo society, instilled in the Mizo youth not only the more important aspects of education – imparting value systems and belief systems, but with skills as well. The society and culture were based on true democratic principles, honesty, truthfulness and faithfulness. They valued a persons not in terms of material possessions or wealth but on moral or ethical standards with integrity. (Zorema & Lalrinchhani v)

A.G McCall also define *tlawmngaihna* as a system of community obligation implying public service. He also elaborates on the different ways how *tlawmngaihna* was practiced in the society:

Crops of the sick would be tended by the strong, the Chief's lands would be weeded as a mark of support, help would be given to rebuild houses accidentally burned down, warriors volunteer when asked for, hunters would strive to be energetic in the chase, and in general, the good citizen was he who was foremost in meeting calls that were generally necessary for the good of the whole village. In return for this such braves were always rewarded by public acclaim and they would often be invited to share select feasts held by the Chief in his own house. (McCall 97 – 98)

In Mizo society, male members are expected and taught to possess masculine characters. At the time of birth, a boy will be marked with a blessing to become a *pasaltha*. “*Pasaltha ral that tur*’ which means ‘a hero who would kill the enemy’ and sometimes they will even make the baby hold a dao, so that he will be brave and become a *pasaltha*. Gender division started right from birth. Work division is strictly gendered. Boys are expected and trained to possessed masculine traits at a very early age. When a boy attained the age of around ten, they would be given duties of

collecting firewood for *Zawlbuk*. They have less obligations and roles within the family and their lives are more centred in the social activities and at *zawlbuk*. At adulthood they will become a member of the *Zawlbuk* and the role of village defence and security and other social roles will become their duty under the guidance of the *val upa*. The *pasaltha* in Mizo society were normally a *tlawmngai* person since the essence of *tlawmngaihna* is correlated with the characteristics of *pasaltha*. Boys and youth are taught to become a *tlawmngai* person, to respect elders, to be trustworthy and to be brave. They are taught all the cultural ethics and social values, and *Zawlbuk* is a place where they are trained to become a Mizo man or Mizo hero.

N. Chatterji has put forward the importance and significance of the *Zawlbuk* in his work *The Earlier Mizo Society*:

Zawlbuk provided a very potent group-setting in the absence of any institutionalised formal social device for educating the youth for the functional support of the traditional-ridden society...Systematic inculcation of desirable habits and cherished values was a fundamental consideration in organising the activities of the *Zawlbuk* and any socially unacceptable action or even slight departure from the established social norms of behaviour and conduct used to be severely dealt with...*Zawlbuk* was indeed a very powerful institution in the village organisation and exercised perhaps the greatest influence in establishing the social norms and customs as also in perpetuating the highly cherished values of the people... Acceptance of *Tlawmngaihna* as the code of conduct and philosophy of life imperceptibly conceived through practical operations of various activities by the inmates of *Zawlbuk* went a long way to shape the values of life of these tribal people and provided a strong anchorage to sustain the social structure on its community-based organization(Chatterji 66-84).

Zawlbuk being the powerful institution in the village organization, it is a place where boys were trained to become ideal men. It was through this institution that men could gain a social status by their acts of *tlawmngaihna*, boys became competitive since they could earn something in return. Girls on the other hand were not included

in the *Zawlbuk* institution. For them, there is no such thing as award of recognition due to their *tlawmngaihna*. The *tlawmngaihna* of a woman is seen as something normal and is taken for granted. The most reward they get through the practice of *tlawmngaihna* or moral ethics is that they are likely to be considered as good and will be married to an eligible man. The *pasaltha* in Mizo society were normally a *tlawmngai* person since the essence of *tlawmngaihna* is correlated with the characteristics of *pasaltha*.

Mizo heroes are generally marked with masculine qualities such as valour and virility with a deep essence of *tlawmngaihna*. Mizo folklore has abundant legendary heroes who have shown varieties of heroic quality and characteristics that has been manifested in hunting and gallantry. The legendary heroes in Mizo folklore were known and honored for different outstanding characters and qualities such as - *tlawmngaihna*, courage, strength, wisdom, humbleness, honesty and kind-hearted, diligence, generosity, selflessness and devotion, etc. B. Lalthangliana has selected eighteen legendary heroes and categorized them using the six heroic qualities as a criterion according to their deeds and action as told in folklore:

PASALTHA NIHNA							
Sl No.	Hming	Ral laka huai	Sa hrang laka huai	Huaisen Hrim hrim	Tlawmngai	Tuarchhel	Ral rel thiam
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Vanapa (1794-1871/1891)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Chawngbawla (1824-1894)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Karhluna (1740-1890)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
4	Chawnbura (1760-1890)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
5	Darhnawka (1780-1850)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-
6	Khuangchera (1865-1890)	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-
7	Taitesena (1880-1902)	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-
8	Neuva (1860-1902)	-	✓	✓	✓	-	-
9	Zampuimanga (1805-1885)	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
10	Saizahawla (1858-1910)	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
11	Hranghlel (1854-1942)	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓
12	Zabiaka (1821-1870)	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-

13	Zingkela (1860-1904)	-	✓	✓	-	-	-
14	Nghatebaka (1830-1860)	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
15	Tawkthiala (1812-1875)	✓	✓	✓	-	-	-
16	Sawibunga (1844-1947)	-	✓	✓	-	-	-
17	Hnawncheuva (1838-1938)	-	✓	✓	-	-	-
18	Ngurbawnga (1867-1890)	-	✓	✓	-	-	-

(Lalthangliana 149 – 150).

From the above six criterion, all the selected eighteen *pasaltha* have acquired courage, which denotes that courage and bravery is the major characteristic to become a *pasaltha*. If a man excelled in any one of the criterion in recognition of society, he could also be included or termed as *pasaltha*. However, a *pasaltha* who possessed all the criterion are most esteemed and honored in the society which could be testified by the stories and status of Chawngbawla and Vanapa (151).

As claimed by Lalthangliana, the six Mizo legendary heroes selected for studies have proved their heroism through their different heroic qualities. For instance, Vanapa and Chawngbawla have possessed all the six qualities, Khuangchera possessed five qualities, Taitesena and Neuva possessed four respectively and Zampuimanga has possessed three qualities.

R. L. Thanmawia had listed five Mizo values that has been depicted in their folk songs and folk narratives. They are – bravery, hunter, *tlawmngaihna*, strong man and music respectively (10 – 19). These Mizo values are mostly related to masculine traits or that they are more concerned with men and their activities because it is contradictory to the gender roles and characteristics of women in Mizo cultural

imaginary. Bravery, hunting, *tlawmngaihna* and physical strength are the different qualities of a *pasaltha*; and music could also be categorized under the male domain since traditional musical instrument such as *khuang*, *darbu*, *seki* and others are usually played by men. *Tlawmngaihna*, which is the cultural ethics is also involved and practiced in the life of women, but it is more related to men in the sense that the social admiration or social recognition of the most *tlawmngai* person, who are awarded the *Nopui* is the competition of men. Although women are encouraged and taught to possess and practice *tlawmngaihna*, but there is no such thing for reward like *tlawmngai nopui* or other social recognition on the part of women.

B. Lalthangliana also point out three important social positions other than the village chief in terms of hierarchical order. They are -

1. *Nopui dawng* : One who proved his outstanding character of *tlawmngaihna*, in service to the society and rendering self-less help to others in the village and at the time of hunting and raiding are selected by a *val upa* from the menfolk. It will be announced at the time of *thingfar zan*, which is the first night of the *Khuangchawi* festival. He will be given a special cup of beer served in a special mithun horn and will be honored to be the one who should drink first before others would drink it.
2. *Val upa* : A man who possessed exceptional characters of *tlawmngaihna*, wisdom, bravery, excellent personality and leadership quality who was respected and looked upon by the villagers would be designated as *val upa*. He is the guide and leader of the menfolk and all the resolutions made in the *zawlbuk* would be taken up under his observation and guidance. He played the role of intermediary to the chief and the menfolk. He is the one most prominent and important person in the village.
3. *Pasaltha* : A man of courage, strength and wisdom who possessed *tlawmngaihna* and is willing to sacrifice even his life for the village in times of danger against the ferocious wild animals or the enemy is given a honourable title of *pasaltha*. The status of *pasaltha* is the most honourable title which only few exceptional men could achieve. (Lalthangliana. *Mizo* 237-239)

The above three important status or positions in traditional Mizo society are also specifically meant for men. Thus, it can be argued that the Mizo cultural values and social structures are framed and constructed upon masculinity or that *pasaltha* which is the highest standard of Mizo masculinity is the foundation of Mizo ethnic-identity.

James Dokhuma in his book *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* has also stated that there are three great personages in traditional Mizo society such as – *lal* (the chief), *khuangchawi* (those who attained a distinct status), *pasalthate* (the braves/heroes). These great men occupied a high social status, and they were entitled to wear a special distinctive dress that shows and highlight their status and distinction (236-237). These three great statuses and ranks could be attained only by men. In Mizo society, women could attain the status of *khuangchawi nu* in correspondence to her husband's status and they would never take part in men's activities like hunting and warfare that they could not obtained the title of *pasaltha*.

Joy L.K. Pachuau in her book *Being Mizo* has written the Mizo self-inscribed notions as,

The Mizo likes to see themselves as a 'tribe' (as well as nation), although they do not deny the existence of several 'tribes' among themselves. This is reflected in their usage of only one word, *hnam*, to refer to the wide array of identity nomenclatures in English such as 'race', nation, 'tribe', clan and so on...The popular discourse claims that all those 'tribes' who are *chhinlung chhuak* (a reference to a Mizo origin myth) as Mizo (10-11).

She further argued that despite confusions and clarity as which 'tribe' actually constitute the Mizos, "the Mizos rely on the 'cultural practice' as the chief determinant of identity and as a boundary marker of identity" (11). The Mizo cultural practices could be considered as being framed on the ideas of patriarchy with men in the supreme position in all aspects of the society. The dynamics of gender became intrinsic to the construction of the Mizo ethnic identity since all the Mizo values and important social positions falls in the hands of men. The argument is that the concept of *pasaltha* (heroes) came to define the hegemonic understanding of the identity 'Mizo / Mizoness

and continued to be consolidated till the contemporary society through legendary tales that portray men as heroes. Through the study of Mizo legendary heroes as hegemonic masculinity based on the concept of R.W. Connell, in this text, it will investigate the relations of masculinity with the Mizo ethnic identity and how these functions as an important agent in the formation of Mizo culture and cultural uniformity.

Mizo ethnic-identity could also be defined as one who possessed *tlawmngaihna*. Mizo as a nation is often described as a *tlawmngai hnam* or tribe. Lalrinawma has rightly claimed *tlawmngaihna* as ‘a practical life character’ and ‘the life of the Mizo,’ which is best defined through activities and actions (Lalrinawma 125). All the Mizo way of life such as the social etiquette and conventional social practices and cultural values and mores falls under the umbrella of *tlawmngaihna*. The role of *tlawmngaihna* is the essence of becoming a *pasaltha*. In Mizo society being brave, courageous, or strong is not enough in the sense that the Mizo way of life, that of being helpful to others or rendering service to the society is also mandatory to be looked upon as esteemed *pasaltha*. For instance, in the story of Khuangchera a man named Neihthanga was very competitive to Khuangchera. He was trying to be famous like Khuangchera. When people talked about the bravery and courage of Khuangchera, he would say that it was simply because of him being lucky enough that he was able to be looked upon as *pasaltha* (hero). Neihthanga was never included as a Mizo *pasaltha* as he was in short of other moral conducts and social ethics such as humility and humbleness and above all *tlawmngaihna* (Khangte 90-91).

In chapter two of the thesis, i have argued that the recurrent themes that runs through Mizo folktales is the passivity and passive victimization of women and that the very passive victimization of women painted men in a dignified position of heroes portraying the supremacy of men. For instance, in the tale of Rimenhawihi, the heroine Rimenhawihi is abducted by a *vai lalpa* who is a chief of others tribe. The husband Zawlthlia rescued her from the *vai lal* all by himself. The *vai lal* as seen in the story is great and wealthy enough that he had a servant and soldiers but Zawlthlia could defeated them all, and saved his beloved wife (*Hand-Picked* 39-42). The portrayal of women as passive and vain is a way of showing men as protector or saviour or hero (for this matter) without whom women are nothing but a poor helpless and suffering

victim. The heroism of male characters in folktales is reflective of Mizo society that men are powerful and wise whereas women are weak and helpless. This dependency of women to men is the social reality of Mizo society. The gender hierarchy of men as supreme and women as subordinate is the very themes that is found in Mizo folktales. In the tales of Kungawrhi also, brave and courageous man like Phawthira was the hero who saved the heroine from the *keimi* (tiger-man) and from the spirits (*khuavang*) who abducted her to their place. Hrangchala who falsely claimed himself a hero was killed at the end of the story, and it was Phawthira the real hero who was rewarded in the end (Khiangte 150-153).

Looking at the tales of Rimenhawihi and Kungawrhi, men's role as protector and saviour of women against enemies was apparently shown which was corresponding to the Mizo society. The antagonists or villains *keimi* (tiger-man) and *vai lal* (chief of other tribe) being a foreigner or belonging to other species may be symbolical to the enemy from the outside world other than their respective village. The chivalry and heroism of men is manifested through the hero who defeated the enemy and save the women from the bad men.

The legendary heroes selected for the study have also approved their heroism and chivalry by fighting wild beasts and enemies to save and protect the people and the village. The status of *pasaltha* is achieved through their bravery and courageous deeds and actions in hunting and attacking of wild beasts and in fighting and encountering of enemies at war. Let me highlight a short account of the selected heroes and how they proved their valour and virility through hunting and fighting the enemies.

1. Vanapa : Vanapa was known and admired for his wisdom and sound judgement. The campaign waged by Vanapa and his men against their enemies were often successful. Once they scattered the Zadeng from their village, pursuing up to the nearby forests. Vanapa encountered and captured a worthy baby Ngura who was the son of the Zadeng chief. There was a great excitement on the capture of Ngura, and they composed a song as –

Highest amongst the Sailo chiefs was Lalsavunga

Wearing an iron-wear, miserable is a Zadeng's sonny (*The Mizo Heroes* 110).

The Zadengs were then required to sacrifice the best and most valuable ransom for their chief, Ngura. Lalsavunga became rich due to the ransom offered. He was so grateful to Vanapa that he shared his ransom with him and he intended to give away part of his chieftdom. But Vanapa declined the offer.

Once the chief sent Vanapa and the young men to attack Siakzapauva, a Thado chief who created a village midst the slopes of Mawmrang hill, resorted to a hit-and-run warfare and thought that he had an impregnable security midst the ravine, comparing himself to a star in the sky. When Vanapa and his men reached their destination, fortune was on their side as the Thados had forgotten to dismantle the bridge connecting the village. They rushed in and killed almost all the villagers.

On one occasion, the chief again sent Vanapa and his men to resist the advancing Hmar to the North. They penetrated deep and encountered the troops of Manipuri chief and captured their gun and named it 'Manipuri'. Again, Vanapa led the young men to chase the Thlanrawn Pawi who happened to appear when they were looking for a new village. They ran after them and killed many of them, but Vanapa and his team came back safely without losing any men. Many a time, they raided the Thado and herded the whole subjects of Thado chief.

2. Chawngbawla : Chawngbawla was brave and fearless that he once caught hold of a tiger's leg. Chawngbawla confronted a wounded tiger and thrust it with his forked spear. But the huge tiger pulled him back and tried to jump over and Chawngbawla caught the tiger in the hind legs. Then his friends helped him and the tiger was killed. From then on, his deed and his courage became much talked about. One day they hunted the boar baiting his own son while he hid himself hiding ready to attack the boar with his sharp dao. He ran past the wild boar and cut its snout and the beast lay motionless on the ground.

Once, they hunted elephants and shot an elephant with fine tusks. When they came back to the spot to carry the meat for a second time, they were confronted by a huge tiger who sit on the dead elephant. The tiger pounced on the man who evaded. Chawngbawla instinctively arched his dao around which hit and cut the tiger's tail. The tiger fled away groaning. Chawngbawla and his friends were on the hunt for elephant, a huge bear suddenly appeared at night. They were reluctant to shoot for fear of scaring away the elephants. All of a sudden, they charged the bear and it fell into the pit. When it tried to come out, Chawngbawla caught its legs and after a long tussle, they managed to kill the bear.

The main incident of Chawngbawla's fame was that of a battle at Sialhmur. Chawngbawla and his men raided the Sialhmur village when most of the warriors in the village were out fishing. Infuriated at the sight of their ransacked village, the Sialhmur warriors leaded by the most ferocious Nghatebaka chased them and threw spears at them. Chawngbawla covered his fleeing men from the rear. One youth called out the name of Chawngbawla, but Chawngbawla replied, "Run, lad, run, Chawngbawla cannot but run today." Chawngbawla stand at the bend of the road and killed the enemy (*The Mizo Heroes* 38-43).

3. Neuva : Neuva was an able hunter who had killed many wild animals and he was among the most daring when confronting the beasts. Once the villagers set a tiger trap, Neuva and his friends rushed to the spot when they heard the sound of the trap-gunfire. They heard the groan of the beasts in pain not far from them. Their torches began to fizzle and went out eventually due to rain. When some followers arrived with a torch Neuva charges towards the tiger. The wounded tiger bit him by the back of his neck, tossed him around and released him, and the tiger shifted itself to the lower spot. The elders suggested they retreat. They made a carrier for him but he declined to be carried. He fold his hands at the top of his head and began to walk with the shoulder support of two young men on his sides. When they were about to enter the house he told them, "Leave me alone! I am going to enter myself". When his family members and

relatives sobbed he told them not to cry. He smoked his pipe as if nothing happened.

The next day, when some hunters tried to look for the beast, they found it dead. They extracted the liver of the tiger and gave it to Neuva. It was said that those who could manage to eat the liver of the tiger would survive. His brother was very surprised on his ability to eat at his condition. Neuva never groaned. Once he asked his brother to dip his finger into his wound. His brother found that his neck bone was broken, and he could even feel some pieces of bone inside his wound. He was so surprised when came to know how long he could live with such a deep wound. Three days later, he crushed his pipe with his teeth due to an agonizing pain he had been suffering. In mid afternoon that day, he turned his body sideways, leaving his head and died.

4. Taitesena : Once an elderly man was charged by a wild buffalo while hunting, the beast tossed him up in the air disabling him and he was unable to walk. While they were sitting with him on the shore, the wild buffalo returned in search of its victim. The buffalo rushed forward, charging and scattering everybody. The man said that he would face his death. But Taitesena comforted him telling him that he would die first as he would not run. When the animal attacked them. Taitesena shot him in the forehead, and it died.

One morning all the grown-up males were to chase the wounded tiger. The first three heroes who went after it were severely wounded by the tiger. Not knowing what to do the crowd watched the three heroes and the wounded tiger lying together. When Taitesena arrived, he jumped at the tiger and struck with his dao, but the tiger caught hold of his thigh. The tiger was now exhausted, and all the other men rushed towards it at once and stabbed the devastating beast to death. The four were still alive. The three of them did not want to be carried home and walked with the support of others. Only one hero Dozika who was accidentally hit at the throat by a spear who was hardly alive was carried home. The next morning, Taitesena, altruistic to the extent of sacrificing his own life for the sake of others breathed his last.

5. Khuangchera : One day while he was only a youth, they chased a wounded bear. The bear entered a cave and the hunters stayed at the mouth of the cave. The bear would not come out and the daring Khuangchera entered the cave saying, "I'll go inside the cave and cut the head of the bear into two." The ferocious beast attacked him but the other hunters shot it. Khuangchera said to his hunter mate, "Had you not shot the bear, I would have chopped off his head inside the cave."

One day he went with two of his friends to kill a wounded tiger. The fearful tiger lay there on a flat rock just above the level of their height below a cliff. When they looked up the angry tiger roared and attacked them, and they fought back with their spears. The brave trio fought undaunted till Khuangchera climbed up on the rock where he pierced the tiger that was ready to jump upon him. They finally managed to kill the tiger.

Beside his bravery, his swiftness, diligence, and sacrifice for others set him apart. One evening, a woman named Ngaihsii was bitten by a hungry tiger. Khuangchera followed and overtook the first man who ran after the tiger. He jumped down right where the tiger was sitting, and the tiger jumped away and sat watching the brave warrior like a dog. Khuangchera stood alone and guard the body with his spear till the others came by and they were able to carry the corpse to safety.

The villages were continually attacking the British troops stationed at Changsil during the Second Military Expedition. Khuangchera had abstained from such attacks because he was observing *naulairilh* (certain period after child birth usually observed by the earlier Mizo). He set off alone for Changsil fort after as soon as his observation of *naulairilh* was over. On the way he met the retreating warriors who advised him to turn back saying, "They are no match for us. Only a man not afraid to die would be foolish enough to go ahead." He replied, "Then it is my place to go I am not afraid to die" and continued on his way. His friend, another fame warrior Ngurbawnga followed

him and the two of them die fighting the enemy till their last breath (Khangte *Mizos*. 105-109)

Quoting Dokhuma, Lathansangi wrote that,

The pre-British period was called Pasalthate hun, time of the Braves. It was not a time for the women to act bold and challenge the men. She further stated that the main reasons why women were being subjugated in the society was due to the fact that the women lived under the protection of men and that there was rarely an occasion which required women (Ralte 123).

Women who had proved their courage and ability to defend the people or who fight enemies or who shows strong determination in reforming the society were often sidelined or left out in the history writing. Hmingthanzuali wrote,

...history writing is not inclusive as it focuses on the male story while the women are just “also there”. The total history has not been brought out. The marginalization of women in political and religious space together with the dominance of traditional patriarchal attitudes over the decades of Mizo had resulted in the privileging of male perspective in the Mizo historical record (42-43).

For instance, the account of the great chieftess Ropuiliani was left unnoticed by Mizo historian for quite a long time. The pioneer of Mizo history writings such as Rev Liangkhaia, Zatluanga, Vanchhunga and K. Zawla did not include the story of Ropuiliani in their works. As claimed by Lalsangzuali Sailo who wrote the history of chieftess Ropuiliani remarks that record on the account of Ropuiliani is scarce to find in Mizo historical record and it was only in the works of Maj. Saibuanga Sailo's work ‘Rolura Thlahte Chanchin Chhuina’ that her story is recorded. Laltluangliana Khangte had written a drama on the account of Ropuiliani which was included in his drama book titled Lemchan Khawvel published in 1997. Lalsangzuali Sailo had also published the historical account of Ropuiliani in the year 1999 which was awarded the Mizo Academy Award Book of the Year 1999. From then on, the story of Ropuiliani began to be recognized and popularized.

‘Masculinity’ in Mizo society was defined by the number of wild animals and the number of enemies heads taken by a man (Ralte 122). The house of a good hunter would be decorated with the animal’s skull at the wall of the threshold and *pasaltha* who had killed the enemy and who had performed the traditional rituals *ral lu ai* could wear a *chhawn* to signify his great status of a *pasaltha* who have killed the enemy.

Mizos are justifiably well known as a singing tribe. The Mizo historian K. Zawla also asserted that among the preliterate people of the world, the Mizos are likely to be the richest in songs (Khangte 46). They sing on all happy and despairing occasions (Thanmawia 27). Their lives and values are recorded and reflected through their songs. There are two types of song that could only be chanted by *pasaltha* namely *bawhhla* and *hlado*. *Bawhhla* is a song chanted by a warrior who killed the enemy and *hlado* is chanted by a hunter when he killed a wild beast. These songs were songs of prowess through which the *pasaltha* proudly claimed their success and their heroism. The spirit of the enemies would become their slaves in the afterlife and the animals would be under the command of the *thangchhuahpa* at the time of entering *pialral*.

Kei chu e, milu ka pian pui e,

Milu a tlar bung e.

I was born to take the heads of my enemies

Several heads are hanging in line.

Kei chu e, mi that ing khaw,

Mualuah thle hlang ka duhin e,

Lu chung e, thlang vapual e,

Her luai luai sawm ka luah e.

Just as I have killed the enemy,

I celebrate the head in the local yard,

And on my head is the hornbill’s feather. (*Mizo Songs* 6)

The glory and greatness of a *pasaltha* is not limited to lifetime only but would even extend beyond the human world in the afterlife. The three social statuses as mentioned by James Dokhuma such as the chief, *thangchhuahpa* and *pasaltha* could be achieved only by men. The position of a chief or chieftainship, for instance, is acquired through inheritance, i.e, father to son; the status of *thangchhuah* could be achieved by men of wealth who is able to perform many public feasts and also by prowess in hunting, ability to killed wild animals such as, a barking deer, a bear, a sambhur, a boar, a wild mithun, king cobra and a hawk (Dokhuma 56).

The title of *pasaltha* as has been discussed before could only be achieved by brave hunter and great warriors. The social status belongs to men only and women are at the most portrayed as having legendary beauty and being effeminate or feminine. Folklore is the reflection of culture and the worldview of the people it belongs. Women in Mizo society have no say or no position at all in the society. They are part and parcel of the society by their service and fulfillment of the duties assigned to them but only to the limitation of becoming partners or helper of men. Therefore, from the social structure and positioning of men in the society, it is evident that Mizo society and culture are constructed on the basis of patriarchy / masculinity.

Patriarchy is a characteristic of most historically dominant forms of social organization (Vijayan 26). Quoting Williams, Prem Kumar Vajayan wrote that,

Culture does not exist independent of the social, the political and the economic: the multiplicity of practices and discourses that constitute a given culture are inevitably shaped and moulded by the pressure of the social, economic and political – just as they are in turn constituted by the culture (12).

The masculine representation in Mizo legendary heroes reinforced the patriarchal male image in Mizo society. The legendary heroes who were admired and honored in the society were looked upon as a model who hold the Mizo ethnic nationalist identity or one who represents Mizo ideal man. As Jan Vansina had rightly claimed, “In every society each role and status is modeled after an ideal to which

holders must conform. The ideal is common to a whole community and often is preserved in its oral traditions” (105).

The Mizo cultural ideals are constructed upon the ethos of *tlawmngaihna*. It is the very essence and spirit of being Mizo or Mizoness, it is expected of every individual who is Mizo to be *tlawmngai* or to live the Mizo way of life. If one is not showing the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* in his relations to others and to the society as a whole or if one is not doing what is expected of him or her at times when the act and deeds of *tlawmngaihna* is necessary, it is often said that he lacks the identity of Mizo or Mizo-ness. In her study of (Death and Locality in the Creation of Mizo Identity) Mizo identity, Joy L.K. Pachuau has emphasized that ‘identity’ resides in practice (184). She argued that “it is practice and reciprocity that finally leads to acceptance and belonging, but also, conversely, to exclusion as well” (195-196). Participation in social practices and social institutions is necessary to acquire Mizo ethnic identity. In Mizo society, the *pasaltha* were the epitome of *tlawmngaihna* for their sacrifice and selfless deeds for others and their village. The story of the Mizo legendary heroes highlighted above represents the masculine ideal character in Mizo society.

As Connell has said, “Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between two groups of men” (78). The characters of Phawthira and Hrangchala could be interpreted as dominant and subordinate men as posited by Connell. Phawthira is representative of the ideal type, the real hero who possessed all the positive masculine qualities such as, bravery, courage, wisdom and intelligence. It was through his bravery and wisdom that they could save Kungawrhi from the *keimi*. On the other hand, Hrangchala was weak and lacks in courage that the spirits were able to abduct Kungawrhi while he was on a night watch. His trembling voice and unmanly acts were instantly noticed by the spirits. He represents the secondary type or the subordinate type of men, who does not possess the ideal quality of men.

There are stories of two men who have a same name Khuangchera. The one is the legendary hero who proves himself a *pasaltha* by his valour in hunting and at wars.

He died fighting the enemy. He is fearless and brave that even wounded and ferocious animals are even afraid of him.

Once the braves shot a tiger and broke its hipbone. The young men thought that it was a good chance to exhibit some daring acts by competing to touch its tail because they knew the tiger could no longer jump. At every attempt, the tiger would roar and make such a great noise that they lost their nerve and not one was able to touch the tiger's tail. They insisted that Khuangchera also make the attempt and he got up slowly and moved towards the tiger. Seeing him coming, the tiger would crawl with great difficulty to avoid a confrontation. This astounded everyone so much that they said, "Who is this man that even the most ferocious beasts when wounded would run from him?" They knew, then, that Khuangchera was far above all and looked on him with new respect. Even a wounded dog which attempt to bite anyone would wagged its tail and licked his hand instead of attacking him (Khangte *Mizo Culture* 105-109).

Khuangchera's heroism was found in many incidents in his encountering of wild beasts and enemy and also in saving people from danger in land and in water. He is considered and remembered as a legendary hero.

The other man is an old man, the village blacksmith who by the name Khuangchera. He was fooled by two travelers by sleeping with his wife and taking away his valuables. He was so angry and went after them for revenge. But again, he was fooled by exchanging him with a mithun to a merchant. He was not to be heard or seen anymore from then on. The latter Khuangchera was a man who failed to protect his wife whereas the hero Khuangchera was the one who could protect the whole village. The story of the fooled Khuangchera was not heard very often and the story such as his was not very common to be found in Mizo folktales while the hero Khuangchera is representing the Mizo cultural hero and is still considered as the hero even today.

Looking at the legendary heroes that has been selected for the study, their brave actions and selfless deeds and their whole life is guided and formed by

tlawmngaihna. For instance, the hero Vanapa was mostly known and esteemed for his *tlawmngaihna* apart from his heroism in hunting and gallantry. He is ready to help others and always willing to do good things for others. Whenever they went hunting under his leadership, they would leave their camp in the forest with stockpile of food and firewood. Vanapa used to say, “Let them be taken by others coming after us” (*The Mizo Heroes* 116).

Once Vanapa and his men felt intense hunger while hunting in the forest. They hurriedly prepared food which they shared little by little just to alleviate their long-felt hunger. Vanapa remarked after a spoonful of food, “I am filled, just like the bow”. Once in the forest while hunting, they again felt intense hunger and Vanapa happened to find a theipui hmin. He called his friend and he himself did not eat it before they came. As soon as they came, a young man who was too hungry happened to eat voraciously, and Vanapa said too him, “My young boy, I have not eat even a single one, and our bellies are not stone filled.” Altruistic himself he could not tolerate greed and selfishness in others (*The Mizo Heroes* 109-110; Zawla 249-253).

The hero, Vanapa possessed Mizo masculine ideal characters. He was brave and wise, unselfish, courageous, tolerant, humble, kind and above all a very *tlawmngai* person. His self-disciplined made him changed his character, his wisdom changed the unaccepted conduct of his wife and other women, his care for others set an example to live for others.

Vanapa and his men once had a big success when they raided Hmar clan, but they met food shortage on that occasion. They searched for edibles and fruits in the forests and to make matter worse, one of them was missing. Nobody dares to go to look for him and Vanapa went alone in search of him. He found his corpse and buried him, digging his grave to knee-deep, all by himself despite his hunger.

In the accounts of the hero Neuva, he was intent on becoming the most altruistic and most courageous. He was always the first man when it comes to digging graves and the villagers were very proud of him.

Taitesena was also famous for his altruism and his spirit of sacrifice to others. One day, while they were hunting, an elderly man found a stone in the dearth of the

jungle and said how he wish to take it home but that it was too heavy to carry all the way home. When they reached home, Taitesena took out the stone from his bag and gave it to him to his surprise (*The Mizo Heroes* 90). To fulfil other's desire and making others happy and selfless sacrifice towards others and for the welfare of the village is one of the great characteristics of *tlawmngaihna* conspicuously shown in the story of Taitesena.

One day while hunting, they prepared themselves for a night stay. After dinner, their leader suggested that the flower of the wild banana be taken for breakfast the next morning. While they were all asleep Taitesena got up and plucked it and made it ready for breakfast. In the morning they were amazed by his altruism. He was not fond of the competitive games of young men in the street. He thought it more appropriate if these games be played by girls.

The chief wanted to know the bravest and most altruistic man in his village. So, he send one of his elder to *zawlbuk* (the men's dormitory) that he need a messenger instantly to go to the neighbouring village. It was late at night, and nobody offered for the task. But Taitesena willingly volunteered and proceeded to the chief asking him the details of the task. But the chief told him that it was only a test in order to know who is the bravest and most altruistic among his men. Chawngbawla and Khuangchera were also known for their selfless deeds and *tlawmngaihna*.

The elevated and finest spirit of Mizo *tlawmngaihna* and Mizo ethnic identity is conspicuously displayed in the lives of these legendary heroes. They have become exemplary in the cultural attitude towards *tlawmngaihna* and heroism and their roles in inscribing identity as well as conduct in the consolidation of Mizo ethnic nationalism.

The physical appearance of the folktale heroes were scarcely elaborated in the story. While women's beauty had been deliberately told about, the description of the hero's physical structure or their looks and appearance are hardly mentioned. The legendary heroes selected for the study are not shown as having big or great physical structure and that their masculinity is stressed more on their characters. For instance,

the appearance of Chawngbawla was not different from others but it was the heroic characters that was admired.

Chawngbawla was not physically big, rather fair complexion comparatively lean, wise and courageous, not self-centred, clever and visionary, mild, thoughtful, humble, enduring and tougher than he looked. His honesty and altruism were worth following, he used to say, “We should not hesitate to retreat if it should lead to victory (*The Mizo Heroes*38).

Taitesena was also shown as “a rather lean, pale, and manifested no sign of what he was” (91). He was twelve years old when his father died. His mother remarried so he stayed with his uncle. He would not accept anything from his mother since her remarriage. Once his mother sent him a cloth, without a word, Taitesena cut and tore the cloth to pieces. Khuangchera had a pale bearing and lanky physique although his eyes revealed great inner strength and bravery. He was quite different from the other boys as his distinctive bravery was much talked about in his village right from his very childhood.

Out of the five legendary heroes selected for the study, three heroes were shown as having a lean and pale bearing showing no extraordinary signs of great physique. But they were portrayed as having a unique character such as – courage, bravery, selfless, stubborn, wise, endurance and the like.

The aggressiveness, stubbornness and tenacity of these legendary heroes are drawn and represented as a unique and great quality possessed by the hero which are highly admired. Neuva was never beaten by any one of the same age from his childhood. Once he had a fight with one bigger than him, he was covered by his opponent on the ground but he at once got a stone and struck him at his forehead. Once they collected jungle strings to toy with a mock buffalo and played straight away. But Neuva was seen sometimes lifting his leg. When they asked the reason, he replied that his feet have been pricked by a thorn. But when they examined closely, from his feet was extracted a long poisonous spike. He would not rest until success when it comes to digging a beetle, and sometimes forcing his father to help him as he would not stop digging all through the day. His words were always something about deeds and feats

with courage and endurance. He used to claim himself that he would die last if stabbed with the pointed bamboo along with other men uniformly. Mention was made of his tenacity in pain too. Once he had a serious hangnail at the sole of his feet but that did not stop him from working. He kept on working and the infection deteriorated and found its way up to the upper feet. But he never stopped working in that condition at all. In his youth, he stepped on a pointed bamboo and he could not walk but he did not want to be carried either. But since there is no other way, they forced him down and carried him and he sobbed all the way (*The Mizo Heroes* 75-78).

Taitesena's tenacity under adversity and pain was also much talked about. All elders and young men set out to spend ten nights to hunt. The severe pain caused by the boil did not hinder him to be counted on. He acted and stayed at the forefront among the group and they returned home successfully. At the outskirts of the village, the hunters were greeted by their families to relieve them. When his sister tried to take off his load, pus from his boil on the back and his container were pasted. His friends were amazed at the way he acted and worked as if he had no pain (*The Mizo Heroes* 89-95).

In the account of Khuangchera, his father became quite proud and determined to prove his son's courage by giving a test of his own. One day he took him to a place where he would make a wooden mortar, he made Khuangchera sit on the ground close to him. When he made his strokes, splinters of wood would hit Khuangchera on his face and elsewhere, but he did not even bother to make any move to escape. His father was amazed and believed what people had said about his bravery (Khangte 105-109).

Although stubbornness and tenacity in men's characters are highly admired and referred to as the characteristics of a hero, it is not at all referred to as admirable on the part of women. For instance, Laltheri the princess of a Sailo chief was stubborn enough to show her agitation to the cruel acts of her brothers who killed her lover Chalthanga on grounds of protecting their status. Chalthanga was a *hnamchawm* (commoner) incompatible to become a son-in-law of a Sailo chief. Laltheri was stubbornly protesting the injustice done by her family by taking off her clothes and roaming around naked, stop taking food and living like a mad woman. She cried and sang

calling out the name of her lover and condemning the cruelty of her kin. But she is hardly shown as a hero, but more as a suffering victim under the Sailo rule.

Folklore plays an important function in constructing and reinforcing gender roles in Mizo society. The representation of heroes in legendary tales is indispensable as it represents the cultural values of masculine traits or masculinity in Mizo society, and it convey a message to the people of the ideal character of man and masculine traits.

Masculinity according to Connell denotes,

...mean the pattern or configuration of social practices linked to the position of men in the gender order, and socially distinguished from practices linked to the position of women. Masculinity is not a pre-social category...An understanding of masculinity starts with the gender orders in which masculinities are defined...Sex role theory explains gender patterns by appealing to the social customs that define proper behavior for women and for men (Connell40).

Male heroes in Mizo folklore are the embodiment of masculinity in the society. The heroes found in Mizo folklore are designed and constructed in representative of the ideal man as the one who save, protect and defend women, and also as one who have authority over women and who are much sensible and wise than women. They usually embodied a similar trait and characters of male dominance and superiority reinforcing the patriarchal male image in the society. Women with their passive and weak characters were typical to the role and status of women in Mizo society.

According to Connell, the concept of 'hegemony' refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustain a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. He further stated that 'hegemony' is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual...which relates to the cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between two groups of men (77).

Connell also posited that the hegemonic form of masculinity is the most honored and desired masculinity which are defined collectively in culture and are sustained in institutions (Connell 10). In Mizo society, *pasaltha* who became the legendary heroes are elevated to the position of hegemonic masculinity. They are admired and honored for their contributions and sacrifice to the society. The Mizos most highly admired and most respectable deeds is the ability and courage of sacrificing one's life for a friend. They claimed themselves as 'thian chhan thih ngam', one who dare to sacrifice their life for a friend, and the common phrase such as 'dam leh tlang khatah, thih leh ruam khatah' which means 'if we live, we live together, but if we die, we die together' are the collective cultural ideals about life and death. This became the motto of the *pasaltha* and the motives to defend and protect the people and the village from the enemy and wild beast are founded upon these ideas. The admiration and honourable status of *pasaltha* largely depends upon the social structure and cultural condition of Mizo society and they "are actively produced, using the resources and strategies available in a given social setting" (The Mizo Heroes 12). Connell later argues that "The patterns of conduct our society defines as masculine may be seen in the lives of individuals, but they also have an existence beyond the individual. Masculinities are defined collectively in culture and are sustained in institutions" (Connell 11).

The lives of *pasaltha* have become the epitome of masculine ideal characters in Mizo society. The traits and behaviour of a *pasaltha* are considered masculine or manly and are therefore looked upon as more honourable and invaluable in the society in contrast to those traits which are considered as feminine.

The Mizo collective cultural values and imagery affect their sense and understanding of a great hero. The invaluable role and functions of a *pasaltha* was reinforced by the social institution such as *Zawlbuk* and social structure by attributing honourable social status and elevated position to it. The cultural values and ideals are recorded and preserved in their oral literature. The oral tradition is the process of transmission of messages through word of mouth over time. Oral traditions, memory is the storehouse of information. This information encompasses the whole of inherited culture – for culture is what is in the mind and it is essential to the continuity of culture

and the reproduction of society from generation to generation. Traditions is memory that stemmed from previous generations, just as memory itself is remembered and that it is not dreamt or fantasized (147). Jan Vansina argued that,

...memories can be faithful repositories which contain the sum total of past human experiences and explain the how and why of presentday conditions...culture is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds...The mind through memories carries culture from generation to generation (xi).

The Mizo ethno-nationalist consciousness has been framed by the collective memories of the legendary heroes who fight for the protection of their land and who sacrifice themselves, even their life for a good cause. It was these heroes who have pioneered and fostered this noble conduct of our cultural heritage which have been passed on to the present generations (The i). Jan Vansina posited that, "...oral traditions are documents of the present, because they are told in the present. Yet they also embody a message from the past, so they are expression of the past at the same time. They are the representation of the past in the present" (Vasina xii).

As Vansina had said, "Every culture has its imagery, collectively held and understood by all...Images can also be used as aids to reasoning, to make abstract notions concrete by use of analogy" (137-138). In the Mizo imagery male heroes are portrayed as the ethno-nationalist identity bearers for their patriotic zeal and heroic deeds. It is the legendary heroes who were representing the glorious past through their masculine chivalry and heroism. The time of *pasaltha* were recorded and preserved in the memory which was retold and recreated through folklore. Memory is not an inert storage system. Remembering is an activity, a re-creation of what once was (147).

The role of folklore in traditional Mizo society is very important and useful, it serves as a tool in inculcating the cultural values and ethics in the mind of younger generations. For instance, in the account of Taitesena, it has been told that during his youth he would spent the night at the house of Phaichhuana who always told him about the brave heroes (*The Heroes* 89-95). Taitesena was touched and influenced by these stories that he later became a great hero himself. Children and youth were told stories

of great legendary heroes of the past which moulded and influenced them to admire these men and also educated their minds to understand the invaluable roles and contributions of the Mizo ideal heroes for the society. The cultural ethics and social standards of masculinity are preserved in their story which is handed down to younger generations in the form of oral literature.

In the contemporary society, Mizo ethno-nationalism is preserved and reinforced by the account of legendary heroes. They are portrayed as exemplary of the Mizo ethnic-nationalist who possessed the ideal quality of being Mizo. The analytical discussion on male heroes may prove that gender, specifically of men and masculinity is one of the foundations of Mizo identity.

Glossary

1. *Nopui*: A cup of liquor offered by the chief to the most *tlawmngai* person.
2. *Chhawn*: A tuft of goat's hair dyed red generally worn suspended round the neck as an ornament, but on special occasions worn as a head- plume by men who have taken heads raids.
3. *Hnamchawm*: the common people

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The thesis entitled ‘Gender Dynamics in Mizo Society: An analysis of Mizo Folktales’ is a study that attempts to bring out the role of patriarchy in the construction of gender roles and cultural identity in Mizo society. Folktales, as the literature of pre-literate societies, are expressions of the people's worldview. In this sense, Mizo folktales function as reflections and records of the Mizo past. They prescribe cultural ideals and values of the people. In order to understand the past, the people and their experience, one has to look into the folktales which circulate and passed on orally as messages to and of the people, authored by the people themselves.

When we look into the Mizo historical writings, it is apparent that it is mostly the record of men and their actions. It is quite obvious that women were left out or sidelined to the periphery. For instance, the account of a great chieftess Ropuiliani was not given space in the works of the early Mizo historians. It was through the later works of Mizo writers such as Laltluangliana Khiangte and Lalsangzuali Sailo that she occupied a position in Mizo literature and began to be widely known as a great chieftess. As Gerda Lerner said, “Women had no history – so they were told and so they believed. And because they had no history they had no future alternatives” (Lerner 222). So, a study of the people’s own inscription about themselves through their folklore is important for a better understanding of the people and the society.

In the absence of writing, the Mizos have been expressing their experiences of life through tales and songs. In that regard, folktales and folk songs function in similar ways as literary writings in literate societies. Literature as well as folktales, being reflections of social realities and experiences, has the potential of exposing the dynamics of gender in a society. On this important role of literature in exposing the politics of gender, Igbal Kaur claims that “literature offers the best possibility of exposing the politics of gender...and reflects the socio-cultural reality...the depiction of women in literature has been according to the social status enjoyed by women...” (Kaur xii). It is this "possibility" of folktales as reflections of social realities concerning positions of genders that the present study has focused upon.

Before the formulation of Mizo alphabet in the year 1894 by the two Christian missionaries Rev J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, the Mizo society was entirely oral in

nature. Laltluangliana Khiantge has written about the importance of oral tradition as "invaluable sources of oral data of the Mizos while tracing of the history and culture of the tribe" which "proved to be an encouraging scope of research" (Khiantge 306).

Without written literature and history, the traditional Mizo society largely depends on the collective memory of the past that had been recorded in their folklore. The past that had been told and re-told in the form of folktales has performed as an important agent in the conception of Mizo cultural identity. The oral literature of the people functions as a record of their history and as a mirror of their society that reflects their cultures, customs and values. The collective identity is learned and acquired through literature and hence, folktales which is the literature of the preliterate Mizo society is an important tool in preserving and re-validating Mizo cultural identity.

The role of folktales in the preservation of culture, in imparting education to younger generations and as a form of entertainment is not a thing of the past alone but continues into contemporary society. The strength and the power of folktales in the creation of Mizo cultural identity is still powerful and prevalent in modern society.

In Mizo folktales, patriarchal dominance is evident and strongly apparent by the construction and presentation of male and female characters. The characters of men are usually portrayed as heroes whereas there is hardly no concept of women as heroes. The gender stereotyping of men as heroes who are authoritative, powerful and brave, and women as weak, submissive and docile in the folktales are reflections of the gender normative behaviour of Mizo society. Heroines in Mizo folktales are representatives of women in Mizo cultural imaginary who remained as passive victims throughout the story and who are rescued by a hero or rewarded to be married off to a hero.

From the analyses of women characters in Chapter Two, it has been observed that women with feminine quality who maintain or consistently stick to the normative gender behaviour are designed to be recompensed. The compensation is modeled upon the re-affirmation of the culturally accepted gender behaviour. Whereas women who do not conform to the feminine ideal characters are mostly depicted as stepmothers or stepsisters. They are portrayed as detestable characters representing negative women stereotypes who plot against the protagonist and cause their suffering out of hatred and jealousy.

The hidden purpose of giving negative stereotype women character to the step-mother could also be implied as a motive of patriarchy to defend the cultural masculine and feminine ideals. The Mizo sayings that favour the need to keep women under patriarchal control such as 'A woman never reprimanded and the edge of a jhum not maintained soon become intolerable' is implicit to the characters of stepmothers which also affirmed women's subordination in Mizo society. These so-called detestable women are never rewarded but suffer in the end one way or another. Ideal women stereotype in the folktales are painted as polar opposites to the bad woman types.

The recurrent theme that runs through Mizo folktales is the passive victimization of women who constantly remain in the shadows of men. The eleven tales selected for the study in chapter II entitled "Women in Mizo Cultural Imaginary" contain tales of women protagonists such as – Rimenhawihi, Ngaiteii, Thailungi, Mauruangi, Darthiangi and Chertuala, Sichangneii, Chawngtinleri, Kelngoteii, Zawngte leh Nula, Kungawrhi, Zawlpala leh Tualvungi. The women in these tales are shown as protagonists but not as powerful or active heroines. It was the male characters who are shown to be the real heroes as saviors of the female protagonists in distress. This heroism and honour was conferred ultimately on the men whereas women are presented as helpless and insignificant throughout the story. Their obedience and submission lead them to their sufferings which in the end turn out to bring them reward.

In Mizo cultural imaginary the ideal women are the ones who possessed certain feminine qualities attributed to women. These attributes are submissiveness and obedience to male dominance. Thus, folktales become the cultural mechanisms by which representations are legitimized. The role and status of women in family and society and the characteristics of ideal women in Mizo cultural imaginary are also reasserted and defended through folktales. The presentation of women's subjectivity as silent figures and passive victims in Mizo folktales seems to validate the feminine ideal qualities.

Chapter III entitled "Women as Sacrificial Lamb" seeks to analyse the pathetic condition of women under patriarchy that expects women to fulfil their roles and duties assigned to them. The female subjectivity and sufferings in Mizo folktales are considered as a symbol of sacrifice for a good cause and is highly admired. The

ideal women are expected to fulfil the role of good daughters, mothers and sisters by sacrificing their whole life for their family, their husbands and brothers or for the society. A woman was powerless on her own and dependent on men all through her life. Daughter during her childhood is under the care and protection of her parents and brother(s), as woman she has to abide and obey them. She could not do anything on her own even if it is a good thing, without the permission of her parents and brothers (Vanlaltlani 21). Her submission and obedience made her into becoming a sacrificial lamb.

In Mizo society, the roles and duties assigned to women is taken for granted since it is perceived as natural and looked upon as something that should be done or normal. A deeper analysis of selected Mizo folktales brings out the fact that women's position as a symbol of sacrifice is protected and upheld by the patriarchal notion of male supremacy. It is the social set up constructed upon the power of patriarchy under which women's destiny is positioned to the role of self-sacrifice. The social conditioning of women as a sacrificial lamb had been preserved with a motive of strengthening and enforcing patriarchy.

While men could achieve a prestigious social status and title such as- *pasaltha*, *val upa* or *tlawmngai nopui* through their valour and deeds, there is no social status or social recognition that could be earned by women in Mizo society. The only social status a woman could obtain is to be entitled as a good or ideal women. But the price she has to pay in order to be labeled as an ideal woman is a never-ending task, a sacrifice of her dreams, desires, and even her own self at some point. Men's actions and deeds are considered as important while women's job is considered as less important. The motives behind the expectation of women's sacrifice or their obedience for a good cause is to exploit them and to keep them subjugated. In the contemporary society, women continue to play the role of a sacrificial lamb in the family. Gender division and gender hierarchy in Mizo society, which can be noticed in the folktales still exist in Mizo contemporary society.

Women's subordination continues till today and it is Christianity that upholds the fact that women should be self-sacrificing. The patriarchal thought of women as a sacrificing figure is internalize by women themselves and are sometimes responsible for preserving patriarchy. The fear of being labeled as bad woman, prevent them from

fulfilling their dreams and desire, and choose to become sacrificial lambs.

Therefore, through the study of Mizo folktales, it is evident that gender played a crucial role in Mizo society by representing the patriarchal concept of masculinity and femininity through the tales. Women are objectified to the position of passive victims and sacrificial lamb while men are portrayed as masculine heroes. The patriarchal concept of gender hierarchy and gender division in the family and society is securely surrounded in Mizo folktales thereby preserving and conveying the patriarchal structure of Mizo society to the people till date.

The fourth chapter of the thesis is entitled Masculinity in Mizo Folktales which is dedicated to the study of Mizo legendary heroes and their roles and functions in the formation of Mizo cultural identity or *Mizoness* which is constructed through collective memories. The study is also focused upon the concept of masculinity in Mizo society and how *pasaltha* (the braves) evolved into the hegemonic form of masculinity in the society based upon the theory of R. W. Connell.

The concept of ‘hegemony’ according to Connell refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustain a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. (77). In Mizo society, *pasaltha* who became the legendary heroes are elevated to the position of hegemonic masculinity. They are admired and honored for their contributions and sacrifice to the society. The Mizos most highly admired and most respectable deed is the ability and courage of sacrificing one’s life for a friend. They claimed themselves as ‘hnam tlawmngai leh huaisen’, the brave and altruistic tribe and ‘thian chhan thih ngam’, one who dare to sacrifice their life for a friend. Therefore, the Mizo cultural identity rest upon the notion of being courageous and altruistic to sacrifice oneself for the betterment of others and the nation. The formation of Mizo cultural identity is founded upon the dominance of patriarchy and gender relations in Mizo society. Men occupied supreme position in the family, society and in all other social spaces whereas women are confined to household and domestic sphere and play a minor role of partner or helper in the family and society.

Men in Mizo society play an important role as protector, village defence force, and are respected and honored for their service and functions to the society. Protecting the village from enemy and wild animals is regarded as the duty and responsibility of

men. Works and activities which needs physical strength and valour are considered as masculine and were entrusted upon men whereas domestic and household works, minor and menial works are considered as women's job. Gender division starts right from birth. Work division is strictly gendered. So, women's dependency on men in terms of economic, security and power is due to the patriarchal social set up that leads to their subordination. The social relations are seen in variety of gendered practices in the society such as division of labours, gender hierarchy and gender normative behaviour.

The Mizo concept of cultural identity is constructed through collective identity. This collective identity is based upon the cultural ideas of masculinity and femininity representing stereotype characters for men and women. The Mizo cultural identity is built upon the ethical code of *tlawmngaihna* which is the basis and foundation of all the cultural moralities and ethics that governed the people to perform good works and selfless deeds. The *pasaltha* were the epitome of *tlawmngaihna* for their sacrifice and selfless deeds for others and for the community. The story of the Mizo legendary heroes represents the masculine ideal character in Mizo society.

The chivalry and heroism of *pasaltha* and their esteemed status is deeply connected to the patriarchal structure and cultures of Mizo society. The cultural customs and traditions, beliefs and values are centred and focused towards the menfolk and men occupied a high and honourable position in the society whereas womenfolk are designated to a less important and secondary place in the formation of the Mizo cultural identity.

The social institution *Zawlbuk* functions as a place of informal education, where boys and men are taught to acquire the spirit of *tlawmngaihna*, and other cultural ethics and social values and trained them into becoming a Mizo man or Mizo hero. Girls and women have no space at *Zawlbuk* while men could gain a social status through this institution. For women, there is no such reward or social recognition. The spirit of *tlawmngaihna* practiced by women are regarded as normative gender roles and thus taken for granted. The most reward they get through the practice of *tlawmngaihna* or moral ethics, is to be titled as a good woman and becoming the choice of men.

Mizo heroes are generally marked with masculine qualities such as valour and virility with a deep essence of *tlawmngaihna*. Mizo folklore has abundant legendary heroes who have shown varieties of heroic quality and characteristics that had been manifested in hunting and gallantry. The legendary heroes in Mizo folklore were known and honored for different outstanding characters and qualities such as - *tlawmngaihna*, courage, strength, wisdom, tenacity, selflessness and devotion. Through the analysis of the select legendary heroes it has been found that heroism in Mizo culture is not to be defined by physical features and strength alone but more by the mental state of courage, dedication and commitment to the community or nation. Out of the five legendary heroes selected for the study, the physical appearance and physical description of only three heroes were given in the tales which shows them as ordinary men having a pale and lean bearing with no extra-ordinary signs of great physique, but it was their extra-ordinary masculine traits that proved their heroism.

In Mizo folktales, men who failed to maintain or possess masculine traits such as courage and wisdom are shown as loser. As Connell has said, “Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between two groups of men” (78). The characters of Phawthira and Khuangchera (the legendary hero) represents the dominant or hegemonic masculinity, whereas Hrangchala and Khuangchera (the old man and blacksmith) could be interpreted as subordinate men as posited by Connell. Phawthira and Khuangchera are representatives of the masculine ideal type or the real hero, who possessed all the positive masculine qualities whereas the latter were representatives of effeminate men, who failed to fulfil the role of men as protectors and lacking the ideal quality of men.

The three important social positions namely - *Nopui dawng*, *Val upa* and *Pasaltha* (Lalthangliana 237-239) are mostly related to masculine traits or that they are more concerned with men and their activities because it is contradictory to the gender roles and characteristics of women in Mizo cultural imaginary. The three great personages in traditional Mizo society such as – *lal* (the chief), *khuangchawi* (a distinct social status), *pasalthate* (the braves/heroes) (Dokhuma 236-237) were also a high social standing and status which could be occupied only by men. Women could attain the status of *lalnu* (wife of a chief) and *khuangchawinu* (wife of a khuangchawi) in

correspondence to their husband's status. But women would never take part in men's activities like hunting and warfare that they could not obtain the title of *pasaltha*. Thus, it can be argued that the Mizo cultural values and social structures are framed and constructed upon masculinity or that *pasaltha* which is the highest standard of Mizo masculinity is the foundation of Mizo ethnic-identity.

The dynamics of gender became intrinsic to the construction of the Mizo ethnic identity, since all the Mizo values and important social positions fall into the hands of men. The concept of *pasaltha* (heroes) came to define the Mizo cultural identity or Mizoness as founded upon hegemonic masculinity and continued to be consolidated till the contemporary society through legendary tales that portray men as heroes. The gender relations that distinct men and women into protector and protected or dominant and dependent respectively, which is exhibited in their folktales substantiates the dynamics of gender in Mizo society.

Connell posited that the hegemonic form of masculinity is the most honoured and desired masculinities which are defined collectively in culture and are sustained in institutions (Connell 10). The indispensable role and functions of a *pasaltha*, the hegemonic form of masculinity in the traditional Mizo society was preserved and protected in their oral literature which was reinforced by the social institution such as *Zawlbuk* by attributing honourable social status and exalted position to it. As Jan Vansina has rightly claimed that, "...oral traditions are documents of the present, because they are told in the present. Yet they also embody a message from the past, so they are expression of the past at the same time. They are the representation of the past in the present" (xii). The Mizo ethnic identity that had been framed in the glorious past are documented through the tales of legendary heroes that function to keep alive Mizo ethno-nationalist consciousness and the dynamics of gender in its construction. This had been passed on to younger generations through the telling and re-telling of the story, and continue to be passed on to the present generations.

The contemporary Mizo society is referred as Mizo Christian society. Since Christian teaching is based on Judeo patriarchal culture, the supremacy of men and subordination of women could not be completely changed. "The patriarchal system was retained with rigidity" (Lalrinawma 193). Thus, Christianity that advocates men as the supreme creation who is next to God and women as only the shadow of men has

strengthened the Mizo patriarchal attitude.

The oral literature of the past has also been reduced to writing. The role of folktales in oral literature as a tool which is used in transferring and teaching the cultural values and ethics is reinforced by reading the documented text and reproduction of Mizo folk tales. The story of Mizo legendary heroes and heroines in folktales conveyed a message, or retold the traditional norms and behaviour to the reader. Mizo society is a communitarian society and social identity is valued and highly esteemed. The cultural identity of Mizoness is taught, retold and preserved through folktales. Folktales play a pivotal role in reinforcing and reconstructing cultural identity and social values in contemporary society. Mizo folktales and its messages had often been reproduced in the form of songs, drama, novels and in prose. It has also been adapted in drama and in films. Writers, poet, church leaders, politician and social activists etc had often quoted folktales to revive and regenerate the Mizo code of ethics. For instance, the biggest and most effective Non-Government Organisation - the Young Mizo Association (YMA) also used the names of legendary heroes for different groups or sections in their respective branches. The legendary heroes are exemplified and honoured, they are portrayed as the one who has proved themselves heroes and who possessed the ideal character of Mizo men. The role and status of women in family and society, the ideal women in Mizo cultural imaginary are also reaffirmed through folktales. Gender division and gender hierarchy in Mizo society which can be noticed in the folktales still exist in Mizo contemporary society.

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ABSTRACT

**GENDER DYNAMICS IN MIZO SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS OF
MIZO FOLKTALES**

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
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**GENDER DYNAMICS IN MIZO SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS OF MIZO
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GENDER DYNAMICS IN MIZO SOCIETY: AN ANALYSIS OF MIZO FOLKTALES

The thesis entitled ‘Gender Dynamics in Mizo Society: An analysis of Mizo Folktales’ is a study that attempts to bring out the role of patriarchy in the construction of gender roles and cultural identity in Mizo society, which in turn locates women in a subordinate position.

In the absence of written literature and history, the traditional Mizo society largely depends on the collective memory of the past that had been recorded in their folklore. The past that had been told and retold in the form of folktales has performed as an important agent in the conception of Mizo cultural identity. The collective identity is learned and acquired through literature, and hence, folktales, which is the literature of the preliterate Mizo society is an important tool in preserving and re-validating Mizo cultural identity. The role of folktales as a preservation of culture, a form of education to younger generations and a form of entertainment does not end in the past, but keep on functioning in the contemporary society. The strength and the power of folktales in the creation of Mizo cultural identity is still influential and prevalent in the modern society.

Chapter – I: Introduction

The Mizo society is a patriarchal and patrilineal society, where men held dominant position in family and society. The social structure of Mizo society largely depends upon the village administration and other social institutions like *Zawlbuk*, family, religion and economy (occupation). These social institutions played a pivotal role in preserving and imparting societal norms and traditions to younger generations. Being a communitarian society, a person’s social identity and sense of place is given importance within the community rather than the individual’s rights. Family is the first institution, whereby gender stereotyping starts right from birth. Children are guided, taught and looked after according to their gender in such a way that they would grow and developed into becoming an ideal man and ideal woman.

Mizo society can be broadly classified into pre-Christian society (traditional society) and post-Christian society. Pre-Christian Mizo society is pre-literate in nature that had a well-established culture, customs and traditions. The village administration and political system rests upon the chief and his councillors which is consisted of men only. All the village officials who were assigned to discharge other duties were also men (Nag, 30). The Mizo sayings “Hmeichhe finin tuikhur ral a kai lo” (The wisdom of women does not extend beyond the village water point) refers to the condition of women regarding their subordinate position in the village administration, which also reflected the limitations of their roles beyond domestic and household duties. There has even been a saying that defined how women have no place and role in religion, “Hmeichhia leh chakai in sakhua an nei lo” (Women and crabs have no religion).

After the advent of Christianity in Mizoram, Mizo society has come across a tremendous change. The acknowledgement of women’s subordination and the need for emancipation of women from the bondage of traditional patriarchy became one of the important topics found in the earlier writings of Mizo literature. The Church functions not only as a religious institution, but also became a social and cultural institution that upheld and sustained patriarchy. The church itself is a patriarchal church in which only men occupied all the high post in the church (Vanlalruata 178). The traditional belief of the supreme Creator *Khuanu* or *Pathian* has also come to be defined as *Pathian* in the Christian religion. Liangkhaia claimed that in Mizo traditional religion, *Khuanu*, who is feminine and have equal power to *Pathian*, is worshipped as *Pathian* (God) (Liangkhaia153). But Christianity which is founded upon Judeo patriarchal cultures and the missionaries who were strongly influenced by the western patriarchal ideology relegated the position of *Khuanu*, and *Pathian* became more dominant in Mizo Christianity. The status and position of women has been developed to a certain extent but the role of women in the political spheres, social and religious institutions is still at the periphery. Women’s subordination is re-strengthened and re-enacted by the Christian culture and ideology which was approved and taught by the missionaries with their western patriarchal attitude.

The preliterate Mizo society have a well organised culture and rich oral traditions, which found its expression in their folklore. Folklore is the cultural repository of the people to whom it belonged. It preserves and transfer culture to generations, and also validates the various institutions that help in the formation of culture. William R. Bascom has given the importance of folklore for the study of culture as,

...since folklore serves to sanction and validate religious, social, political, and economic institutions, and to play an important role as an educative device in their transmission from one generation to another, there can be no thorough analysis of any of these other parts of culture which does not give serious consideration to folklore (Dundes 26).

The dominance of men and women's passivity is one of the themes founded in Mizo folktales. Patriarchy that advocates the supremacy of men and women's subordination is preserved and protected in their folktales.

The difference between sex and gender has been central to feminism. It has become the major concern of feminism. From antiquity to middle-ages, women were regarded as inferior to men. Women were relegated to the subordinate position of daughters, sisters and mothers who need the protection of men and needed to be looked after by men. The scientific accounts of the biological difference of the sexes also tried to prove male supremacy and women's subordination. Feminism is the outcome of challenging the sexist ideology, which claims the subordinate position of women based on science and biology. Feminism thus argued the inequalities between men and women in a society, objecting the theories that support the disparities as natural and normal. It seeks to study and examine the reality of the lives of women to understand and explain the cause of women's oppression.

Feminism seeks to challenge the role of patriarchy. Kath Woodward posited that, "The development of feminist thinking about gender has been widely enmeshed with another key concept, notably that of 'patriarchy' which was developed to provide an explanation of some of the inequalities of gender

relations and their historical emergence” (Woodward 15). Kate Millet, in her work, *Sexual Politics* has perceived patriarchy as the fundamental oppressive force, and argued that it is a system of power which encompasses and underpins all other forms of social relations (Whelehan 15-16). According to Kate Millet, “Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or ‘masculine’ roles and that women always have the subordinate, or ‘feminine ones’ (Millet 84).

The present research will take an interdisciplinary approach using folktales as texts while using feminist theories of gender as theoretical tools in order to bring out the nuances of gender relations in Mizo society. Reiterating Bhatia’s claim, feminism is not simply about women but more about how gender inequalities and subordination of one sex by another are challenged and confronted (Bhatia 43). Although social theorists like Marx, Weber or Engel had studied inequalities in human society, little or no attention had been paid to inequalities between genders. It was Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal book, *The Second Sex* (1949) that opened up new grounds on the subject of gender relations and inequalities. Beauvoir’s work became a major influence during the second wave feminist movement and her famous statement, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (Beauvoir 293) became the foundation of feminist perspectives on gender. The feminists argued that the study of society that focussed on men alone is no justice and they “...sought to understand society through individual experiences. They attempted to understand the ‘public’ through the ‘private’. They advocated a methodology through which women’s everyday experiences would help better understand the structures of society. The feminists argued that it was important to understand these structures from a woman’s perspectives as the power relations are embedded and institutionalized within these structures.

Connell’s theory also challenges hegemonic masculinity and looks at the relations and inequalities between genders. She claimed in *Masculinities* that, ‘masculinity’ could exist only in contrast with ‘femininity’ (Connell 68). Therefore, the idea is basically feminist. Connell’s ideas of hegemonic

masculinity as ‘the most honoured or desired’ and ‘currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy’ which ‘guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’ have been taken into consideration while examining heroism in Mizo folktales.

Chapter – II: Women in Mizo Cultural Imaginary

Looking at cultural identity as a “collective self-image” (Assman & Czaplicka 125-133), the Mizo cultural identity involves a collective memory of a people who wish to come under a common identity of a shared past. It is therefore pertinent to recognize the positioning in the imaginative re-discovery of the past that produces Mizo cultural identity. The “profound research” about the “shared” Mizo past leading to the collective self-image is mediated by a re-discovery of cultural heroes (and heroines). Traditional Mizo society, in the absence of written literature and history, relies much on the collective memory of the past through folklore. The telling and re-telling of the past in the form of folktales is a powerful element in the conception of Mizo identity.

Representations of women in Mizo folktales are indicative of women’s position in the new formulation Mizo identity. A recurrent theme that runs through most folktales is woman’s passive victimization, women are seen as passive victims who are in need of rescue. Eleven tales have been selected to be examined for this purpose. A close examination of Mizo folktales revealed patriarchal bias and hegemonic structures in the construction of Mizo cultural identity. In an attempt to bring out the cultural identity of women reflected in Mizo folktales, a thematic based analysis of women’s passive victimization of the selected tales is done.

Women characters in Mizo folktales are painted as ideal women or detestable women. Women who are portrayed as ideal women were normally playing the major role of the protagonist, who were victimized but choose to remain silent till they were rescued by men. They never cross the boundary of a female space constructed by the society. They are shown as doing either domestic works or women’s works in jhum. They played the role of a good

daughter, good mother and good wife, who never complain or fight for their own right, freedom or dignity.

Mauruangi or her mother, for instance, were voiceless and remained silent throughout the story. But good women are often rescued or rewarded in the end by good and heroic men who change their tragic fate forever. Detestable women, on the other hand, were punished in the end. Characters such as the step-mother and step-sister represented the negative gender stereotype women. In Mizo folktales, the stepmother is often depicted as cruel and cunning, possessing the negative gender qualities, but there is hardly a step-father who became hostile towards their stepchildren.

In the story of Thailungi also, the step-mother has to face the vengeance of Thailungi's brother. Obedient and submissive women like Chawngtinleri, who is completely dependent on her brother also became a wife of a fairy king and was later considered a great fairy queen, who created and take care of all the wild animals. But her high status of being a fairy queen is acquired through her submission and obedience to her brother and husband. Similar is the case with Kungawrhi who obeyed her father and married thrice, but remain silent throughout the story.

The stereotype women characters found in Mizo folktales symbolizes the ideal women in the Mizo traditional culture. Mizo society and culture is framed by patriarchal ideology with a notion that men are superior and women are inferior to men. The collective identity is learned and acquired through literature and hence, folktales the literature of the preliterate Mizo society is an important tool in framing and constructing women in Mizo cultural imaginary.

Chapter – III: Women as Sacrificial Lamb

For traditional societies like Mizo society, folktales and songs act as custodians of collective memory. These narratives do not only act as records of the people's past but also function as media of representatives. The presentation of female subjectivity as silent figures of sacrifice in Mizo folk tales seems to sanctify

women's suffering as sacrificial and therefore meaningful. These suffering women characters are portrayed as ideal women. Their sacrifices are either for the good of their family, their husbands or for society, but it is important to realise the underlying patriarchal structures within the tales that underwrite female suffering. The sufferings of women are often sanctified since they are deemed as sacrifice. The tales that has been selected for the study contains women characters, who passively accepted and suffer silently and thereby represent the proverbial sacrificial lamb.

The phrase 'sacrificial lamb' is used here in the metaphorical sense as a person sacrificed for the common good and well-being. Sacrificial lamb is thus symbolical of extreme selflessness, but it is also indicative of women's victimisation through a social discourse that promotes women's subjugation. Women characters found in Mizo folktales are defined by their roles as passive victims, who could do nothing but sacrifice themselves for the good cause. They obediently accept the cause of their suffering as something which is needed or should be done. In Mizo folktales, it is always men who are heroes and who claims the trophy, while women are passive victims who always remained in the shadow of men. Women who possessed wisdom and power could only become the useful helper in order to display men as heroes. The superficial position of women in Mizo society is strongly apparent in folk tales.

Looking into the tale of Hrangkhupa and Hawnglaia, we see the tragic suffering of two innocent women under men who wanted to prove their superiority over each other. Women are used as tools for winning wars. The name of the women victims are not even mentioned in the tales, which may be connected to their subordinate position. They were just a shadowy figure – nameless, voiceless and passive victims.

In the tale of Kawrdumbela, the chief forced his own daughter to marry the ugliest guy in order to protect the village. But in the end, she was rewarded for her obedience that her ugly husband Kawrdumbela, has changed into the most handsome man in the village. In the tale of Ngaitei, the protagonist Ngaitei, has to fulfil her father's demand to stop the flood. She has to be given away to her father who has full authority over her for being her father. In this tale, male dominance over their children as the rightful owner is truly revealed.

In the tale of the Mizo legendary hero Chhurbura, the protagonist Chhurbura has fooled his mother-in-law into sleeping with him. But when one think about this particular story what would be talked about or the very fun of the story is often related to the wisdom of Chhurbura by his ability to trick his mother-in-law into sleeping with him. Chhura, in another story, is also the hero, who managed to kill all the men in the village, and who had slept with all the women in the village. His way of showing superiority upon men and women is different. He killed men and slept with women to become a hero in this rivalry.

The tale of Khuangchera (the blacksmith), also reflected the complete submissiveness of a wife to her husband. “In Mizo family and society, the word submission is very important criterion for a woman to become good wife” (Sinha 52). The wife was too humble and obedient which make her into a sacrificial lamb, who will do everything as told.

Although rape in Mizo society is something which is strongly despised by the society, it is the women who would suffer the silent pain and often restraint to speak out for justice. Quoting Brown Miller, Jan Jordan wrote, “Our first laws on rape were born deep within the core of patriarchy. From what early records we have, rape emerges as a not uncommon act and one to which women traditionally had little hope of legal redress,” (Jordan 38). In Mizo society, the trial of rape case is so shameful especially for women, that vulgar words and derogatory words would often be used during the trial (Lianthanga 88). So, women would mostly shun away from filing case against the rapist, and chose to keep their mouth shut and suffered silently for a good cause. It is not only the victim who was pointed at, but also the honour of the family too could be at stake. For instance, the story of Kelngoteii, who was repeatedly raped by men but remained a silent victim, can further be assumed that her brother’s chose to keep quiet, so that they will be saved from losing their honour.

Female sexuality is never tolerated in Mizo society. They are expected to be sexually passive and remained chaste before marriage. Women who reveal their sexuality are regarded as perverts and that their sexuality has to be curbed down. The tale of Chawngchilhi could also be interpreted as highly depictive of female sexuality, which was not at all tolerable and needed to be restraint. So,

Chawngchilhi has to be sacrificed or killed in order to protect the family honour. As Alan Dundes has rightly claimed, “Folklore provides socially sanctioned forms of behaviour in which a person may do what can’t be done in real life” (Dundes59), the sexual intercourse with a snake and pregnancy with the snake’s baby may not be possible in real life, but provides socially sanctioned forms of behaviour.

Tales such as Zawlpala leh Tualvungi, Chawngtinleri and Thailungi, also revealed the same pattern of women’s suffering due to bride price. These women were representatives of a sacrificial figure in Mizo society, who were sold in marriage for the well-being of their family or (for this matter) their brother, that men will enjoy and profit through women who are forced to bring in fortunes for the family.

In the tale of Kungawrhi, Kungawrhi is shown as nothing more than a trophy. Kungawrhi has been given as a reward three times to three men by her father. Trophy substantiates a person’s achievement and signifies the power which the winner holds. Winning the trophy has elevated the status of man, but it degrades the woman’s worth.

In Mizo society, women have always been looked upon as symbols of sacrifice. Through the analysis of the selected folktales, it is evident that the patriarchal structure is the underlying factor that developed the subjugation of women. The superiority of men and the subordinate position of women in Mizo patriarchal society is upheld and sustained in the folktales. The social conditioning of women as a sacrificial lamb has been preserved with a motive of strengthening and enforcing patriarchy.

This trend of women’s subordination is re-enforced by the teaching of Christianity that helps in validating the fact that women should be self-sacrificing and obedient to men. In the contemporary society, women continue to play the role of a sacrificial lamb and in order to sustain the exploitation of women, their subordination have been beautifully labelled as sacrifice.

Chapter – IV: Masculinity in Mizo Folktales

The Mizo ethno-identity is built on the collective memory of a people who chose to be identified under a common identity based on a shared past. Unlike history, which comes with an idea of being ‘fixed and stable’ once established and sustained by evidence, memories are created and fluid, and affected by the context and concerns of the present. The folktales and legends selected for this chapter revealed, how in the Mizo ethno-nationalist consciousness, memories of a glorious past are created but these memories of a collective past are often masculine in nature. In these tales, while some characters that show masculine traits are glorified, some who are seen to be lacking in masculine aggression or those who do not subscribe to notions of manhood are vilified. The study reveals how folklore can act as a medium with persuasive potential in creating an ethno-nationalist Mizo identity which is essentially masculine and patriarchal. The tales to be taken up for the study are - Khuangchera, Taitesena, Vanapa, Chawngbawla and Neuva.

Masculine or masculinity is a term that is quite common in the study of gender and social theory. The term is closely related to hegemony or power, which is used and performed from times immemorial and became almost universal. R. W. Connell, who theorized and studied masculinity, recognized that masculinity has always been defined by its difference from femininity. In his famous book *Masculinity*, R.W. Connell identified four types of masculinity in the current gender order, such as hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization, which is seen as how men exercise hegemony over women. The term hegemonic masculinity is derived from the assumption that there is a hierarchy of male behaviour, meaning the fact that most societies encourage men to express dominant versions of masculinity and dominate. Hegemonic masculinity is a competing entity that exhibits a tendency for men to try to dominate other men and subordinate women.

Mizo heroes are generally marked with masculine qualities such as valour and virility with a deep essence of *tlawmngaihna*. The elevated and finest spirit of Mizo *tlawmngaihna* and Mizo ethnic identity is conspicuously displayed in the lives of these legendary heroes. They have become exemplary in the cultural attitude towards

tlawmngaihna and heroism, and their roles in inscribing identity as well as conduct in the consolidation of Mizo ethnic nationalism. The argument is that the concept of *pasaltha* (heroes) came to define the hegemonic understanding of the Mizo identity or Mizoness and continued to be consolidated till the contemporary society through legendary tales that portray men as heroes.

The title of *pasaltha* could only be achieved by brave hunter and great warriors. The social status belongs to men only and women at the most are portrayed as having legendary beauty and being effeminate or feminine. The masculine representation in Mizo legendary heroes reinforced the patriarchal male image in Mizo society. As Jan Vansina had rightly claimed, “In every society each role and status is modelled after an ideal to which holders must conform. The ideal is common to a whole community and often is preserved in its oral traditions” (Vansina 105). The legendary heroes who were admired and honoured in the society were looked upon as a model who hold the Mizo ethnic nationalist identity or one who represents Mizo ideal man.

As Connell has said, “Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in the society as a whole. Within that overall framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between two groups of men” (78). The characters of Phawthira and Hrangchala could be interpreted as dominant and subordinate men as posited by Connell. There are also stories of two men who have a same name Khuangchera. The one is the legendary hero who proves himself a *pasaltha* by his gallantry in hunting and at wars. The other man is an old man, the village blacksmith who was fooled by two travellers by sleeping with his wife and taking away his valuables. The story of the fooled Khuangchera was not heard very often and the story such as his was not very common to be found in Mizo folktales, while the hero Khuangchera is representing the Mizo cultural hero, and is still considered as the hero even today.

Connell posited that the hegemonic form of masculinity is the most honoured and desired masculinities which are defined collectively in culture, and are sustained in institutions (Connell 10). In Mizo society, *Pasaltha* who

became the legendary heroes are elevated to the position of hegemonic masculinity. They are admired and honoured for their contributions and sacrifice for the society.

The Mizo ethno-nationalist consciousness has been framed by the collective memories of the legendary heroes who fight for the protection of their land and who sacrifice themselves, even their life for a good cause. It was these heroes who have pioneered and fostered this noble conduct of our cultural heritage which have been passed on to the present generations (*The Mizo Heroes*). It is the legendary heroes who were representing the glorious past through their masculine chivalry and heroism. The time of *Pasaltha* were recorded and preserved in the memory which was retold and recreated through folklore.

In the contemporary society, Mizo ethno-nationalism is preserved and reinforced by the account of legendary heroes. They are portrayed as representatives of the Mizo ethnic-nationalist who possessed the ideal quality of being Mizo. The analytical discussion on male heroes may prove that gender, specifically of men and masculinity is one of the foundations of Mizo ethnic-identity.

Chapter – V: Conclusion

In Mizo folktales, patriarchal dominance is evident and apparent by the construction and presentation of male and female characters. The characters of men are usually portrayed as heroes, whereas there is hardly any concept of women as heroes. The gender stereotyping of men and women in the folktales are the reflection of the gender normative behaviour of Mizo society. Heroines in Mizo folktales are representatives of women in Mizo cultural imaginary, who remained the passive victims throughout the story and who are rescued by a hero or rewarded to be married off to a hero.

From the analysis of women characters in chapter two entitled ‘Women in Mizo Cultural Imaginary’, it is obvious to the fact that women with feminine quality who maintain or consistently stick to the normative gender behaviour are designed to be recompensed. The compensation is modelled upon the re-affirmation of the

culturally accepted gender behaviour, whereas women, who do not conform to the feminine ideal characters are mostly depicted as step-mothers or step-sisters. They were portrayed as detestable characters representing the negative gender stereotype women. The hidden purpose of giving negative stereotype women character to the step-mother could also be implied as a motive of patriarchy to defend the cultural masculine and feminine ideals. The Mizo sayings that favour the need of keeping women under patriarchal control such as “Hmeichhe vau loh leh vau vau loh chu an pawng tual tual”, which means ‘A woman never reprimanded and the edge of a jhum not maintained soon become intolerable’ (Khangte 69) is implicit to the characters of step-mothers which also affirmed women’s subordination in Mizo society. These detestable women were never rewarded but suffer in the end one way or another.

The recurrent themes that run through Mizo folktales is the passive victimization of women, who constantly remained in the shadow of men. It was the male characters who came to the fore-front to their rescue, playing the role of a powerful hero, whereas, women remained inactive and passive throughout the story. Their obedience and submission lead to their sufferings, which in the end turn out to bring them reward.

In Mizo cultural imaginary, the ideal women were the one who possessed feminine quality. Their complete dependency on men and submission to male dominance is highly valued and deemed to be the choice of men, which is regarded as the ultimate achievement of women. The idealised women or stereotype characters depicted in the folktales had become the cultural mechanisms by which representations are legitimised. The role and status of women in family and society, and the characteristics of ideal women in Mizo cultural imaginary is also reasserted and defended through folktales.

Chapter III entitled ‘Women as Sacrificial Lamb’ seeks to analyse the pathetic condition of women under patriarchy that expects women to fulfil their roles of a sacrificial lamb. The female subjectivity and sufferings in Mizo folktales are considered as a symbol of sacrifice for a good cause and is highly admired. The ideal women are expected to fulfil the role of good wives, daughters, mothers and sisters

by sacrificing their whole life for their family, their husbands and brothers or for the society.

In Mizo society, the roles and duties assigned to women is taken for granted, since it is perceived as natural and looked upon as something that should be done or normal. A deeper analysis of selected Mizo folktales brings out the fact that women's position as a symbol of sacrifice is protected and upheld by the patriarchy. It is the social set up constructed upon the power of patriarchy under which women's destiny is subjugated to the role of self-sacrifice. The social conditioning of women as a sacrificial lamb has been preserved with a motive of strengthening and enforcing patriarchy.

While men could achieve a prestigious social status and title such as *Pasaltha*, *Valupa* or *Tlawmngai-nopui* through their valour and deeds, the only social status a woman could obtain is to be entitled as a good or ideal woman. But the price she has to pay in order to be labelled as an ideal woman is a never-ending task, a sacrifice of her dreams, desires, and even her own self at some point. Men's actions and deeds are considered as important while women's job is considered as less important. The motives behind the expectation of women's sacrifice or their obedience for a good cause is to exploit them and to keep them subjugated. In the contemporary society, women continue to play the role of a sacrificial lamb in the family.

Chapter IV entitled, 'Masculinity in Mizo Folktales' analysed how the Mizo concept of cultural identity is constructed through collective memory. The Mizo cultural identity is built upon the ethical code of *tlawmngaihna*. The *pasaltha* were the epitome of *tlawmngaihna* for their sacrifice and selfless deeds for others, and for the community. The story of the Mizo legendary heroes represents the masculine ideal character in Mizo society.

The dynamics of gender became intrinsic to the construction of the Mizo ethnic identity. The concept of *pasaltha* (heroes) came to define the Mizo cultural identity or Mizoness as founded upon hegemonic masculinity and continued to be consolidated till the contemporary society through legendary

tales that portray men as heroes. In Mizo folktales, men who failed to maintain or possess masculine traits, such as courage and wisdom, are depicted as loser. The gender relations that distinct men and women into protector and protected or dominant and dependent respectively, which are exhibited in the folktales substantiates the dynamics of gender in Mizo society.

The contemporary Mizo society is usually referred as Post-Christian Society or Mizo Christian society. Since Christian teaching is based upon Judeo patriarchal culture, the supremacy of men and subordination of women could not be completely changed. “The patriarchal system was retained with rigidity” (Lalrinawma 193). Thus, Christianity that advocates men as the supreme creation who is next to God, and women as only the shadow of men has strengthened the Mizo patriarchal attitude.

After the reduction of oral literature to writing, the role of folktales as a tool in preserving and transferring the cultural values is fortified by the documented text and reproduction of Mizo folktales in literary works. Folktales continued to play a pivotal role in reinforcing and reconstructing cultural identity and social values in the contemporary society. Mizo folktales and its message had often been reproduced in the form of songs, dramas, novels and in prose works. It has also been acted in drama and in films. Writers, poets, church leaders, politicians and social activists had often quoted folktales to revive and regenerate the Mizo code of ethics. For instance, the biggest and most effective Non-Government Organisation - the Young Mizo Association (YMA) also used the names of legendary heroes for different groups or sections in their respective branches. The legendary heroes are exemplified and honoured, they are portrayed as the one who had proved themselves heroes, and who possessed the ideal character of Mizo men or Mizoness. The role and status of women in family and society, the ideal woman in Mizo cultural imaginary is also reaffirmed through folktales. Gender division and gender hierarchy in Mizo society which can be noticed in the folktales still continue to exist in Mizo contemporary society.

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