

**A STUDY OF HUMOUR IN SELECTED WORKS OF
PL LIANDINGA AND MAFAA HAUHNAR**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
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**Submitted
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled '**A Study of Humour in Selected Works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar**' submitted by K.C. Lalthansanga has been written under my supervision. He has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the Ph.D regulations of Mizoram University. The thesis is the result of his own investigation. Neither the thesis as a whole nor any part of it was submitted to any other University for any research degree. It is also certified that the scholar has been admitted in the Department through an entrance followed by interview as per UGC Regulation 2018.

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

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

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Chapter-1

Introduction

Humour stands as an integral facet of human society and culture, serving as a communicative medium that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries. It functions as a universal connector, establishing a shared platform for individuals to engage with and comprehend each other. Within the realm of literature, humour assumes diverse roles, ranging from offering comic relief to delivering insightful social commentary.

Humour, as a mode of communication, seeks to elicit enjoyment from its audience, typically expressed through physical manifestations of pleasure such as smiles and laughter. It operates by orchestrating surprises for the audience, often entailing incongruities and the tension generated between the initial framing and the sudden reframing of content. This approach forms the foundation of humour, allowing it to be a dynamic and universally accessible means of fostering connection and understanding among people. According to Beeman, “Humour aims at creating a concrete feeling of enjoyment for an audience most commonly manifested in a physical display consisting of displays of pleasure including smiles and laughter” (106).

Origin, Meaning and Definitions of Humour

Humour is defined as “the ability to smile and laugh, and to make others do so... humour takes many forms ranging from the casual level of the joke told to friends to the sophistication of a Shakespearean comedy” (Walker 3).

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the term ‘humor’ traces its roots to the Latin word ‘umor,’ meaning ‘body fluid.’ This etymological connection is linked to ‘umere,’ signifying ‘be wet, moist,’ and ‘uvescere,’ translating to ‘become wet’ (“humor”). Meanwhile, as stated by Rod A Martin in his book *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*:

Humor began as a Latin word (humorem) meaning fluid or liquid. It still retains this meaning in physiology in reference to bodily fluids, such as the aqueous and vitreous humors of the eye. The Greek physician Hippocrates (fourth century B.C.), who is considered to be the father of medicine, believed that good health depends on the proper balance of four fluids, or “humors,” of the

body, namely blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Later, the Greek physician Galen (second century a.d.), who lived in Rome, introduced the idea that these four fluids possessed particular psychological qualities, so that an excess of any one of them in an individual created a certain kind of temperament or character. A predominance of blood caused one to have a sanguine or cheerful temperament, too much black bile produced a melancholic or depressive personality, and so on. (20-21)

In ancient Greek and Roman medicine, the prevailing belief was that an individual's physical and mental well-being depended on the equilibrium of four bodily fluids or humours: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Any imbalance in these humours was thought to impact temperament and overall health, with deviations leading to eccentric or unusual characteristics as Martin stated.

The English word *humour*, borrowed from French *humeur*, evolved from an unbalanced temperament in the sixteenth century to referring to behavior deviating from social norms. Humour was initially associated with eccentric or peculiar individuals, who were often viewed as ridiculous or objects of ridicule, leading to its association with funniness and laughter in comedy (21).

These variations from the perceived norm eventually evolved into a source of humour and amusement. By the 16th century, individuals with eccentric temperaments were not only considered eccentric but also deemed ridiculous, making them prime subjects for comedic portrayal by actors (Carroll 5). This shift in perception marked a significant transformation in the term 'humour,' which transitioned from its association with bodily fluids to describing the artistry practiced by humorists, encompassing comic actors, writers, and comedians. 'Humour' came to encapsulate the craft of creating and appreciating humour, often involving the portrayal of eccentric or unconventional characters for comedic effect.

Simultaneously, the meaning and origin of humour can be traced back to the Greek word for laughter. According to A.G. L'Estrange, 'Glad' is from the Greek word for laughter, and the word 'jocund' comes from a Latin term signifying 'pleasant' (14). Humour is a source of pleasure and is often associated with enjoyment. It brings people

together, adds charm to social interactions, and is generally connected to mirth and good-naturedness.

In the *History of English Humour*, it is mentioned that the first sounds uttered by humans were likely demonstrative of pain or pleasure, marking a primary distinction shared with animals (L'Estrange 21). However, humans soon developed a unique perception of the intermingling of pain and pleasure, which gave rise to a specific utterance denoting a combination of opposite feelings not possessed by other animals.

The origin of humour is believed to be connected to the physical sensation of tickling or the inhalation of gas, which can elicit laughter. The sensation of laughter can also be produced by other bodily causes. As for the meaning of humour, it is described as a change of countenance accompanied by a spasmodic intermittent sound, a modification of the voice. Laughter is generally associated with pleasure, except in cases of hysteria where the course of nature is reversed. The connection between mind and body in laughter is not fully understood, but it is recognized as a source of pleasure and a means of expressing emotions.

Humour in literature is not just about making people laugh. J.B. Priestley states “It is a pity that a mere buffoon in words should be confused with a true humorist” (Priestley). He emphasizes that true humour goes deep into human nature and is created by individuals with an unusual mental makeup exhibiting a balance of intellectual acuteness perception of life’s incongruities and warmth of heart. This results in a creation that is both laughable and lovable not just a mere figure of fun but a real person only rather larger than life-size. Therefore humour in literature involves a deep concern with human nature and is an atmosphere created by a writer with unique qualities going beyond mere laughter to encompass a profound understanding of human nature. The popular humorist such as Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare and others exhibit deep concern with human nature in their work.

Furthermore, humour in literature, according to Hasley, is defined as “a departure from a norm playfully considered” (Hasley). This definition underscores the significance of detachment and playfulness as integral elements of literary humour. It further notes that humour rarely exists in a pure state, often being a skillful amalgamation of diverse techniques employed by literary humorists. In essence, these

insights underscore the multifaceted nature of humour in literature, where wit and playfulness coalesce with a profound understanding of human nature, creating enduring works that stand as a testament to the art of literary humour.

Theories of Humour

There are three primary theories that elucidate the purposes of humour: the relief theory, the incongruity theory, and the superiority theory. The relief theory emphasizes the physiological release of tension, while the incongruity theory centers around the contradictions between expectations and experiences. On the other hand, the superiority theory focuses on the sense of supremacy over others.

Superiority theory

The superiority theory of humour proposes that humour stems from a sense of superiority, or the feeling of being better than others. According to Irina P. Sirbu, this theory suggests that individuals find humour amusing when they perceive themselves as superior to the subject of the joke or situation, whether it involves derision, mockery, malice, or abuse (221-231). As stated, individuals laugh at the misfortunes, mistakes, or weaknesses of others because it allows them to feel superior or more competent in comparison.

Warren et al. say, "Superiority theories suggest a link between humour appreciation and aggression." (41-65) This concept implies that humour frequently entails a feeling of superiority or dominance over others, which can materialize in different forms of aggression, whether subtle or overt. When individuals derive amusement from something based on the superiority theory, it may mirror underlying attitudes of superiority or disdain towards the subject of the humour. This sense of superiority can lead to aggressive actions like taunting, ridiculing, or demeaning others.

Moreover, the enjoyment of superiority-based humour can occasionally reinforce social hierarchies, perpetuate negative stereotypes, or uphold discriminatory attitudes. For instance, jokes that hinge on racial, ethnic, or gender stereotypes for comedic effect can contribute to the normalization of discriminatory behaviors and attitudes.

The superiority theory frequently creates comedic scenarios in literature by highlighting characters' flaws, foibles, or failures for humorous effect. Satire and parody, for instance, heavily rely on this theory by ridiculing societal norms, institutions, or powerful individuals. Through exaggeration or exposing the absurdities and deficiencies of these targets, writers can elicit laughter while also providing social commentary.

Plato and Aristotle, two prominent ancient Greek philosophers, had differing views on humour and laughter. Plato viewed laughter as potentially disruptive in society, cautioning against its excessive or inappropriate use. On the other hand, Aristotle saw humour as a rhetorical tool to disarm opponents during debates or discussions (Lingard 40–48). These two philosophers, along with Hobbes, made significant contributions to the superiority theory of humour. This theory posits that laughter frequently arises from identifying and ridiculing flaws in others, resulting in a sense of superiority.

Plato, in his dialogues such as *The Republic*, cautioned against laughter that stems from a sense of superiority, as he believed it could lead to moral degradation and the reinforcement of harmful social hierarchies (Trivigno 13–34). He said, “Men of worth must not be represented as overcome by laughter, and still less should we allow such a representation of the gods.” (qtd. in Morreal 4). As quoted, Plato believed that portraying individuals of great value as losing control or succumbing to laughter can undermine their dignity and serious image. He argued that laughter that leads to frivolity or irresponsibility is incongruous with the ideal character of a person of worth. Plato also criticized the portrayal of gods in literature and art, arguing that depicting them as laughing diminishes their divine attributes and moral authority. He argued that humanizing gods with laughter could be disrespectful or blasphemous, reducing their transcendence and moral authority.

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle also discussed the role of humour in highlighting human foibles but also warned against using laughter to degrade or insult others. He believed that excessive humour can lead to vulgarity and insensitivity, as individuals often seek amusement at any cost without considering the consequences for the target. He emphasized the importance of moderation and ethical considerations in humour usage, advocating for a balanced approach that respects others and doesn't

perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Aristotle's critique of excessive humour reveals his philosophical concern with virtue and moral character, arguing that virtuous individuals would use humour responsibly, using wit and comedy to uplift and enlighten rather than degrade or harm. He said, "Those who carry humour to excess are thought to be vulgar buffoons. They try to be funny at any cost and aim more at raising a laugh than at saying what is proper and at avoiding pain to the butt of their jokes." (qtd. in Morreal 5).

In his renowned work *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes explores various aspects of human nature, society, and the dynamics of power, all of which contribute to his understanding of humour. Hobbes' perspective on humour closely aligns with the superiority theory, as he posits that laughter often arises from a sense of superiority or perceived eminence. Hobbes' statement, "Laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly" (*Human Nature* ch.9 sec.13), exemplifies the superiority theory of humour. This statement effectively encapsulates his belief that humour frequently involves a sense of triumph or superiority over others, whether it be through mocking their weaknesses or reveling in one's own perceived superiority.

Similar to the concerns of Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes expresses apprehension regarding the potential harm that laughter can inflict upon an individual's character. He perceives something inherently flawed about a person who derives satisfaction solely from belittling others. While he acknowledges that laughter can stem from a sudden realization of one's own abilities without explicit comparison to others, he maintains that the majority of laughter is directed at others, thus signifying a lack of courage and resilience.

...is incident most to them that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour by observing the imperfections of other men. And therefore much laughter at the defects of others is a sign of pusillanimity. For of great minds one of the proper works is to help and free others from scorn, and compare themselves only with the most able (*Leviathan* ch.6).

The explanation of laughter by Thomas Hobbes, which revolves around the concept of superiority, has become the definitive representation of the superiority theory of humour. Hobbes argued that laughter often originates from a sense of superiority or a feeling of eminence over others. This theory posits that individuals find amusement in situations where they perceive themselves as intellectually, morally, or socially superior to the target of the humour. Hobbes's articulation of the superiority theory has had a lasting impact on the understanding of the psychological and social dimensions of humour among scholars and philosophers, influencing the discourse on laughter and its underlying mechanisms.

Relief Theory

This theory is one of the three primary theories of humour, alongside the incongruity theory and the superiority theory. Relief theory suggests that humour provides a means of escaping or releasing negative or stressful situations (Aultman & Meyers). As proposed by Sigmund Freud and later developed by Herbert Spencer, focuses on the idea that humour serves as a release of tension (Cooper). According to this theory, laughter arises when there is a sudden shift from a tense or serious situation to one that is harmless or inconsequential.

As mentioned, the relief theory of humour proposes that humour plays a crucial role in helping individuals navigate and cope with negative or stressful situations. According to this theory, humour acts as a psychological escape from the everyday pressures of life, offering a brief respite from anxiety, tension, or emotional discomfort. Through eliciting laughter and amusement, humour brings about a temporary shift in perspective, enabling individuals to distance themselves from their worries and find a sense of relief. This release of tension can be cathartic, aiding individuals in processing challenging emotions in a more light-hearted and manageable manner.

The relief theory of humour has a long and intricate history, shaped by the contributions of various philosophers, psychologists, and scholars across different time periods. While Aristotle was among the first to mention humour as a release of tension or excess emotion (Meyer), it was figures like Sigmund Freud and Herbert Spencer who further developed and popularized the relief theory during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Sigmund Freud, known for his groundbreaking work in psychoanalysis, integrated the relief theory of humour into his broader exploration of the human psyche. According to Freud, humour functions as a mechanism for individuals to release repressed thoughts, desires, and anxieties in a socially acceptable manner (Romero & Pescosolido). He believed that laughter and amusement provide a cathartic outlet for psychological tension, promote emotional well-being, and act as a defense mechanism against inner conflicts.

Herbert Spencer, a philosopher and social theorist, contributed to the relief theory by emphasizing the physiological aspect of humour. He proposed that laughter is a response to the discharge of excess nervous energy, akin to a pressure valve releasing steam in a steam engine (Kiss 238-258). Spencer's perspective added a biological dimension to the relief theory, underscoring the role of laughter in regulating emotional arousal and restoring psychological equilibrium.

In contemporary times, scholars and researchers have continued to delve into the relief theory of humour, exploring its cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. Studies in psychology, neuroscience, and literary theory have provided valuable insights into the role of humour as a coping mechanism, a tool for social bonding, and a form of creative expression. The relief theory remains a fundamental concept in the analysis of humour, offering a framework for understanding the psychological and social advantages of laughter and amusement in human life.

In a literary context, the relief theory of humour suggests that authors use humour as a tool to ease tension, stress, or emotional discomfort within a narrative. Authors strategically incorporate comedic elements such as jokes, satire, irony, or absurd situations to provide readers with a respite from serious or heavy themes. By infusing humour into their works, writers create moments of levity that allow readers to relax, laugh, and momentarily escape the intensity of the story's emotional or thematic content.

Literature frequently employs humour to balance the tone, preventing it from becoming overly serious or burdensome for readers. A variety of genres and writing styles, such as comedic novels, satirical plays, humorous poems, and witty dialogues in dramas, incorporate humour. Moreover, the relief theory of humour is closely

associated with the concept of catharsis, as laughter and amusement can act as a cathartic release, enabling readers to navigate complex emotions in a more accessible and enjoyable manner.

Ultimately, the relief theory of humour enhances the literary experience by adding layers of depth, dimension, and emotional richness to narratives. It allows authors to engage their audience, craft memorable characters, and delve into profound themes while infusing a sense of lightness and entertainment throughout the story.

Incongruity Theory

Incongruity theory posits that the unexpected or illogical juxtaposition of ideas, situations, or words is what makes something funny. According to John Morreall, incongruity theory is a key concept in the field of humour studies, proposing that humour emerges from the identification of inconsistencies or deviations from expected patterns. Morreall differentiates between incongruities in ‘things’ (objects, people, situations) and incongruities in ‘presentation’ (speech and language) (Nijholt 429).

Incongruity theory, as expounded in the elucidation, is a foundational concept in the realm of humour studies that investigates the mechanisms that underlie comedic experiences. The theory suggests that humour emerges from unexpected or irrational combinations of ideas, situations, or words, resulting in a feeling of amusement or laughter. John Morreall’s contribution to incongruity theory highlights its significance in the wider field of humour studies, highlighting how humour stems from the identification of inconsistencies or deviations from expected patterns.

Morreall’s distinction between incongruities in ‘things’ and incongruities in ‘presentation’ enriches the comprehension of how humour functions. Incongruities in ‘things’ pertain to concrete elements such as objects, individuals, or scenarios that diverge from established norms or expectations. Conversely, incongruities in ‘presentation’ involve the utilization of speech, language, or communication techniques in unforeseen or unconventional manners, generating humorous effects.

The compelling aspect of incongruity theory lies in its capacity to elucidate a broad spectrum of comedic phenomena across various genres and forms of expression. From physical comedy to clever wordplay and astute satire, humour often relies on

incongruity's element of surprise to elicit laughter and captivate audiences. This theory also underscores the involvement of cognitive processes in humour, as the mind navigates through unexpected twists and turns, resulting in instances of cognitive dissonance that culminate in amusement.

Moreover, incongruity theory underscores the fluid nature of humour, wherein cultural, social, and individual factors influence perceptions of what is humorous. What may be incongruous and amusing in one context may not necessarily evoke the same reaction in another setting. This contextual dimension adds layers of complexity to the study of humour and encourages scholars to consider multiple viewpoints in the analysis of comedic phenomena.

Ancient philosophical discussions surrounding laughter and humour serve as the roots of incongruity theory. Plato and Aristotle engaged in a debate regarding whether humour stemmed from superiority, such as mocking others' flaws (superiority theory), or from the unexpected and incongruous (incongruity theory). While both elements can contribute to humour, the incongruity theory has gained prominence in contemporary discussions on humour writing and comedy.

Scholars like Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer during the 18th and 19th centuries contributed to the emergence of incongruity theory as a distinct concept in humour writing. Kant argued that humour arises from perceiving incongruity between a concept and a real object that does not align with the concept (Wangsomchok 462). Laughter resolves the mental conflict this mismatch creates.

Kant's theory of humour, which centers on the perception of incongruity, provides a profound understanding of comedic experiences. According to Kant, humour arises when the mind encounters a contradiction between an expected concept and the actual observation of a real object that does not conform to that concept. This clash of expectations creates surprise and cognitive dissonance, leading to amusement and laughter. What sets Kant's theory apart is its focus on the cognitive processes involved in humour. It goes beyond jokes and punchlines, highlighting the mind's ability to detect incongruities and find them amusing.

According to Kant's perspective, our ability to perceive and appreciate unexpected twists or deviations from the norm is the root of humour. This aligns with the broader understanding of humour as a form of cognitive play, where the mind takes pleasure in the unexpected and the unconventional. By emphasizing incongruity, Kant's theory also highlights the subjective nature of humour. What one person finds humorous may not elicit the same response in another, depending on their cognitive frameworks and expectations.

Furthermore, Kant's theory has implications for our understanding of creativity and wit. Humour often involves clever juxtapositions, surprising analogies, or imaginative leaps that challenge conventional thinking. This aligns with Kant's idea of humour as a departure from the ordinary and the predictable, engaging the mind in a process of reevaluation and reinterpretation.

Expanding on Kant's ideas, Schopenhauer proposed that humour involves a sudden shift in perspective, where the mind initially expects one thing but encounters something entirely different (Shani et al. 1). Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer have both made significant contributions to the philosophical exploration of humour, albeit from slightly different angles. Kant's theory, which is based on the perception of incongruity between a concept and a real object, underscores the cognitive dissonance that leads to laughter when expectations are overturned. On the other hand, Schopenhauer, building upon Kant's concepts, delves deeper into the psychological mechanisms of humour by focusing on the element of surprise and the sudden change in perspective.

Schopenhauer's assertion that humour necessitates a sudden shift in perspective mirrors his conviction that laughter arises when the mind expects a certain result but encounters something completely unexpected. This unforeseen twist challenges the mind's preconceived ideas and generates a moment of cognitive dissonance, resulting in amusement and laughter. Schopenhauer's theory underscores the dynamic nature of humour, where the mind's anticipation and subsequent surprise play a pivotal role in evoking comedic reactions.

Furthermore, Schopenhauer's viewpoint on humour is in line with his broader philosophical stance on human perception and consciousness. He argues that humour

offers a temporary escape from the constraints of everyday rationality and enables a playful interaction with life's absurdities. This conception of humour as a form of intellectual liberation adds complexity to Schopenhauer's theory, positioning laughter as a way to transcend mundane realities and embrace a more imaginative and adaptable mindset.

Throughout the 20th century, incongruity theory continued to develop with the contributions of philosophers, psychologists, and comedians. Sigmund Freud explored humour as a release of repressed thoughts and emotions, often involving incongruous or taboo topics. Henri Bergson emphasized the role of mechanical and rigid behavior in generating humour, highlighting the contrast between inflexibility and spontaneity.

Incongruity theory also finds its place in literary and comedic practices, with writers and comedians intentionally creating situations or dialogue that subverts expectations and defies logic. For instance, absurdism, a literary movement, deliberately employs the incongruous and the irrational to provoke laughter and challenge conventional thinking.

Types of Humour in Literature

Humour comes in many forms, and authors use a variety of techniques to make their readers laugh or smile. It takes on diverse forms, varying across countries and cultures. In the Indian context, Vikram Bhalla categorizes humour into 11 types: Slapstick, deadpan, satire, insult, wordplay, self-deprecating, awkward, dark humour, situational, impromptu, and double-meaning ("There are eleven..."). In a general sense, let us divide into ten categories:

Satire:

Satire is a powerful tool that authors use to criticize societal issues, human behavior, and political systems through humour, irony, or exaggeration. It serves as a form of social commentary that aims to provoke thought, challenge norms, and bring about change. Satirical works often employ wit and sarcasm to expose the flaws and absurdities of individuals or institutions in a way that is both entertaining and thought-provoking. Horatian satire is known for its light-hearted and playful tone, while Juvenalian satire tends to be more harsh and critical (Skalicky 499-525). Satire is

commonly employed as a tool for political commentary and social critique, with satirical content often presented in a manner that mirrors journalistic reporting but with exaggerated or distorted elements (Vaibhav et al.).

Satire plays a significant role in societal discourse by providing a unique and often humorous perspective on serious issues. It serves as a platform for criticism, activism, and engagement, urging audiences to think critically about the world around them.

Irony:

Irony is a literary device where the intended meaning is different from the literal meaning of the words used, often used to highlight absurdity, criticize, or create a humorous effect. It can be subtle or overt and plays a crucial role in various forms of humour, including satire and sarcasm.

According to Angeleri & Airenti, irony is often categorized under conversational humour due to its overlapping nature with other forms of humour. It is a tool that allows individuals to convey their attitudes or opinions indirectly, often through the use of wit and clever wordplay (133-46).

Irony is a versatile and powerful tool that allows individuals to convey complex ideas, criticize societal norms, and create entertaining and thought-provoking content. Whether used in literature, everyday conversations, or comedy routines, irony adds depth and complexity to communication, making it a fundamental aspect of human expression. There are different forms of irony — verbal irony, situational irony and dramatic irony.

Parody:

Parody is a form of comedic imitation or mockery that exaggerates or distorts the characteristics of a particular work, individual, or genre for comedic effect. It involves taking elements from the original source and twisting them in a humorous or satirical manner to create a new, often absurd, version of the original. Parody is closely related to satire and irony, as it often aims to critique or comment on the original work or subject matter through humour.

Parody can be a powerful tool for social commentary and cultural critique. It allows creators to play with familiar tropes, characters, and themes in a way that highlights their absurdity or challenges their conventions. According to Bruce Zuckerman, parody is not merely an aspect but the very essence of a work, suggesting that it goes beyond imitation to become a fundamental element of the piece itself. This highlights the transformative nature of parody, where the original work is reimagined and reshaped to convey a new message or perspective (136-65).

Puns:

Puns are a form of wordplay that involves a play on words, often exploiting the multiple meanings of a word or the similarity in sound between different words to create a humorous or witty effect. Puns are a common feature in jokes, literature, and everyday language, adding a layer of cleverness and amusement to communication.

According to Kao et al., puns are a crucial component of humour expression, with the distinctiveness measure being able to differentiate exceptionally funny puns from mediocre ones. Puns rely on the ambiguity of language, where a word or phrase can have more than one interpretation, leading to a humorous twist when the intended meaning is revealed (1270-85). Puns serve as a creative and playful way to engage with language, showcasing linguistic dexterity and wit. By blending multiple meanings, sounds, or connotations within a single phrase, puns offer a unique form of humour that challenges the audience to decipher the intended wordplay and appreciate the cleverness behind it.

Absurdism is a comedic approach that involves embracing the nonsensical, irrational, or illogical aspects of life to create humour. It revolves around defying conventional logic and challenging the norms of reality, often leading to unexpected and bizarre outcomes that provoke laughter. Absurd humour thrives on incongruity, absurdity, and the violation of traditional expectations, inviting the audience to question the rationality of the situation presented.

Absurdism is often associated with a playful disregard for conventional norms and expectations. It involves a departure from the ordinary and the rational, opting instead for the unexpected and the illogical. By challenging the boundaries of logic and

reason, absurd humour offers a fresh perspective on reality, inviting the audience to view the world through a lens of absurdity and whimsy (Sundén & Paasonen 233-43).

In essence, absurdism in humour celebrates the absurd, the irrational, and the nonsensical aspects of life, inviting audiences to embrace the unexpected and find humour in the unconventional. By defying logic and challenging traditional expectations, absurd humour offers a unique and refreshing perspective on the world, encouraging laughter, contemplation, and a playful engagement with the complexities of existence.

Slapstick:

Slapstick comedy is often associated with the use of physical movements and actions to create humour (Griep & Mikasen). It is a comedic style that heavily relies on physical actions and exaggerated, often absurd, situations to generate laughter. It is characterized by its emphasis on visual and physical comedy, often involving exaggerated movements, mishaps, and physical humour such as falls, collisions, and other forms of exaggerated physicality. Slapstick humour typically aims to entertain through the use of exaggerated and often ridiculous physical actions that are designed to evoke laughter from the audience.

Slapstick comedy is known for its emphasis on physicality and the use of visual gags to create humour. It often involves characters engaging in over-the-top and exaggerated actions that result in comical outcomes. Slapstick humour is not reliant on verbal wit or wordplay but rather on the physicality and visual impact of the comedic actions taking place. This form of humour is often associated with classic comedy genres such as silent films, where physical comedy was a central element of entertainment.

Wit:

Wit is a sophisticated form of cleverness and intelligence that is used to create humour through quick thinking, sharp observations, and clever wordplay. It involves the ability to make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas, to deliver subtle and clever remarks, and to engage in verbal sparring that amuses and entertains the audience.

It is often associated with differentiation or enforcement functions in communication, where clever remarks or observations serve to highlight distinctions or emphasize certain points (Meyer 310-31).

Sarcasm:

Sarcasm is a form of communication where individuals say the opposite of what they mean, often with the intention of mocking, criticizing, or being humorous. Sarcasm involves using words to convey a message that is different from the literal meaning, typically in a mocking or ironic manner. It is a nuanced form of language that requires an understanding of context, tone, and delivery to be effectively interpreted.

According to Willibald Ruch, sarcasm is considered an element of mean-spirited humour, which involves using wit to keep people at a distance (Ruch et al.). Sarcasm is often used to convey criticism or mockery in a humorous way, relying on the sharpness of language to create a comedic effect. It can be a tool for social commentary or a form of playful banter among individuals.

Self-Deprecating Humour:

This type of humour is a form of humour where individuals deliberately target themselves in a humorous manner, often by making jokes or comments that highlight their own perceived flaws, mistakes, or shortcomings. It involves self-directed jokes that invite others to share in the laughter at the individual's own expense.

Self-deprecating humour is considered a form of affiliative humour, which is non-hostile and affirming of both oneself and others (Hoption et al.). It involves making jokes or comments that poke fun at oneself in a lighthearted and non-hostile manner. It can be used to build rapport, ease tension, and create a sense of camaraderie among individuals. Self-deprecating humour is a valuable form of humour that can foster positive relationships, enhance communication, and contribute to a more positive and inclusive social environment.

Dark Humour:

Dark humour, often synonymous with black, gallows, or cynical humour, is a form of comedy that involves making light of typically taboo subjects that are normally considered painful (Duenas et al.). It delves into sensitive or morbid topics such as death, tragedy, or social taboos, using irony, sarcasm, or absurdity to create humour. Dark humour often challenges societal norms and pushes boundaries by addressing uncomfortable or controversial subjects in a comedic light.

Dark humour is characterized by its ability to provoke laughter through unconventional and often unsettling subject matter. It can serve as a coping mechanism in dealing with difficult or distressing situations, allowing individuals to find humour in the face of adversity.

Humour in Classical Literature

The evolution of humour in classical literature is intricately entwined with the development of dramatic arts. The earliest known comic poet, Chionides, emerges as little more than a historical name associated with plays such as “Beggars,” “Heroes,” and “Persians,” dating back to around 486 BCE (Sathvara 1017). The classical Greek Comedy unfolds in three distinct periods: Old Comedy (archaia), Middle Comedy (mese), and New Comedy (nea) (1009).

Old Comedy:

Aristophanes, a prominent figure in the realm of Old Comedy during the 5th century BCE, left an indelible mark on classical literature with his satirical prowess and unconventional approach to humour. Renowned for his insightful critiques and keen observations of Athenian society, Aristophanes employed a distinctive blend of political satire, sexual innuendo, and scatological humour in his plays. One of his notable works, “Acharnians,” presented in 425 BCE, stands as a testament to his creative genius and marks the earliest surviving complete play from this period.

In “Lysistrata,” another exemplary work by Aristophanes, the playwright showcases a nuanced understanding of comedic techniques. Released in a time of political unrest, the play revolves around women who, frustrated by the prolonged war,

decide to withhold conjugal relations until peace is achieved. Aristophanes masterfully employs wordplay, satire, and physical comedy to navigate the delicate themes of war, peace, and gender dynamics. The comedic techniques serve not only to entertain the audience but also to offer a critical commentary on the prevailing political circumstances. For instance, the use of physical comedy, as evident in scenes where women engage in a comical altercation with men, adds a visual dimension to the societal critique embedded in the narrative (Sommerstein 198).

Aristophanes' enduring legacy lies in his ability to intertwine laughter with societal critique, providing audiences with a unique form of entertainment that simultaneously prompts reflection on the issues of the time. His utilization of satire, wordplay, and physical comedy reflects a keen awareness of the power of humour as a vehicle for commentary and a means to engage with the complexities of the human experience. The comedic techniques employed by Aristophanes in Old Comedy not only entertained ancient Greek audiences but also allowed them to grapple with the nuances of their society through a lens of humour, making his works both a product of and a reflection on the cultural and political dynamics of his era.

Middle Comedy:

Middle Comedy, spanning the late 5th to the middle of the 4th century BCE, represents a pivotal and transitional period in the evolution of classical humour. During this era, playwrights like Menander emerged as significant contributors, exemplifying the nuanced characteristics of Middle Comedy. Menander, renowned for his works during this period, played a crucial role in shaping the themes and style of Middle Comedy. As noted by Shaw, the plays of Middle Comedy featured a diverse array of elements, including mythological burlesque, domestic and erotic themes, depoliticized humour, riddles, stock characters, and a playful comic style (1).

Other humorists of this period, such as Antiphanes, Anaxandrides, and Ephippos, also made notable contributions by incorporating themes drawn from everyday life. Their works introduced characters like the old hetaira, the parasite, the cook, the braggart soldier, and the rich hetaira, each with clear ancestral ties to Middle Comedy (Webster). These characters, rooted in the daily experiences of the audience,

added relatability to the comedic narratives, reflecting the shift towards a more grounded and familiar portrayal of human life.

While Middle Comedy retained some elements from its predecessor, Old Comedy, such as the use of stock characters and physical comedy, it marked a departure in terms of thematic emphasis. The narratives of Middle Comedy became less political, moving away from the overtly satirical and exaggerated personas characteristic of Old Comedy. Instead, Middle Comedy focused on character development and intricate plot constructions. The humour of this period stemmed from relatable situations and characters, allowing the audience to connect with the material on a more personal level. This shift in focus indicates a conscious move towards a more refined and subtly nuanced form of humour that addressed the complexities of human relationships and everyday experiences.

Middle Comedy, led by playwrights like Menander and complemented by the contributions of other humorists, represents a phase of artistic evolution where classical humour transitioned from the bold and overt satire of Old Comedy to a more nuanced and character-driven form. The incorporation of everyday themes and relatable characters marked a departure from the exaggerated and politically charged narratives of the past, contributing to the continued richness and diversity of classical comedic traditions.

New Comedy:

New Comedy, persisting until approximately 260 BCE, ushered in notable transformations in the landscape of classical humour. The diminishing role of the Chorus and the adoption of a structured five-act format marked a departure from earlier comedic traditions (Sathvara 1012). This shift emphasized a plot-centric approach, wherein the narrative took precedence over the collective commentary of the Chorus. The Chorus, a prominent feature in both Old and Middle Comedy, faded into the background, allowing the unfolding plot and the interactions of characters to take center stage. The structured format brought a new level of coherence to comedic storytelling, providing a clear framework for the development of plotlines and character arcs.

Within the realm of New Comedy, the emergence of recurring stock characters, such as cooks, soldiers, and cunning slaves, became a defining feature. These archetypal figures served as familiar elements within the comedic narratives, contributing to the genre's accessibility and popularity. The reliance on such characters facilitated a shorthand for conveying certain traits or behaviors, allowing the audience to quickly grasp the dynamics at play within the comedic scenarios. This simplification of character types became a hallmark of New Comedy, streamlining the storytelling process and enhancing audience engagement.

While New Comedy reflected the social fabric of Athenian society and its prevailing morality, it did not position itself as a reformatory force. Instead, it functioned as a mirror, reflecting the norms and values of the society it depicted. This characteristic sets New Comedy apart from its predecessors, as it presented a more observational and less prescriptive approach to societal critique. The genre's commitment to portraying societal norms allowed it to resonate with audiences, offering a form of entertainment that was not only amusing but also a reflection of their own shared experiences and values.

In his book, *History of English Humour*, A.G. L'estrangé discusses the evolution and transformation of Greek humour, particularly highlighting the shifts in literary and social humour following the era of Aristophanes:

After the time of Aristophanes, the literary and social humour of Greece altered. It grew less political as liberty became more restricted, and men's minds were gradually diverted by business and foreign trade from that philosophical and artistic industry, which had made Athens the center of the world. The brighter part of the country's genius descended to effeminate pursuits and employed itself in the development of amorous fancies. In the comedies which came into favor, the *dramatis personae* represented a strange society of opulent old men, spendthrift sons, intriguing slaves, and courtesans. (79)

The influence of New Comedy extended far beyond its temporal boundaries, leaving an indelible mark on the trajectory of Roman comedy. Roman playwrights, notably Plautus, drew inspiration from the Greek comedic tradition, infusing it with Roman cultural nuances to create a distinctive comedic legacy. The fast-paced plots,

reliance on stock characters, and the incorporation of satirical elements persisted in Roman comedy, showcasing the enduring impact of New Comedy's innovations. This cross-cultural fertilization enriched the comedic traditions of both ancient civilizations, creating a comedic tapestry that transcended geographical and temporal constraints.

Greek Influence on Roman Comedy

The Greek comedic tradition, exemplified by the works of Aristophanes and Menander, exerted a profound influence on the development of Roman comedy. Plautus, a prominent figure in Roman theater, skillfully adapted elements from Greek comedies to cater to the tastes of Roman audiences. This adaptation resulted in a distinct form of Roman comedy characterized by its incorporation of crude humour, stereotypical characters, and satirical undertones. The interplay between Greek and Roman comedic traditions marked a cultural exchange that shaped the comedic landscape in ancient Rome.

Menander, writing during the 3rd and 4th centuries B.C., stands out for his contribution to Greek New Comedy, infusing it with sophisticated humour and introducing lifelike characters. *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre* underscores the transformative nature of this 'New Comedy,' noting its departure from the farcical situations and characters that previous generations had enjoyed. Instead, it presented more relatable characters and problems, reflecting a shift toward a more nuanced and realistic portrayal of human experiences (Macdonald and Walton 124-125).

The legacy of Greek Old Comedy and New Comedy resonated deeply in Roman comedic expressions. Aristophanes and Menander left an indelible mark on Roman theater, influencing not only the narrative structures but also the characterization and thematic elements of Roman comedies. The incorporation of fast-paced plots, the recurring presence of stock characters like the clever slave, and the inclusion of satirical commentaries became distinguishing features of Roman comedic tradition. This amalgamation of comedic traditions not only enriched the cultural tapestry of ancient Rome but also created a lasting comedic legacy that transcended geographical and temporal boundaries.

In essence, the interaction between Greek and Roman comedic traditions was a dynamic cultural exchange, resulting in the synthesis of diverse comedic elements. The merging of these traditions created a unique and enduring form of entertainment that reflected the shared humour, social dynamics, and human experiences of both ancient Greek and Roman societies.

Humour in English Literature

The English literary period is classified into different periods. WH Hudson identifies twelve periods in English literature from around 500 AD to 1955 (8). William J. Long, on the other hand, outlines ten periods from the Anglo-Saxon period to the 20th century (x-xii). C. Huge Holman also categorized eight periods, which will be used in this research. Holman's categorization of English literary periods is as follows:

428-1100: Old English Period

1100-1350: Anglo-Norman Period

1350-1500: Middle English Period

1500-1660: The Renaissance Period

1660-1798: The Neo-Classical Period

1798-1870: The Romantic Period

1870-1914: The Realistic Period

1914-1972: The Contemporary Period (*A Handbook* 192)

The Old English period, which lasted from around 428 until 1100, had a diverse and extensive evolution of humour in literature. The era was primarily defined by the utilization of the Old English language and resulted in a wide array of literary compositions that accurately depicted the cultural, social, and linguistic intricacies of that period.

Riddles were a common kind of humour in Old English literature, found in both oral and written traditions. The riddles functioned as a source of amusement and mental stimulation, encouraging audiences to unravel the intricately designed enigmas. *The Exeter Book* is a unique compilation of Old English poetry that includes a remarkable assortment of riddles, which demonstrate the cleverness and linguistic skill of the

writers. During this period, Anglo-Saxons had a playful and earthy sense of humour, which is evident in their riddles. These riddles often contained double meanings, including some that were considered obscene.

In *British Literature (Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century and Neoclassicism)*, it is written about Anglo-Saxon riddles as follows:

Collections of riddles in Latin date back to the fourth century. Most of the authors are unknown, although the names of a few Anglo-Saxon authors survive: Aldhelm, Tatwine, and Eusebius. ...The riddles written in Latin usually had the answer as the title, and they were considered enigmas: logic games that could be quite sophisticated and detailed. The most famous collection of riddles written in Anglo-Saxon are found in the *Exeter Book*; these riddles, in contrast to the Latin ones, often ask the reader to guess the answer, and no answer is provided. While the topics of the riddles range from animals and natural phenomena to weapons and writing, there are some riddles that contain double meanings (one of them obscene) that demonstrate an earthy sense of humour. Riddles appear to have occupied an important place in Anglo-Saxon culture and beyond. (303)

The above quote emphasizes that during the Old English period, humour was expressed primarily through riddles, showcasing intellectual and creative aspects. These riddles, with their intricate and clever construction, served as a means of both entertainment and intellectual engagement. The use of riddles to convey humour was a distinctive feature of the Old English literary period, highlighting the nuanced ways in which humour was manifested during that time.

Furthermore, Old English literature actively incorporated a robust practice of verbal storytelling, in which scopas (bards or poets) held a pivotal position in spreading narratives through recitation. The performative nature of storytelling facilitated the incorporation of comedy through vocal modulation, gestures, and timing, thus augmenting the total influence on the audience. Old English literature incorporated comic aspects within religious writings, contributing to its diverse range of literary forms.

L'etrange asserted that the Crusaders played a pivotal role in shaping English humour (170). As they embarked on their journeys to the East, they encountered the rich and imaginative civilization of the East. This exposure to Eastern culture, characterized by its ornate creations and storytelling traditions, likely left an indelible mark on the development of English humour. The Crusaders, accompanied by troubadours and minstrels, would have returned with tales and narratives that captivated the imaginations of Europeans. These stories, infused with elements of fantasy and adventure, potentially contributed to the emergence of a more imaginative and humorous storytelling tradition in England.

The interaction with Eastern cultures might have fostered a cross-cultural exchange, introducing novel narrative techniques and themes that enriched the English storytelling landscape. The infusion of Eastern influences, with their fanciful elements, could have sparked a shift towards more vibrant and imaginative forms of humour within English literature. This cultural exchange, facilitated by the Crusaders, troubadours, and minstrels, served as a catalyst for the evolution of a distinctively English humorous tradition, characterized by its imaginative storytelling and playful elements.

Humour in Indian Literature

Schopen says that “humour has been an integral part of Indian literature, encompassing various genres such as farce, satire, and comedy” (201-226). It is a significant aspect of Indian literary traditions, spanning various genres and forms. It connects readers across generations through social commentary, absurdity, and comic relief. Whether in farce, satire, or comedy, humour in Indian literature offers insightful reflections on the human experience. The history of humour in Indian literature reflects a rich tapestry of cultural diversity, social commentary, and comedic expression.

One of the earliest examples of humour in Indian literature can be found in the ancient Sanskrit texts such as the Vedas and the epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. While these texts primarily focus on serious themes like duty, righteousness, and cosmic order, they also contain elements of wit, satire, and irony. In the Mahabharata, for example, comic relief is provided through the character of Duryodhana, who often finds himself in humorous situations due to his arrogance and

folly (Chatterji 127-46). Additionally, the dialogues and interactions between characters in both epics can contain elements of wit, irony, and satire, adding layers of complexity to the storytelling.

In the Vedas, the ancient Indian scriptures, humour is not a central theme, as the texts primarily focus on rituals, hymns, and philosophical teachings. However, the Vedas contain elements of wordplay, metaphor, and symbolic language that can be interpreted in a humorous light (Jones et al. 175-92). The Rig-Veda, for example, includes hymns that use poetic devices and figurative language to convey profound spiritual truths in a creative and engaging manner.

Ancient Indian humour is a vibrant and integral part of Indian literary traditions, encompassing a wide range of comedic styles and techniques. From the Vedas to the epics and classical plays, humour in ancient Indian texts serves to entertain, enlighten, and engage audiences, reflecting the cultural richness and diversity of ancient Indian society.

Indian literature has been enriched by various forms of humour, including satire, farce, and comedy, which have been utilized to reflect the cultural, social, and political landscape of India. The works of renowned authors like Rabindranath Tagore and the exploration of Indian pop culture through parodies have further contributed to the multifaceted nature of humour in Indian literature.

Emergence of Mizo Humour

By examining it closely, Mizo humour can be broadly divided into four major periods; when we look carefully at how humour evolved across these different periods—its forms, styles, and platforms—we can see that one significant period clearly emerged around the 50 years. Let us now trace the emergence of humour across these periods.

- 1) Oral Literature Period (Before 1894)
- 2) Transitional Period (1894-1950)
- 3) Modern Period (1950-2000)
- 4) Contemporary Period (2000-Present)

Oral Literature Period (Before 1894)

The earliest form of Mizo humour emerged during the oral literature period, when storytelling, songs, and proverbs formed the core of cultural expression. Before the creation of the Mizo alphabet *A, AW, B* in 1894, the Mizo people relied entirely on oral transmission to preserve their collective wisdom, beliefs, and sense of humour. Humour was intricately woven into folk songs, folktales, riddles, and proverbs, which were often performed during community gatherings, work sessions, or in the *Zawlbuk* (bachelors' dormitory). These oral performances were rich in playful exaggerations, teasing remarks, and witty exchanges that vividly reflected the liveliness of Mizo social life. Much of this humour carried a moral or didactic purpose—educating through amusement by mocking traits such as laziness, vanity, or greed in a light-hearted way. Proverbs and short anecdotes showcased the Mizo people's love for clever wordplay and quick wit, qualities that later became defining characteristics of written Mizo humour. Hence, the oral period laid the cultural and linguistic foundation for the evolution of Mizo humour in its later, written forms.

Folk literature refers to the body of traditional knowledge, beliefs, and artistic expressions that are orally transmitted from generation to generation within a community. It embodies the collective wisdom, imagination, and values of a culture, often originating in societies without a written tradition. As *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains, folk literature “is the lore (traditional knowledge and beliefs) of cultures having no written language,” encompassing “both prose and verse narratives, poems, songs, myths, dramas, proverbs, and riddles,” all preserved and passed on through oral communication (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

In addition to being a repository of a community's traditions, folk literature serves as a means of education, entertainment, and moral instruction. According to *Study.com*, it represents “the body of traditional beliefs and customs preserved in forms such as stories, poems, or songs,” serving to transmit cultural identity and wisdom across generations (“Folk Literature: Definition & Books”). Similarly, *ARC Journals* defines folk literature as “the oral and informal expressions of a culture—such as myths, legends, folktales, fables, and songs—that are passed down across generations, often anonymously” (“Folk Literature...”).

Francis Lee Utley further clarifies that folk narrative (or folk literature) refers to “literature transmitted orally,” including tales, songs, proverbs, riddles, and other verbal traditions passed down within communities. Utley emphasizes that such oral literature emerges from communal creativity, embedded in social contexts, and often reflects the values, humour, and lived experiences of everyday people (139). He argues that scholars must examine both the “milieu of the folktale or folksong” and the variations across groups, since oral literature is shaped by the social environments in which it is told and adapted (139–40). Thus, a folk narrative is an enduring expression of collective imagination, preserved through performance and continually reshaped by its tellers.

From the foregoing definitions, folk literature may be understood as the traditional oral expression of a community’s collective imagination, beliefs, customs, and moral values. It encompasses a wide range of forms such as myths, legends, folktales, songs, proverbs, and anecdotes that are transmitted orally across generations rather than through written texts. Unlike authored or individual literary works, folk literature is a communal creation that exists in multiple versions, continually reshaped by the imaginative contributions of storytellers and the interpretive engagement of audiences.

Within the field of folkloristics, folk literature is therefore regarded as a dynamic cultural and artistic manifestation of collective consciousness—a living and evolving oral tradition that preserves and communicates a community’s cultural memory, social values, and identity through the enduring practice of storytelling and verbal artistry.

In the context of Mizo folk literature, folk narratives often incorporate elements of humour to express social truths, critique human behaviour, and strengthen communal relationships. The humorous aspects found in Mizo folktales, folksongs, myths, proverbs, and phrases function as instruments of social commentary, employing satire and irony to reflect the realities of everyday life. Through laughter, exaggeration, and playful language, these narratives unveil the moral and cultural fabric of Mizo society, transforming humour into a powerful medium of instruction, reflection, and cohesion. Hence, humour within Mizo folk narratives serves as a vital narrative strategy that sustains the oral tradition while reinforcing collective identity and cultural continuity.

1. Humour in Folksong

Dr. Lalruanga identifies fifteen categories of Mizo folksongs, namely: (1) *Thuthmun zai* (which means song sung while sitting), (2) *Hlado leh bawhhla* (war chants and hunting songs), (3) *Naupang hla* (children's songs), (4) *Rimawi hlate* (musical instruments songs), (5) *Thiam hla leh indawina hlate* (songs of invocation and incantation), (6) *Chawngchen zai* (feast songs), (7) *Chai hla* (festival songs), (8) *Salu lam hla* (Songs celebrating the animals hunted and killed by great and brave warriors) (9) *Mimal hming chawi zaite* (songs praising individuals), (10) *Hnam hming chawi zaite* (songs praising clans or tribes), (11) *Thil chi hrang hming chawi zaite* (songs named after objects), (12) *Ram leh khaw hming chawi zaite* (songs named after places or villages), (13) *Indo leh inrun zaite* (songs about conflict and reconciliation), (14) *Nungcha hming chawi zaite* (songs named after living beings), and (15) *Intukna hlate* (satirical songs) (*Mizo Rochun Hlaril...* 7).

Among these various types of folksongs, satirical elements appear quite frequently. Hence, much of the humour found in Mizo folksongs can be considered a form of satire. As Dr. Lalruanga observes, “Mizo Rochun Hlarilah hian satire-in hma a hruai a, satire bawkin hnung a dawl leh tlat mai hi a ni” (70) [“In Mizo folksongs, satire played a leading role and also appeared later as one of the concluding forms”; my trans.].

In the Mizo tradition of folk narratives, the story of *Thlanrawkpa Khuangchawi* contains notable elements of satire. According to R.L. Thanmawia, this narrative may be regarded as the earliest example of satire in Mizo folksongs (*Mizo Hla Hlui* 685). In this narrative, the Bamboo Rat, out of envy toward the Berlmys, attempted to adorn itself with flowers. However, the bamboo rat's appearance was not suitable for such decoration, leading the other animals to mock it in the following satirical verse: “Thlanrawkpa khuangchawi ni-in e,/Buipuiin pangpar beh a;/Mawina nei lo, thatna nei lo, su bui bui,” [“On the day of *Thlanrawkpa Khuangchawi*/The Bamboo Rat adorned itself with flowers;/Lacking beauty and grace, it limped awkwardly along”; my trans.].

This concise episode illustrates that satire was developed early in Mizo folk literature, showcasing the populace's sharp sense of humour and their capacity to mock vanity and pretension through playful derision.

Satire in Mizo folksongs can be broadly categorised into four types: personal satire, political satire, social satire, and religious satire. These forms vary in tone and purpose, but they together illustrate the wide range of humour present in Mizo oral literature. The following discussion will briefly examine each of these categories, beginning with personal satire.

(a) Personal Satire

Personal satire appears to be the most common and prevalent type of satire found in Mizo folksongs. In the Mizo folk narrative *Lalruanga*, for instance, we uncover several *indawina hla* (incantation songs) that contain elements of personal satire. Similarly, certain invocation songs also exhibit satirical undertones. As Dr Lalruanga explains, “Mi tu emaw, miin an dawí avanga damlo nia an hriat chuan dawí thiltihtheihna (power) kha hneh turin inthawina... an hmang ðhin a, chutah pawh chuan dawí suttu puithiamin a thiam hla chu *satire* ze diktak kha a ni.” (71) [“When a person believes that he or she has fallen ill due to witchcraft, incantations are recited to overcome the evil power. Some of these chants, especially those performed by skilled priests, contain sharp elements of satire”; my trans.].

In addition, *Bawhhla* and *Hlado* (war chants and hunting songs) often include aspects of personal satire, usually directed at an opponent or rival. Such songs may express boastfulness about one’s own bravery or ridicule of others’ failures and weaknesses. Although the original composers of these songs are not always known, their tone and lyrical structure reveal elements of satire.

Moreover, the story of Lalvunga and Lianchia, two handsome young men from Farzawl village, provides another well-known example of personal satire. According to Hrangðhiauva and Lalchungnunga, “Lalvunga leh Lianchia hi hmanlai mi hmingthang leh lar berte zinga mi an ni a. Kum zabi 18-na chawhma lam vel laia mi an ni,” (*Mizo Chanchin* 101) [“Lalvunga and Lianchia were among the most well-known and admired young men of their time. They lived around the mid-eighteenth century”; my trans.]. Their rivalry, rooted in competition over physical beauty and romantic success, gave rise to many satirical songs and anecdotes mocking each other’s vanity and pride.

Later examples of personal satire in Mizo folksongs include those involving Awithangpa (Hmarlutvunga) and Diriallova (Dokhara). According to Dr Lalruanga, they are said to have composed around thirty satirical songs (73). Their satire often revolves around romantic jealousy, personal pride, and social reputation, mocking each other's luck in love and popularity. They were both skilled and creative composers, and their rivalry produced several humorous exchanges. One of the best-known examples of Awithangpa's satire goes as follows: "Awithangpa van hnuai than hi/Puan ang thler theih chang se, Diriallo val/Tlem tein sem ve ila, a va lawm dawn em, a nui ngei ang," (75) ["If Awithangpa's fame could be divided like a piece of cloth/I would give a small share to Diriallo;/He would be so delighted that he would smile with joy"; my trans.].

This short verse exemplifies the witty and playful nature of personal satire in Mizo folksongs. It demonstrates how rivalry, self-praise, and mockery were expressed humorously through poetic creativity, reflecting the Mizo community's appreciation of wit, language, and laughter as part of social interaction.

(b) Political satire

Historically, the Mizos operated under a chieftaincy system, wherein each village was administered by its chief. The chiefs and their villages frequently engaged in conflict, with rivalries often articulated through satirical songs. In these songs, the Mizos employ wit and humour to deride their adversaries or rival chiefs. Similar to personal satire, political satire in Mizo folksongs generally emerged from rivalry among powerful chiefs or from the pride and envy that prevailed among them.

One of the earliest known examples of political satire in Mizo history is believed to have originated from a conflict between Southern Chiefs and Northern Chiefs named *Chhim and Hmar Indo*. According to *Mizo History Kamkeuna*,

A lo chhuah chhan chu Vuttaia leh Lalpuithanga Buanhmun kai an inchuh vang a ni. A bulpui ber chu Vuttaia leh Lalpuithanga te'n Buanhmun an inchuh vang a ni. Vuttaia'n Buanhmunah bâwk a khawh a, Lalpuithanga'n a kai khalh a, Vuttaia a kai lut ve ta a, a tawpah Lalpuithanga chu a inhnu khniam leh ta a, Chengte-ah a let leh ta a. Chuta a let leh chu hlain:

"Buanhmun pai ang pawm tawh hnu,

Chengte-ah lam ang let e,
 Lalpuithang lema” an ti zui ta a. (Lalhluna 37)

[“The origin of this conflict can be traced to a dispute between Vuttaia and Lalpuithanga over the ownership of Buanhmun. The central issue was that both Vuttaia and Lalpuithanga claimed Buanhmun as their territory. Vuttaia had prepared Buanhmun and temporarily settled there. However, before he could permanently migrate and establish his village, Lalpuithanga occupied the place first. Vuttaia then reclaimed Buanhmun by force, causing Lalpuithanga to retreat and return to his former village, Chengte. Upon his return to Chengte, the people of Vuttaia mockingly sang: After taking Buanhmun,/He retreated to Chengte;/Lalpuithanga, the trifling one”; my trans.].

This short song serves as an early instance of political satire in Mizo oral tradition. It ridicules the defeated chief, Lalpuithanga, and his followers, reflecting how humour and ridicule were used as tools of political expression and communal commentary in traditional Mizo society.

Satire played a significant role during the conflict known as *Chhak leh Thlang Indo*, which was between the Eastern Chiefs and the Western Chiefs. Among the western chiefs, Buangtheuva, the eastern chief, became the target of a popular satirical verse composed by the Eastern group: “Piahah tawlh rawh, Lalbuanga,/Kaichhungpa’n a man ang che,/Pipu ro thil tian dar i ui chuanin” (Lalruanga 77) [“Move aside, Lalbuanga,/Kaichhungpa may capture you;/If you still desire your ancestors’ treasures”; my trans.]

Here, “Lalbuanga” is a nickname used to mock Buangtheuva, while “Kaichhungpa” (means ‘the father of Kaichhunga’) refers to his rival. The verse humorously taunts Buangtheuva, warning him to step aside lest his rival seize both him and the wealth inherited from his ancestors. This short composition demonstrates how political rivalry among chiefs in traditional Mizo society often gave rise to satirical songs, which served both as expressions of humour and as subtle instruments for social and political commentary.

Apart from these, there were also numerous lesser-known political satirical songs composed between villages and chiefs. Since conflicts and rivalries among villages and chiefs occurred frequently, such satires served as an important medium of expression and commentary on their mutual hostilities.

(c) Social satire

Songs expressing dissatisfaction with social conditions, village administration, or leadership often take the form of social satire. In Mizo folksongs, criticism of authority figures or discontent with social governance is one of the most expressive and recurring themes. Notable examples of social satire can be found in *Darpawngi Zai* (songs of Darpawngi) and *Laltheri Zai*, both of which reflect the protest of individuals—particularly women—against injustice and unfair treatment within their communities.

The story of Darpawngi is among the best-known examples. When she was living in Thentlang village, she had a dispute with the chief's council of elders, known as *lal upa* (among them, the most senior and influential member was called the *upa min* or *lal upa min*). During this period, Darpawngi and the *lal upa min* had a disagreement over the ownership of a kid of a goat. To resolve the dispute, the queen and her council decided, "Tie up both goats—the mother belonging to Darpawngi and the mother belonging to the *upa min*—in the open field. We will release the kid in the same field, and whichever goat the kid recognizes and suckles will prove to be its true mother." Following this instruction, both parties did as they were told. The kid ran to Darpawngi's goat and began to suckle its milk, clearly proving that it was her goat's offspring.

However, the council, in an act of bias and injustice, awarded the kid to the *upa min* instead. Later, the *upa min*, finding the goat troublesome to keep, slaughtered it for meat. That night, Darpawngi's mother goat cried out mournfully, wandering around and bleating in grief for her lost kid. Hearing this, Darpawngi felt deep pity and sorrow for the animal, and in her pain and protest, she composed a satirical song against the queen's partial judgment and the injustice of the rulers (Zawla 352–53).

Her *thinrim zai* (song of resentment) runs as follows:

Chhimtlang ka liam dawn e,
 Chhimtlang ka liam dawn e,
 Khuaza nghinnu'n biahthu tûm thing;
 Laiah a tan lo ve.

["I will go to the southern land,
 I will go to the southern land;
 The Queen judgement leans to one side,
 She no longer judges with fairness"; my trans.].

Darpawngi also composed other satirical songs expressing her dissatisfaction with the queen's rule and the injustices she faced under her authority.

Apart from Darpawngi, *Laltheri Zai*, (Laltheri is the daughter of the Sailo chief Lalsavunga) can also be regarded as examples of social satire. Laltheri fell in love with a commoner named Chalthanga, a relationship that defied the strict social hierarchy of the time. Tragically, when Laltheri became pregnant with Chalthanga's child, her brothers, fearing dishonour, killed Chalthanga. Grief-stricken and heartbroken, Laltheri expressed her sorrow and protest through several songs (326–27). One of her well-known songs runs as follows: "Bawmzo ral mah dar anga chhai ngam lo,/Belzu kungah ka di Chhawngthang chawng sai ang sat e" ["While they fear to strike down the enemy,/They have hacked to death my beloved Chalthanga with their dao"; my trans.].

This poignant song exposes the cruelty and hypocrisy within the patriarchal code of honour, where bravery is glorified in warfare but injustice is tolerated within the family. Through her lament, Laltheri transforms her personal tragedy into a form of social satire, revealing the incongruity between the moral ideals of courage and the inhumanity of her kin's actions.

(d) Religious satire

Among the religious satires found in Mizo folksongs, notable examples include *Chalmar Zai* and *Ramthar Zai*, which emerged after the emergence of Christianity in Mizoram. The Mizos underwent a cultural transformation in their lifestyle and habits upon the introduction of Christianity. The new Christian converts refrained from drinking *zu* (the traditional rice beer), preferring instead to drink *thingpui* (tea). Those

who opposed the new faith or mocked the Christians composed satirical songs ridiculing this change in custom.

Mr. Chalmar, a teahouse owner from Cachar, became associated with this kind of song, and thus the term *Chalmar Zai* came to refer to songs mocking the Christians and their new practices (Lalruanga 81). One of the best-known *Chalmar Zai* runs as follows: “*Ṭinzu leh ṭinzu a dang mang e, Nangni ṭinzu luarbawn thingpui hnahtel ro, Tirhkoh Meibula’n a dût kuang kuang*” [“Your drink and ours are not the same; Yours is but the dry leaf of tea; *Tirhkoh Meibula* sips his brew with strange delight”; my trans.].

In this satirical song, *ṭinzu* refers to the traditional rice beer brewed by the Mizos, while *thingpui* denotes tea, which Christians adopted as a substitute beverage. *Tirhkoh Meibula*—a name referring to an early Christian evangelist—is humorously mocked for his unfamiliar and modest drinking habit. The song humorously contrasts the old Mizo tradition of drinking *zu* with the new Christian practice of drinking tea, revealing the tension between traditional and Christian values. Thus, *Chalmar Zai* represents one of the earliest forms of religious satire in Mizo folklore, using humour and irony to portray the cultural transition and conflict between old customs and new beliefs during the early Christianization of Mizoram.

In addition to *Chalmar Zai*, another example of religious satire in Mizo folksongs is found in *Ramthar Zai*. This type of song emerged after the establishment of the Church in Mizoram. Composed by those who disliked the new Christian way of life, these songs mocked the Church and the Christians’ rejection of traditional Mizo customs, folk songs, and cultural practices. Such compositions served as a form of ridicule and resistance against the rapid changes brought about by the new religion (82).

The composers of *Ramthar Zai* were believed to be members of the *Tlira Pawl* and the *Khuangtuaha Pawl*, although the exact identities of the authors remain unknown. Despite their satirical intent, the songs are often noted for their melodic beauty and poetic quality, making them memorable examples of early Mizo religious satire.

2. Humour in Folk Narrative

(a) Myth

Humour is not very common in Mizo myths, yet in the narrative of *Thlanrawkpa Khuangchawi*, several humorous episodes do appear. According to R.L. Thanmawia, *Thlanrawkpa*—one of the earliest beings to emerge between humans and spirits—was a handsome, courageous, and powerful young man (*Mizo Hnahthlak...* 63). During his *Khuangchawi* (grand feast), he summoned all kinds of people and animals. It was during this celebration that the names of various animals were said to have originated, and the humorous manner in which these names were assigned forms an important part of the story. For example, when the *zawhte* (cat) walked along a thin branch of a tree, the people exclaimed, “Oh, the branch it walks on is so small!” Thus, they named the animal *zawhte*. Literally, the Mizo word *zawhte* is formed from *zawh* (to walk or traverse, especially on a narrow path or branch) and *tê* (small), meaning “one who walks on small branches.”

Likewise, various animals, even those that normally do not associate with one another, are said to have gathered during *Thlanrawkpa Khuangchawi*. *Sakhi* (barking deer) and *sakuh* (porcupine)—who do not ordinarily meet—were made to perform together. They jumped and danced awkwardly, producing a rhythmic sound: “Khi kuh, khi kuh, kuh khi kuh...” In this context, the rhythmic sound “khi kuh, khi kuh, kuh khi kuh...” is formed by combining the names of the *sakhi* (barking deer) and the *sakuh* (porcupine). The two animals sang together by playfully mixing their names, and they were delighted with how well the sounds matched. Believing it to be harmonious, they attempted to perform a dance for the *thingdim* ritual—one of the events held during the *Khuangchawi*. Soon, other animals joined them, adding their own names into the song, and together they sang and danced with great joy. (66-67). These playful episodes reveal how humour naturally emerged in the interaction of different animals during the *Khuangchawi*. In addition, the satire involving *Buipui* (bamboo rat)—already discussed in Mizo folksongs—also belongs to the narrative cycle of *Thlanrawkpa Khuangchawi*.

(b) Folktales

William R. Bascom defines folktales as “prose narratives which are regarded as fiction.” He further explains, “They are not considered as dogma or history; they may or may not have happened, and they are not to be taken seriously.... Folktales may be set in any time and any place, and in this sense they are almost timeless and placeless” (97). Bascom also identifies several sub-types of folktales, including human tales, animal tales, trickster tales, tall tales, dilemma tales, formulistic tales, *and* moral tales and fables. Following Bascom’s classification, we can observe that Mizoram possesses a rich corpus of folktales, many of which contain abundant elements of humour.

One Mizo folktale that contains clear elements of humour is the story of *Chawngvungi leh Sawngkhara*. Chawngvungi is portrayed as a remarkably beautiful young woman of good character and high social standing, while Sawngkhara—who often visited their home—was also known for his attractiveness. However, after he applied *zawlaidi* (a love potion) to Chawngvungi, she immediately fell in love with him. Chawngvungi’s mother disliked Sawngkhara intensely, yet he later applied *zawlaidi* to her as well, causing her to develop a sudden and exaggerated fondness for him. From then on, she waited eagerly for his visits. Whenever Sawngkhara came to their house, Chawngvungi’s mother would instruct her daughter to open the door quickly. Chawngvungi would rush to obey, and the moment she flung the door open, it made a loud “*rik rawk*”—the distinctive creaking sound of their door (Thanmawia 1-5). The humour arises from the exaggerated eagerness of both mother and daughter, whose behaviour changes completely because of *zawlaidi*. The repeated, dramatic “*rik rawk*” of the quickly opened door becomes a comic signal of their excitement, adding a playful and rhythmic humour to the folktale.

The Mizos possess a rich corpus of trickster tales, the most prominent of which are the stories of Chhura. Chhura appears in a wide range of narratives, but one of the best-known episodes concerns his visit to the village of *Mawngping* (literally “closed anus,” referring to people whose anuses have no opening). When Chhura arrived in the village, he went to relieve himself, and the villagers were astonished to see excrement emerge normally from his body, for they themselves lacked an anal opening. Amused by their amazement, Chhura boasted, “When we are born, our parents pierce our anus with an iron skewer; that is why we can defecate so easily.” Believing him, the

villagers begged, “Please pierce our children’s anus as well.” Chhura agreed, but in doing so, he killed all the young children of the village. Enraged, the people of *Mawngping* attempted to catch Chhura and hunted him relentlessly. This tale embodies a classic trickster pattern, employing exaggeration, absurdity, and dark humour.

Another trickster narrative follows Chhura’s escape. As the fathers of *Mawngping* pursued him, Chhura tricked them again, leading to their deaths. After this, he fled the village. When the wives of the villagers later came searching for their husbands, Chhura deceived them as well and sent them away from the village. While they were gone, he extinguished all the household fires in the village, leaving only his own burning. Upon their return, the women asked Chhura to give them fire. He replied, “If you desire intimacy with me, I will give it to you,” and thus each woman obtained fire only after complying with his demand (*Chhura Thawnthu* 100). In his collection *Chhura Thawnthu*, R.L. Thanmawia records eight episodes related specifically to Chhura’s trickery in the village of Mawngping.

In addition to these human trickster episodes, Mizo folktales include numerous animal trickster stories, in which animals deceive one another or use various objects and materials to outwit their rivals. These narratives, rich in humour and creativity, reveal the depth and diversity of the Mizo folk imagination.

(c) Legend

According to Britannica, a legend is defined as:

...a traditional story or group of stories told about a particular person or place. Formerly the term legend meant a tale about a saint. Legends resemble folktales in content; they may include supernatural beings, elements of mythology, or explanations of natural phenomena, but they are associated with a particular locality or person and are told as a matter of history. (Britannica Editors)

Dr. Lalruanga, a noted scholar on Mizo folklore, classifies Mizo legends into three main categories: (1) *Pathian thil siam mak tak leh ropui legend, nungchang leh thil dang* (marvellous beings and objects) (2) *Hmun* legend (legend of places) and, (3) *mi hmingthang emaw, mihring* legend (legend of persons) (*Mizo Thawnthu...* 15–18). Among these categories, legends about individuals (legends of persons) appear to

exhibit the strongest sense of humour, though legends associated with places also sometimes convey humorous undertones.

Among the personal legends in Mizo folktales, Chhura stands out as the most prominent character associated with humour. His frequent quarrels with his brother Naa, a range of popular anecdotes, and his often absurd actions make him a central figure of comic relief in Mizo oral tradition. One particularly amusing story involves Chhura's comical misunderstanding while attempting to prepare lunch for his wife.

Before heading to the rice field, Chhura's wife instructed him, "When the sunlight reaches the fork of the banyan tree, start cooking the rice." Unfortunately, Chhura failed to grasp her meaning. Later in the day, when the sunlight touched the fork of the tree, he attempted to follow her instructions—but in a very literal and confused manner. He tried to set up a cooking area beneath the banyan tree by placing a large, tightly woven rice basket (*empai*) on the ground and stacking the rice pot, firewood, and water container on top of it. However, the entire setup repeatedly collapsed, leaving Chhura increasingly flustered and frustrated (*Mizo Thurochun* 303). This tale is rich in humour and highlights Chhura's combination of simple-mindedness and exaggerated logic—traits that have made him an enduring symbol of comic folly in Mizo storytelling.

In addition to the various tales of Chhura, Mizo legends about notable individuals are often marked by vivid exaggeration (hyperbole) in their portrayal of character and action. A prime example is the story of *Mualzavata*, whose name literally means "one who clears jhum across a hundred hills." His feats of strength and endurance are described with extreme hyperbole. Not only is he said to have cleared a hundred hills, but in one tale, while resting in the jungle, he lay down beneath the forest canopy with his arm extended across a ravine. An elderly woman, out gathering firewood, mistook his outstretched arm for a fallen tree and attempted to split it with an axe. In another exaggerated tale, when something irritated his eye, villagers attempted to remove it—only to pull out water containers, a chicken coop, and other large household items. Such exaggerated imagery underscores the larger-than-life nature of his character.

Mualzavata was not the only figure celebrated in such epic terms. His companions—*Lamlira*, *Phawlawngzamngira*, *Pangpuiehlthliaka*, and *Saikhaia*—were also portrayed as men of tremendous strength. In one narrative, they brought a massive log to a widow's house. When Phawlawngzamngira set down his staff, the entire house collapsed. In response, they rebuilt it: Pangpuiehlthliaka uprooted a massive tree, and the group constructed a new dwelling (Lallianzuala 51–54). These tales, filled with comic exaggeration, serve both to emphasize physical prowess and to inject humour into the narrative.

Other legendary figures remembered through humorous hyperbole include *Buizova* (a masterful singer), *Samdala* (notorious for his laziness), *Lianchia* (renowned for his beauty), *Pawngvina* (noted for his temper), *Pi Hmuaki* (a revered female composer), *Saichawnkhupa* (remembered for his unattractiveness), and *Aihniara* (celebrated for his agility and quickness). Stories about these individuals blend exaggerated traits with playful storytelling, reflecting the wit and creative imagination found in Mizo oral traditions.

Humour can also be found in Mizo legends associated with places, and among these, the legend of *Tualte Vanglai* stands out as one of the most prominent. Tualte was a village ruled by the Sailo chief Vanhnuailiana, and due to either the prestige or exaggerated pride of the village, it became the subject of many humorous and hyperbolic sayings.

For example, it is said: “Tualte Vanglai chuan khaw dunga sava thlawk laite hi an au thla tawp thin” (Lalhruaitluangi et al. 87) [“In the days of *Tualte Vanglai*, when birds flew over the village, people shouted and the birds dropped dead”; my trans.] — a clearly exaggerated metaphor meant to express the fierce or powerful nature of the villagers. Another saying goes: “Tualte Vanglai chuan fur chhe lai berah pawh, feh kal hmasate kal laia diak leh nal em em hi, a kal hnuhnungte thlen meuh chuan a lo vaivut hman vek tawh a, a khu ram ram thei” (87) [“During *Tualte Vanglai*'s time, even in the peak of the rainy season, those who left early for the fields walked through thick mud, while those who followed walked on dry dust”; my trans.]. This again is an example of extreme hyperbole, suggesting either the advanced development or exaggerated greatness of the village

Sayings about *Tualte Vanglai* have become so common and overused that they are now frequently employed as figurative speech or proverbs to express bravado or nostalgic exaggeration. Typically, any statement that begins with “In the days of *Tualte Vanglai*...” signals the telling of a hyperbolic or humorous tale. Similarly, the village of *Selesih Sangsarih* is also referenced through humorous and exaggerated anecdotes, used to describe its supposed grandeur or renown.

3. Humour in Folk Speech

Folk speech—often referred to by folklorists as folksay—is a broad category of verbal folklore that encompasses informal, creative, and expressive uses of language. Unlike more fixed forms of folklore like songs or tales, folk speech includes a wide variety of oral expressions such as: (i) Riddles and conundrums (ii) Puns and wordplay (iii) Jokes of many kinds (iv) Sayings, proverbs, and proverbial similes (v) Slang and folk vocabulary (vi) Children’s rhymes and jingles (vii) Tongue twisters (viii) Word games. These elements of folk speech are powerful tools for communication. They are often humorous, playful, and highly dynamic, adapting quickly to cultural and social changes. According to Pedersen, folk speech “is not an object like a folk song or tale but a generous category” of verbal folklore, marked by invention and oral creativity rather than preservation alone (188-89). Pedersen argues that folk speech functions as both a personal and national expression of feelings, completing the communicative act by adding emotional nuance, identity, and humour beyond the conveyance of simple information.

(a) Riddles and conundrums

According to Roger D. Abrahams and Alan Dundes, “It is tempting to restrict a survey of riddles to ‘true riddles,’ that is, enigmatic questions in the form of descriptions whose referent must be guessed” (130). E. Martin Pedersen likewise notes that “riddles frequently contain comparisons between objects or animation of inanimate objects” (190). He further explains that conundrums are “similar to punning riddles but they usually directly compare two objects” (191). These definitions highlight how riddles and conundrums serve as creative tools for mental stimulation, amusement, and imaginative reasoning.

The Mizos have a rich tradition of riddles that showcase wit, metaphor, and linguistic creativity. Rochharzela has compiled an extensive collection of these riddles, a few of which are presented below:

(i) A chang changa mit nei eng nge? (132) [“What has eyes at each joint?”; my trans]

Answer: *Mau* (bamboo)

Explanation: Bamboo has *chang* (nodes) and *mit* (sheath scars), which in Mizo also means “eye.” The riddle plays on this dual meaning to evoke a humorous and imaginative image.

(ii) Mi zawng zawng u eng nge? (133) [“Who is everyone’s elder?”; my trans.]

Answer: *Uṭawk* or *Uchang* (toad)

Explanation: In Mizo, “U” is a respectful prefix used for addressing elders. Since the Mizo words for toad begin with “U,” the toad is humorously labeled as everyone’s elder.

(iii) A têt laia dawih deuh, a puitlin hnua huai deuh (133) [“Craven in youth, bold in maturity—what is it?”; my trans.]

Answer: *Hmarcha* (chili)

Explanation: Young chilies are mild (*dawih* double meaning is timid/bland and craven), while mature chilies become hot and pungent (*huai* double meaning is hot/pungent and bold). The riddle humorously captures this transformation using figurative language.

(iv) Lui hnar aṭangin kawi eng emaw zat a kal hnuin, sakhiin lui mawngah tui a in a, a dak vak a, a hnar a hmu leh si—engtin nge a nih theih? (139) [“A barking deer walks from the river’s source, winds its way downstream, drinks from the river, lifts its head, and sees the source again—how is this possible?”; my trans.]

Answer: *Ama hnar a hmu* (It sees its own nose).

Explanation: In Mizo, *hnar* refers both to a river’s source and to the nose. The riddle’s clever ambiguity hinges on this linguistic overlap.

Mizo folk speech also includes many conundrums, which often take the form of humorous comparisons. A notable example is:

Lukawlh leh vanram inanna eng nge? [“What is the similarity of bald man and heaven?”; my trans]

Answer: *Thenna a awm tawh lo* [“There is no parting in either”; my trans.].

Explanation: In Mizo metaphor, heaven is often described as a realm of unity without division or separated. Similarly, a bald man has no hair parting—creating a pun based on dual meanings of “parting.”

Riddles and conundrums continue to play a vibrant role in Mizo culture. They are especially enjoyed by children, serving as forms of entertainment that stimulate thought, encourage creativity, and provoke laughter. While not necessarily moralistic, they are rich in humour, wordplay, and cultural expression.

(b) Sayings, proverbs, and proverbial similes

Roger D. Abrahams writes:

Proverbs are short and witty traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings. Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and a strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play (119).

As Abrahams explains, proverbs primarily serve as moral instruction and guidance for right conduct in daily life.

Mizo proverbs function in much the same way, and many also contain elements of humour—particularly through the use of hyperbole, playful exaggeration, or commentary on absurdity and extreme behavior. A few illustrative examples are presented below.

(i) *A sai ngal deng tliak zawnga ṭawng ngai a ni lo ve* (Lalzeitluanga 49) [“They never speak in a way that could break an elephant’s shin”; my trans.].

Explanation: This proverb teaches the importance of politeness and restraint in speech. The image of breaking an elephant’s shin—arguably one of the strongest parts

of one of the largest land animals—is a humorous and hyperbolic way to warn against the use of harsh or hurtful language. It implies that words should not be so sharp or offensive that they metaphorically shatter even the strongest of beings. The exaggeration adds a touch of humour while reinforcing the moral lesson.

(ii) Duh loh nena khuangchawi ai chuan, duhtak nena bahra khur laih a nuam zawk (49) [“It is better to dig a yam pit with someone you love than to hold *khuangchawi* - a grand feast with someone you don’t”; my trans.]

Explanation: This proverb centers on love and companionship, especially in the context of marriage. In traditional Mizo society, a *khuangchawi* was a lavish feast held only by the wealthy, symbolizing joy and abundance. In contrast, *bahra khur laih* (digging a yam pit) reflects a time of hardship or famine—an act of survival. The saying humorously elevates the value of love and compatibility over wealth and status, suggesting that even the most difficult labor is preferable if done with a beloved, rather than enjoying riches in the company of someone unloved.

(iii) Hmeichhia leh uite chuan a chul nel peih apiang an nel mai (49) [“Women and puppies love those who treat them with gentle affection”; my trans.].

Explanation: This proverb reflects traditional Mizo views on emotional sensitivity, particularly regarding women. It implies that women, like young animals, respond best to gentle affection and care. Though culturally rooted, the comparison uses light humour and metaphor to convey a broader message about the importance of tenderness and emotional attentiveness in relationships.

There are also many sayings and proverbial similes in Mizo that carry a strong sense of humour. Below are some examples along with their explanations:

(i) Chil chhak phak (Saizawna 3) [“The distance of spit”; my trans.]

Explanation: This phrase humorously describes something extremely close. Since spitting only reaches a short distance, saying something is *chil chhak/pik phak* (as far as a spit) is an exaggerated way of emphasizing proximity. It’s a light and funny way of saying something is very nearby.

(ii) Ar chil zat (8) [“The number of a chicken’s spit”; my trans.].

Explanation: Used to refer to a very small quantity, this phrase relies on the image of how little a chicken can spit—if at all. It’s a playful exaggeration to indicate scarcity, and its absurdity adds to its humour.

(iii) Chawnsela van ek khum tum ang (Saizawna 24) [“Like Chawnsela trying to defecate on the sky”; my trans.].

This simile refers to someone whose harmful actions toward others ultimately backfire on themselves. The image it creates—of someone trying to poop toward the sky but soiling themselves instead—is both absurd and hilarious. It teaches a moral lesson through visual humour and exaggeration.

(iv) Mahni lu chung a meiling chhek khawm ang (31) [“Like stocking live embers on one’s own head”; my trans.].

This saying refers to self-destructive behavior. Placing burning embers on one’s head is clearly unbearable—and this simile illustrates how bad actions or decisions can lead to painful consequences. The humour lies in the exaggerated and vivid image of someone foolishly stacking hot coals on their own head, unable to bear the heat yet continuing to add more.

Sayings/phrases and proverbial similes are abundant in Mizo folk speech, and many of them are rich in humour. Due to their sheer number and variety, it is not possible to include or explain them all here. The examples and interpretations provided above reflect the general character and essence of these expressions. Mizo sayings and proverbial similes often feature hyperbole, absurdity, hilarity, and foolishness, making them some of the most humorous elements of Mizo folk speech.

(c) Tongue twisters

According to Jorgensen, a tongue twister is defined as “...traditional routines of speech play which may sometimes result in embarrassment, or a display of performance incompetence on the part of the person attempting to pronounce difficult sequences of words” (67). Based on this definition, tongue twisters are crafted with

phonetically similar and complex word sequences that challenge even skilled speakers. Their tightly packed sounds and repeated syllables make them prone to mispronunciation—often with humorous results. Many are intentionally structured to create confusion or even accidental slips that produce amusing or suggestive meanings.

In Mizo folk speech, tongue twisters are a vibrant form of linguistic play, widely enjoyed across generations. Below are several notable examples:

(i) Tlang pangah pangang panga a bet (Rochharzela 133) [“Five caterpillars cling to the side of a hill”; my trans.].

Explanation: This tongue twister is built around strong alliteration and repetition of the syllables *pangah*, *pangang*, and *panga*, making it very easy to mix up. Its rhythmic structure and near-identical syllables often result in humorous mispronunciations when spoken quickly.

(ii) Saw lai thing saw thli *ṭha* chhem thluk nge thli chhe chhem thluk? (134) [“Was the tree blown down by a good wind or a bad wind?”; my trans.].

Explanation: The phonetic closeness of *thli ṭha chhem thluk* and *thli chhe chhem thluk* makes it especially difficult to pronounce rapidly. The similarity between *ṭha* (good) and *chhe* (bad) within an otherwise identical phrase creates a verbal trap that invites tongue slips and listener amusement.

(iii) Sakawr hur hawiher lawi hur hawiher (134) [“The lustful horse neighs, the lustful buffalo bellows”; my trans.].

Explanation: This example showcases tonal and rhythmic challenges in Mizo speech. The repeated phrase *hur hawiher*—meaning “to neigh” or “to bellow with desire”—paired with similar animal names (*sakawr* for horse and *lawi* for buffalo), demands quick, precise articulation, which often ends in comical distortion.

(iv) Ka pi chhi duh, ka pu chhi duh (134) [“My grandmother wants sesame, my grandfather wants sesame”; my trans.].

Explanation: This tongue twister is particularly tricky due to the syllable *chhi*, a shortened form of *chhawhchhi* (sesame) used here to enhance rhythmic structure. When spoken rapidly, many speakers mistakenly say *chhu* instead of *chhi*, unintentionally turning the word into a slang reference for female genitalia. This phonetic slip, while unintended, introduces an element of risqué humour that is widely recognized in the cultural context and adds to the laughter the tongue twister generates.

These examples reflect the clever wordplay and oral inventiveness found in Mizo folk speech. Whether used for amusement, oral dexterity, or as part of social gatherings, tongue twisters offer a dynamic and often hilarious showcase of linguistic creativity.

Transitional Period (1894-1950)

The transitional period marks a turning point in Mizo cultural history with the introduction of writing and Christianity through British administration and missionary education in 1894. This shift gradually transformed oral forms into written literature, while also changing the tone and themes of humour. The influence of Christian morality softened traditional humour, which had sometimes included coarse or teasing expressions. Instead, humour began to appear in moral anecdotes, religious tracts, and school compositions, often used to illustrate ethical lessons or human folly. This period represents a cultural negotiation between traditional wit and new moral values. Though few humorous works were formally published, the seeds of literary humour were sown as Mizo writers began documenting folk narratives and composing short moral tales. The laughter of this era was modest but meaningful, reflecting both adaptation and preservation amid social transformation.

During this formative period of Mizo literature, writers who could be identified as humorists were exceedingly rare. This scarcity can be attributed to the nascent stage of Mizo written expression, as the practice of writing had only recently been introduced and the volume of literary production remained minimal. Nevertheless, subtle elements of humour can be discerned within the limited body of early writings. The majority of literary works produced during this time were religious in nature, reflecting the pervasive influence of the church and missionary education. Even the few instances of

humour that emerged were closely associated with ecclesiastical contexts, often serving didactic purposes aimed at promoting Christian values and moral instruction.

1. Poetry

During the Transitional Period, the earliest traces of humorous songs can be found in *intukna hla* (satirical songs) and *kaihlek hla* (comic or mocking songs). The term *intukna hla* refers to satirical songs, and in this period, we can identify examples of personal satire, religious satire, and political satire. Among the personal satires, the *Awithangpa Zai* stands out as one of the earliest and most prominent examples. *Awithangpa Zai* occupies a significant position bridging the Oral Literature Period and the Transitional Period, representing an important link between the two. As Thanpuii Pa (J. Malsawma) notes in *Thu leh Hla Chanchinbu*, “Hla inphual el nasa ber ni hiala an sawi thin chu Awithangpa leh Diriallova te an ni” (20) [“The ones most known for satirizing each other are Awithangpa and Diriallova”; my trans.]. Similarly, R.L. Thanmawia observes in *Lung Min Lentu* that “Awithangpa leh Diriallova intukna kha mi mal inbeihnaah chuan a hmingthang ber leh sei ber a ni ang” (96) [“The satirical exchanges between Awithangpa and Diriallova are likely the most well-known and enduring examples of personal satire”; my trans.].

Religious satire during this period often took the form of songs composed by early Mizo Christians to ridicule or criticize those who had not yet embraced Christianity. One such song humorously mocks the small group of believers, often referred to as the *buhfaiṭham* (handful of church): “Immanuela a ṭam em ni?/Chawlhni tlaia in buhṭham khawn zozai hi,/Ei seng hian kei zawng ka ring nem le! (Thanmawia 697) [“Is Immanuela so hungry?/On the Sunday, you collect piles of rice,/I doubt he could consume them all”; my trans.].

Political satire emerged after the formation of the first political party, the *Mizo Union*, on April 9, 1946. Following its establishment, tensions grew between the *Mizo Union* and the Mizo chiefs. During this conflict, Mizo Union supporters composed songs that ridiculed the chiefs, as reflected in the following lines:

Bai thak arva, artui khawn leh,
Lal hnung zui reng ka ning tawh;
Kawltu chawi lai daltu a ni,
Sazai lian pui pui a ni (*Mizo Hla Hlui* 699)

[“After gathering chicken curry and eggs,
I grow tired of following the Chief;
He obstructs our labor in the jhum fields,
His command is a great burden to bear”; my trans.].

These examples from the Transitional Period demonstrate how humour and satire began to take a structured literary form in Mizo culture, using song as a vehicle for social criticism, religious commentary, and political expression.

Kaihlek hla refers to modified versions of existing Christian hymns in which only the words were altered, while the original melody or tune was retained. These songs often expressed themes of love and affection between young men and women, using familiar church melodies in a secular or playful way. According to J. Liankhuma, such songs began to appear around the early 1920s (36). He explains the origin of *Kaihlek hla* as follows:

Kaihlek zai hi chu Zoṭawnga Kohhran hla kan neih hnua chhuak a ni. Kaihlek tih hming a putna chhan tak pawh Kohhran hla thluk ringa nula/tlangval lunglen hla an siam kha a ni. Hla thluk awm sa ringa miin hla a phuah reng reng chu kaihlek a ni chuang lo. Kristian hla ṭheuh ṭheuh hla thluk awm sa ringa miin a phuah chuan kaihlek a ni lo. ...Kohhran hla thluk ringa Lengzem hla ang chi siam hi ‘Kaihlek’ hla kan tih chu a ni. (35)

(“*Kaihlek zai* emerged after the introduction of Mizo Christian hymns. The term *kaihlek* is used because young men and women composed songs of love and longing using the melodies of existing church hymns. However, not every song created using an existing tune can be called *kaihlek*. Similarly, a Christian hymn composed with a previously used Christian tune is not considered *kaihlek*. Only love songs that adopt the melodies of existing Christian hymns are what we call *Kaihlek hla*”; my trans.).

Although *Kaihlek hla* are not explicitly comic songs, they inherently possess a humorous quality arising from the playful modification of sacred Christian hymns into secular love songs. The humour in *Kaihlek hla* emerges from the incongruity between the solemn, devotional tone of the original hymn and the lighthearted, romantic themes introduced through new lyrics. This unexpected blending of the sacred and the secular

creates a subtle yet effective comic tension, producing amusement without overt ridicule.

For instance, when a hymn originally expressing deep spiritual devotion—such as “Kulhpui bulah ka awm reng a, ni eng lo chhuak nghakin” [“I dwell beside the great castle, waiting for the light to rise”; my trans.] is reworded into a romantic declaration like “Belpui bulah ka awm reng a, haileng no khat nghakin” (Liankhuma 35) [“I stay beside the pot of liquor, longing for just one cup”; my trans.], the shift in meaning is both surprising and amusing. The humour arises not from disrespect but from creative reinterpretation, reflecting how early Mizo singers negotiated between religious influence and human emotion.

In this way, *Kaihlek hla* demonstrate a mild form of satirical humour grounded in incongruity theory, where laughter stems from the mismatch between expectation (sacred devotion) and expression (earthly affection). They reveal the Mizo community’s growing ability to use humour as a form of cultural adaptation and linguistic playfulness, turning reverence into relatable everyday emotion.

Apart from the folksongs and *Kaihlek zai*, during this period some individuals from the Lunglei area, such as Lalmama and Chhuana, also composed humorous songs. In 1932, the *Serkawn Concert* began to be held regularly at Serkawn. Concerning this event, R. Raltawna writes: “Mizoram Chhimbiala lehkha zirna lo inñanna hmunpui Serkawn Boys’ School chuan kum 1932 atang khan Concert hi a lo buatsaih tan a. Kum hnih khat emaw chu a han kaihlak rih a. Mahse, 1946 thleng khan August thla tawp leh September thla tir inkar vel hian kum tin concert ropui tak a buatsaih thin a ni,” (17a) [“Serkawn Boys’ School, which became the main centre for the promotion of Mizo literature and culture, started organizing the concert from the year 1932. Although it was occasionally discontinued for a year or so, until 1946 a grand concert was held annually, usually between the end of August and the beginning of September”; my trans.].

The songs performed during these concerts were composed and sung by their teachers such as Lalmama, Chhuana, Liandala, Darchhunga, Hlunthuama, Zadala, Selthuama, Saizawna, Hanga, and Kara (13a). Among them, Chhuana composed “Chhura Rawngbawl,” “Van Uang Thlawn,” “Chhura leh Nahaia,” “Chhura Lênrual,” and “Chhura Hraichawi” (the composer is unknown, though it is believed to have been composed by Chhuana). Lalmama composed “Chhura Sangha Vua,” “Valdawng

Thlawna,” and “Thaibawih Hla”; Hlunṭhuama composed “Chhura Aium” and “Turni leh Virthli”; while Liandala composed “Chhura Lêngui” and “Chung Muvanlai” (composer unknown). These songs vividly reflected elements of humour and wit, which appealed greatly to the audience.

Notably, the songs composed by Lalmama gained particular recognition. His first composition, “Thaibawih Hla,” was written in 1932. In 1935, he composed “Chhura Sangha Vua” and another humorous piece titled “Val Dawng Thlawna.” These songs became very popular during his time and were said to have been widely known even in Aizawl. It is recorded that when he visited Aizawl, people already recognized him and greeted him as “Pu Lalmama, Chhurbura hla phuahtu” (*Serkawn Lalmama* 97) [“Pu Lalmama, the composer of Chhurbura’s songs”; my trans.].

2. Prose

Since the creation of the Mizo alphabet *A, AW, B* in 1894 by Rev. J. H. Lorrain (Pu Buanga) and Rev. F. W. Savidge (Sap Upa) of the Arthington Mission, the Mizo language entered a new literary era. Before this development, the Mizo people depended entirely on oral traditions to transmit their collective knowledge and cultural expressions. The two missionaries reduced the Mizo language to writing using the Roman script based on the Hunterian system of orthography. Their alphabet, consisting of twenty-eight letters, was the first systematic attempt to represent every sound of the language accurately, and it became the foundation for all subsequent Mizo writings (Khangte 6–7).

Following the invention of this alphabet, the first known Mizo journal, *Mizo Chanchin Laishuih*, was published in 1898, most likely in July. It was a handwritten, cyclostyled tabloid that contained local news, folktales, and government notices addressed to various village chiefs. Unfortunately, this early publication is no longer extant (9).

The second Mizo periodical, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, appeared in November 1902, published by J. Shakespear, then Superintendent of the Lushai Hills. It was a monthly journal featuring contributions from the first literate Mizos—mainly three chiefs who were highly respected in their communities (9). Unlike the first journal, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu* remains accessible today and provides

valuable insights into early Mizo writings, including the emergence of humour and social commentary in written form.

In the October 1906 issue of *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu*, two students of Serkawn Zosap School, Rohmingliana and Khawnghinga, contributed a short story titled “Sum leh Khuang Thawn Thu” [“The Story of the Wooden Mortar and the Drum”; my trans.]. The story is primarily moralistic in nature but contains elements of humour. It presents a dialogue between a *sum* (wooden mortar) and a *khuang* (drum). The wooden mortar laments its unfortunate condition compared to others, while the drum responds sympathetically, explaining that its own situation is not much better, and in fact, the mortar’s condition may be preferable. In the end, the wooden mortar remains silent, seemingly accepting its fate (144-145).

The moral of the story suggests that human beings should learn to be content with their own circumstances, as each condition has its own value and purpose. Although not written as a humorous piece, the exchange between the wooden mortar and the drum carries a subtle sense of humour and irony, as their personified conversation reveals unexpected wit and playful contrast between their situations.

Rohmingliana made significant literary contributions to *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Lehkhabu* during the early twentieth century. In the September 1907 issue, he published a piece titled “Lengtūl Zahawmte” [“The Respected Singles”; my trans.], followed by another work, “Ṭhangthara leh Ṭhanghluia Inchhanna Thu” [“The Conversation between the Modern Man and the Old Man”; my trans.], in the April 1908 issue of the same journal. The latter work, in particular, contains elements of humour expressed through witty dialogue and social observation. Rohmingliana’s repeated contributions to the journal mark him as one of the early Mizo writers who integrated humour into prose writing. His works are of considerable importance in tracing the emergence and development of humorous writing in Mizo literature, as they reveal how early writers employed satire and conversational wit to reflect social attitudes and generational contrasts.

A notable example of early humorous expression in written Mizo literature appears in the March 1909 issue of *Chan Chin Bu*, which features a collection of eight riddles contributed by an anonymous writer identified only by the initial “E.” The

author's full name remains unknown, but the piece—reportedly adapted from *The Indian Witness*—demonstrates the emergence of didactic and humorous reasoning in early Mizo prose. The riddles, reproduced below, reveal the blend of wit, moral insight, and imaginative personification that characterized early twentieth-century Mizo humour:

1. Mi dang hnena-kawng hlatzia ka entir a, kei ka mit a del shi; ka beng a ngawng a, ka ṭawng thei lo va, nimah-shela ka chhiar thei (53) ["I stand by the road and show the way, though I am blind, deaf, and dumb, yet I can read"; my trans.].

Answer: Milestone

2. Keima hmu turin mite'n an ṭawngtai a, nimahshela ka lang veleh, an biru ṭhin (53) ["People pray for my coming, but when I appear, they hide"; my trans.].

Answer: Rain

3. Ke li leh hmul ka nei a, nimah-shela sa emaw sava emaw kani shi lo (53) ["I have four legs and a covering of fur, yet I am neither an animal nor a bird"; my trans.].

Answer: Bed

4. Lukhum khat hnuaia unau pali an awm a (53) ["Four siblings live together beneath one cap"; my trans.].

Answer: Table

5. Unau pahnih an tlan dun a, nimah shela an in-leh-khalh ngai lo (53) ["Two brothers run side by side but never overtake each other"; my trans.].

Answer: Wheels of a carriage

6. Chunglama letling-in engnge ke a kal thei? (53) ["What walks upside down upon the ceiling?"; my trans.].

Answer: Fly

7. Mi pahnih an awm dun a, mi zawng zawng an hmu a, nimah-shela an inhmu ngai lo va (53) ["Two living beings see everyone, yet they can never see each other"; my trans.].

Answer: Eyes

8. Chinghne rual an tlan a mi-in pakhat a kap a, engzatnge a la awm? (53) [“A pack of wolves runs, a man shoots one—how many remain?”; my trans.].

Answer: The dead one.

Although these riddles serve an instructive or moral purpose, their humour arises from incongruity and surprise—the unexpected logic connecting question and answer. The personification of inanimate objects such as the milestone or the bed, and the playful paradox in statements like “the eyes see everyone but not each other,” reveal a subtle yet deliberate sense of wit. As such, these riddles exemplify one of the earliest forms of written humour in Mizo literature, merging entertainment, moral reasoning, and linguistic creativity within the colonial and missionary-influenced literary landscape.

In October 1911, R. Dala and his colleagues published *Krista Tlangau*, the first Christian periodical in Mizo literature, which was later renamed *Kristian Tlangau* in 1914. The journal primarily emphasized Christian teachings and moral ethics, yet within its pages, a distinct undercurrent of humour can often be found. Many of the writings from the early years (1911–1919) blend moral instruction with wit, indicating that humour had already found a place in the emerging Christian literary tradition of the Mizos.

For example, the December 1911 issue (Book No. 3) featured Zakunga’s “Kristian Thufing Tawi” [“Christian Short Proverbs”; my trans.], which contained eleven witty proverbs. Similarly, in the September 1912 issue (Book No. 9), Thankunga contributed “Kristian Dan Thu” [“Christian Ethics”; my trans.], consisting of eleven witty sayings. The October 1912 issue (Book No. 10) presented Taishena’s “Kristian Thufing Tawi” with fourteen proverbs, while the December 1913 issue (Book No. 12) featured Pachhawna’s “Pathian Thu Nawi” [“God’s Short Words”; my trans.], containing twenty-one proverbs. Later, T. H. China contributed twelve witty sayings titled “Thu-fing Tawi” [“Short Proverbs”; my trans.] in the February 1914 issue (Book No. 29), and Lalpuia added three more in May 1915 (Book No. 44). These early writings reveal a distinctive sense of humour—sometimes witty, sometimes satirical—emerging within moral and religious discourse.

Beyond proverbs and witty maxims, *Krista Tlangau* also published short literary narratives with humorous undertones. A notable example appears in the

November 1912 issue (Book No. 11), where R. Dala, the editor himself, contributed a short humorous piece titled “Hla Sha Thiam Lo” [“Unexpert to Sing a Song”; my trans.]. The story portrays a devout Christian man whose sincere but unskilled singing produces an unintentionally comic effect. Dala writes:

Hman lai-in mi pakhat, Pathian ring fel tak a awm a, chu mi chuan mi te a pâwl duh lo va, a hrang-in a awm thin a. Pathian fak nan hla a sa thin a; hla chu a thiam mang lo va, a hla shak ri chu, Mizo in ‘Beraw-râwt rik ang’ an tih hi ani a, anih loh leh *thingzai-na a rang-va zai ang mai hi ani a*; a thiam lo kher e! A in kianga sava riak thin te pawh chu, an riak râu zo ta, a hla shak ri kha, a ngaih thlâk a nuam lo êm êm, a hlauh in an hlau ta mai a... (*Krista Tlangau* 176).

[“Once upon a time, the man who believed God, very good man has not companion with the others, has a own time. He sing a Christian song for the God praising, but he is not very sing expert. His voice/tone of sing is like chainshaw to saw/cut *rangva* (house roofed with corrugated iron). The birds stay in the night near his house also straying, his sound of singing is not unpleasant to hear and they fear...”; my trans.].

The passage humorously exaggerates the man’s lack of musical skill, comparing his voice to the harsh noise of a saw cutting through corrugated iron. This use of hyperbole creates a vivid comic image while maintaining a moral undertone, as the character’s pious devotion contrasts sharply with his dreadful singing. Through this, Dala demonstrates one of the earliest instances of humour within Mizo Christian writing, merging religious sentiment with playful exaggeration.

One of the most notable humorous writings in the early issues of *Kristian Tlangau* was written by Luaia, titled “Hla leh Thu Inrem Lo” [“Poem and Prose Not Compatible”; my trans.], published in the November 1921 issue (10th Year, Book No. 121). In this piece, Luaia presents a humorous anecdote set in a village in America, where two chapels stand opposite each other, both conducting their worship services at the same hour. During these services, whenever one chapel begins to sing a hymn, the other also starts singing—but the songs differ entirely in subject and tone. The simultaneous singing of unrelated hymns produces a comic dissonance, turning an act of worship into an amusing scene of melodic confusion.

The humour intensifies when Luaia describes the preachers of the two chapels. While one preaches earnestly about “Ramhuai” [“the Beast”] the other sermonises on love, declaring, “Ni tin-in ka ngai che” (172) [“I miss you every day”; my trans.]. The absurd contrast between the two sermons—one grave and apocalyptic, the other sentimental and affectionate—creates a delightful scene of incongruity. The audience witnesses a sacred setting unintentionally transformed into a parody of devotion, where words and intentions comically collide.

Through this witty illustration, Luaia conveys a moral observation that “word and song should be in harmony.” His use of contrast, irony, and incongruity not only exposes the lack of coordination between the two chapels but also reveals the humorous potential within religious contexts. The laughter arises from the absurd mismatch between intention and expression—an instance of incongruity-based humour, where conflicting elements of tone and meaning produce comic effect. Luaia’s narrative thus exemplifies an early form of literary sophistication in Mizo Christian writing, blending moral reflection with refined wit.

3. Drama

As recorded in the report “Lunglei Khuangchawi Thu” by Sentawta Pawi Bawitlung, published in the *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Leikhabu* (March 1903 issue), the Mizo chiefs gathered for a grand celebration of *Khuangchawi* held on December 28, 1902. During this occasion, several gayals were slaughtered for the feast and festivities. According to the report, on the night of January 1, 1903, people dressed in unusual attire, with some men impersonating women, dancing and performing for amusement. The report, written by Sentawta Pawi Bawitlung at Lunglei on January 10, 1903, describes the event as follows:

December thla tahrik ni 28, hemi ni-in Lalho kokhawm an lo thleng a, Sial pakhat an talh shaka, atuka pakhat an talh shak leh a, tin, a tuka an awl a. Januari thla tahrik 1 hemi ni-in Sial pahnih an talh leh a, aza-in Sial pali an talh a ni. Tin, azana chuan Kawr ho mak tak takin an inthuan a hmeichhe lem a-te an chang a, an lam thin a... (Bawitlung 4).

[“On December 28, the Mizo chiefs assembled for the celebration and slaughtered one gayal for the feast. Another gayal was slaughtered the following day, after which they rested for a day. On January 1, two more gayals were

slaughtered, making a total of four gayals for the entire festival. That night, the Kawr people dressed in amusing costumes, some impersonating women, and performed lively dances, creating a cheerful and humorous atmosphere”; my trans.].

From this account, it may be inferred that the participants engaged in cross-dressing and comic performance as a form of entertainment during the celebration. This episode may be regarded as the earliest known instance of a dramatic or theatrical performance among the Mizos after the establishment of British administration, characterized by elements of humour and comic acting.

The earliest recorded evidence of drama or theatrical performance in Mizoram can be traced back to Christmas in 1912. After the Christmas celebration that year, the residents of Thakthing Veng staged a play titled “Bawrhsap Thuchhe Rem Thu.” The way Christmas was celebrated that year was described under the title “Kum 1912 Krismas Hman Dan” [“How Christmas Was Celebrated in 1912”; my trans.], written by Lianhmingthanga of Thakthing Veng on December 31, 1912. His writing was later published in the January 1913 issue of *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*. This play, “Bawrhsap Thuchhe Rem Thu,” featured a well-developed plot, characters, and dialogues, and it greatly amused the audience. It is believed to have been a comedy. Lianhmingthanga, wrote: “Chhiar tu, hla shak mawi te, en-nawm leh nuiza te i hmu leh i hriat duh chuan kum tin in Aijal a 25th December thla apiang in lo kal thin la...” (Lianhmingthanga 12) [“If you wish to see beautiful singing, joyful laughter, and pleasant performances, come to Aijal every 25th of December...”; my trans.].

After this, humorous and entertaining performances became a regular part of Christmas celebrations, and although many of these plays were not written down, they were highly engaging and memorable. However, after some years, theatrical performances began to decline. This was mainly due to the Zoram Gospel Revival (*Harhna*) in 1919, which discouraged plays and entertainment activities. As Laltluangliana Kiangte explains: “Fiamthu thawh ching leh nuihza siam chingte chu Pathian thu awih lova ngaih an nih tak mai avangin Biak Inah lemchan an chhuah zui ta lo. Intihhlamna leh nuih dur durna chi a nih avangin khawvel thil anga ngaiin Biak In atangin an thehchhuak ta a ni,” (*Mizo Thu leh Hla...* 143) [“Those who once enjoyed laughter and entertainment began to regard such activities as belonging to non-believers. Because of this belief, they stopped these activities in the Church. Since

laughter and entertainment were seen as non-gospel practices, they withdrew them from the Church and other religious gatherings”; my trans.]. As a result, drama was no longer seen as a religious or Church-related activity but came to be viewed as a secular form of art.

During the Transitional Period, well-known playwrights included Ch. Pasena, Lalkailuia, Chawngzika, Lalzuithanga, and Dengrikhuma. Among them, Ch. Pasena and Dengrikhuma wrote plays in a humorous or comic tone. Although these plays were not published in print, they were written for stage performance. Notable examples of humorous plays from this period include Ch. Pasena’s “Tinreng Daih Khawl” (1928) and “Ransa Khawmpui” (1929), as well as Dengrikhuma’s “Hitler-a Deuhsawhna” (1940). These plays were greatly enjoyed by audiences of their time.

Modern Period (1950-2000)

During this period, one of the most significant events that occurred in Mizoram was the MNF’s declaration of independence, which began in 1966. Because of this movement, the land was in turmoil, and many villages were deserted. Consequently, Mizo literature suffered greatly. B. Lalthangliana writes in *Mizo Literature (Mizo Thu leh Hla)* as follows:

Zoram buai lai khan Mizo Thu leh Hla (Literature) ðhan a ðthu nasa hle, Kum 1966-74 chhung pheì kha chuan Kohhran ta tih loh chu thla tin Magazine chhuak a awm meuh lo a, Nitin Chanchinbu chhuak pawh a vang hle. Lehkhabu hlui te, Magazine hlui te, Nitin Chanchinbu hlui, tunhnua chanchin chhui nana ðangkai tak tak a bo tam hle a, Mizo hnam ro tam takin a tuar a ni. Lehkhabu thar chhuak pawh sawi tur a awm meuh lo. Tlema buai zual ven hnu, kum 1975 vel a ðang chuan a ziaawm deuh tain a lang (354).

[“During the period of *rambuai* in Mizoram, Mizo literature faced a severe setback. Especially between 1966 and 1974, almost no magazines other than those published by the Church were available, and even daily newspaper ceased publication. Many old books, magazines, and newspapers disappeared, and valuable materials for studying our past became scarce. The Mizo treasure as a whole endured great suffering. Hardly any new books were published. However, after the turmoil began to subside, around 1975, signs of recovery slowly began to appear”; my trans.].

As B. Lalthangliana observes, the period of *rambuai* (political turmoil) had a profound impact on literary activity, resulting in a noticeable decline in humorous writings during that time. However, as the *rambuai* situation gradually subsided, various periodical journals began to reappear, leading to the renewed emergence of writings and poems infused with humour and lighter thematic expressions.

1. Poetry

During the period between 1950 and the early 1960s, humorous songs were quite popular. Among those who composed such songs were the members of the *Sawithanga Group*. Around 1952–54, three students of Mizo High School formed a group called the “Three-Member Group.” They were Sawithanga, A. Rohnuna, and Laldailova, who later became popularly known as the *Sawithanga Group* (Lalkhawliana 128). They composed many humorous songs and were very cheerful during their time. One of their songs begins with the lines, “Eng tikah nge relah ka chuan ang/Ngaihzawngte kalsanin” (129) [“When shall I be at the train/Leaving my lovers behind?”; my trans.].

F. Laltuaia composed his songs between 1954 and 2000, and he was among the earliest composers of humorous (comic) songs during this period. In his early years, he composed many humorous and witty songs, some of the well-known ones being “Pu Tuaia A Haw Leh Dawn”, “Tawrh”, “Fenchhingi”, “Hmun Ruak A La Awm E”, “Kan Nui Ver Ver”, “Vitamin”, and “I Zun Zama Uai Chu”. Among these, “Tawrh” and “Fenchhingi” are regarded as examples of social satire. Moreover, “Hmun Ruak A La Awm E” was written about his friend K. Hmingthanga’s courtship of a girl, while “Kan Nui Ver Ver” was also composed about the same friend after he got married (Jonunsanga 9).

C. Durthanga began composing songs in 1955, when he was still very young, and over the years he composed around 500 to 600 songs (Chhangte vi). Among them, about five are humorous or satirical songs. Some of these include “Biangboh An Iang Zo Ta,” “Hring Dup, Ka Tlo, Ka Tlo, Kan Ti” (1997), “Tlawng Lui Hydrel Project” (1999), “Thingrem Ruak Leh Ba Nen” (1999), and “I Nungchang Volume” (2002). In general, C. Durthanga’s humorous songs tend to lean towards the satirical type.

Among the Mizo song composers of the Modern Period, one of the earliest to compose humorous songs was P.S. Chongthu. He began composing songs around 1940

and wrote many outstanding ones. Among his compositions, one of the most well-known is “Leng Uchuaki,” composed in 1960, which satirizes the behavior and lifestyle of contemporary Mizo youths. Besides this, songs such as “Zawngte Pipu Uai,” “Choak leh Utawk/Uṭawk leh Chungu Inhnial,” “Arsa” (1961), and “Phung Hla” (1961) are also delightful and witty humorous songs (Lallianzuala 38–39).

Around this same period, several other comic songs were also composed, including “Ka Di Ve Kha” by R. Zuala, “Valhuaia” and “Chhawihthangvalmawla” by Sangliana, “Val Hi” by J. Lalduhawma and Darchhawna, and “Pasalṭha” by Rokunga Chongthu — all of which became some of the most notable humorous songs of the time (Hauhnar 135-37).

During the Modern Period, one of the most prominent Mizo poets was Zirsangzela Hnamte, who was well known for composing poems rich in humour and social commentary. Some of his poems display a lively sense of humour, as seen in works such as “Tawn Har Di” (1973), “Ka To Ber” (1977), “Kawmthlangnu Chan” (1978), and “I Harh Ang U” (1999). His poetry often contains elements of social satire, using wit and irony to expose the flaws and follies within Mizo society.

In his poem “Kawmthlangnu Chan”, for instance, Zirsangzela Hnamte humorously depicts the irresponsibility of a family head addicted to alcohol:

Chhungkaw khaipa ber ‘kâm’ ber chu
 Ningzu dâwn nilen a ni;
 Siki thlengin pâ dangah
 A thlum liam duak duak mai le,
 Chawlkai hringleng a lo ni e. (Hnamte, “Kawmthlangnu Chan”)

[“The chief duty of the head of the family
 Is to sit and drink all day long;
 Even the coin *siki* is slips sweetly down his throat,
 He lives as the very embodiment of drunkenness”; my trans.].

This poem exemplifies Zirsangzela’s use of humour as a form of social criticism, where he blends light mockery with moral reflection to highlight issues such as alcoholism and domestic irresponsibility within Mizo society.

Around this period, L.T. Muana Khiangte also composed a number of poems characterized by satirical and humorous elements. His poems not only address themes of love and courtship between young men and women but also reflect the comic spirit of his time, as seen in his well-known humorous poem “Sudden Muanga.” Some of his notable humorous and satirical poems include “Ho Em Mai” (1976), “Bum Thiam Mi U” (1976), “Chukchu Ri Kurh” (1977), “Sa-Um Weekly” (1978), and “Sudden Muanga” (1978).

A stanza from “Bum Thiam Mi U” illustrates his playful tone and witty expression:

Ka dâwn ngam lo nunhluite,
A ninawm em mai si a,
Nuih tiza luak tichhuak;
I zuna uai ka bâng ta. (*Thingsai Zaikungpuite* 108)

[“I can hardly bear to think of our past life,
It was unbearably tiresome.
Those memories now make me laugh — and feel a little sick,
I’ve stopped longing for you at last”; my trans.].

This poem reflects L. T. Muana Khiangte’s ability to blend romantic sentiment with gentle humour, producing a light-hearted yet emotionally engaging verse that mirrors the social and emotional atmosphere of the late 1970s in Mizo poetry. In those days, F. Lalthanliana also composed “Val Kuah Lawri” (1979), which is a satire similar to “Bum Thiam Mi U.”

Towards the end of this period, the band *Mak An La Ti Ang* (MALTA), founded in 1991, emerged as one that cannot be left unmentioned. Most of their songs belong to the humorous genre, and their vocalist, Lalmangaiha, composed many of them. Among their songs, “Hrangkekuali,” “Rotuiburi,” “Ka Pi Um Khat Chu,” and “Bal An Chhum” became immensely popular across Mizoram (Tluang).

2. Prose

As B. Lalthangliana has noted earlier, during the early period of *Rambuai* (1966–1970), the printing industry in Mizoram declined severely; however, non-printed forms of literature, particularly poetry and songs, continued to flourish. After the

Rambuai subsided in the early 1970s, Mizoram gradually returned to a state of normalcy. The printing culture began to revive, and newspapers and various writings started to reappear.

Lalhminglana Saiawi began contributing articles to various newspapers and magazines around the year 1958. The main periodicals that served as platforms for his writings included *MZP Chanchinbu*, *Meichher*, *YMA Chanchinbu*, *Thu leh Hla*, *Runlum*, and *Zolife*.

What distinguishes Lalhminglana Saiawi's writings is that, although he often addressed serious and thought-provoking subjects, his works frequently contain elements of humour and wit that make them highly engaging. As a novelist, he consistently infused his narratives with humour regardless of the subject or theme, thereby adding delight and liveliness to his works. The same quality is also evident in his essays and articles. In the preface to his book *Thukhawchang*, he writes, "Fiamthu hi ka duh ve viau a, ka thu ziahah hian ka fiamthu a tel deuh zel, lunglen thu-ah leh Pathian Thu-ah te pawh hian," (v) ["I am very fond of humour; in my writings, I always include some touch of humour, even in pieces on emotional themes or religious reflections"; my trans.].

The distinctive feature of Lalhminglana Saiawi's humour can be traced to his personal experiences. As an IAS officer, his government postings, official duties in different regions, and his observations during his travels across Mizoram provided him with a rich source of inspiration. Many of his humorous expressions arise from real-life incidents, and his ability to employ varied linguistic styles makes his humour particularly vivid and natural.

His essay collection *Thukhawchang* has been published in six volumes as follows:

- *Thukhawchang* (1989) – 18 essays and articles
- *Thukhawchang Bu 2-na* (2003) – 23 essays and articles
- *Thukhawchang Bu 3-na* (2008) – 20 essays and articles
- *Thukhawchang Bu 4-na* (2009) – 19 essays and articles
- *Thukhawchang Bu 5-na* (2012) – 15 essays and articles
- *Thukhawchang Bu 6-na* (2015) – 32 essays and articles

The essays and articles contained in these *Thukhawchang* volumes include many delightful humorous pieces that serve as light and enjoyable reading. Although the publication of these collections belongs to the Contemporary Period, most of the writings compiled within them originally appeared in various journals during earlier decades. Since these essays were first written and published during the Modern Period, they are therefore classified within the literary output of that period.

One of the most important aspects of Mizo humorous writing is the comic. In 1976, Lalsangzuala published a comic book titled *Sudden Muanga* (meaning “Mr. Sudden Slow,” a name that itself carries a humorous contradiction), which was a cowboy-themed satire. The comic reflected the immorality and corruption of the time, often serving as satire on politicians and social behavior.

The main character of the story, Sudden Muanga, was used by the author to create witty and entertaining situations filled with irony and humour. The comic was published four times in a year and continued to appear well into the early 1990s. Describing his main character, Lalsangzuala said that Sudden Muanga is “sometimes very good, and a rascal, but a lovable person” (qtd. in *Asian Comics* 280).

During this period, *Meichher* served as one of the earliest and most important platforms for humorous literary writings. In the May/June 1976 issue, P.C. Lianhmingthanga wrote “Ka Pheikhawk,” which can be regarded as a satirical piece reflecting social interactions of his time. Similarly, H. T. Khuma’s “Hming Phuah Dan Leh Hman Dan,” published in the October 1976 issue, was also a work of satire.

Other notable humorous and satirical pieces include “Ka Sap Ram Kal Thu” by H.T.K., published in March 1977; “A Zahthlak Haih Haih” by Paul L.T. Zuala in the August and September 1981 issues; “Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna” by P.L. Liandinga and John Hmangaiha in the July 1984 issue; and “Ka Pawhdawh” by P.L. Liandinga in the September 1984 issue. These works were all remarkable examples of humorous writing, and *Meichher* magazine continued to publish similar pieces throughout this period.

Apart from *Meichher*, the *Mizo Academy of Letters* (MAL) journal *Thu leh Hla* was also an important platform for humorous literature. Notably, Sangliana’s article “Nuihza Fiamthu leh Thu Thiam – Mizo Zingah,” published in July 1976, and “Nuihza

Fiamthu,” published in the January & February 1981 issues, were both fine examples of humorous writing.

During this period, a few writers emerged who could be regarded as humorists, and among them, James Lian Mawia was particularly well-known. He frequently wrote lighthearted and entertaining essays in various magazines, and a collection of these essays was later published under the title *Nun Khawhar* in 2001. Although the book was published in 2001, the essays themselves were written and circulated during the Modern Period, and therefore belong to that era.

This collection contains several examples of humorous writing, including “The Unblossom Rose,” “Aw! Ṭhianhlui Ngaihawm Takte Kha!”, “My Last Tribute to J. F. Laldailova,” “Civil Hospital-I,” and “Kuu-Kuu-i.”

PL Liandinga also wrote a number of humorous and entertaining pieces toward the end of this period, which were later compiled and published in his books *Ka Ṭha Ber Lo Deuh* (2003) and *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* (2003). In addition to his numerous humorous writings that appeared in various journals such as *Meichher*, *Thu leh Hla*, *Sabereka Khuangkaih*, and *Lengzem*, he also published several other independent works.

In *Ka Ṭha Ber Lo Deuh*, he included several humorous essays such as “Ka Nupui Nen Kan Innei”, “Hei Hi Ka Nupui A Nia”, “Ka Hre Reng Thei Ang Em?” and “Eng Kan Ti Nge Keini Chhung Hi!”. According to the author’s own note, these pieces were written in the 1980s and mostly deal with family and household matters, making them fine examples of domestic humour.

In *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh*, Liandinga collaborated mainly with John Hmangaiha, and some of their notable humorous pieces include “Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna” (written in 1984), “Keini Zawng Thingtlang Mi Kan Nia” and “Keini Zawng Thingtlang Mi Kan Nia (Thlang Lenkaw! Hmar a Hnim)” (both written in 1985), “Thingtlangah Lo Zin Ve Ta Che” and “Vanram Fan Thu” (both written in 1987). These works are largely based on their experiences in government service and can be categorized as workplace or job-based humour. The essay “Vanram Fan Thu”, however, takes a more satirical tone.

In addition to the published works mentioned above, P.L. Liandinga also has many valuable humorous essays that remain unpublished. He began writing in the

1970s and has continued actively even into the twenty-first century. In a personal interview with P.L. Liandinga on 27 October 2025, he mentioned that he has written over 500 articles and essays since the 1970s, many of which contain humorous elements (Liandinga).

3. Drama

A notable development during this time was that humorous prose writings increasingly took the form of drama. For instance, James Dokhuma's humorous books *Chawngkhum Dân Tlang Huat Loh-I* (1981) and *Bu II-na* (1982) were written in a drama style. Similarly, Lalhmingliana Saiawi's humorous piece "Tuk Khat Chu," published in the December 1975 issue of *Meichher* magazine, which continued in January 1976, was also written in a dramatic format, featuring interactions among different characters.

Furthermore, in the Contemporary Period, C. Lalnunchanga's humorous book series *An Tia Lawm Bu 1–6* (2006–2016) is likewise presented through dialogues and interactions among various characters, resembling a dramatic structure.

During the Modern Period, Mizo drama witnessed significant creative growth with the emergence of numerous playwrights exploring various themes and styles. Laltluangliana Kiangte designates the period between 1959 and 2000 as "Lemchan Parparh Hun Lai" (The Flowering Period) (*Mizo Thu leh Hla...* 159), noting it as an era of remarkable expansion in dramatic writing. However, in the specific context of humour studies, this period presents a noticeable gap, as relatively few playwrights devoted their works entirely to comedy. Most plays written during this time leaned towards tragicomedy or tragedy, with pure comedies being rare.

Among the few notable instances of comic drama, K. Saibela's "Chhura leh Naa" (1962) stands out as an early example of a humorous play that captures the spirit of folk wit and light-hearted narrative. Likewise, in the same year, Lalsiama composed a short play titled "Ka ha Jaiga", which, along with his other short plays, was later published in *Zonun* (194). The 1980s continued to see sporadic attempts at humorous drama, such as C. Laizawna's "Kan Tiam Tawh Si" (1982) and Liansailova's "Duaia Duai Bik Lo" (1988), both of which combined social reflection with elements of irony and comic relief.

Nevertheless, it is Laltluangliana Khiangte who emerges as the most prominent playwright contributing to the development of Mizo comic drama in the later part of the modern period and beyond. His play “Balhla leh Mizo Tlangval” (1999) exemplify his skill in employing satire, parody, and situational humour to reflect upon social and cultural realities. This work not only highlight his creative versatility but also affirm the continuing vitality of humour within Mizo theatre, even during a period dominated largely by serious and tragic themes.

Contemporary Period (2000-Present)

In the Contemporary Period, several new and influential platforms for humorous writing have emerged, marking a dynamic shift in Mizo literary expression. Building upon the foundations laid by earlier monthly magazines such as *Sabereka Khuangkaih*, first published in March 1996, subsequent publications like *Lengzem* (established in 2001) and *Zolife* (established in 2006) have gained considerable prominence as important outlets for humour and creative prose. These periodicals not only provided writers with opportunities to experiment with various forms of humour but also helped cultivate a readership that appreciated wit, satire, and social commentary in literary form.

Moreover, the number of published books during this period has increased significantly, reflecting an expanding interest in humour as a literary genre and as a tool for social reflection. In addition, the rise of electronic and digital media has introduced new spaces for humorous writing and expression. Consequently, humour in the contemporary period is no longer confined to printed magazines and books but extends to online platforms, blogs, and social media, where many writers continue to publish entertaining and insightful works that engage a broader and more diverse audience.

1. Poetry

During the contemporary period, poetry flourished greatly. However, among the many poets who emerged, there were very few who could be identified particularly as writers of humorous poems. Although a number of poets appeared and composed on various subjects, only a few of them wrote poems that can be regarded as humorous.

Among the poets of the contemporary period who can be considered pioneers of humour-oriented poetry is H. Lalrinfela (Mafaa Hauhnar). His first book *Chawlhna Tuikam* contains 26 poems, of which three exhibit humorous elements. In another of his

works, *Thlaler Aurawl*, there are 23 poems, of which seven possess humorous qualities; among these, one is a satire, while the others are light verses. In his humorous book, *Hlim Ni leh Nuihlai Ni*, there are eight light verses, some of which were later included in *Thlaler Aurawl*. In his last collection published before his death, *Hringnun Hrualhruai*, there are 16 poems, among which two contain humorous expressions and may also be interpreted as satirical.

Thus, across Mafaa Hauhnar's poetic works, twenty-one poems can be identified as light verses and satirical songs. One of the light verses included in *Thlaler Aurawl* is the poem "Ka Dâwn Thin", which reads as follows:

Tiang tê hian, ka di, ka dâwn fo thin,
Thangvanzawl khi lehkhapuanah changin,
Tui zawng zawng hi lehkha-tui lo ni se,
Hringfaten eng nge kan in tâk ang? (220)

["I wonder, my dear, just think —
If the sky were paper,
And all the water were ink,
What would we humans drink?"; my trans.].

Among the contemporary poets whose names have become well known after Mafaa Hauhnar, one of the most prominent writers of light verse is Zaiva Nununa Renthlei (At times, he publishes his work under another pen name, Nununa Renthlei). He has so far published four books of poetry. His first poetry collection, *Hringnun*, was published in 2007, and includes a long narrative poem (ballad) titled "Chhurbura," based on the well-known Mizo legend of the same name. In addition to a prelude and an epilogue, the collection contains twenty-two shorter pieces following the main narrative poem. Although the central theme of "Chhurbura" is not primarily humorous, the story itself contains many humorous episodes, which lend the poem a lively and entertaining tone throughout.

In 2023, he published another poetry collection titled *Thingthlavar*, which contains seven light verses: "Bei Chiam Lo Mai Rawh," "Chîng Nawn Duh Tawh Suh," "Luck Loh Theih Ngei Mai," "Nang Ve Kha," "I Hmelma Kumhlun Chu," "Tih Ve Mai Mai," and "Nang Pui Roh Hi."

In 2024, his next collection, *Siar Vangkhua*, was released. This volume includes nine poems that can be classified as light verse, namely: “Inen Mai Rawh,” “A Mi Azirin,” “Hmuamtheihthil,” “A Ngaihna Awm Lo,” “Min Phu Lo Tute,” “Dingdihlip,” “Kei Ve Hi,” “Pathian Inang,” and “Phu Tawk.”

In 2025, he brought out another book titled *Zantiang Chhawrthla*, which contains six light verses, namely: “Lak Tlak Zawk,” “Kan Leng Ho Dial Dial E,” “Chan Chhia,” “Daw leh Tlaw,” “Rilru Chhungril,” and “Chhai Love You.”

Zaiva Nununa Renthlei’s light verses are largely self-deprecating, self-ironic, and often verge on satire. Some of his poems reflect a keen awareness of his own social position and express this through gentle humour, while also providing delight and amusement to the readers. His poems frequently explore human nature, the expression of emotion, and the various impulses and follies of the human mind, making his humour both reflective and entertaining.

In 2024, Lalnunpuia Hrahsel published a collection of poems titled *Beisei Bo Beiseina (Chham Hla Chhekhawm)*, which contains eight humorous poems, namely: “Beisei Bo Beiseina,” “Nula Siniar Sam,” “Hmangaihna,” “Ka Lung Helhkam,” “Zoram Darthlalong,” “Thalaite Hnena Thurawn,” “I Chhe Lo,” and “Tho La, Eng Rawh.” Lalnunpuia Hrahsel’s poems are predominantly social satires, often focusing on themes such as the improvement of society and the moral or social instruction of the younger generation. As tools of humor, he effectively employs various forms of wordplay, along with simile, pun, and portmanteau, demonstrating his linguistic creativity and stylistic ingenuity.

Apart from these poets, there are only a few others who have written a significant number of light verses or satirical poems with humorous elements. Many poets include humour only occasionally in their works, often as brief expressions of wit or irony within their broader poetic themes. A few representative examples may be mentioned here.

In Malsawmi Jacob’s poetry collection *Tinkim Dawn* (2003), the poem “Pa Lo Roh” displays elements of humour. In C. Lalhruaitluanga’s *Chhamhla* (2012), the poems “Val To Lo/Leng Vuai Vala” and “Nang Hmeichhia” similarly reflect humorous

tones. Thumtea Khawhling's collection *Awmhar Hnemt* (2014) includes "Hla Fiam-I," "Hla Fiam-II," and "Hla Fiam-IV," which contain elements of humour. In Jacob Vanlalhumhima's *Damdai* (2016), several light verses such as "Chhunlawn Lunglen," "Holam," "Lengtinkhumi," "Thingpui Zaw Le," "Valvuaia," and the narrative poem "Zawngtah Hla" exhibit a fine sense of humour and subtle social commentary.

In Rochharzela's poetry collection *Thinlung Chawlh Hmun* (2020), the poem "Parawl Choka" reflects humorous undertones. Febry K. Zonunmawii's *Chawlhna Thingthiang* (2020) contains light and witty poems such as "Kar Khat," "Ka Da," "Dû Dû," and "Something." Similarly, Lalrammuana Sailo's *Tidamtu Rimawi* (2020) includes the humorous pieces "Sazu" and "Enga'n Khatin Mi Nek Le." In TS Khupchong's *Ani Ka Lo Ni* (2021), the poems "Vai Val Valzin," "Pawi Thak Lo," and "I Chhe Keh" contain satirical and humorous commentary on cultural and social behavior. Mapuia Hrahsel (Malsawmdawngzuala), in his collection *Khauchher Khawhar* (2022), includes "Val Senior Au-RAWL" and "A Iang," both of which display light humour and self-ironic expression.

In more recent years, in *Zanlai Rum Ri* (2024), it includes *Pianglo-i Pa's* poem "Ka Chung Chuanna," while Au Saktea's works such as "A Na Dawn Asin," "Ka Fawp Nawn Fo Thin Ang," "Tuihnang," and "Choui Leng," as well as Thara Ralte's poem "Tuia Tuihal Lo," exemplify the continuation of humorous and satirical tendencies in contemporary Mizo poetry.

The emergence of these poets marks an important phase in the development of humorous poetry in contemporary Mizo literature. While earlier poets such as Mafaa Hauhnar laid the groundwork for modern Mizo humour through satirical and light verse, later writers like Zaiva Nununa Renthlei and Lalnunpuia Hrahsel expanded its thematic and stylistic dimensions. Their works demonstrate how humour in Mizo poetry evolved from simple amusement to a more reflective, critical, and socially aware form of expression. Through techniques such as wordplay, irony, and satire, these poets use humour not merely for entertainment but also as a medium of social observation and moral reflection. The use of self-deprecating and self-ironic tones in the works of Nununa Renthlei, for instance, reflects an awareness of human imperfection and social absurdities, while Lalnunpuia Hrahsel's social satires address moral complacency and the need for reform in contemporary society.

Similarly, poets such as Malsawmi Jacob, C. Lalhruaitluanga, Ṭhuamtea Khawlhiring, and Jacob Vanlalhumhima employ humour and wit to expose contradictions within human relationships and community values. The more recent generation, including Febry K. Zonunmawii, Lalrammuana Sailo, TS Khupchong, Mapuia Hrahsel, Pianglo-i Pa, Au Saktea, and Thara Ralte, continue this tradition by blending humour with themes of modernity, identity, and cultural change. Collectively, their works reveal that humour in Mizo poetry has become a vital mode of literary expression, capable of balancing laughter with insight and critique with compassion. In this way, contemporary humorous poetry carries forward the legacy of earlier writers like Mafaa Hauhnar, while also giving voice to the complex emotions, ironies, and social realities of modern Mizo life.

2. Prose

H. Lalrinfela—later widely known by his pen name Mafaa Hauhnar (a name he consistently used in his later works)—may be regarded as one of the pioneering humorists of the Contemporary Period in Mizo literature. His first collection of essays, *Chawlhna Tuikam*, was published in 1997, followed by his second volume, *Thlaler Aurawl*, in 2008. The former contains 26 essays and poems each, while the latter includes 24 essays and 21 poems. His essays are notable for their light-hearted readability, self-deprecating humour, and taunting or bantering tone towards others. Even in essays that are not overtly comic, he effectively employs literary devices such as simile, metaphor, and hyperbole to create humorous effects. In general, the predominant elements of humour in his writings include simile, satire and sarcasm, and hyperbole, all of which characterize his distinctive comedic style.

In 2011, Mafaa Hauhnar published another major collection titled *Hlim Ni leh Nuihlai Ni* (*A Galore of Wit, Humour and Anecdotes*), which brings together various short humorous pieces, anecdotes, witty reflections, and light verses. One of the remarkable humorous pieces in this collection is “Ṭheh Hawnna” (Introduction), where he humorously comments: “Adama kha chu a vannei ngawt mai, fiamthu a han thawh ve te khan midang lo thawh tawh hnu a ni lo tih kha a hrechiang dawn si a,” (11) [“Adam was indeed a fortunate man, for he could be certain that every joke he made was entirely his own—no one had ever told it before him”; my trans.]. This statement

reflects Mafaa Hauhnar's characteristic wit—combining gentle humour with philosophical reflection on human relationships and companionship.

In 2018, he published another volume titled *Hringnun Hrualhru*, which includes 47 essays and 16 poems. Although not all of these essays are purely comic, many of them contain strong elements of humour, making the collection an engaging and entertaining read. After his death in 2018, a posthumous compilation of his unpublished works, titled *Riahrun Remna*, was published in 2025.

Mafaa Hauhnar's contribution to the development of humour writing extends beyond his books. He served as editor of the *Sabereka Khuangkaih* magazine beginning with the September–October 1996 issue, where he introduced a jokes column titled “Nui Takin Mangtha le” [“Goodnight with smiley”; my trans.] Later, when he joined *Zolife Magazine*, he continued his humorous column under the name “Mafaa Nuihtheihthil.” From 2013 until his death, he also wrote a regular column in the Mizo daily newspaper *Vanglaini*, contributing essays on a weekly basis.

Through his books, essays, and journalistic writings, Mafaa Hauhnar established himself as one of the most influential and beloved humorists of the Contemporary Period, shaping the course of modern Mizo humour with his distinctive blend of satire, linguistic creativity, and self-reflective wit.

K.L. Liana's humour does not primarily lie in the subject matter he chooses, but rather in the language and style of his expression. His writings often contain a subtle tone of melancholy, and as a lawyer by profession, he skillfully incorporates legal reasoning and argumentation into his essays, making them both humorous and intellectually engaging. Since 2013, he had been a regular columnist for the Mizo daily newspaper *Vanglaini*, where he contributed essays almost every week (“KL Liana Kan Chan Ta”). He continued writing until the year of his death in 2020, with his final published article, titled “Olive Thing,” appearing in *Vanglaini* on May 5, 2020.

In 2006, a collection of his selected essays was compiled and published by Vanlalenga under the title *K.L. Liana Nunkawng (Collection of Articles)*. The volume contains about fifteen of his most delightful writings. One of the notable pieces in this collection is “Ka Buai Tuh Tuh Mai,” in which the author humorously narrates the

biblical story of God’s command to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, imagining how the serpent might have felt and reasoned before carrying out its fateful act. The following passage illustrates his humorous and imaginative style:

A hma khan rul kha engtin nge a kal ang, tihah mawlh hian ka buai fo ṭhin. Nuho chuan an lo hre lehpek daih tawh maithei a ni. Ke paliin an kal theu theu reuh a ni ang, han ti dawn ila, rul hian ke a nei lo remchang si. Ṭhingthiin a kal ṭhin a ni ang e, han ti dawn ila, khup a na duh dawn em mai, na turin khup lah a nei baw si lo. Bawkbawvakin a kal a ni ngei ngei ang, han tih dawn lahin engtin nge a bawhvah tak ang, tih ka hrethiam baw si lo.... (10)

[“I often find myself wondering how the serpent used to walk before that happened. Perhaps women might know such things better! Maybe it once walked on four legs—but then again, the serpent had no legs at all, which makes the thought rather amusing. Perhaps it tried to move on its knees, though that would have been quite painful—and besides, it had no knees to begin with! Maybe it simply crawled, but if so, how exactly did it manage to crawl? That, I still cannot quite imagine...”; my trans.].

Since 2004, Darrokima has been writing for *Lengzem*, a monthly Mizo magazine, where he became well known for his humorous essays. Among his most popular pieces are “Khum Ke Panga Nei,” “Ka Leng Tar Mai Ang,” and “Vailem Chan Thu-I & II.” These works were later compiled into a book titled *Keimah Thingtlangpa* published in 2008, which features a total of 27 essays. Prior to that, in 2007, he also published a humorous novel titled *Thih Sak Pawh Ka Ngam*, which was widely appreciated and well received by readers.

In his essay “Khum Ke Panga Nei,” he humorously narrates the struggles of living below someone else, as seen in the following excerpt:

Tlai thim dawnah in kan han thleng a. Thlasik lai a ni emaw, nipui lai a ni emaw, tuiluma inbual chu thil thiang a ni der si lo; budget a buai vek a ni mai. Tui lum nana khawnvartui ngai zat leh khawnvartui mana pawisa ngai zat te chu entawn lo pawhin kan sawi thei vek a, sahbawn lo ei hek ṭhintu sazu pawh

zankhuua sairawkherh nena chang peih khawpa economic lama kan tlakchhiat tawh laia tuiluma lo inbual chu thil tih chi a ni lo, a nghawng a na lutuk... (7)

[“We made our way home in the evening twilight. Whether it was winter or summer, bathing with hot water was out of the question—it would blow our budget. One didn’t even need to calculate how much kerosene was needed to heat the water or how much it would cost. Given our poor economic condition, we even had to take turns standing guard at night to catch the rat that kept stealing our soap—just to save a single bar. Clearly, bathing with hot water under such circumstances would have been an unwise and costly indulgence”; my trans.].

This passage is humorous because it exaggerates the speaker’s economic hardship to absurd levels—so poor that even a rat stealing soap becomes a major threat. The image of someone guarding a bar of soap at night like a prized possession is both ridiculous and relatable, blending wit with a touch of self-deprecating charm.

C. Lalthmingmawia, popularly known by his pen name Musa, is one of the most prominent contributors of humorous essays to the *Lengzem* monthly magazine. In 2007, he published an essay collection titled *Keimah Sanghalhriamapa*, which comprises 22 essays. Among these, a section titled “Thu Zangkhai” includes eight essays of distinctly humorous nature. His second collection of essays, *Val Bo Lo*, was later published in 2018, containing a total of 26 essays.

Another notable contemporary humorist is Stephen Auhmun, who is regarded as one of the most creative and innovative figures in modern Mizo humour. His first book, *Rapchungah Mi Bik Ka Rawn Ding Chhuak*, was published in 2014. The volume contains a mixture of humorous essays, comic poems, and a selection of witty Facebook posts that had gained wide popularity among readers. Stephen Auhmun’s humour is distinguished by his extensive use of puns and wordplay, which give his writing both linguistic charm and comic freshness. For instance, in one of his witty expressions he writes: “Fan hnuaia mut pawhin a lum tho’ an ti teh fahran a; tu nge fan chungah mu ngai?” (166) [“People often say it’s still hot even when they lie under the fan—but who has ever tried lying above the fan?”; my trans.].

This witty remark exemplifies incongruous humour through the reversal of ordinary logic—by turning a common complaint into an absurd possibility. Stephen Auhmun’s use of wordplay and irony transforms a mundane expression into a clever reflection on how humour often arises from unexpected twists in everyday reasoning.

Bena Ralte is another active humorist whose essays frequently appeared in the *Lengzem* monthly magazine. His collected essays were published in 2017 under the title *Kan Khuaah Puitling Film*, which includes 18 essays. The book provides light, engaging, and occasionally reflective reading, written in a tone of gentle humour and witty social commentary.

Among the contemporary Mizo humorists, one of the most prominent female voices is Zoremi Hmar Zote. Her collected essays are published under the title *Zomors*—a portmanteau word creatively formed from “Zoremi” and “Humour.” The majority of her essays are autobiographical in nature, and she skillfully employs self-deprecating humour to reflect on her personal experiences and everyday situations. Her writings range from light and semi-humorous reflections to those that approach adult humour, though never inappropriately so, maintaining an appealing balance that makes her work accessible to a wide readership.

Her first essay collection, *Chumchi Leng (Zomors)*, was published in 2018 and contains 28 essays. In 2021, she published another volume comprising 15 essays and two humorous short stories. Through these works, Zoremi Hmar Zote has established herself as a significant contemporary humorist, contributing a distinctive feminine voice to the evolving landscape of Mizo humorous literature.

Published in 2019, *Sikul Thlang Chhuakte (Lâsi Unzi)* by R. Lalthmunsanga (Sanga Ralte) is an example of humorous writing in the Contemporary Period. The book contains ten engaging pieces that recount various childhood experiences, youthful incidents, and reflections drawn from the author’s own life. These are written in a lively and amusing style, making them both entertaining and light reading. The work also includes elements of taunting and playful banter, particularly directed toward his peers, which further enhance its humour and charm.

3. Drama

During the Transitional Period, when the Mizos were in the process of adapting to new cultural influences, it was observed that humorous writing did not thrive as much as other emerging forms of Mizo literature. As Dr. Laltluangliana Khiantge remarks, “...lemchan lama mi ṭhahnemngai hi Mizo zingah tam tak an awm lo. Lemchan thawnthu ziaak lama ke pen pheih chu tam lo tak an ni. Chuti chung chung kutchhuak nei an lo awm leh zauh ṭhin hian hnam hmel a timawi a...” (*Milim Pathum* 9) [“...those who excel in the art of humour are very few among the Mizos. Even in the field of drama, the number of skilled playwrights is quite limited. Nevertheless, the few who occasionally publish works in this genre do so with the intention of portraying the Mizo people in a positive light”; my trans.].

Within the Church context, the drama/play was often viewed as inappropriate or worldly, and though it occasionally appeared as a means of youth fellowship entertainment, it did not gain much prominence in written literature. However, during the Contemporary Period, drama writings began to re-emerge gradually, showing noticeable shifts in both style and purpose.

In contrast to the Transitional and Modern periods, Dr. Laltluangliana Khiantge emerged as a prominent literary figure in the Contemporary Period, contributing significantly to the revival of drama in modern Mizo writing. In 2001, he published an anthology of short plays titled *Chantual Ennawm (Bu I-na)*, which featured contributions from various writers. The collection includes the following plays: “Duat Luat Vangin” by Laltluangliana Khiantge; “Thu A Tawp E, Lumam” by K. Saibela (though originally written in the 1980s, it is included here as it was first published during the Contemporary Period); “Buia Sai-ip” by Laltluangliana Khiantge; and “Kum Sangbi Tharah Chuan” by Laltluangliana Khiantge, which leans toward the comic narrative form.

In 2016, Dr. Laltluangliana Khiantge published another collection of plays titled *Milim Pathum (Collection of Short Plays)*, which features dramatic works by various writers. The volume also includes one of his own comedy, “Milim Pathum.” Later, in 2024, he published a compilation of his selected plays under the title *Lemchan*

Khawvel-4 (The World of Drama Series), which likewise contains his comedy “Zuia Zuiin Aw.”

In 2014, C. Lalhruaitluanga published a collection of plays titled *Inpumphalna*, which contains eleven plays in total. Among them, the play “Titi (Ṭhuthmun Thukhawchang)” is a comedy, written with notable humorous expression. Although primarily intended as an educational play for teaching the Mizo language, it is presented in an engaging and entertaining manner for readers and audiences alike.

In 2016, T.C. Vanlalzauva released his second collection of plays, *Lemchan Thulkhung Bu 2-na*, comprising eleven dramatic works. Within this volume, the play “Sangtei” is categorized as a comedy and serves as an instructional drama on water conservation. The play introduces two comedic characters, Liana and Johny, whose interactions and behaviour give rise to much of the play’s humour and entertainment.

In 2017, C. Vanlalzawma published a collection of thirteen plays under the title *Lemchan Nunchan*. Among these, “Duli Bo,” “Of Course?!,” “Ṭanrual Hi Chakna A Ni,” “Engkimah Fimkhur La,” “Tawlhloh Zungbun,” “Ṭhalaite Darthlalang,” and “Ṭhianpa” may not all be classified strictly as comedies, yet they display a strong sense of humour and comic situations. Vanlalzawma’s plays are notably diverse in tone and subject; even those not explicitly labelled as comedies contain humorous elements that enhance their appeal. His instructional and religious dramas also incorporate humour, which he uses effectively to engage audiences while conveying moral or spiritual lessons.

In 2022, V.L. Muanpuia Chawngthu published *Lemchan Zun Zam*, a collection of two plays, one of which, “Virus,” is a satirical drama. Although the story is largely serious and contemplative, it provides ample amusement for readers through its wit and ironic treatment of social and moral issues.

The development of Mizo humour, as traced through its oral, transitional, modern, and contemporary periods, reveals a continuous evolution shaped by the sociocultural changes of each era. In the oral period, humour functioned as a communal expression rooted in everyday life, conveyed through folksongs, folktales, riddles, and proverbs that combined wit, satire, and playful exaggeration. The transitional period

introduced literary documentation, allowing traditional humour to be preserved in written form and gradually influenced by new religious, cultural, and political encounters. With the emergence of the modern period, humour expanded in thematic depth and stylistic diversity as educated writers began to use satire, irony, and narrative humour to comment on society, identity, and changing values. In the contemporary period, humour has become even more dynamic, adapting to new genres, media, and forms of expression while retaining the linguistic creativity and social insight characteristic of earlier traditions. Altogether, these stages demonstrate that Mizo humour has remained a vibrant, adaptive, and culturally rooted mode of expression, continuously reshaped by the lived realities of the Mizo people.

Short Account of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar

PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar, two of Mizo humorists, are widely known for their distinctive styles of humour that have both entertained and enlightened readers for decades. This study explores the role of incongruity theory in their humorous writings, with a particular focus on their use of language, satire, and self-deprecation.

PL Liandinga was born on July 24, 1955, in Lungrang village, Mizoram. Since 1976, he has written over 100 essays and began crafting humorous essays in 1977. He is the author of five books, including *Fiamthu Daihzai* (1998), co-authored with his friend C.H. Thangkhuma; *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* and *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* (2003), *Sherlock Holmes Lenna Ram* (2007), and *Fiamthu Ngeiawm* (2009). Liandinga's writing is well known for its clever use of humour and satire, often poking fun at societal norms and expectations. He is recognised for addressing a wide range of topics—from domestic life to the workplace—through a satirical lens.

Mafaa Hauhnar was born on May 19, 1975, in Tlangnuam, Aizawl. He began his literary career in the early 1990s and became a prominent figure in the Mizo literary scene as both a writer and editor. His published works include *Chawlhna Tuikam* (1997), *Thlaler Aurawl* (2008), *Vaihna Varṭian* (2010), *Hlim Ni leh Nuihlai Ni* (2011), *Hringnun Hrualhruai* (2018) and *Riahrun Remna* (2025-posthumously) (Vanglaini). Mafaa's writing spans essays, poetry, literary criticism, and short stories. He is particularly known for his self-deprecating humour and for using satire to reflect on social and political issues in Mizoram.

Language plays a crucial role in the creation of incongruity in the writings of both PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar. Through rhetorical devices such as puns and wordplay, they construct humorous narratives that hinge on unexpected juxtapositions and linguistic twists. Language not only structures the humour but also provides the contextual cues needed for audiences to detect and appreciate the incongruity. Their humour also offers valuable insights into the socio-cultural and political context of Mizoram. From addressing corruption to critiquing traditional cultural norms, their works serve as a form of social commentary. Analysing the themes and messages embedded in their humour allows for a deeper understanding of the challenges and dynamics shaping Mizo society.

This research aims to examine the humour styles of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar through the lens of incongruity theory. By analysing their use of language, satire, and self-deprecation, this study seeks to better understand the functions of humour in Mizo literature and culture. The primary texts selected for analysis are *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* (2003) and *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* (2003) by PL Liandinga, and *Chawlhna Tuikam* (1997) and *Thlaler Aurawl* (2008) by Mafaa Hauhnar.

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Chapter-2

The Humour of Experience in PL Liandinga's Essay

PL Liandinga's essays serve as a testament to the humour found in everyday life, drawing from his experiences as a government servant in rural Mizoram and his personal life as a father and husband in a bustling household. Much like Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia* and Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad*, Liandinga crafts a distinctive comedic style rooted in observation, empathy, and wit. His humour, much like that of Lamb and Twain, reflects his environment and personal challenges, making his work both deeply relatable and enduringly engaging.

Liandinga's collections, *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* and *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh*, vividly capture the peculiarities of rural communities. As a government servant frequently stationed in remote villages, he observed and documented the cultural dynamics, struggles, and eccentricities of rural life. His humour often arises from these observations, whether in recounting the bureaucratic absurdities of his work or highlighting the unique traditions of the communities he served. He frequently contrasts his urban perspective with the rural mindset, creating moments of misunderstanding that lead to comical situations. Similarly, Twain, in *The Innocents Abroad*, humorously portrays cultural clashes during his travels, using wit to critique and reflect on societal norms. He describes "seeking amusement under difficulties" during his voyage, playfully highlighting the contrasts between Mediterranean customs and American habits (32). Liandinga's essays explore a similar theme, as he navigates the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar rural settings.

In both Liandinga's and Lamb's works, personal and familial life also serve as rich sources of humour. Liandinga frequently writes about the chaos of raising young children in a lively household, using self-deprecating wit to share his struggles in managing domestic responsibilities while balancing his professional duties. This recalls Lamb's essay "Dream-Children: A Reverie," where he reflects on family relationships with both humour and tenderness. His playful depiction of his timid nature and the imagined conversations with children create a poignant narrative that seamlessly blends comedy with sentiment (*Essays of Elia* 208-13).

Twain's exploration of domestic humour in *The Innocents Abroad* similarly resonates with Liandinga's focus on family dynamics. Twain often comments on the everyday chaos aboard the "Quaker City," weaving humour into his reflections on the relationships among passengers. He captures the interplay of personalities and the camaraderie that emerges in confined spaces, offering a comedic perspective on domesticity in an unconventional setting. In much the same way, Liandinga brings to life the constant activity of his household, presenting universal truths about family life through the lens of his own experiences.

Beyond personal anecdotes, Liandinga's essays also provide a broader commentary on Mizo society. His ability to infuse humour into observations of rural and domestic life aligns him with humorists like Lamb and Twain, who use comedy as a means of social reflection. Lamb's essays frequently explore the social and cultural nuances of early 19th-century England, as seen in "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," where he humorously reminisces about the quirks of his former colleagues (175-91). Similarly, Twain critiques the cultural idiosyncrasies of European and Mediterranean societies, blending humour with sharp social commentary. Liandinga extends this tradition, using his wit to provide insight into the social fabric of Mizoram while entertaining his readers.

This chapter explores PL Liandinga's essays to understand how his humour emerges from the experiences of rural and domestic life. It examines his ability to transform mundane moments into delightful anecdotes while reflecting on Mizo culture and society. By analyzing key themes, techniques, and styles in his essays, this chapter highlights Liandinga's contribution to Mizo humour and literature.

Rural Life

Rural life has long served as rich material for humour in literature, providing a backdrop where the simplicity and authenticity of village existence accentuate the idiosyncrasies of human nature. Authors often use rural settings to contrast the earnestness of country folk with the absurdities that emerge from their interactions and beliefs. This juxtaposition not only amuses but also offers insightful commentary on societal norms.

R.K. Narayan, in his short story *A Horse and Two Goats*, captures the essence of rural humour through the character of Muni, an impoverished villager. Muni's misunderstanding with a foreigner about a horse statue highlights the comedic potential of cross-cultural exchanges while showcasing the charm and simplicity of rural life. The story vividly portrays village existence, where daily struggles are met with a mix of naivety and wit, resulting in humour that is both lighthearted and revealing (*A Horse and Two Goats*).

Similarly, PL Liandinga's essays harness the nuances of rural life to craft humour. His depictions of village traditions, daily experiences, and the quirks of its inhabitants not only entertain but also reflect deeper truths about human nature. By weaving comedy into everyday rural scenarios, Liandinga underscores the universality of humour found in the simplicity and authenticity of country life, making his work both engaging and thought-provoking.

In one of PL Liandinga's essays from his collection *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh*, titled "Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna" ["Government Job in the Village" my trans.], the author recounts his experience of being transferred to a remote rural area. As he narrates his journey to the village, he humorously describes the road conditions and the village's modest nature. He observes, "...kawng pengthum lo awm apiangah a tē zawk zel zawhin kan awmna hmun tur chu kan han thleng khu ve luih a" (13) ["Among all the roads branching out at the junction, I took the smallest one and arrived at the village, covered in dust"; my trans.].

This lines captures the quintessential humour of rural life by painting a picture of the physical and cultural isolation often associated with such areas. The humour lies in Liandinga's wry observation of the stark contrast between rural and urban settings. The small, neglected road symbolizes the village's marginal status, while the dusty welcome humorously underscores the raw simplicity of life in the countryside. His gentle sarcasm about the road not being "metal" reflects the reality of underdeveloped infrastructure in rural areas, a subject that resonates with many readers familiar with such settings.

Additionally, this humorous anecdote can be analyzed through the lens of incongruity theory, one of the central frameworks in humour studies. This theory

suggests that humour arises when there is a mismatch or contradiction between expectations and reality. In PL Liandinga's narrative, the humour stems from the unexpected disparity between the imagined experience of a government posting and the actual conditions of rural life.

The incongruity begins with the journey itself. A government transfer often carries an implicit association with professionalism, structure, and some degree of convenience. However, Liandinga's description of the smallest and most neglected road defies these expectations. The idea of a narrow, unpaved road leading to a supposed professional assignment creates a comedic tension between the anticipated formality of his work environment and the unpolished reality of his destination.

Furthermore, the dusty welcome adds another layer of incongruity. A grand arrival might traditionally be marked by fanfare or at least some semblance of readiness, yet here it is replaced by a plume of dust—unexpected, unglamorous, and wholly rural. This stark contrast invites the reader to laugh at the absurdity of the situation, where even the natural elements seem to highlight the humble character of the village.

The humour also works because Liandinga's tone is neither bitter nor dismissive. Instead, his acceptance of the incongruities with a lighthearted attitude allows readers to see the charm and authenticity of rural life. The comedic effect is enhanced by his ability to find joy and amusement in circumstances that might otherwise be considered inconvenient or frustrating.

In his essay, "Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna", PL Liandinga humorously recalls the experience of receiving newspapers in a rural village. He writes:

Zawr em em maiin chanchin hlui hlir kan dawng a. A milem chuang lo chi leh kawnglaka pa duh sek tak takte lambun bang chin chauh kan chang a. A nih loh leh kan nitin chanchinte chu a thawktu lamin a têt te hian min rawn thawn ta ðhin a, ba ðhinnaah, 'Daka thawn man kan tito,' te hi an rawn ti zui vei rawl nen... (15)

[“We receive daily newspaper limp and already outdated. They often arrive without the photographs—only the text—so tattered they look as though they’ve

survived a storm. And if not that, they come in bulk, tied together like a bundle of debt reminders, with a note from the sender saying, “We’ve had to increase the dispatch charges due to rising postal costs”; my trans.].

This account paints a humorous picture of the challenges of staying connected to the outside world from a rural perspective. The humour arises from the incongruity between the expectation of a fresh, neatly printed daily newspaper and the reality of receiving outdated, damaged, or bundled papers. The added irony of a debt reminder casually appended to the delivery amplifies the absurdity. This clash between urban convenience and rural improvisation exemplifies how humour can emerge from the contrast between the ideal and the real.

According to incongruity theory, humour is created when there is a discrepancy between what we anticipate and what actually occurs. In this scenario, the expectation of receiving timely and intact news is subverted by the absurd condition of the newspapers and the cheeky message from the sender. This unexpected turn invites laughter while also highlighting the unique challenges of rural life in a lighthearted manner.

In another essay named, “Keini Zawng Thingtlang Mi Kan Nia” [“We Are The Villagers”; my trans.], Liandinga humorously describes the scene he encountered after returning home from a day of cultivating fields in the forest:

In kan han thleng a, rit phur chungin kawtkaia arbawm suan luh nghal a’n ngai a. Sumhmun pelin in chhung kan han bih a, chhuatlaiah arekpachal a lo ‘parade’ thut mai a. Thuk ar thai lah a lo zawngdaikalh nuk mai baw si. Kan suankualin sutpui a lo kapkalak khuau a, chhuat dungah chaicheh a lo ‘attention’ a...” (21)

[“When I arrived home, the chicken coop in the front yard had to be moved indoors for safekeeping. Peeking inside the house, I saw that the chicken dung had paraded proudly in the middle of the floor, forming a neat line as if on display. The fireplace was a chaotic battlefield, clearly having been the chickens’ chosen hangout during my absence. The kitchen utensils were

scattered everywhere, looking like a disorganized market after closing time”; my trans.].

This vivid depiction of rural life uses humour to highlight the interplay between humans and their environment in a village setting. The idea of chicken dung “parade” in the house and the chaotic fireplace becoming a “zawngdaikalh nuk” for the poultry is both absurd and relatable to those familiar with the untamed nature of rural living. The scene humorously portrays the inevitable mess and disorder that accompanies life in a simple, agricultural community.

Incongruity theory operates here by subverting the reader’s expectations of a well-kept home. Instead of returning to a tidy, peaceful house, the narrator finds chaos and disarray caused by his livestock. The humour lies in the exaggerated and anthropomorphic description of the chickens’ behavior, making the scene more vivid and entertaining. This clash between the anticipated tranquility and the chaotic reality creates a comedic effect, while also shedding light on the unique dynamics of rural life.

In examining the humour derived from rural life, it becomes evident that authors like PL Liandiga and R.K. Narayan use vivid observations to bring rural communities to life with a touch of comedy. Through their portrayals, they capture not just the physical setting of villages but also the personalities, habits, and social interactions that make these places unique. The charm of rural humour lies in its ability to find amusement in the everyday, turning seemingly mundane experiences into moments of lighthearted entertainment.

The customs and traditions of village life, often rooted in age-old practices, become fertile ground for comic situations. Whether it is the struggle of receiving newspapers that arrive so late they are almost historical artifacts or the unintentional chaos caused by livestock invading homes, rural humour thrives on the quirks of an environment where nature and human life are deeply intertwined. The unpredictability of rural existence lends itself naturally to humour—where the best-laid plans can be undone by an unpaved road, a sudden dust storm, or the mischief of farm animals. These elements create a tapestry of comedic storytelling that resonates with both those familiar with rural life and those viewing it from a distance.

Beyond amusement, humour in rural narratives serves a deeper purpose. It highlights both the struggles and the simple joys of country living. The lack of modern conveniences, infrastructural neglect, and isolation from urban centers are often presented with a tone of playful resignation rather than despair. At the same time, there is an undeniable warmth in these stories—an appreciation for the resilience, resourcefulness, and wit of rural communities. The humour that emerges from these settings is not only a source of laughter but also an affirmation of the enduring spirit of village life, where people find ways to adapt, make do, and even laugh at their own circumstances.

Eventually, rural humour is not just about exaggerating village life for comedic effect; it is about revealing the humanity within it. The incongruities, the everyday struggles, and the humorous mishaps all come together to create a portrait of rural existence that is at once entertaining and insightful. It allows readers to recognize that even in the most remote corners of the world, humour flourishes—turning dust into laughter, struggles into stories, and life's little surprises into moments of shared amusement.

Workplace Humour

Peter L. Berger presents workplace humour as a coping mechanism that helps individuals manage frustrations and navigate professional challenges. He suggests that humour often arises from a sequence of minor workplace mishaps, where those with a sense of humour can find amusement in the situation, while others may react with frustration. *In Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*, Berger states:

Suppose that there is an escalation of minor mishaps in, say, a work situation. The boss has just come in showing all the signs of a brooding bad temper, the computer system is down, the coffee machine has also broken down, and—to top it off—it turns out that the overnight cleaning staff has thrown out a pile of important papers that had been prepared for the boss's perusal. The very accumulation of these mishaps will induce laughter in those who have the putative sense of humor and thus make it easier for them to overcome the

difficulties, while those lacking this redeeming quality will stew in their frustration. (100)

Through this example, Berger illustrates how workplace humour emerges from the incongruities of daily professional life, particularly when things go wrong in unexpected and exaggerated ways. The accumulation of small failures—whether technological issues, an irritable boss, or misplaced documents—creates a situation so absurd that laughter becomes a natural response. This humour functions as a psychological release, allowing employees to momentarily distance themselves from stress and regain perspective.

Similarly, in *Life on the Mississippi*, Mark Twain employs irony, exaggeration, and self-deprecating humour to describe his experiences as a steamboat pilot, demonstrating how humor can help make sense of difficult or unfamiliar situations. For instance, he writes:

The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book—a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. And it was not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day. (118)

This statement illustrates irony by comparing the unpredictable and dangerous river to a ‘wonderful book,’ highlighting the contrast between the romanticized perception of the river and its actual challenges. The exaggeration of the river as a ‘dead language’ that only he can understand underscores the complexity of piloting, making it appear almost impossible to master. Additionally, the self-deprecating humour emerges as Twain gently mocks his own pride in understanding the river, subtly undercutting his expertise by presenting it as both impressive and slightly absurd. Through these humour elements, Twain offers a nuanced portrayal of steamboat life, balancing its perceived glamour with its practical difficulties.

Similarly, George Orwell worked as a plongeur (dishwasher/kitchen helper) in a Parisian restaurant around 1928–1929, an experience he recounts in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. He writes:

The kitchen measured fifteen feet long by eight broad, and half this space was taken up by the stoves and tables. All the pots had to be kept on shelves out of reach, and there was only room for one dustbin. This dustbin used to be crammed full by midday, and the floor was normally an inch deep in a compost of trampled food.

For firing we had nothing but three gas-stoves, without ovens, and all joints had to be sent out to the bakery. (144)

In this passage, the sarcasm lies in the understated description of the cramped and impractical kitchen. Orwell also uses exaggeration to emphasize the absurdity of the situation, such as describing the floor as “an inch deep in compost,” which adds a humorous touch to an otherwise grim depiction. Orwell’s humour in these excerpts is primarily characterized by sarcasm and exaggeration, effectively highlighting the chaotic and unsanitary conditions of his workplace.

Both Mark Twain and George Orwell use humour—through irony, exaggeration, and satire—to expose the challenges and absurdities of their respective professions, whether as a steamboat pilot navigating a treacherous river or as a dishwasher enduring the chaos of a poorly managed restaurant. Their humorous portrayals serve not only to entertain but also to critique the systems they operate within, revealing the stark contrast between romanticized expectations and harsh realities.

Similarly, PL Liandinga, in his essay “Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna” in *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* employs humour to examine the bureaucratic and political structures that shape the lives of government employees. Like Twain and Orwell, Liandinga blends satire, irony, and exaggeration to highlight the frustrations of working within an often inefficient and unpredictable system. His humour arises from the incongruities between official rhetoric and real-life experiences, much like how Twain mocks the perceived grandeur of river piloting and Orwell exposes the grim reality of kitchen labour. By using humour as a lens to critique authority and bureaucracy, all three writers provide insightful social commentary, demonstrating how humour can be a powerful tool in exposing systemic flaws while making serious subjects more engaging and accessible to readers.

PL Liandinga, who served as a government employee in the Department of Social Welfare under the Government of Mizoram from 1982 until his retirement, brings a similar perspective to his writings. Throughout his career, he was frequently transferred to rural and remote areas, gaining a wealth of experiences that he later documented in his two essay collections, *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* and *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh*. Workplace experiences often serve as rich material for humour, with writers employing techniques such as exaggeration, satire, simile, and hyperbole to craft comedic narratives.

In his essay “Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna,” PL Liandinga delivers a sharp and humorous critique of the bureaucratic and political systems that govern the lives of government servants. Through satire, irony, and exaggeration, Liandinga captures the absurdities and frustrations of working within such systems, offering a unique perspective that blends critique with comedy. The following analysis will explore the humour in the text, the role of government jobs as a medium for this humour, and the author’s distinctive voice, while applying the incongruity theory to dissect the comedic elements.

PL Liandinga begins his essay by describing the anticipation and disappointment that characterize the lives of government servants, using humour to highlight the impersonal nature of bureaucratic communication. He writes:

Dak semtu vei vel apiang mai chu kan thlengthlawkthei thlir ngawih ngawih zel a. Lehkhaip tlang tial, ngun taka char, a chung a ‘Black Stamped’ tihte leh, ‘Open with a smile’ tihte kan lo beisei loh vek pawhin hawrawp sin deuh leh han hnim vel pawha ngaihruat tala vanchung nula rim nam kan lo beisei lain lehkhaip sei zel zul, OIGS ONLY tih chuang kulh mai min han pe a; hotute hmuha mawi lo khawpa thatho lovin kan han hawng a—‘You are hereby...’ tiha inṭanin a tawpah ngaihnopei lo zetin ‘immediately’ an han ti lehngal a. (15)

[“We eagerly watch the postmaster each time he walks by, as if we were spotting a UFO. When we receive an envelope, its edges are striped and meticulously sealed, with ‘Back Stamped’ printed at the top. Sometimes, we receive a long envelope marked OIGS ONLY on the cover—especially when we are hoping it says ‘Open with a smile’ and the sender is a beautiful girl, like

an angel. We open it reluctantly, only to find that the letter begins with ‘You are hereby...’ and ends with ‘immediately’; my trans.].

This segment is an example of satire and hyperbole, used to critique the overly formalized and impersonal nature of bureaucratic communication. The comparison of the postmaster’s arrival to spotting a *thlengthlawkthei* (UFO) is an exaggerated metaphor that underscores the rarity and significance of receiving official correspondence in the lives of government servants. The meticulous description of the envelope’s appearance—striped edges and ‘Back Stamped’ labeling—adds a layer of irony, as the anticipation built around such a formal object is ultimately deflated by the impersonal and often unwelcome content of the letter.

The expectation of a personal, joyful message from a *vanchung nula rim nam* (beautiful girl, like an angel) contrasts sharply with the reality of a directive that begins with “You are hereby...” and ends with “immediately.” This juxtaposition creates humour through incongruity, as the romanticized expectation clashes with the bureaucratic reality. The author’s use of irony here underscores the disconnect between the human desire for personal connection and the impersonal nature of governmental procedures.

This section also highlights the monotony and predictability of bureaucratic life. The anticipation of something extraordinary, symbolized by the *thlengthlawkthei* (UFO) metaphor, is repeatedly met with the mundane reality of official directives. This cycle of hope and disappointment is a recurring theme in the lives of government servants, and the author captures it with both humour and pathos. The humour here is not just in the absurdity of the situation but also in the relatability of the experience. Anyone who has worked in a bureaucratic environment can identify with the frustration of receiving yet another impersonal directive, dressed up in formalities that only serve to emphasize its lack of warmth or humanity.

Liandinga further critiques the arbitrary nature of political and bureaucratic decision-making, using irony to expose the lack of transparency and the capriciousness of those in power. He observes:

Political Party Unit, member zathum zali emaw lek lek awmna hruaitute emaw, an chekkawite emaw lah hian chak zawk dawna an inrin deuh chuan, “Kan sawn ang,” tiin puanven sawichhin chawhmeh takah min hmangin a lehlam lah hian min biak that tumin, “In awmna hmunte pawh hi,” tiin a thawktute ngei pawhina kan man phak chiah loh hian min han sawi mawi vel vei nen. (16)

[“In a political party unit with three or four hundred leaders and their followers, they boldly declare, ‘We will transfer,’ when they believe they will come to power. However, during times of politeness, they flatter us by saying, ‘Your posting has been...’ while we remain clueless about what our employers actually mean”; my trans].

This portion uses irony and satire to critique the power dynamics within political and bureaucratic systems. The bold declaration, “We will transfer you,” reflects the arbitrary and often authoritarian nature of decision-making in such environments. The shift in tone to a more polite but equally vague assertion, “Your posting has been...,” highlights the manipulative language used by those in power to obscure their intentions.

The comedic effect stems from the incongruity between the authoritative tone of the leaders and the confusion it creates among the employees. The author’s critique of this dynamic reveals a deeper commentary on the lack of transparency and the capriciousness of bureaucratic decisions, which are often made without regard for the individuals affected. This satirical portrayal of political and bureaucratic behavior serves as a tool to expose the absurdity and inefficiency of such systems.

The segment also touches on the theme of powerlessness. The employees are at the mercy of their leaders, who can make life-altering decisions with little explanation or justification. The humour here is tinged with a sense of resignation, as the employees are left to navigate a system that is both opaque and arbitrary. The author’s use of irony underscores the futility of trying to make sense of such a system, while also highlighting the resilience and adaptability of those who must endure it.

Liandinga delves into the oppressive nature of bureaucratic hierarchies, using hyperbole and dark humour to illustrate the dehumanizing experiences of government servants. He writes:

Mahni hnathawhna lama hotute lah chuan a engah mah hma hian khawpuia hmel lan hi an han ui nghal hlur mai a. Eng emaw ʔul ngawih ngawihna avangin hotute dawrin han kal ila, mahni department pisa puiah meuh chuan rahka kan kai aʔangin Peon Senior-in min lo bawlzan ʔan a, kan zawlpui, Headquarters-a ʔhute chuan Bangladesh Refugee tiat lekin min lo hmu tawh a, hotute tak tak hma kan han thlen tawh hi chuan thinbutut a chhuah hman loh vek pawhin, ‘Aw ka pu,’ tih liam zung zung hi kan lo inpeih fel diam tawh ʔhin. Lainate leh ʔhiantaʔn min ngen chiam avang emaw, kan pu (grandfather) teʔn thi mai dawna an inhriat ruk tlat vang emaw pawhin an phalna lovin khawpui vaivut han pal khu hlek ila tihsual tawh dang zawng zawng nen an han ʔham kawp a, a nung chungin min vaw hlum lo chauh mai si. (17)

[“Our boss strictly prohibits us from going to the city. However, when we must visit the office for an urgent matter, the Senior Peon teases us, saying that our rank—those stationed in headquarters—looks like Bangladeshi refugees. When we finally meet the main boss, our temper is already on edge, yet we are instantly prepared to respond with a swift ‘Yes, Sir!’ ...But when we visit headquarters without the boss’s approval due to our grandfather’s health condition, they angrily compile all our past mistakes, looking as if they are ready to beat us to death—while we are still alive”; my trans.].

This passage employs hyperbole and dark humour to illustrate the oppressive and often dehumanizing nature of bureaucratic hierarchies. The comparison of government servants to ‘Bangladeshi refugees’ serves as a hyperbolic metaphor, emphasizing the lack of dignity and respect they receive. The swift transition from frustration to subservience, as seen in the immediate “*Aw ka pu*” (Yes, Sir!) response, highlights the power imbalance and the fear of authority that pervades such environments.

The exaggerated image of superiors compiling past mistakes, “a nung chungin min vaw hlum lo chauh mai si” [“they are ready to beat us to death while still alive”;

my trans.) is a darkly comedic portrayal of the punitive and vindictive nature of bureaucratic oversight. This humour, rooted in incongruity, arises from the stark contrast between the seriousness of the situation and the absurdity of the response. The author's use of such vivid imagery not only critiques the system but also humanizes the experiences of those trapped within it.

This paragraph also explores the theme of dehumanization. The employees are reduced to mere cogs in a machine, their personal lives and struggles disregarded in favor of bureaucratic efficiency. The humour here is a coping mechanism, a way to make sense of and endure the absurdity of their situation. The author's ability to find humour in such a bleak reality is a testament to their resilience and creativity.

Liandinga writes his critique by highlighting the inefficiencies and absurdities of bureaucratic communication, using irony to underscore the systemic failures that plague government operations. He notes:

Hna dang dil tur han awm hlek se a dil theih hun chhung tawp hnu chawlhkar khatah te kan han hria a; a chang leh nimin dar sawmpakhata interview tura min kohna kha tukin tukthuan ei rualte'n kan han hmu vel a. 'March ni 10 hmain i rawn ti ngei tur a ni' an han tihte chu vanneih chang chuan March ni 12-ah te kan hmu ve vat thin. (17)

[“When the other post becomes vacant, we usually find out about it a week after the application deadline has already passed. Sometimes, we receive an interview call stating that the scheduled time was yesterday at 11 o'clock, but the letter arrives today at breakfast. On other occasions, an order saying, ‘You must do it before March 10,’ reaches us on March 12—if we're lucky”; my trans].

This lines relies heavily on irony and exaggeration to highlight the inefficiencies and absurdities of bureaucratic communication and processes. The repeated instances of missed deadlines, delayed notifications, and contradictory instructions create a sense of frustration that is both relatable and comical. The humour here is derived from the incongruity between the expectations of timely and efficient communication and the reality of bureaucratic ineptitude.

The author's portrayal of these experiences serves as a critique of the systemic failures that plague government operations, while also providing a humorous lens through which to view these frustrations. The use of irony in this context not only entertains but also invites reflection on the need for reform within such systems.

This text also touches on the theme of helplessness. The employees are at the mercy of a system that is both inefficient and indifferent to their needs. The humour here is a way to reclaim some agency, to laugh at the absurdity of a situation that is otherwise beyond their control. The author's ability to find humour in such a frustrating reality is a testament to their resilience and creativity.

The humour in this excerpt is multifaceted, employing satire, exaggeration, irony, and incongruity to critique the bureaucratic and political systems that govern the lives of government servants. Through these literary devices, the author exposes the absurdities, inefficiencies, and dehumanizing aspects of such systems, while also humanizing the experiences of those who navigate them. The uniqueness of the author's perspective lies in their ability to blend critique with humour, creating a narrative that is both entertaining and thought-provoking.

By applying the incongruity theory, we can see how the comedic tension results from the disparity between anticipated outcomes and actual events, highlighting the inherent contradictions and failures of bureaucratic systems. This analysis not only illuminates the comedic elements of the text but also underscores its significance as a commentary on the human condition within institutional frameworks. The author's ability to find humour in such a bleak reality is a testament to their resilience and creativity, and their work serves as both a critique and a celebration of the human spirit.

Humour as Resistance

In bureaucratic workplaces, power hierarchies often create frustration and helplessness among workers, particularly those in lower ranks. However, humour serves as a powerful tool for resistance, allowing workers to cope with authority, express dissent, and reclaim a sense of agency. The provided excerpts illustrate how employees use humour—especially irony, sarcasm, and exaggeration—to navigate the rigid structures of bureaucracy and workplace politics.

One of the most striking examples of humour as resistance is the comparison of waiting for the postmaster to *thlengthlawkthei thlir* [spotting a UFO]. This analogy humorously exaggerates the employees' anticipation, implying that receiving official communication is both rare and mysterious. The workers' expectation of receiving a letter marked "Open with a smile"—only to be met with bureaucratic phrasing like "You are hereby..." and "immediately"—is a subtle yet sharp critique of the impersonal nature of authority. By turning this experience into a joke, employees highlight the emotional disconnect between those in power and those at the receiving end of official decisions.

Similarly, humour is used to mock the political figures who control job postings and transfers. The statement that they "chak zawk dawna an inrin deuh chuan, 'Kan sawn ang [boldly declare, 'We will transfer,' when they believe they will come to power]" ridicules the arrogance of political leaders who act as though workers' lives are mere pawns in their political games. However, when these same leaders switch to a more diplomatic tone —*In awmna hmunte pawh hi* [Your posting has been...] —the employees recognize the insincerity behind such polite language. By pointing out this contrast in a humorous manner, workers expose the unpredictability and manipulation in workplace politics, subtly resisting the illusion of fairness.

Another instance of humour as resistance is seen in the teasing remark of the Senior Peon, who compares workers stationed at headquarters to "Bangladeshi refugees." While the comment may seem harsh, it reflects the workers' shared experience of feeling displaced and unimportant within the bureaucratic system. This form of humour fosters camaraderie among employees, helping them cope with the frustrations of their rank. Likewise, the exaggerated description of how superiors "tihsual tawh dang zawng zawng nen an han tham kawp a, a nung chungin min vaw hlum lo chauh mai si" ["compile all our past mistakes, looking as if they are ready to beat us to death—while we are still alive"] turns workplace discipline into a darkly comic scenario. By framing their grievances in hyperbolic terms, workers diminish the power of their superiors and transform their struggles into something laughable rather than oppressive.

Finally, humour is used to highlight the inefficiencies of bureaucratic systems. The frustration of receiving job vacancy notices after the application deadline has

passed, or getting an interview call stating that the meeting was “nimin dar sawmpakhata” [“yesterday at 11 o’clock”]—but the letter arrives the next day—emphasizes the absurdity of bureaucratic delays. Instead of directly complaining, workers turn these experiences into humorous anecdotes, using sarcasm to expose the flaws in the system.

In all these examples, humour functions as a survival strategy, a form of subtle defiance, and a way for workers to maintain their dignity in the face of power hierarchies. By laughing at the system, they strip it of some of its authority, creating a psychological space where they can momentarily reclaim control.

Formal vs Informal Humour

The contrast between formal and informal humour in the workplace is evident in the way authority figures and employees use humour to either reinforce hierarchy or resist it. In the provided excerpts, formal humour appears in indirect, bureaucratic language used in official communication, whereas informal humour emerges through sarcasm, exaggeration, and playful teasing among servants.

Formal humour is seen in the official letters received by employees. The description of the envelope— “Lehkhaip tlang tial, ngun taka char, a chung a ‘Black Stamped’ tihte” [“its edges are striped and meticulously sealed, with ‘Back Stamped’ printed at the top”] —emphasizes the rigid formality of bureaucratic communication. The expectation of receiving something pleasant, like a letter marked “Open with a smile” from a loved one, is humorously contrasted with the reality of receiving an official order that begins with “You are hereby...” and ends with “immediately.” This ironic contrast highlights the impersonal and intimidating nature of formal workplace humour. It also demonstrates how authority figures use humour in a controlled manner, often masking commands within polite but rigid language.

On the other hand, informal humour is more spontaneous and subversive, serving as a coping mechanism among servants. The Senior Peon’s teasing remark—that employees stationed at headquarters “Bangladesh refugee tiat lekin min lo hmu tawh a” [“look like Bangladeshi refugees”]—is an example of informal humour used to mock workplace conditions. While this joke exaggerates the hardships faced by lower-

ranking employees, it also creates a shared sense of amusement and solidarity among them. Similarly, the exaggerated statement that superiors “an phalna lovin khawpui vaivut han pal khu hlek ila tihsual tawh dang zawng zawng nen an han tham kawp a, a nung chungin min vaw hlum lo chauh mai si” [“if we so much as set foot in the city without their permission, they gather up all our past mistakes and come close to striking us down—smiling all the while”] is an instance of informal humour that ridicules the harsh and often unreasonable scrutiny faced by employees. This kind of humour allows workers to express their frustrations in a lighthearted way, turning their grievances into a form of resistance against rigid workplace hierarchies.

In essence, formal humour in the workplace tends to uphold authority, relying on indirect and bureaucratic phrasing to maintain control. In contrast, informal humour is more expressive, often using exaggeration and sarcasm to challenge authority and bond with fellow employees. The stark difference between these two forms of humour reflects the power dynamics in bureaucratic environments, where humour becomes a means of either enforcing rules or resisting them.

Humour as Social Commentary

The use of humour in the given excerpts goes beyond mere entertainment; it serves as a sharp critique of bureaucratic inefficiency, power dynamics, and the unpredictability of workplace politics. Through irony, exaggeration, and sarcasm, the narratives expose systemic flaws in governance, hierarchy, and administration, transforming workplace frustrations into humorous but thought-provoking social commentary.

One of the key criticisms evident in the first excerpt is the unpredictability of political authority and its impact on employees. The statement, “We will transfer,” illustrates how political leaders casually use their assumed power to threaten job stability, reinforcing the idea that bureaucratic decisions are often dictated by personal or political motives rather than merit. The shift in language—from a bold declaration of authority to the more polite but ambiguous “Your posting has been...”—highlights how bureaucratic communication can be deliberately vague, leaving employees uncertain about their future. This humour exposes the hypocrisy of power structures, where direct threats are disguised under seemingly formal and polite statements.

The second excerpt critiques rigid workplace restrictions and the double standards in enforcing rules. The boss's strict prohibition against visiting the city contrasts with the necessity of urgent office visits, revealing the impracticality of certain rules. The humour in the Senior Peon's remark—comparing employees at headquarters to “Bangladeshi refugees”—highlights the poor working conditions and low status of certain employees. This kind of workplace humour, though lighthearted on the surface, reflects deeper frustrations with unfair treatment and hierarchical discrimination. Additionally, the exaggerated reaction to an unapproved visit—“they angrily compile all our past mistakes, looking as if they are ready to beat us to death—while we are still alive!”—demonstrates how bureaucratic systems tend to focus on punishing workers rather than addressing genuine concerns, exposing the inefficiency and oppressive nature of rigid workplace policies.

Through humour, the text effectively critiques bureaucratic incompetence, hierarchical injustices, and the disconnect between authority and employees. The satire captures the frustrations of those working under such systems, using humour as both a coping mechanism and a tool for social critique.

Domestic Humour

Peter L. Berger illustrates domestic humour as a natural and spontaneous occurrence within everyday family life. He provides an example of a young girl playfully imitating her mother by wearing oversized clothing, unintentionally creating a humorous scene. This type of humour is unplanned, often lighthearted, and can be amusing to both family members and outsiders alike. He states:

Take a very common episode of family life: A little girl is dressing up in her mother's clothes. She puts on a dress or a blouse, far too big for her, so that she virtually disappears in it. She slips on a pair of high-heeled shoes, perhaps tops the costume with a hat that slips down to her nose. In this get-up she stumbles around the room in a perfect parody of her mother. (100)

Through this example, Berger emphasizes that domestic humour often arises from the incongruence between expectation and reality. The child's exaggerated imitation of adulthood, with ill-fitting clothes and clumsy movements, creates a comic

contrast that makes the scene amusing. This kind of humour is not only a source of entertainment but also serves as a bonding experience within the family, reinforcing relationships through shared laughter.

More broadly, domestic humour encompasses comedic expressions rooted in everyday home life, family relationships, and routine domestic affairs. It often highlights the absurdities, ironies, and challenges of managing household responsibilities, parenting, marital dynamics, and social expectations. While this form of humour is universal, its specific themes and expressions vary across cultures and historical contexts, reflecting the diverse ways individuals navigate family life.

One of the defining characteristics of domestic humour is its relatability. It thrives on shared experiences, making it highly accessible and engaging for audiences. Whether it is the trials of parenting, the quirks of cohabitation, or the minor frustrations of household chores, these themes resonate widely. Domestic humour frequently relies on situational comedy, revolving around common household scenarios such as miscommunication between spouses, children's antics, or the generational clash between parents and grandparents. These everyday moments, familiar to many, become the foundation for humour.

Exaggeration and absurdity also play a crucial role in domestic humour. Everyday struggles, such as assembling furniture, managing household chores, or dealing with in-laws, are often amplified for comedic effect. By heightening the challenges and frustrations of domestic life, humour emerges from the contrast between expectation and reality. Additionally, wordplay and wit are commonly employed, using puns, irony, and sarcasm to highlight the humour in daily interactions. Clever dialogue, misunderstandings, and quick-witted exchanges create a comedic rhythm that enhances the humour found in routine situations.

Beyond simple amusement, domestic humour often carries an element of social commentary. While it appears lighthearted on the surface, it subtly critiques gender roles, societal expectations, and the challenges of modern family life. Through humour, it sheds light on the complexities of relationships, the division of household labor, and the pressures of maintaining an idealized domestic image. By making these issues

comedic, domestic humour invites audiences to reflect on and question the norms that shape family and home life.

A prime example of this is Mark Twain's essay "The Experiences of the McWilliamses with Membranous Croup" from *Sketches New and Old*, which humorously explores family life and parental anxiety. Comedy unfolds through Mrs. McWilliams' exaggerated panic over their child's mild cough, which she mistakes for the deadly membranous croup. Mr. McWilliams, in contrast, remains skeptical but is helpless against his wife's relentless worry. Twain uses irony and exaggeration to turn this relatable family situation into comedy.

When Mr. McWilliams gently advises his wife not to let their daughter chew on a pine stick, she initially dismisses it but then reverses her stance. She insists that pine contains turpentine, which benefits the kidneys. Mr. McWilliams sarcastically replies, "Ah—I was under a misapprehension, I did not know that the child's kidneys and spine were affected" (100). This exchange humorously captures how husbands often struggle against their wives' ever-changing logic, making even minor household matters absurdly complicated.

As Mrs. McWilliams' anxiety escalates, she insists on moving the child's crib multiple times to ensure safety. The family shuffles between rooms all night, illustrating how parents often make irrational decisions in moments of panic. Twain humorously exaggerates this chaos, depicting a household thrown into disorder over nothing. When Mrs. McWilliams misreads the medicine instructions, she exclaims, "As I live, the directions say give one teaspoonful once an hour! Once an hour!—as if we had a whole year before us to save the child!" (104). Her urgency, despite the absence of real danger, satirizes how parents instinctively assume the worst and demand immediate action.

Conclusively, all the distress proves unnecessary, yet Mr. McWilliams quietly submits to his wife's authority, highlighting the humour in marital dynamics. Twain transforms ordinary family life into comedy, making this essay a timeless example of domestic humour that reflects the universal quirks of marriage and parenting.

This blend of humour and insight is also central to Charles Lamb's *Essays of Elia*, where he frequently explores domestic settings with nostalgia and gentle satire. His essays capture the nuances of everyday life with warmth, irony, and self-deprecating humour, making them a prime example of domestic humour. One of the best illustrations of this is "A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig," in which Lamb humorously portrays a child's overwhelming excitement in introducing his parent to a new experience, transforming an ordinary family interaction into a scene of exaggerated comedic chaos:

Bo-bo, whose scent was wonderfully sharpened since morning, soon raked out another pig, and fairly rending it asunder, thrust the lesser half by main force into the fists of Ho-ti, still shouting out "Eat, eat, eat the burnt pig, father, only taste—O Lord," —with such-like barbarous ejaculations, cramming all the while as if he would choke (247).

Lamb humorously illustrates a child's unrestrained excitement as Bo-bo eagerly thrusts a piece of roasted pig into his father Ho-ti's hands, insisting that he taste it. The humour is generated by the exaggerated description of Bo-bo's heightened sense of smell, as if he has developed a supernatural ability overnight. This playful overstatement adds to the absurdity of the scene, making his enthusiasm seem almost excessive.

The frantic repetition of "Eat, eat, eat the burnt pig, father!" further enhances the comedic effect. Bo-bo's urgency and overwhelming excitement contrast sharply with his father's likely confusion and distress over the house burning down. Instead of reacting with anger or reprimanding his son for causing destruction, Ho-ti is swept up in the moment, shifting his focus entirely to the unexpected discovery of roasted pork. This reversal of expectations transforms a potentially disastrous situation into a moment of delight, reinforcing the humorous absurdity of the narrative.

The section demonstrates domestic humour by portraying a recognizable father-son interaction within a household setting. Bo-bo's relentless enthusiasm mirrors real-life situations in which children excitedly introduce their parents to new experiences, often with an intensity that overrides any practical concerns. The contrast between the child's eagerness and the parent's bewilderment is both exaggerated and relatable,

highlighting the comedy inherent in everyday family life. Through irony, exaggeration, and an amusing shift in focus, Lamb captures the chaos and charm of domestic relationships.

A similar use of humour can be found in P.L. Liandinga's essay "Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna" ["Government Job in the Village"], from his collection *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh*, PL Liandinga humorously remarks, "Kan han luah fel meuh chuan mi bungrua kan hawh zawng zawng chu la fai se chuan chan a lawi kan nei lo vang." (14) ["Once we rent a house, if the owner takes back all their belongings, there would be nothing left for us—we'd be left with absolutely nothing"; my trans.].

The humour in this excerpt is shaped by the unexpected deviation from logical assumptions, reinforcing the ideas central to incongruity theory. The humour here stems from the exaggerated contrast between the assumption that renting a house provides a place to live and the absurd realization that, without the owner's belongings, tenants would be left in complete emptiness. Typically, one expects that renting a house ensures a stable living space, but Liandinga's statement subverts this expectation by implying that tenants are left in a barren shell of a home, challenging the very notion of what it means to 'rent' a place.

This type of humour falls under domestic humour, as it draws from everyday family life and relatable experiences. Many people, especially those in rural communities, have encountered landlords who maintain a strong claim over their property. The exaggerated suggestion that everything, down to the last item, belongs to the owner highlights the dependence of tenants on borrowed property, making it an amusingly familiar scenario for the audience. Furthermore, the humour is heightened by the conversational tone and the implicit irony in the phrase "chan alawi kan nei lo vang," ["there will be absolutely nothing left for me"] which emphasizes the absurdity of the situation.

Liandinga employs a similar approach to humour in his depiction of household habits, particularly in his observations on the tendency to postpone dishwashing:

Thleng sil tur kan han 'pending' a, ei leh dawnah kut sil pahin kan han nuai fai a, ei lehna hnu pawh ei lehpek dawn huna nuai faiah kan han kheh leh a, 'A

inchiah rei avangin a fai duh zawk' te'n kan hre vel a. Peih lo em ema rawngbawl pahin, 'Lawmna kim chu rawngbawl na hi a ni' tih hlate kha kan sa vel mai mai a. Parawl zet zawng, chhung rual tih chi tak chauh a lo ni. (14)

[“We leave the dishes from one meal to soak while we prepare the next, washing our hands as we go—only to add more dishes to the pile afterward. It reminds us of the saying, ‘If it soaks, it gets cleaner.’ And when we cook half-heartedly, we console ourselves by singing, ‘True joy is found in service/cooking.’ What a single person manages alone often requires a whole family to accomplish”; my trans.].

This portion generates humour through the incongruity theory. The usual expectation is that dishes are washed immediately after eating as a hygienic and responsible practice. However, the reality described here is quite the opposite—washing dishes only when they are needed again, or even skipping the task entirely until the next meal. The humour emerges from the exaggerated and almost comically lazy approach to dishwashing, which is in direct contrast to traditional notions of cleanliness and discipline in household chores.

Additionally, the irony in the saying “A inchiah rei avangin a fai duh zawk” [“If it soaks, it gets cleaner”] adds to the comedic effect. While soaking dishes can indeed help loosen dirt, the statement is taken to an extreme, implying that simply leaving dirty dishes for an extended period will miraculously clean them without effort. This misinterpretation of a practical method is an example of domestic humour, as it reflects the relatable, everyday experiences of procrastination in household tasks.

The humour is further enhanced in the closing remark about reluctantly cooking while singing “Lawmna kim chu rawngbawl na hi a ni” [“True joy is found in service/cooking”]. The contradiction between the reluctance to cook and the cheerful, dutiful message of the song creates an amusing paradox. This moment highlights how people often use sayings or songs to justify or ease their discomfort with tasks they dislike. The humour here is deeply rooted in domestic life, making it particularly enjoyable for those familiar with the daily struggles of household responsibilities.

A similar comedic approach can be found in PL Liandinga's essay "Keini Zawng Thingtlang Mi Kan Nia" ["We Are the Villagers"], where he humorously portrays the everyday struggles of a village household:

Zanah kan han mu dawn a, kan pawnpui, engtik kum atanga suk loh tan tawh nge tih pawh hriat loh chu kan han pawtsawi ve vel a. Naupanghovin, "Ka pa, kan pawnpui hmul hi engtikah nge a to leh ang?" an han ti a! Zan a lo rei deuhvin an mu fel dawn ta maw tihah naupang tho a chu pawnpui tetah an han vak chhuak vel a. Kan inbeng fel ta maw tihah nau a lo e, nu berin ui a'n ko va. Thenawmte upui, eiruk hmanh tih hriat reng reng a lo tlan lut zuau zuau a. Nu berin, "Che hlek suh! I chet chuan i delh pherh a ni mai!" a'n ti teng chhuai a. Fanau malsawmna kan dawn hma kan ngai rauh rauh mai thin. (22-23)

[“At bedtime, we pull over a blanket—one so old and tattered that we can’t even recall the last time it was washed. The children, in their innocence, ask, ‘Dad, when will the wool on our blanket grow back?’ Just as we are about to sleep, one child starts sleepwalking through the torn fabric. Once that chaos is settled, another child has an accident, and in a moment of desperation, the mother calls the dog to clean it up. The sneaky neighbor’s dog sneaks into the room. In the midst of the commotion, the mother shouts, ‘Don’t move! If you do, you’ll be scattered like dry leaves!’—a warning to all the children. At that times, we yearn for the peaceful days before these beloved children were born”; my trans.].

This segment is an example of domestic humour, as it captures the chaotic reality of family life in a rural home. The humour arises primarily from the application of incongruity theory, which states that humour is produced when there is a mismatch between expectation and reality. The typical expectation of bedtime is a peaceful retreat into rest. However, the reality presented in this paragraph is filled with absurd disruptions—dirty blankets, innocent yet amusing questions from children, and a series of unexpected nighttime events.

The child’s question, “Ka pa, kan pawnpui hmul hi engtikah nge a to leh ang?” [“When will the wool on our blanket grow back?”] is particularly humorous because it reveals a childlike misunderstanding of how blankets work. Instead of recognizing the

irreversible deterioration of the blanket, the child treats it as though it were a living thing capable of regrowing, much like a sheep's wool. This naive yet logical perspective creates a humorous contrast between adult knowledge and a child's innocent worldview.

Further humour arises from the escalating chaos of bedtime—first, a child sleepwalks through the torn fabric, emphasizing the blanket's poor condition in a literal way. Then, another child has an accident, and in a moment of absurd practicality, the mother calls the dog to clean up the mess. The humour is heightened when, instead of their own dog, the sly neighbor's dog sneaks in, introducing an unexpected and mischievous element to the scene.

The mother's exaggerated warning—"Che hlek suh! I chet chuan i delh pherh a ni mai!" ["Don't move! If you do, you'll be scattered like dry leaves!"]—adds another layer of humour. The simile paints an over-the-top picture of the children being thrown into disarray, emphasizing the level of disorder in the household. This exaggeration is a common comedic device, making the situation even more amusing.

In essence, the text is an example of domestic humour because it draws from relatable family experiences. It highlights the struggles of maintaining order in a household full of children, using irony, exaggeration, and incongruous situations to create a humorous effect. Many parents and caregivers can relate to the overwhelming nature of family life, making the humour both personal and universal.

A similar use of humour can be found in PL Liandinga's book *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh*, where he includes the essay "Hei Hi Ka Nupui A Nia" ["This is My Wife"; my trans.]. In this piece, he humorously describes his wife in a way that captures the comedic dynamics of marriage and everyday domestic life as follows:

Han inhel lai kha chuan nupa khum te chu zahawm phurawm pui pui leh pangpar mawi tak taka chei, fiamthu nuihzatthlak leh hmangaihna thu sawi melh melhna hmun turah tlangval chuan kan suangtuah thin a. Mahse, han inneih tak tak ralah chuan indona mualah pawh a hautak lai ber a ni mai awm mang e tih theih a lo ni pek a. Tihfuh loh zan chuan hachhek hlui thlah palh ang maiin lehlam hawiin an han let ngût mai a. Han dek zauh ila a khawi lai mai

pawh hi a sak fun mai a. Mahni khumlaizawlah puan sin tur tlachhamin zawngtah tangrah tla ang maiin pachang kan mu kawm chal mai a. Han khawih hlek ila sak fun e ti lo chuan an pum chet ang dul dul a. (24)

[“Before marriage, a couple’s bed is imagined as a place of desire, adorned with beautiful flowers, filled with romantic conversations and playful jokes—that’s how a young man envisions it. But in reality, after marriage, it becomes the toughest battlefield. When the night’s mood goes wrong, they turn away from each other, like an old adze falling to the ground. Every touch is met with stiffness and resistance. As for me, the father, I sleep curled up uncomfortably, like a bitter bean pod falling from a tree—on a large bed that feels empty, yet lacking even a proper blanket to cover myself”; my trans].

PL Liandinga’s humorous depiction of marital life in the given lines embodies the application of incongruity theory in humour. The theory, which suggests that humour arises when expectations are subverted by an unexpected outcome, is evident in the stark contrast between pre-marital imagination and post-marital reality. The young man’s idealized vision of a romantic bed, adorned with flowers and filled with tender moments, is abruptly contradicted by the depiction of it as a battleground where intimacy gives way to resentment and physical detachment. This shift from an expected scenario of love and harmony to one of discomfort and estrangement creates an incongruous effect, evoking laughter from the reader.

The humour in this excerpt is further reinforced through Liandinga’s use of vivid and exaggerated similes. The comparison of a quarreling couple turning away from each other to ‘hachhek hlui thlah palh ang’ [“as an old adze falling to the ground”] humorously emphasizes the rigidity and lifelessness of their interaction. Similarly, the father’s description of himself as a “zawngtah tangrah tla ang maiin” [“as a bitter bean pod falling from a tree”] highlights not only his discomfort but also his insignificance in the grand scheme of marital disputes. The exaggeration of these metaphors serves to enhance the comedic effect while simultaneously resonating with the universal experience of marital tension.

Additionally, this section depicts domestic humour—comedy derived from everyday life, particularly within the household setting. Domestic humour often draws

upon the familiarity of shared human experiences, and in this case, Liandinga humorously captures the reality of marital struggles that many couples endure. The imagery of the husband lying curled up on a large bed that paradoxically feels both empty and lacking in comfort humorously conveys the irony of personal space within a strained relationship. This scenario, though exaggerated, reflects real-life moments of tension in marriage, making it relatable and amusing to readers.

Through his use of incongruity and domestic humour, Liandinga transforms an otherwise mundane or even unpleasant aspect of married life into a source of amusement. The comedic value arises from the unexpected contrast, the use of exaggerated yet familiar imagery, and the relatability of the situation, all of which align with the principles of incongruity theory.

Liandinga's humour extends beyond marital dynamics to family life as a whole. In the same essay, he offers an equally humorous portrayal of his family and children, further exploring the complexities and comedic moments of domestic life as follows:

Thenawmte hi a ni sual ka tih em em thin chu! Pawi khawih leh rukruk te hi an hrat ngawtin ka hria! Kan bungrua, entirnan bakmeh chemte te hi a lo ner sâng mai a, a titu lah kan inchhungah kan awm miah si lo va! Thenawmte tih ngei a nih ka ring a ni. A bo palha pawia viau thei ang chi reng reng hi chu a'n bo daih zel mai a, kan fate hi chu an tha bawk chu ni tur a ni — an tih a lo ni ngai reng reng lo zel mai a. (26)

[“After all, it must be our neighbor! They are always up to no good—constantly stealing and causing trouble! Our property, for example—our scissors become completely blunt, and no one in our family admits to using them! We’re sure it must be our neighbor’s doing! We always seem to lose valuable things. Our children? They’re far too well-behaved to do such things—of course, all of this must be the neighbor’s fault!”; my trans.].

PL Liandinga's humorous depiction of everyday domestic conflicts, particularly in the portion accusing the neighbors of mischief, epitomizes incongruity theory in humour. The theory suggests that humour arises when an expectation is subverted by an unexpected or absurd outcome. In this case, the narrator irrationally blames every

household inconvenience—blunt scissors, missing valuables, and disorder—on the neighbors, despite the implausibility of such accusations. The exaggerated certainty that “*thenawmte tih ngei a nih ka ring a ni*” [“it must be our neighbor’s doing!”] presents an absurd logic, where the family absolves themselves of any responsibility for their own misplaced or damaged possessions. This contradiction between expectation (rational problem-solving) and the absurdity of blaming an external party (the neighbors) generates humour.

Furthermore, the humour is heightened through the unreliable and exaggerated self-perception of the family. The claim that “*kan fate hi chu an tha bawk chu ni tur a ni — an tih a lo ni ngai reng reng lo zel mai a.*” [“our children? They’re far too well-behaved to do such things”] is inherently humorous because it contradicts the reality of typical household dynamics where children often cause minor chaos. The comedic effect emerges from the juxtaposition of this idealized image of the family with the absurdity of their misplaced blame. The irony of this exaggerated innocence reinforces the humour, as readers recognize the unrealistic portrayal of the family as flawless while the neighbors are demonized as perpetual wrongdoers.

This segment also serves as an example of domestic humour, which derives its comedic impact from relatable, everyday experiences within the household. Families frequently experience minor inconveniences such as misplaced items, broken tools, and children causing mischief—yet the exaggerated response of shifting blame to an external figure, in this case, the neighbors, creates an amusing hyperbole of real-life situations. The humour resonates with readers because it reflects a familiar pattern of irrational blame-shifting within family life, where external scapegoats are humorously held responsible for internal household mishaps.

The lines employ incongruity theory by subverting rational expectations with an illogical yet amusing narrative of blame. By portraying the family as entirely innocent and the neighbors as the culprits behind every inconvenience, the humour emerges from the absurdity of this assertion. Additionally, the relatability of the exaggerated family dynamics enhances the domestic humour, making the passage an effective comedic commentary on everyday household misunderstandings.

Liandinga extends this humorous exploration of family life to marriage as well. In the same essay, he offers a lighthearted portrayal of his wife, illustrating the playful tensions and affectionate exaggerations that characterize domestic relationships:

Nulat laia a changtunu rim nam hiam, uluk deuh deuhva inchei duhdah thin, mi dangin chhia an tihna lai ber pawh ngaih la tlata kan hriat thin kha pawnfen mawng huh ang hliam hluamin inchhungah an han kal sawk sawk mai a, an hmelin ngaihsan lem loh thenawmnu hmel lah a ang tawlh tawlh lehnghal a. Thah thiang lo note ni awm fahran, angel-ah pawh a nunnem pawl tak ni mai tura kan lo ngaihbel thin khan thiante nupui zinga a huaisen pawl, tlangval lai pawha kan lo huphurh ruk fo thin awm dan te an chhun tawlh tawlin kan hria a. (27)

[“When she was a young maiden, she had the charm of a heroine—dressing in a way that seemed both careless and deliberate, making others see her as reckless. And perhaps that’s exactly why we were drawn to her. But now, she walks around the house with the hem of her skirt still wet, her appearance resembling that of an unkempt neighbor’s mother. Back in our youth, we never doubted that she was the gentlest among angels. Yet now, she has become like one of our friends’ wives—fierce and commanding—while we, once bold young men, no longer dare to challenge”; my trans.].

The paragraph humorously contrasts the idealized image of a young maiden with the stark reality of a married woman’s daily life, creating a comedic effect through incongruity. The initial description of the woman as a charming and carefree heroine evokes romanticized expectations of youth and love. The narrator’s admiration for her recklessness suggests a youthful attraction to unpredictability and excitement. However, this admiration is subverted when the narrative shifts to her current state—walking around the house with the hem of her skirt still wet, resembling an unkempt mother from the neighborhood. The stark contrast between the idealized past and the mundane present produces humour by highlighting the exaggerated transformation.

The humour is further reinforced by the narrator’s realization that the once-gentle woman, whom he once regarded as angelic, has now become a commanding figure like his friends’ wives. This reversal of roles—where the once-bold men now

find themselves subdued and hesitant—highlights the classic comedic trope of the domesticated husband. The incongruity emerges from the sharp contrast between youthful expectations and married life’s unglamorous reality. This transformation is not just unexpected but also exaggerated for comedic effect, making the humour resonate with those who have experienced or observed similar domestic shifts.

Moreover, this text embodies domestic humour by drawing from everyday marital experiences. It captures the universal theme of how marriage alters perceptions and dynamics between partners. The narrator’s resigned acceptance of his wife’s newfound dominance mirrors the shared experiences of many husbands, making the humour relatable. Additionally, the exaggerated depiction of a woman’s shift from a romanticized angelic figure to a practical, no-nonsense wife enhances the comedic impact. This portrayal plays on gender expectations and the inevitability of change in relationships, allowing the audience to find amusement in the exaggerated yet familiar domestic scene.

Through its use of incongruity, exaggeration, and relatability, the passage crafts a humorous reflection on the realities of marriage. The contrast between youthful admiration and marital practicality creates an amusing dissonance, turning an otherwise mundane domestic transformation into a source of comedic relief.

Liandinga’s exploration of domestic humour extends beyond marriage to family life as a whole. In another essay, “Eng Kan Ti Nge Keini Chhung Hi!” [“Why Is Our Family Like This?”; my trans.], from the same book, he humorously reflects on his family, particularly highlighting the amusing quirks and experiences of his children:

“Tu tih nge?”

“Kei chu ka ni lo.”

“Ka va kal a, a lo keh ringawt.”

“Ka tih a ni lo. Heti hian a bulah ka kal a, hemi hian mirawn nam a. A keh ringawt.”

“Ka nam lo che. I banah karawn khawih ringawt a nih kha.”

Kan inzawt thui tawlh tawlh a, a titu an vang tulh tulh mai. Darthlalang, a titu awm lova keh kan ngah tawh em em a. A titu awm lova lehkhaw thler ta mai

te, latu awm lova thil bo te, eitu awm lova ei tur zo ta vek te leh thil dang, a titu awm lo hi kan inchhungah chuan a tam em em a ni.” (34)

[“Who did this?”

“Not me.”

“I’m going there—and it was already broken.”

“I didn’t do it! I just went near him, and he pushed me, and it broke.”

“I didn’t push you! I only touched your arm!”

We question them, yet the truth becomes even harder to find. In our house, there are many broken glasses, yet no one admits to breaking them! A book is torn, yet no one did it. Things go missing, but no one took them. The food is gone, yet no one ate it. And so, time and time again, countless things happen—yet somehow, nobody is ever responsible; my trans.].

The text humorously illustrates a common domestic scenario where accountability is consistently evaded. The incongruity lies in the contradiction between the undeniable evidence of broken and missing items and the absolute denial of responsibility by all household members. This exaggerated avoidance of blame, despite clear indications of mischief, creates an amusing paradox that aligns with the principles of incongruity theory.

One way the humour emerges is through the dialogue, which reflects the absurd nature of familial disputes. The repetitive denials—“Kei chu ka ni lo” [“Not me”], “Ka tih a ni lo” [“I didn’t do it!”]—present a familiar pattern in household dynamics, where no one confesses, and yet the damage is evident. The humour is heightened as each child shifts blame, complicating the situation rather than resolving it. The incongruity here arises from the expectation that questioning will uncover the truth, but instead, it leads to greater confusion and absurdity.

Additionally, the excerpt employs hyperbole to emphasize the mysterious nature of the disappearing or broken objects. The phrase “a titu awm lo hi kan inchhungah chuan a tam em em a ni” [“countless things happen—yet somehow, nobody is ever responsible”] humorously exaggerates the frequency of such occurrences, making it seem as though supernatural forces are at play. This exaggeration enhances the comedic effect by highlighting the absurdity of the denials.

This section is a strong example of domestic humour because it resonates with shared experiences in family life. Many readers can relate to the chaos of a household where accidents happen, yet no one takes responsibility. The humour is rooted in the everyday reality of family interactions, making it both entertaining and relatable. Furthermore, the universality of such incidents in households strengthens the comedic appeal, as it taps into the collective memory of similar experiences shared across different cultures and backgrounds.

Through the incongruity between expectation and reality, exaggerated denials, and a humorous portrayal of familial dynamics, the portion effectively produces a sense of humour that is deeply rooted in domestic life. The portrayal of children's evasive logic and the seemingly endless cycle of blame reflect a playful yet realistic aspect of household life, turning an otherwise frustrating scenario into a source of amusement.

Building on this theme of domestic imperfection, PL Liandinga humorously remarks in the same essay that nothing is ever truly perfect inside his house:

Cushion hnuai awm thei lo thil eng nge awm ang aw? tih hi kan in chhungah chuan ngaihtuah tham a ni. Marble te, tuboh fang te, perek hlui, thirchhiaa hralh tur te, lehkhabu te, papor te, moza te, pen te, thirfian te a awm thei vek a. A chang phei chuan thutthleng kara thil dah a chhiat hlahv vingin thutthlengah inlengte chu sawi loh, chhungkhat pa ber pawh kan thut a thiang lo va. Thil a bo va, rin aia hmuh har deuh chuan thutthleng phah chhan hi keu phawt tur a ni. Kan vurbawm pui pawh hi bo se thutthleng hnuai hi a rinhlelhawm pawl tak a ni ta ve ang! (35)

[“What couldn’t be under the cushion?”—that’s the biggest mystery in our house. Marbles, a hammer, an old nail waiting to be sold, books, paper, socks, pens, spoons—almost anything can turn up there. At times, no one is allowed to sit on it, not even Father (the head of the house), for fear of breaking something hidden underneath. Whenever something goes missing, the first place we check is under the cushion. Honestly, if our refrigerator ever disappeared, we’d probably suspect it was there too”; my trans.].

The segment presents a humorous depiction of a household mystery—the seemingly endless variety of objects found under the cushion. The humour arises primarily from incongruity, as the reader encounters an unexpected and exaggerated contrast between the ordinary function of a cushion and the absurdly diverse assortment of items concealed beneath it. According to incongruity theory, humour emerges when there is a surprising deviation from logical expectations. In this case, a cushion, typically associated with comfort and relaxation, is humorously transformed into a chaotic storage space where even a refrigerator might plausibly be found. This exaggeration challenges the reader’s common sense, creating an amusing cognitive dissonance.

The humour is further heightened by the specificity of the listed items—marbles, a hammer, an old nail, books, socks, pens, and spoons—objects that, in reality, have no reason to be collectively hidden in such a place. The inclusion of these items, which vary in size, function, and value, amplifies the absurdity. The climax of the humour comes with the hyperbolic suggestion that if the refrigerator were ever to go missing, it might also be found under the cushion. This unexpected leap from small household objects to a massive appliance exemplifies the core principle of incongruity theory: the creation of an unrealistic but comically exaggerated scenario.

This paragraph also fits within the realm of domestic humour, which derives its comedic effect from relatable, everyday situations within family life. Many households experience misplaced items and children or family members who carelessly leave things in unlikely places. By exaggerating this common experience to a ridiculous degree, the passage taps into a shared familial reality, making it both amusing and engaging for readers who recognize similar situations in their own homes. The mention of a father being prohibited from sitting on the cushion for fear of breaking something hidden underneath adds another layer of humour by highlighting the exaggerated importance placed on protecting these misplaced items, even over the comfort of the head of the household.

Moreover, the conversational tone and casual exaggeration make the humour more effective. The phrase “Kan vurbawm pui pawh hi bo se thutthleng hnuai hi a rinhlelhawm pawl tak a ni ta ve ang!” [“if our refrigerator ever disappeared, we’d probably suspect it was there too!”] provides an exaggerated punchline that solidifies

the humour. The excerpt is structured in a way that gradually builds comedic tension, leading to an absurd yet relatable conclusion.

At last, this text demonstrates how incongruity theory and domestic humour work together to transform an everyday household quirk into an amusing, exaggerated narrative that resonates with the reader.

Liandinga extends this playful exploration of family life by humorously reflecting on his children in the same essay:

Pathian lehkhabu phék khawí maw laia cowboy lem ziah hi a hmuhnawm dan a lawmawm loh ngawt mai. Bang hmai var ṭha lai tak maia liANtLU han tih kuau mai te hi chu a lawmawm dan min hmuhpui thiam tur chuan mi dang beisei ve vak chi pawh a ni lo. ‘Ka pa, en teh en teh!’ an han tih te hian hnathawh laklawh lai tak pawh ni se en hram hram a ṭha. Chuti lo chu phur zetin an rawn khai chhuak a, kawrchungte hi hruiin an rawn hlin loh vek pawhin nghawngawrh te’n ui tê an rawn kai thut thei. (37)

[“A cowboy illustration on the pages of the Holy Bible is hardly a welcome sight. Likewise, seeing liANtLU scribbled on a white wall is far from pleasing. Yet, when they call out, “Dad, look, look!” we have no choice but to turn our attention, no matter how busy we are. If we don’t, they’ll eagerly tug at our coat with a rope—or worse, they might even drag the little dog around by its necktie”; my trans.].

The segment humorously juxtaposes the unexpected with the mundane, creating a comedic effect through the incongruity theory of humour. The opening line sets the stage for an absurd contrast—while the Holy Bible traditionally features solemn and religious imagery, the presence of a cowboy illustration disrupts this expectation, generating a humorous incongruity. Similarly, the phrase “Bang hmai var ṭha lai tak maia liANtLU han tih kuau mai te hi...” [“liANtLU scribbled on a white wall”] evokes a clash between the pristine and the defaced, reinforcing the humour through an exaggerated sense of disorder in an otherwise orderly environment.

The humour deepens with the depiction of children demanding attention. The phrase “Ka pa, en teh en teh!” [“Dad, look, look!”] is a universal childhood call, but its

humorous impact lies in its inevitability—no matter how preoccupied the parent is, they must respond. This moment is relatable and amusing due to the exaggeration of parental obligation, reinforcing how domestic life is often governed by the unpredictable whims of children.

The final sentences escalate the humour by presenting an exaggerated consequence of ignoring the child's plea. The imagery of children tugging at a coat with a rope is unexpected, but the true comedic peak emerges with the absurdity of dragging a small dog by its necktie. The exaggeration and absurd logic amplify the incongruity—while children may indeed engage in playful mischief, the idea that they would resort to such exaggerated actions in response to being ignored creates a humorous dissonance between expectation and reality.

This section illustrates domestic humour by capturing the chaotic and unpredictable nature of family life. The humour stems from exaggeration and the inversion of expectations—parenting requires constant vigilance, and failing to engage with children's demands can lead to unexpectedly hilarious consequences. The humour is further enriched by its relatability; readers with experience in family life recognize the truth behind the absurdity, making it even more amusing.

Humour and Gender Roles

Humour in domestic settings often serves as a lens through which gender roles, family dynamics, and household responsibilities are explored. The selected excerpts provide a rich depiction of everyday life, using humour to illustrate the realities of domestic labour, parenting, and marital relationships. Through exaggeration, irony, and satire, these narratives highlight the contrast between romanticized expectations and the mundane struggles of family life.

One of the most striking aspects of humour in these excerpts is its role in reinforcing traditional gender roles within the household. The depiction of housework, child-rearing, and marital interactions reflects long-standing societal expectations, particularly regarding the division of labor. In the excerpt about washing dishes, there is a lighthearted resignation toward procrastination—"If it soaks, it gets cleaner." This humorous justification for delaying chores subtly comments on how domestic

responsibilities, often viewed as trivial, are inevitable and repetitive. Similarly, the scene of a chaotic bedtime routine, where children's antics disrupt the parents' sleep, portrays the mother as the central figure in managing disorder. Her exaggerated command—"Don't move! If you do, you'll be scattered like dry leaves!"—establishes her as both authoritative and nurturing, embodying the cultural expectation that mothers serve as primary caregivers.

Reinforcing or Challenging Stereotypes

While humour in these narratives acknowledges gender roles, it also satirizes them, sometimes reinforcing stereotypes and at other times subtly critiquing them. The trope of the 'nagging wife' appears in the description of the wife's transformation from a youthful, angelic figure to a 'fierce and commanding' presence. This portrayal aligns with a common comedic stereotype of wives in domestic humour—gentle and desirable before marriage but domineering and unyielding afterward. The husband's passive reaction—"while we, once bold young men, no longer dare to challenge"—reflects a shift in power dynamics where men, who were once assertive in their youth, now adopt a more submissive role in the household. While this could be interpreted as reinforcing a stereotype, the humour also invites reflection on how marriage alters relationships, revealing the deeper emotional and psychological shifts that come with time.

However, domestic humour does not solely portray women as authoritarian figures. The depiction of the husband's sleeping position—"curled up uncomfortably, like a bitter bean pod falling from a tree"—suggests that men, too, face discomfort and powerlessness in domestic life. His large bed, paradoxically "empty, yet lacking even a proper blanket," captures the irony of domestic dissatisfaction. This suggests that marriage is not merely a battleground where men feel defeated by their wives; rather, it is a space where both partners experience challenges, expectations, and disillusionments that contrast sharply with their earlier romanticized notions of married life.

Male vs Female Perspectives

The approach to humour in domestic spaces often varies depending on the author's gender. Male authors, as seen in these excerpts, frequently use self-deprecating

humour to present themselves as passive figures in the household. They emphasize their perceived loss of authority, portraying themselves as confused, overpowered, or trapped by domestic life. The line “At times like these, we can’t help but yearn for the peaceful days before these beloved children were born” humorously suggests that fatherhood, while fulfilling, also brings unforeseen chaos and exhaustion.

Female authors, in contrast, tend to use humour to critique the unequal distribution of labor in domestic spaces. While male perspectives often exaggerate their lack of control in marriage, female perspectives may highlight the invisible and undervalued work performed by women. For instance, if a woman were narrating these events, she might focus more on the burdens of childcare, housework, and the emotional labor of maintaining relationships. The humour would likely shift from lamenting a husband’s loss of authority to exposing how men avoid domestic responsibilities or fail to recognize the full extent of women’s labor.

These excerpts exemplify how humour functions as both a reinforcement and critique of gender roles in domestic life. While traditional stereotypes, such as the ‘nagging wife’ and ‘passive husband,’ appear in the humour, they are also exaggerated to the point of self-reflection. The absurdity of household struggles, from washing dishes to bedtime chaos, invites readers to see humour as a coping mechanism for the challenges of family life. The difference between male and female approaches to domestic humour suggests that humour is not just a tool for reinforcing stereotypes but also a way to expose societal expectations and question the realities of marriage, parenting, and domestic labor.

Table 1: Comparison of Three Types of Humour in PL Liandinga’s Essays

Aspect	Rural Humour	Workplace Humour	Domestic Humour
Primary Setting	Rural villages and countryside life	Government offices and bureaucratic environments	Family life and household routines
Main Source of Humour	Cultural misunderstandings, exaggerated simplicity of rural life, and unexpected struggles	Bureaucratic inefficiencies, absurd workplace dynamics, and political favoritism	Marital conflicts, parenting struggles, and household mishaps
Use of Incongruity	Contrast between rural expectations	Contradictions in official procedures,	The gap between romanticized

	and urban perspectives, exaggerating village customs	miscommunication, and ironic bureaucracy	family life and the chaotic reality
Narrative Tone	Lighthearted, observational, often self-deprecating	Satirical, witty, often critical of government inefficiency	Playful, exaggerated, and rooted in daily family interactions
Key Literary Techniques	Irony, exaggeration, cultural contrast	Satire, sarcasm, irony, and bureaucratic jargon	Hyperbole, irony, self-deprecation, and witty comparisons
Common Themes	Adapting to rural settings, village customs, unexpected difficulties of simple life	Struggles of government employees, frustration with officialdom, unpredictable transfers	The unpredictability of family life, shifting power dynamics in marriage, mischief of children
Character Portrayal	Innocent villagers, well-meaning but naive	Overbearing superiors, indifferent officials, struggling employees	Exasperated husbands, authoritative wives, mischievous children
Example of Humour	The absurdity of poor infrastructure, delayed newspapers, livestock disrupting homes	Receiving official letters late, being treated unfairly by political party leaders, frustration with transfers	Children avoiding responsibility, misplaced objects under cushions, unrealistic expectations of marriage

This chapter has explored the humour in PL Liandinga's essays through the lens of incongruity theory, focusing on rural life, workplace experiences, and domestic humour. By examining how Liandinga transforms everyday situations into comedic narratives, it is evident that his humour is deeply rooted in observation, exaggeration, and irony. His works resonate with the universal experiences of adapting to rural environments, navigating bureaucratic challenges, and managing the unpredictability of family life.

Liandinga's portrayal of rural humour reflects the unique cultural and social dynamics of Mizoram, while also drawing parallels with humorists like Mark Twain, Charles Lamb, and R.K. Narayan. His ability to highlight the quirks of village life—whether through the absurdity of bureaucratic inefficiencies or the chaos of raising children—demonstrates how humour serves as both entertainment and social

commentary. By applying incongruity theory, we see how the unexpected disruptions in daily life become a source of comedy, allowing readers to find amusement in the contradictions between expectation and reality.

Furthermore, his essays on workplace humour expose the frustrations of government service, using satire and exaggeration to critique bureaucracy and political dynamics. His wit lies in his ability to make light of serious institutional challenges while maintaining a playful, self-deprecating tone that makes his reflections engaging and accessible.

Domestic humour, another key component of Liandinga's comedic style, brings to life the everyday struggles of marriage, parenting, and household management. His humorous depictions of family dynamics—children evading responsibility, the unpredictable placement of household items, and the transformation of romantic ideals after marriage—illustrate the relatability and universality of family life. His work captures the essence of domestic humour by revealing the absurdities of ordinary moments and turning them into sources of laughter.

Through this analysis, it is clear that Liandinga's humour is not merely a means of amusement but a reflection of the human experience. Whether through rural life, workplace struggles, or family interactions, his writing highlights the charm of everyday imperfections, showing how humour helps people navigate and embrace life's unpredictable nature.

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Chapter-3

Rhetorical Devices in the Humour of Mafaa Hauhnar

Rhetorical devices play an important role in the construction of humour across various forms of discourse, including stand-up comedy, humour writing, etc. These devices, which include irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, and wordplay, are necessary for creating humour that resonates with audiences and readers. The effectiveness of humour often hinges on the strategic use of these rhetorical techniques, which can manipulate language and context to provoke laughter and engage listeners.

The main aspect of rhetorical devices in humour is their ability to create incongruity, a key element in humour theory. Incongruity arises when there is a mismatch between expectations and reality, leading to humorous effect. For instance, highlight that humorous texts often utilize structural and linguistic incongruity to evoke laughter, emphasizing the importance of context and audience perception in interpreting humour (Rosenberg et al., 717). Similarly, discuss how rhetorical strategies in humorous discourse can influence audience perceptions and conceptualizations of humour through the use of metaphor and other rhetorical devices (Tianli et al., 27). This indicates that humour encompasses not only the substance of jokes but also how they are framed rhetorically.

Moreover, the role of rhetorical devices extends beyond mere amusement; they can serve as tools for social commentary and critique. The analysis of disparagement humour reveals that rhetorical structures can reinforce social norms and attitudes while simultaneously providing a platform for humour (Weaver). This dual function of humour—entertaining while critiquing—underscores the complexity of rhetorical devices in humour.

Rhetorical devices are integral to the construction and delivery of humour. They not only facilitate the creation of incongruity and surprise but also enable humour to serve as a medium for social critique and cultural reflection. The strategic use of these devices can enhance the effectiveness of humour, making it a powerful tool in communication across various contexts.

Mafaa Hauhnar's works, *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, showcase the extensive use of various rhetorical devices that play a significant role in shaping his humour. This chapter will explore and examine how Mafaa employs these devices, demonstrating their crucial function in enhancing the humour in his writing.

Wordplay: Humour Through Linguistic Creativity

Wordplay is a linguistic technique that exploits the multiple meanings, sounds, or structures of words to create humour. It encompasses a range of forms, including puns, malapropisms, and clever turns of phrase, which engage the audience's intellect and evoke laughter. At its core, wordplay relies on the clever manipulation of language to surprise the listener or reader, leading to unexpected connections and interpretations. This playfulness with words not only entertains but also invites deeper contemplation of the nuances of language, highlighting its complexity and richness.

In *A Cognitive Linguistics Account of Wordplay*, Konrad Zysko observes, "Playing on words, traditionally understood as a literary technique and a form of wit, has a long history of use and is probably almost as old as language itself. Although the earliest traces of wordplay are impossible to find due to the oral tradition of language, some early written forms have been well preserved." (1) This highlights the ancient roots of wordplay, emphasizing that even before written language emerged, humans engaged in playful manipulation of words and meanings.

As mentioned by Zysko, the earliest recorded examples from ancient civilizations, such as Egypt, Iraq, and China, demonstrate that wordplay was woven into the creation of myths, literature, and daily communication. These early instances show how wordplay was not only a source of entertainment but also a reflection of cultural and intellectual practices. In modern times, wordplay continues to evolve, adapting to new forms of media and modes of expression, from literature and conversation to advertising and digital platforms. This enduring tradition reflects the human fascination with language's potential for wit, creativity, and humour.

In *Word Play and Translation*, Dirk Delabastita defined, "The various textual phenomena in which structural features of the language(s) used are exploited in order to bring about a communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic

structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings.” (128). As Delabastita definition suggests, wordplay thrives on exploiting the inherent flexibility of language. By drawing attention to the structural features of words—such as phonetics, semantics, syntax, and morphology—wordplay creates a ‘communicatively significant confrontation’ between two or more linguistic structures. This confrontation is crucial because it introduces a contrast between familiar language patterns and novel or incongruent interpretations. The humour arises from this incongruity, where the audience's expectations are subverted, prompting amusement and cognitive engagement.

For example, puns, one of the most common forms of wordplay, rely on the dual meanings of words or phrases. A pun may play on homophones, where two words sound the same but have different meanings, or homographs, where words are spelled the same but pronounced differently. In both cases, the humour stems from the ambiguity created by the similar linguistic forms, allowing multiple interpretations of the same statement. This ambiguity is central to wordplay, as it forces the reader or listener to navigate between competing meanings, ultimately arriving at the unexpected, often humorous resolution.

Another form of wordplay, malapropism, occurs when a speaker mistakenly uses a word that sounds similar to the intended word but carries a completely different meaning. This ‘mistake’ can generate humour because it juxtaposes an incorrect yet plausible interpretation against the expected meaning. Beyond humour, wordplay serves a cognitive function by encouraging a deeper engagement with language. It reveals the multiple layers of meaning that language can convey, demonstrating that communication is not always a straightforward process. Delabastita’s exploration of wordplay in a cognitive linguistic framework further emphasizes that language is not just a tool for conveying information but also a medium for creative expression. Wordplay highlights the plasticity of language, where the same word can take on different meanings depending on context, intonation, or juxtaposition.

Moreover, wordplay functions as a social and cultural tool, often used to build rapport or showcase wit. In many cultures, the ability to create clever wordplays is valued as a sign of intelligence and verbal dexterity. In literature, writers use wordplay to add layers of meaning to their work, allowing readers to engage with texts on

multiple levels. Shakespeare, for instance, is renowned for his extensive use of puns and wordplay, which not only enriches the dialogue but also provides commentary on the characters and themes of his plays.

In the works of Mafaa Hauhnar, linguistic creativity plays an important role in constructing humour. Mafaa employs wordplay to reflect the cultural and social contexts of Mizo society, often using language to create connections between everyday experiences and broader societal themes. His clever use of puns and other forms of wordplay allows him to engage with complex ideas while maintaining a lighthearted tone. For instance, Mafaa's humour often reflects on issues of identity, tradition, and modernity, all while employing language that resonates with his audience. This ability to weave humour into the fabric of language makes his works not only entertaining but also thought-provoking.

The relationship between language and humour is intricate and multifaceted. Language serves as the medium through which humour is expressed, and the subtleties of language can significantly influence the effectiveness of comedic expression. Wordplay, in particular, enhances humour by creating layers of meaning that invite laughter through surprise and cleverness. The effectiveness of humour often hinges on timing, delivery, and the audience's familiarity with the language and cultural references used. In Mafaa's writing, the interplay of language and humour reveals how wordplay can illuminate shared cultural experiences while simultaneously challenging conventional narratives.

Furthermore, wordplay can bridge the gap between different languages and cultures, as it often relies on universal themes and emotions. Mafaa's adeptness at utilizing wordplay allows him to engage with a diverse audience, as his humour transcends cultural barriers while remaining rooted in specific cultural contexts. He frequently employs wordplay in his works. Some of his wordplay is based on words that look similar but have different meanings, while others rely on words that sound alike but differ in meaning. These can be categorized as homophones and paronomasia. Broadly speaking, his use of wordplay falls into two main categories: puns and syllepsis.

Puns

A pun is a form of wordplay where humour arises due to a word having two or more divergent meanings, or from the similarity in sound between two different words. The humour is derived from the unexpected revelation of these meanings.

In the words of Robert A. Harris, a pun is defined as:

A pun, also known as paronomasia, plays with the multiple meanings of a word or words. One word may be used in a way that suggests several meanings, or two words that sound alike (or almost alike) may be used, with their different meanings. Silly puns have in modern times reduced the pun to its current status as “the lowest form of humour,” but historically puns were often considered witty and elegant because they were often well done. (183)

Harris highlights the dual nature of puns, emphasizing how they leverage the complexity of language by exploiting the ambiguity of words. A single word can carry multiple meanings, allowing for playful or clever juxtapositions. In other cases, phonetic similarities between different words open the door to humorous or insightful connections, where the mind can jump between meanings based on sound alone.

However, Harris also addresses the shift in perception surrounding puns. While modern attitudes often dismiss puns as trivial or unsophisticated humour, this was not always the case. Historically, well-crafted puns were highly regarded for their cleverness, as they required a deep understanding of both language and context. They were considered an art form that could communicate wit, elegance, and intellectual dexterity.

The shift in the appreciation of puns could be attributed to a combination of cultural changes and the overuse of simplistic or ‘silly’ puns that may lack the sophistication of their historical counterparts. As humour has evolved, puns—despite their linguistic cleverness—may have lost some of their luster in modern times. Nonetheless, at their core, puns continue to demonstrate the richness of language and its capacity for playful manipulation, whether the humour is light-hearted or sophisticated.

In *Taking Humour Seriously*, pun is also defined as “...A second difficult example is the pun, where humour derives simply from the fact that a word turns out—unexpectedly—to have two divergent meanings.” (Palmer 100) Like this definition, the pun works by exploiting the ambiguity of language, particularly when a single word or phrase can be understood in multiple ways. This duality is often surprising and creates humour through the incongruity between the expected meaning and the alternative one that suddenly emerges.

It is a form of wordplay in which a word suggests two or more meanings by exploiting polysemy, homonymy, or phonological similarity to another word for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect (Miller et al.). Like these statements, puns are central to humour, involving words with double meanings or similar sounds but different meanings. They are often used to create wit, irony, or satire by exploiting these linguistic ambiguities. In Mafaa Hauhnar’s works *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, puns serve not only as a comedic tool but also as a vehicle for deeper social commentary. His linguistic creativity engages the reader with clever twists on words, double meanings, and humour that reflects and critiques societal issues.

Puns in political satire not only serve to amuse but also to engage audiences in critical discourse. By employing humour, satirists can lower the defenses of their audience, making them more receptive to political critiques. Mafaa excels in using puns in this important domain. His critique of political figures is often wrapped in linguistic humour, as in the phrase *ram hmangaihna* from *Chawlhna Tuikam*. He writes:

Politician ðhenkhat dang leh chuan, chu ‘ram hmangaihna’ hming duhawm changchawi chuan, ram zau tak an ‘pata’ duai duai mai bawk a, ‘ram’ chu an lo hmangaih hle tak mai. ðhenkhat leh chuan an ‘ram’ chu an hmangaih em avangin an zun leh êk thli, tuichhia chenin an ramah an luantir duh lo va... ‘Ram ka hmangaih’ tia iak iak thinte hi ‘RUM hmangaihtute’ an ni thin chawk a, an thli sen leh zuai zuai ðhin (48).

[“Some politicians, under the banner of the noble word *ram hmangaihna* (patriotism), have *pata* (taken possession of) vast areas of *ram* (land). They claim to love *ram* so deeply — whether it means private property or the nation itself. They even forbid others from letting *zun leh ek* (urine and dung) flow

onto their land, because of their so-called boundless love for *ram*. Ironically, those who shout the loudest, ‘I love my country’, often turn out to be the true ‘RUM lovers’, and their love flows out in a very crimson stream”; my trans].

In this statement, the humour is created through pun—a type of wordplay that uses multiple meanings of a word to create a witty or humorous effect. Specifically, the pun arises from the Mizo word *ram*, which can mean both ‘land’ or ‘private property’ and ‘nation’ or ‘country.’ This double meaning is cleverly used to highlight the contrast between politicians’ claims of patriotism and their self-serving actions. The term *ram hmangaihna*, which refers to love or patriotism for one’s country, is manipulated to imply that some politicians are more focused on expanding their private land and exploiting the country’s resources. This wordplay critiques the insincerity of politicians who use patriotism as a guise for personal gain, adding layers of irony and satire to the humour.

In his works, Mafaa Hauhnar employs wordplay and double meanings to critique societal behaviors and expose hypocrisy, particularly among politicians. The following table highlights the use of such linguistic techniques, illustrating how terms like *ram* and ‘rum’ convey deeper meanings that reveal the contradictions in politicians’ professed patriotism versus their self-serving actions.

Table 2. The Use of Puns in Mafaa Hauhnar’s Political Satire

Aspect	Explanation
Double meaning of <i>ram</i>	<i>Ram</i> means both ‘nation’ and ‘land/private property.’ Politicians claim to love their <i>ram</i> (nation) to appear patriotic, but in reality, they are focused on expanding their private <i>ram</i> (land/wealth).
Wordplay between <i>ram</i> and ‘RUM’	The author plays on the similarity between <i>ram</i> (land/nation) and ‘RUM’ (alcohol). Politicians claim to love their <i>ram</i> (country), but indulge in ‘RUM’ (alcohol), exposing their hypocrisy and self-indulgence.
Satirical critique	This pun serves as satire. It ridicules politicians’ false patriotism by showing that their talk of <i>ram hmangaihna</i> (love for the nation) hides personal greed, land expansion, and indulgence in alcohol and corruption.

Puns serve as a unique form of humour that reflects and often challenges societal norms. They exploit linguistic ambiguities, such as homophones and polysemy, to create humour that can be both playful and thought-provoking. The appreciation of puns often hinges on the audience's cognitive engagement, as they require the recognition of dual meanings or phonetic similarities in language (Vadehra). This cognitive process can reveal underlying societal norms and values, as puns often play on cultural references or social commentary, thereby engaging the audience in a deeper reflection of their societal context.

Mafaa's humour often includes playful critiques of Mizo societal norms, as evidenced by his twisting of a Mizo proverb in the line, "Kan ze mawi tak pakhat chu 'Aia hausa zahna' -in a rawn lan mek a nih hi!" (157) ["One of our finest characteristics has been supplanted by our growing respect for the wealthy"; my trans.]. The Mizo proverb *Aia upa zahna*, meaning 'respect for elders,' is humorously altered by replacing *upa* (elders) with *hausa* (the wealthy). The resulting phrase, *Aia hausa zahna*, shifts the meaning from 'respecting elders' to 'respecting those wealthier than us.' This wordplay critiques the changing values of Mizo society, where wealth has become more respected than traditional values, such as honoring elders. The pun draws attention to the societal shift toward materialism and how this change undermines age-old cultural norms. Mafaa uses this linguistic restructuring to convey satire, reflecting on how money and social status have taken precedence over respect for elders in contemporary Mizo society.

In *Thlaler Aurawl*, the phrase "Mite chuan nupui atan ngaihawng an neih lain, ani hi chuan hlauh zawng a nei mauh mai" (162) ["While most people marry someone they love, he married someone he fears"; my trans.] is another example of Mafaa's ability to weave humour through puns. Here, he employs a clever pun using the words *ngaihawng* (lover) and *hlauh zawng* (fear). The similarity in sound between these two words creates a humorous contrast between love and fear in the context of marriage. While love is typically expected in a marital relationship, Mafaa flips this expectation by suggesting that the character in question married out of fear rather than love. This play on words not only adds a comedic twist to the narrative but also provides a subtle critique of societal norms around marriage, perhaps suggesting that relationships are sometimes driven by practical concerns, fear, or social pressures rather than affection.

The pun here serves as both a joke and a reflection on the complexities of human relationships.

In a passage from *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa takes advantage of the phrase *pawm lai nei* during a bus trip, which plays on its dual meanings—one referring to being married and the other suggesting a physical embrace (*pawm* meaning ‘to hug’). The passage reads as follows:

Ani hi St. Mary’s fenfualiteho nena kan picnic haw lam bus tlar hnung bera ‘pawm lai nei’-a chuan thiam riau kha ni a. Bus kha a thawl angreng nen eng vanga inpawm tlat nge maw an tih le tia ka va hawi pheï nak chuan thianpa Ronald-a kut bawr chu a lo bo daih a, a Pawmlaii kawr awm erawh chu kawngkal fel tak neiin a lo puar kual pap pap thung. (165)

[“He was known as an expert in getting a seat and returning from a picnic with the St. Mary’s girls—always the one who somehow ended up holding or embracing someone on the back seat of the bus. I wondered why they needed to put their arms around each other when the bus still had plenty of empty seats. When I turned to look, my friend Ronald’s arm was nowhere to be seen—yet the shirt of the girl he was “embracing” was oddly bulging across her chest”; my trans.].

The humour in this passage stems from the phrase *pawm lai nei*, which can be interpreted in multiple ways. One meaning suggests a man who is already married, while another implies a man embracing or hugging a lady. Additionally, the literal meaning refers to someone providing support or cushioning for another person. This pun creates a playful and slightly risqué humour, as the narrative hints at a romantic or flirtatious situation during a seemingly innocent picnic. The wordplay on *pawm lai nei* adds layers of meaning to the situation, humorously describing Ronald’s actions and making the reader laugh at the double entendres.

Mafaa’s humour is also marked by self-deprecation, as evidenced by the phrase, “Chuta karah mi fate chu an zun a hîng thin a ni a, kei chu ka zun a’n thlum tlat bik mai lehngal” (158) [“Meanwhile, some people’s urine smells sour, but mine is sweet, as they say, which actually means diabetes”; my trans]. This example showcases Mafaa’s

use of self-deprecating humour through the pun on the word *zun* (urine). Most people's urine has an unpleasant smell, but the speaker humorously claims that his urine is sweet or sugary, referencing glycosuria, a condition associated with diabetes. This play on words adds a lighthearted tone to what could be a serious topic—illness—by turning it into a joke. The pun highlights Mafaa's ability to make fun of himself, a characteristic feature of self-deprecating humour, while simultaneously educating the reader about a medical condition in an amusing way.

In *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa Hauhnar employs puns as a key rhetorical device to create humour and to critique societal behaviors and norms. His use of double meanings, similar-sounding words, and restructured proverbs invites readers to see humour as a tool for social commentary, illustrating how language can be manipulated to reveal deeper truths. By analyzing these examples, it becomes clear that puns are not mere linguistic play in Mafaa's works—they are a potent means of delivering biting satire, challenging societal values, and fostering critical thought, all while making the reader laugh.

Syllepsis

Syllepsis, a rhetorical device, originates from the Greek word 'syllepsis' and ultimately from 'syllambanein,' which means 'to take together.' It has been used in English since at least 1550 (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary). It is a figure of speech in which a single word is used in two different senses within the same sentence, creating a humorous or ironic effect. This technique often relies on the ambiguity of language, where a word or phrase applies to multiple meanings, eliciting laughter through incongruity. In literature, syllepsis serves not only to enrich the text but also to critique societal norms or highlight contradictions within human behavior.

One of the key aspects of syllepsis in humour is its ability to exploit lexical ambiguity. As noted by Norwanto, syllepsis can be categorized as a verbal rhetorical figure that utilizes ambiguous sentence structures to deliver humor effectively (262-79). This ambiguity allows for multiple interpretations, which can lead to a humorous realization when the audience recognizes the different meanings intended. The use of syllepsis can be particularly effective in humour, as it allows writers to convey layered meanings and invite readers to engage with the text on a deeper level.

In *Chawlhna Tuikam* by Mafaa Hauhnar, he wrote, “An tlangval laia vote an thlak zah zet sâwn an thlak hman a. Ramthim mai bakah AIDS te pawh an vei tel nawkin ka ring a ni. Gospel campaign leh crusade an kal ve tum te hian an rilru a chak a, an inhmuchhuak zung zung zel a” (106) [“They cast their votes as casually as men who father children out of wedlock—even while they were still carefree bachelors. I suspect they have experimented with all kinds of things, from reckless behaviour to dangerous diseases. And whenever they attend gospel campaigns and crusades, their minds suddenly become sharp and restless, as if they have instantly become aware of all their own faults”; my trans.]. In this passage, the Mafaa employs syllepsis through the word *thlak*, which refers to both a child born out of wedlock (*sawn thlak*) and the act of casting a vote (*vote thlak*). This clever play on words creates humour by juxtaposing the two meanings, suggesting that the man’s promiscuity in fathering children is comparable to his carelessness in voting. The duality inherent in *thlak* produces a humorous effect, as readers are invited to consider the absurdity of equating such disparate actions.

Moreover, the second part of the passage introduces another layer of syllepsis with the word *vei*. In the word, *vei* can signify both contemplation and suffering. While it initially suggests a reflection on nations that have yet to receive the gospel, it also conveys the heavy implications of AIDS, a disease that brings suffering. This interplay of meanings enhances the humorous tone while simultaneously critiquing the societal issues surrounding promiscuity and disease.

Another example of syllepsis can be found in *Chawlhna Tuikam*: “A thenin chhang an den laiin a thenin lehkha an lo deng ang a; a thenin Krismas hla an sak laiin a thenin zu, thluk nei lovin an lo sa ve ang a” (188) [“While some are busy playing cards, others are busy pounding rice; and while some are singing Christmas carols, others are ‘making their own spirits’—producing alcohol completely out of tune”; my trans.]. In this example, the words *den/deng* and *sak/sa* are pivotal to the humour generated through syllepsis. *Den* (to make/pound) refers to the act of baking bread, a traditional Mizo Christmas activity, while *deng* (to play) denotes playing cards. The contrasting actions illustrate the divergence of holiday spirit, where some individuals engage in festive activities while others indulge in gambling.

Furthermore, the word *sa* carries a double meaning. In *krismas hla sa*, *sa* means ‘sing,’ but in *zu thluk nei lova sa*, it takes on the meaning of ‘make,’ as in brewing alcohol. This playful manipulation of language humorously critiques the way people choose to celebrate Christmas. The juxtaposition of wholesome traditions against more dubious behaviors exposes the hypocrisy in societal practices and invites readers to reflect on the true essence of the holiday.

The phrase “A ðen motor-a an chetsual laiin a ðen khumlaizawlah” (190) [“Some end up in accidents on the road, while others get into a very different kind of ‘accident’ in bed”; my trans] also signifies syllepsis. In this instance, Mafaa employs syllepsis through the term *chetsual*, which signifies both an accident and the act of sexual intercourse. The phrase *motor-a chetsual* refers to a vehicular accident, while *khumlaizawl chetsual* implies having sexual encounters in bed. This clever play on words elicits humour by contrasting the mundanity of road mishaps with the intimate nature of sexual experiences.

The humour arises from the unexpected comparison of two situations that are fundamentally different yet share a common term. The resulting incongruity invites readers to laugh at the absurdity of the comparison while also prompting them to reflect on the dual nature of human experiences—one filled with potential danger and the other steeped in intimacy.

In *Thlaler Aurawl*, it can be seen the line “Lehkhabu chu a ziah leh a zir ai chuan a chhiar leh a zuk lamah a kal zawk a” (171) [“He was more interested in counting and smoking than learning and writing the paper/book”; my trans]. Here, the author employs syllepsis with the term *lehkha*, which means ‘book.’ The phrase *ziah* refers to writing, while *zir* implies studying. The interplay between *chhiar* (reading) and *zuk* (smoking) creates a humorous effect as it highlights the absurdity of someone being more engaged in smoking than in the scholarly activities associated with reading and writing.

By utilizing the term *lehkha (bu)* in different contexts, the author underscores a stark contrast between productive academic pursuits and the seemingly unproductive habit of smoking. This contrast invites readers to laugh at the irony while also offering a subtle critique of societal priorities regarding education and leisure.

In exploring the nuances of humour in Mafaa Hauhnar's works, the rhetorical device of syllepsis emerges as a powerful tool that enriches the narrative. By employing words with multiple meanings, Mafaa crafts moments of wit provoke thoughtful reflection on societal norms.

The following table illustrates several examples of syllepsis from *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, highlighting how these clever linguistic choices create humour while revealing underlying contradictions in human behavior.

Table 3: Use of Syllepsis in Mafaa Hauhnar's *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*

Examples	Words	Functions	Humour Creation
An tlangval laia vote an thlak zah zet sâwn an thlak hman a. Ramthim mai bakah AIDS te pawh an vei tel nawkin ka ring a ni. Gospel campaign leh crusade an kal ve tum te hian an rilru a chak a, an inhmuchhuak zung zung zel a	<i>thlak</i> and <i>vei</i>	<i>Thlak</i> refers to both a child born out of wedlock (sawn thlak) and the act of voting (vote thlak). <i>Vei</i> signifies contemplation and suffering.	The juxtaposition of promiscuity and voting humorously compares two serious actions. The irony prompts reflection on personal morality versus civic duty, while the dual meaning of <i>vei</i> critiques societal issues related to AIDS.
A thenin chhang an den laiin a thenin lehkha an lo deng ang a; a thenin Krismas hla an sak laiin a thenin zu, thluk nei lovin an lo sa ve ang a	<i>den/deng</i> and <i>sak/sa</i>	<i>Den</i> refers to baking (wholesome Christmas activity), while <i>deng</i> refers to playing cards (less savory activity). <i>Sa</i> means 'sing' in one context and 'make' in another.	The contrast between baking for Christmas and gambling highlights the divergence in holiday spirit, emphasizing societal hypocrisy and inviting laughter at the juxtaposition of these behaviors.
A then motor-a an chetsual laiin a then khumlaizawlah	<i>chetsual</i>	<i>Chetsual</i> signifies both a vehicular accident and sexual intercourse.	The unexpected comparison between a road accident and intimate experiences creates humour through incongruity, inviting reflection on the duality of human experiences and evoking laughter from the absurdity.
Lehkhabu chu a ziah leh a zir ai chuan a chhiar leh a zuk lamah a kal zawk a	<i>lehkhabu</i>	<i>Lehkha (bu)</i> means 'book.' The interplay of <i>chhiar</i> (reading) and <i>zuk</i> (smoking) contrasts scholarly	The humour arises from the absurdity of prioritizing smoking over reading, underscoring societal contradictions and prompting laughter

		engagement with leisure activities.	while reflecting on values regarding education.
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Syllepsis is a powerful rhetorical device that enriches language by employing a single word in multiple senses, creating humour and irony. In *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa Hauhnar employs syllepsis to highlight contradictions within societal behaviors, offering readers a chance to engage with complex ideas through humour.

Satire as Social Commentary

Satire serves as a powerful form of social commentary, allowing individuals and groups to critique societal norms, political structures, and cultural practices through humour. By employing irony, exaggeration, and absurdity, satire can illuminate the flaws and contradictions inherent in various aspects of society, prompting audiences to reflect critically on the issues at hand. This multifaceted approach to humour not only entertains but also engages audiences in meaningful discourse about pressing social concerns.

One significant aspect of satire is its ability to provoke public engagement with critical issues. By framing serious issues in a comedic context, satire encourages audiences to confront uncomfortable realities while simultaneously providing a platform for dialogue. This aligns with the broader historical role of satire in democratic societies, as highlighted by Young, who notes that political humour has long been used to challenge existing power structures and provoke thought among citizens (1–7). The playful nature of satire allows for a unique exploration of serious topics, making it an effective tool for social commentary.

In his two books, *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa Hauhnar's satirical works can be categorized into five distinct themes. These areas of focus reflect his nuanced critique of various aspects of society and governance, using humour as a means to highlight the underlying contradictions and hypocrisies. The categories are as follows: (i) Satire on Religion, (ii) Satire on Public Services and Governance, (iii) Satire on Politics, Corruption, and Self-Interest, (iv) Satire on Society and Family, and (v) Satire on Cultural Identity and Westernization. Let us explore and analyze each of these areas in detail, drawing on examples from *Thlaler Aurawl* and *Chawlhna Tuikam*.

Satire on Religion

In his literary works, *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa employs satire as a means to examine the dissonance between religious ideals and the actions of those who profess to follow them, frequently exposing the hypocrisy that exists within ecclesiastical institutions and their leaders. Through his incisive humour, he underscores the superficiality that can infiltrate religious observance and illustrates how individuals may manipulate their faith for personal gain. His satirical approach does not seek to diminish the value of religion itself; rather, it aims to illuminate the inconsistencies and ethical shortcomings of those who purport to embody its principles.

Religious satire emerges as a compelling form of humour that critiques and reflects upon the tenets, practices, and institutions of faith. This particular genre often utilizes techniques such as exaggeration, irony, and absurdity to underscore the contradictions and deficiencies present in religious settings, thereby serving as an effective instrument for social critique. The potency of religious satire lies in its capacity to stimulate reflection while providing entertainment, enabling audiences to grapple with intricate issues in a more digestible format. An illustrative example of this can be found in the sharp critique of church leaders and religious hypocrites, which employs both exaggeration and irony to lampoon their conduct:

Kohhran upaa tlin inbeisei tling thei si lo kawhmawh bawl tum hrim hrim te; thiamna aia pawlsanna hmachhuana mite chungdelh tum ran te; thinlung ʔit-êk put ʔhulh chuang miah lova lam eu zek zek chi te; hriat ang zawng zawng sawi tum leh hriat loh lam thleng thleng pawha hre vek anga lan tum te ‘sande sikul’ kan han kai ho chiah mai chu, assembly session hi a ang ta berin ka hria (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 24).

[“Those who hoped to be elected as church elders but failed now try to stir up trouble; those who look down on others and act as if they have outgrown everyone else; the self-proclaimed geniuses who flaunt their degrees but lack basic common sense; those who cannot control their immoral thoughts or behaviour yet still love to dance in church; and the blabbermouths who pretend to know everything—including things they clearly don’t. When all of them

gather together in Sunday School, it feels exactly like an assembly session”; my trans.].

Mafaa paints a chaotic image of self-proclaimed intellectuals who dominate religious spaces but lack genuine conviction. The satirical reference to *Sande Sikul* mocks the performative nature of these gatherings, comparing them to an assembly session where noise and disorganization reign. By portraying such characters as hypocrites, Mafaa underscores the disparity between their outward piety and their inner emptiness. The humour lies in how the exaggerated flaws of these individuals reflect broader issues in religious communities, where moral posturing often replaces sincere faith.

In another passage from *Chawlhna Tuikam*, Mafaa critiques the performative aspects of religious gatherings and the treatment of individuals based on their social status, even in religious contexts: “Kût hmang tur ang maia phûrin kan in anrawn singa fel a. Mizoram Gospel Centenary lawm tuma Sap mikhual ang mai khan buaipuitu ka ngah a ni” (104) [“They were eager to prepare my house as if getting ready for a festival. I suddenly had crowds of people fussing over me—just like the English guests during the Gospel Centenary”; my trans.]. This passage reflects Mafaa’s satirical view of the glorification of individuals after their deaths, particularly within religious contexts. The comparison of the speaker’s treatment to that of VIP guests at a grand event, like the Gospel Centenary, emphasizes the absurdity of how people are often neglected in life but praised in death. Mafaa subtly critiques the societal and religious tendency to overlook individuals’ needs while they are alive, only to shower them with attention once they have passed.

Satire can serve as a means of moral and social critique, addressing broader societal issues through the lens of religion. Jenkins highlights how satirical humour in the 18th century often targeted religious figures and institutions, undermining their moral authority and exposing societal hypocrisy (Jenkins). This variety of humour entertains and makes viewers consider the morality of their beliefs and those in power. The use of satire in this context can lead to a reevaluation of societal norms and encourage critical thinking about the role of religion in public life. One of Mafaa’s sharpest satirical critiques of religion targets those who outwardly conform to religious practices while leading morally questionable lives:

Urlawk zanah uluk takin luak ve bawrh bawrh thin mah se, biak in lamah Tirkoh Paula sangawi zawnpui ang hrimin, an thu felfai leh thiam a... An tlangval laia vote an thlak zah zet sâwn an thlak hman a. Ramthim mai bakah AIDS te pawh an vei tel nawkin ka ring a ni. Gospel campaign leh crusade an kal ve tum te hian an rilru a chak a, an inhmuchhuak zung zung zel a (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 106).

[“Despite their habit of getting drunk and vomiting on Christmas Eve, they carry themselves in church as though they were St. Paul’s closest disciples. ...they cast their votes as casually as men who father children out of wedlock—even while they were still carefree bachelors. I suspect they have experimented with all kinds of things, from reckless behaviour to dangerous diseases. And whenever they attend gospel campaigns and crusades, their minds suddenly become sharp and restless, as if they have instantly become aware of all their own faults”; my trans.].

In this excerpt, Mafaa attacks the pretensions of individuals who lead immoral lives yet maintain a façade of religious respectability. The phrase *Tirkoh Paula sangawi zawnpui ang hrimin* sarcastically likens the character to the Apostle Paul, a figure known for his religious fervor, thus highlighting the disparity between the character’s true nature and the religious ideals they claim to represent. Mafaa’s use of the word *thlak* cleverly combines the concept of producing children out of wedlock with the act of casting votes, reflecting the dual meanings and adding a layer of complexity to the humour. The critique deepens as Mafaa hints at the character’s potential contraction of AIDS, pointing to the consequences of their moral failures, all while remaining seated in the church as a faithful participant.

In another passage on *Chawlhna Tuikam*, Mafaa illustrates how commercialism and superficiality can taint religious observances:

Krismas boruak chuan mi tin mi tang – mi chhe baibaw, puk chawpa thiante ruala rui ve thei taw taw te; pa challang satliah pawh ni lo, pa tukkhum-lang te; ram hmangaihtu, ram hmangaih luat avanga thenawmte nêk zawnga pal hung hrât te leh, mahni mopuite nena pasala chungte rel hmang te chenin a rawn

tuam ta a. Sumdawnggho pawhin, an lakna ‘rate’ aia hniama vawi thum an tawlh hnuah a thlep an la hlep leh ta hnawh hnawh mai. (188)

[“The Christmas spirit enveloped everyone—from the poor who borrowed to get drunk, to the patriots encroaching on their neighbor’s land, to the men with prominent foreheads, and the daughters-in-law who spoke ill of their husbands’ families. Even the merchants, after discounting thrice, still managed to profit by more than half”; my trans.].

In this passage, Mafaa humorously critiques the way the Christmas season often serves as a time for moral lapses and material excess. This satire on religious festivals’ commercialization and corruption features actors like the poor who borrow to get drunk and merchants who manipulate prices. The religious meaning of Christmas is overshadowed by indulgence and moral compromise, illustrating the tension between religious ideals and social behavior. Through humour, Mafaa critiques how religious occasions can devolve into opportunities for vice rather than spiritual reflection.

Mafaa’s satire on religion in *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl* serves as a critical lens through which he examines the discrepancies between religious ideals and the actual behaviors of religious adherents. By highlighting hypocrisy within the church and among its leaders, he effectively showcases the superficiality and self-serving motivations that often characterize religious practices. Through vivid imagery and irony, Mafaa critiques the performative nature of religious gatherings, exposing how societal hierarchies can influence the treatment of individuals based on status, both in life and death. His sharp observations reveal a deeper commentary on the moral failings of those who outwardly conform to religious practices while leading questionable lives. Additionally, he addresses the commercialization of religious occasions, illustrating how such events can devolve into moral lapses and material excess. Ultimately, Mafaa’s multifaceted satire encourages reflection on the true essence of faith, urging readers to seek authenticity amidst the contradictions within religious life.

Satire on Public Services and Governance

Satirical commentary on public services and governance provides a vital framework for analyzing and debating societal challenges. Through the use of humour,

irony, and hyperbole, such works effectively illuminate the shortcomings, absurdities, and failures present within public institutions and governance frameworks. This genre of social critique not only stimulates reflection but also fosters civic participation, rendering it an influential instrument for advocacy and reform. In Mafaa's satirical examination of public services and governance, he utilizes humour to reveal the inefficiencies and contradictions that are deeply embedded in the system. His satire conveys a profound discontent with the bureaucratic apparatus, which frequently appears disconnected from the actual needs of the populace it claims to serve.

One of his passages in *Chawlhna Tuikam* offers a vivid portrayal of the work culture among government employees, as Mafaa humorously highlights how weekdays are consumed by various forms of protest and non-cooperation rather than actual productivity:

Kan sorkar zem zenho te, kan zirlai rualte leh hnathawktu dangte hi han en ila. Thawhtanniah 'kan duh lo' tiin band an siam a, thawhlehniah 'bang rawh se' tiin an strike a, nilainiah 'pawi zawk ang' tia au rual dual dual chungin protest march an nei leh a; ninganiah 'kan level-puite kan phak lo' tiin pendown-strike/sit-down-strike an ti leh a. Zirtawpniah eng eng emaw rally, conference, seminar, etc. an hmang leh a. Hnathawhna hun an neih ve chhun Inrinni leh Chawlhni lah chu sorkar chawlh a lo ni leh vei rawl nen. (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 33)

[“Consider those who live on government salaries—our students and employees alike. On Monday, they shout “We object!” and organise bandhs. By Tuesday, they’re on strike, demanding, “Let them resign!” Come Wednesday, they’re marching in protest, warning that “there will be consequences.” Thursday is reserved for pen-down or sit-in strikes, and Friday is packed with rallies, conferences, and seminars. That leaves only Saturday and Sunday for their actual work—but of course, those are holidays”; my trans.]

Mafaa critiques the cycle of strikes, protests, and conferences that dominate the employees' workweek. By using satirical exaggeration, he illustrates how the focus on activism and demonstrations leaves little room for the actual responsibilities of their jobs. This sequence from Monday to Friday portrays an absurd and repetitive cycle of avoidance of duties, suggesting that the weekends—reserved for rest—are the only time

left for what should be their core tasks. This critique reflects the public perception of governmental inefficiency and the bureaucracy's detachment from its original purpose of serving the people. Mafaa's humour lies in the exaggeration of this daily routine, showing that rather than fulfilling their roles, the employees engage in symbolic actions that often serve no real purpose beyond disrupting their work obligations.

In another passage, Mafaa shifts his satire toward the public healthcare system, providing a bleak picture of neglect in rural areas.

...an unau zain an midum-nihliap-tiat-lek inah fahrahin an khawsa a ni. 'Cher' leh 'Chawrche' sawi nikhuua entirnaa hman atana awhawm tak tak vek an ni a. 'An thlarau pawh a hmuh tlang theih ang a' tih tur khawpin an sa a pan tlang a. ... An tana tanpuitu hnai ber lah chu, an khua atanga mel 10-a hlaa damdawi intê (Medical Sub-Centre) a ni deuh mai a. Chuta thawktute lah chu, Aizawlah an 'TA/DA' ngaihvenin an awm deuh reng bawk si. (56)

[“...he and his siblings live in a tiny house, scarcely larger than a big umbrella. They are the very definition of thin and frail, so much so that you can almost see through their souls. Their only lifeline is a small medical sub-center 10 miles away, but the staff there are often in Aizawl, preoccupied with their TA/DA”; my trans.].

In this excerpt, Mafaa shifts his focus to the direct impact of government inefficiency on vulnerable populations. Through the imagery of thin, frail villagers living in poor conditions, he paints a picture of how essential services, such as healthcare, are inaccessible due to the negligence of government employees. The medical sub-center, a vital resource for the community, is staffed by workers who are habitually absent, often attending to their own travel allowances (TA/DA) in the capital, Aizawl. Mafaa satirically underscores the discrepancy between the needs of the people and the priorities of the public servants, emphasizing that those in power prioritize their own financial gains over their duties to the community. This critique resonates with broader societal frustrations about the lack of accountability in public services, particularly in rural and underdeveloped areas.

Mafaa's satire on public services and governance reveals a critical examination of bureaucratic inefficiency and its impact on society. By employing humour, he effectively highlights the frustrations stemming from a system that often prioritizes symbolic actions—such as strikes and protests—over genuine productivity. His portrayal of government employees consumed by activism rather than their actual responsibilities illustrates an absurd cycle of disengagement, leaving essential tasks neglected. Furthermore, his focus on the public healthcare system underscores the consequences of this detachment, revealing the dire conditions faced by vulnerable populations. Through vivid imagery, Mafaa emphasizes the discrepancy between the needs of the community and the self-serving priorities of public servants. Overall, his satire acts as a compelling social commentary, encouraging reflection on the systemic flaws that obstruct development and well-being. In doing so, Mafaa not only entertains but also provokes critical discourse on governance and accountability in society.

Satire on Politics, Corruption, and Self-Interest

Satire about politics, corruption, and self-interest serves as a critical mechanism for social commentary, utilizing humour to expose the flaws and absurdities within political systems and governance. By employing irony, exaggeration, and parody, satirical works can effectively highlight the pervasive issues of corruption and self-serving behavior among political figures, prompting audiences to reflect on the implications of these behaviors for society at large. In the oeuvre of Mafaa, the exploration of politics, corruption, and self-interest serves as a significant vehicle for social critique. Through astute observations and keen wit, he exposes the duplicity inherent in political systems, revealing the disconnect between politicians' professed ideals and their actual motivations.

Mafaa's assertion that “Tui lah chu a'n vang em em mai lehngal, Mizorama hna zawn ang mai a ni, tute emawina min tihpui hmasak fe loh phei chuan kan tan hmuh a beiseiawm loh” (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 19) [“Water was so scarce that getting even a small amount was as tough as landing a job in Mizoram. Without the help of those in the know, it was a hopeless endeavor”; my trans.] serves as an indictment of systemic failures that plague not only water access but also job opportunities. It highlights the dire scarcity of water as a metaphor for the challenges faced by the populace in securing basic necessities, likening this struggle to the difficulty of obtaining

employment in Mizoram. This comparison underscores the frustration of citizens who find themselves reliant on the whims of the politically connected, suggesting that without their assistance, success is unattainable. Here, Mafaa's use of simile effectively conveys the broader implications of corruption and mismanagement, illustrating a landscape where the disadvantaged are left to navigate a labyrinthine bureaucracy to secure what should be fundamental rights.

In addition to its role in exposing corruption and encouraging political engagement, satire can also shape public perceptions of political figures and institutions. The 'satire boom' of the 1950s and 1960s, as described by Brassett, saw a rise in comedic acts that lampooned politicians and their corrupt nature, capturing public interest and prompting discussions about political accountability (37–56). This historical context illustrates how satire has long been a vehicle for criticizing political self-interest and corruption, reinforcing its relevance in contemporary discourse. One of Mafaa's passages exposes how political rhetoric often masks ulterior motives:

...Politician *thenkhat dang leh chuan*, *chu 'ram hmangaihna'* *hming duhawm changchawi chuan*, *ram zau tak an 'pata' duai duai mai bawk a*, *'ram' chu an lo hmangaih hle tak mai*. *Thenkhat leh chuan an 'ram' chu an hmangaih em avangin an zun leh êk thli*, *tuichhia chenin an ramah an luntir duh lo va...*
...*'Ram ka hmangaih' tia iak iak thinte hi 'RUM hmangaihtute' an ni thin chaw a*, *an thli sen leh zuai zuai thin* (48).

[“Some politicians, hiding behind the banner of “patriotism,” have freely exploited the nation’s resources while claiming to love their country. But this supposed love is usually nothing more than a convenient excuse for personal gain, and they do not hesitate to plunder the land when it suits them. Those who shout the loudest, “I love my country,” often turn out to be lovers of rum—so much so that the only thing turning red is the liquor they pour into their cups”; my trans.].

The dual meaning of *ram*—signifying both land and nation—serves as a clever rhetorical device, amplifying the irony of politicians who profess love for their country while simultaneously exploiting its resources for personal gain. Mafaa deftly contrasts *ram hmangaihna* (love for the nation) with the selfish ambition that drives these figures

to enrich themselves at the expense of the populace. The wordplay between *ram* and RUM (a type of alcohol) further illustrates this contradiction, revealing the corrupt practices that persist under the pretense of national loyalty. This satirical commentary effectively critiques the moral bankruptcy of political leaders who prioritize their own interests over genuine service to their constituents.

The author extends this critique of political absurdity by reflecting on the trivial pursuits of ministers, as articulated in the line “Bus ticket tih vel mai maiah pawh kan minister chhuanawm tak takte an inrawlh zur zut duh tawhna hunah hi chuan, a betate hi nula buan chak lo laklawh ang maiin, kan bet rawk rawk kumkhua mai dawn a nih awm hi maw!” (159) [“When ministers involve themselves in even the most trivial matters, such as bus tickets, the oppressed, much like promiscuous women, find themselves increasingly subjugated”; my trans.]. Here, Mafaa equates the ministers’ micromanagement of inconsequential matters, like bus tickets, to the objectification and oppression of women. This stark analogy highlights how politicians’ preoccupations with trivialities serve to distract from the pressing issues that truly affect their constituents, further emphasizing their detachment from the realities of the populace. By likening ministers to those who diminish women’s agency, Mafaa underscores the exploitative nature of politics, where the powerful neglect the needs of the vulnerable.

Mafaa encapsulates the essence of political maneuvering in the phrase “Politics hi ‘Polite Tricks’ hawihhawm taka inbumna, mahni dul invulh thau siakna, kum nga dana inhlawk chhawkna...” (167) [“Politics is polite trickery—deception wrapped in courtesy—where they manage to sustain themselves while enriching their own pockets every five years”; my trans.]. This assertion distills the essence of political behavior into a succinct critique of the disingenuousness that pervades political discourse. The characterization of politics as ‘polite tricks’ reveals the facade that politicians maintain, perpetuating a cycle of deception that ultimately prioritizes their survival over the welfare of the citizenry. By framing political engagement as a series of performative acts designed to manipulate public perception, Mafaa effectively critiques the systemic issues that foster corruption and self-interest.

In Mafaa’s exploration of politics, corruption, and self-interest, satire emerges as a powerful tool for social critique. His incisive observations expose the stark disconnection between politicians’ proclaimed ideals and their true motivations,

illuminating systemic failures that hinder basic access to necessities like water and employment. Through metaphors and similes, such as the comparison of water scarcity to the struggles for jobs, Mafaa effectively conveys the frustration of citizens reliant on politically connected figures. His critique extends to the hypocrisy of politicians who masquerade self-interest as patriotism, employing clever wordplay to highlight the contradictions within political rhetoric. By juxtaposing love for the nation with personal gain, he underscores the moral bankruptcy of leaders prioritizing their ambitions over genuine service. Additionally, Mafaa's satirical portrayal of ministers preoccupied with trivial matters further emphasizes their detachment from pressing societal issues. Ultimately, his work invites readers to reflect on the complexities of governance and the pervasive impact of corruption and self-interest in their society.

Satire on Society and Family

Satire about society and family serves as a powerful tool for critiquing social norms, familial structures, and cultural expectations. Mafaa's exploration of societal norms and familial interactions through satire provides a profound critique of contemporary issues, revealing underlying absurdities within the social fabric. His work highlights the contradictions inherent in daily life, particularly concerning the roles and expectations placed upon individuals within familial and societal structures.

His critique of societal authenticity surfaces in the assertion that even when individuals exhibit negative emotions, such as tantrums, they convey a more genuine essence than those who project insincere smiles. The lines, "Zei lo taka a han tûm ve chang te pawh hian, mi dangin 'awm dan mawi bu' aţanga an pûk chawp tih hriat fahrana min han nuih hil tlawng thin te ai chuan, a thlakhlelhawmin en nuam ka ti zawk reng reng a" (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 62) ["Even if we sulk awkwardly, it is still more genuine and precious than the fake smiles they temporarily borrow from a book on etiquette and manners"; my trans.], underscores the absurdity of valuing false pleasantries over authentic emotions. This critique resonates with contemporary social dynamics, where superficial interactions often take precedence over genuine expressions of individuality.

One of the primary functions of satire in the context of family is to critique the responsibility of parents. The poignant observation arises from Mafaa's reflection on

parental neglect in the context of religious devotion. He remarks, “Ka pain pulpita ramthim min veisan hlana ka nundan ka ngaihtuah chhuak ta iarh iarh a” (103) [“I recall the times when my father was preoccupied with preaching the gospel, often neglecting me in the process”; my trans.]. This statement not only reveals the personal ramifications of a father’s preoccupation with religious duties but also critiques a societal expectation that places spiritual obligations above familial bonds. The tension between faith and familial responsibilities highlights the potential disintegration of family ties in the face of fervent religious pursuits.

Furthermore, Mafaa cleverly satirizes the societal norms surrounding marriage and parenthood. He observes that married couples adhering strictly to virginity guidelines often find themselves unexpectedly welcoming fully developed infants within an improbably short period. He stated, “Nula leh tlangval, kohhran dan thianghlina inneite pawhin an inneih hnu thla nga lekah ‘Nau thla kim’ an nei thei a. Vai vawk, a pui lehngal talhtute pawhin, bazarah ‘Zo vawk, a pa til lak’ ngat an hralh leh chur chur thei a ni” (106) [“Married couples who adhered to the guidelines for virgin unions often found themselves welcoming fully developed babies in just five months. Meanwhile, a butcher who slaughtered a sick foreign pig marketed it as a local specialty”; my trans.], juxtaposes the absurdity of cultural expectations regarding purity with the reality of human experience, thereby highlighting the often ridiculous standards imposed on couples.

Mafaa’s critique extends to societal values regarding names and identity. The quote reads, “Lalthianghlina te hi, an hmelhriat nih zahthlak khawpa bawlhhlawh te an lo ni thin a. Pathian remruatpuina tel miah lova lo piang, sâwn zingah pawh Lalremruata an awm fo va. KS-ho zingah te hian Lalrawngbawli an awm nulh duh asin” (106) [“Lalthianghlina’s (literal translation is ‘Purity of God’) corruption has reached such an extent that it’s downright embarrassing to be associated with her. Babies born out of wedlock are often named Lalremruata (literal translation is ‘God’s Divine Plan’), while prostitutes tend to adopt names like Lalrawngbawli (literal translation is ‘Servant of God’); my trans.], encapsulates the irony inherent in naming conventions that reflect moral standing. By drawing attention to the dissonance between a name that implies purity and the corruption associated with its bearer, Mafaa critiques societal hypocrisy and the superficial markers of respectability.

In another example, the social dance of courtship is portrayed with a humorous twist: “Tlangvalte paw’n thiante thawmhnaw hawhin nula kan rîm a. Kan rîm tui laiin a neituten an thawmhnaw an rawn seng daih ang tih a hlauhawm thin ngawt mai” (107) [“Bachelors often courted young women while wearing clothes borrowed from their friends, but it becomes quite dangerous if, in the middle of the rendezvous, the true owner suddenly decides to reclaim their shirt”; my trans.]. Here, the interplay of social expectations and romantic pursuits is depicted, revealing the awkwardness and complications that arise when personal desires clash with societal norms. This commentary not only reflects on individual relationships but also critiques the broader societal structures that dictate romantic interactions.

Mafaa addresses the issue of privilege and pretense in educational contexts. The line, “Zirlaite zingah pawh, scholarship dil a’n hun leh mah ang a, kan officer fate pawh ‘Peon’, ‘Loneitu’ fate an ni leh sup sup ang a” (107) [“When the time arrives for students to apply for scholarships, the children of officers will miraculously transform into the progeny of peasants and farmers”; my trans.], highlights the irony in the transformation of identities among the children of officers when scholarship opportunities arise. This observation underscores the systemic inequalities embedded within the educational landscape, where those with societal advantages often manipulate their identities to benefit from resources meant for the less privileged.

In one notable passage, he describes a world where the ludicrous intertwines with the mundane:

Nawhchizuar pawhin lawm thu sawi nana sawma pakhat Lalpa an pekna hmun; sorkar hnathawkten kum 70 an nih hnua kum 60 mi nia an pension thinna hmun; chawlhni thawmhnaw nena ‘phuahchawp bill’ leh ‘cash memo suak’ hmanga hausakna ruk khawm a ngaihna hmun. ...thla khata cheng sangthum la lutin thianghlim taka cheng singkhat a hman ral theihna hmun. (108-109)

[“In a world where prostitutes tithe to the church, government employees retire at 60 after reaching 70, and forging cash memos and fake bills while donning one’s Sunday attire are the norms. Where Mawitea has a plethora of ‘first loves,’ and someone earning three thousand rupees a month can righteously spend ten

thousand rupees. In this world of pretense and vanity, my customs and body are now laid to rest”; my trans.].

Here, he juxtaposes the absurdities of pension norms with the prevalence of dishonesty in financial transactions. This satire exposes the hypocrisy within societal practices, where individuals navigate a world rife with deceit while adhering to formal roles such as churchgoers and government employees. The imagery of government workers receiving pensions after reaching the age of seventy while simultaneously engaging in fraudulent activities encapsulates the dissonance between public personas and private conduct, prompting readers to reflect critically on societal values.

Mafaa further critiques societal obsession with status and title. In *Thlaler Aurawl*, he states, “Hetì tak maia a nihna leh a hming bawra han inchhek arbawm vel nuam kan ti mai hi a thei fa chu ni ila, tuna an title neih sa bakah hian a dang hlam thum daih ka pek belh duh hlawm ngei ngei ang maw le!” (58) [“Given our obsession with grandiose names, if I had the power, I would have bestowed upon them a dozen more titles just for the fun of it”; my trans.]. This commentary underscores the tendency to prioritize superficial accolades over genuine merit. By expressing a desire to bestow even more titles, he illustrates the absurdity of a culture that values grandiosity and appearances over authenticity, thereby calling attention to the superficiality that often pervades social interactions and familial relationships.

Additionally, Mafaa employs humour to highlight competitiveness and the pressures of societal expectations. He quips, “Mizoram aiawhin 100 metre race velah tel se, ram tan medal hlu tak tak arawn awrh haw ngei theih ka ring hial” (179) [“Had he competed on behalf of Mizoram in the 100-meter race, I’m certain he would have brought home several gold medals for the state”; my trans.]. This metaphor likens interpersonal conflicts to athletic competitions, suggesting that societal dynamics often manifest in a race for recognition and achievement. Through this lens, he satirizes the pressure to succeed within the community, which can lead individuals to prioritize winning over ethical considerations, further complicating family and societal relationships.

His critique extends to cultural influences as well, as seen in the passage, “Vai film t̃enghneng t̃e t̃e en t̃hang tih hriat reng reng khan a kawngghren a han pawt dawh

a..." (181) ["He unbuckled his belt, clearly inspired by the low-budget Hindi films"; my trans]. The reference to low-budget films serves as a commentary on the pervasive influence of media in shaping behavior and societal norms. By drawing parallels between cinematic depictions of masculinity and real-life actions, he exposes the often ridiculous lengths to which individuals go to conform to societal expectations, thereby illuminating the absurdity of such imitations.

Mafaa's satire on society and family offers a sharp critique of contemporary social norms, revealing the inherent absurdities in familial and societal interactions. Through his observations, he challenges the superficiality of emotions and the societal tendency to value false pleasantries over genuine feelings. By criticizing the neglect that arises from prioritizing religious devotion over familial bonds, he highlights the tension between spiritual commitments and family responsibilities.

He also satirizes cultural expectations regarding marriage, parenthood, and names, illustrating the hypocrisy within societal values. His commentary on privilege in educational contexts exposes systemic inequalities, while his depiction of societal obsession with status and titles critiques the superficial nature of social interactions. Furthermore, by likening interpersonal conflicts to competitions, he underscores the pressure to succeed within the community. Ultimately, Mafaa's humour not only entertains but provokes critical reflection on the complexities of societal and familial relationships, urging readers to question the values that shape their lives.

Satire on Cultural Identity and Westernization

Satire serves as a powerful vehicle for humour regarding Westernization, allowing individuals and cultures to critique the influence of Western ideals and practices on their identities and societies. Mafaa's satire on cultural identity and Westernization critically examines the profound impact of colonial influences on Mizo society, particularly the pervasive adoption of English language and Western customs at the expense of local traditions and values. Through his keen observations, Mafaa unveils the irony of cultural assimilation, where the Mizo people embrace foreign elements while neglecting their indigenous heritage.

One notable example is found in the line: “Sapho khan Kristianna rawn keng lut lo phei sela chu, anmahni kha kan lo be mai duhin a rinawm a ni” (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 69) [“Had the English not brought Christianity with them, we’d probably be worshipping them instead”; my trans.]. Here, Mafaa reflects on the historical ramifications of English colonialism, implying that had the English not introduced Christianity, the Mizo might have idolized them as deities. This remark underscores a critical perspective on how Western influence has not only shaped religious beliefs but has also altered the very essence of Mizo cultural identity. The satire lies in the absurdity of attributing reverence to foreign entities, suggesting that colonialism has not merely brought religious change but has redefined the Mizo people’s understanding of divinity and loyalty.

In another poignant observation, Mafaa states: “Kan zawhte-te lamin sap hming an pu a. Kan uitete pawh sap tawngin kan bia a. Kan arpa te pawh ‘ti-ti-ik-ik’ ti lovin ‘cocka-doddle-doo’ tiin an khuang lek lek tawh a ni” (71) [“Even our cats have English names, and we chat with our dogs in English too. As for our roosters, they’re about to ditch our local ‘ti-ti-ik-ik’ for a sophisticated ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’”; my trans.]. This critique highlights the extent of Westernization infiltrating even the most mundane aspects of Mizo life, as he humorously notes the English names adopted by pets and the linguistic shifts taking place in everyday interactions. He satirizes the absurdity of the Mizo people abandoning their local dialects in favor of English, thus emphasizing the erosion of cultural identity in the face of globalization.

His commentary extends to societal values and holiday traditions, as illustrated in his critique:

Kan ngaihsan tawp theih loh, tuipuiralho ‘sitail’-in Krismas card, krismas lam hawi reng reng lo, nula tlangval inpawm lai lem te kan inthawn ang a. Dawt an sawi changa kan hrem thin kan fate bum nan ‘Krismas putar’ leh ‘No dawh’ tih ang reng dawt chumchiap tak tak kan leklam leh ang a. Kalvari thing hre chang map lovin ‘Krismas tree’ kan buaipui leh ang a. (188-189)

[“In our admiration for Western customs, we exchange Christmas cards showing couples in romantic embraces—images that have nothing to do with Christmas at all. We punish our children for lying, yet we deceive them with

stories about Santa Claus and ‘No dawh’. We have replaced the true meaning of the Calvary cross with the commercialized glitter of the Christmas tree”; my trans.].

Through this passage, Mafaa illustrates how Mizo celebrations have become increasingly commercialized and detached from their true meaning. The adoption of Western symbols, such as the Christmas tree, replaces authentic cultural expressions with superficial imitations. This criticism emphasizes the loss of genuine cultural significance as the Mizo people become entangled in a web of Western customs that lack relevance to their historical and spiritual narratives.

Furthermore, in “A Mizo ṭawng chuan ka sawi thiam lo,” ti zing ve dup, a sapṭawng pawha sawi thiam leh lawi si lo, vai tawng hmusit ve tumhrang bawk si kan insulpel noh noh mai a nih hi maw” (*Thlaler Aurawl* 71) [“The people who often say, “I can’t express it in Mizo,” yet cannot manage it in English either—while still looking down on Hindi—simply end up talking over one another”; my trans.], Mafaa draws attention to the linguistic inferiority complex that pervades Mizo society. This statement reveals a paradox where individuals profess an inability to articulate their thoughts in their native tongue while simultaneously struggling with English. The disdain toward the Mizo language reflects a broader societal trend of valuing foreign languages over indigenous ones, leading to a cultural identity crisis. By satirizing this phenomenon, Mafaa calls into question the authenticity of Mizo identity in a landscape increasingly dominated by Western linguistic and cultural norms.

Mafaa’s satire on cultural identity and Westernization provides a critical lens through which to examine the detrimental effects of colonial influence on Mizo society. His observations reveal how the adoption of the English language and Western customs has led to a significant erosion of local traditions and values. By illustrating the absurdity of revering foreign entities and the superficiality of Western holiday symbols, Mafaa underscores the disconnection between Mizo cultural identity and the realities of globalization. His commentary also highlights a linguistic inferiority complex, where the Mizo people struggle to articulate their identity in their own language while simultaneously embracing English. This paradox ultimately points to a cultural identity crisis, calling into question the authenticity of Mizo heritage. Through his incisive critique, Mafaa advocates for the importance of valuing indigenous traditions and

preserving cultural heritage amidst the pervasive pressures of Westernization, urging a renewed appreciation for Mizo identity in a rapidly changing world.

Gilbert Highet explains the essence of satire when he writes, “The purpose of satire is, through laughter and invective, to cure folly and to punish evil; but if it does not achieve this purpose, it is content to jeer at folly and to expose evil to bitter contempt” (156). This statement underscores satire’s dual aim: to correct social wrongs through ridicule and criticism, or, at the very least, to highlight those wrongs and invite public scorn. Highet suggests that even if satire fails in its loftier goal of reform, it still serves the important function of unmasking vice and stupidity, ensuring that they do not go unchallenged.

This function of satire—whether it leads to genuine social change or merely brings attention to societal issues—reflects its unique power. By blending humour with critique, satire can soften the delivery of harsh truths, making them more palatable and accessible to a wider audience. The very act of mocking or ridiculing folly can open the door for reflection, dialogue, and even reform. It challenges the status quo in a way that is not just confrontational, but also engaging and, at times, entertaining.

Similar to Highet’s observation, Mafaa also employs satire in his works to critique societal flaws with the aim of promoting a better future. As previously discussed, his satirical commentary addresses various aspects of society, including religion, public services and governance, politics and corruption, self-interest, family dynamics, and cultural identity. While Mafaa’s satires often highlight these issues through humour, he does not necessarily provide explicit solutions or offer a direct path to reform. However, by exposing societal wrongs and absurdities with wit, his works attract a wider audience and generate a significant impact, fostering greater awareness and encouraging deeper reflection on these problems.

Similes as Tools of Humour

A simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things using words such as ‘like’ or ‘as’ to highlight similarities between them. According to Marsh H. McCall Jr., simile “is an expanded metaphor” where a direct comparison word is

introduced, making it a less risky expression than a metaphor, which is more immediate and direct (143).

Similes are often used in rhetorical theory and literature to clarify, embellish, or vivify a description or argument. As McCall explains, the addition of an introductory word in a simile helps soften the comparison, making it more explicit and accessible to the audience than metaphor, where the connection may be more implicit or abstract. This technique allows the speaker or writer to draw out the comparison in a way that reduces the possibility of misunderstanding.

The main goal of similes is to enhance understanding or to embellish descriptions by making abstract or complex ideas more tangible and relatable. This method works well in various contexts, including rhetorical argumentation and poetry, to create vivid mental images and to clarify the speaker's or writer's intended meaning.

In humorous writing, similes serve as an effective tool to create vivid and often unexpected comparisons that provoke laughter. By linking two seemingly unrelated elements, similes introduce an element of surprise or incongruity, which lies at the heart of humour. This technique allows the humorist to exaggerate or mock certain characteristics in a playful manner, enhancing the comedic effect. Mafaa Hauhnar employs similes to add layers of meaning to his humour, transforming ordinary scenarios into amusing and memorable images. His similes often draw upon everyday experiences, cultural references, and social observations, allowing readers to find humor in the unexpected or exaggerated connections he draws.

Mafaa Hauhnar's use of similes in *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl* spans various themes, reflecting the depth of his humour and insight into different aspects of life. His similes from *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl* can be categorized into six major thematic areas: (i) Weather and Nature Similes, (ii) Social and Cultural Critiques Similes, (iii) Personal Struggles and Pain Similes, (iv) Humour and Irony Similes, (v) Death and Health Similes, and (vi) Religious and Spiritual Similes. Let us now analyze and explore these similes within each category to better understand his rhetorical techniques.

Weather and Nature Similes

In Mafaa's humour, the use of similes relating to weather and nature serves as a poignant reflection of human experiences and societal observations. These comparisons not only evoke vivid imagery but also encapsulate complex emotions and situations, often with a humorous undertone.

The simile, "Shillong khua chu hmeichhe leplerh rim ang mai a ni a, hriatthiam a har nak thin" (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 19) ["The weather in Shillong was as unpredictable as the perfume of a flirtatious woman—always keeping you guessing and never quite what you expected"; my trans.], encapsulates the essence of unpredictability inherent in both weather and interpersonal relationships. By likening the weather in Shillong to the court of a flirtatious woman, Mafaa underscores the elusiveness of certainty. This comparison illustrates how, much like a flirt, the weather can leave individuals guessing and adapting to sudden changes, creating a humorous reflection on human expectations versus reality. The anthropomorphism of weather imbues it with a personality that resonates with the audience, making the natural phenomena relatable.

Furthermore, the simile, "Thlasik rim a'n nam dek dek tawh lah khan, nula sinia ang maiin a vawt vin nghal tuk mai a" (19) ["Just like a spinster at the first hint of winter, the temperature drops dramatically, leaving us shivering in no time"; my trans.], effectively captures the abruptness of seasonal transitions. The imagery of a spinster reacting to the first signs of winter humorously conveys the sharp decline in temperature, evoking a visceral reaction of discomfort and surprise. This comparison not only highlights the severity of weather changes but also employs societal stereotypes associated with femininity, thus inviting readers to engage with both the humour and the cultural context.

Mafaa also utilizes the simile, "Tui lah chu a'n vang em em mai lehngal, Mizorama hna zawn ang mai a ni, tute emawina min tihpui hmasak fe loh phei chuan kan tan hmuh a beiseiawm loh" (19) ["Water was so scarce that getting even a small amount was as tough as landing a job in Mizoram. Without the help of those in the know, it was a hopeless endeavor"; my trans.] to comment on scarcity and hardship. The analogy of obtaining water being as challenging as securing a job in Mizoram reflects the dire circumstances faced by individuals in accessing essential resources.

Here, the simile goes beyond mere humour, highlighting social realities and serving as a form of social commentary through humour. It cleverly juxtaposes the mundane with the profound, encouraging readers to reflect on societal challenges while eliciting laughter.

In the comparison, “Zirtawp tlai leh Thawhtan tuk ang hlauhva danglam em em lawi si an awm” (176) [“There is a clear contrast—about as different as Friday evening and Monday morning”; my trans.], Mafaa presents a striking dichotomy. The reference to two historical figures, Mother Teresa and Alexander the Great, reveals the stark contrasts in character and legacy, similar to the contrasting experiences of Friday evening and Monday morning. This simile invites readers to appreciate the spectrum of human endeavors, evoking humour through the juxtaposition of ideals and actions. By employing such similes, Mafaa not only entertains but also invites introspection regarding values and societal expectations.

Social and Cultural Critiques Similes

Mafaa’s exploration of social and cultural critiques through similes effectively highlights the contradictions and challenges inherent in Mizo society. His use of similes not only enhances the humour in his work but also serves as a vehicle for deeper social commentary.

One of his similes in the book *Thlaler Aurawl* highlights the rapidity with which we embrace Westernization:

Mizo zingah sap tihdan lachhawng chak apiang changkang chakah kan ngai a. Sapin phei an chheh rualin rem leh rem lovin phei chheh ve teh kan lo tum a. Tuipui kama an pho han zawh loh, an ke no chum buang an khai rualin, mawi leh mawi lo pawh thlu lovin kan tribal kephah hlai kan lo khai a. An dungthulin an ruala kal ve kan lo tum a, Kohhran Thianghlim khuang-vuak-speed-a an kal avangin kan um pha lo va, a ni lo lamah kan pen bo zawh phah ta thin a ni. (68)

[“In Mizo society, those who quickly adopt English customs are praised as the most progressive. We tried to follow in their footsteps, never mind how ill-suited it all was—our broad tribal feet tracing their pale footprints, the kind that not even the brightest beach could ever tan. But before we knew it, they had

sped ahead like a *Kohhran Thianghlim* drum solo, and we had wandered far down the wrong path”; my trans.].

Here, Mafaa draws a poignant comparison between the rapid adaptation of English customs by certain members of Mizo society and the struggles of those left behind. The simile likening their movement to a *Kohhran Thianghlim khuang-vuak-speed* encapsulates the swift pace at which they navigate cultural changes, suggesting an almost frenetic urgency that highlights the societal pressure to conform to perceived progressiveness. Its wandering off the beaten path serves to illustrate the confusion and disorientation felt by those who cannot keep up, reflecting broader themes of cultural identity and the alienation that can arise in the face of rapid social change.

In poignant simile, Mafaa states, “Bus ticket tih vel mai maiah pawh kan minister chhuanawm tak takte an inrawlh zur zut duh tawhna hunah hi chuan, a betate hi nula buan chak lo laklawh ang maiin, kan bet rawk rawk kumkhua mai dawn a nih awm hi maw!” (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 159) [“When ministers involve themselves in even the most trivial matters, such as bus tickets, the oppressed, much like promiscuous women, find themselves increasingly subjugated”; my trans.], uses a striking simile to critique the role of ministers in trivial matters. By equating the involvement of ministers in mundane issues, like bus tickets, to the promiscuity of women, Mafaa exposes a troubling reality where those in power neglect significant concerns while fixating on inconsequential details. This comparison serves to undermine the authority of ministers, suggesting that their preoccupation with trivialities contributes to the oppression of the marginalized. The humorous juxtaposition reveals a stark reality, inviting readers to question the priorities of those in leadership positions and the systemic inequalities that persist within society.

Through these similes, Mafaa not only employs humour to engage his audience but also prompts critical reflection on social dynamics and cultural identity in Mizo society. His ability to weave humour with poignant social commentary underscores the intricate relationship between laughter and critique, allowing readers to confront uncomfortable truths while being entertained. Ultimately, these similes serve as a powerful tool for exposing the complexities of social and cultural interactions, inviting deeper understanding and dialogue within the community.

Personal Struggles and Pain Similes

Mafaa's adept use of similes provides profound insights into personal struggles and the experience of pain. These comparisons not only evoke vivid imagery but also articulate the emotional and physical turmoil that individuals endure, reflecting on the complexities of the human condition.

The phrase, "Chutiang dinhmun chaurau taka min keuh thlutu ruihhlo chu thlah ka tum pawhin, savawm pawm ang deuh hi a ni a, ani'n min thlah ve duh tawh si lo" (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 104) ["Even when I wanted to quit drugs, it was akin to embracing a bear—it simply refused to release its grip"; my trans.] exemplifies the grip of addiction, portraying the struggle to overcome substance dependency. By likening the desire to quit drugs to *savawm pawm ang*, Mafaa encapsulates the overwhelming nature of this struggle. The bear, a powerful and formidable creature, symbolizes the formidable challenge posed by addiction—its strength and ferocity mirror the hold that drugs can have on an individual. This simile poignantly conveys the notion that, despite the individual's yearning for freedom, the grip of addiction is tenacious and suffocating, rendering the escape nearly impossible. The vivid imagery evokes a visceral response, allowing readers to empathize with the anguish of being trapped in a cycle of dependency.

Furthermore, Mafaa's portrayal of personal suffering continues with the line, "...chawlhkar hnih pumpuhlum zet mai natna khumah ka'n thi-hawrh mut zuar mai pek a." (*Thlaler Aurawl* 158) ["I lay on a hospital bed like a corpse for two straight weeks"; my trans.]. This simile compares the experience of lying in a hospital bed to the stillness of a corpse. By drawing this parallel, Mafaa conveys the weight of illness and the feeling of lifelessness that can accompany serious health struggles. The comparison to a corpse suggests a profound sense of hopelessness and despair, emphasizing the physical and emotional toll that illness exacts on the individual. The imagery evokes a stark sense of vulnerability, inviting readers to contemplate the fragility of life and the overwhelming sensation of being trapped in a body that no longer responds with vitality. Through this simile, Mafaa effectively encapsulates the depths of personal suffering, allowing the audience to grasp the seriousness of such experiences.

In another poignant moment in *Thlaler Aurawl*, “Ka lu chu Assam Rifles hockey stick (tiangkawm)-a an khalh kawi hrep hnu ang mai hian a nâ a. ‘A rai no huat a chhuak pek a nih hi’ tih mai turin a chhang khât mawi tawkin ka uak deuh sek mai bawk a. Thil ei ka’n tum ve lah chuan thingtang dawlh tum ang tlatin a khirh a” (158) [“My head hurt as if it had been struck by an Assam Rifles hockey stick. I vomited as if I were suffering from early pregnancy. Eating was as difficult as trying to swallow a twig”; my trans.]. Mafaa’s reference to the pain experienced in his head offers a striking visual of suffering. The comparison of the headache to being struck by an Assam Rifles hockey stick serves to amplify the intensity of the pain. The use of a well-known object—an Assam Rifles hockey stick—provides a cultural touchpoint, grounding the experience in a specific context while also emphasizing the severity of the pain endured. This simile captures the excruciating nature of the experience, allowing readers to viscerally sense the weight of the struggle that accompanies illness. Additionally, the subsequent description of vomiting and difficulty eating as akin to *thingtang dawlh tum ang* further underscores the physical limitations imposed by pain. By creating such stark imagery, Mafaa allows readers to engage with the rawness of the experience, fostering a deeper understanding of the challenges faced in moments of personal distress.

Mafaa’s use of similes regarding personal struggles and pain highlights the intricate relationship between language and emotional experience. Through his comparisons, he reveals the depth of human suffering while simultaneously inviting readers to engage with and empathize with the realities of these experiences. The effectiveness of these similes lies not only in their vivid imagery but also in their capacity to convey complex emotions, illustrating how personal struggles can shape one’s identity and perspective. In doing so, Mafaa’s work stands as a testament to the power of humour, not just as a means of laughter but as a vehicle for exploring the profound realities of human existence.

Humour and Irony Similes

Mafaa’s adept use of similes to convey humour and irony serves as a compelling mechanism to reflect the absurdities and contradictions inherent in societal norms and personal experiences. The similes in his work often highlight the

discrepancies between expectations and reality, illuminating the comedic elements of irony.

One notable example arises from the simile, “Mahni kekawrte an thlak zin tluk zeta ngaihzawng thlak ngunte leh ke pahnih nei tawh phawt chu lo ‘hmu tai’ duh ta zel mihring kan kiang lawka an veivah huai huai lai hian...” (*Thlaler Aurawl* 48) [“While people with as many lovers as the pairs of pants they’ve worn, and those desperate enough to entertain anything on two legs, are wandering around us...”; my trans]. This line evokes a humorous image of individuals whose romantic entanglements are as numerous as their pairs of pants, suggesting a transient and superficial approach to relationships. The irony lies in the juxtaposition of physical intimacy and emotional detachment, highlighting a societal trend where personal connections are shallow, often resembling a form of consumable fashion rather than meaningful bonds. By illustrating this contrast, Mafaa invites readers to reflect on the ephemeral nature of modern relationships while simultaneously evoking laughter at the absurdity of such behavior.

Another striking instance is encapsulated in the simile, “Kutdawh pialral kai ang maiin kan tlai tawh mai thin.” (94) [“Like beggars in paradise, we are well-fed”; my trans]. Here, the phrase likens the well-fed condition of individuals to beggars in paradise. The irony stems from the juxtaposition of abundance and deprivation, as it paints a picture of those who are fortunate enough to enjoy a comfortable existence yet choose to wallow in their own perceived misfortune. This portrayal serves to satirize a common human tendency to complain despite being in advantageous positions, thereby highlighting the absurdity of their discontent.

In a similar vein, the line “...Brazil kha tan man an awm lo thei em em mai a. Nula hmeltha deuh mi rinawm lohsan ching ngaihzawn ang maiin rilru an tihahin, mi an tihrilhai zing a ni” (96) [“Supporting Brazil was as frustrating as having a beautiful but unfaithful girlfriend”; my trans.] illustrates the frustration of supporting a national team, likened to the experience of being involved with a beautiful but unfaithful girlfriend. The humour here arises from the stark contradiction between the expectation of loyalty in relationships and the unpredictability of sports fandom. The simile encapsulates the emotions of hope and disappointment that intertwine within the context of both love and sports, prompting the audience to recognize the folly in placing undue emotional investment in entities that often betray those hopes.

The simile, “A ṭawng tui laklawh laia lo inrawlh ve tum chu, puan ṭhui mek laia khawl hriauva la thil lo tum ve sek ang vela thil khirh a ni e, pawh ti ila thukhuh tak ka la ni tho vang” (168) [“Trying to get a word in while he’s talking is like trying to thread a needle while it’s still running through a sewing machine—impossible, just as it is to keep the facts unexaggerated”; my trans.] encapsulates the frustration of trying to interject in a conversation dominated by another. The imagery of attempting to thread a needle while it is situated in a sewing machine not only conveys the absurdity of the situation but also highlights the dangerous nature of the social dynamic at play. This line humorously illustrates the futility and risk involved in trying to assert oneself in a conversation where one is outmatched or overshadowed. The irony, coupled with the vivid imagery, enhances the comedic effect, as it underscores a relatable social dilemma where individuals often find themselves rendered voiceless in group settings.

Through these similes, Mafaa crafts a humorous narrative that simultaneously critiques social behaviors and expectations, effectively utilizing irony as a fundamental element of his comedic style. Each simile serves to not only provoke laughter but also to prompt reflection on the deeper societal truths that underlie everyday experiences. By presenting irony through humour, Mafaa invites readers to explore the often absurd realities of human interaction and societal norms, reinforcing the potency of similes as tools for humour in literature.

Death and Health Similes

In Mafaa’s exploration of humour, the similes concerning death and health serve as potent devices to provoke thought while simultaneously entertaining the audience. The following examples illustrate how these similes encapsulate profound reflections on life, mortality, and societal issues.

The simile from the *Chawlhna Tuikam* reads, “Hringnun ka khualzin chhunga ka khawsak dan, ka Hringlang Tlang atanga ka thlir lai chuan, engtin nge minrawn hmuhchhuah tih pawh ka hriat lohvin mi anrawn pungkawm a. Kût hmang tur ang maia phûrin kan in anrawn singsa fel a. Mizoram Gospel Centenary lawm tuma Sap mikhual ang mai khan buaipuitu ka ngah a ni” (104) [“As I gazed back from *Hringlang Tlang*, reflecting on my life’s journey, a crowd mysteriously gathered around me. I have no idea how they found me, but they were eager to prepare my house as if getting

ready for a festival. I suddenly had crowds of people fussing over me—just like the English guests during the Gospel Centenary”; my trans.] presents a poignant image of death intertwined with the concept of reflection. The protagonist gazes back from *Hringlang Tlang*—a significant spiritual location in Mizo culture—where the souls of the deceased pause to contemplate their earthly lives. This simile emphasizes the existential journey, suggesting that the dead do not merely transition but also reflect upon their lives. The joviality of the crowd gathered around the protagonist, akin to a festival atmosphere, serves to juxtapose the solemnity of death with the vibrant celebration of life, underscoring the complexity of human emotions surrounding mortality.

In the statement, “Fa paih tih lah chu rilphir paih ang maiin kan ngai holam zo ta a” (113) [“Abortion is now regarded with the same normalcy as the removal of an appendix”; my trans.], the normalization of abortion likens it to the common medical procedure of an appendectomy. This comparison highlights the grim realities of health and societal attitudes toward life and death. By equating a significant and contentious issue such as abortion to a routine health operation, Mafaa critiques the desensitization of life itself. This simile not only incites laughter through its absurdity but also invites reflection on how society perceives and responds to critical issues regarding life and death.

Moreover, *Thlaler Aurawl*’s simile, “Somalia tam tuar zingah te khuan pa thau tak hmuh zuk tum teh u, meihawl ip atanga chhangphut var bun chhuah tum ang chauh in ni ang,” (28) [“Finding a well-fed man among those suffering from famine in Somalia is as challenging as locating a white dough ball in a bag of charcoal. People on their deathbeds don’t tend to gain weight”; my trans.] employs vivid imagery to highlight the stark contrast between health and suffering. The challenge of finding a well-fed man among famine-stricken individuals in Somalia is likened to searching for a white dough ball in a bag of charcoal. This imagery underscores the dire health conditions prevalent in certain parts of the world, accentuating the harsh realities faced by those on the brink of death. The humour arises from the exaggerated impossibility of the task, yet it simultaneously serves as a profound commentary on the social injustices of poverty and famine.

Through these similes, Mafaa not only engages the audience with humour but also compels them to confront the stark realities of life, health, and mortality. Each simile operates on multiple levels, inviting the audience to laugh while simultaneously reflecting on the deeper meanings embedded in the text. This intricate balance of humour and critical commentary is what makes Mafaa's work a significant contribution to the discourse on health and death in contemporary literature.

Religious and Spiritual Similes

In the realm of humorous writing, religious and spiritual similes serve as a nuanced tool for reflection and critique, often illuminating societal attitudes toward faith and belief systems. Mafaa employs these similes to highlight the incongruities between expected religious values and the realities of human behavior. The similes create a vivid landscape where spiritual themes are examined with a blend of humour and criticism, allowing for a deeper understanding of cultural attitudes toward religion.

For instance, Mafaa remarks in *Chawlhna Tuikam*, “Europe thalai rual awm tha duh loho lo vei ve fan fan laia ‘Tuikuk’-ho zinga rawngbawl tura kohna hmuh ang mai lah ni!” (170) [“It’s like being sent to preach to the *Tuikuk* when all we really wanted was to mentor the youth of Europe”; my trans.]. This simile poignantly captures the dissonance between lofty aspirations and the harsh realities encountered in the pursuit of spiritual or educational missions. By comparing the experience of preaching to the marginalized *Tuikuk* tribe in Mizoram to the desire to engage with European youth, Mafaa underscores a significant cultural contrast. The *Tuikuk*, viewed unfavorably by mainstream Mizo society, symbolizes a challenging demographic, while European youth represent an idealized audience filled with potential and enlightenment. This juxtaposition not only highlights the absurdity of misdirected intentions but also invites the audience to reflect on the complexities of religious outreach and engagement.

Moreover, this simile also draws attention to the perceptions of the *Tuikuk* community within the broader Mizo socio-religious context. By referencing the *Tuikuk* in a humorous light, Mafaa challenges the audience to reconsider their preconceived notions about marginalized groups. The humour embedded in the simile serves as a mechanism for social commentary, prompting readers to question their own biases and the societal values that dictate these perceptions.

The use of religious and spiritual similes in Mafaa's writing reflects a broader commentary on the nature of faith, societal expectations, and the realities of human interaction with the divine. By employing humour to explore these themes, Mafaa invites his audience to engage in a more profound contemplation of their beliefs and the ways in which these beliefs manifest in everyday life. This technique effectively transforms a seemingly simple simile into a rich tapestry of meaning, encouraging readers to navigate the complexities of faith with both seriousness and levity. His employment of religious and spiritual similes is not merely a stylistic choice; it is a deliberate strategy to provoke thought and discussion about the intersection of humour and spirituality. The blending of humour with serious themes serves to illuminate societal attitudes toward marginalized groups, inviting readers to reflect on their values and beliefs in a manner that is both engaging and thought-provoking.

In the exploration of similes as tools of humour, Mafaa Hauhnar employs this literary device to craft vivid, surprising comparisons that elicit laughter while delivering deeper social commentary. Similes facilitate a juxtaposition between seemingly unrelated elements, introducing incongruity—the essence of humour. His similes draw upon everyday experiences, cultural nuances, and societal observations, transforming ordinary situations into memorable and amusing narratives.

His thematic categorization of similes across works such as *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl* highlights the multifaceted nature of his humour, ranging from critiques of weather and nature to social dynamics and personal struggles. By merging humour with poignant insights into Mizo culture, the author invites critical reflection on societal norms and personal experiences. Ultimately, his use of similes enriches the reader's understanding of complex human emotions, reinforcing the notion that humour can serve as a powerful lens through which to examine the intricacies of life.

Hyperbole: Exaggeration for Comedic Effect

Hyperbole refers to a rhetorical figure of overstatement or exaggeration that magnifies a statement beyond realistic credibility. As Marcus Fabius Quintilian explains, "Hyperbole is commonly used even by ignorant people and peasants, which is understandable, as all people are by nature inclined to magnify or to minimise things

and nobody is content to stick to what is really the case” (qtd. on *Hyperbole in English* 1).

C. Hugh Holman also defines hyperbole as “a figure of speech in which conscious exaggeration is used without the intent of literal persuasion. It may be used to heighten effect or it may be used to produce comic effect” (261). Like this, hyperbole is a rhetorical device based on deliberate exaggeration and is a powerful tool for enhancing humour. It amplifies traits or situations to an extreme, creating a sharp contrast between reality and the exaggerated depiction. This exaggeration often subverts the reader’s expectations, creating humour by introducing something unexpected or incongruous. The use of hyperbole aligns closely with Incongruity Theory—a major framework in humour studies—where humour arises from the clash between what is anticipated and what is actually presented.

The primary goal of hyperbole is to create an exaggerated impact, often to emphasize the intensity of an experience, object, or sentiment. As Claridge states, hyperbole serves to express “an emotional attitude and the presentation of an appropriate ‘image’ of oneself” (Claridge 264). Similarly, Mafaa’s use of hyperbole is highly effective in conveying his message in a vivid and imaginative way, capturing the reader’s attention. This technique is particularly evident in his work *Chawlhna Tuikam*, where in the first article, “Chhum Zinna Ram,” he uses hyperbole to describe his experiences studying in Shillong, painting a dramatic picture for his readers:

Chhunah kan college-ah hla kan han zir a. Keini aia tlema bus bang beng a zai lo rem thang deuh tawhte’n hla an han hruai a. Uṭawk tui dive tur ang main an han phar kak ang diai diai a. Chutah, Handel-a ‘Haleluiah’ kan han sa hap hap a. Ṭum dang aia kan lak sàñ ṭumin, a saprano-ho chuan, kâ aṭanga dangmawn thlawk chhuak dawn dawnin ‘Lal cheng neng’an han ti tek tek a. Keini bass-ho tan kha chuan sak a lo nuam tawk ve chauh si a, kan tui ta lutuk ṭhin khan, “Haleluia, suihlunglen; haleluia, suihlunglen” kan ti lo chauh a ni. (25)

[“We learned a choir song one afternoon at college. The ones who usually slapped the sides of the college bus were suddenly leading the practice. They struck dramatic poses—like frogs about to leap into a pond—and then launched into Handel’s Hallelujah. Whenever we reached the higher notes, the sopranos

struggled so hard it looked as if their uvulas were about to fly out of their mouths as they sang Lal cheng neng. For us basses, that was just our normal range. We got so carried away that we were often tempted to sing, ‘Hallelujah, suihlunglen; hallelujah, suihlunglen,’ with full theatrical flourish”; my trans.].

In his description of a choir’s attempt to reach high notes, Mafaa employs vivid hyperbole, likening the singers to frogs preparing to leap into a pond, effectively capturing their physical struggle in a humorous manner. The portrayal of sopranos nearly losing control of their uvulas while attempting high-pitched notes heightens the absurdity. This exaggerated depiction of the choir—normally composed and professional—contorting themselves in an exaggerated manner creates a sharp and comedic contrast to the seriousness of their performance. By utilizing hyperbole, Mafaa transforms a routine choir practice into a scene filled with unexpected and exaggerated imagery, generating humour through the incongruity between what is anticipated and the exaggerated reality. This deliberate incongruity, combined with the exaggerated elements, serves to engage readers more effectively.

Mafaa frequently employs hyperbole in his works, particularly in *Thlaler Aurawl* and *Chawlhna Tuikam*. His use of hyperbole can be classified into five major thematic categories: (i) size or magnitude, (ii) quantity or scarcity, (iii) difficulty or ease, (iv) quality (both good and bad), and (v) time (duration or speed).

Size or Magnitude

Exaggeration is a fundamental aspect of hyperbole, particularly in humour, where the exaggeration of size or magnitude plays a pivotal role in producing absurd, exaggerated, and often comical effects. This type of hyperbole amplifies the traits of objects, people, or situations beyond realistic proportions, allowing the audience to perceive them in a humorously distorted manner. When size or magnitude is exaggerated, the audience recognizes the unrealistic nature of the description, creating a cognitive dissonance that elicits humour.

Mafaa Hauhnar frequently employs hyperbole to exaggerate size, magnitude, and scale in his humour, creating comedic situations that distort reality in a playful and exaggerated manner. In his works *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, he uses this

rhetorical device to transform ordinary events into exaggerated, often absurd experiences, evoking laughter through the deliberate overstatement of everyday occurrences.

In *Chawlhna Tuikam*, Mafaa uses hyperbole to humorously exaggerate both the largeness and smallness of objects, effectively highlighting the contrast between reality and exaggeration. This technique creates vivid, exaggerated images that provoke humour by presenting a distorted version of reality, allowing the reader to visualize ordinary objects in an absurd and humorous way. In one instance, he writes, “...ka midum nihliap, hmeithai in tiat zet ka hawl chhuak sual fo va,” (19) [“...I often make the mistake of bringing my enormous umbrella—so large it could practically serve as a widow’s cottage”; my trans.] humorously exaggerating the size of his umbrella by stating that it could be large enough to serve as a cottage for a widow. Here, the umbrella is described as absurdly oversized, beyond any realistic proportions, creating an exaggerated mental image that heightens the comic effect. This exaggeration of size emphasizes the ridiculousness of carrying such an enormous object in a daily context, making the ordinary act of carrying an umbrella feel humorous through its unrealistic scale.

In contrast, Mafaa also uses hyperbole to depict extreme smallness. He writes, “...an unau zain an midum-nihliap-tiat-lek inah fahrahin an khawsa a ni,” (56) [“...he and his siblings live in a tiny house, scarcely larger than a big umbrella”; my trans.], describing the characters’ house as so small that it barely exceeds the size of a large umbrella. This exaggerated depiction of the house’s smallness creates a comical contrast between what a house should realistically be and what is being described, further emphasizing the absurdity of the situation. By using hyperbole to suggest that a family lives in a space no bigger than an umbrella, Mafaa once again amplifies the scale of everyday objects to an unrealistic level, creating humour through this exaggerated portrayal.

In both examples, Mafaa manipulates the size and magnitude of everyday items—an umbrella and a house—to generate humour. His use of hyperbole to exaggerate these objects makes the reader visualize absurdly distorted versions of reality, invoking laughter through the incongruity between what is expected and what is presented.

Mafaa Hauhnar's use of hyperbole to exaggerate size and magnitude is evident in several passages from his works. His hyperbolic descriptions amplify both physical characteristics and situations, transforming ordinary events into humorously exaggerated scenarios. This deliberate overstatement enhances the comedic effect by distorting reality in unexpected ways, a hallmark of his humorous style.

One example of hyperbole can be seen in *Thlaler Aurawl*, where Mafaa humorously exaggerates the size of his nose during an instance of playful taunting: “Anniho hi a tlachawp (extempore)-a Zoṭawnga han inbawlzan vela ka hneh loh tur thah, dim baksak lova min sawisak rawn, VCP vaihlo bawm tiat lâwnga hnar hmu lurh lurh khawpa min siam duhtute an ni a” (168) [“They were the crew I could never outdo in extempore Mizo-language teasing—merciless in their taunts—making me feel as if my nose were as big as a VCP’s tobacco box”; my trans.]. In this passage, Mafaa likens the feeling of embarrassment, brought on by his inability to outperform his friends in extempore insults, to having a nose as large as a VCP’s (Village Council President) tobacco box. This comparison to an object of exaggerated size—a tobacco box traditionally associated with authority figures—creates an absurd and humorous image. The exaggeration of his nose’s size not only underscores his bashfulness, it also highlights the humour derived from the disproportion between reality and the exaggerated description.

Similarly, in another instance, Mafaa amplifies the size of his fist to convey his emotions during a confrontation: “Chutah ka kuttum ding lam, Gospel Centenary Khuangpui vuakfung tia lawng maia ka han tin tak runah chuan ka kut vei lama ka tham kân pa chuan a hmabak chu a huphurh thlu ngang a ni ang, a thiam thil zawng zawng theh khawmin ngaihdam min dil ta chûl a” (179) [“When I was about to strike him with my right fist—almost as big as the Gospel Centenary drumstick—the opponent I had lifted with my left hand became so terrified that he began apologizing with every diplomatic skill he knew”; my trans.]. Here, he compares his clenched fist to the massive drumstick used in the Gospel Centenary celebrations, a symbol of significant cultural and religious importance in Mizoram. By exaggerating the size of his fist to such an absurd extent, he turns a potentially tense situation into a humorous one, further emphasized by the exaggerated reaction of his opponent, who begins to apologize with the “a thiam thil zawng zawng theh khawmin.” [“every diplomatic skill

he knew”; my trans.]. The contrast between the exaggerated size of his fist and the humorous fear it induces creates a comic effect that plays on the mismatch between expectation and reality.

Through these examples, Mafaa’s use of hyperbole to exaggerate size and magnitude becomes an effective tool for generating humour. His ability to transform mundane elements into exaggerated, larger-than-life scenarios illustrates how hyperbole can distort reality to create comic situations that resonate with readers.

In *Thlaler Aurawl*, one of Mafaa’s notable uses of hyperbole illustrates an exaggerated sense of size or magnitude: “Duh tawka chaw ka han ei tak tak mai pheh hi chu ka in-ei-keh lo chauh hi a ni thawthang a, kan tawnzau hmaa milem chuangte hi an men piai puai mai thin” (27) [“When I eat as much as I want, I’m so full I feel as if I might burst—and the portrait printed on my shirt looks like it’s about to wail”; my trans.]. In these lines, the author humorously exaggerates how much he has eaten, using the phrase “tawnzau hmaa milem chuangte hi an men piai puai” [“the portrait printed on my shirt looks like it’s about to wail”; my trans.]. This hyperbolic expression suggests an extreme physical reaction to overeating, implying that the author’s body has expanded so significantly that even the fabric of his shirt is struggling to hold together.

The visual image of the shirt’s print ‘crying’ emphasizes an exaggerated increase in size, humorously portraying the absurdity of extreme fullness. The hyperbole takes a common experience—feeling overly full—and magnifies it to an almost comically impossible level, where the shirt’s print distorts as if reacting to the strain. The humour in this hyperbole stems from the incongruity between the actual sensation of fullness and the extreme, fantastical imagery used to describe it. By presenting an exaggerated cause (overeating) and an equally exaggerated effect (the shirt’s print appearing to cry), Mafaa intensifies the humour, transforming a relatable experience into an absurd and visually amusing scenario. The idea of the shirt’s print ‘crying’ is both absurd and visually humorous, turning a familiar sensation into something wildly exaggerated. The hyperbole effectively captures the essence of feeling overly stuffed, elevating it to a comedic level where even inanimate objects, like the print on the shirt, appear to react dramatically to the situation. The humour lies

in the impossibility of the scenario and the playful imagery it evokes, showcasing Mafaa's skill in creating humour through hyperbolic descriptions.

Mafaa Hauhnar also employs a striking hyperbole to illustrate the number of people congregating at Stephen Hall, stating, "Stephen Hall (St. Anthony's College Hostel)-a an inkawm khawmna pindana kan titi vawrh ngaithla tur khan lungdawh tiat tiat hi anrawn inhawr khawm tup tup thin" (162) ["Crowds, as large as a monumental stone, would often gather around Stephen Hall (St. Anthony's College Hostel) to listen to our conversations"; my trans.]. In this context, the phrase *lungdawh tiat tiat* ["as large as a monumental stone"; my trans.] serves as a hyperbolic expression emphasizing size and magnitude. This exaggeration significantly amplifies the perceived impact of the group's discussions, suggesting that the conversations were so compelling that they attracted a vast audience. Mafaa implies not only the sheer number of individuals who attended but also the admiration they held for the dialogues taking place.

The hyperbole elevates the perceived importance of these conversations, creating a humorous contrast between the mundane nature of the discussions and the exaggerated response of the crowd. This disjunction between the trivial content of the conversations and the monumental gathering of listeners generates humour through the overstatement, underscoring the absurdity of the scenario.

Quantity or Scarcity

Exaggeration of quantity or scarcity is a rhetorical device that plays a crucial role in generating humour and highlighting contrasts in perception. This form of hyperbole enhances the portrayal of abundance or absence, pushing the boundaries of realism to extreme levels. By overstating the magnitude of what is present or absent, this technique creates a pronounced discrepancy between the audience's perception and reality, often leading to comedic or satirical effects.

Exaggeration of quantity or scarcity can be categorized into two main functions: amplification and diminution. Amplification refers to the inflation of quantity beyond reasonable bounds. For example, when an author writes, "I've told you a million times," the exaggerated use of 'million' emphasizes the speaker's frustration with the

repetition. The humour here arises from the absurdity of the exaggerated figure, which, while unrealistic, effectively conveys the emotional intensity of the statement. In literature, amplification is frequently used to emphasize excess, such as wealth or power, often prompting readers to question the credibility or perspective of the narrator. Diminution, on the other hand, involves reducing the quantity to an unrealistically low level to highlight scarcity or deprivation. Expressions like “there wasn’t a drop of water for miles” depict extreme conditions, evoking both sympathy and, at times, humour due to the audience's recognition that such extremes are improbable. In humorous writing, the exaggeration of scarcity can serve as social commentary, calling attention to disparities or amplifying feelings of deprivation in a way that critiques societal norms.

In comedic contexts, the exaggeration of quantity or scarcity aligns closely with the Incongruity Theory of Humour. The humour arises from the unexpected contrast between a reasonable expectation and the absurd presentation of excess or lack, generating laughter. Furthermore, in satirical writing, these exaggerations often serve as a vehicle for critiquing social or political issues. By magnifying extremes, authors expose contradictions, hypocrisies, or injustices, encouraging audiences to reflect on the deeper implications of these disparities. In sum, exaggeration of quantity or scarcity is more than just a literary embellishment; it is a potent tool for highlighting the gap between perception and reality. Whether used to evoke humour, underscore emotional states, or critique societal conditions, it remains a key rhetorical device in both literary and comedic expression.

Mafaa Hauhnar’s use of hyperbole to depict quantity or scarcity often touches on themes such as medical test results, where excessive amounts of paperwork are used to explain his illness, or the exaggerated consequences of his friends’ eating habits. He also employs hyperbole to highlight the dishonesty of his friends, his relationships with others, and the overcrowding of people in a single household. The exaggeration of quantity or scarcity in these instances goes beyond mere amplification, serving as a form of satire that critiques the absurdities and irregularities of human life.

In one instance in *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa humorously exaggerates the promiscuity of individuals through a hyperbolic comparison: “Mahni kekawrte an thlak zin tluk zeta ngaihzawng thlak ngunte leh ke pahnih nei tawh phawt chu lo ‘hmu tai’ duh ta zel mihring kan kiang lawka an veivah huai huai lai hian...” (48) [“While people

with as many lovers as the pairs of pants they've worn, and those desperate enough to entertain anything on two legs, are wandering around us..."; my trans]. The image of people having as many lovers as the pairs of pants they have worn underscores not only the quantity of romantic entanglements but also serves as a satirical commentary on the lack of commitment. The use of hyperbole in this context critiques superficial relationships by magnifying the absurdity of such behavior.

Another example focuses on the theme of excessive crowding: "Khami tuma kan khah hnehzia kha, chhuat kha tla hlawk mah se a entute kha chu kan innêk tang t̃hap thei ang tih tur a ni" (92) ["We were packed so tightly on that occasion that if the floor had given way, none of us would have fallen"; my trans.]. In this passage, Mafaa exaggerates the density of people so dramatically that, even if the floor were to collapse, the sheer number of individuals packed together would prevent anyone from falling. This hyperbolic depiction not only emphasizes overcrowding but also highlights the absurdity of the situation in a comic manner.

Another example of hyperbole in *Thlaler Aurawl* emphasizes the overwhelming amount of medical paperwork: "Endoscopy leh ultrasound tih angreng hmanga min enna result neuh neuh ringawt pawh nursery school zirlaibu zat zet a tling a, chu'ng chu file hrana vawngin, a kawmah *Mafaa Bihchianna* tia pentui sena ka chhinchhiah kalh nghe nghe kha" (159) ["The results of my endoscopy, ultrasound, and all the other tests are as thick as a nursery school syllabus. I've even filed them separately under the title 'Mafaa Bihchianna' with red-ink markings"; my trans.]. In this instance, Mafaa humorously exaggerates the volume of his medical test results by comparing them to a 'nursery school syllabus.' The hyperbole lies in the suggestion that medical test results, typically extensive and detailed, could be as voluminous as a formal educational syllabus, a clear overstatement intended to amuse the reader.

By magnifying the quantity or scarcity of the medical paperwork, Mafaa not only humorously implies the complexity of his health situation but also indirectly critiques the often excessive bureaucracy of medical systems. The humorous contrast between the seriousness of medical tests and the triviality of a nursery syllabus adds an additional layer of absurdity. The comparison exaggerates the volume and intricacy of the test results, while the juxtaposition with something as simple and lightweight as a

child's syllabus underscores the dissonance between the actual significance of medical documentation and the triviality suggested by the analogy.

Mafaa Hauhnar humorously depicts a friend who possesses an extraordinary appetite, employing biblical references to amplify this exaggeration. He writes, “Cher viau ei ti lo chuan ei leh in lamah û tak a ni. Sawm ve loh ruaithehnaah pawh mahni inbengvar chawp mai chi a ni a. Huau huau hrik a ni ringawt. Isuan chhangper panga leh sangha pahnih a tihpun tum khan tel ve ngat sela chu bawmrang sawmpahnih bang tur a awm hlek lo vang,” (33) [“Even though he’s quite thin, he’s a pro when it comes to eating. He’d show up at feasts uninvited, just to indulge. A true hedonist, if he had been present when Jesus was multiplying bread and fish, there wouldn’t have been twelve baskets left—maybe not even one”; my trans.].

This statement serves as a clear illustration of Mafaa’s use of hyperbole concerning quantity and scarcity. By exaggerating the character’s appetite, Mafaa humorously suggests that, despite his thin appearance, this individual would consume such a vast amount of food that even the miraculous abundance provided by Jesus in the biblical narrative would prove insufficient. This hyperbole emphasizes the character’s extraordinary capacity to eat, elevating it to an absurd level where he alone could deplete the resources of a divine miracle. The contrast between the character’s thinness and his exaggerated eating prowess creates humour by highlighting the absurdity of the situation. By positing that even a miraculous event could not satisfy this individual’s appetite, Mafaa magnifies the scenario to an extreme, resulting in a comically implausible depiction.

Mafaa Hauhnar’s use of hyperbole, particularly in relation to quantity or scarcity, predominantly involves amplification rather than diminution. While he frequently employs diminution in his writings, these instances do not typically fall under the category of hyperbole. In his hyperbolic expressions, we observe an emphasis on amplification, where the exaggeration serves to enlarge or intensify aspects of quantity or scarcity, rather than reducing them. This amplification is a central feature of his hyperbole, as seen throughout his works.

Difficulty or Ease

Exaggeration of difficulty or ease is a rhetorical device frequently used to create humour by distorting the perception of how challenging or effortless a task or situation truly is. By presenting an action or challenge as either excessively difficult or unbelievably simple, this form of hyperbole stretches the truth in a way that contrasts sharply with the audience's understanding of the normal effort required. The comedic effect arises from this exaggeration, as the audience recognizes the disparity between the realistic effort involved and the overstated description.

Exaggeration of difficulty or ease is often employed in comedic writing and performance to amplify the relatability of everyday struggles or achievements. In comedic contexts, this form of hyperbole plays a key role in the Incongruity Theory of Humour, where humour arises from the contrast between the audience's realistic expectations and the exaggerated presentation of effort or ease. The clash between the audience's knowledge of a task's normal difficulty and the hyperbolic description creates a comedic effect by subverting their expectations.

In satirical writing, exaggeration of difficulty or ease is used to critique societal attitudes, work ethics, or personal habits. Overstating difficulty can draw attention to people's tendencies to avoid effort, while overstating ease can expose arrogance or underestimation of complex tasks. For example, political satire might exaggerate how easily a leader claims to solve national problems, only to reveal their actual incompetence or overconfidence.

Mafaa Hauhnar employs hyperbole in his works to exaggerate the notions of difficulty and ease, often reflecting personal characteristics, social critique, and humorous exaggeration. These hyperbolic expressions provide commentary on various aspects of Mizo society and Christian culture, as well as illustrating personal struggles or triumphs. In *Thlaler Aurawl*, the following instances serve as vivid examples of this rhetorical technique:

In the first instance, Mafaa uses hyperbole to critique the temptations of alcohol and women in his society: “Pawisa, sap zu leh hmeichhiaah chuan thlem a ngai ngai lo. Chutih a hnekin amah thlem turin Setana a thlem lo chauh zawk” (32) [“When it comes

to money, women, and alcohol, he doesn't need any temptation— in fact, he almost tempted Satan himself to tempt him"; my trans.]. The exaggerated statement that the character almost tempts Satan himself illustrates not only the ease with which the character succumbs to vices but also reflects on Mizo society's struggles with issues like alcohol and temptation, intertwined with Christian beliefs. The reference to 'Satan' introduces a moral and religious dimension, showing how hyperbole is used to amplify both societal and individual weakness in a humorous yet reflective manner.

In the next example, the author uses hyperbole to emphasize physical pain and illness: "Ka lu chu Assam Rifles hockey stick (tiangkawm)-a an khalth kawi hrep hnu ang mai hian a nâ a. 'A rai no huat a chhuak pek a nih hi' tih mai turin a chhang khât mawi tawkin ka uak deuh sek mai baw k a. Thil ei ka'n tum ve lah chuan thingtang dawlh tum ang tlatin a khirh a" (158) ["My head hurt as if it had been struck by an Assam Rifles hockey stick. I vomited as if I were suffering from early pregnancy. Eating was as difficult as trying to swallow a twig"; my trans.]. This vivid exaggeration paints the picture of someone suffering extreme discomfort, comparing the pain to being struck by a hockey stick and nausea to early pregnancy. Such comparisons, including the struggle to eat as difficult as swallowing a twig, heighten the difficulty of the situation, allowing the reader to empathize while also being entertained by the absurdity of the descriptions.

The following statement introduces the idea of someone's excessive indulgence in life: "Zan khat party-a a kal kha a lâm nasa awm ngawt mai, pheikhawk ke-artui sang a bun chhuah kha a lâmna lamah a rawn sawh tawi vek thei zu nia!" (163) ["She danced so much at a party once that her high heels were completely worn down"; my trans.]. Here, Mafaa exaggerates the character's enthusiasm for dancing to the point that their high heels are worn out by the end of the night. The hyperbole humorously highlights the ease with which the character engages in leisure activities, contrasting with the difficulty or effort others might experience in everyday life.

The fourth instance uses hyperbole to demonstrate the difficulty of interrupting someone who is speaking incessantly: "A țawng tui laklawh laia lo inrawlh ve tum chu, puan țhui mek laia khawl hriauva la thil lo tum ve sek ang vela thil khirh a ni e, pawh ti ila thukhuh tak ka la ni tho vang" (168) ["Trying to get a word in while he's talking is like trying to thread a needle while it's still running through a sewing machine—

impossible, just as it is to keep the facts unexaggerated”; my trans.]. Mafaa likens trying to speak while someone else is talking to the impossible task of threading a needle while it’s in a sewing machine, heightening the sense of frustration and helplessness. The hyperbole exaggerates the challenge of getting a word in, turning a common social interaction into a near-impossible feat, which adds humour through the absurdity of the comparison.

Mafaa also employed hyperbole which exaggerates the speed of a frightened character: “Mizoram aiawhin 100 metre race velah tel se, ram tan medal hlu tak tak a rawn awrh haw ngei theih ka ring hial” (179) [“Had he competed on behalf of Mizoram in the 100-meter race, I’m certain he would have brought home several gold medals for the state”; my trans.]. The character’s fear-induced flight is compared to an Olympic-level runner, humorously exaggerating the ease and speed with which they escape. This hyperbole not only entertains the reader but also underscores the character's desperation in the face of danger, transforming a mundane event into a comic exaggeration of heroism or cowardice.

These instances of hyperbole, whether emphasizing difficulty or ease, showcase Mafaa Hauhna’s ability to exaggerate everyday human experiences. Through his comic overstatements, he provides not only entertainment but also a subtle critique of societal behaviors such as temptation, indulgence, and human vulnerability. By amplifying the challenges or ease associated with various scenarios, Mafaa transforms ordinary life into a comical narrative, encouraging readers to reflect on the absurdity of these exaggerated depictions. In these examples, hyperbole is employed to heighten both the sense of struggle and the ease with which characters navigate situations, creating humorous and often absurd exaggerations that engage the audience. Mafaa’s use of hyperbole magnifies familiar experiences, turning them into exaggerated spectacles that underline the humour and irony embedded in human actions and societal conventions.

Quality (Good or Bad)

Exaggeration of quality, whether of goodness or badness, is a rhetorical device that amplifies the inherent value or defect of an object, person, or situation far beyond the boundaries of normal perception. This form of hyperbole magnifies positive or

negative attributes to extreme levels, emphasizing either extraordinary excellence or profound deficiency. The result is often satirical or comedic, as the disparity between the exaggerated quality and the audience's understanding of reality creates a heightened sense of absurdity.

In comedic and satirical writing, exaggeration of quality is a central mechanism within the Incongruity Theory of Humour, where humour stems from the clash between the audience's realistic expectations and the hyperbolic portrayal of attributes. When something is described as either far better or far worse than the audience knows it to be, the extreme contrast creates a humorous disconnect. The humour lies in the absurdity of the claim and the audience's awareness of the actual, more moderate reality.

In satire, exaggeration of quality often serves as a tool for social or political commentary. Over-glorifying a leader, system, or idea can expose the shallow nature of admiration or reveal underlying faults that might be overlooked in less extreme descriptions. On the other hand, exaggerating the negative qualities of a person or institution can spotlight hypocrisy, corruption, or incompetence, creating a critical lens through which the audience is invited to reflect on the subject.

In *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa Hauhnar's use of hyperbole serves to accentuate negative qualities or behaviors, often in a humorous or satirical light. His exaggerated statements bring to the forefront social issues, personal shortcomings, or broader critiques of Mizo society, especially in the context of Western influence, personal character flaws, and human relationships.

In *Chawlhna Tuikam*, Mafaa sarcastically comments on the Westernization of Mizo society through the line, "Sap ram ngaihtuah hian min ti lawm a' tih hla te pawh kan sa thuaiin a rinawm tawh a ni" (69) ["It looks like we'll soon be singing, 'Thinking of England makes me happy'; my trans.]. Here, the hyperbole emphasizes the extreme admiration some Mizo people had for the British, reflecting a broader critique of the lingering colonial mindset. The exaggerated notion of people singing happily about their former colonizers exposes the perceived cultural subservience and Westernization that Mafaa views with irony and humour.

Similarly, “Sapho khan Kristiannarawn keng lut lo phei sela chu, anmahni kha kan lo be mai duhin a rinawm a ni” (69) [“Had the English not brought Christianity with them, we’d probably be worshipping them instead”; my trans.], the author amplifies the idea of colonial admiration. This statement underscores how deeply Western culture and Christianity have penetrated Mizo society, to the point that, if not for Christianity, Mizo people might metaphorically idolize their former colonizers.

In another instance, Mafaa uses hyperbole to mock physical appearance and the work of doctors in the Mizo context. “... khenbeh hial tlak khawpa hmelchhiate hmelah pawh Isua hmel an hmuh luih a ngai a” (126–127) [“They must perceive the face of Jesus in countenances so unattractive that they warrant crucifixion”; my trans.] illustrates his satirical take on the services rendered by doctors. This hyperbole exaggerates the ugliness of patients, humorously suggesting that their faces are so unattractive that they resemble those deserving of crucifixion. In doing so, Mafaa both elevates the selfless work of doctors and mocks the idea that outward appearances might determine the worthiness of care.

In *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa continues his use of hyperbole to describe personal character flaws. The line “A patê kher khawr viau na a, a han inhrosa tak tak han hmuh chuan thlipui pawh a hau reh ve thei mai awm hi a ni a. Chimawm thiam lamah lah ram pawn lama Mizoram aiawha tirh chhuah tlak hial a ni ang chu” (32) [“Though he’s small in stature, his fierce demeanor could probably calm a storm. He’s so mischievous, he should be the official ambassador of trouble for Mizoram”; my trans.] emphasizes the individual’s mischievous character through an extreme and humorous comparison. By exaggerating the person’s fierce demeanor to the point where it could “thlipui hau reh,” [“calm a storm”; my trans.] Mafaa uses hyperbole to mock the disruptive nature of the character while still maintaining a lighthearted tone. The statement humorously suggests that this person’s troublesome behavior is so significant that they should be officially recognized for it.

One of his statements in *Thlaler Aurawl*, “Hei vang hian alawm mi suak sual, ramhuaite nen department khata thawk ho emaw tih tur khawpa sual buruhsehte pawh an thih ni-ah chuan an nupui fanauten hmangaihna mittui sur chung a an thlah liam thin ni!” (50) [“And this is why even the worst scoundrels, who could have been the devil’s coworkers, are sent off with tears by their families when they depart”; my trans.],

Mafaa uses hyperbole to emphasize the power of familial love, even for the most despicable individuals. The exaggerated portrayal of these *mi suak sual* (scoundrels) as almost the devil's coworkers highlights their negative qualities, while the image of their family still mourning them adds an ironic twist. This hyperbole serves both as a critique of human flaws and as a commentary on the unwavering bonds of love within a family, even in the face of severe moral shortcomings.

Through these examples, Mafaa Hauhna's hyperboles tend to exaggerate negative traits, whether related to the impacts of Westernization, individual character flaws, or societal behaviors. His use of amplification—rather than diminution—offers sharp and humorous insights into Mizo society, using exaggeration to engage readers with both humour and social critique.

Time (Duration or Speed)

Distortion of time, whether in terms of duration or speed, is a rhetorical device that manipulates the perception of time to exaggerate how long or short something lasts, or how fast or slow something occurs. This exaggeration often serves to heighten the humour in the description of actions, events, or experiences by creating an incongruous relationship between the expected time frame and the exaggerated portrayal. Through this distortion, the normal flow of time is stretched or compressed to extremes, producing comedic, satirical, or absurd effects.

The distortion of time can be explored through two primary aspects: exaggeration of duration and exaggeration of speed. Exaggeration of duration involves stretching the length of time associated with an event, action, or experience far beyond what is plausible. Actions that normally take a short amount of time are presented as lasting for an unnaturally long period, thereby creating an absurd or humorous effect. For instance, a phrase such as “Tuk khat mut reiah fatir nihna pawh kan hralh phal mai ang a, tih tur kha a ni reng a ni” (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 20) [“We were often ready to relinquish our firstborn privileges just for a few extra hours of blissful morning sleep”; my trans.], uses hyperbole to stress the harshness of Shillong's cold weather. Here, Mafaa humorously exaggerates the human desire for comfort, implying that the characters are willing to give up something as significant as their birthright for the small luxury of sleeping in during the cold mornings. This extreme comparison of

giving up one's birthright—a culturally and biblically significant idea—heightens the sense of discomfort caused by the weather and underscores the depth of human desire for immediate physical comfort. The statement reflects not just a personal experience but also a humorous observation of human nature, where trivial pleasures sometimes outweigh major responsibilities.

Mafaa uses hyperbole to address the cultural attitudes towards alcohol consumption. “Zu in hi sual a nih a, chutiang ti mite chuan phu tawka hrem tur ni sela chuan ani hi chu dam chhung bakah September thla thlenga tan ina tang tlak a ni” (54) [“If alcohol were a sin, and those who indulge in it were to be punished accordingly, he deserves a life sentence and then some—right up until September”; my trans.]. The exaggeration of the character's indulgence in alcohol to the point where he “dam chhung bakah September thla thleng” [“he deserves a life sentence and then some—right up until September”; my trans.] is a playful yet critical commentary on excessive behavior. This line further emphasizes the length of the punishment in an exaggerated manner, pointing to both the character's overindulgence and society's ambivalence or indulgence in alcohol culture. Mafaa's use of this hyperbolic expression highlights the tension between personal freedom and moral judgment, as well as the consequences of indulgence within the Mizo community.

Conversely, distortion of speed involves amplifying how quickly or slowly something occurs, often to an exaggerated or implausible degree. Tasks that should take a significant amount of time are presented as being completed in an impossibly short period, or actions that should be quick are stretched out for humorous effect. For example, a phrase in *Thlaler Aurawl*, “India Today' pawh kan khua a lo thlen chhoh ve meuh chuan 'History of India' a lo ni hman tawh thin” (97) [“By the time *India Today* reaches our place, it has already turned into History of India”; my trans.] —Mafaa Hauhnar employs hyperbole to emphasize the remoteness and isolation of his location, humorously exaggerating the delay in receiving current news. The hyperbole lies in the drastic transformation of *India Today*, a well-known news magazine, into History of India, suggesting that by the time the news arrives in his village, it is no longer relevant or timely but has instead become outdated and historical. This exaggerated comparison highlights not just a literal slowness of information flow but also the broader experience of being disconnected from national events. By transforming the magazine

into a symbol of the past, Mafaa underscores the humour of living in a place where ‘today’s’ news arrives so late that it becomes irrelevant.

The hyperbolic ‘speed’ in this instance is inverted—rather than speeding things up, it humorously stretches out time, making the delivery of news so delayed that it effectively transcends its contemporary value. Through this witty overstatement, Mafaa critiques the infrastructure and communication delays typical of rural or remote areas, while also making light of the experience of those who live there. The exaggeration serves both to entertain readers and to subtly highlight the disparity between urban and rural access to timely information.

In both comedic and satirical writing, distortion of time plays a central role in the Incongruity Theory of Humour. Humour arises from the clash between the audience’s reasonable expectations of time and the exaggerated portrayal of duration or speed. This incongruity between the realistic passage of time and the absurd, exaggerated version creates a humorous disconnection, often leading to laughter or amusement.

In literature, distortion of time can be used to deepen emotional expression and heighten the narrative’s impact. By exaggerating duration, authors may emphasize a character’s sense of boredom, frustration, or impatience, drawing the reader into the character’s subjective experience of time. Similarly, exaggeration of speed can be employed to underscore themes of haste, urgency, or carelessness, often with humorous or satirical undertones. In some cases, such distortions may serve as metaphors for larger societal issues, such as the pressure to meet unrealistic deadlines or the inefficiencies of certain institutions.

Distortion of time, whether through the exaggeration of duration or speed, is a powerful rhetorical device that enhances humour, satire, and critique by manipulating the audience’s perception of time. By stretching or compressing the realistic experience of time, authors can create absurd, comical, or ironic effects that engage audiences while also prompting reflection on broader societal or emotional issues. This device is widely used in literature, comedy, and performance to reveal the often-subjective nature of time and to comment on human behaviors, systems, and emotions. Whether

highlighting the frustration of waiting or the absurdity of speed, distortion of time serves as a versatile tool in both entertaining and critiquing human experiences.

Taunting and Irony: Mocking as Humour

Taunting and irony, as rhetorical devices, serve to ridicule or criticize individuals, behaviors, and social structures while simultaneously evoking humour. Taunting typically involves sharp, provocative remarks intended to belittle or challenge, often exaggerated for comedic effect. On the other hand, irony relies on the audience's recognition of a contrast between appearances and reality—whether in speech or situation—which produces laughter through the element of surprise.

In the context of humour, Incongruity Theory is highly relevant. The theory posits that humour emerges from the recognition of incongruity, or the difference between what one expects and what actually happens. In Mafaa's works, this incongruity frequently arises when characters say one thing but mean another, or when the events of a situation diverge from logical expectations, resulting in an ironic or mocking tone. By using taunting and irony, Mafaa highlights these contradictions, allowing his humour to simultaneously entertain and critique societal norms.

Taunting in humour can be defined as the act of mocking or ridiculing someone or something with the intent to provoke laughter. Unlike straightforward humour, which seeks to entertain without any sharp critique, taunting humour often carries a sharper edge, aiming not just to amuse but also to challenge, provoke, or embarrass its target.

In Mafaa's *Thlaler Aurawl*, taunting appears frequently, often directed at individuals who fail to live up to societal expectations. For instance, the taunt about the man who marries not for love but out of fear: "Mite chuan nupui atan ngaihawng an neih laiin ani hi chuan hlauh zawng a nei mauh mai" (162) ["While most people marry someone they love, he married someone he fears"; my trans.] exposes the incongruity between societal ideals of marriage based on affection and the reality of marriages formed out of fear. This example mocks the absurdity of social pressures that lead to such unions, using exaggeration to enhance the comedic effect.

Another example is the church-goer who, instead of offering cash during a church collection, mistakenly presents a condom, “Tum khat ZPMK (Zoram Pawn Mizo Kohhran) biak ina a thawhlawm thawh turin a condom (extra large- *kamasutra* ngat lehngal) a phawrh palh nawlh thu erawh chu vawiin thlengin kan la zeppui” (162) [“To this day, I still keep the moment when he offered a condom—an extra-large Kamasutra one—instead of the offertory at the ZPMK (Zoram Pawn Mizo Kohhran) church”; my trans.]. This instance of taunting humour not only targets the individual’s mistake but also pokes fun at the moral rigidity of religious norms, showing how humour can subvert the seriousness of such institutions. The laughter here stems from the incongruity between the expected behavior in a religious setting and the absurd reality that unfolds.

Mafaa’s use of taunting often focuses on societal figures who represent authority or propriety. By highlighting their contradictions and human failings, he uses humour to reduce their perceived status, inviting the audience to laugh at their expense. The humour in these taunts is both playful and critical, allowing Mafaa to expose the folly of social pretensions.

Irony, another core device in Mafaa’s humour, is defined by the contrast between appearance and reality. In verbal irony, what is said is the opposite of what is meant, while situational irony involves a twist in events that defies expectations.

In *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa often uses verbal irony to highlight the absurdity of human behavior. In one passage — “Dika zawng ṭawng thiam chak tih takah, a Shillong awm chhung khan ṭawng chi hrang hrang sawmpahnih, “Bat in phal em?” tih a thiam hman” (164) [“As Dika is a quick language learner, he managed to learn how to say “Can I owe this?” in twelve different languages during his time in Shillong”; my trans.], Dika is praised for learning multiple languages, but the punchline reveals that the only phrase he mastered was “Bat in phal em?” [“Can I owe this?”; my trans.] in twelve different languages. This use of verbal irony underscores Dika’s laziness, creating humour by juxtaposing the high regard in which linguistic proficiency is held with the triviality of the phrase he actually learned.

Situational irony is also prominent in Mafaa’s work. In one scene, “Zan khat party-a a kal kha a lâm nasa awm ngawt mai, pheikhawk ke-artui sang a bun chhuah

kha a lâмна lamah a rawn sawh tawi vek thei zu nia!” (163) [“She danced so much at a party once that her high heels were completely worn down”; my trans.], a character is ridiculed for dancing excessively at a party until her high heels wear out. The humour arises from the incongruity between the character’s desire to be glamorous and the physical deterioration of her attire, which ultimately undermines her efforts.

Mafaa’s ironic humour often serves as social commentary, revealing the absurdities of human behavior and societal norms. Through irony, he exposes the gap between how people present themselves and the often ridiculous realities of their actions.

In many instances, Mafaa blends taunting and irony to create a more complex form of humour. These two devices often intersect in his works, with ironic taunts amplifying the comedic effect. One example is the passage where a character is mocked for his dark skin, with the humour deriving from the absurdity of societal colorism:

“Chuaу-hang’ a nih leh ‘Chuaу-ngo’ a nih chu amah hmuha chi chauh a ni. ‘A vun rawng a hang e’ ka tihna em em pawh ni lovin, a hmaitlang aṭang hi chuan, “A naupan laiin a nuin a tikang palh a ni ang a,” tih tur khawpa thîmin a zîn hnan kha a ni ve a. Eng ang pawn haw hma mah se, a thim haw ve ziah. Ni kin huna vur anga var hun tur hi, ani nen hian kan nghakhlel ṭhian dun hle ṭhin.” (169)

[“Whether he’s a ‘chuaу-hang’ or a ‘chuaу-ngo’ is obvious when you meet him. I’m not saying he’s dark-skinned, but just looking at him makes you wonder if he got scorched by accident as a child. Even when he comes home early, he still arrives in the dark. We both eagerly await the end of time when we’ll be as white as snow”; my trans.].

Here, the taunt is laced with irony, as the character’s skin color becomes the subject of exaggerated attention, challenging the arbitrary nature of such distinctions in Mizo society.

This intersection often heightens the humour, as Mafaa’s mockery exposes the incongruity between societal values and individual realities. The taunting undermines

the target's status, while the irony highlights the absurdity of the situation, creating a layered comedic effect.

Mafaa's use of taunting and irony is deeply embedded in Mizo cultural norms, where social status and reputation hold significant weight. His humour often mocks individuals who take themselves too seriously or fail to recognize their own contradictions. In Mizo society, where humility is a valued trait, Mafaa's humour challenges those who prioritize status over substance, using taunting and irony to expose their flaws.

For example, the taunt about the man who behaves as if he is a tree-hugging primate due to his excessive body hair, "Guwahati sahuana kawr phelha zawng lian nena thla an lak dun chu hmu ve ula, "A khawii zawk hi nge nangmah?" in ti ve ngei ang. A ngûmah hian mei tawi tê vuahsak ila thingkung remchanga ban ve zut zut thei mai hmel a pu a ni" (164) ["If you saw his photo with a big monkey at the Guwahati zoo—both of them shirtless—you'd definitely ask, "Which one is you?" And if we tied a short tail to his loincloth, he could easily pass for a tree-hugging primate"; my trans.]. This taunt challenges societal expectations of masculinity and appearance. By exaggerating the character's features, Mafaa creates humour that critiques not only the individual but also the societal emphasis on physical appearance.

In addition, Mafaa's humour often reflects the tensions between traditional Mizo values and modern influences. His use of irony highlights the contradictions that arise as individuals navigate these cultural shifts, allowing his humour to function as a commentary on the evolving identity of Mizo society.

Taunting and irony are central to Mafaa's humour, serving both to entertain and to critique. Through taunting, he mocks individuals who fail to live up to societal ideals, using exaggeration to expose their flaws and provoke laughter. Irony, by contrast, reveals the gap between appearance and reality, creating humour through the unexpected twists in speech and situation.

Both devices align with Incongruity Theory, as the humour arises from the recognition of contradictions between expectations and reality. By combining these devices, Mafaa creates a humour that is not only amusing but also deeply reflective of

the cultural and social tensions within Mizo society. His humour invites the audience to laugh at the incongruities in their own world while offering a sharp critique of societal norms and behaviors.

Self-Deprecating Humor: The Art of Laughing at Oneself

Self-deprecating humour, a powerful rhetorical device in comedy, entails making oneself the subject of humor by highlighting personal flaws, failures, or vulnerabilities. This type of humour fosters relatability, as it disarms the audience and invites them to laugh at the human condition by laughing at the humorist's self-portrayal. In this context, Mafaa uses self-deprecating humour to build a rapport with his audience while maintaining an underlying sense of humility and self-awareness.

Unlike forms of humour where the target is external—such as irony or taunting, which may focus on societal or political critique—self-deprecation turns inward, offering a candid critique of the humorist's own shortcomings. Mafaa, through this self-directed humour, balances his role as a commentator on cultural and social life with the ability to poke fun at his own foibles. This shift from external to internal critique creates incongruity, as the audience does not expect the humorist to turn the joke onto himself.

This humor technique aligns with Incongruity Theory. Here, humour stems from the contrast between the audience's perception of Mafaa as an astute commentator and the self-effacing, humble image he constructs through his jokes. The unexpected nature of this humility, juxtaposed against his wit, gives rise to a sense of surprise that leads to laughter.

The Role of Self-Deprecating Humour

Mafaa uses self-deprecating humour in both *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl* to mock his appearance, habits, and even his social standing. By doing so, he bridges the gap between himself and the audience, making himself appear more relatable and down-to-earth. His self-portrayal as a flawed, sometimes exaggeratedly incompetent character is key to his ability to create laughter.

For instance, in *Chawlhna Tuikam*, Mafaa comments on his lips being perfectly suited for frowning and throwing tantrums: “...ka hmui tûm bur nana îtawm fahran hi...” (128) [“My lips, perfectly suited for displaying long faces and throwing tantrums”; my trans.]. This humorous self-assessment of his own physical appearance becomes an effective way for him to connect with the reader through an image of exaggerated self-pity. The physical feature he describes is not typically associated with pride, yet by making it the subject of a joke, he disarms any negative judgment, allowing the audience to laugh alongside him.

In *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa’s use of self-deprecating humour becomes even more vivid. He mocks his own body shape and growth, writing that he was destined by the creator to expand endlessly when he stopped growing taller: “Chawl lova ðang zel tur chi hrim hrima Siamtuina duhsak taka a siam bik ka ni a, a sang zawnga ka ðan a kin hnua pawh a vang zawngin ka han ðang chhunzawm leh ta char char mai a...” (27) [“I was destined by the Creator to keep growing. When I stopped growing taller, I simply began expanding sideways instead”; my trans.]. The absurdity of his statement creates humour, as he likens himself to an uncontrollably expanding figure, generating laughter through the image of comical exaggeration.

Moreover, in another passage from *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa compares his physical appearance to that of a sumo wrestler rather than a writer, stating that he resembles someone better suited for a commercial rather than a literary debate: “Mi min hmuh danah pawh lehkha zia mi ai mahin pepsi fakna atana an hman Japanese sumo wrestler rawng ka kai mah mah zawk fo va Shakespeare-a thu ril leh TS Eliot-a hla khirhkan han chai vel ai chuan kawmkil kara vawkpui âwm nâ ðangkham rûn ka inhme zawk maithei...” (27) [“To others, my figure resembles that of a sumo wrestler more suited for a Pepsi commercial than for the life of a writer. Instead of discussing the depths of Shakespeare or the complexities of T.S. Eliot, I look more like someone meant to lie among domesticated pigs in a narrow pen. I’m always as oily as the kadhai in a wealthy Indian household”; my trans.]. Here, he combines self-deprecation with cultural references, blending humour about his own appearance with a critique of societal expectations about intellectuals and public figures.

Functions and Effects of Self-Deprecating Humour

Self-deprecating humour serves multiple functions in Mafaa's works. Primarily, it lowers the barriers between the author and the audience. By laughing at his own flaws, Mafaa becomes more relatable and approachable, as readers see a reflection of their own human imperfections in his exaggerated portrayals. This humility softens any potential harshness in his satire or critiques of society, allowing him to explore complex themes without alienating his audience.

In addition, this form of humour fosters a sense of vulnerability. By making fun of himself, Mafaa shows that he is not immune to the failings and absurdities he observes in others. This shared vulnerability creates a bond between the humorist and the audience, who can relate to his human failings.

Self-deprecating humour also acts as a tool of subtle social critique. By poking fun at his own position or stature, Mafaa is able to indirectly critique societal structures and norms. For instance, in *Thlaler Aurawl*, he humorously describes his physical state after indulging in food, saying that he swells up so much that his shirt looks like it's trying to cry: "Duh tawka chaw ka han ei tak tak mai phei hi chu ka in-ei-keh lo chauh hi a ni thawthang a, kan tawnzau hmaa milem chuangte hi an men piai puai mai thin..." (27) ["When I eat as much as I want, I'm so full I feel as if I might burst—and the portrait printed on my shirt looks like it's about to wail"; my trans.]. This humorous exaggeration offers not only a light-hearted commentary on gluttony but also subtly critiques societal preoccupations with appearance.

One instance of Mafaa's self-deprecating humour in *Thlaler Aurawl*, as shown below:

Ka pheikhawk tlêt leh tlêt loh pawh mi dang min hrilh chawp kher ngai lovin keimah pawhin ka hmu ve phak a, tlawmngai pawlte tanpuina tel lo pawhin chhuata thil tla ka chhar thei a, inpuahchah lawk hmasak fe ngai kher lovin ka kekawr hnung ipte pawh ka duh hun hunah ka zen thei a, YMA thutthleng pawh a tlar tlarin ka awh khat bik lo va, passport size thlalakah pawh ka hmai pumin a la khung len theih a, nula tam tak aiin ka hnute pawh a la tê zawk a, mi thenkhat

anga thlawhtheihna aṭanga chhuk thlir ang maia lang bial chui satliah ka ni hlei nem. (30-31)

[“I can check for myself whether my shoes are shiny without anyone pointing it out. I can pick things up from the floor without needing a full search party to assist me. I can reach my back pocket without any special preparation. I don’t hog the entire YMA bench, and my whole face actually fits inside a passport photo. My chest is smaller than that of many women, and—unlike some people—I don’t look like a round ball when viewed from an airplane”; my trans.].

Mafaa uses self-deprecating humour to diminish any sense of superiority or distance between himself and his audience. By humorously downplaying his physical abilities—such as checking his shoes without help or fitting his entire face in a passport photo—he creates a relatable and humble self-image. This allows the audience to laugh at his exaggerated portrayal while simultaneously feeling a sense of shared humanity. His comparison of his chest to that of women’s and his avoidance of taking up the entire YMA bench through overexaggeration further contribute to the comic effect. Self-deprecating humour, in this instance, functions as a rhetorical tool that lowers barriers between Mafaa and his readers, making his social observations more palatable and engaging. It also diffuses tension, offering a light-hearted critique of both himself and the norms within Mizo society, such as his reference to the respected voluntary organization, YMA, by bringing humour to the everyday details of physical space and social propriety.

Through these examples, Mafaa uses self-deprecating humor as a way to express both humility and critique, blending the personal and the social in his unique comedic voice.

Incongruity in Self-Deprecating Humour

Self-deprecating humour, as employed by Mafaa, aligns seamlessly with Incongruity Theory. The humour emerges from the unexpected contrast between the way the audience perceives Mafaa and the self-mocking way he presents himself. As a well-regarded figure in Mizo literature, one might expect Mafaa to uphold a certain

dignity or gravitas in his self-representation. However, by joking about his own appearance or habits, he defies this expectation, creating humour through surprise.

For example, in *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa writes about his struggles with his own body, contrasting his intellectual achievements with an image of physical incompetence: “Hmelchhe hmai sîn rêt ai chuan hmaitlang hetiang riang ruangah chuan a tha lai lai pawh a awm lo thei lo...” (29) [“Instead of an unattractive small face, a large face like this has a better chance of having some features that are quite tolerable”; my trans.]. Here, the incongruity lies in the contrast between the expected image of a respected writer and Mafaa’s humorous self-description, where he jokes about how his unattractive, large face might still have redeemable qualities. This contrast not only creates humour but also humanizes Mafaa, making his character more accessible to readers.

Self-deprecating humour plays a crucial role in Mafaa’s comedic style, offering a nuanced and humble form of social commentary. By turning the joke onto himself, Mafaa deflects any potential criticism and invites the audience to join him in laughing at the absurdities of life, both personal and societal. This form of humour is integral to his ability to navigate complex cultural critiques while maintaining a tone that is light-hearted and engaging.

In the broader context of Mizo humour, Mafaa’s use of self-deprecation highlights his skill in blending personal reflection with social observation. His self-mocking tone makes his commentary less confrontational, allowing readers to reflect on their own experiences and societal norms without feeling attacked. As a result, his self-deprecating humour not only enriches his body of work but also establishes him as a uniquely relatable figure within Mizo literary tradition.

In conclusion, the exploration of rhetorical devices in Mafaa Hauhnar’s humour demonstrates the complexity and richness of his comedic style. Through the strategic use of wordplay, satire, similes, hyperbole, and self-deprecating humour, Mafaa not only entertains his audience but also engages them in critical reflection on society, politics, and culture. His manipulation of language and clever use of double meanings, irony, and exaggeration create humour that resonates with readers on multiple levels,

making them laugh while also prompting deeper contemplation of the contradictions and absurdities in everyday life.

By examining the nuances of these rhetorical techniques, it becomes clear that Mafaa's humor serves as a powerful tool for social commentary, allowing him to critique political figures, societal norms, and cultural values in a way that is both accessible and thought-provoking. His ability to blend humour with insightful observations makes his work a valuable contribution to Mizo literature and highlights the transformative potential of humour in fostering critical discourse.

Ultimately, the rhetorical devices in Mafaa Hauhnar's works not only showcase his linguistic creativity but also underscore the importance of humour as a medium for both entertainment and social critique. Through his humour, Mafaa challenges readers to reflect on the complexities of language, identity, and society, reminding us of the profound role that humour can play in shaping our understanding of the world around us.

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Chapter-4

A Comparative Study of Humour in the Works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar

In literary research, a comparative study refers to the systematic examination of literary phenomena across different languages, cultures, periods, or genres, with the aim of identifying relationships, origins, developments, and patterns. As A. R. Marsh explains, it involves examining “the phenomena of literature as a whole, to compare them, to group them, to classify them, to enquire into the causes of them, to determine the results of them” (166). Unlike purely aesthetic criticism, comparative literature treats literature as “one of the great provinces of universal nature” (165), recognizing that value lies not only in style or eloquence but also in tracing themes, influences, and transformations across contexts.

Its necessity in academic—particularly literary—research arises from its ability to broaden interpretative frameworks, challenge national or period-specific boundaries, and reveal the interconnectedness of human expression. Marsh emphasizes that such study can address key research questions regarding “literary origins, literary development, and literary diffusion” (167), providing a more objective and historically grounded understanding of texts. Comparative study thus resists “mere sensibility and opulent phraseology” (161) by anchoring analysis in empirical patterns and cross-cultural evidence, enriching both theoretical perspectives and critical evaluations.

This chapter seeks to examine the humour of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar in order to illuminate both convergences and divergences in their comedic vision, techniques, and socio-cultural engagements. The purpose of this comparison is not merely to juxtapose two individual authors, but to situate their humour within a broader literary and cultural continuum. As A.R. Marsh suggests, comparative work should aim to enquire into the causes of [literary phenomena], to determine the results of them, a methodological aim that here involves tracing how two distinct humourists—shaped by different life experiences, generational contexts, and rhetorical priorities—negotiate similar thematic terrains such as rural life, bureaucratic absurdities, and social critique.

The importance of comparing these two humorists lies in the insight it offers into the development of modern Mizo humour and its varied functions. Liandinga’s essays, deeply rooted in personal experience as a rural government servant, reveal a

humour grounded in observational realism, incongruity, and gentle satire. In contrast, Mafaa Hauhnaar's humour frequently adopts sharper rhetorical devices—wordplay, satire, hyperbole—that exploit linguistic creativity and social parody.

This comparative study is primarily guided by Incongruity Theory, a leading theoretical framework for understanding humour. This theory posits that humour arises from the recognition of a discrepancy, contradiction or mismatch between what is expected and what actually occurs. It is a versatile theory that can be applied to a wide range of comedic forms, from simple puns to complex situational comedy. As the Roman orator Cicero noted, “The most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing and another is said; here our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh” (qtd. in Wilson). However, a nuanced appreciation of the works of Liandinga and Mafaa requires an analysis of how they manifest this theoretical principle in fundamentally different ways, moving beyond a simple, one-dimensional application.

Liandinga's humour is a quintessential example of situational incongruity. The humour is generated by a clash between his preconceived notions and the often-absurd realities of his everyday life. This type of humour, rooted in the unexpected, is a hallmark of literary humour. For instance, the incongruity of a government job transfer, which one might expect to be a formal and structured process, leading to a journey down a “small, neglected road” that ends in a “dusty welcome” is a primary source of comedy in his work. As Liandinga writes, “...kawng pengthum lo awm apiangah a tê zawk zel zawhin kan awmna hmun tur chu kan han thleng khu ve luih a” (Liandinga 13) [Among all the roads branching out at the junction, I took the smallest one and arrived at the village, covered in dust; my trans.]. The humour here stems from the unexpected disparity between the anticipated formality of his work and the unpolished reality of his destination. Similarly, the expectation of returning to a peaceful and tidy home is subverted by the reality of finding it in a “chaotic battlefield” created by his family and livestock, where “chicken dung had paraded proudly in the middle of the floor” (*Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* 22). Liandinga's role is to observe and transform these external, situational dissonances into relatable and gentle humour, effectively chronicling the human experience of adapting to an unpredictable world. This is a core aspect of humour that functions as a coping mechanism, helping individuals navigate life's absurdities by finding amusement in them.

In contrast, Mafaa Hauhnar's humour is a prime example of linguistic incongruity. Rather than observing external events, he actively manipulates language to create a communicatively significant confrontation between two different linguistic structures or meanings within a single phrase. The humour is internal and intellectual, stemming from the clever workings of language itself. This is particularly evident in his use of puns and syllepsis. The humour in his pun on *ram hmangaihna* arises from the dissonance between the expected meaning of "love of country" and the unexpected, satirical meaning of "love of private property" or alcohol. As Mafaa writes, those who "shout the loudest, 'I love my country', often turn out to be the true 'RUM lovers', and their love flows out in a very crimson stream" (Lalrinfela 48). Here, the incongruity is not discovered in an external event but is constructed by the author through a rhetorical device and then projected onto society as a critique of hypocrisy. This approach aligns with a core tenet of Incongruity Theory, where humour is used to provoke thought and bring new aspects of disparate ideas to light.

While Incongruity Theory provides the core framework, a comprehensive analysis must integrate a broader set of critical perspectives, including rhetorical and literary analysis. For Mafaa, this involves examining how his use of satire, hyperbole, and irony amplifies his linguistic incongruities, transforming them into sharp social commentary. For Liandinga, the analysis must consider how his self-deprecation, exaggeration, and narrative structure turn simple situational incongruities into effective and endearing anecdotes. The application of these multifaceted approaches ensures that the analysis is rich and comprehensive, capturing the full range of their comedic styles. The fundamental difference between their humour is that Liandinga's is a humour of experience, while Mafaa's is a humour of intellect. Liandinga's humour is a reaction to the absurdities of his world, whereas Mafaa's is a deliberate tool to impose order on or critique that world, revealing a causal link between the source of their humour and its ultimate function. Liandinga uses humour as a means of accepting life's absurdities and turning them into relatable narratives, while Mafaa uses it as a weapon against those absurdities, employing puns and satire to expose and ridicule hypocrisy.

The distinct stylistic approaches of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar are a direct consequence of their differing backgrounds and artistic intentions. While both are

celebrated Mizo humourists, they occupy different social and literary spaces, which profoundly shapes their comedic output.

Liandinga's persona is that of a well-meaning government servant and family man, and his humour is a direct reflection of his intimate, everyday experiences. His insider perspective on bureaucratic and domestic life allows him to craft a humour that is deeply self-deprecating and highly relatable. His work represents a storytelling style where comedy is derived from the recounting of personal anecdotes and observations. His humour is experiential and narrative, employing situational irony, self-deprecation, and gentle exaggeration to create a light-hearted, warm, and engaging narrative. As Peter L. Berger notes, humour often emerges from "a sequence of minor mishaps," allowing those with a sense of humour to find amusement and "overcome the difficulties" that lead to frustration (100). This is a perfect description of Liandinga's style. Liandinga's humour, much like that of Charles Lamb and Mark Twain, is rooted in observation and wit, making his work both deeply relatable and enduringly engaging to a broad audience. By focusing on the nuances of everyday life, he created a form of humour that resonated with the common experiences of the Mizo people.

In contrast, Mafaa's persona is that of an incisive commentator and a public intellectual, unafraid to challenge the status quo. His work reflects the public and political anxieties of a society in transition. His humour is rhetorical and satirical, using wordplay and linguistic creativity to craft a comedic style that is both intellectual and sharp-edged. Mafaa's primary techniques include puns, syllepsis, and hyperbole, which serve to expose contradictions and flaws in a direct and often biting manner. As Gilbert Highet explains, the purpose of satire is to "cure folly and to punish evil" or at least "to expose evil to bitter contempt" (156). This intention perfectly encapsulates Mafaa's work. His humour operates on a public scale, targeting the systemic issues of politics, religion, and cultural values. This is in stark contrast to Liandinga's focus on the more personal, domestic, and professional spheres.

These stylistic differences lead to a clear thematic divergence. Liandinga's humour is centered on the personal and familial, focusing on domestic life, parenting struggles, and the absurdities of the workplace from an insider's view. His humour serves to help people cope with life's minor frustrations. Mafaa's humour, conversely, is public and critical, targeting systemic issues such as corruption, political posturing,

the commercialization of religion, and the influence of Westernization. His humour functions as a form of resistance, a way to critique and challenge power.

The two authors represent different facets of the Mizo identity itself. Liandinga's humour, rooted in rural and domestic life, acts as a chronicle of a more traditional, community-oriented Mizo identity. His work is a nostalgic reflection on the past. Mafaa's biting critique of corruption and cultural assimilation addresses the anxieties of a modernizing Mizo identity. His work provides a critical commentary on the present and the future. Therefore, their humour is not merely a style but a powerful means of negotiating the complex tensions between tradition and modernity. When read comparatively, their works serve as a narrative of Mizo identity in transition, with Liandinga representing the mirror of the past and Mafaa representing the critique of the present.

Sources of Humour

The humour of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar originates from fundamentally different sources, a distinction that defines their respective comedic styles. While Liandinga's work is a testament to the humour found in lived, everyday experiences, Mafaa's humour is a product of intellectual and linguistic creativity, often deployed as a tool for social and cultural critique.

Liandinga: Lived Experience

Liandinga's essays serve as a chronicle of the humour embedded in daily life, drawing heavily from his personal and professional experiences. His role as a government servant and a family man provides a rich tapestry of material, as he adeptly transforms mundane moments into delightful anecdotes. This experiential humour is observational and deeply rooted in the incongruity between expectation and reality, which he encounters in three primary settings: rural life, the bureaucratic workplace, and his own domestic sphere. His work's focus on lived experience aligns with the tradition of humourists like Charles Lamb and Mark Twain, who similarly use comedy for social reflection and to capture the nuances of everyday life.

In his portrayal of rural life, Liandinga finds comedy in the clash between his urban perspective and the peculiarities of the countryside. He masterfully uses his own

experiences to create a relatable narrative for readers. In his essay, “Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna,” he humorously recalls the experience of receiving newspapers in a remote village: “Zawr em em maiin chanchin hlui hlir kan dawng a” (15) [“We receive daily newspaper limp and already outdated”; my trans.]. The humour arises from the incongruity between the expectation of a fresh, neatly printed daily newspaper and the reality of receiving outdated, damaged, or bundled papers that feel like ‘ancient history’ by the time they arrive. The added irony of a note from the sender casually appended to the delivery amplifies the absurdity, as it states, “Daka thawm man kan tito,’ te hi anrawn ti zui vei rawl nen...” (15) [“They saying ‘We’ve had to increase the dispatch charges”; my trans.]. This clash between urban convenience and rural improvisation exemplifies how humour can emerge from the contrast between the ideal and the real.

Liandinga’s humour in the workplace is an insider’s commentary on the frustrations of bureaucracy. He uses his personal experience as a government employee to expose the inefficiencies and arbitrary nature of the system, a function of humour that Peter L. Berger identifies as a coping mechanism. The humour in his essays often emerges from the incongruity between official rhetoric and real-life experiences. For instance, he humorously describes the anticipation of receiving an official letter, with its striped edges and formal ‘Black Stamped’ labeling, only to find it contains a mundane directive that begins with “You are hereby...” and ends with “immediately” (15). This juxtaposition of the formal packaging and the impersonal content creates a sense of both irony and frustration, which he transforms into a source of shared amusement. Liandinga also critiques the arbitrary nature of political and bureaucratic decision-making. He observes how political party leaders can be both threatening—with bold declarations like “We will transfer”—and insincere, with polite but vague assertions such as “Your posting has been...” (16). The humour in this passage arises from the incongruity between the authoritative tone and the confusion it creates among employees, revealing a deeper commentary on the lack of transparency in the system.

Liandinga finds a rich source of humour in his domestic life, which he portrays with self-deprecating wit and warmth. He turns the chaos of raising children and managing a lively household into a universal comedic experience. For example, he uses the old, tattered blanket that is so worn out that his children innocently ask, “Ka pa, kan pawnpui hmul hi engtikah nge a ʔo leh ang?” (22) [“Dad, when will the wool on our

blanket grow back?"; my trans.]. The humour here lies in the contrast between a child's naive perspective and the reality of a worn-out object, creating a relatable scene of familial chaos. Similarly, he humorously describes his pre-marital expectations of a peaceful, romantic bed, only to find that after marriage, it is a 'toughest battlefield' where he sleeps 'curled up uncomfortably, like a bitter bean pod falling from a tree' due to tension with his wife. This contrast between an idealized past and a less glamorous reality is a core feature of his domestic humour, making his struggles endearing and universal. He extends this exploration to the minor inconveniences of household life, humorously exaggerating how a single family can be responsible for losing or breaking things yet irrationally blaming neighbors, creating an absurd narrative that resonates with the shared experience of household chaos.

Mafaa: Linguistic Play and Satire

In stark contrast to Liandinga's experiential approach, Mafaa Hauhnar's humour is primarily rooted in linguistic creativity and biting satire. His work relies on an intellectual and rhetorical manipulation of language to create humour and social critique. The humour is not found in the observation of external events but is meticulously crafted through the use of wordplay, puns, and other rhetorical devices. According to scholars, the strategic use of such devices can influence how audiences perceive and conceptualize humour (Li). His work embodies what Hua Li refers to as "language humour" or "verbal humour," which is distinct from situational humour because it has little to do with the external world and is created entirely through linguistic manipulation.

Mafaa's mastery of wordplay is a defining characteristic of his comedic style. He leverages the multiple meanings, sounds, and structures of Mizo words to create unexpected connections that surprise the reader and provoke laughter. His humour is intellectual, requiring the reader's cognitive engagement to recognize the dual meanings and linguistic nuances he employs. This aligns with Dirk Delabastita's definition of wordplay as a "communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings" (128). For instance, he uses a clever pun on the Mizo word *ngaihzawng* (lover) vs. *hlauh zawng* (fear) (*Thlaler Aurawl* 162), creating a humorous contrast between love and fear in the context of marriage, suggesting that the character in question married out of fear

rather than love. He also employs a playful and slightly risqué humour by using the phrase *pawm lai nei* on a bus trip (165), which plays on its dual meanings of being married and physically embracing someone, hinting at a romantic or flirtatious situation during an innocent picnic.

The rhetorical device of syllepsis is another key element of Mafaa's linguistic humour, where he uses a single word in two different senses within the same sentence to create a humorous or ironic effect. As a figure of speech, syllepsis is designed to exploit the ambiguity of language to make a point or evoke laughter ("Syllepsis: A Literary Device"). For example, in *Chawlhna Tuikam*, Mafaa uses the words *den/deng* and *sak/sa* to critique societal hypocrisy during Christmas. "A thenin chhang an den laiin a thenin lehkha an lo deng ang a; a thenin Krismas hla an sak laiin a thenin zu, thluk nei lovin an lo sa ve ang a" (188) ["While some are busy playing cards, others are busy pounding rice; and while some are singing Christmas carols, others are 'making their own spirits'—producing alcohol completely out of tune"; my trans.]. *Den* (to make/pound) refers to baking bread, while *deng* (to play) denotes playing cards, and *sa* means to both 'sing' and 'make' (as in brewing alcohol). This juxtaposition of wholesome traditions against more dubious behaviours exposes the hypocrisy in societal practices and invites readers to reflect on the true essence of the holiday. Another example is his use of *chetsual* to refer to both a vehicular accident and sexual intercourse (190), creating humour by the unexpected comparison of two situations that are fundamentally different yet share a common term.

Life Situations vs. Linguistic Creativity

The core difference between Liandinga's and Mafaa's humour lies in its origin. Liandinga's humour is a response to the external world, turning life's inconveniences and absurdities into comedy. His work is a form of narrative humour, where a story is made funny through the recounting of a personal event. He is an archivist of comedic moments, documenting the spontaneous incongruities that arise in a government office or a rural household. Mafaa's humour, on the other hand, is a response to the internal world of language, turning linguistic ambiguities into sharp social critique. He is an architect of comedic concepts, meticulously crafting jokes and satires from the ground up by manipulating words and rhetorical devices. This distinction explains why Liandinga's work is so deeply relatable and grounded in the everyday, while Mafaa's is

so intellectually sharp and often biting. This analysis confirms that the two authors, while both working in the genre of Mizo humour, represent two distinct subgenres of comedy: situational and verbal. Liandinga's humour is a reaction to the absurdities of his world, whereas Mafaa's is a deliberate tool to impose order on or critique that world, revealing a causal link between the source of their humour and its ultimate function.

Thematic Concerns in Humour

The thematic concerns of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar reflect their differing artistic intentions and comedic styles. While Liandinga's humour explores the universal struggles and joys of domestic and rural life, Mafaa's satire boldly tackles the systemic flaws and hypocrisies of modern Mizo society.

Society and Family

The humour of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar, while both addressing the themes of society and family, does so from distinctly different perspectives. Liandinga's work is characterized by a gentle domestic humour that finds comedy in the mundane and relatable aspects of family life, using humour as a means of coping. Mafaa, in contrast, employs a sharp satirical critique to expose the absurdities and contradictions within societal norms, family structures, and personal morality.

Liandinga's domestic humour is rooted in the shared experience of household chaos, turning minor frustrations into sources of amusement. His essays celebrate the imperfections of family life, transforming the mess and mischief of a lively home into a comedic narrative that resonates with a broad audience. For instance, he humorously captures the absurd mysteries of a cluttered house by describing the myriad of objects found under a cushion: "What couldn't be under the cushion?" he asks, listing everything from "marbles" to "an old nail waiting to be sold" (*Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* 45). The humour lies in the exaggerated improbability of a cushion serving as a chaotic storage space for such diverse items. This is a quintessential example of situational incongruity, where the expectation of an orderly home is subverted by a comically cluttered reality. He also humorously portrays the irrationality of a family that blames its neighbors for every missing or broken item, from blunt scissors to lost valuables,

highlighting the universal tendency to shift blame in a chaotic household. The humour in this blame-shifting is relatable and endearing, showcasing Liandinga's ability to find comedy in the small, everyday absurdities of family life. He extends this gentle critique to the dynamics of marriage, humorously contrasting the idealized romantic expectations of a young man with the less glamorous reality of married life, describing a shared bed as a “toughest battlefield” where one sleeps “curled up uncomfortably, like a bitter bean pod falling from a tree” due to marital tension (24). This juxtaposition of romantic ideals with domestic struggles makes his humour both relatable and universally poignant.

Mafaa's approach to family and society is defined by a satirical edge that aims to expose hypocrisy and systemic flaws. Unlike Liandinga's gentle observations, Mafaa's humour is a critical force, using linguistic creativity to provoke thought and ridicule societal norms. He satirizes the societal pressure to maintain a facade of religious and moral purity, as seen in his observation that couples who adhere strictly to religious purity standards often end up having a fully developed infant “within an improbably short period” after their wedding (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 106). This humour functions to expose the disconnect between professed values and human reality. Mafaa also directs his satire at the societal tendency to judge others based on names and titles, as seen in his lines about individuals named “Lalthianghlimi” and “Lalremruata” who lead morally questionable lives, while those with ordinary names can be models of virtue (106). This critique of naming conventions serves to highlight the irony of appearances and societal hypocrisy. His satire extends to the public domain, where he critiques societal attitudes towards authenticity, noting that someone's genuine bad temper is more authentic than an insincere, borrowed smile (62). This reveals a deeper social critique of the value placed on superficiality over genuine emotion. Mafaa's satire on family and society, therefore, is not a celebration of shared human experience but a pointed critique of the absurd standards and hypocrisies that govern them.

Workplace and Bureaucracy

The humour of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar in the context of the workplace and bureaucracy highlights their different comedic approaches. Liandinga, a long-serving government employee, crafts an insider's humour that is a form of coping mechanism, turning his personal frustrations with bureaucratic absurdities into relatable

anecdotes. Mafaa, on the other hand, employs a direct satire on governance to expose systemic flaws and the indifference of public services to the needs of the people.

Liandinga's humour about the workplace is deeply personal and self-deprecating. He uses irony and exaggeration to describe the dehumanizing and frustrating experiences of a government servant. For instance, he humorously reflects on the oppressive nature of bureaucratic hierarchies, using hyperbole to describe how superiors and even junior employees treat those who come from rural postings. He states that a senior peon might tease them by saying their rank looks like "Bangladeshi refugees" and that a boss's anger is so intense that they look "ready to beat us to death—while we are still alive" (*Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* 17). The humour here arises from the absurd exaggeration of the peon's authority and the boss's vindictive nature, which, while darkly humorous, resonates with the universal experience of feeling powerless within a rigid hierarchy. This is also seen in his critique of bureaucratic inefficiencies, as he humorously recounts instances where official letters arrive after a deadline has passed, or a notice for an 11 a.m. interview arrives at breakfast the next day (17). The humour is born from the incongruity between the professional language of the letters and the absurdly delayed reality of their delivery, revealing a deeper commentary on the inefficiency of the system.

In stark contrast, Mafaa's humour about public services and governance is a bold and direct satire. He uses humour as a weapon to expose systemic failures that affect the populace at large. He critiques the cycle of strikes and protests that consume the workweek of government employees, humorously noting that they spend Monday making bands, Tuesday striking, and Wednesday protesting, leaving the weekend as the only time they might actually work (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 33). This satirical portrayal exposes a system where employees are more engaged in performative activism than in their actual duties. He also uses a powerful simile to highlight the severe consequences of this inefficiency, comparing the scarcity of water in Mizoram to the difficulty of finding a job, suggesting that one must have political connections to obtain either (19). This humour goes beyond personal frustration and serves as a powerful social commentary on the systemic corruption and neglect that affect the lives of ordinary citizens.

Religion and Culture

Thematic concerns related to religion and culture are approached with a clear distinction between the two authors. Liandinga's humour, rooted in his observational style, is indirect and subtle, focusing on how cultural norms and religious practices intersect with everyday life. Mafaa, conversely, employs a biting satire to directly critique hypocrisy, materialism, and the erosion of Mizo traditions.

Liandinga's engagement with religion and culture is implicit in his observational humour. The provided research notes that his humour, which is deeply rooted in everyday life, helps document and preserve Mizo culture. While specific examples of his humour on religion and culture are not explicitly provided in the same detail as his other themes, his overall comedic style reflects a gentle observation of these topics. His humour functions as a form of social reflection, allowing him to subtly comment on cultural nuances without direct critique.

In contrast, Mafaa's satire on religion and culture is direct and uncompromising. He uses his wit to expose the hypocrisy of church leaders, as he portrays them as individuals who lack genuine faith and whose gatherings are more like a chaotic "assembly session" (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 24). He also critiques the superficiality of religious observance, humorously noting that individuals who lead morally questionable lives, and are even at risk of contracting diseases like AIDS, still manage to maintain a facade of piety in the church (106). This biting humour serves to expose the chasm between religious ideals and the actions of those who profess to follow them. Mafaa also satirizes the commercialization and Westernization of Mizo culture, particularly around the Christmas season. He humorously points out the absurdity of sending "Christmas cards" that show couples embracing instead of a religious theme, and the tendency of people to neglect the true meaning of the holiday in favor of material excesses and Western traditions (188). He further critiques the pervasive influence of Western culture by noting that Mizo people are adopting English names for their pets and that even Mizo roosters crow with a "cocka-doodle-doo" (71), highlighting the absurdity of cultural assimilation. This direct, often biting, satire serves to challenge and critique what Mafaa sees as a decline in Mizo cultural and religious authenticity.

Politics and Identity

The contrast between the two authors is perhaps most evident in their handling of politics and identity. Liandinga's perspective is that of a quiet observer, whose subtle reflections on politics are implicitly tied to his experiences with bureaucracy. Mafaa, on the other hand, is a bold political commentator who uses direct satire to critique power and the evolving Mizo identity.

Liandinga's engagement with politics is primarily seen through the lens of his experience as a government employee. His humour is not directed at politicians themselves but at the absurdity of the political machine and its impact on the lives of ordinary citizens. He uses irony to highlight the capricious nature of political power, humorously reflecting on how politicians can switch from threatening to transfer employees to making vague, polite assertions about their "posting" (*Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* 16). This subtle critique reveals a deeper commentary on the lack of transparency and the helplessness felt by those at the mercy of political decisions. His humour serves as a gentle reflection on the human side of the political machine.

Mafaa's political humour, in contrast, is bold, explicit, and unsparing. He uses his wit to directly mock political figures and expose systemic corruption. He defines politics as "Polite Tricks," a cunning game where politicians deceive the public for personal gain (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 167). This satirical assertion distills the essence of political behaviour into a succinct and humorous critique, exposing the facade of politeness that masks greed and self-interest. He also uses a striking analogy to critique the ministers who involve themselves in trivial matters like bus tickets, stating that their preoccupations with such inconsequential details are akin to the objectification of women (159). This powerful comparison highlights the moral bankruptcy of leaders who are detached from the real needs of their constituents. Mafaa also uses humour to critique the linguistic inferiority complex that pervades Mizo society, as he notes the irony of individuals who claim to be unable to speak their native tongue while also struggling to master English (71). This direct commentary on the erosion of the Mizo language serves as a sharp critique of cultural identity in transition, where people have become disconnected from their own heritage.

Techniques and Rhetorical Devices

The humour of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar is not only a matter of thematic concern but also a matter of rhetorical technique. Their use of rhetorical devices reflects the fundamental difference in their comedic styles, with Liandinga relying on narrative and situational devices and Mafaa employing linguistic and satirical ones. A comparative analysis of their techniques demonstrates how their humour operates as both a personal reflection and a broader social critique.

PL Liandinga

PL Liandinga's humour is deeply rooted in the comedic potential of storytelling. He uses rhetorical devices to enhance personal anecdotes and make them relatable to his audience. His humour is a form of comedy that arises not from a deliberate manipulation of language, but from his keen observational skills and the unexpected twists of his lived experiences. This style aligns with situational humour, as it has little to do with language and everything to do with extra linguistics elements that dominate a situation. This humour is a form of empathetic validation, a way for the reader to laugh at the human condition by recognizing a reflection of their own lives within Liandinga's narrative.

Liandinga's use of irony and exaggeration is central to his style, with the humour generated by the clash between a character's expectations and the absurd realities of his life. In his essay, "Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna," he describes the anticipation of receiving an official letter, with its formal 'Black Stamped' labeling, only to find that it contains a mundane directive beginning with "You are hereby..." and ending with "immediately" (Liandinga 15). This juxtaposition of a formal and meticulously sealed envelope with an impersonal and brusque message creates irony, as the expected importance of the letter is subverted by its trivial content. He also employs exaggeration to describe the inefficiencies of the system as he stated, "Hna dil tur han awm hlek se a dil theih hun chhung tawp hnu chawlhkar khatah te kan han hria a; a chang leh nimin dar sawmpakhata interview tura kohna kha tukin tukthuan ei rualte'n kan han hmu vel a" (17) ["When a government job opens, we usually hear about it a week after the deadline has already passed. And sometimes the interview call letter reaches us only today at breakfast—informing us that the interview had already taken

place yesterday at 11 a.m.”; my trans.], recounting how notices for job vacancies often arrive a week after the application deadline has passed, or how an interview call for an 11 a.m. yesterday arrives at today breakfast. The humour in these instances arises from the absurd, exaggerated delays, which subvert the expectation of an efficient and timely bureaucracy.

In his domestic humour, Liandinga uses irony and exaggeration to turn the chaos of family life into a relatable and comedic experience. He humorously describes the phenomenon of a cluttered home by listing the improbable variety of items—from marbles to a hammer—found under a single cushion, an exaggerated absurdity that resonates with any reader who has experienced household clutter. The humour culminates in the hyperbolic assertion that if their refrigerator were ever to go missing, they would likely suspect it was under the cushion as well (*Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* 35). This outrageous overstatement takes a common experience of misplaced items and elevates it to a comically impossible scenario. He also humorously portrays the irrationality of a family that blames its neighbors for every missing or broken item, from blunt scissors to lost valuables, highlighting the universal tendency to shift blame in a chaotic household (26). The humour in this blame-shifting is relatable and endearing, showcasing Liandinga’s ability to find comedy in the small, everyday absurdities of family life.

Liandinga’s use of self-deprecation and resignation is a key technique that defines his humour. In his essay “Hei Hi Ka Nupui A Nia,” he humorously contrasts his pre-marital expectations of a peaceful, romantic bed with the post-marital reality of it being a “toughest battlefield”. He portrays himself as a victim of this domestic strife, sleeping “curled up uncomfortably, like a bitter bean pod falling from a tree” (24). This self-effacing style, where he makes himself the subject of his own joke, serves as a form of emotional release, transforming his personal frustrations into a source of shared amusement. Similarly, his humour on the challenges of raising children in a lively home leads him to a humorous sense of resignation: he states that in these chaotic moments, he “can’t help but yearn for the peaceful days before these beloved children were born” (*Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* 22-23). This self-deprecation makes him appear more approachable and his humour more endearing, fostering a sense of camaraderie with his audience.

These techniques are all manifestations of situational incongruity, where the humour is generated by a clash between his preconceived notions and the often-absurd realities of his everyday life. The unexpected disparity between the anticipated formality of his work environment and the ‘unpolished reality of his destination,’ or the contrast between an idealized marriage and a ‘toughest battlefield,’ are primary sources of comedy in his work. Liandinga’s role is to observe and transform these external, situational dissonances into relatable and gentle humour, effectively chronicling the human experience of adapting to an unpredictable world.

Mafaa Hauhnar

In contrast, Mafaa Hauhnar’s humour is a prime example of a linguistic-rhetorical style that is intellectual, deliberate, and deeply linguistic. His wit is not a product of his circumstances but a tool he wields to dissect and confront society. He uses a wide range of rhetorical devices as his primary tools, which function as a form of intellectual resistance and confrontation.

(1) Wordplay: Puns and Syllepsis

Mafaa’s wordplay is a defining characteristic of his comedic style. As a rhetorical device, wordplay exploits the multiple meanings, sounds, or structures of words to create unexpected connections that surprise the reader and provoke laughter. This aligns with Dirk Delabastita’s definition of wordplay as a “communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings” (Delabastita 128).

His use of puns serves as both a comedic tool and a vehicle for deeper social commentary. He critiques the changing values of Mizo society by twisting a proverb, changing *Aia upa zahna* (respect for elders) to *Aia hausa zahna* (respect for the wealthy), a pun that satirizes the societal shift towards materialism and the diminishing respect for traditional values (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 157). He also employs a pun on the words *ngaihawng* (lover) and *hlauh zawng* (fear) in a passage about marriage, where the similarity in sound creates a humorous contrast between love and fear, suggesting that the character in question married out of fear rather than love (162).

Mafaa also demonstrates syllepsis, a rhetorical device where a single word is used in two different senses within the same sentence to create a humorous or ironic effect. As a figure of speech, syllepsis is designed to exploit the ambiguity of language to make a point or evoke laughter. For example, he uses the words *den/deng* (to pound/to play) and *sak/sa* (to sing/to brew) to critique the hypocrisy of Christmas traditions, juxtaposing baking and caroling with card playing and brewing alcohol (188). He also uses the word *chetsual* (accident) to refer to both a vehicular accident and sexual intercourse, creating humour by the unexpected comparison of two situations that are fundamentally different yet share a common term (190).

(2) Satire, Parody, and Irony

Mafaa's humour is defined by its satirical and ironic edge, which is a key rhetorical device for social commentary. His satire, which Gilbert Highet defines as a tool to "cure folly and to punish evil," is a powerful weapon against societal hypocrisy and systemic flaws (156).

Mafaa uses satire to critique the performative nature of religious gatherings, comparing a self-proclaimed intellectual's religious gathering to a chaotic "assembly session" (24). He also satirizes the superficiality of religious observance by humorously noting that individuals who lead immoral lives and are at risk of contracting diseases like AIDS still manage to maintain a facade of piety in the church (106). This biting humour serves to expose the chasm between religious ideals and the actions of those who profess to follow them.

In addition to satire, Mafaa frequently employs irony, which relies on the audience's recognition of a contrast between appearances and reality. His use of verbal irony is seen in the passage about a friend who is praised for learning multiple languages, but the punchline reveals that the only phrase he mastered was 'Bat in phal em?' ["Can I owe this?"; my trans.] in twelve different languages (164). This ironic remark creates humour by contrasting the prestige usually associated with mastering multiple languages with the trivial and self-serving nature of the only phrase he claims to have learned. Mafaa also employs situational irony to mock the glamour of a socialite, as a character is ridiculed for dancing so excessively that her high heels wear out (163). The humour arises from the incongruity between the character's desire to be

glamorous and the physical deterioration of her attire, which ultimately undermines her efforts.

Mafaa's humour also uses parody, which, as a discursive practice, exaggerates the formal characteristics of a genre to mock them. While not explicitly named as parody, his rephrasing of the proverb *Aia upa zahna* into *Aia hausa zahna* is a form of parodic humour, as it mocks the traditional format of Mizo wisdom literature to critique a modern social trend (157).

(3) Hyperbole: Exaggeration for Comedic Effect

Mafaa also adopts hyperbole, a rhetorical device of overstatement or exaggeration that magnifies a statement beyond realistic credibility. He uses this technique to create a vivid and often comical effect, often subverting the reader's expectations and aligning closely with Incongruity Theory.

Mafaa's use of hyperbole can be classified into several thematic categories:

(i) *Size or Magnitude*: Mafaa humorously exaggerates his own physical appearance in a self-deprecating manner, stating that he is better suited to be a sumo wrestler for a Pepsi commercial than a writer discussing Shakespeare or Eliot (*Thlaler Aurawl* 27). He also uses hyperbole to describe his physical pain, comparing his headache to being struck by an Assam Rifles hockey stick and his nausea to early pregnancy (158).

(ii) *Quantity or Scarcity*: Mafaa exaggerates the sheer volume of his medical paperwork, stating that the results of his endoscopy and ultrasound were as thick as a nursery school syllabus (159). He also uses hyperbole to describe a friend with an extraordinary appetite, humorously suggesting that if this friend had been present when Jesus was multiplying bread and fish, there would not have been a single basket of leftovers (33).

(iii) *Difficulty or Ease*: Mafaa uses hyperbole to critique the temptations of alcohol, stating that when it comes to money, foreign liquor, and women, a character is so easily tempted that he almost tempts Satan himself (32). He also exaggerates the

difficulty of trying to interrupt an incessant talker, likening it to the impossible task of threading a needle while it's in a sewing machine (168).

(iv) *Quality (Good or Bad)*: Mafaa's hyperboles tend to exaggerate negative qualities for satirical effect. He mocks the fierce demeanor of a small man by stating that his fierceness could calm a storm (32). He also uses hyperbole to emphasize the power of familial love, even for the most despicable individuals, by saying that even the worst scoundrels, who could have been the devil's coworkers, are still mourned by their families (50).

(v) *Time (Duration or Speed)*: Mafaa uses hyperbole to exaggerate the speed of a frightened character, stating that if he competed in a 100-meter race for Mizoram, he would bring home a gold medal (179). He also uses hyperbole to criticize the slow pace of rural information flow, humorously noting that by the time *India Today* reaches his village, it has already turned into History of India (97).

(4) Taunting and Self-Deprecation

Mafaa also uses taunting and self-deprecation as key rhetorical tools. Taunting, which involves sharp and provocative remarks, is often directed at individuals who fail to live up to societal expectations. For example, Mafaa taunts a friend for his dark skin, humorously suggesting that his mother must have accidentally scorched him as a child (169). He also taunts another friend for his excessive body hair by comparing him to a primate (164).

In contrast, Mafaa's self-deprecation serves to build rapport with his audience by highlighting his own flaws, failures, or vulnerabilities. He humorously mocks his own body shape and growth, comparing his expanding midsection to a sumo wrestler and stating that he is better suited to wrestle a pig than to discuss T.S. Eliot (27). He also humorously downplays his own physical abilities, stating that he is able to check his shoes without help and can still fit his entire face in a passport photo (30). This humility and self-awareness soften the potential harshness of his satire, allowing him to explore complex themes without alienating his audience.

Narrative Humour vs Linguistic-Rhetorical Humour

The humour of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar represents two distinct but complementary trajectories within modern Mizo literature: one rooted in narrative realism and lived experience, the other in rhetorical wit and linguistic manipulation. Liandinga's humour flows naturally from the texture of everyday life—his experiences as a rural government servant, husband, and observer of Mizo society—while Mafaa's humour emerges from the dexterous play of words, double meanings, and rhetorical devices. These contrasting modes of humour—narrative versus linguistic-rhetorical—reflect deeper differences in creative intention, cultural engagement, and intellectual positioning.

Liandinga and the Narrative Humour of Experience

Liandinga's essays are characterized by a form of narrative humour that grows out of storytelling rather than linguistic experimentation. His humour is experiential, situational, and empathetic, relying on the irony of daily life rather than clever wordplay. As his essays in *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* and *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* reveal, he draws comedy from the incongruities between expectation and reality—a hallmark of Incongruity Theory, which posits that humour arises when an anticipated outcome is suddenly overturned.

Liandinga's "Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna" humorously narrates his transfer to a remote village, where he describes the road as "small and dusty," contrasting the dignity of his government post with the rugged simplicity of his destination (13). This incongruity generates humour through contrast: the prestige of bureaucracy versus the rustic absurdities of rural life. Similarly, his description of receiving outdated newspapers that arrive "as if they had survived a storm" and are tied together "like debt reminders" (15) transforms rural isolation into a scene of gentle laughter. The humour lies not in ridicule but in acceptance—an ability to find amusement in adversity. Such moments exemplify Peter L. Berger's claim that humour "redeems laughter" by helping individuals cope with life's small frustrations (Berger 100). Liandinga's humour is thus deeply humanistic; it finds grace in imperfection and laughter in endurance.

This narrative mode extends to domestic scenes as well. In essays describing household chaos, Liandinga portrays family life as a theater of comic misadventures. His account of returning home to find “chicken dung parading in the middle of the floor” (22) demonstrates his mastery of situational irony. Here, humour arises from the collision between the expectation of domestic order and the messy vitality of village life. The anthropomorphic description of “chicken dung parading” creates a vivid comic image that reflects his gentle acceptance of life’s unpredictability. His domestic humour also reveals a self-deprecating tone: he mocks his own shortcomings as a husband or father, turning private frustration into shared amusement. Such humour resonates with the everyday reader because it mirrors their own imperfections.

Liandinga’s narrative humour is thus integrative. It merges observation, empathy, and irony within a coherent narrative structure. Like Charles Lamb’s *Essays of Elia*, it relies on the storyteller’s voice—a persona both sincere and ironic—to mediate between the real and the ridiculous. As Lamb often transformed his own domestic difficulties into humorous reflections on human nature, Liandinga too uses narrative humour as a lens through which ordinary Mizo life acquires literary depth (Lamb 175–91). His essays are not built upon verbal ingenuity but upon the subtle rhythm of storytelling that turns experience into comedy. The laughter he evokes is inclusive and cathartic, not derisive—a laughter of recognition rather than mockery.

Mafaa and the Linguistic-Rhetorical Humour of Wordplay

In contrast, Mafaa Hauhnar’s humour is primarily linguistic and rhetorical. His comedy originates not from external situations but from the manipulation of language itself. In his works *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*, Mafaa constructs humour through puns, syllepsis, satire, and irony—techniques that depend on the elasticity of words and the awareness of their multiple meanings. As Dirk Delabastita defines, wordplay “exploits the structural features of language to create a confrontation between similar forms and different meanings” (128). Mafaa’s linguistic humour perfectly fits this definition, as he constantly juxtaposes homonyms and polysemic words to create layered meanings.

The famous pun on *ram hmangaihna* (patriotism) in *Chawlhna Tuikam* epitomizes his style. By contrasting *ram* (“nation” or “land”) with *RUM* (alcohol), he

transforms patriotic discourse into a satire of political hypocrisy: “Those who shout the loudest, ‘I love my country,’ often turn out to be the true ‘RUM lovers,’ and their love flows out in a crimson stream” (48). The humour arises from linguistic incongruity—an ironic tension between moral rhetoric and corrupt practice. Through a single pun, Mafaa exposes the contradiction between professed ideals and actual behavior. His wit depends on linguistic intelligence rather than situational observation; it demands that the reader recognize the play between sound, sense, and satire.

Similarly, Mafaa’s use of syllepsis extends his rhetorical humour. In *Chawlhna Tuikam*, he writes: “A thenin chhang an den laiin a thenin lehkha an lo deng ang a; a thenin Krismas hla an sak laiin a thenin zu, thluk nei lovin an lo sa ve ang a” (188). The humour derives from the double meanings of *den/deng* (“bake” and “gamble”) and *sa* (“sing” and “brew”). The juxtaposition of wholesome and indulgent acts—baking bread versus gambling, singing hymns versus brewing liquor—creates a comic contrast that critiques the hypocrisy of festive morality. The laughter here is intellectual and ironic, not emotional or narrative. It invites readers to decode the double meaning, making humour an act of participation.

Mafaa’s linguistic humour also extends to self-deprecation and social critique. His pun on *ngaihzawng* (lover) and *hlauh zawng* (fear) in *Thlaler Aurawl* humorously suggests that a man marries “out of fear rather than love” (162). The play on sound and meaning converts a personal confession into a commentary on the pragmatism of marriage. Likewise, his use of *chetsual* to denote both “accident” and “sexual encounter” (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 190) reflects how linguistic ambiguity can render ordinary words explosively comic. These instances reveal that Mafaa’s humour operates as a rhetorical performance—an intellectual act that weaponizes language to critique, entertain, and provoke thought simultaneously. As Hua Li observes, such “verbal humour” arises not from context but from “the creative manipulation of language itself” (Li 45). Mafaa’s wit, therefore, represents a humour of intellect rather than of circumstance.

Comparative Analysis: Story versus Structure

The essential contrast between Liandinga and Mafaa lies in the axis of creation. Liandinga’s humour emerges *from* life; Mafaa’s humour is imposed *upon* language.

Liandinga narrates; Mafaa performs. The former's comedy depends on empathy, sequence, and situation—an alignment of lived experience with narrative rhythm—while the latter's depends on wit, irony, and linguistic dexterity. In Liandinga's humour, language is transparent, a medium through which the narrative shines; in Mafaa's, language is opaque and self-reflective, becoming the very subject of the joke.

From a theoretical perspective, both exemplify different expressions of Incongruity Theory. Liandinga's incongruities are situational, rooted in the external world—between the expectation of order and the discovery of chaos. Mafaa's incongruities are linguistic, rooted in the internal structures of language—between the expected semantic field and its sudden reversal. Cicero's classical observation that “the most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing and another is said” (qtd. in Wilson) applies equally to both, but in different dimensions: Liandinga's “another” is an event; Mafaa's “another” is a meaning.

Liandinga's humour thus functions therapeutically. It transforms hardship into laughter, offering resilience through narrative. Mafaa's humour functions critically. It exposes hypocrisy, corruption, and shifting cultural values through wordplay and satire. Gilbert Highet notes that satire “seeks to cure folly and punish evil” by exposing vice to ridicule (156). Mafaa's rhetorical humour fulfills this role by challenging societal complacency, while Liandinga's narrative humour consoles and reconciles.

Stylistically, Liandinga's prose is conversational and anecdotal, moving through temporal sequences and descriptive imagery; Mafaa's is condensed, layered, and metaphorical, often demanding active interpretation. Liandinga's laughter is inclusive, communal, and restorative—what Mikhail Bakhtin might call the “carnavalesque” spirit of shared humanity. Mafaa's laughter, by contrast, is exclusive, intellectual, and satirical, closer to Voltaire's biting wit than to Twain's gentle irony.

The juxtaposition of narrative and linguistic-rhetorical humour in Liandinga and Mafaa reveals the dual nature of Mizo humour itself: one that comforts and one that confronts. Liandinga's narrative humour is grounded in observation, patience, and warmth; it mirrors the rhythms of village and domestic life, transforming struggle into amusement. Mafaa's linguistic-rhetorical humour, on the other hand, is sharp, analytical, and performative; it uses language as both weapon and mirror, revealing the

contradictions of modern Mizo society. Together, they represent the evolution of Mizo humour from lived storytelling to rhetorical sophistication—two complementary forms of laughter that sustain and challenge the cultural imagination.

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Chapter-5

Conclusion

Humour in literature has long served as a mirror through which societies interpret themselves, confront their contradictions, and express the nuances of lived experience. In the Mizo context, humour has developed into a sophisticated literary mode capable of illuminating social change, critiquing political systems, and capturing the rhythms of daily life. This study, *A Study of Humour in Selected Works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar*, has sought to analyse how humour operates in the literary imagination of two prominent Mizo humourists, each representing distinct stylistic trajectories and cultural sensibilities. Bringing together theoretical insights from classical and contemporary humour studies and close textual readings of Liandinga's and Mafaa's works, the study has endeavoured to demonstrate that humour is not merely a secondary or ornamental literary feature in Mizo literature but a central mode of cultural, social, and intellectual expression.

This final chapter synthesizes the findings from the preceding four chapters, situates the contributions of both authors within broader literary and cultural contexts, highlights the theoretical implications of the study, and suggests possible directions for future research. The goal of this conclusion is not merely to summarize but to reflect more deeply on how the humour of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar enriches the evolving canon of Mizo literature and what this suggests about humour's function within society.

Overview of the Study

The study began by establishing the theoretical groundwork necessary for understanding humour as both an aesthetic and a cultural phenomenon. Chapter One explored the conceptual foundations of humour—its origin, meaning, evolution, and various definitions across historical periods. Drawing on authorities such as R.A. Martin, Freud, Morreall, Spencer, Hobbes, and Aristotle, it approached humour as a multilayered human experience involving cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions. In particular, Incongruity Theory served as the conceptual anchor for the entire study because of its applicability to both experiential humour (as in Liandinga) and linguistic humour (as in Mafaa). Freud's Relief Theory and Hobbes's Superiority Theory further

enriched the framework, enabling the study to contextualize humour both as psychological release and as social critique.

Chapter Two examined PL Liandinga's humour through the lens of lived experience. By analysing his essays, particularly those in *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* and *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh*, the study demonstrated how Liandinga uses humour to reinterpret the realities of rural life, workplace challenges, domestic obligations, and personal inadequacies. His humour, rooted in situational incongruity, blends gentle satire, self-deprecating wit, and an empathetic understanding of human nature. Liandinga's writing stands as a chronicle of the rhythms and idiosyncrasies of rural Mizoram, revealing humour as a way of coping with the frustrations and surprises of daily life.

Chapter Three turned toward the rhetorical sophistication of Mafaa Hauhna, examining his use of wordplay, puns, syllepsis, hyperbole, and satire in *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*. Unlike Liandinga's experiential humour, Mafaa's humour arises from linguistic incongruity and rhetorical artistry. His puns expose political hypocrisy, societal contradictions, and cultural inconsistencies. His usage of syllepsis—where a single word triggers multiple meanings simultaneously—creates layers of meaning that invite readers to reflect critically on corruption, religious pretense, moral frailty, and shifting social identities. Mafaa's satire stands as a more confrontational and intellectually charged mode of humour, aligning with broader traditions of satirical writing found in world literature.

Chapter Four compared the two authors, showing how their divergent sensibilities reveal two major trajectories of humour in Mizo literature: Liandinga's humour of experience and Mafaa's humour of intellect. While both rely on incongruity, the nature of the incongruity differs: for Liandinga, it is situational; for Mafaa, linguistic. Their humour reflects different cultural moments, social pressures, and literary objectives, providing a multifaceted portrayal of Mizo life.

This conclusion now brings these strands together, reflecting on the significance and implications of these findings for Mizo literary studies.

Major Findings

Findings on PL Liandinga's Humour

The study found that PL Liandinga's humour is rooted in the authenticity of everyday life. His position as a government servant stationed in rural and semi-urban locations afforded him first-hand experience of the socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural conditions of rural Mizoram. These conditions often generated incongruities—between expectation and reality, official rhetoric and lived experience, or familial aspiration and domestic chaos.

In Liandinga's humour, one observes a blending of three primary elements:

1. Observational Realism

Liandinga's humour relies heavily on close observation. He documents situations with a level of detail that allows readers to visualize the circumstances vividly. Whether describing a potholed road, the absurdity of bureaucratic procedures, or the challenges of rural administration, his narratives often mirror the chaotic charm of rural life. Such humour aligns with Morreall's idea that humour emerges when an unexpected deviation disrupts the normal frame of experience.

2. Self-Deprecating Wit

A striking feature of Liandinga's humour is its humility. He often places himself as the subject of the joke. Rather than mocking others, he reveals his own vulnerabilities, awkward moments, and personal failings with good-natured honesty. This aligns with Freud's Relief Theory, where self-directed humour becomes a strategy for coping with tension, disappointment, and social expectations.

3. Gentle Satire

Liandinga's satire is empathetic rather than harsh. He critiques social practices, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and domestic obligations, yet always with a tone of understanding. His humour invites readers to laugh not out of superiority, but out of recognition—recognition of the absurdities that define human experience.

Because of these elements, Liandinga's humour is fundamentally therapeutic. It allows readers to see their own struggles reflected in a humorous light, thereby providing psychological relief. His essays thus affirm humour's role as a mechanism for endurance, resilience, and mutual understanding.

Findings on Mafaa Hauhnar's Humour

If Liandinga represents the warmth of experiential humour, Mafaa Hauhnar embodies the sharpness of intellectual humour. His humour is self-conscious, deliberately crafted, and linguistically sophisticated. While Liandinga relies on narrative situations, Mafaa relies on rhetorical strategies. The following elements define his style:

1. Wordplay and Linguistic Incongruity

Mafaa's mastery of puns, homophones, and semantic double meanings—particularly in Mizo—reveals his deep understanding of linguistic structure and cultural context. His puns are not superficial; they reveal contradictions within society, politics, religion, and culture. For example, playing on the double meaning of *ram* (land/nation) or *pawm lai nei* (to be married/to embrace) allows him to deliver humour that is both comedic and socially critical.

This aligns with Delabastita's concept of wordplay as a "linguistic confrontation of structures with similar forms and divergent meanings" (128).

2. Satirical Critique

Mafaa's satire is biting and unapologetic. He uses humour as a tool to expose hypocrisy—whether political leaders exploiting patriotism, religious institutions masking commercialization beneath spirituality, or individuals engaging in performative morality. In this way, his humour resonates with Highet's view of satire as literature's attempt to "cure folly and punish evil" (156).

3. Hyperbolic Exaggeration

Hyperbole is another central feature of his humour. Mafaa uses exaggerated images to reveal the absurdity of certain behaviours or values—for example, comparing people to professional protestors, critiquing vanity during Christian celebrations, or mocking pretentious learners of English.

4. Cultural Commentary

Mafaa's humour reflects a Mizo society in transition—grappling with modernization, political change, Western influence, and evolving religious practice. His linguistic creativity allows him to map these transitions with clarity and precision.

Thus, Mafaa's humour serves a more intellectual and ideological function than Liandinga's. It challenges, provokes, and exposes, inviting readers not only to laugh but also to reflect critically on the conditions that shape their society.

Comparative Findings

The comparison in Chapter Four showed that Liandinga and Mafaa represent two distinct modes of humour that nonetheless contribute to a unified cultural discourse. Their differences illuminate several broader insights:

1. Two Generational Voices

Liandinga writes from the perspective of a mid-20th-century Mizo society still in the process of social consolidation. His humour arises from:

- (a) Rural hardships
- (b) Bureaucratic absurdity
- (c) Domestic struggle
- (d) Personal limitations

Mafaa, writing later, confronts:

- (a) Political evolution

- (b) Cultural identity in flux
- (c) Commercialized religion
- (d) Urbanization and Western influence

2. Two Humour Functions

- (a) Liandinga's humour comforts.
- (c) Mafaa's humour confronts.

Liandinga helps readers cope with life's challenges; Mafaa challenges readers to reconsider their assumptions.

3. Two Humour Engines

- (a) Liandinga: situational incongruity = gentle satire
- (b) Mafaa: linguistic incongruity = sharp satire

4. Shared Foundations

Despite their differences, both humorists:

- (a) Highlight human folly
- (b) Reveal cultural truths
- (c) Use humour as a mode of social understanding
- (d) Enrich Mizo literary tradition

Together, they form the dual pillars of modern Mizo humour—experience and intellect, narrative and rhetoric, past and present.

Contribution to Mizo Literature

Contribution of PL Liandinga

Liandinga's contributions are primarily cultural and narrative:

- (a) He captures rural Mizo life with remarkable clarity.
- (b) His humour preserves a social history of bureaucracy, village administration, and family life.
- (c) His narrative voice humanizes the daily struggles of the common people.
- (d) He elevates humour as a legitimate form of literary expression in essay-writing.

His writing has become a cultural archive, ensuring that future generations understand the textures and rhythms of traditional Mizo life.

Contribution of Mafaa Hauhnar

Mafaa's contributions are rhetorical, satirical, and critical:

- (a) He expands the linguistic possibilities of Mizo writing through inventive wordplay.
- (b) He demonstrates how humour can critique political corruption and cultural pretension.
- (c) His satire encourages intellectual self-reflection within Mizo society.
- (d) He brings modern Mizo humour into alignment with global traditions of satirical literature.

His humour raises the intellectual stakes of Mizo literature, pushing readers to confront uncomfortable truths.

Joint Contribution

Together, Liandinga and Mafaa:

- (a) Diversify the forms and functions of humour in Mizo literature
- (b) Reflect the shifting cultural, political, and social landscapes of their times
- (c) Enrich literary aesthetics by merging narrative charm with rhetorical brilliance

- (d) Offer a multidimensional understanding of Mizo identity

Their works confirm that humour is not peripheral but central to Mizo literary culture.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this study open multiple avenues for future research:

- (1) *Comparative Northeast Humour Studies*: Humour among Nagas, Manipuris, Assamese, and Mizos shares both similarities and distinctions worthy of comparative study.
- (2) *Digital Humour in Mizo Social Media*: Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram have produced new humour cultures. This deserves scholarly investigation.
- (3) *Humour and Gender*: Examining how humour functions differently for Mizo men and women could contribute to gender studies.
- (4) *Psycholinguistic Studies of Mizo Wordplay*: Given the complexity of Mafaa's humour, psycholinguistic methods could analyse how readers process double meanings.
- (5) *Humour and Mizo Christianity*: Many humour pieces draw indirectly on Christian culture. A study of humour in relation to Mizo Christianity could be illuminating.

Final Conclusion

Humour in Mizo literature, as exemplified in the works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar, transcends mere entertainment. It emerges as a profound cultural force—revealing societal values, exposing contradictions, preserving memory, and fostering collective introspection.

PL Liandinga's humour, grounded in lived experience, affirms humour's capacity to gently illuminate the struggles and joys of daily life. By contrast, Mafaa Hauhnar's rhetorical humour sharpens the critical edge of Mizo literature, challenging complacency and critiquing social institutions with linguistic dexterity.

Together, their works demonstrate that humour is both a mirror and a critique—a way of seeing the world with clarity, compassion, and courage. Through their writings, humour becomes a vital mode of cultural expression within the Mizo literary tradition, embodying both the resilience of the past and the aspirations of the present.

Thus, this study concludes that humour is not merely an aesthetic device in the works of Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar; it is a foundational structure through which Mizo society narrates, understands, and transforms itself. Their contributions confirm that humour, far from trivial, remains one of the most potent tools of literature—a tool that reveals, reflects, critiques, and ultimately enriches the cultural life of the Mizo people.

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B.A.	2013	Mizoram University (MZU)	II	59%
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Paper Present:

Year	Seminar/Symposium/Workshop	Organisers
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2018	Presented a paper in the “International Seminar on Mizo Language” on 10 th August, 2018 at Seminar Hall, Pachhunga University College	Department of Mizo, St. Xavier's College, Lengpui

2020	Presented a paper in the “Three Days International Webinar on ‘A Critical Study of the Songs of Lal̄tanpuia Tochhawng” during 15 th – 17 th September, 2021 at Govt. Hrangbana College	Department of Mizo, Govt. Hrangbana College and Research & Consultancy Cell, Govt. Hrangbana College
2021	Presented a paper in the “Three Days International Webinar on ‘A Study of Mizo Poetry” during 28 th – 30 th October, 2021 at Khawzawl	Department of Mizo, Govt. Khawzawl College
2023	Presented a paper in the “International Level Seminar on ‘Revisiting Mizo Poetry” on 21 st March, 2023 at Seminar Hall, Pachhunga University College	Mizo Poetry Society and Department of Mizo, Pachhunga University College
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2023	Presented a paper in the “Two Day National Seminar on the Role of Women - Educator, Writer and Entrepreneur in Mizoram” during 1 st – 2 nd June, 2023 at Mizoram University	Department of Mizo, Mizoram University
2023	Presented a paper in the “Mizo Rau-Mi leh Huai Zir Hona (A Symposium on Mizo Ghostlore)” on 6 th October, 2023 at ICFAI University	Department of Mizo & Cultural Studies, ICFAI University
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DEGREE	:	DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT	:	MIZO
TITLE OF THESIS	:	A STUDY OF HUMOUR IN SELECTED WORKS OF PL LIANDINGA AND MAFAA HAUHNAR
DATE OF ADMISSION	:	29 th AUGUST, 2022
APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL:		
1. DRC	:	23.03.2023
2. BOARD OF STUDIES	:	12.04.2023
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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF HUMOUR IN SELECTED WORKS OF PL LIANDINGA AND MAFAA HAUHNAR

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

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**DEPARTMENT OF MIZO
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND LANGUAGES
DECEMBER, 2025**

A STUDY OF HUMOUR IN SELECTED WORKS OF PL LIANDINGA
AND MAFAA HAUHNAR

BY
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DEPARTMENT OF MIZO

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Submitted
In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Mizo of Mizoram University, Aizawl

A Study of Humour in Selected Works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhna
(Abstract)

Humour, as a universal human expression and literary phenomenon, has undergone a long evolution from its earliest medical associations to its modern understanding as a mode of amusement, wit, and social critique. The word *humour* itself derives from the Latin *humor* or *umor*, meaning “moisture” or “fluid,” a concept rooted in the ancient theory of bodily humours in classical physiology (“humor”). As Rod A. Martin explains:

Humor began as a Latin word (*humorem*) meaning fluid or liquid. ... The Greek physician Hippocrates ...believed that good health depends on the proper balance of four fluids...of the body, namely blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Later, the Greek physician Galen introduced the idea that these four fluids possessed particular psychological qualities... (20-21)

Over centuries, the meaning shifted from temperament, to eccentricity, and eventually to the contemporary sense of comic amusement. In the seventeenth century, it evolved into its modern comic meaning.

Definitions of humour also vary according to field and perspective. Walker describes it as “the ability to smile and laugh, and to make others do so” (3). William O. Beeman notes that humour “aims at creating a concrete feeling of enjoyment for an audience most commonly manifested in smiles and laughter” (106). Hasley adds that humour is essentially “a departure from a norm playfully considered” (10). These diverse definitions indicate that humour is not merely an emotional response but an intellectual, cultural, and linguistic activity.

Scholars have proposed various theories to explain how humour works. Superiority Theory, associated with Plato, Aristotle, and later Thomas Hobbes, argues that laughter arises from a feeling of triumph or “sudden glory” over another’s weakness or folly (*Human Nature* ch.9 sec.13). Relief Theory, advocated by Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud, suggests that humour functions as a release of psychological tension. Freud observes that humour conserves psychic energy by

turning painful experiences into laughable ones (Romero & Pescosolido). Incongruity Theory, the most widely accepted today, posits that humour emerges when there is a mismatch between expectation and reality. Cicero captures this principle clearly when he states that “the most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing and another is said” (qtd. in Wilson). As PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar create humour by manipulating expectation—whether through everyday life situations or linguistic twists—this theoretical model serves as the central theoretical framework of this thesis.

This study, entitled “A Study of Humour in Selected Works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar,” examines the use of humour in selected works of two humorists in modern Mizo literature. The primary texts selected for the study are PL Liandinga’s *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* (2003) and *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* (2003), and Mafaa Hauhnar’s *Chawlhna Tuikam* (1997) and *Thlaler Aurawl* (2008), all of which are collections of essays. The study adopts the Incongruity Theory of humour as its principal theoretical framework for analysis..

These two humorists demonstrate the diversity and richness of humour in Mizo literature—Liandinga through situational humour rooted in lived experience, and Mafaa through linguistic humour grounded in rhetorical artistry. Their selected works form the core material for this thesis, which seeks to analyse their humour, classify their techniques, examine their social and cultural implications, and evaluate their contributions to the development of modern Mizo humorous writing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter provides an introduction to the study, outlining its background, aims, and theoretical framework. It delivers the conceptual, historical, and literary foundation for the present study by examining the origin, meaning, and development of humour from global traditions to its specific growth within Mizo literature. The chapter begins by tracing the etymology of the term humour, which originally derives from the Latin *humor* or *umor*, meaning “moisture” or “fluid,” associated with the ancient medical theory of bodily humours. As Rod A. Martin notes, humour “began as a Latin word meaning fluid or liquid... later associated with psychological temperament” (20). Over time, the term evolved to refer first to eccentric behaviour and later to the comic

quality that produces laughter and amusement. Definitions from scholars such as Walker, Beeman, and Hasley demonstrate the multifaceted nature of humour: a blend of wit, emotion, cultural insight, and linguistic play.

The chapter then discusses major humour theories which were relevant for the present study. Superiority Theory, associated with Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes, argues that laughter arises from a “sudden glory” or feeling of dominance over another’s shortcomings. Relief Theory, developed by Spencer and Freud, suggests that humour allows the release of pent-up mental energy. Incongruity Theory, which forms the central theoretical framework of this thesis, proposes that humour arises when expectation and reality contradict each other. Cicero articulates this principle when he observes that “we expect one thing and another is said,” (qtd. in Wilson) producing laughter through broken expectation. Modern theorists affirm that incongruity is the most widely accepted explanation for humour’s cognitive and linguistic mechanisms.

Chapter one also provides an overview of the major types of humour found in literature and examines how humour functions across different literary traditions, which were relevant to the present study. Humour in literature manifests in diverse forms such as Slapstick, deadpan, satire, insult, wordplay, self-deprecating, awkward, dark humour, situational, impromptu, and double-meaning (Bhalla). These categories demonstrate that humour may be rooted in exaggerated behaviour, unexpected linguistic turns, or social critique, and that each type carries its own stylistic and communicative purpose. The chapter further surveys humour across different literary traditions. In Greek Classical literature, humour developed through three major stages: Old Comedy, represented by Aristophanes, marked by political satire and bold social criticism (Sommerstein 198); Middle Comedy, which shifted toward parody and mythological burlesque with reduced political attack (Shaw 1); and New Comedy focusing on domestic life, mistaken identities, and everyday social situations. Roman humour, especially through Plautus and Juvenal, inherited and reshaped these traditions into farce, verbal play, and sharp satire targeting vice, hypocrisy, and corruption. In English literature, humour evolved from medieval riddles to Shakespeare’s comedies, Restoration wit, and later satirical writing that reflected changing cultural contexts. Indian literature also contains a rich humour tradition through Sanskrit drama, classical

farce, folktales, and modern prose, where comic elements often highlight moral lessons or human folly (Chatterji 127-46). These cross-cultural examples—from Greek and Roman foundations to English and Indian developments—establish humour as a universal literary mode adaptable to diverse historical and cultural settings, provides a broader framework for analysing humour in Mizo literature.

A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to the periods of Mizo humour, tracing its emergence and transformation from oral tradition to contemporary literature. The oral period encompasses proverbs, folktales, riddles, and folksongs, which contain wit, exaggeration, teasing, and playful moral instruction. The transitional period saw the emergence of written humour through mission schools, early publications, handwritten magazines, and village chronicles, where storytelling and satire began to adapt to new media. The modern period witnessed humour becoming a more conscious literary craft, appearing in essays, drama, and personal writing influenced by urbanisation, education, and print culture. Finally, the contemporary period showcases the diversification of Mizo humour through rhetorical essays, satire, linguistic play, political commentary, and creative experimentation—forming the environment in which humorists like PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar have emerged.

The chapter concludes by presenting the selected humorists and their works, introducing PL Liandinga's experiential essays in *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* and *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh*, and Mafaa Hauhnar's rhetorical humour in *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*. Their literary backgrounds are briefly contextualised to establish the foundation for the analytical chapters that follow. Thus, Chapter One lays the theoretical and historical groundwork necessary for the study of humour in the selected works, situating them within both global humour theory and the evolving periods of Mizo humorous expression.

Chapter 2: The Humour of Experience in PL Liandinga's Essay

Chapter two examines the humour of PL Liandinga by situating his essays within the tradition of experiential and narrative humour. Drawing primarily from *Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* (2003) and *Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* (2003), the chapter demonstrates

how Liandinga transforms everyday life—rural settings, bureaucratic frustrations, and domestic unpredictability—into a sustained mode of comic reflection. His humour is fundamentally rooted in the incongruity-based approach, which posits that laughter arises from the clash between expectation and reality. This principle is repeatedly affirmed in his essays, where the ordinary becomes amusing through unexpected outcomes or ironic turns. As Rosenberg et al. note, such humour emerges when “an anticipated outcome is suddenly overturned” (717).

Liandinga’s rural humour captures the peculiarities of village life with vivid simplicity. In “Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna,” he recounts his transfer to a remote village where the journey ends on “the smallest one” of all roads, leaving him “covered in dust” (*Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* 13). The incongruity lies in the stark contrast between the dignity associated with a government posting and the rugged conditions of rural reality. The humour extends into scenes of rural isolation, such as, “Zawr em em maiin chanchin hlui hlir kan dawng a. A milem chuang lo chi leh kawnglaka pa duh sek tak takte lambun bang chin chauh kan chang a. A nih loh leh kan nitin chanchinte chu a thawktu lamin a têt te hian minrawn thawn ta thin a, ba thinnaah, ‘Daka thawn man kan tito,’ te hi anrawn ti zui vei rawl nen... (15) [We receive daily newspaper limp and already outdated. They often arrive without the photographs—only the text—so tattered they look as though they’ve survived a storm. And if not that, they come in bulk, tied together like a bundle of debt reminders, with a note from the sender saying, “We’ve had to increase the dispatch charges due to rising postal costs”; my trans.]. These exaggerations, grounded in lived experience, illustrate Peter L. Berger’s view that humour “redeems laughter” by helping individuals cope with small frustrations (100).

Workplace humour plays a central role in Liandinga’s essays, often emerging from bureaucratic inefficiency. His anticipation of important government correspondence is humorously deflated when an impressive, “Black Stamped” envelope contains a mundane order beginning with “You are hereby...” and ending with “immediately” (15). He further exaggerates rural administrative delays, noting that a job notification “usually find out about it a week after the application deadline has already passed” and that an interview call letter often arrives “today at breakfast” for an

interview scheduled “yesterday at 11 a.m.” (17). These ironic reversals transform systemic inefficiency into a shared experience of humour.

Liandinga’s domestic humour is equally central to his style. He portrays the chaos of family life with affectionate self-deprecation. His description of finding household items—“from marbles to a hammer”—under a single cushion (*Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* 35) uses exaggeration to elevate ordinary clutter into comedy. His children asking when the wool on their worn-out blanket will “grow back” (*Ka Chhe Ber Lo Deuh* 22) captures the innocence of childhood while exposing domestic realities. In marital humour, he recalls imagining a peaceful pre-marital bed only to discover it is now “indona mualah pawh a hautak lai ber” [a toughest battlefield; my trans.], where he sleeps “zawngtah tangrah tla ang maiin” (*Ka Tha Ber Lo Deuh* 24) [like a bitter bean pod falling from a tree; my tran.]. These self-deprecating moments align with the gentle humour of Charles Lamb, whose domestic reflections similarly blend irony and tenderness.

Chapter two shows that Liandinga’s humour is grounded in observational realism, situational irony, and empathetic storytelling. Whether depicting the absurdities of rural life, the frustrations of bureaucracy, or the unpredictability of family dynamics, Liandinga uses humour not merely to entertain but to humanize everyday experience. His essays embody a deeply Mizo mode of humour—warm, resilient, and rooted in shared cultural life.

Chapter 3: Rhetorical Devices in the Humour of Mafaa Hauhnar

Chapter three focuses on the humorous techniques of Mafaa Hauhnar. It explores the rhetorical and linguistic foundations of humour in the writings of Mafaa Hauhnar, focusing primarily on *Chawlhna Tuikam* and *Thlaler Aurawl*. Unlike PL Liandinga, whose humour grows out of lived experiences and situational contradictions, Mafaa’s humour is fundamentally linguistic-rhetorical, crafted through deliberate manipulation of words, structures, meanings, and cultural references. His humour aligns with Incongruity Theory, wherein laughter arises from the recognition of unexpected linguistic shifts, semantic reversals, and ironic juxtapositions. As

Rosenberg et al. observe, humorous texts often rely on “structural and linguistic incongruity to evoke laughter” (717), a principle that underlies every aspect of Mafaa’s style.

The chapter begins with wordplay, which forms the cornerstone of Mafaa’s linguistic humour. Following Dirk Delabastita’s definition of wordplay as a “communicatively significant confrontation of two (or more) linguistic structures with more or less similar forms and more or less different meanings” (128). The analysis shows how Mafaa uses multiple-meaning words, homophones, and phonetic parallels to generate humour. A significant example is his parody of a well-known proverb, transforming *Aia upa zahna* (respect for elders) into *Aia hausa zahna* (respect for the wealthy), a witty critique of shifting social values in modern Mizo society (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 157). In another instance, he plays on *ngaihzawng* (lover) and *hlauh zawng* (fear), creating an ironic suggestion that a man marries “out of fear rather than love” (*Thlaler Aurawl* 162), highlighting how humour exposes emotional tension within cultural norms.

The chapter further investigates syllepsis, a rhetorical device where a single word is employed in two different senses within the same sentence. Mafaa uses syllepsis to critique social hypocrisy and festive moral contradictions. His Christmas passage, “A *ṭhenin chhang an den laiin a ṭhenin lehkha an lo deng ang a; a ṭhenin Krismas hla an sak laiin a ṭhenin zu, thluk nei lovin an lo sa ve ang a*” (188) [While some are busy playing cards, others are busy pounding rice; and while some are singing Christmas carols, others are ‘making their own spirits’—producing alcohol completely out of tune; my trans.] — juxtaposes *den/deng* (pounding/play cards) and *sak/sa* (sing/brew alcohol), allowing humour to emerge from the sudden clash between piety and indulgence. Another example is his use of *chetsual*, which means both “accident” and “sexual intercourse,” creating humour through the absurd comparison of two unrelated experiences (190). Such devices reveal how linguistic ambiguity becomes a powerful tool for social critique.

Self-deprecating humour is another distinctive hallmark of Mafaa’s style. In *Thlaler Aurawl*, he jokes about his own physical appearance: “Hmelchhe hmai sîn rêt ai chuan hmaitlang hetiang riang ruangah chuan a *ṭha lai lai pawh a awm lo thei lo...*”

(29) [Instead of an unattractive small face, a large face like this has a better chance of having some features that are quite tolerable; my trans.], using exaggeration to humanize himself and invite readers into a space of shared vulnerability. His comedic reflection on illness — “...mi fate chu an zun a hîng t̃hin a ni a, kei chu ka zun a’n t̃lum tlat bik mai lehng̃hal” (158) [...some people’s urine smells sour, but mine is sweet, as they say, which actually means diabetes; my trans.] —turns a medical condition into wordplay, demonstrating the therapeutic dimension of humour.

The chapter also examines satire, parody, and irony, all central to Mafaa’s rhetorical craft. Gilbert Highet defines satire as an attempt to “cure folly and punish evil,” (156) a principle evident in Mafaa’s critique of religious hypocrisy and social pretense. He mocks performative religiosity by describing church-goers who maintain a facade of morality while leading dubious private lives (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 106). His verbal irony is equally sharp, as when he describes a friend praised for “knowing many languages” but who actually mastered only the phrase “Bat in phal em?” [Can I owe?; my trans.] in twelve languages (164).

This chapter demonstrates that Mafaa Hauhnar’s humour is a humour of intellect—dense, playful, multi-layered, and socially engaged. Through puns, syllepsis, satire, irony, and self-deprecation, he transforms language into a tool of critique, revealing the contradictions of society while inviting readers to participate in the pleasurable act of decoding humour.

Chapter 4: A Comparative Study of Humour in the Works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar

Chapter four presents a comparative study of humour in the writings of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar, situating their works within a broader framework of literary comparison. The chapter begins by outlining the theoretical basis of comparative literature. Drawing from A.R. Marsh, comparative study examines “the phenomena of literature as a whole, to compare them, to group them, to classify them, to enquire into the causes of them, to determine the results of them” (166). Marsh emphasizes that such study moves beyond “mere sensibility and opulent phraseology”

(161) and instead addresses questions of “literary origins, literary development, and literary diffusion” (167). This framework guides the comparative analysis of Liandinga’s experiential humour and Mafaa’s linguistic-rhetorical humour.

The chapter argues that their humour represents two distinct trajectories in modern Mizo literature: Liandinga’s reality-based humour grounded in lived situations, and Mafaa’s language-driven humour shaped by verbal ingenuity. Both rely on an expectation–violation framework, which explains humour as the comic effect produced when anticipated outcomes diverge from actual events or expressions. As Cicero explains, “the most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing and another is said” (qtd. in Wilson). While this theory applies to both authors, the chapter demonstrates that they enact incongruity differently.

PL Liandinga’s humour emerges from everyday encounters, practical observations, and context-driven situations that reflect the realities of ordinary life. His comedy arises from the disjunction between expectation and the chaotic authenticity of daily life. In “Thingtlangah Sawrkar Hna,” for example, he describes a meticulously sealed government letter bearing a formal “Black Stamped” identity, only for the content to be a mundane directive beginning with “You are hereby...” and ending with “immediately” (*Ka Chhe...* 15). This anticlimax creates humour through situational incongruity. Elsewhere, he exaggerates bureaucratic inefficiencies “Hna dil tur han awm hlek se a dil theih hun chhung tawp hnu chawlhkar khatah te kan han hria a; a chang leh nimin dar sawmpakhata interview tura kohna kha tukin tukthuan ei rualte’n kan han hmu vel a” (17) [When a government job opens, we usually hear about it a week after the deadline has already passed. And sometimes the interview call letter reaches us only today at breakfast—informing us that the interview had already taken place yesterday at 11 a.m; my trans.]. His narrative style—observational, anecdotal, and empathetic—creates a humour that comforts, consoles, and humanizes the struggles of rural and bureaucratic life.

Mafaa Hauhnar’s humour, by contrast, is linguistic, intellectual, and rhetorically sharp. He exploits semantic ambiguity, puns, and satire to expose contradictions within politics, religion, and cultural identity. His political satire is bold, marked by an

inventive and ironic reframing of political conduct that exposes its underlying duplicities (*Chawlhna Tuikam* 167), capturing the duplicity of political life. He ridicules ministers preoccupied with trivialities such as bus tickets, comparing their actions to “...nula buan chak lo...” (159) [the objectification of women; my trans.]. Mafaa also critiques linguistic insecurity in Mizo society, highlighting the irony of those who “cannot speak their native tongue” while still failing in English (*Thlaler Aurawl* 71). His humour challenges readers intellectually, using language as a mirror of social tension and moral contradiction.

The chapter concludes that while Liandinga narrates and Mafaa performs, their humour collectively maps the evolution of Mizo humour from experiential storytelling to rhetorical sophistication. Their differences—situational versus linguistic incongruity, gentle satire versus sharp satire, communal laughter versus intellectual critique—together illuminate the multifaceted nature of Mizo cultural expression.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter presents the principal findings of the research and offers the concluding observations. It synthesizes the insights drawn from this study and demonstrates how humour—far from being ornamental—functions as a central literary and cultural force in Mizo writing. The chapter begins by reaffirming that humour in literature serves as a mirror through which societies interpret themselves, confront their contradictions, and express the nuances of lived experience. In the Mizo context, humour has evolved into a sophisticated mode of expression capable of reflecting political anxieties, cultural transitions, and everyday struggles. This study, which examines humour in the selected works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar, shows that these two writers embody complementary strands of modern Mizo humour—one rooted in everyday observation, the other in stylistically crafted linguistic play.

The chapter summarizes how this expectation–contrast framework underpinned the entire research, given its relevance to the humour strategies of both authors. Freud’s Relief Theory and Hobbes’s Superiority Theory also enrich the understanding of

humour's psychological and social functions, especially in Liandinga's empathetic humour and Mafaa's critical satire.

The findings reaffirm that PL Liandinga's humour continues to reflect a grounded and relatable comic tone shaped by recognisable everyday scenarios and empathetic storytelling, emerging from the challenges of rural postings, bureaucratic inefficiency, and familial chaos. His experiences as a government servant navigating potholed roads, delayed office notices, and domestic clutter provide fertile ground for situational humour. These conditions produce incongruities between expectation and lived reality, allowing humour to function as a means of endurance and psychological relief. The study concludes that Liandinga's work humanizes the daily struggles of common people and preserves a social history of bureaucracy, village administration, and family life. His humour thus serves as a cultural archive of rural Mizoram.

Mafaa Hauhnar's humour, by contrast, represents the intellectual evolution of Mizo humour. His writing is defined by wordplay, satire, hyperbole, and linguistic creativity, exposing the contradictions of political behaviour, religious performance, and cultural identity. His well-known satirical reinterpretation of political behaviour highlights the moral bankruptcy underlying political discourse. His satire on linguistic insecurity—mocking those who cannot speak Mizo yet fail at English—reveals the fragile cultural self-confidence of modern society (*Thlaler Aurawl* 71). Mafaa's humour is confrontational, ideological, and rhetorically layered, inviting readers to reflect on the conditions shaping contemporary Mizo life.

The chapter further concludes that together, Liandinga and Mafaa diversify the forms and functions of Mizo humour, representing two generational voices: Liandinga's humour comforts, while Mafaa's confronts. Their comedic visions illuminate the dual nature of Mizo humour—one grounded in narrative warmth, the other in linguistic critique—yet both enrich Mizo literary tradition and offer a multidimensional understanding of identity and society.

Finally, the thesis identifies several avenues for future research, including comparative Northeast humour studies, digital humour on social media, gender and

humour, psycholinguistic approaches to Mizo wordplay, and humour in relation to Christianity.

Overall, chapter five establishes that humour in the works of PL Liandinga and Mafaa Hauhnar is not a trivial embellishment but a vital cultural instrument—one that reveals, critiques and preserves Mizo society.

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