

WOMEN AND INSURGENCY IN MIZORAM: A FEMINIST STUDY OF SELECT  
RAMBUAI FICTION

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STUDY OF SELECT RAMBUAI FICTION***

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Aizawl.***

**DECLARATION**

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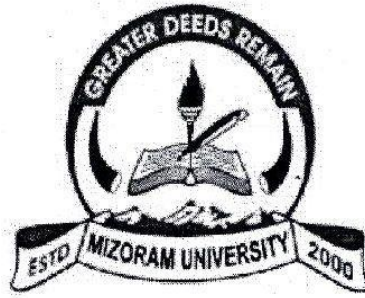
**I, V.Lalrinsangi, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been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

**This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.**

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that “Women and Insurgency in Mizoram: A Feminist Study of Select Rambuai Fiction” written by V.Lalrinsangi has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the M.Phil. regulations of Mizoram University. The dissertation is the result of her own investigations. Neither the dissertation as a whole nor any part of it was ever submitted by any other University for any research degree.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

This study proposes to examine and analyse select *Rambuai* fiction namely, *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015) written by Malsawmi Jacob, *Rinawmin* (1970) by James Dokhuma and *The Beloved Bullet* (1992) written by James Dokhuma and translated into English by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama. This chapter will provide an outline history of Mizo Insurgency, followed by a brief study of the literary genre of *Rambuai* fiction and the leading factors responsible for its emergence. Besides, this chapter will denote the importance of gender in studying armed conflict and explain in brief why the study deals with the experiences of women during Mizo Insurgency.

The word *Rambuai* literally means disturbance or trouble in the land. It denotes the troubled period of Mizoram during the 1960's. Mizo *Rambuai* is considered as the most turbulent and horrific historical event of Mizoram. It started on 1 March 1966 with the outbreak of the Mizo National Front (MNF) armed struggle for "Mizo Independence" (Chawngsailova 41) and it ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord on 30 June 1986. The political conflict broke out in the mid 1960's was the outcome of political consciousness developed by the Mizo in the wake of Indian independence. In the *Administrative Reports of the Lushai Hills 1945-1946* it was noted, "With the movement towards independence in India, political forces are beginning to awake in the Lushai Hills" (Chawngsailova 22).

As a result of this growing political consciousness, the political representatives of the Mizo created a memorandum and demanded, "Government for Mizoram with a constitution of its own within the province of Assam" (Chawngsailova 13). But the disapproval of their

demand and the discontentment and dissatisfaction of the Mizo towards the District Council established in 1952 added to the growth of political restlessness in the Mizo Hills. In 1959, when the *Mautam* famine hit the entire land and hills of Mizoram, the separatist feelings which have been nurtured in the mind of the people have ripened. The slow and indifferent manner of the Assam Government towards the famine stricken Mizo Hills resulted in the formation of a new organisation named Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) to help people get over the crisis. The volunteers of the MNFF considered the slow action of the Assam Government as an 'economic blockade'. Therefore, the MNFF with their slogan 'Mizoram for Mizo's' stressed the need for a sovereign and independent state, while demanding foods and other supplies at the same time. After the end of the famine, the welfare organisation continued and it was converted into a political party named Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Laldenga. With 'Mizo Independence' as its main objective the MNF movement aroused ethnic political consciousness and it preached secession without fear of action from the Government. While the flame of distrust and hatred towards Indian Government burned across each and every corner of Mizoram, thousands of young and patriotic youth who supported the MNF movement prepared themselves to fight for the cause of independence. In *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India: Mizoram* Rao, Thansanga and Hazarika wrote, "The situation was ripe for conflict. There was dissatisfaction in the Mizo Hills over the administration of the Assam and the MNF exploited the situation to its fold" (240).

Taking advantage of the restless situation, in the midnight of 28 February 1966, 'Operation Jericho' was launched by the MNF armed rebellion to systematically capture the power in Mizo district. Simultaneous attacks on Assam Rifles garrisons were carried out to throw out Indian forces stationed in Mizoram. The armed surprise attack was followed by the

declaration of independence by the MNF on 1 March 1966. With that, the killings, torture and sufferings started to envelope the peaceful hills of the Mizo and it lasted for 20 years.

The MNF might not foresee the eventual consequences of the insurgency they have conducted. With their purpose held in high esteem they carried out their mission for God and for Mizoram. But the destructive nature of insurgency and counter-insurgency organised by both the MNF movement and the Indian Government are beyond human endurance. On 2 March 1966 the Government of India sent military forces to counter the MNF movement and the whole district was declared as 'Disturbed Area' under Assam Disturbed Area Act of 1955. Besides, the Armed Forces Special Power Act of 1958 was also in force within the district. On 5 March 1966 the Indian Government carried out an action which marked the history of Mizoram. At 11.30 in the morning, Aizawl came under air-strikes. There was no warning, no time to run and hide. The Indian military who are expected to provide protection were instructed by the Indian Government to attack its own people. In his book *Sentinels of the North East: The Assam Rifles*, Gen. (Retd.) D.K Palit wrote:

.....5<sup>th</sup> March was the crucial day. At last 1130 hours came the airstrike, IAF fighter strafing hostile position all around the battalion area. The strafing was repeated in the afternoon..... (On 6<sup>th</sup> March) There was another airstrike that day and that put paid to the investment. The hostiles melted away. (Hluna and Tochwng 103)

The bombing of Aizawl and other villages not only killed the hostiles. The bomb hit homes and residential areas, it took away the lives of innocent civilians and turned their precious properties and belongings into ashes. Thus, the innocent civilians became the one who bore the brunt of enmity between the MNF and the Indian Government.

The bombing of Aizawl was followed by another horrendous military action known as Grouping or *Sáwikhâwm*. During 1967 to 1970, villages in Mizoram were regrouped into larger units to facilitate effective operation of security forces against the MNF underground movement. The manner in which the operation has been carried out was extremely cruel. Thousands of people were forced to leave their ancestral homes with few belongings they could carry. Their houses were burnt down before their eyes and were driven to the grouping centres where life was bitter and hard. The centres or the camps were used by the Indian army as forced labour camps. People in the camps were forced to work under military instructions. Carrying water, firewood's, digging bunkers and building fences were the task assigned to them, while no time was spared for them to do their agricultural works. As they were restricted by limited working hours and curfew by nightfall, they cannot go to the jhum which is their main source of living. With no means to earn a livelihood, many people suffered from malnutrition and poor-health related death was a common occurrence.

The counter-insurgency measures taken up by the Indian Government threatened the life of innocent civilians. Constant curfew, restriction of movement, feelings of insecurity and fear frustrated them. Under Section 4 of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA) all the Indian officers in the armed forces could exercise special power in the following ways:

- i) If he is of opinion that it is necessary to do so for the maintenance of public order, after giving such warning as he may consider necessary, fire upon or otherwise use force, even to the causing of death, against any person who is acting in contravention of any law or order...
- ii) Destroy any arms dump, prepared or fortified position or shelter from which armed attacks are made or are likely to be made or are attempted to be used.....

iii) Arrest without warrant....

iv) Enter and search without warrant... (Lalrinawma 260-261)

The Indian army abused the above mentioned power specially designed to calm and counter hostilities in the region. As “every Mizo was suspect” (106 Nibedon) in the eyes of the Indian army, many civilians were arrested on suspicion. Many were wrongfully detained and tortured without genuine reason and some were even killed. And if the civilians reported the wrong doings of the Indian army to the higher authorities, he or she will be charged as MNF sympathizer and will be arrested. Many Mizo men were also used as human shields in Army’s patrolling. Male civilians were taken by the army and were used as protection from surprise attack of the MNF insurgents. In many encounters and ambushes, men who were taken as human shields and civilians in the nearby village were the one who suffered the most. By accusing them as supporters of the MNF insurgents, the armed forces either tortured the male members of the nearby village or burnt down the whole village.

During Mizo Insurgency women paid high prices for being a Mizo and a woman as well. The Indian army utilized rape as a political tool to dominate them and to undermine the social fabric of the Mizo. In *Suppression of Mizos in India: An Eye Witness Report* submitted by G.G. Swell and J.J.M. Nicholas Roy to the Government of India, the mass rape took place at Kolasib in 1966 was recorded. In the report it was written:

In Kolasib, 50 miles of Aizawl, the army rounded up all the men of the village, about 500 of them. They were collected, made to lie down on the ground on their stomachs to kick, beat, trample upon and confined for the night. At night groups of soldiers moved around. They broke into the houses, helped

themselves with everything of value- clocks, sewing machines, clothes etc.- and raped the women.

There was the case of a woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy- Lathumai, wife of a cultivator, Lalkhangliana. Five soldiers appeared in her house, took the husband out of the house at gun-point and then while two soldiers held the woman down, the third committed rape. (as qtd. in Chandra 196)

Though these incidences were horrendous enough for the entire village, only “three women complained of having been raped by commanding officers” (as qtd. in Chandra197), while others silenced their traumatic experience. Women in other places of Mizoram encountered the same harassment. Little girls were raped while their parents were away, and countless women were raped in-front of their husbands and families to frighten and to punish the MNF insurgents. Such brutalities caused damage and wreaked havoc on individuals and on the entire community.

Insurgency in Mizoram might be taken as an important political history of Mizoram, but its outcome was truly devastating. The predatory instinct unleashed by insurgency and counter-insurgency were destructive. Every action of the MNF insurgents and the Indian armed security forces left frightful marks on the civilians. Many parents lost their beloved sons and the soil of the land was tainted with their blood. The cries of the helpless children, women and elders echoed through the land and hills of the Mizo. While the patriots marched on singing their patriotic songs, the innocent civilians helplessly tolerated the atrocities of insurgency. As the heights of their agony and pain were so intense, the end of Mizo Insurgency itself could not erase the harm done to them. Severe wounds and pain inflicted upon them left a deep scar which cannot be healed with the passing of time.

The traumatic Mizo *Rambuai* gives birth to new literary genres such as *Rambuai* poems, songs, fiction and non-fiction. Literary works in each genre speaks of the Mizo

independence movement of 1966 and the troubled atmosphere of Mizoram during this period. These writings contain the MNF narratives and the non-MNF narratives. The MNF narratives focus on the origin and history of the MNF movement, and the experience of the MNF volunteers. On the other hand, the non-MNF narratives render unbiased interpretation of Mizo Insurgency and it encapsulate different experiences of the common people which are often left out in the politically influenced MNF narratives.

Among different literary genres generated by Mizo *Rambuai*, the scope of *Rambuai* fiction can be accepted as the most flexible and wide ranging. It contains different approaches and interpretations which bring to light multiple and distinctive pictures of Mizo Insurgency and its impact. C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau in his book *Rambuai Literature* (2014) defines *Rambuai* fiction as ‘creative writing’. According to him:

*Rambuai fiction hi creative writing chi khat, thawnthu phuahchawp phèna a ziaktu in a thil hmuh leh hriatte, a rilrua a vei tlangaupina hmanraw tangkai tak a ni.*  
(Vanchiau 85)

(*Rambuai* fiction is a form of creative writing, an useful literary device which enables the author to voice out his experiences, ideas and thoughts behind his fictional narratives.)

Another definition is given by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama and C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau in *After Decades of Silence Voices from Mizoram: a Brief Review of Mizo Literature*:

*Rambuai* fiction is no doubt creative writing, but behind the creativity lie several sub-texts that the writer embeds, and attempts to voice. The trauma and terror experienced during the troubled history, the trials and tribulations brought on by the events often left untold by many, make their appearance in such writings under different guises. (71)

As a form of creative writing, *Rambuai* fiction presents the 20 dark years of Mizoram under the guise of a common Mizo story line. K.C. Lalvunga's novel *Nunna Kawngthuam Puiah* (1989) is among the Mizo love stories which is set against the backdrop of the Mizo *Rambuai* period. The novel narrates the moving love story of the beautiful Ngurthansangi and IPS Chhuanvawra. Through the misfortune of the female protagonist Ngurthansangi, the author voices out the horrors of rape and forced prostitution experienced by Mizo women. The author also questions the traditional condemnatory stance towards all suicides. By moving beyond the Christian moral judgement and its condemnation of suicide, the author gives justification to the suicidal act performed by the helpless woman Pi Kungliani who is brutally raped by the Indian army. The author writes:

*Khawngaihtu Pathian chuan a ngaidam ang* (Vanchiau 89)

(The Merciful God will forgive her)

The novel *Ngilh Har Kan Tuar* is also written under the influence of what had happened in the village of East Lungdar during the Mizo Insurgency. The strong and fearless voice of the author discloses the actual brutality meted out towards Mizo women by the Indian Army and the MNF insurgents. Her unbiased interpretation of troubles, meaningless killings and bloodshed enounces the price paid by the innocent civilians for the cause of Mizo independence. Other fictional works namely, *Mizo Hmeichhe Rinawm Lalthansangi* (2003) written by T. Vanlawma, *Hautluangpuui Uirena* (2007) written by Larinchhana Hmar, C. Ringzuala's novel *Hmangaihna Par* (2010), Pramod Bhatnagar's novel *Zoramthangi: Daughter of the Hills* (1982) are one of the finest and most widely read *Rambuai* fiction that interweave romance, killings, troubles and sufferings.

Novels in the genre of *Rambuai* fiction not only focused on the horrors and trauma of insurgency, it also valorised the MNF underground movement and the selfless action of the patriotic MNF insurgents. C. Laizawna's novel *Zalen Hma Chuan* (1986) is one of such novels that idolized the MNF insurgents who devoted their lives and strengths for Mizoram. The novel narrates the story of the brave patriot Zoramchhana. As reflected in the novel, the village of Maite was burnt down by the armed security forces. Zoramchhana's family was among the victims. While his wife and children desperately migrated to Aizawl, Zoramchhana could not retreat from his duty. Rather, he made a finite decision to continue fighting and not to return until Mizoram gain independence. In the statement of Zoramchhana, one will not fail to hear the voice of a true Mizo patriot:

*Zalên hma chuan ka hmel in hmu tawh lo vang. Independent sualin ka chhuak a, ka hmuh hma chuan ka kir thei tawh lo.* (Vanchiau 88)

(You will not see my face again until Mizoram gains independence. I have gone out fighting for independence, and I cannot return until I succeed)

F. Lalramchhana's novel *Thlarau Zahawm* (2010), C. Laizawna's novel *Thuruk* (1984), *Rinawmna Rah* (1985) written by Vanlalchhuanga, *Hring Nun* (1984) by PC. Biakthanga etc. are other novels which registered the ideology of MNF movement and the bleak political history of Mizoram during the 1960's.

Besides what is already mentioned, there are numbers of fictional works written under the influence of Mizo *Rambuai*. In his book *Rambuai Literature*, C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau mentioned that there are about 70 fictional works which can be included in the genre of *Rambuai* fiction. In all these fictional works, memories of armed conflict, violence, anger, depression, trauma, dislocation etc. occupy central position in the narratives. As rightly

opined by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama, writers of conflict region, “...have no models except that which they create of their own, no mentors except for the compulsion within to voice unrecorded history and no other motive but the one that matter the most-to tell their tale as the best they can, for other to learn and know what it is to be human.” (Zama, *Emerging Literature* 73). Likewise, the motives and models of *Rambuai* fiction writers are also directed towards their dark history. By maintaining a thin line between fiction and non-fiction, *Rambuai* fiction writers run the risk of expressing the repressed trauma and unrecorded sufferings of their own people. With no other mentors except the inward urges that compel them to re-write their own history, they tell the stories of their past, which is tainted with terror and intense disappointment.

The texts selected for the study namely, *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015), *Rinawmin* (1970) and *The Beloved Bullet* (1992) are important fictional works that are included in the genre of *Rambuai* fiction.

The novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015) is the first historical novel penned by a Mizo writer in English. The author Malsawmi Jacob is a noted poet, novelist and journalist from Mizoram. She taught English in Aizawl and Bangalore for over 12 years, and she worked as a freelance journalist for different publications like The Assam Tribune, the Northeast section of The Telegraph, and the Northeast Frontier. Her published books are, *Tinkim Dawn*, a collection of poems in Mizo and English (2003), *Fresh Lease*, a collection of short stories (2005), *Amazing Adventures*, children’s story (2006), *A Pushkar Pandit’s Tryst with God*, narrative non-fiction (2009), *Magic Mirror Stories*, children’s story (2010), *The Messiah*, narrative non-fiction (2012) and *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015).

*Zorami: A Redemption Song*, the first novel of Malsawmi Jacob is written based on the Mizo Insurgency highlighting its social and psychological impact on the people of Mizoram. Written from a woman's perspective the novel gives a realistic portrayal of women and their traumatic experience of Mizo Insurgency. The novel tells the story of Zorami, who comes of age at the beginning of the armed struggle for independence by the MNF. As narrated in the novel, Zorami was sexually violated by an Indian army man when she was only 13 years of age. From then onwards, she suffered the trauma of being a raped victim, a painful secret that she could never reconcile with. Zorami stands as a metaphor for the Mizo in general, Mizo women and Mizoram. Her sufferings and experiences as a victim of Mizo Insurgency reflect the repressed sufferings of her own people, land and culture. Zorami and Mizoram are one entity that are wounded and tortured by the horrendous Mizo Insurgency and the inhumane counter-insurgency measures undertaken by the Indian army. Both seek redemption from the cauldron of violence and retaliation, which according to the author Malsawmi Jacob can be attained through spiritual epiphany. In her conversation with Jaydeep Sarangi an interviewer from literary journal *Writers in Conversation*, Malsawmi Jacob says:

Spiritual epiphany is the key factor in my protagonist's inner healing. I honestly could not find any other way to mend her shattered psyche. And for a people still hurting from the atrocities they suffered, a genuine spiritual experience is the need. Spiritual, not merely religious. (4)

Through her female character Zorami, Malsawmi Jacob brings forth the possibility of inner healing for the wounded land and the people. Just as Zorami, a damaged woman, who attains inner healing at the end of the novel, the wounded Mizoram and its people can attain inner healing through reconciliation, spiritual restoration and epiphany.

The novel *Rinawmin* (1970) is a remarkable fictional work produced during years of insurgency in Mizoram. The author James Dokhuma (1932-2007) is one of the most prolific writers Mizoram has ever produced. He wrote 42 books, 40 poems and 400 essays and articles during his lifetime. He was awarded Padma Shree Award in 1985 and University of California awarded him an Honorary Doctorate degree in the year 1997. James Dokhuma studied only till grade V, and after he had worked in several governmental and private institutions he was elected as the MNF block president at Hualtu village in 1962. And when MNF declared independence in the year 1966 he went underground for the cause of Mizoram. He was arrested and imprisoned at Nowgong Special Jail and Guwahati District Jail from 1966 to 1971. During his imprisonment he wrote three novels and *Rinawmin* is one of the novels.

Written during the most violent period of the movement, the years between 1966 and 1971, the novel *Rinawmin* gives a realistic portrayal of the brute political upheaval. The horror of Village grouping, the burning flames of national feelings which enveloped the entire Mizo hills, the armed encounter between the Mizo Army and the Indian Army and the sufferings of innocent civilians are described effectively in the novel without exaggeration. Similar to other fictional works in the genre of *Rambuai* fiction, the novel *Rinawmin* interweaves the 1960's chaotic political situation of Mizoram and the tragic love story of Ramhluni and Major Rozuala. By titling the novel as *Rinawmin*, which is equivalent to the English word 'faithfully', James Dokhuma discloses the significance of being faithful and loyal in human relationship and in fighting for the land as well. The novel tells the story of a faithful Mizo Army officer Major Rozuala and his beloved Ramhluni, who remain faithful to him through thick and thin. Both found love in times of conflict, when fear, hatred and anger

covered the entire land. Though the times they were in never permit their love to flourish, their hope for greater Mizoram sustained and strengthened their love for each other.

The male protagonist Major Rozuala acted as a mouthpiece of the MNF movement. Throughout the novel, Major Rozuala speaks out the valued MNF motto, 'For God and For the Country'. His actions are guided and shaped by the MNF ideology, and he performs his every action for God and for Mizoram. After serving his land faithfully, he sacrifices his life for Mizoram, the land he dearly loved. His heroic death renounces him as a true patriot who lives and dies for his own land. On the other hand, the female protagonist Ramhluni appears as a pathetic victim who suffers a great deal of pain for the loss of her lover Major Rozuala. Like every Mizo woman, Ramhluni bears the burden of being a woman and being a victim of the armed conflict. When the land is raided by killings, fear and confusion she has to perform certain tasks and duties which every woman is expected to carry out. As demanded by tradition, she has to hide her feelings for her lover and she has to entertain every bachelor who courted her. Besides she was reminded to remain faithful and to maintain her purity as well, in a time when many women are sexually threatened by the army men. As the burden she carries as a woman was unbearable for her, she even expresses her desire to become a man. Throughout the novel Ramhluni remains faithful to her lover and she lives with the hope of being united with her lover once again. But her submission, her effort of waiting and her hope turn out to be fruitless when Major Rozuala died. This reduces her to a state of desperation. Given no other option to deal with her trauma, she silently bears the pain of loss and separation.

The novella *The Beloved Bullet* (1992) is written in Mizo by James Dokhuma under the title of *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, and is translated into English by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama. The translator Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama is a faculty member of the Department of

English, Mizoram University. Besides publications of her own academic works, her translations of Mizo fiction and tales are to be found in edited volumes published by Katha, Oxford University Press and Sahitya Akademi.

*The Beloved Bullet* is a moving love story which focuses on the trauma and suffering generated by violence, killings and forced dislocation. Starting with the description of the mysterious tomb, the novella dwells deep into the darkest period of *Rambuai* years. A clear projection of the brutal consequences of insurgency shows the severity of the harm done to the Mizo by the Indian armed security forces. Forced dislocation and relocation known as Village grouping is recorded as the most destructive measures carried out by the armed security forces. Thousands of innocent civilians were uprooted from their ancestral village and were relocated in a new grouping centre, a place which gives them sense of fear, insecurity and alienation. *The Beloved Bullet* records the deep and inexpressible pain inflicted upon the Mizo who are the victims of Village grouping. As narrated in the novella, the village named Hualtu was once a peaceful place undisturbed by the chaotic political upheaval of the land. But the troubles soon reach the village. With only a few hours notice the inhabitants of the village Hualtu were forced to leave their homes with few belongings they could carry. Their house, their domesticated pets and all their belongings were burnt down before their eyes. Unable to accept the unexpected forced dislocation, “the elderly clung to their doorposts, weeping openly. But circumstances demanded their departure, and they did so most unwillingly” (Zama, “Beloved Bullet” 155).

The novella then narrates the heart touching love story of Ramliani and Lt. Sanglura. The tragic love story discloses the severity of the harm done by both insurgency and counter-insurgency measures. Ramliani and Lt. Sanglura as narrated in the novella “unexpectedly found love in the battlefield” (Zama, “Beloved Bullet” 170). Whether time

allows them to celebrate their love or not, they decide to cherish it. But unexpected misfortune befell them. Lt. Sanglura was killed in an encounter with the Indian army. After Lt. Sanglura died, Ramliani lives in isolation, cutting herself off from the rest of the world. As silence is the only coping strategy available for her, she spends years and years of her life repressing her trauma of loss and separation. For Ramliani, the bullet which takes away the life of her lover becomes the only thing that gives her solace, and it later becomes the object she treasures the most. Even though Ramliani does not suffer from the enemies directly, she becomes the victim of the bullet that kills her lover. By giving her an inexpressible pain and agony, the bullet in its own way renders her a slow and painful death.

*Rambuai* fiction is no less different than any other literary works written under the influence of war, conflict and holocaust. It bears witness to violence, sufferings and troubles perpetrated among the innocent civilians. And most importantly, it records the silenced sufferings and the endless struggle of Mizo women in times of insurgency. Though *Rambuai* fiction renders a realistic and straightforward portrayal of the brute political upheaval, to have an in-depth understanding of the diverse impacts of insurgency it presents, gender dimension and its dominant features have to be taken into account.

Gender is typically construed as individual attributes or demographic characteristics, understood as biological or physical traits. Feminist theorists reject this primordial view and re-define gender as, “a social construct, an institutionalized entity or artefact in a social system, invented or constructed by patriarchal culture or society to maintain hierarchical division among the sexes” (Sjoberg 5). In her theory of gender, the French feminist Simone De Beauvoir, conceptualizes gender as a social or cultural construct that creates and sustains division, stratifications and modes of domination within and across intellectual and national borders. In her famous statement “one is not born, but rather

becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 293), she distinguishes sex from gender and suggest that gender is an identity gradually acquired. According to Beauvoir, female subordination stems from gender binary. Throughout history women’s inferiority has been maintained and proved using religion, philosophy, theology and more recently, science, biology and experimental psychology. But Beauvoir rejects the biological determinism that has been used to maintain woman’s inferiority. She believes that there is no natural or universal characteristic that defines woman. Rather a woman’s identity is socially constructed. It has been constructed by a society which maintains ideological systems prescribing her subordination, and by women’s own participation in those systems. Similar to Beauvoir, Kate Millet an American feminist takes gender differences to have essentially cultural rather than biological bases that result from differential treatment. She interprets gender as, “the sum total of the parents, the peers and the culture’s notion of what is appropriate to each sex by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression” (Millet 31).

For Beauvoir, Millet and other feminist theorists gender is none other than a social or cultural code that describes, prescribes and shapes social expectation for the sexed bodies. Gender differences are thus, the oppressive results of social interventions that dictate how women and men should behave. While gender roles prescribe women to learn subordinated roles, it gives men greater privilege and power over women. These hierarchical binaries exist as a system which identifies and differentiates men and women as the opposites, the superior and inferior beings.

The hierarchical binaries that are embedded in gender are influential in polarizing the nature and consequences of war. The conduct of war and armed conflicts are generally understood as the killing and injuring of combatants and civilians, the destruction of infrastructure and cities, and the conquering of cities. But, war and conflict however, are also

profoundly gendered experience. Gender influences how war should be fought, who will fight the war and in defence of whom. At the same time, it also shapes war experiences and directs the kind of violence and sufferings perpetrated among the victims.

Feminists have long noted that particular ideas and beliefs about gender is harnessed and reinforced in every war, conflicts and insurgency. As accepted by feminist theorists, the traditional dichotomy of men as 'Just Warrior' and women as 'Beautiful Soul' functions as a model of binarism and it polarises the image of war. In her book *Women and War*, an American feminist Jean Bethke Elshtain writes:

In times of war, real men and women- locked in a dense symbiosis, perceived as beings who have a complementary and exemplify gender specific virtues- take on, in cultural memory and narrative, the personas of Just Warrior and Beautiful Soul..... These troops on the social identities of men and women do not denote what men and women really are, but function instead to re-create and secure women's location as non-combatants and men as warriors. (4)

The dichotomy of 'Just Warrior' and 'Beautiful Soul' as observed by Elshtain is the socially constructed roles and identities structured around gender stereotypical notion of what it is to be a man and a woman. The 'Just Warrior' embodies masculine ideals such as, bravery, strength, fearlessness, nobility, duty, honour and sacrifice, while the 'Beautiful Soul' denotes feminine ideals such as beauty, passivity, purity, dependent and weak. These ideals serve to legitimize and recreate men's identity as compassionate and dutiful warriors and women as vulnerable beings who are to be protected. Therefore, men fight as warriors and superior beings whose service and duties are demanded for the safety of their inferiors. On the other hand, women were relegated to the home front undertaking the task which is deemed as less

valuable and honourable than the heroic deeds of men. Though having the same potential as the heroic male, they are forced to remain as the weaker sex, required to be rescued and protected.

The system of war not only crippled the heroic possibilities of women, it heightened gender hierarchy and exacerbated women's subjection and marginalisation. In *Minerva Quarterly report on Women and the Military*, Carolyn Nordstrom states, "Dirty war tactics, elevated to a common strategy grounding many of today's wars, place women at the epicentre of conflict. Women stand as general targets, raped, maimed and murdered in the dirty war construction of terror" (215).

War and conflict no doubt doubled the burden of women. It increases women's insecurities, vulnerabilities, pauperization and expose them, especially as refugees, informal traders, sex workers and to other forms of violence. In accordance to several feminists who study war, gender coding is strongly influential in heightening women's vulnerability and in shaping women's traumatic experience. As noted by a feminist scholar Carol Cohn, the organised use of sexual violence as tactic of war draws its power from gender arrangements. In her book *Women and War: Contested Histories Uncertain Futures* she writes:

The belief that women are lesser than and should be subordinate to men leads men to feel entitled to rape women. Additionally, the patriarchal view of women as men's property underwrites the notion that rape is the legitimate bounty of war: the winners would be seen as entitled to take their opponents women, just as they loot other property. (61)

Carol Cohn's observation reveals how the patriarchal tradition and ideology fostered sexual violence. The patriarchal presumption that viewed women as men's property signify women's

bodies as violable and this misogynistic presumption encouraged sexual violence. Taking advantage of the traditional patriarchal belief, during war and conflict men employed rape and attack women owned by the male enemy as a proxy attack against them. The mutilation of women bodies then becomes the proof of the powerlessness, the rite of humiliation and demasculinization of the men who owned them and who failed to protect them. Similarly, the symbolic framing of women as repository and reproducer of ethnic, national, religious or other collective identities makes women more prone to attack during war and armed conflict. It positions them as the target of sexual violence which is used as a strategy for ethnic cleansing. In this way, the bodies of women that are no more than, in the words of Beauvoir “a womb, an ovary” (21), are used as the battleground of man’s war.

It is important to note that sexual violence is not the only atrocities of war and armed conflict encountered by women. They go through other countless hardships. Their gender roles which destined them as supporters, caretakers and nurturers doubled their burden as women and as victims. It positioned them as the supportive backbone of every war and conflict. Women, especially mothers, are targeted by war propaganda in different countries. It often attempts to stimulate feelings of motherly patriotism among women by “drawing on representation of the good mother as one who is willing to sacrifice her sons to war” (Lorentzen and Turpin 11). While women were encouraged to send off their husbands and sons to the battlefield, in the absence of men they remain at home heading household with fewer resources while they still are expected to play a supporting role. For them, war economies become a double edged sword. Their lack of economic power and opportunity forced many of them to enter the profession of prostitution and bear the pain of selling their own bodies to manage their roles as providers and caretakers. For those who do not enter the profession of prostitution, the war economy is not friendly either. Some struggled hard to

obtain the required household needs by earning low wages and some even died of starvation, as they have to give up their foods to feed their own children. Besides the physical torture and other sufferings they tolerate, forced displacement and resettlement is equally harmful and threatening for women. As a woman's identity is strongly embedded in domestic space, disruption of social institutions and the threatening of domestic realms of social life makes her develop a sense of alienation and question her identity. War and its consequences are no doubt horrifying and destructive for every victim. But for women who occupy secondary social position, war becomes a system which sustains their subjugation and which multiplies their burden and their sufferings.

Besides the actual war and conflict that is fought, what is equally important is how the history of violence and conflict is interpreted and re-told. As observed by feminist scholars and theorists, representation of war, conflict and holocaust made by the male and female writers differs to a great extent. In her book *Women and the War Story*, a feminist scholar Miriam Cook, reveals the dichotomy of war representation rendered by the male and female writers. She writes:

Women and men are churning out novels, short stories and poetry. The women's descriptions of the war seemed to preclude the possibility of arranging the chaos into coherent narratives, whereas most men war stories lined up the opposition.....Responsibility in the women's writing entailed duties towards the others, duties that had to be fulfilled so that the war might stop. In the men's writing, responsibility adhered to a notion of rights: protagonist protected what was theirs against others. After disavowing chaos the men transformed it into the clarify of friend and foe. (16)

The distinct forms of war representation reflected by Miriam Cook shows how the dichotomy of the masculine and feminine, the protector and protected, the combatants and non-combatants, violence and peace structured the writings of both the male and female writers. Even though the war stories told by the writers are written under similar influence, their treatment of violence and conflict and the way they re-told it are shaped and influenced by gender and its binary function. The interpretation of war rendered by the privilege male who fought and won honour in the battle focuses on masculine duty, violence, victory, heroism and patriotism. On the other hand, the war stories told by the marginalised female whose subjection and domination are heightened by masculine warfare focuses on what is neglected by the male writers such as, the destructive nature of war, the inward sufferings and the unarticulated experiences of women, children and the non-combatants of war. Thus, the dominant gender paradigm becomes influential not only in structuring war and how it should be fought, but it is also influential in framing and shaping the representation of war, how it documented and interpreted.

The feminist framework of gender and war mentioned above is crucial in examining and understanding Mizo Insurgency, its nature and consequences. Gender as believed by feminists and war theorists is visible throughout multiple phenomena associated with war and conflict and that it is inappropriate to define, analyse and explain conflicts and its consequences without reference to gender and gender subordination. Carol Cohn gives a clear explanation on the centrality of gender in examining and in understanding of war:

All kinds of war are deeply gendered, in the preparation made for them, the kinds of masculinities and femininities required to support and conduct them, the effects they produce and the processes that attempt to recover from them. Understanding the specific ways in which particular violence is gendered will

not only help us better understand the experiences women and men have of that war; it will also enable us to have a more realistic and accurate understanding of the war itself. (36)

Mizo Insurgency as generally understood is an armed political conflict between the MNF and the Indian government, which started with the MNF declaration of independence and ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord. But a substantial revision of violence, sufferings and the experience of the marginalised Mizo women through the lens of gender can provide a new understanding of Mizo Insurgency. By taking gender dimension into account, the study will therefore examine Mizo Insurgency through the lens of gender. It will attempt to add a new dimension and a new understanding to the complicated trajectories of troubles and violence during Mizo Insurgency. It will also focus on women and their traumatic experience of Mizo Insurgency and highlight the multiple dimensions of the sufferings of women and the different ways in which violent conflict increases patriarchal control over them.

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## Chapter II

### Representation of Mizo Insurgency

War and its devastating impacts are always influential subjects which occupy the pages of many literary works written throughout the ages. In such literature, the authors, whether male or female rendered a realistic portrayal of war. But the way in which they represented or articulated the causes, sufferings and experiences of war were strongly determined by their gender roles. In her book *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, Lucy Noakes discloses how gender roles create distinctions in the male and female representation of war:

While many women wrote of memories of bombardment, loss, injury and waiting, relating these memories to the feelings and experiences of war....Many of the male correspondents appear to have 'relived' their own experiences of combat in their writing. (156)

Men who acted as warriors and fighters during war structured the literary representation of war they rendered so as to maintain male supremacy and to elevate masculine ideals and values. On the other hand, women who always appear as the passive victims of war structured the manner in which they represent war to articulate the destructive nature of war, its severe impact and the countless sufferings of women and the innocent civilians. Thus, to have an in-depth understanding of the nature and consequences of war portrayed in literature, an important question has to be taken into account. How does the literary representation of war shift when one considers the gender of the writer? Focusing on this question the study will examine select *Rambuai* fiction and it will attempt to provide a gendered analysis of Mizo Insurgency and the stereotypical forms of representation rendered by the male and female authors.

The selected fictions, *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015) written by Malsawmi Jacob, *Rinawmin* (1970) by James Dokhuma and *The Beloved Bullet* (1992) written by James Dokhuma and translated into English by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama record the most turbulent history of Mizoram. It contains the stories of the Mizo National Front (MNF) armed rebellion against the Indian army which started in 1966 and ends with the signing of Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986. Intertwined with love, passion, cultural norms and values, the selected fictions stand as the kaleidoscope painting, expressing different images of Mizo Insurgency and its impact. The trauma of village groupings officially known as 'Protected Progressive Village', rape, forced labour, burning of villages and running from one hideout to another in the deep jungles to escape the pursuing Indian army, runs throughout the texts. Even though the selected fictions have been written under similar influence, the paradigm of its treatment is quite different. The manner in which the subjects are represented, as well as the manner in which the writers structured the relationship of their writings and the subject they dealt with undoubtedly varies depending on the gender of the writers. Thus, examining through the lens of gender, one will be able to see the masculine and feminine quality of the literary representation rendered by authors of the selected fictions.

Throughout history, literary works produced by male no doubt contain masculine sensibility which according to Gilbert and Gubar signify the paternal authority of male in creating literary text. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their survey of the nineteenth-century woman's literature, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1984), suggest that Edward Said's etymological study of the word 'authority' is instructive for understanding the relationship between authority and literary reproduction. According to Said:

The unity or integrity of the text is maintained by a series of genealogical connections: author-text, beginning-middle-end, text-meaning, reader-interpretation and so on. Underneath all these is the imagery of succession, of paternity, or hierarchy. (Eagleton 91)

As mentioned in the statement, underneath all literary creation there is hierarchy and paternal authority which stands as a foundation for literary production. A foundation which shapes the structures and forms of a literary text. Male authored text therefore is not only the compilation of speech; rather it is the transfer of hierarchy, power and authority from the author into the text he creates. A power that is constructively backed up by culture and traditions, and which is acted out as a means of domination. Judging from this aspect, the selected fictions, *Rinawmin* by James Dokhuma and *The Beloved Bullet* translated by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama can be considered as the manifestation of male authoritative power. A power and hierarchy infused by the writer into his own literary creation to maintain the continuity of its course.

In *The Beloved Bullet* and *Rinawmin*, the circles of gender relations and its dominant features stands as an important foundation in framing the political issues and its manner of representation. Both the texts mirrored the Mizo male perception of insurgency which is deeply engaged with the male centred traditional ideals and values. It would not be wrong to say that Mizo society is basically patriarchal in nature. The societal tradition, norms and attitudes are inspired by the belief in “male supremacy and female inferiority which delineates the status of women” (Sinha 1). The stereotypical status of both the sexes in society creates an endless categorization. War, bravery and victory are the leading norms which elevate the status of the Mizo men in the pre-Christian era. Such sensibility remains a burning flame which guided the males in times of troubles and conflicts. By the time a great

political upheaval sweep over the land, the traditional norms of heroism and political conflict are strongly infused in the mind of the Mizo men. Therefore, the masculine quality of strength, valour and bravery becomes the means through which men prove their worth.

The infusion of traditional and political ideology in both the texts can be accepted as the author's continuous maintenance or transmission of patriarchal norms and values from verbal into written words. Just like other male authors who according to Gilbert and Gubar, "generated male characters over whom they would seem to have had similar rights of ownership" (12), James Dokhuma constructed the characters of Lt. Sanglura and Major Rozuala, to whom he instilled perfect ideals of masculinity in Mizo culture. At the same time they are also the embodiment of the strong MNF ideology which James Dokhuma himself embraced as a member of MNF underground movement. In *Rinawmin* the enormous love and passion between Major Rozuala and Ramhluni, as well as the sufferings of the community never exhausts the strong nationalist feelings of Major Rozuala. In the midst of troubles, sufferings and confusion he stands firm for his country and his loyalty is never subject to change. In the novel, when Ramhluni asks Major Rozuala to surrender himself to the Indian army for the sake of their love, he gives her a firm answer which proves his loyalty to his country:

*Kei chuan kan ram hi ka phatsan dawn lo. Rilru tlawm vanga vai laka intulût  
tûr phei chuan tu thlêmna mah hi ka tân zawm nahawm a awm ngai lo ang.  
Chu thilah kher zawng hmangaih êm êm che mah ila i thu ka âwih chuang lo  
ang. Ka thâwk feih feih theih chhûng chuan kan ram tân ka do dawn tih hria  
ang che. (Dokhuma 192)*

(I will never betray our land. I will never fall for the temptation which urges me to surrender to the “vais” (mainland Indians). In this case, though I love you so much I cannot obey your words. As long as I breathe, know that I am going to fight for our land)

In *The Beloved Bullet*, Lt. Sanglura and Ramliani who unexpectedly found love in times of trouble also face countless hurdles and pain. The growing passion between them could not be destroyed by the unfriendly environment which surrounds them. At the same time their love and relationship could not precede the call of the land which demands loyalty and sacrifice. The statement of Lt. Sanglura reveals his deep devotion to his land:

Our world today is such that unless we stand firm, it won't be possible to go ahead with anything. Even the cause of our independence will be achieved only through the firmest stand. But this dangerous mission of ours I believe, will someday bring happiness and fulfilment to us both. So don't worry, wait for me with a peaceful mind..... (Zama 170)

The statements of Lt. Sanglura and Major Rozuala disclose their loyalty to their land. They both remain faithful to the MNF underground movement and to the land they fought for. They are the “enemies of India, members of the underground, targets to be killed, criminals in the eyes of Mizo Union, followers of a deviant policy” (Zama 163). Though many patriotic youths who join the MNF underground movement betrayed their own land and surrendered themselves to the Indian army, Lt. Sanglura and Major Rozuala remain true and loyal to Mizoram. Keeping aside all their personal desires they went underground to protect their land and stand firm till their last breath. The service rendered by both the characters is undoubtedly respectable. They epitomize bravery, courage, nobility and selflessness, the qualities valued by the male privilege patriarchal system. In creating such characters James

Dokhuma creatively enlivened the spirit of masculinity and shifted his manner of representation in such a way to celebrate a culturally constructed masculine ideals and patriotism.

The novel *Rinawmin* and *The Beloved Bullet* record the traumatic experiences of the Mizo community wherein women were the worst victims. In his representation of insurgency James Dokhuma deals with the sufferings of women and the valuable services of the MNF insurgents in a different manner. In *The Beloved Bullet* Dokhuma expresses the silent yet respectable death of the MNF insurgents:

This grave deserves to be an object of sympathy. But it is not the only one that does. At the height of underground movement in Mizoram, life no longer had value. Many members of this movement were young man in their prime who at their dying moments in deep forests, had no one to mourn or bury them. If they did, it was only flies and maggots- and tall swaying grasses nearby. When it came to their burial, their comrades barely finds them in the midst of conflict to dig graves deep enough to hastily bury their unshrouded bodies before stealing off to hide again. Such was the fate of countless beloved sons of many families. (Zama 154)

Under the guise of sympathy a tone of respect and honour can be seen in the statement. By describing the sympathetic death of the martyrs James Dokhuma draws attention to the valuable deeds of the martyrs. At the same time he also uses it as a means to express the values of martyrdom or self-sacrificing act which has been honoured in Mizo culture for centuries. On the other hand, the silent sufferings and the valuable deeds of the female characters are never considered as equivalent to the admired masculine action. By looking at

how male and female experiences are described, one will not fail to see gender biases which create great differences among the characters.

Dokhuma's treatment of his female characters is no less different than the western male literary tradition which projected man as the 'self' and woman as the 'other'. The male conception of woman as the 'other' is well explained in Simone de Beauvoir's introduction of *The Second Sex*. She writes:

Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man. And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called 'the sex', meaning that male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other.  
(Beauvoir 6)

To be the 'other' is to be the non-subject, the non-person, the non-agent, in short the mere body. In his representation of insurgency James Dokhuma categorized his women characters as the 'other', who are alienated from the masculine world of warfare. At the same time they are continuously defined in relation to men. They are also identified as the pale reflections of the heroic male characters who fight for the land. Being the nurturer and the care-giver the female characters stand as the passive instruments of men who struggle for power over themselves. Though they themselves are never included in the masculine task, they are the helpmates of men who went out performing masculine task and are never separated from it. In *The Beloved Bullet* Ramliani, the female protagonist, is too an ardent supporter of the MNF underground movement. She is the daughter of a sincere MNF follower, and she is one

of the few MNF girl volunteers. But the patriarchal world in which she lives in destined her as the mere supporter of the MNF underground movement. Her death itself is closely linked to the heroic death of Lt. Sanglura, but her's is never praised or respected. Embracing the strict patriarchal code of behaviour, she is the 'other' to Lt. Sanglura and the masculine war he confronted. She is everything what he is not. She is passive, while he is active. Loneliness is the trait which signifies her, while war and bravery identifies him. With a tone of sympathy her death is lamented as the cause of a broken heart, loneliness and depression. Before she died she voiced out her sufferings:

The object I care about the most happens to be the very bullet that took the life of the one I hold above all others in this world. I wish this very bullet could take my life as well, were it possible. It will not happen in the same way as it did with U Lura, but I know that in its own way, this bullet will kill me too. (Zama 186)

Being a woman, Ramliani defines her own existence solely through her male counterpart, and without him her existence has no meaning. Being wholly the creation of male authority, she is unable to define herself and live as an independent being. Therefore, even though she does not suffer from the Indian army directly, she becomes the victim of the bullet that had killed her beloved.

Ramhluni the female character in *Rinawmin* is too the victim of insurgency. In the midst of turmoil and conflict, when people are raided with fear and confusion, Ramhluni silently remained faithful to her beloved. But all her hopes and her dreams of uniting with the one she love is shattered when Major Rozuala sacrificed his life for his land. Throughout the novel, the personal sufferings of Ramhluni are silenced and unarticulated. Her sufferings are

doubled by the clutches of the subverting patriarchal orders. She is separated from her beloved by the masculine war which every man has given their utmost priority. As an inferior being, she wholly submitted herself to her male counterpart who convinced her to remain faithful and wait for him. But her submission and obedience worsened her sufferings and it finally brought her to a state of loneliness and desperation.

In his representation of Mizo Insurgency, James Dokhuma never fails to describe the sympathetic sufferings of the female in times of insurgency. But the strong and undeniable gender influence no doubt shapes his manner of representation. He constructs his female characters in such a way to disclose the idealized notion of femininity in Mizo society which is nonetheless a sign of inferiority. While men who fight for their land are promoted to an elevated position, women who remain faithful and suffer for their cause are rewarded with a simple note of sympathy, which connotes the ‘otherness’ of women to masculine convention.

The literary representation of James Dokhuma as described strictly possesses the quality of a typical male literary tradition. His representation of insurgency takes the form of a patriarchal war narrative which is “traditionally recognized as war poetry or war novels by outmoded and conservative categorical distinctions, consigning the subject of wars and conflicts to the province of male or male writers.” (Chadwick 94). The split between male combatant and female non-combatant, between war and peace, the division that construct two absolutely separate and oppositional entities are used by him to upraise the idealized masculine notion of heroism and patriotism. Though the paradigmatic linkages on the other hand over-shadow other voices presented in his fictions, James Dokhuma presented a realistic portrayal of Mizo Insurgency which indeed can be labelled as masculine warfare.

Generally, war narratives stress men's experiences in battlefield and often create perception which is rather bias. In *Writing War: Fiction, Gender and Memory*, Lynne Hanley states in her introduction:

.....our fictions have power, they shape our memories of the past and they create memories of pasts we have never had, of experiences not even remotely like anything that has ever happened to us. And these narratives of exotic experiences may have the most power over us of all, because we can't challenge their authenticity with the evidence of our own senses. (5-6)

The statement of Lynne Hanley demonstrates the narrowness of male-writings and their vision of war. As wars and conflicts disturb the whole nation, women, children, non-combatants, and even the enemy have experiences worth telling and remembering as much as the story of any soldier. Therefore war narratives framed by women writers independently concentrate on the underprivileged subjects who had long been neglected by male writers and break the other side of silence which contain a completely different story.

The story of insurgency framed under the influence of Mizo *Rambuai* painted different pictures when the narrative is constructed from a female point of view. In *Rambuai* Literature, male authors generally create a passionate vision of nationalism, patriotism and warfare. Women characters in their fictions even occupy important, yet passive roles in supporting the MNF underground movement and its ideology. Besides what have been heard and presented, there are numbers of untold stories which lay dormant inside the wounded hearts of the female victims. Though some have emerge, some are too painful to express and they remain suppressed and silent. Mizo women writers focus on such issues and concentrated on the neglected side of the story. Among them, Lalremmawii (Mafeli) gives a

strong note of confusion and antagonism in her fictional work *Nghilh Har Kan Tuar* (2010). She strongly questions what many male authors idealized in their writings. She condemns the efforts of both the MNF and the Indian army that had wounded the land and the people. Focusing on the pain and sufferings endured by the people, she writes:

.....would they share in the grand feast of independence while to the mind's eye passes montage of vivid images of their village being raze to the ground? Would they raise up high the cup of joy while reflecting on what befell the spirits of their brothers, husbands and fathers who were killed? Would they dance in celebration of independence while tormented internally by memoirs of someone else brutally abusing their bodies solely for pleasure? That would indeed be a very difficult. (Vanchiau 65)

Lalsangzuali Sailo, Mizo poetess, song writer and singer also put a straightforward comment on the act of killing during Mizo *Rambuai*. One of her *Rambuai* song *Tualthah Pawizia* (1983) is a condemnation of the act of killing performed by the MNF insurgents and the Indian army. She writes:

Nang tualthattu, kimte'n han dawn ve te  
 I hmelma chu ihrai duh laichin la,  
 A chun leh zua thinlai phang tur dawin,  
 Hlei len ai chuan nemte'n i chawi ngei ang.  
 (Consider this with care, you murderer,  
 Picture your adversary as your own child  
 Sharing the anguish his parents would feel  
 You'd surely cuddle rather than hurt him.) (Vanchiau 66)

Through this poem the poetess questions the notion of killing which has been accepted as the sign of “commitment for the cause of the land or the country” (Vanchiau 67). She finds it hard to understand the meaningless effort of violence in the name of fighting independence. Therefore, she names the freedom fighters who spill the innocent blood as murderers, who take away the joy and hope of many parents.

Among few women’s writing generated under the influence of *Rambuai* in Mizoram, *Zorami: A Redemption Song* written by Malsawmi Jacob occupies a central position in the genre of *Rambuai* fiction and Mizo writing in English as well. The significance of the text lies in its representation of insurgency which throws a new light on the historical event of *Rambuai* in Mizoram. The book tells the story of a young woman and the unending influence of the dreadful political unrest in her life. Interweaving with the past and present, the novel paints the memories of the massive air attack of Aizawl (the capital of Mizoram) carried out by the Government of India, destruction of peace for the sake of independence and the spilling of innocent blood. At the same time it also deals with the problematic aftermath of armed conflict in the life of the victims whose fear and anger can never heal with the passing of time.

Applying the same strategy utilized by Lalremmawii (Mafeli) and Lalsangzuali Sailo, Malsawmi Jacob breaks away from the male literary tradition which honours and respects the heroic deeds of the Mizo patriots. Distancing herself from the rigid mode of representation rendered by male writers, she makes a judgmental expression of masculine warfare, its notions and values. In the book, the story of Nikhuma is narrated by Zorami the female protagonist. This narration is constructed as a means to question the influencing act of heroism and patriotism in times of insurgency. Nikhuma as reflected is the true patriot who gave up his profession of teaching to pursue his dream of a self governing and independent

Mizoram. His passion for independence urged him to leave his wife and children and went underground for the cause of Mizoram. While he was away his house was burnt down and his wife and children were held captives by the Indian army. Being a true patriot, rather than returning to his family, he chose to fight on for the cause of Mizoram. When he himself was arrested, the mental and physical pain he endured never for once convinced him to betray his country. Rather, he reminded himself by saying, “Some time or other *Zangkhua a la Bungbung*, the Great Bear will raise his buttocks” (Jacob 93). Nikhuma comforted himself believing that circumstances will change someday. Mizoram will one day gain independence, and all their efforts will not be in vein.

Narrating the story of Nikhuma, Malsawmi Jacob raised an ethical questions relating to war and its consequences. As expressed in the novel, “Nikhuma’s fate did change, like that of his novel’s hero.....But what about the poor, innocent victims! Their lives turned out to be meaningless.” (Jacob 94). For Nikhuma, who gave up and give in everything he had for the love of his country, the Great bear did turn over. Circumstances changed and Mizoram did become a self-governing state. But what about the wife and children of Nikhuma? What about the wife of Nikhuma who silenced her inward disapproval of her husband’s passion which drove him out of home when they needed him the most. Is their life less valuable than the dream of greater Mizoram? Focusing on such issues Malsawmi Jacob questions the notion of masculine warfare and the male participants who prioritize and accept war with all its means and consequences.

War kills, whether the outcome is victory or defeat. That is why argument about war is so intense. In *But Was It Just: Reflection on the Morality of the Persian Gulf War*, Jean Bethke Elshtain gives a profound illustration of war by stating, “At bottom, to be sure, war

remains the same: a lethal contest, fed by hatred, in which physical violation is unleashed in all its brutality; a duel that aims at “crushing” or “destroying” the enemy” (Decosse 108).

Whatever the cause and reason may be, war destroys and it unleashes the brutal instinct which lurks in every human beings. For this reason killing under the cloak of war has usually been condemned and cannot be accepted judging from a moral point of view. In her novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* Malsawmi Jacob reflects the masculine act of killing which is performed in times of insurgency. She condemns the intense patriotic feeling which lures man to neglect the values of life. In Chapter 21 named “Deserter”, the story of a young youth who is caught in the dilemma of, to kill or not to kill is narrated. Just like every combatant he enters the world of violence where life has lesser meaning than death. Every patriot is ready to sacrifice their life rather than living life as a coward or doing nothing for the country. The young youth, named Lalawmpuia had been a nationalist from a very young age. When the MNF started the independent movement, he enrolled himself, and was ready to fight the Indian army. But he never imagined fighting his own people. When one of his comrades Khama was suspected of informing on the MNF, he was ordered to kill Khama. The word ‘*tuai*’, a disdainful Mizo word for classifying man who does not possess masculine quality has been used by Major T to praise the masculine action of killing. By subtly referring him as ‘*tuai*’ Major T challenged him to kill his comrade. Rejecting to kill his comrade, he ran away from the camp. In exile, he expressed a powerful note which questions the assumed rightful action of killings promoted by patriotism:

Is my reluctance to kill due to cowardice?.... No. I’m ready to give my life for a worthy cause? I cannot see the worth of killing my uncle, in cold blood. Shoot an unsuspecting man sitting peacefully in his house from behind! Craven! I enlisted in the MNF to fight for freedom of my people, not to

commit treacherous murders. And what is the connection between these murders and Mizoram independence? None! (Jacob 147)

He continues:

We dreamt of a free Mizoram where people will live in peace. But were falling into worse and worse bondage! More and more bloodshed. Mizo's killing Mizo's. Young patriots ordered to murder one's friends and relatives. At this rate, even if independence were achieved, would it be worth it? Would peace ever come back (Jacob 148).

Lalawmpuia himself is not the deserter of patriotism or nationalism, rather he is the deserter of the misguided notion of patriotism which leads the patriots to justify their action of killings without genuine purpose. Through his statement, Malsawmi Jacob voices out the overlapping recognition of the complexity hiding behind the idealized patriotic altruism. By bringing out the moral complexities of warfare, she expresses her condemnation of the meaningless killings performed by the MNF insurgents. Killing and wounding the enemy becomes the work of the patriots in times of insurgency. They are in the situation of kill or be killed. But taking away life easily and meaninglessly for the cause of Mizoram is not justifiable. Even if independence is achieved, the attained freedom will never be able to mend the lost of valuable lives. Therefore, she openly condemns the unexpected behaviour of the patriots believing that patriotism does not offer any distinctive moral reason for killings in pursuit of patriotic goals.

“A woman and her book are identical” (Shattock 8), Edgar Allan Poe framed this statement when reading an early collection of poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Poe's statements have had a great relevance in examining women's text. Women and their text are

undoubtedly identical as women write of what they knew, and what they knew best was themselves. Similarly, in *The Laugh of the Medusa* Helen Cixous rightly stated:

By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. (Cixous 880)

Only after she breaks out the snare of silence and writes about herself, a woman will be heard. By identifying herself through her own language, and representing herself, she will be able to articulate her story which has been silenced and neglected.

Writing is equally important for Mizo women whose inner voice has been muted for so long. Writing paves way for articulating their deep anger, fear and depression which they themselves suppressed under the direction of patriarchal system. Through writings they create their own story and make their silenced sufferings audible. Malsawmi Jacob is one of those women writers who speaks for and about women. In her novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* she let loose the suppressed innermost feelings of Mizo women and their misery in times of troubles. She does not deal with insurgency in same the way as male writers did. But she touches on what is neglected by the male writers. Such as- the emotional, the concrete, the particular, the human bodies and their vulnerability, human lives and their subjectivity. All of which are marked as feminine in the binary dichotomies of gender discourse. Like male writers she does touch on the realistic story of Mizo *Rambuai* and the respected stories of the freedom fighters. But she shifts her manner of representation to reveal the miserable life of women which is no less important than the stories of the patriots.

It is a known fact that war and armed conflict kill and destroy. On the other hand survival in times of war is what every victim dreamt of. But for Mizo women whose life has been wholly devoted to their male counterpart, survival without men is as painful as death. Malsawmi Jacob in her book reflects the pathetic life of a widow whose husband met his end while he went underground for the cause of Mizoram. Through the story of Kimi's mother she expresses the nightmares of survival in times of trouble when the burden of women was twice doubled. As narrated in Chapter 8 of the book, Kimi's mother was a devoted wife and a mother. Her husband was an officer in the Mizo army. Though his children were still young and her wife was not in good health he still opted to join the underground forces. Like his fellow patriots he left his family and fight for his motherland. Unfortunately he was killed by the Indian army. But for Kimi's mother the situation they were in did not permit her to dwell on her grief and mourn for her husband. She had to feed her children and took care of the family without her husband. But for a typical housewife who worked day and night for her family, it was difficult to find a job and earn a living. Therefore she worked in the farm alone, and sometimes with the help of some neighbours. But, misfortune befell on her and she had to give up working in a farm due to her ill-health. As a devoted mother, for her children she resolved to involve in the business of brewing rice beer for selling. In the novel it was written, "Reluctantly, Kimi's mother gave in. Better than letting her children starve, she thought" (Jacob 130). Though her husband died earning a good name, she strove hard to survive and endure the pain of living. Rather than letting her children starve she resolved to brew rice beer in a place where drinking liquor or even brewing was considered as a sinful act. Such was the plight of a widow who had nothing to fall back on. She struggled to survive, but survival itself became a nightmare for her.

While war and conflict inflicts suffering on everyone, women are disproportionately affected by forced displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructures, rights violations and by sexual and gender-based violence. Among such experiences sexual violence is the worst. In her book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* Susan Brownmiller writes:

.....war provides men with the perfect psychologic backdrop to give vent to their contempt for women. The very maleness of the military..... confirms for men what they long suspect, that women are peripheral, irrelevant to the world that counts, passive spectators to the action in the centering. (14)

The statement given by Brownmiller is relevant in examining the case of Mizo women who are the victims of sexual violence. When the Government of India sent military forces to counter the MNF movement in Mizoram, the innocent civilians, especially women endured a great deal of sufferings from the military men. For women, young and old, married or unmarried, their being a woman and their docility make them an easy prey to the sexual urges of the military men. In *Zorami*, Malsawmi Jacob reflects the unjustifiable action of sexual assault performed by the Indian army which is a sign of their contempt for Mizo women. A vivid picture of the army men's attempt to rape a pregnant woman is described, "They began to assault her, removing her clothes with free hands, the other hands still holding the guns" (Jacob 105). Another incident of rape is also described:

Major Kholi, who led the party, commanded his men to arrest the two women. They were dragged away, forced to leave the baby alone in the house. They took them to their barrack. The Major locked Mawii in his room and ordered his subordinates to take Rami away. The women were released

the next morning. The sisters held hands crying, and somehow inched back home. They found the baby unconscious. He died a few days later. (Jacob 131)

The rape incidents as she reflected are the sign of male excessive control and domination over women. Rape is a pattern of responses made by men to establish their mastery *quo male* over a woman *quo female*. It confirms that “women are for men: to be used, dominated and treated as objects” (Jackson 135). By painting a vivid picture of sexual violation, Malsawmi Jacob highlights the undeserved misfortune of Mizo women, who in times of turmoil and conflict endlessly bear the burden of being a woman.

The strategy employed by Malsawmi Jacob in her representation of insurgency is no less different than what Bell Hooks termed as ‘talking back’. According to Bell Hooks the term talking back denotes the ‘liberated voice’, a gesture of defiance that heals, making new life and new growth possible. She writes, “It is that act of speech, of talking back, that is no mere gesture of empty words that is the expression of our movement from object to subject-the liberated voice” (Hooks 9).

By writing the same subjects and issues which many male writers delve into with authority and familiarization, Malsawmi Jacob performs the act of ‘talking back’ and claims the authority for women to tell their own stories. Showing gesture of defiance, she re-interprets the history of Mizoram, but focuses on the marginalized aspects and concentrate on what is usually left out as feminine subjects. Giving liberation to the silenced and suppressed voice of women victims she unveils the fact that women in times of armed conflict have their own stories which is worth telling and worth studying just as the influencing heroic stories of men.

The study of insurgency and its manner of representation highlights the complexity and instability of the meaning inherent in insurgency as a literary subject. The attitudes of the authors towards the subject they represent and the meaning they create in it varies depending on their gender as social beings. In his novels, James Dokhuma categorizes insurgency as a masculine warfare and shapes his interpretation so as to maintain patriarchal authority and upraised masculine ideology. In opposition, Malsawmi Jacob expresses the destructive nature of armed conflict and used it as a means to voice out the inward sufferings of women. The two distinct forms of insurgency presented by both the male and female authors demonstrate the significance of gender in influencing the creation and reception of a literary text. At the same time it also reveals the importance of gender in structuring and in shaping the manner in which insurgency is represented and narrativized.

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### Chapter III

#### Women and the Trauma of Insurgency

The dominant image of women in the iconography of armed conflict is that of an eternal victim, passive and without agency, an outsider to the battlefield. Though women do not take up arms, and perhaps many feel alienated from the mechanism of war, its apparent irrationality and its destructive consequences no doubt make them the most vulnerable victims. The purpose of the study in this chapter is to look into the painful and distressing fate of women in a situation of conflict. This chapter will specifically focus on the traumatic experience of women narrated in select *Rambuai* fiction. Feminist theoretical paradigm will be used to study the multiple dimensions of women sufferings and how they battle with misogyny fostered in conflict. The thematically centred trauma and its nature will also be studied to disclose the importance of gender ideology in influencing the way in which trauma is internalized and processed.

‘Gender’ and ‘Trauma’ are relevant issues relatively studied, elaborated and intertwined in various theories and disciplines, to a various extent. As believed by many theorists, researchers and therapists, “an examination of the outcomes of war specific to gender provides an opportunity to refine understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of trauma in situations of war and organised violence and the multifaceted psycho-social outcomes” (Sideris 714). Trauma generally refers to the psychological or physical wound or injury that alters the life of a person from normal to a state of painfully troubled existence. Such wounds or injuries as observed are shaped by the internalized gender norms and ideology. In her examination of the nature of trauma Rachael Kimerling observed:

Gender is the major factor in the type of trauma exposure experienced by the individual, the social relationship that mediate the impact of exposure,

and the system of meaning into which the traumatic event is encoded.....However, awareness and consideration of gender issues in research and service delivery can enhance our understanding of this disorder and our abilities to help traumatized individuals. (xi)

In the introduction of *Different Horrors, Same Hell: Gender and the Holocaust*, Myrna Goldenberg and Amy H. Shapiro states:

How can gender be ignored in a culture that hinged on labels such as blood and race? .....Gender analysis is indispensable in any effort to understand Nazi constructions of 'race' and 'blood' because system of gender are so central to how people organise and give meaning to their world. (11)

In the statement of Kimerling, Goldenberg and Saphiro, what should be noted is, within a dominant discourse of male domination and female subordination, gender ideology frames the divergent experiences of what it means to be a man or woman. Because of their supposed mental strength and bravery men were usually sent off to battle, and because of their perceived weakness and objectification women were targeted for sexual violence. Thus, Gender can be considered as responsible in positioning individuals as vulnerable to certain kinds of trauma, and in influencing what kinds of experiences can be deemed traumatic.

The interconnection between trauma and gender system is artistically disclosed in the selected fiction. Each text unfold the trauma and terror of insurgency shaped by the dominant gender system prevalent in every human society. The portrayal of dysfunctional Mizo society during the years of troubles and conflicts uncloak the burden silently carried by Mizo women. This is the burden they carry as women and the burden they carry as victims of Mizo Insurgency. During war and conflict, women of all tribes and colours have the same experience. Death and injury, sexual assault, bereavement and separation become common

experiences of women shared across social divides. Similar to women in any other conflict zone, women in Mizoram face countless atrocities. Their sufferings are multiplied to a large extent with the rise of political turmoil during 1960's. When one looks into the traumatic historical events of Mizoram during this period, one will find the unbalanced social relations of men and women in the midst of massive sufferings and disorder. The troubles of the land itself exacerbate the inequalities that are deeply rooted in Mizo society and heightened it to varying degrees. For Mizo women, physical violence, rape and other forms of torture become the normal features of their lot. Their helplessness during an assault on their unwilling body and the mindless annihilation of their human personality remains a trauma rarely forgotten. The traumatic history of Mizo women makes their appearance in select *Rambuai* fiction under different guises. The stories of women told in each text testify the complexity and multiplicity of women's sufferings in times of conflict. At the same time it also navigates the importance of gender ideology in shaping the way in which trauma is internalized and most importantly how gender roles position subjects as victims of trauma.

Sexual assault and its ensuing trauma is the most terrifying experience which haunts the life of women around the globe. The traumatic sexual assault carried out in situations of conflict and war manifests the vulnerability of women's bodies. Throughout the ages, the existing gender binary in society stereotypes the gender male as protector and the female as the nurturer with the objectification of the female as a property and commodity. As women are supposedly owned by men, during war and violent political upheavals, violation of women is used by the military as a punitive and intimidating weapon to and challenge violate male possession, and as a "humiliation rite for men on the other side who cannot protect their own women" (328 Williams and Macedo) .

In accordance to feminist analysis of rape, whether it is a political weapon or the outcome of personal desire, rape is a mechanism for maintaining male control and

domination. In her studies of rape in wartime, the American feminist Susan Brownmiller rightly stated, “His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood” (16). Rape therefore becomes not only a male prerogative, but a man’s basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will. By going against the will of a woman and by penetrating her forcefully, a man proves his masculine strength, his superiority as well as the inferiority of woman.

Written from a woman’s perspective, the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015) takes as its focus women and their traumatic experience of sexual assault. The novel gives a realistic portrayal of horrendous rape carried out among female civilians during Mizo Insurgency. The protagonist Zorami herself stands as a reflection of women who are subjected to rape. For her memories become a foe which enlivens the wounds and pain she can never reconcile with. As narrated in the novel, Zorami sits alone on the sofa, drawing up her feet, head on her knees. Soon then her memories started resurfacing and it begins to haunt her:

Broken? She was lacerated, ripped apart. A fiend in human body did it in revolving lust. When the thirteen year old did not come back from the *tuikhur* where she had gone to fetch water, her worried mother took a couple of neighbours with her and went in search of her daughter. They found her unconscious, her dress torn and soaked with urine and blood, in the bushes. In the hospital, after she regained consciousness, a nurse stitched her up. Without anaesthesia. How she screamed! The needle pierced her again and again. Stinging pain upon pain. (Jacob 197)

The returning memories of Zorami not only tell the painful past of hers, it also bring back the deeply buried traumatic past of many Mizo women. One of the female characters, Dinmawii’s

misfortune and the price she paid for the strong passion she nurtured for the love of her lover is the terror which can make the heart of every women pound at a faster rate. When Dinmawii saw her lover shot dead on the ground, with a loud scream she ran to him. But the three army men came forward, “one lifted her up with taunting laughter...They dragged away Dinmawii and loaded her into their truck” (Jacob 138). The attempted rape of a pregnant woman named Siami is no less traumatic than the actual rape. The long lasting fear and insecurity started haunting her life when she encounters the brutal army men. With no consent for a pregnant woman, “they began to assault her, removing her clothes with their free hands, the other still holding the guns.....An army officer appeared on the scene and commanded his men to leave, and the pregnant was saved. But fear never left her” (Jacob 105)

The uncensored description of female bodies, bruised, damaged and tortured by army men in the novel echoes the vulnerability of female bodies. Their wounded bodies are the sign of male conquest over the female body and the proof of male superiority. On the other hand the brutal actions of army men as reflected in the novel are a purposeful act of control and an extreme expression of patriarchal drive towards masculine domination over women. Rape has been used by them as a ritual of degradation, a tactic of demoralization and a way of instilling terror. As women characters are in the possession of men, the army men violate their bodies brutally to challenge masculine possession in Mizo community and to prove their manliness as well. For Zorami and the other female characters, age, sex and status, whether young, old, virgin or pregnant, do not matter. Their imposed gender identity and their inferiority identify their bodies as violable and exposed them to what is deemed to be the most traumatic experience for women. Their gendered bodies which are traditionally accepted as the property of man became the battleground where man fights over for power and control.

The brutalizing effects of armed conflict do not disappear with the end of conflict. For women who are the victim of rape, the nightmare of survival just begin with the end of

the conflict. Even though physical wounds heal with the passing of time, the repetitive nature of trauma itself enlivens the unwanted past and keep their present in a traumatic state. According to trauma theorists, the repressed trauma which is seemingly forgotten were re-experienced in the form of repeated and overpowering symptoms such as nightmares, flashback, convulsion or sleep walking, as trauma has a repetitive compulsion. Cathy Caruth gives relevant explanation in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* by stating:

In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. (11)

The delayed response of trauma and the repetition of fear and shock are evident in Zorami's psychic response to her past trauma in Malsawmi Jacob's novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song*. The returning traumatic past of the protagonist Zorami and the fragmented yet haunted nightmares of hers demonstrate how experience of trauma repeat itself, unexpectedly and unremittingly through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his or her very will. As narrated in the novel, after years of estrangement Zorami returns to her hometown, a place she left as a young girl shuddered and wounded. As soon as she enters the place the old ghost, the ghost of her traumatic past started haunting her. When she and her brother unknowingly went to the water point to fetch some water, the sense of fear, shock and terror she once had when she was brutally raped by an army man started resurfacing and it sends shivers down her spine:

It was before sunrise, the water point surrounded by trees and located at a lower level on the hillside, was still in twilight. All was quite except for the sound of insects and flowing water. A feeling of horror crawled up Zorami's

spine, ending in a sharp, stabbing pain on the top of her head. She sat down on a stone, clutching her hands with both hands. (Jacob 211).

During her childhood, Zorami was raped by an army man when she went to 'tuikhur', a water point, to fetch some water. Fetching water therefore, becomes the unconscious or accidental action which unintentionally enlivens her past. And in repeating her action Zorami not only re-experiences the pain she endured as a little girl, but as a young woman she for the first time face her traumatic past which reminds her of her helplessness and vulnerability as a female being. Her metaphorical dreams of the 'big black snake' which undid her, denotes the emotional and physical injury caused to her by the male gender. The black snake which, according to Freudian analysis of dream stands as the 'phallic symbol' can be interpreted as the male energy. When Zorami cries out in terror, thinking how "the black snake undid her" (Jacob 123), she acted out the fear inflicted to her when she was just a young girl, a fear forcefully inflicted by male to maintain his power and control over her.

Zorami's delayed response to her past trauma on the other hand, navigates her psychical dissociation from the traumatic events she experienced, which in the words of Cathy Caruth can be called as 'unclaimed experience', meaning the traumatic experience which an individual failed to grasp and understand at the time of its occurrence. In her examination of trauma, Cathy Caruth states, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance\_ return to haunt the survivor later on"(4).

The statement of Cathy Caruth makes clear that the pain of a particular event cannot be fully comprehended at the moment of its occurrence, as the pain is too severe and overwhelming for a person. Similarly, for Zorami the trauma she encountered as a little girl was so severe, so incomprehensible, and so utterly unbelievable that she fails to have full

comprehension of the event. But later, when memories of the past haunted her, she is exposed to the true meaning of her traumatic past, that ‘the black snake undid her’. She comes to learn that her dignity, the only thing worth valuing she possess as a female has been ripped off violently, and that her body has been conquered by the destructive action of a man. Trauma and its repetitive compulsion subjected her to re-experience her past trauma which is predominantly shaped by the dominating gender system.

In the aftermath of conflict and insurgency, a survivor of rape continuously suffers from endless categorisation and rejection generated under patriarchy, that demands women to possess sexual purity. In her explanation of rape, Adrienne Rich, a revolutionary poet and a feminist states, “it is not rape of the body alone but, rape of the mind as well, as it is the crime when the victim faces rejection and not the oppressor” (Tandon 65). Social stigma related to loss of virginity and negative societal attitude towards the victim shapes the way female raped victims internalize their traumatic experience and make the meaning out of it. The socially constructed virtue of a woman which is associated with purity, chastity and fidelity influenced the victims to develop a fear of rejection, insecurity, shame, low self-esteem and depression.

The pathetic life of a rape victim in the aftermath of Mizo Insurgency is well reflected in the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song*. Living in a society where chastity and purity has strong bearing on a woman’s worth, the protagonist Zorami faces reintegration difficulties and social stigma related to her abuse. The ending of the horrifying Mizo Insurgency does not put an end to her sufferings; rather it subjected her to further sufferings. Being a woman strictly bounded by patriarchal norms, she has the fear of being rejected. The word ‘damaged’ is used to identify her. Her father called her a ‘damaged girl’ who is too good for a young and handsome bachelor like Sanga, one of her suitor. The attitude of Zorami’s father is representative of the rigid patriarchal ideology which valued female

chastity and stigmatized the loss of chastity. The deeply ingrained patriarchal ideology makes Zorami accept herself as a 'ruined woman'. She confesses to Sanga, saying "I'm a ruined woman ....not fit for you" (Jacob 63). Being a ruined woman she is forced to accept herself as a damaged property, unfit for marriage, and hence to be rejected. Such is the plight of women who face rejection and humiliation for the loss of their chastity, which is equally painful and traumatic as their experience of sexual violation.

Forced migration, involving displacement and resettlement is one of the most psychologically devastating consequences of Insurgency and armed conflict encountered by women. Though it uprooted the entire communities from their homes and lands, the impact of sudden displacement and resettlement can be further traumatic for women because of the already prevalent gender disparities persisting in society. The discernible depiction of village groupings in the selected fiction presented the differential impact of violent uprooting and forced migration among the Mizo communities. Village grouping which is officially known as 'Protected and Progressive Village' or PPV is carried out by the Indian army during the Insurgency period of Mizoram, to facilitate effective military operation against the MNF underground movement. Under this practice, inhabitants of different villages in Mizoram were forcibly grouped into 18 groups, and were ordered to move out of their homes and lands with whatever property they could carry to the centres. All the grains, fowls and pigs that could not be carried were burned along with their houses so as to keep food and shelter out of the reach of the MNF insurgents. There was absolute confusion everywhere. Women were wailing and shouting and cursing. Children were frightened. Young boys and girls held hands and looked at their burning villages with a stupefied expression on their faces. Such dark times were vividly expressed in the translated works of Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama, *The Beloved Bullet* (1992):

Tonight, the village elders who had been reared and nurtured by spring waters of Hualtu, whose feelings of nostalgia and tenderness could be roused only by their own village and who now were about to be driven out of their homes by alien men, wept and mourned aloud, unable to accept and understand this trauma. Anyone who was slow or did not pack fast enough, was bullied and hurried by the soldiers. Some carried their excess goods and hid them on the outskirts of the village. Happiness had left each and every face. No one looked forward to the migration, yet no one dared to show it. (Zama 171)

In their portrayal of the military enforced village groupings, the authors of select *Rambuai* fiction do not fail to touch upon the miserable life of the subjugated female members of Mizo communities. The disruption of social institutions and domestic sphere resulted by village groupings do not weaken their traditionally destined roles. Standing in difficult position they still have to take up their roles of nurturer and caretaker. Being women, who, according to Simone de Beauvoir are “doomed to the continuation of species and the care of home” (Beauvoir 480) they have to cope not only with their personal trauma and their problem, but also with having to support their families economically and emotionally.

The nameless woman, who is addressed as Rina’s mother in the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song*, disclosed the miseries of Mizo women who bear the burden of motherhood in a poverty stricken grouping centre. For a mother, life becomes harder with the additional problems of resettling in a new grouping centre where no one was allowed to go out without permission. As getting permission from the army authority was not easy, it was hardly possible for them to work in their farms. This in turn brings starvation. The army did give them food at first, but soon the supply ran dry, and many died of hunger and disease. As there was no proper supply of food, many children hang around the army camp waiting for the army men to give them leftovers from the kitchen. Among them was Rina, the son of the

nameless woman. Whenever the army men gave them their leftovers, he ran home eagerly offering what he had to her mother. But never would she “take more than a bite. She died before her son turned nine” (Jacob 116)

The action of Rina’s mother is no doubt the outcome of the unbounded motherly love, care and affection. But her action also reveals how painful it is to be a mother when faced with the prospects of violence and conflicts. The challenges of carrying out her traditional roles as well as the added responsibility of ensuring the survival of her own son which solely rested in her hands doubled the sufferings she bears for the cause of forced uprooting. The staggering burden of motherhood, which she is taught to accept as a ‘marvellous privilege’ and the pathetic living condition in grouping centres leaves her no choice except to wilfully give up her life for her son.

Experience of forced evacuation from home and resettlement also imposed severe psychological trauma among Mizo women. As women’s identity is strongly embedded in domestic space, disruption of social institutions and the threatening of domestic realms of social life make them develop a sense of alienation. Constant dislocation and relocation caught them in the ‘in between’ state or space which deny them a definite identity and a definite home. In an interview, Salman Rushdie, a postcolonial writer explains the experience of being ‘in between’ two cultures as a migrant by stating:

I don’t think migration, the process of being uprooted necessarily leads to rootlessness. What it can lead to is a kind of multiple rooting. It’s not the traditional identity crisis of not knowing where you’ve come from. The problem is that you come from too many places. The problems are of excess rather than of absence. (Frank 139)

The situation of the displaced Mizo woman as reflected in the novella *The Beloved Bullet*, can best be explained in relation to Rushdie’s explanation of being caught in the ‘in

between'. Her problem of home and identity is what Rushdie observed as the 'problem of excess rather than of absence'. It does not stem from the idea of not knowing where she has come from or an absence of belonging, but of belonging to too many places or an excess of belonging. As narrated in the text, Ramliani and the whole community of Hualtu are forcefully regrouped in a new grouping centre at Baktawng Village. After five years when the political situation in Mizoram improves, people at grouping centres are allowed to resettle back in their old villages. But, re-establishing themselves in their old villages again only serves to worsen Ramliani's misery further. When they are forcefully relocated in a grouping centre she yearns to go back to her ancestral village Hualtu and long for it. But when they resettle back in their ancestral village again, her sense of longing and nostalgia shifts toward the village Baktawng which they once adopted as their home:

Ramliani look around, loneliness and nostalgia engulfing her. Downhill in the distance, she could see Baktawng, the village she had adopted as her own for five years... When she had been there, she had missed her ancestral Hualtu. Now her longing for Baktawng flooded her. Standing there amidst the sun grass of Rawkawn, she sang softly, with tears tickling down her face.  
(Zama 156)

In her conversation with her friend Chalkimi, Ramliani discloses her sense of alienation by stating:

I like it well enough, having no other place I would rather to go. But it no longer feels like what it did before we left Baktawng. I was really eager then, thinking I would get heal in time, but instead things seem to have got worse after my return. No place really gives me joy anymore. (Zama 158)

The village which she presently long for fails to provide her feelings of emotional attachment and bonding she once had with her ancestral village. On the other hand, the village Hualtu

which she regarded as her home neither provides her a sense of self and belonging which she had prior to the forced migration, rather it gives her a sense of alienation. As home, place or locale to which one belongs is important in shaping one's identity, belonging to two places refrain Ramliani from developing definite identity and definite sense of belonging to a particular place. In her present state she does not feel like belonging to the host society, or even more to the original society. At the same time she belongs to both. Thus, the horrendous village grouping forced her to live in the world of 'in between' where it is impossible to reconcile with the two warring identities given by the village of Hualtu and Baktawng. Her fractured existence which is the outcome of her rootedness to different places in turn creates a deep seated psychological stress and trauma which leaves her in a pathetic condition. For women like Ramliani, whose identification are solely marked by their domestic surroundings forced displacement and resettlement shattered their own sense of place and belonging, which indeed is a strong marker of one's own identity.

In examining women and the trauma of insurgency, what cannot be left out is how women deal with their trauma and how they process with the overwhelming experience. The responses to traumatic events and crisis are normal responses to abnormal circumstances. It is impossible to predict whether the trauma survivor will cope well or become psychologically impaired. But, what is predictable is that an individual response will likely be influenced by culture-determined gender roles. In *Trauma and Migration: Cultural factors in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Traumatized Immigrants*, Meryam Schouler-Ocak writes:

Culture influences the individual and collective experience of trauma at many levels: the perception and interpretation of the events as threatening or traumatic; modes of expressing and explaining distress; coping responses and adaptation; patterns of help-seeking and treatment response. Most importantly, culture gives meaning to the traumatic events itself, allowing

individuals, families and communities to make sense of violence and adversity in ways that may moderate or amplify their impact. (113)

Thus, gender relations mediated in every culture can be considered as influential not only in positioning an individual to certain kinds of trauma, but also in determining how survivors respond to their trauma.

The story of women told in the selected fiction provides relevant interpretation concerning with this assumption. How women characters deal with their trauma is more or less influenced by the culturally salient dichotomies of femininity and masculinity. Women characters who are the victims and survivors of Insurgency adapted silence as a strategy to cope with their trauma. Though silence is the greatest barrier to recovery, they choose silence which is an expected response for women in Mizo culture. Femininity in Mizo patriarchal culture is strongly associated with silence and passivity, while masculinity is credited with speech, power and authority. Whenever serious discussion is held a woman's word is considered illogical and women are not encouraged to participate in the discussion. The old sayings in Mizo culture, “ ‘*hmeichhe thu thu ni suh, chakai sa sa ni suh*’ ” (Just as the meat of a crab is no meat, so the word of a woman is no word) and the term ‘*hmeichhe thudawn*’ (woman's wishful thinking)” (Gill 145), are the revealing evidence which shows how Mizo women are not seen as independent beings having rational thinking to voice out. Similar to women in other patriarchal culture, they are forced to remain silent, which according to African feminist Pauline Uwakwe is, “a patriarchal weapon of control used by the dominant male structure to subordinate and muted female structure.” (Ifechelobi 22)

The novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* demonstrates how women survivors of rape internalized silence as a means to deal with their trauma. The protagonist Zorami silences her traumatic past throughout the novel. How she copes with her trauma is shaped by patriarchy which taught her to be silent, passive and ashamed. Zorami was once an active and a happy

young girl. She even sang in front of her teacher and classmate happily without any hesitation. But in the eyes of patriarchy her behaviour resembles immodesty, while modesty for female is to be timid, shy and inactive. Her mother's statement, "Girls shouldn't do such things or talk too much" (Jacob 43) is reflexive of the voicelessness of women in patriarchal society. Being part of such society Zorami "learns to be ashamed and to keep quiet. So, she did not tell anyone about the bully. Neither did she tell about the dirty man with the dirty touch". (Jacob 43) As expected by society, she remains silent and muted her pain and agony. Rather than disclosing her traumatic experience of sexual violence which will bring shame to herself and her family, she choose to bear the pain in silence, as silence is the only strategy available to deal with her trauma.

In the moving love story, *The Beloved Bullet* (1992) and *Rinawmin* (1970), the act of silence is reflected as self-selected. Women characters opted silence, as speechlessness is traditionally seen as a defining quality of women, whereas having a voice is seen as a threat to female identity. In a traditional Mizo society, the life of women from pre-marital to post-marital is constrained by the constructed ideals of femininity. As '*Nula rim*' or courting is an established practice among the Mizos, "the quality of young woman is usually assessed on the basis of the number of courtiers she has" (Mann 119). Though a man could clearly show his preference to any girl, young women on the other hand are not allowed to show any partiality even to the particular man she likes. When a number of young suitors surround her, she should not make any sign by which young men may learn whom she favours. Therefore ideals of femininity in the pre-marital life of Mizo women are always based on women whose preference of men can never be known. Such ideals mediated under patriarchal culture, influenced Mizo women to silence their emotions, as it would be shameful and degradatory to show partiality before marriage.

In *The Beloved Bullet* and *Rinawmin*, women characters who unexpectedly found love in the land of troubles, have to live up to the expectations of society. As silence was the only solution introduced to them for dealing with their emotional problem, they repressed their trauma with silence which in turn gave them deep depression, anguish and pain. In *Rinawmin*, the word ‘thup’ which is equivalent to English word ‘hide’ and ‘mualphona’ which is equivalent to ‘disgrace’ and ‘humiliation’ were continuously used by the female protagonist whenever she was about to express her agony. In her letter to her lover Capt. Rozuala, Ramhluni wrote:

*A hminga nula ka nih ve chhûng si chuan, tlangval inlêng chuangkaite kan lo nei ve lo thei si lo. An lakah nun leh zia thup a tûl a, khawhar chung hlim hmêl put tum hrâm te hi ka mizia in a tlin zâwnng a ni lo a....* (Dokhuma 96)

(As long as I’m an eligible young woman by name, appearance of suitors in our house is unavoidable. As hiding one’s true nature is required towards them, showing happy faces in a state of loneliness is what my innate nature cannot handle.)

In her statement Ramhluni expresses her deep anguish in silencing her passion and emotions. The word ‘hiding’ used by Ramhluni demonstrates her lack of self-expression. Though her love for Major Rozuala is growing each day, she cannot go against the traditional patriarchal order and openly reveal her innermost feeling, as it would harm her reputation as a young woman. Therefore, she has to live in silence, hiding an immense passion that she nurtured for the love of her lover Major Rozuala. At the end of the novel, when Ramhluni burst out into tears openly, crying and wailing over the dead body of her lover Rozuala, her reaction is narrated as disgraceful, which in the word of Mizo is ‘mualphona’:

*Rozuala thihna meuh chuan Ramhluni nena an in hmangaihna chu khawvel hmaah a rawn puang zârin a rawn pho chhuak ta a ni. Mahse chuti taka a mualphona chu a rinawmna thurûk sawi chhuaktu a ni ta hlahz zawk*

*a....inchhûng lah chu a tân mualphona mai nia a hriat avang leh lêng ve  
mawlha a inhriat loh avangin....mahni chauha tlai khawhar hmang tûrin dai  
lam a pan ta a. (Dokhuma 227)*

(The death of Rozuala unveils the love between him and Ramhluni before the world. But such a disgrace instead became the voice which articulates her secret loyalty...as she feels that staying at the house of mourning only added to her disgrace.....she went to the outskirts of village to spend time alone in a lonely evening.)

The statement reveals the deep connection between the words ‘hide’ and ‘disgrace’. The meanings of both the words are constructed by male authority to restrain a woman from having a voice of her own. Silence indicates obedience and submission, while breaking the silence relegated women in a disgraceful position. Likewise, in the novel *Rinawmin*, when the passion and emotion of Ramhluni is no more hidden in secrecy, it brings disgrace to her. Declaration of love openly, which every young Mizo women would never dare to perform is done by Ramhluni through her mourning. Even though the community in which she lives shows no sign of condemnation, the traditionally constructed ideals of femininity inculcated in her shapes her judgement. Therefore, she once again chooses to embrace silence to cope with her trauma of loss and hide her misery.

Similar to Ramhluni the protagonist of *Rinawmin*, Ramliani the sympathetic female figure in *The Beloved Bullet* yearns to express her inner turmoil and emotional battles. Her inability to reunite with her lover Lt. Sanglura and her inability to express her innermost feelings make her life miserable. Ramliani expressed her misery in a letter she wrote to Lt. Sanglura by saying, “If pouring out my thoughts meant relief, how happy I would be....But instead, it aggravates my problem, yet keeping them to myself is stifling me.” (Zama 175). Ramliani wants to convey her inner turmoil, which she thought might bring relief to her sufferings. But, as language that describes the world is not the language of

women's making, no language is there that can readily give voice to her sufferings. For this reason, silence operates as the only culturally appropriate coping mechanism for her. Like every other young women, Ramliani muted her love for Lt. Sanglura. She even receives many marriage proposals, but she refuses to consider them without giving any reason. In period of turmoil and sufferings, Ramliani did her best to hide her relationship with her lover. Even when she heard of the death of her lover Lt. Sanglura, she again adopted silence to repress her trauma and deep depression. As breaking of secrecy and silence is the beginning of healing for the traumatized, silence becomes destructive for Ramliani. Her inability to speak assertively as an individual destroys her inwardly and it eventually takes her life. For Ramliani and the other female characters in the selected fiction, the unsupportive environment and patriarchal culture which silenced them makes their traumatic experience unspeakable. Given no alternatives to cope with their trauma, they are made to choose silence instead of voicing out their trauma.

Besides silence, neurosis is an ineffectual coping strategy adapted by women characters to deal with their traumatic experience. While silence is an appropriate coping strategy generated by patriarchy, neurosis or madness is the unrecognised or unacknowledged coping mechanism against patriarchal orthodoxy which put women out of social circulation. In *Zorami: A Redemption Song*, the author Malsawmi Jacob mentions the story of two women whose misfortune drives them to insanity. What happens to the two women named Rami and Mawii is no less traumatic than the experience of the 'comfort women' who were forced into prostitution in Japanese brothels during World War II. To prevent rape crimes committed by Japanese army personnel and to prevent rise of hostility among people in occupied areas, many young women were abducted from their homes by the Imperial Japanese army and were incarcerated in different comfort stations in Japan and abroad. In the stations young women were continuously raped, beaten and were forced into sexual slavery. The story of

Rami and Mawii in the novel *Zorami* echoes the possibility of brutality similar to Japanese military action during Mizo Insurgency as well. As narrated in the novel, Mawii and Rami were abducted by army men under the command of Major Kohli. They were dragged away and were forced to leave Rami's baby who was found unconscious and died a few days later. The army men took them to their barrack. Major Kohli locked Mawii in his room, who is younger in age and ordered his subordinates to deal with Rami. The two women were released the next morning and they both return home holding hands and crying at the same time. But the arrest does not stop, Rami and Mawii were arrested by the army whenever they wished, and were sexually harassed with no sympathy. After numbers of arrest the two women lost their sanity and became neurotics and the arrest stop altogether. Malsawmi Jacob writes:

Then the arrests stopped altogether. The two sisters had forgotten to get back to their home. They forgot to take bath or to change their clothes. They roamed around day and night, crying, and sleeping on the roadside when exhaustion overcame them. No one could help them, though they tried. If anyone went close to them, they scream at the top of their voices and ran away. They had stopped talking and communicated only through screams. (Jacob 131)

In accordance with feminist understanding of hysteria, the neurotic behaviour of the two women can be interpreted as a reaction to the knowledge of vulnerability. A reaction against female objectification; against the rationality of patriarchal order which signify the female body as vulnerable, violable and penetrable. The two women, Rami and Mawii can be categorised as 'admirable hysterics' whom Helen Cixous, a feminist thinker celebrates as women who manage to air all that their repressed sisters and daughters desperately desire to express. According to Helen Cixous female hysteria, neurosis or madness is a kind of language that genuinely turns into female mode of expression. She states, "There is a voice

crying in the wilderness....the voice of a body dancing, laughing, shrieking, crying. Who is it? It is they say, the voice of woman, newborn and yet archaic, a voice of milk and blood, a voice silenced but savage.” (Cixous and Clemen ix)

According to Cixous, hysteria is female language that opposes the rigid structures of male discourse and thoughts. Hysterics have lost speech. When there is no speech, there is no understanding. It is the body that speaks and in the body-language of the hysterics, gender role is absent and they react not in accordance with the socially expected female roles and qualities. Thus, the body turn into a mode of expression, and an explicit form of protest and rebel against the systematic misogyny and masculine dominance. In connection with Cixous’s observation, the aggressive behaviour and the unfeminine physical appearance of Mawii and Rami can be considered as a gesture of rebel which forcefully unleashed their deep seated anger, agony and pain. Their neurotic gestures of screaming, crying and running away are incoherently meaningless. But, their neurotic behaviour undoubtedly mirrored the horrible annihilation of their body within the four walls of the Indian Army barrack, and it unveiled the hidden pain and trauma of rape which many women bear in silence. By transforming their misery into madness and by embracing the socially impermissible aspects of femininity, they destroy the submissive female figure which is subjected to abuse. They no longer symbolize female fragility, incoherence and marginalisation. Rather, they become a figure capable of disrupting and demolishing existing patriarchal structure. Neurosis or madness for them becomes a reasonable response to their trauma. A response which allows them to lay bare the oppressive and inhumane value system of patriarchy which foster sexual violation.

The fictional narratives of women and the trauma of Mizo Insurgency studied in this chapter reverberates the brutal consequences of Insurgency and its different impacts on the subjugated female members of Mizo community. The multiple dimensions of women sufferings exposed in the study expose the indignities to which Mizo women are subjected to,

and the different ways in which violent conflict increases patriarchal control on them. Most importantly, the study showcases the practical and theoretical relevance of gender relations in understanding and examining women's experience of armed-conflict and the subjective nature of trauma they encountered. It is generally accepted that every victim of war and armed conflict suffer a great deal of pain whether male or female. But, feminist study undertaken in this chapter discloses the fact that women as inferior members of the human society have experienced armed conflict differently and that they have their own stories and sufferings to tell as victims and survivors of the armed conflicts.

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## Chapter IV

### Women and Heroism

Women and heroism are contradictory concepts traditionally accepted as having no deep-seated connection, especially in war zone and battlefield. Generally, heroic title is conferred to men since history has been the witness of battles and wars where masculinity, with all its vigour, power, and glory has stood tall above everything else. Women or the cultural conception of female on the other hand, are deprived of heroic title. They are excluded from the kind of event and behaviour that both form the heroic subjects and heroic actions. The motherly role of women, their confinement to a devalued domestic sphere, and their traditional roles of caretaking barred them from performing the valued heroic deeds. Therefore, no women are expected to engage in heroic action while heroism for men is always considered as a valuable masculine trait which is socially and culturally honoured.

By focusing on the traditional concept of women and male heroism, the chapter will give an in-depth analysis of the culturally constructed notion of male heroism and its restriction on women characters in select *Rambuai* fiction. Heroism which has been used as a means to set up barriers between male and female in times of Mizo Insurgency will be closely examined using relevant feminist theory. At the same time, the silenced patriotism among women characters and their passivity in times of Mizo Insurgency will be studied in relation to heroism. Besides, attempts will be made in exploring at length female heroism during Mizo Insurgency and the limitation of the culturally constructed notion of heroism.

Heroism represents the pinnacle of human behaviour. In many cultures and traditions, the noblest act that a human being can perform is a heroic act, and the most distinguished life that a human being can lead is a heroic life. Heroism, as a universally

valued trait involves a behaviour or action on behalf of another person or for a moral cause. Bravery, gallantry, selflessness, humility, patience, moral integrity etc. are the characteristics which define heroism or heroic action. In his article *The Philosophical foundation of Heroism*, Dr. Andrew Bernstein defined heroism by stating:

Heroism is a moral concept. By its nature it is reserved for the man set apart--for the select few who tower above the rest. It is a sparsely populated classification. To attain this status one must reach the zenith of human morality--an undeviating commitment to rational values, in action, in the teeth of opposition that would dismay a lesser man.... It is from observation of these men that the concept "hero" is formed; it is for these men that the special designation of "hero" is reserved. ... There are a special few who take on all comers to achieve their ends. The designation "hero" is a moral approbation reserved for this elite.

(5)

In his definition, Bernstein celebrates heroism or heroic deeds as vitally attainable by the few who possessed the highest and noblest, almost god-like qualities. The image of such heroes handed down throughout the ages has their roots in the most treasured stories and legends of every human civilization. Be it the Indian *Mahabharata*, the Greek epic poems *Iliad's* and *Odyssey*, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* or the German *Nibelungenlied*, the legendary tales personify and dramatize heroic attitudes, and it set images of the great man whom every man admires and yearns to be. In his lectures on heroes, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, a Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle says that the each human being in some sense or other, worships heroes. Hero worship from Carlyle perspective is, "the deepest root of all; the tap root, from which in a great degree all the rest were nourished and

grown....worship of a hero is transcendent admiration of a Great man...No nobler feeling than this of admiration for one higher than himself dwells in the breast of men” (18-19).

Carlyle’s perception reveals that the deep veneration of heroes permeate every segment of human society. The veneration of heroes serves as the catalyst for self enrichment, as every man feels that “he is himself made higher by doing reverence to what is really above him” (Carlyle 23). Heroism becomes the unending driving force which governs and inspires the actions of men in every culture. The nature of heroic deeds may vary from culture to culture and from age to age, but its value stands firm. Even though social connection and personal motivation changes continually, the heroes still remain as the idolised universal characters having a compelling place in the hearts of every man.

Sadly, throughout most of human history the idealized heroism has been decidedly a male activity denied to a vast majority of women. The definition as well as a classical description of heroism fostered in every culture emphasized male behaviour and masculine attributes. The term hero derives from the Greek word ‘*heros*’, meaning protector or defender. The use of the word hero as gender neutral substantive is only a modern advent, as in Greek the term ‘*heros*’ carries a strong implicit male bias and was generally used exclusively to refer to the masculine form. Classical heroes such as Achilles, Hercules, Gilgamesh, Beowulf, etc. emphasized the qualities of power, apotheosis and masculinity. They were revered for their strength, courage and resourcefulness, while their female counterparts are the supporters of man’s endeavour. They appear as mere helpers, victims, betrayers or seductive reward for male heroes. Such classical legends have proven the limitation of heroic recognition given by patriarchal culture. For women there is no accompanying portraits or images which include them in the valorised arena of heroic action. They become the sole admirer of the prominent heroism of men while their heroic possibilities are crippled.

Similar to the other patriarchal culture, the predominant image of heroism immortalized in Mizo culture is also the outcome of male chauvinism. Starting from the pre-Christian era, the spirit of action oriented heroism is nurtured in Mizo culture. In the socio-cultural life of the Mizo, an outstanding hunter and warrior called '*Pasaltha*' held a prominent figure. The manliness and the bravery of the '*Pasaltha*' is proved and manifested in times of war and when hunting of ferocious animals is performed. In such times the '*Pasaltha*' stood above the general people by fighting courageously. Though deserving praise, the '*Pasaltha*' never expected honour, he instead wanted others to be honoured. Courage, selfless, patience, wise, humble, unselfish, hardwork, noble, good hunting skills, etc. are the qualities of the '*Pasaltha*'. The Mizo believe that these qualities could be found only in the lives of the honoured '*Pasaltha*' who were always ready to render service to others. As the Mizo cherished their brave efforts and their tireless activities, right from ancient times when a boy was born, the village elders blessed him to be a '*Pasaltha*' and he was taught and encouraged endlessly to become one. The heroic deeds of the '*Pasaltha*' then became an inspiration which shaped the action of young boys and men in every village. Whenever they went for hunting young hunters would proudly chanted with a spirit of heroism, "You go to work in the Jhum obeying your mother. As for me, I take my gun and hunt over the hills after wild animals" (Lalrinawma 48).

The Mizo warriors and hunters also had songs which are chanted in celebration after taking heads of an enemy. When they returned from war, the heroes would adorn themselves in their masculine attire and waving their swords in the air they would proudly chant:

“Kei chu e, mi that ing khaw,

Mualuah thle hlang ka duhin e,

Lu chugin e, thlang vapual e,

Her law luai sawm ka luah e.

(Just as i have killed the enemy,  
I celebrate the head in the local yard,  
And on my head is the hornbill's feather)"

(Sinha and Lalrinchhane 52)

The songs chanted by the Mizo warriors and hunters denote the greatness and superiority of masculine action. Through their songs they accentuate their bravery and masculinity.

The culturally constructed notion of Mizo heroism on the other hand, excluded the female members of the Mizo community. It denied their access to the space of physical action and they are not welcomed in the arena of heroic action. But, this exclusion does not freely unchain Mizo women from the chores which identified them as the server of male. Though they do not participate in warfare and hunting, women were the ones who prepare warriors and hunters for their task. It is a custom for women to bid farewell to the male warriors and hunters with songs, foods and rice beer specially prepared for them. And on their return women will prepare the same welcoming rituals for them. In the realms of heroism Mizo women are what Beauvoir has termed as the 'other'. In her book *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir states:

A Man's body has meaning by itself, disregarding the body of women, whereas the woman's body seems devoid of meaning without reference to male. Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man. And she is nothing other than what man decides..... She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her. She is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other.

(6)

Beauvoir's statement gives genuine reason for the unheroic existence of women in Mizo culture. Mizo women are assigned the status the 'other' to male activities. They are defined in

relation to men, not as equals but as opposites. They are what a man is not, and they are identified as the inferior who do not possess the required potential to take part in the assumed rightful activities of men. As women are defined and differentiated in relation to men, the place of women in masculine hierarchy which honours male actions would simply have to be complementary to the prominent heroism of men. While men perform their heroic action, Mizo women need to perform their passive and unheroic action. While the heroes and warriors proudly chant their victory and success, women stand as a true admirer and an incubator for future heroes, which is less valuable comparing to the highly esteemed heroism and heroic actions of men.

The limitations of the culturally constructed notion of heroism can be seen in the author's realistic representation of Mizo Insurgency in select *Rambuai* fiction. It is true to say that the national feelings aroused during Mizo Insurgency have a deep connection with the admired traditional Mizo heroism. In the 1960's when Mizoram was enveloped by severe political turmoil, the strong spirit of tribal heroism has made its presence felt again in the land of the Mizo, who are "the descendents of Zampuimanga" (Nibedon 55), the legendary Mizo hero. In the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015), Malsawmi Jacob reflects the burning flame of patriotism inspired by the tribal heroism during Mizo Insurgency. As narrated in the novel, during the time when the whole inhabitants of Mizoram are disturbed and threatened by the horrific political turmoil, the admired Mizo National Front leader Pu Laldenga gave an encouraging political speech in Dampui Village. His words strong like fire melted down the hearts of the listeners. Each and every listener drank in his words and were enthralled when he said:

Lets remember the *pasaltha*, the heroes of the past. How brave they were! Think of Taitesena. He did not cringe before ferocious tiger. Think of Vanapa. He considered community's welfare before his own. Think of Khuagchera. He was

fearless. These heroes were willing to give their lives for our people. They were not afraid of death. Shall we not follow these example?.....lets rise up and fight!

Lets fight for God and our country! (Jacob 69)

The political speech of Pu Laldenga demonstrates how the nationalist rhetoric brought back the normative notion of masculinity and masculine ideals into play. With comparable means nationalist agitators like Pu Laldenga enlivens the cult of manliness with heroism and patriotism, combined with the willingness to sacrifice one's life, which is traditionally accepted by the Mizo as the highest form of masculine virtue.

Even though the wretched condition of Mizoram calls for the action of the patriots and the heroes, the unbounded zest of patriotism and an immense thirst for heroic action unambiguously re-installed gender hierarchy which no doubt goes along with male heroism. The story of the patriot Nikhuma narrated in the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* manifests how male heroism exists as a strong cultural mechanism which sustain female subordination. Nikhuma, like a true patriot leaves his wife and children to answer the call of the land when the troubled land needs him the most. Nikhuma is the true embodiment of manhood and patriotism; he is one of many Mizo men who are influenced by traditional heroism sensitized by political leaders like Pu Laldenga. On the other hand, his wife Tlani is the true representation of women who are categorised as mere spectators of male heroism. Though Tlani dislike her husband's decision in joining the MNF underground movement, when her husband is called by the MNF leaders, without any contradiction Tlani respects the choice made by her husband and helps him prepare for his journey to MNF headquarters at Aizawl. As narrated in the novel:

But since her protest did not succeed in changing his mind, she had given up contradicting him on any matter. So, now without any fuss, she helped him pack and prepare for the journey. It did not take long to get his few things

together. Bedding, a shirt, a pair of pants and *puan*....He strapped the bedroll to his back with a sheet and slung on his *ipte pui*, a shoulder bag of coarse cloth. The bag contained a machete, a bunch of *vaihlo zial*, tobacco rolled in strips of thin paper and tied with bits of thread to prevent them from unrolling; some cooked rice and vegetables wrapped in banana leaf for his meal on the way.

(Jacob 84)

How Tlani prepared her husband for his heroic mission symbolizes the traditional parting rituals performed by Mizo women when heroes and warriors are about to set forth for their task. Following the traditional roles of Mizo women, Tlani filled her husband's bag with supplies he might need and prepared him for his heroic journey to fight for the land. Through her action, Tlani proves her inferiority as a woman and the superiority of men and their valued heroic deeds.

The dichotomy of man as 'Just warrior' and woman as 'Beautiful soul' can be seen in Tlani and her husband Nikhuma. In her book *Women and War*, Jean Bethke Elshtain explains this dichotomy as a culturally constructed and transmitted notion that function "to re-create and secure women's location as non-combatants and men's as warrior" (4). The dichotomy of 'Just warrior' and "Beautiful soul" embodies certain powerful, received notions about the roles men and women have, and should play in times of war and armed conflict. The 'Just Warrior' embodies masculine ideals such as bravery, strength, fearlessness, nobility, duty, honour and sacrifice, while the 'Beautiful Soul' denotes feminine ideals such as beauty, passivity, purity, dependent and weak. These ideals serve to legitimize and recreate men's identity as compassionate and dutiful warriors and women as vulnerable beings who are to be protected. Therefore, during war and armed conflict men fight as warriors and superior beings to protect who are assumed as their inferiors. On the other hand, women who are to be protected remain at the home front undertaking the tasks which are considered as

less valuable and honourable than the heroic deeds of men. These paradigmatic linkages give binary classifications to both Tlani and her husband in the midst of armed conflict. Tlani stands as the true embodiment of woman who serves as “biological and social mothers of the soldiers, and the wives who await them when they come home.” (Sjoberg 26). She is the innocent ‘other’ to male heroism who is destined to be a domestic executive who saw to the welfare of her husband and her household. On the other hand, her husband is the embodiment of male warrior. The highly esteemed spirit of heroism and patriotism possess by him prove Tlani’s otherness and her exclusion to male activities. It also identify her as the weaker sex who is worth to be categorised as mere server, supporter and who at times need to be protected.

Women who are assumed as the ‘other’ to male heroism have historically been denied public activities. They rarely appear in combat or in the arena of high politics. As conventional accounts of war focus on public sphere activities, it is not surprising that women in times of war and conflict appear only as “an offstage chorus to a basically male drama” (Lorentzen and Turpin 45). They are almost never the initiator of conflict or war. They are never the leader of conflicts and are rarely at the negotiation table, or participated in wars and conflicts as actors. Rather, they are the auxiliaries to male warriors who provide logistical support, or in the domestic realm, who keep the home fires burning as mothers and wives of the heroes. Even though women are distanced from masculine warfare and politics, the feelings of nationalism and the spirit of patriotism impact them equally like men. Whenever the wave of political turmoil swept over the land or a country, women who are denied of political accessibility developed a strong sense of willingness to render sacrificial service. But, as wars and conflicts call for masculine action, the heightened masculine expectations and their responsibilities as women barred them from becoming combatants or active political actors. This led to the silencing of altruistic patriotism develop by women as citizens, which

on the other hand led to the possibility of maintaining the culturally constructed images of women as nurturer, passive, weak and dependent.

The silenced patriotism of women and their passivity in times of armed conflict can be seen in James Dokhuma's novel *Rinawmin* (1970). In this novel, women characters appear as victims of Mizo Insurgency. Though they do not participate in the conflict as combatants, they are the faithful supporters of the patriots who fight for the cause of Mizoram. They show their love for the land and their support for the patriotic combatants by passively acting as supporters and providers of their needs. If time and situation allow them, they never miss the chance to supply local made cigars, foods and clothes to the MNF insurgents. But the actions of these women, though valuable, are secondary to male actions and at the most an extension of their household work. These women no doubt have the same love and passion for Mizoram. They are ready to serve and fight for their own land like the men. But they are, as Jean Bethke Elshtain put it, "the queen of home and hearts" (Elshtain 5). Therefore, the only suitable means for expressing their allegiance is by undertaking actions that are feminine and unheroic in nature.

Besides women who passively play supportive roles, there are women who wanted to enter the male domain and serve their land as combatants. One of the female characters, who is addressed as a beautiful divorced woman in *Rinawmin*, is among women who actively wanted to partake in the MNF (Mizo National Front) underground movement as a combatant. In the novel she appears as a woman who is mistakenly arrested as pointer who identified the MNF volunteer in front of the army men. But later in her confession, it turns out that she is the true supporter of MNF underground movement who wanted to go underground if she had no child of her own:

*Tih tak êmah chuan kha leh chen kha ram tan tui takin buai hma leh buai hnuah pawh ka lo thawk toh a. Fachuam phe chu neilo ila chuan ramhnuai lama chhuak ve daih tur hi ka ni zawk a. (Dokhuma 129)*

(Before and after troubles of the land I have worked sincerely for the land. If not having a child of my own I am the one who should probably go underground)

The statement of a divorced woman conceals the limitation of military system which always appears as a massive ‘should’ system. It encourages both instructions and implicit messages to be tough, physically strong, courageous, aggressive and self-confident, whether or not they possess these qualities. This instruction prioritises masculine qualities and leaves women with a chance to enter the realm of heroism or to act out their patriotic zest only if they emulated men. They have to adopt masculine attitudes and values to enter military armed forces, while they are socially expected to retain feminine qualities. So, for patriotic women who at times need to play the role of mothers, military service which denied feminine qualities turn out to be inaccessible for them. The bias military system becomes a great barrier which prevents them from acting as patriotic combatants and this cripples their heroic possibilities.

Women are generally denied of military access during war and armed conflict. But the conflict torn society somehow encourages few women to break into male domain and fight as combatants. These women make a conscious choice and move beyond domestic sphere by opting for actions that are overtly masculine. They transgress the socially accepted gender roles and venture into the public sphere willingly, proving their worth and strength as women. Through their actions they prove that “women also have the blood to shed for the service of the fatherland in danger” (Macdonald, Holden and Ardener 208). This kind of heroic female figure can be seen in Malsawmi Jacob’s novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song*. As reflected in the novel, Dinpui is the female combatant who joins the MNF underground movement. She is the only female in the cadres named Blue Valley. Like her compatriots,

Dinpuii though being a woman, is drawn into the underground military service by her love for the land. Unlike many women of her age, she is very much concern about the socio-economic and political condition of Mizoram. While her fellow women confined themselves in domestic sphere playing supportive roles, she chooses to fight the actual battle. She is among many youths who are influenced by the patriotic speech of the political leader Pu Laldenga. The speech of Pu Laldenga makes “her heart responded passionately to the idea of liberating her people from bondage and of building up the nation.” (Jacob 70). Therefore she willingly volunteered to join the MNF. When the Indian Army raided Blue Valley camp, some were killed, some were arrested and others disappeared. But Dinpuii was not among them and was nowhere to be found. Later a woman’s body was found and it was assumed to be Dinpuii. It was written:

About a month after the raid, a badly mutilated corpse of a woman was found near army encampment in the same area. Though no one actually identified the body, it was generally believed to be that of Dinpuii. (Jacob 196)

The brave and selfless actions of Dinpuii have deep connection with the ideology propounded by Amazonian feminism. As a separate discourse Amazonian feminism opposes gender roles stereotyping and discrimination based on the assumption that women are supposed to look or behave as if they were passive, weak and physically helpless. It vigorously rejects the idea that, “certain characteristics are inherently masculine, and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood by focusing on the images of the female heroes as expressed in fiction, art and literature, in the physiques and feats of female warrior and athletes, and in sexual values and practices” (Stahly 107).

The vision of heroic womanhood uphold by Amazonian feminism can also be seen in the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song*, through the heroic action of Dinpuii. She can be considered as the rightful living image of female warrior, who according to Amazonian

feminism is the ‘symbol of woman’s power and strength’. As an active female combatant she blurred the clear cut line drawn between the culturally constructed male heroism and the unheroic female roles. She challenges masculine ideologies which “serve to secure women’s social position as non-combatant and men’s identity as warriors”. (Elshtain 4) Her action serves as an answer to the often questioned female physical capabilities, and proves the capability of woman to live up to the heroic standard set by patriarchal order. Dinpui patriotically serve her land and the people just as the Mizo ‘*Pasaltha*’ did. She renders a sacrificial service which is no less heroic than the honoured deeds of the Mizo ‘*Pasaltha*’. As a true patriot she fights and dies for Mizoram, the land she dearly loved. From passive supporter, she moves to clandestine combatant and then to overt warrior. Thus, her death can be celebrated as the true heroic martyrdom and she can be named ‘*Hnam Pasaltha*’, the hero of the tribe.

Women are directly or indirectly affected by war and conflict. They play significant roles and without them the so called masculine war can never be successfully conducted. But their heroic achievements are rarely documented nor given the recognition and acknowledgement it deserved. This is due to the bias notion of heroism which is constructed in exclusion of the supposedly passive and weak women. But heroism as an exclusively male domain cannot be accepted as an adequate definition of heroism. Thomas Carlyle in his ‘Great Man Theory’ defines hero or heroism in relation to masculinity. His statement, “History of the world is but the biography of Great Men” (Wallace 275) illustrates that the figure of heroic individual has historically been male, while excluding women who might have the same potential as the great man. But, as heroism involves a behaviour or action on behalf of another person or for a moral cause, it cannot be considered as a single, static or rigidly understood notion defined and shaped by gender roles. Rather, it is a flexible and malleable constellation of ideas which can be shaped or constructed along different lines by

different people under different circumstances. In the *Banality of Heroism* Zeno Franco and Phillip Zimbardo rightly define heroism as a notion which entails deeper personal sacrifice readily available to be performed by anyone, whether male or female. According to them the core of heroism revolves around “the individual’s commitment to a noble purpose and the willingness to accept the consequences of fighting for that purpose.” (Franco and Zimbardo 31). By rejecting the culturally constructed notion of heroism, they claim that everyone have the potential to become a hero, and that circumstances can force almost anyone to be a hero or urge them to undertake heroic deeds. Phillip Zimbardo and Zeno Franco stated:

“we are all potential heroes waiting for a moment in life to perform a heroic deed. The decision to act heroically is a choice that many of us will be called upon to make at some point in time. By conceiving of heroism as a universal attribute of human nature, not as a rare feature of the few “heroic elect”, heroism becomes something that seems in the range of possibilities for every person, perhaps inspiring more of us to answer that call.”  
(Franco, Zimbardo 31)

In relation to Zeno Franco and Phillip Zimbardo’s definition of heroism, women characters in select *Rambuai* fiction can be considered as individuals having heroic potential of their own. Though they lack inspirational model, their undying patriotism and the brave yet domestically confined deeds performed by them are no doubt heroic in action and in heart. From a patriarchal point of view, even the actions of Dinpuui, the only heroic female figure in the selected texts cannot be fully accepted as heroic. Her intervention into masculine arena does not free her from the clutches of gender hierarchy. Being a woman, she was assigned feminine roles, such as tending wounds, nursing and caring while her comrades assigned themselves the assumed masculine task. In the novel it was narrated:

She was the only female in what the cadres named Blue Valley Camp. There were no proper medical facilities there, but they said Laldinpuii tended wounded Mizo soldiers with loving care. They nicknamed her 'Florence Nightingale'. (Jacob 195)

Dinpuii's action and the role she played in MNF underground military service might be different from the anachronistic and incomplete images of heroism set up by the masculine value system. In a time when men's activity involving destruction of life or risking of life is given high prestige, she carry on the role of giving life and saving life assigned to her. The role she has been assigned clarify her inferiority as a woman as well as the superiority of men. Because, as truly stated by Beauvoir, men's ability to risk life raised him to an elevated position, "for it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal" (72 ). But, Dinpuii breaks the dichotomy of man as a superior being having the heroic capability of risking life and woman as life giver and life saver which is considered less heroic. As freedom fighter and as female combatant she actively participated as man and woman. She performs the assumed inferior and superior task by carrying out domestic task in the camp and by risking her life for Mizoram. Through her actions, Dinpuii proves that heroism is in the range of possibilities for everyone, and that heroism is genderless and not something which can be defined or differentiated depending on gender roles. For Dinpuii, her gender as a woman, and the role she played as combatant matter less in defining her deeds in relation to heroism. The male and female role she played together for the cause of her land does not make her heroic or less heroic. Rather, her commitment to a noble purpose, that is to fight for the independence of Mizoram, and her willingness to fight for that purpose makes her a true hero.

Similarly, the praise-worthy deeds performed by other women characters in the selected texts differ from the remarkable deeds of the male heroes who separated themselves

from home and family for their heroic path. But these women cannot be considered as less heroic than the patriotic MNF volunteers. In James Dokhuma's novel *Rinawmin*, two young women along with the church minister went to the Indian army camp to visit the MNF volunteers who are held captives by the Indian army. They gave them local made cigars, ten pieces of egg, warm tea and Mizo *chhang*, bread made of starched-rice. The two young women acted as suppliers and supporters of the MNF volunteers and went to the camp of the Indian army, a place where many abducted Mizo women were raped and tortured. The amount of risk taken by the two young women in acting out their roles as suppliers and their commitment to their task make them eligible to be categorised as female heroes. On the other hand, women whose husbands left them for heroic purpose, who in their hands rested all the male and female responsibilities of the family and who tried hard to manage their roles as providers and caretakers can nonetheless be hailed as heroes. Kimi's mother in the novel *Zorami*, is among such women. After the heroic death of her husband, the responsibilities of both parenting and household management solely rested in her hands. Though her husband's absence weakened the household administration and lessened their chance of survival in conflict ridden society, she managed to hold up and keep her family in good shape while enduring countless challenges and pain.

These women might not be recognized as heroes or freedom fighters, but as Victor Hugo rightly expressed:

Life, misfortune, isolation, abandonment, poverty, are battlefields which have their heroes; obscure heroes, sometimes greater than illustrious heroes. ( Polster 143)

Therefore, the courage, selflessness, and perseverance of women characters cannot be neglected as worthless and unheroic. Their undying support and love for Mizoram as well as the underground movement, and how they battled with the hardships of life as women amidst

political violence and killing makes them eligible to be accepted as heroes having the same potential and commitment as the Mizo patriots.

It is true to say that heroism and heroic achievements are rarely within the reach of women in any culture and in any region. Looking into the traumatic events of Mizo Insurgency, one will not fail to see the gendered notion of heroism and its restrictions on women who are traditionally deemed as the sole admirers of the prominent heroism of men. But the study of women and heroism during Mizo Insurgency navigates the heroic possibilities of women who are neglected as passive victims of armed conflict. Though women characters in the selected texts appeared less active and less heroic than male combatants, they have proved that without emulating male warriors and heroes, women have the potentials and capabilities to perform action which is no less respectable and honourable than male heroic achievements. At the same time, their stories narrated in each text unveiled the truth that the meanings and values inherent in heroism do not solely rest in masculine action, but rather in commitment, courage and selflessness.

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## Chapter V

### Conclusion

The study has attempted to look into the fictional narratives of women and Mizo Insurgency through the lens of gender. Relevant feminist theory and trauma theory is incorporated to analyse the experiences of women during the period of Mizo Insurgency (1966-1986). Throughout the study, select *Rambuai* fiction stands as an open window to the unforgettable historical events of Mizoram, known as *Rambuai*. Each text offers a space for collective memories, introspection, retrospection, flashback and an awful remembrance of Mizo Insurgency and its traumatic impact. *Rambuai* fiction as part of fictional genre maintained a balance between the real and the unreal, though not exaggerating or stressing on one element totally at the expense of the other. On the other hand, the realistic and impelling mode of expression utilized by the authors are so effective that it enlivens the traumatic past of the Mizo, for the younger generation who do not experience political turmoil and violence which overshadowed the entire length and breadth of Mizoram for 20 years. Such expression rendered in *Rambuai* fiction opens up multiple interpretations and it offered a vital analytical foundation for a feminist study of Mizo Insurgency.

A Feminist study of *Rambuai* fiction, undertaken in this dissertation demonstrates the significance of gender in analyzing Mizo Insurgency and its manner of representation. The study makes it discernable that the binary function of gender, which create differences among the sexes is not only a crucial organizing principle in situation of conflicts. But it is also an influential principle which strictly shapes the way conflicts is represented and narrativized. The gender of the authors therefore becomes a predominant function which creates division in the structure, body, mode of expression and representation in the selected fictions.

The two distinct forms of representation rendered by the authors of select *Rambuui* fiction reverberates the significance of gender relation in shaping the literary representation of Mizo Insurgency. The shifting of literary representation can be seen in the comparative examination of the selected texts written by the male and female authors. James Dokhuma, the male author frames his literary representation so as to maintain patriarchal authority and to celebrate the culturally constructed masculine ideals and values. His projection of insurgency strongly honoured patriotism, masculine efforts and sacrificial services rendered by the male combatants. Such stereotypical mode of representation as deliberated in the study is the true manifestation of male authoritative power and the continuous maintenance or transmission of patriarchal norms and values. On the other hand, Malsawmi Jacob, the female author frames her literary representation of insurgency to question the elevated masculine ideals and to give an outlet to the silenced experiences and sufferings of women. By dealing with the same subject which the male writers delve into with authority, she performs the act of taking back or writing back from the women's perspective. Helen Cixous writes:

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. (9)

By taking up the task of writing, Malsawmi Jacob breaks the silence. Her narrative of insurgency challenges male literary tradition and she deals with what is often marked as

feminine in the binary dichotomies of gender discourse. She focuses on the often neglected consequences of insurgency and paints a different picture of Mizo Insurgency.

The study brings out the relevance of gender in examining the traumatic experience of women characters in select *Rambuai* fiction. Women as documented in historical records and literature have always been the primary victims of armed conflict. They lost their husbands, their fathers, their sons in combat. They often have to flee from the only homes they have ever known and they have to endure the most atrocious and heinous acts of brutality and torture. Such sufferings of women as denoted in this study are strongly shaped by gender roles. Their gender roles which deemed them as the weaker sex positioned them to experience certain kinds of trauma and it even influenced their response to the trauma they encountered.

Gender is the core element which serves to construct women as victims of certain trauma. Gender roles which categorise them as the weaker sex, threatens their security and positions their body as rapable. Lillian Kimani states:

Both in war and peace the stigma that is attached to women as victims of violence remain with them forever and it passed on from one woman to another. From the time you are born your mother tells you that as a woman you are not safe. You know that you are vulnerable because you were born a woman. (Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen 48)

The study shows how Mizo women paid a severe price for being women during the years of conflict in Mizoram. Women characters who are victims of sexual violence are the true reflection of Mizo women, who have been sexually abused, tormented and killed by the cold-blooded Indian army men. They have been raped and tortured in a place they have

owned from ancestors, with no one to save them from such brutality. For them age and status matter less, their gender as women subjected them to rape.

The dominant gender relation becomes a governing system which shapes the way women characters internalize their traumatic experience and make the meaning out of it. Women characters are directed to accept themselves as worthless or less valuable if they fail to maintain gender expectations generated under patriarchy. In the case of female raped victims, they face endless categorisation and rejection for their inability to maintain sexual purity. This makes them develop a sense of fear, insecurity and low self-esteem. Masculine ideology which categorises them as the inferior opposite insists upon them a quality of vulnerability and defines them on the basis of sexual purity. But their vulnerability again subjects them to sexual assault and consequently reduces them to a status of damaged beings.

The nature of trauma itself is also unbearable for female rape victims. The repetitive nature of trauma enliven the unwanted past and keep their present in a traumatic state. Their re-surfacing traumatic past reminds them of their damaged bodies and their vulnerability as a woman. For them the pain of being raped does not end with the actual experience of rape, but real the pain begins when the rape is over.

Gender again plays an important role in shaping the way women response to their traumatic and overwhelming experience. As denoted in the study, silence and neurosis are the recurring options available for women characters to deal with their trauma. Such responses from a feminist point of view are appropriate and inappropriate coping mechanism accepted and denied by the patriarchal system. Silence is an acceptable strategy applied by women characters to deal with their trauma. With no applicable strategy available, they muted the pain they endured and groan in silence. Though silence itself is a great barrier for self

recovery, they confront their traumatic experience with silence and hide the reality of their misery which is traditionally expected of women who are destined to be voiceless.

Neurosis on the other hand, is the unacknowledged coping strategy adapted by women characters to cope with their trauma. According to feminist theorists Helen Cixous and Catherine Clément, neurotic behaviour is a sign or language of voiceless women and a rebellious strategy against patriarchal orders. Though such behaviour is aggressive and destructive in nature it legitimizes women to gain their suppressed voice. At the same time it unchain their bodies from vulnerability and passivity which subjected them to abuse. The study deliberated how neurosis or madness becomes a powerful coping strategy. For women characters neurosis or madness turns out to be a powerful coping strategy which empower them to voice out the horrific tormentation of their bodies by the army men. When they enter the realm of madness, they no longer symbolize female fragility, incoherence and marginalisation. Rather, they become a figure capable of disrupting and demolishing existing patriarchal structure. Neurosis or madness for them becomes a reasonable response to their trauma. A response which allows them to lay bare the oppressive and inhumane value system of patriarchy which foster sexual violation.

Generally, history of wars and conflicts is filled with male heroic achievements and victimization of women. While men stand at the front being honoured for their masculine action women were left in the corner being denied for their physical strength which is accepted as weaker than men. But, as proven in the study, women are denied to enter the arena of heroism not because of their supposedly weaker body, but because of the androcentric masculine ideology which categorised them as the passive 'other' to male heroism. Though women are never welcomed in the heroic male domain, there are few women who intervene and enter it. As mentioned earlier in the study, such patriotic and

heroic women are those who can be categorised as female warriors or the embodiment of women's power and strength. Dinpuui the female character in the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* is the true image of female heroism. Through her the unbounded patriotism of women in times of Mizo Insurgency is declared. Though history records almost no heroic achievements of patriotic women, her stories reflected the heroic possibilities of Mizo women who are the supporter, supplier and caretaker of the patriotic MNF volunteers.

The culturally constructed notions of heroism partially honoured the aggressive and destructive masculine action, while no medals, monuments or acknowledgments were given to women who replaced men in the workforce and who faithfully support male-combatants. In connection with this partiality, the study questions male heroism and explains how heroism cannot be accepted as a notion strictly confined in masculine actions. Heroism, as declared in the study cannot be defined by gender alone, rather it is flexible, expandable and is within the reach of everyone whether man or woman. The meanings and values inherent in heroism do not solely rest in action, but in commitment, perseverance, willingness and courage. Therefore, women characters who risk their life in supplying and supporting the MNF volunteers and women who remain at home managing household administration can be considered as heroes. At the same time, women who survive the brutal sexual harassment, and who live with the pain of being sexually 'damaged'; and also women who bravely battled with the brutal consequences of armed conflict as women can also be considered as the true embodiment of heroism.

A feminist study of select *Rambuai* fiction demonstrates the complexity and multiplicity of troubles, sufferings and challenges faced by Mizo women in situations of conflict. By focusing on women as its core subject, the study produced the insider's picture of the untold women's experiences. It presented the core elements which sow the seeds of

misogyny and which fuelled an immense diversion in the experiences of the Mizo who are equally troubled by the horrific Mizo Insurgency. The study also substantiates the limitation of the recurring images of Mizo Insurgency, such as the destruction, the combat-orientated objectives and goals. By concentrating on the less explored women's experience, the study brings out the centrality of gender dynamics in the understanding of Mizo Insurgency. It shows how the politically constructed images and narratives of Mizo Insurgency can take a different turn if examined through the lens of gender. And most importantly, the study discloses the fact that the often neglected Mizo women have their own stories of insurgency which are worth studying and telling just as the patriotic stories of the Mizo men.

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## APPENDICES

**NAME OF CANDIDATE** : V. Lalrinsangi  
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**DEPARTMENT** : English  
**TITLE OF DISSERTATION** : Women and Insurgency in Mizoram:  
A Feminist Study of Select Rambuai  
Fiction  
**DATE OF PAYMENT OF ADMISSION** : 3.8.2015  
(Commencement of First Semester)  
**COMMENCEMENT OF SECOND**  
**SEMESTER/ DISSERTATION** : 1.1.2016

### APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL –

1. BOS	: 11. 4. 2016
2. SCHOOL BOARD	: 19. 4. 2016
3. REGISTRATION NO. & DATE	: MZU/M.Phil./299 of 19.04.2016
4. DUE DATE OF SUBMISSION	: 31.07.2017
5. EXTENTION IF ANY	: February, 2017- July, 2017

**HEAD**

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X	MBSE	2005	II	51.4%
XII	MBSE	2007	II	50.2%
B.A	Mizoram University	2013	II	54.50%
M.A	Mizoram University	2015	II	53.50%
M.Phil.	Mizoram University	Course work completed in 2015	I 'A' Grade awarded. 10 pt. scale grading system, 'A' corresponds to 6- 6.99 pts.	Corresponds to 61% in terms of percentage conversion.

**M. Phil Regn. No and Date :** MZU/M.Phil./299 of 19.04.2016

**Other relevant information :**

- i) Currently working on M.Phil dissertation entitled “Women and Insurgency in Mizoram: A Feminist Study of Select Rambuai Fiction” under the supervision of Dr. Lalrindiki T. Fanai, Department of English, Mizoram University.
- ii) Attended and participated in international seminar entitled, “Indigeneity: Expression and Experience” organised by the Department of English, Mizoram University under UGC-DRS-SAP I, on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2016.
- iii) Attended a national seminar entitled, “Emergent Identities: Its Literary Representations”, organised by the Department of English, Mizoram University under UGC-DRS-SAP I, on 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2016.
- iv) Attended a national seminar entitled, “Child Lore and Identity”, organised by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi and the Department of English, Mizoram University, on 4<sup>th</sup> November, 2016.
- v) Visited the following out-of-state libraries for the purpose of research:
  - a. North Eastern Hills University (NEHU) Library, Shillong
  - b. Jawaharlal Nehru University Library, Delhi
  - c. Delhi University (North Campus) Library
  - d. Delhi University (South Campus) Library
  - e. Sahitya Akademi Library, New Delhi
- vi) Awarded the UGC-MZU Fellowship for the tenure of eighteen months from the date of admission on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2015.

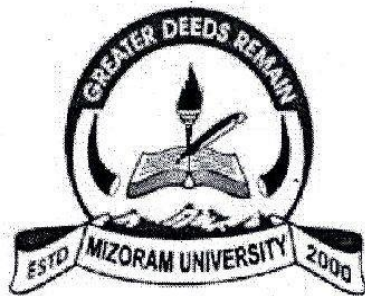
**WOMEN AND INSURGENCY IN MIZORAM: A FEMINIST STUDY OF  
SELECT RAMBUAI FICTION**

**ABSTRACT**

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**MIZORAM UNIVERSITY**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**2017**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Master of  
Philosophy in English of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

This dissertation proposes to examine and analyse women and their experiences of Mizo Insurgency as depicted in select *Rambuai* fiction. The word *Rambuai* literally means disturbance or trouble in the land. It denotes the troubled period of Mizoram during the 1960's. Mizo *Rambuai* is considered as the most turbulent and horrific historical event of Mizoram. It started on 1 March 1966 with the outbreak of the MNF (Mizo National Front) armed struggle for 'Mizo Independence' and it ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord on 30 June 1986.

Insurgency in Mizoram might be taken as an important political history of Mizoram, but its outcome was truly devastating. The predatory instinct unleashed by Mizo Insurgency and counter-insurgency were destructive. Every action of the MNF insurgents and the Indian armed security forces left frightful marks on the civilians. Many parents lost their beloved sons and the soil of the land was tainted with their blood. The cries of the helpless children, women and elders echoed through the land and hills of the Mizo. While the patriots marched on singing their patriotic songs, the innocent civilians helplessly tolerated the atrocities of insurgency. As the heights of their agony and pain were so intense, the end of Mizo Insurgency itself could not erase the harm done to them. Severe wounds and pain inflicted upon them left a deep scar which cannot be healed with the passing of time.

During Mizo Insurgency women paid high prices for being a Mizo and a woman as well. The Indian army utilized rape as a political tool to dominate them and to undermine the social fabric of the Mizo. In *Suppression of Mizos in India: An Eye Witness Report* submitted by G.G. Swell and J.J.M. Nicholas Roy to the Government of India, the mass rape that took place at Kolasib in 1966 was recorded. In the report it was written:

In Kolasib, 50 miles of Aizawl, the army rounded up all the men of the village, about 500 of them. They were collected, made to lie down on the ground on

their stomachs to kick, beat, trample upon and confined for the night. At night groups of soldiers moved around. They broke into the houses, helped themselves with everything of value- clocks, sewing machines, clothes etc.- and raped the women.

There was the case of a woman in an advanced stage of pregnancy- Lathumai, wife of a cultivator, Lalkhangliana. Five soldiers appeared in her house, took the husband out of the house at gun-point and then while two soldiers held the woman down, the third committed rape. (as qtd. in Chandra 196)

Though these incidents were horrendous enough for the entire village, only “three women complained of having been raped by commanding officers” (as qtd. in Chandra 197), while others silenced their traumatic experiences. Women in other places of Mizoram encountered the same harassment. Little girls were raped while their parents were away, and countless women were raped in-front of their husbands and families to frighten and to punish the MNF insurgents. Such brutalities caused damage and wreaked havoc on individuals and on the entire community.

During war and conflict, women of all tribes and colours have the same experience. Death and injury, sexual assault, bereavement and separation become common experiences of women shared across social divides. Similar to women in any other conflict zones, women in Mizoram face countless atrocities. When one looks into the traumatic historical event of Mizoram, one will find the imbalanced social relations of men and women in the midst of massive sufferings and disorder. The troubles of the land itself exacerbated the inequalities that are deeply rooted in Mizo society and heightened it to varying degrees. For Mizo women, physical violence, rape and other forms of torture became the normal features of their lot. Their helplessness during assaults on their unwilling bodies and the mindless annihilation of their human personality remain a trauma rarely forgotten.

The traumatic history of Mizo women makes its appearance in select *Rambuai* fiction namely, *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015) written by Malsawmi Jacob, *Rinawmin* (1970) by James Dokhuma and *The Beloved Bullet* (1992) written by James Dokhuma and translated into English by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama. The stories of women told in each text testify the complexity and multiplicity of the sufferings of women during Mizo Insurgency. The uncensored description of the female bodies, bruised, damaged and tortured by the army men echoes the vulnerability of female bodies during armed conflict. It shows how the brute political upheaval shredded women's security and how it positioned them to encounter the traumatic sexual violence. The straightforward depiction of Village grouping also discloses the severity of the harm done by forced dislocation and its different impacts on women who are deeply engaged with the domestic sphere. By focusing on women characters and their experiences of Mizo Insurgency, this study highlights the multiple dimensions of the sufferings of women. It also exposes how gender and its dominant features frame the divergent experiences of armed conflict, its nature, causes and consequences.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction.**

The first chapter provides an outline history of Mizo Insurgency, followed by a brief study of the literary genre of *Rambuai* fiction and the leading factors responsible for its emergence. It also gives a short analysis of the three selected texts namely, *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015) written by Malsawmi Jacob, *Rinawmin* (1970) by James Dokhuma and *The Beloved Bullet* (1992) written by James Dokhuma and translated into English by Prof. Margaret Ch. Zama. Besides, this chapter denotes the importance of gender in studying armed conflict and explains in brief why the study deals with the experiences of women during Mizo Insurgency.

*Rambuai* fiction is an important literary genre which speaks of the Mizo independence movement of 1966 and the troubled atmosphere of Mizoram during this period. Among different literary genres generated by Mizo *Rambuai*, the scope of *Rambuai* fiction can be accepted as the most flexible and wide ranging. It contains different approaches and interpretations which brings to light multiple and distinctive pictures of Mizo Insurgency and its impact. C.Lalawmpuia Vanchiau in his book *Rambuai Literature* (2014) defines *Rambuai* fiction as ‘creative writing’. According to him:

*Rambuai fiction hi creative writing chi khat, thawnthu phuahchawp phena a ziaktu*

*in a thil hmuh leh hriatte, a rilrua a vei tlangaupaina hmanraw tangkai tak a ni.*

(Vanchiau 85).

(*Rambuai* fiction is a form of creative writing, an useful literary device which enables the author to voice out his experiences, ideas and thoughts behind his fictional narratives.)

The feminist framework of gender and war is crucial in examining and in understanding the nature and consequences of Mizo Insurgency depicted in *Rambuai* fiction. Gender as believed by feminists and war theorists is visible throughout multiple phenomena associated with war and conflict, and that it is inappropriate to define, analyse and explain conflicts and its consequences without reference to gender and gender subordination. The conduct of war and armed conflicts are generally understood as the killing and injuring of combatants and civilians, the destruction of infrastructure and cities, and the conquering of cities. But, war and conflict however, are also profoundly gendered experience. Gender influences how war should be fought, who will fight the war and in defence of whom. At the same time, it also shapes war experiences and directs the kind of violence and sufferings

perpetrated among the victims. Carol Cohn gives a clear explanation on the centrality of gender in understanding of war:

All kinds of war are deeply gendered, in the preparation made for them, the kinds of masculinities and femininities required to support and conduct them, the effects they produce and the processes that attempt to recover from them. Understanding the specific ways in which particular violence is gendered will not only help us better understand the experiences women and men have of that war; it will also enable us to have a more realistic and accurate understanding of the war itself. (36)

Thus, a substantial revision of the sufferings and experiences of Mizo Insurgency through the lens of gender can add a new dimension and a new understanding to the complicated trajectories of troubles and violence during Mizo *Rambuai*.

## **Chapter 2: Representation of Mizo Insurgency**

The second chapter gives a gendered analysis of Mizo Insurgency and the stereotypical forms of representation rendered by the male and female authors of the selected texts. Through the comparative analysis of insurgency represented by both the authors, the study highlights the importance of gender in structuring and in shaping the manner in which the history of Mizo Insurgency is represented and narrativized.

War and its devastating impacts are always influential subjects which occupy the pages of many literary works written throughout the ages. In such literature, the authors, whether male or female rendered a realistic portrayal of war. But the way in which they represented or articulated the causes, consequences and experiences of war were strongly determined by their gender roles. In her book *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity*, Lucy Noakes discloses how gender roles create distinctions in the male and

female representation of war. She states, “While many women wrote of memories of bombardment, loss, injury and waiting, relating these memories to the feelings and experiences of war....Many of the male correspondents appear to have 'relived' their own experiences of combat in their writing” (156)

Similar to other literary works written under the influence of war, conflict and holocaust, select *Rambuai* fiction bear witness to violence, sufferings and troubles perpetrated among the innocent civilians. But the manner in which insurgency is represented, as well as the manner in which the writers structure the relationship of their writings and the subject they deal with vary according to the gender of the authors. James Dokhuma, the male author frames his literary representation so as to maintain patriarchal authority and to celebrate the culturally constructed masculine ideals and values. His projection of insurgency strongly honoured patriotism, masculine efforts and sacrificial services rendered by the male combatants. Such stereotypical mode of representation as deliberated in the study is the true manifestation of male authoritative power and the continuous maintenance or transmission of patriarchal norms and values. On the other hand, Malsawmi Jacob, the female author frames her literary representation to make a judgemental expression of Mizo Insurgency and the sufferings of women as well. By dealing with the same subject which the male writers delve into with authority, she performs the act of ‘talking back’ and claims the authority for women to tell their own stories of insurgency. Helen Cixous writes:

It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. (9)

By taking up the task of writing, Malsawmi Jacob breaks the silence. She gives an outlet to the silenced and suppressed voice of women victims. Distancing herself from the rigid mode of representation rendered by the male writers, she deals with what is often marked as feminine in the binary dichotomies of gender discourse. She focuses on the often neglected consequences of insurgency and paints a different picture of Mizo Insurgency.

Thus, gender can be considered as a predominant function which creates division in the structure, body, mode of expression and representation rendered by the male and female authors. The study makes it discernable that the binary function of gender, which create differences among the sexes, is not only a crucial organizing principle in situation of conflicts. But it is also an influential principle which strictly shapes the way conflict is retold and represented.

### **Chapter 3: Women and the Trauma of Insurgency**

The third chapter focuses on the painful and distressing fate of women characters in select *Rambuai* fiction. Through the examination of women characters and their traumatic experience of insurgency, this chapter exposes the indignities to which women are subjected to, and the different ways in which a violent conflict increases patriarchal control over them. At the same time, it showcases the practical and theoretical relevance of gender relations in understanding the subjective nature of trauma, how it is internalized and processed.

Gender is the core element which serves to construct women as victims of certain trauma. During war and violent political upheavals, sexual violations are used by the military as a punitive and intimidating weapon to challenge and violate male possession, and as a “humiliation rite for men on the other side who cannot protect their own women” (328 Williams and Macedo). The mutilation of women’s bodies, then becomes the proof of

powerlessness, the rite of humiliation and demasculinization of the men who supposedly owned them and who failed to protect them. The brutal actions of the army men as reflected in the novel are also a purposeful act of control, a ritual of degradation, a tactic of demoralization and a way of instilling terror. As women characters are in the possession of men, the army men violate their bodies brutally to challenge masculine possession in Mizo community and to prove their manliness as well. For the female characters, age, sex and status, whether young, old, virgin or pregnant, do not matter. Their imposed gender identity and their inferiority identify their bodies as violable and exposed them to what is deemed to be the most traumatic experience for women. Their gendered bodies which are traditionally accepted as the property of men became the battleground where men fights over for power and control.

The dominant gender relation becomes a governing system which shapes the way women characters internalize their traumatic experience and make the meaning out of the incomprehensible events. Women characters are directed to accept themselves as worthless or less valuable if failed to maintain gender expectations generated under patriarchy. In the case of female raped victims, they face endless categorisation and rejection for their inability to maintain sexual purity. This makes them develop a sense of fear, insecurity and low self-esteem. Masculine ideology which identify them as the inferior opposites of men, insist upon them a quality of vulnerability and defines them on the basis of sexual purity. But their vulnerability again subjects them to sexual assault, and consequently reduces them to a status of damaged beings.

Gender again plays an important role in shaping the way women characters response to their trauma and how they process with the overwhelming experience. Silence and neurosis are the recurring options available for women characters to deal with their trauma. Such responses from a feminist point of view are appropriate and inappropriate coping mechanism

accepted and denied by the patriarchal system. Silence is an acceptable strategy applied by women characters to deal with their trauma. With no applicable strategy available, they muted the pain they endured and groan in silence. Though silence itself is a great barrier for self recovery, they confront their traumatic experience with silence and hide the reality of their misery, which is traditionally expected of women who are destined to be voiceless.

Neurosis on the other hand, is the unacknowledged coping strategy adopted by women characters to cope with their trauma. According to feminist theorists Helen Cixous and Catherine Clemen, neurotic behaviours are the sign or language of voiceless women and a rebellious strategy against patriarchal orders. Though such behaviours are aggressive and destructive in nature, it legitimizes women to gain their suppressed voice. At the same time it unchain their bodies from vulnerability and passivity which subjects them to abuse. In the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song*, neurosis or madness is a powerful coping strategy adopted by Mawii and Rami. It empowers them to voice out the horrific tormentation of their bodies by the army men. When they enter the realm of madness, they no longer symbolize female fragility, incoherence and marginalisation. Rather, they become a figure capable of disrupting and demolishing existing patriarchal structure. Neurosis or madness for them becomes a reasonable response to their trauma. A response which allows them to lay bare the oppressive and inhumane value system of patriarchy which foster sexual violation.

#### **Chapter 4: Women and Heroism**

The fourth chapter gives an indepth analysis of the culturally constructed notion of male heroism and its restriction on women characters in select *Rambuai* fiction. It also explores at length female heroism during Mizo Insurgency and the limitation of the culturally constructed notion of heroism.

Women and heroism are contradictory concepts traditionally accepted as having no deep-seated connection especially in war zone and battlefield. Generally, heroic title is conferred to men, since history has been the witness of battles and wars where masculinity, with all its vigour, power and glory has stood tall above everything else. Women or the cultural conception of female on the other hand, are deprived of heroic title. They are excluded from the kind of event and behaviour that both form the heroic subjects and heroic actions. Women are denied to enter the arena of heroism not because of their supposedly weaker body, but because of the androcentric masculine ideology which categorised them as the passive 'other' to male heroism. Though women are never welcomed in the heroic male domain, there are few women who intervene and enter it. Such patriotic and heroic women are those who can be categorised as female warriors or the embodiment of women's power and strength. Through their actions these women prove that "women also have the blood to shed for the service of the fatherland in danger" (Macdonald, Holden and Ardener 218)

Dinpui the female character in the novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* is the true image of female heroism. Through her the unbounded patriotism of women in times of Mizo Insurgency is declared. Though history records almost no heroic achievements of patriotic women, her stories reflected the heroic possibilities of Mizo women who are the supporters, suppliers and caretakers of the patriotic MNF volunteers.

The culturally constructed notions of heroism partially honoured the aggressive and destructive masculine action, while no medals, monuments or acknowledgments were given to women who replaced men in the workforce and who faithfully support male-combatants. But, heroism cannot be accepted as a notion strictly confined in masculine actions and it cannot be defined by gender alone. Rather, it is flexible, expandable and is within the reach of everyone whether man or woman. According to Zeno Franco and Phillip Zimbardo the core of heroism revolves around "the individual's commitment to a noble purpose and the

willingness to accept the consequences of fighting for that purpose” (Franco and Zimbardo 31), and that everyone has the potential to become a hero, and circumstances can force almost anyone to be a hero or urge them to undertake heroic deeds. Phillip Zimbardo and Zeno Franco stated:

.....we are all potential heroes waiting for a moment in life to perform a heroic deed. The decision to act heroically is a choice that many of us will be called upon to make at some point in time. By conceiving of heroism as a universal attribute of human nature, not as a rare feature of the few “heroic elect”, heroism becomes something that seems in the range of possibilities for every person, perhaps inspiring more of us to answer that call. (31)

In relation to Zeno Franco and Phillip Zimbardo’s definition of heroism, women characters in select *Rambuai* fiction can be considered as individuals having heroic potentials of their own. Though they lack inspirational model, the brave yet domestically confined deeds performed by them are no doubt heroic in action and in heart. Their courage and selflessness, their perseverance, their undying support and love for Mizoram as well as the underground movement; and how they battled with the hardships of life as women amidst political violence and killings makes them eligible to be accepted as heroes having the same potential and commitment as the Mizo patriots. Though women characters in the selected texts appeared less active and less heroic than male combatants, they have proved that without emulating male warriors and heroes, women have the potentials and capabilities to perform actions which are no less respectable and honourable than male heroic actions. At the same time, they also unveiled the truth that the meanings and values inherent in heroism do not solely rest in masculine action, but rather in commitment, perseverance, willingness and courage.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter concludes the points highlighted in the dissertation. Mizo Insurgency as generally understood is an armed political conflict between the MNF and the Indian government, which started with the MNF declaration of independence and ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord. But a feminist study of select *Rambuai* fiction offers a new understanding of Mizo Insurgency, its nature and consequences. By focusing on women as its core subject, the study highlights the insider's picture of the untold women's experiences. It presents the core elements which fuelled an immense diversion in the experiences of the Mizo who are equally troubled by the horrific Mizo Insurgency. It also demonstrates the complexity and multiplicity of troubles, sufferings and challenges faced by Mizo women in situations of conflict.

The study also substantiates the limitation of the recurring images of Mizo Insurgency, such as the destruction, the combat-orientated objectives and goals. By concentrating on the less explored women's experiences, the study brings out the centrality of gender dynamics in the understanding of Mizo Insurgency. It shows how the politically constructed images and narratives of Mizo Insurgency can take a different turn if examined through the lens of gender. And most importantly, the study discloses the fact that the often neglected Mizo women have their own stories of insurgency which are worth studying and telling just as the patriotic stories of the Mizo men.

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