

***REPRESENTATION AND REALITY:
A STUDY OF SELECT MIZO FOLK NARRATIVES***

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Chapter 1: Situating Representation and Reality in Select Narratives

Representation and reality are crucial in the perception of the world. We perceive and acknowledge our reality through the aspect of representation. Representation primarily involves the conceptions and images (representation) of the world, something which naturally take place on many levels within society (Dahlstedt 236). While noting the ambiguity of the word *real*, Raymond Williams has noted, “this word can have almost diametrically opposed senses” because on the one hand we often use real in opposition to the false or imagery. The real is concrete and knowable to the senses. On the other hand, we also use real in opposition to appearances or self- deceptive convictions. In this case, the real, points to underlying or overlooked facts, to truths that are not apparent in everyday life. The real here is precisely what we cannot know by the senses or through material objects in the world (Potolsky 94). This ambiguous nature has been dealt by scholars dating back to Plato, in *The Republic* written around 380 BC and Aristotle’s *Poetics*. According to Plato, the real is unattainable by men by stating an example of his famous “allegory of the cave” where human beings are presumed to be trapped in a cave watching shadows cast on the wall of the cave. What these prisoners take to be reality is, from the perspective of philosophy, mere illusion. Since they known nothing beyond the shadows they see, the prisoners can have no grasp of reality, nor any sense as to why the world as they know it, is false and incomplete. All they know are shadows. Next a prisoner freed from

his chain has the chance to venture out from the cave and turns towards the light and the actual object that cast the shadows, found himself staring at the sun (Plato 2010). What people in general understand as reality is for the philosopher less real than truth grasped by means of reason alone. According to Plato, the world itself becomes an imitation.

In terms of representation, the term raised Plato's condemnation denotes that representation is a degraded imitation, "a kind of game and shouldn't be taken seriously" because it represents only appearance and not the truth or reality. *Mimesis* (representations) does not reflect the real, but are cheap imitations of the real. The representational artist and his mimetic art should in fact be banished. *Mimesis* and *verisimilitude* are terms related to representation and reality. *Mimesis* has been derived from classical Greek which generally means *imitation* or in this case *representation*. As it developed as a critical term, the meaning of *mimesis* has gradually widened to encompass the general idea of close artistic imitation of social reality (Morris 5) while *verisimilitude* is "defined as the appearance of being true or real; likeness or resemblance to truth, reality or fact" (5). Plato's seminal theory of reality and representation has been referred to and advocated by scholars over the years. Aristotle's *Poetics* is also important in the study of representation as it also deals with art and representation or imitation. Aristotle never gives an explicit analysis of the term 'imitation' however his conception of imitation is a corrective to Plato. While Plato accused imitation of being a deceiving art, for Aristotle, they are innate in human beings from childhood and that man learns

by the process of imitation. His point is that poetry is an expression of a human instinct for mimesis that is also displayed in more elementary forms of behavior. He also holds that imitation gives pleasure and is natural to man because of the knowledge attained through them (Halliwell 15). Since then, these theories have been applied in representational theories by various writers.

The question of reality has become an issue, a never ending debate. The real is contrasted with the illusory, the fictitious and the spurious, an allied trio, not quite identical each with each (Laird 2). And the question of how do we know which is reality poses certain philosophical debates because reality is not static. Hodgson has claimed that what constitutes the “real” as an object or event:

must first exist or take place independently of the existence of the percipient; secondly it must not be illusory, but, in unchanged circumstances, must continue to be or to appear as it is or appears at any given moment; thirdly, it must have some efficient operation in changing or maintaining the state of things around it. Stated briefly, by the real is meant, in pre-philosophic thought, the opposite of that which is appearance only”(10) .

According to him, the idea of our reality is “derived from the ideas of Matter, which is in turn derived from facts of immediate experience” (11). The perception of ‘Matter’ includes experience, sensation, perception, representation, and reasoning which occurs from an infant

stage. These enable us to perceive and recognize our reality. This view is often termed as 'naïve realism'.

Reality is perceived in many ways, and the following usage may appear to be the most conspicuous in which the term is used: 'Reality may be understood in the sense of simple Being, or that which has a place in the Universe-the Universe meaning here the totality of that which is or may be apprehended by any actual or possible mode of cognition' (Makenzie 2). Reality here is derived from anything that is perceived in the universe. 'It [reality] may be used in the sense of definite Existence, or that which has a place in the order of normal human waking experience' (3). Here it contrasts to the illusionary or imaginary. Though this usage may be practical yet theoretically vague, but nonetheless, it is clear for practical purpose. 'It [reality] may be used in the sense of Truth or Validity' (3). In this sense, as in the preceding one, reality has an opposite; but the opposite in this case is not the imaginary or illusory, but the false. 'Reality may also be understood in an intensive s[e]nse, to express the degree in which anything occupies a place in some order' (5). Degrees of reality here are often measured 'in the sense of something that has force, persistence, importance, or some other characteristics that gives it a greater value than something else' (5). Finally, 'reality may be understood in the sense of that -which is substantial or independent. It is the sense in which Reality is contrasted with Appearance' (5-6). There are many senses in which appearance is or may be real. Though the above usages of reality are theoretically vague and begging contradictions, nonetheless they are used by the common man in

sharing his realities and this world view is what constitutes culture. Reality is the state of being real, and real is factual or true in an objective way, where this objectivity is through the eyes of the beholder. Therefore, reality is a construction of the world that we build up through symbol systems such as language, mathematical models, and pictures. When humans experience new symbols and facts, they tie this information in with collective experiences. In so doing, the realities of the world are re-defined. The concept of “world construction” refers to the realities created by humans through the invention of language, tools, social norms, values and other aspects of culture. These realities are constructed out of the activities in which humans are engaged. However once created, “these realities become endowed with factual qualities; they are experienced as objective and are defined as the natural state of affairs” (Eber et. al 13). “World maintenance” consists of the social influences, controls, and supports by which people uphold definitions of reality in any given social context (15). The cultural histories of everyday life help us to begin to attempt to understand the ‘structure of feeling’ or reality that underlies a particular culture and its shared values.

In art and literature, the varied sense of the real shifts according to who does the defining. Rene Wellek has written, ‘[a]rt cannot help dealing with reality’ (qtd. Potolsky 95), but the nature of that reality is flexible. Tony Davies describes ‘realism’ as one of those words ‘whose range of possible meanings runs from the pedantically exact to the cosmically vague’, because of its association with claims about reality, the concept of realism [also] participates in scientific

and philosophical debates (Morris 2). All realisms do, however, have one thing in common and that is that they attempt to show that art reflects or imitates the social world or nature in the qualified sense (qtd in Morris 3). Realism is applied ‘to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature’ (Abrams 269). Here the chief aim is to represent human existence precisely as it is. This in turn gives rise to the questions of “fidelity of representation” or “rendering of precise details” in art and literature. There is a popular and somewhat paradoxical assumption that realist fiction is to be judged according to how faithfully it corresponds to things and events in the real world (Morris 5). The more exact the correspondence, the more the realist writer is to be praised as having achieved his aim. However, literary realism is a representational form and a representation can never be identical with that which it represents; words function completely different from mirrors (4). Realist novels developed as a popular form during the nineteenth century along with representational practice of photography. Like realist writing, photography too is distinctive art forms that carefully select, organize and structure their representations of the world. It was this kind of perception of realism which aimed as accurate reportage or ‘reflection’ that aroused the criticism of idealists who invoked truths that lay beyond the surface appearance of things (6).

Realism is a representational art as it aims to depict reality. The representation of reality employs numerous strategies and has been varied according to certain contexts. *Representation* is derived from the Roman word *repraesentare* “which mean the literal bringing into presence of

something previously absent or the embodiment of an abstraction in an object” (Pitkin 3).

Christophere Prendergast has supplied two basic meanings:

First, there is the sense of represent as re- present, to make present again, in two related ways, spatial and temporal: spatially present (in the sense of the German *darstellen*, “to put before,” “to put there”) and present in the related temporal sense of the present moment (to present there and now)...The second basic meaning of represent is that of standing for: a present term “b” stands in for an absent term “a”...Representation in this sense thus rests on a principle of *substitution* (4-5).

These could be further specified in terms of a number of different contexts of use, and the most popular are; political, representation in the sense of a political system and representations in art.

The history of art and art criticism demonstrates that artistic representation has always been a matter of style and convention (Pitkin 66). Auerbach (1953) approaches his study of literary representations of reality through the perspective of historical linguistics and literary stylistics. His reading scrutinizes and compares the dynamics of cultural styles. For him, reality and truth are perceived and represented on a matter of style over the years. Just as realism is flexible, the representational mode too varies from one to another. Aristotle in *Poetics* has laid out that representations differ from one another in three ways: in object, manner and means. The “object” is that which is represented; the “manner” is the way in which it is represented; the

“means” is the material that is used. In literary representation, the “means” are basically similar to the mentioned “code”, therefore they are language. But this “means” (language) could be employed in several ways. Thus the “manner” suggests the particular way a representational code is employed (Mitchell).

The proportional theory of representation makes explicit that “resemblance, reflection, accurate correspondences are vitally necessary ...because these things are what representation means” (Pitkin 62). When partially this is true, representation need not only be resemblance and accuracy of depiction, as the “means” could be utterly different and function in the form of symbols. Symbolic meaning is derived from the process of reality construction by which meanings, designs, and vocabularies are created for describing the external environment. Once created, such meanings are incorporated into personal spheres of thought and action (Eber et.al 3). When an artist represents something by a symbol, that symbol may well be a recognizable object, but it need not be and usually is not a representation of what it symbolizes.

To this relation of “standing for” the question arise on what authority “a” stands for “b”. Authority in representation is linked with the relation between representation and *power*. In literature, realist fictions are distinctive art forms that carefully select, organize and structure their representations of the world. Here, “representations are best seen as forces at work in a cultural force field; in that sense, they are irreducibly bound up with power. Literary fictions do

not simply portray or reflect the world. They elicit, precisely by way of their fictional modes of representation, attitudes to the world that enable - or - disable forms of understanding” (Prendergast 15). With such a role in literature, New Historicists view representations as the products of and the means of propagating the culture’s prevailing ideologies and power relations. In other words, representations maintain the status of the class or classes by re- presenting the belief systems and preserving the institutions upon which their status and power depend (Murfin et al 407).

In this aspect, representation and reality will be focused in studying the cultural realities of the Mizos through select folk narratives. Hence an introduction to the study of folklore and the Mizo folk narratives is necessary.

Mizoram is situated in the North East of India. The people of Mizoram known as the Mizo, are from a Mongolian race, with physique most common to the Chinese. The advent of the Mizos to their present land has been mostly agreed to occur during the sixteenth century (Sangkima 2004: 52). The Mizos comprises of several clans like Sailo, Ralte, Chhakchhuak, Kawlni, Renthlei, Chawngthu, Tlau, Hmar, Mara, Lai and many others. The word “Mizo” is “rather a generic term by which all the tribes under the Mizos are known in Mizoram..” (17). The Mizos have their own system of administration under chieftainship during the pre- colonial period (Chieftainship was abolished by the British government in 1954). Every village has its

own chief who consolidated his power over his subjects and under his administration, he appointed “*Lal Upate*” (Chief’s elders) to assist him. Wars in terms of raiding are common and therefore, the chief and his elders along with the men of his village undertook the responsibility of safe guarding the women and children. The chief is the supreme head in making decisions over war, “in burying the hatchet and making peace with another tribe and in the sacrificial ceremony which ratified the peace treaty; in dividing lots for annual cultivation (*jhoom*) plots, even in religious ceremonies and also at the times of celebrating public feasts or festivals...He had power over the life and death of his subjects” (Lalthangliana64). Most Mizos practice monogamy while there may be instances where some practice bigamy. Marriage was a transaction process, whereby the bride price is determined in terms of *sial* (mithun). In a family, the father is the head and the inheritance left to the youngest son. Regarding religion, Sangkima has denoted that like other primitive religion that usually includes animism, ancestor worship or worship of the dead and worship of a supernatural being, “the Mizo religion shows that it had the same characteristics and was animistic in nature” (Sangkima 2004: 64).

The Mizos had no script of their own. Sayings have it that they once had a script of their own but due to carelessness, a stray dog carried it away. Therefore due to the absence of written documents, their history and culture are often traced from “historical and traditional sources” : The historical sources comprise of research done from historical inscriptions and pre-historic monuments, while the traditional sources may include folklore, folksongs, beliefs, superstitions,

ceremonies, hymns, rituals etc (2-11). It was only after the advent of the British missionaries that the Roman script was implemented in writing the dialect of the Mizos in 1894. The history of the Mizos could be roughly divided into two broad divisions: the Pre- colonial period and the Post- colonial period (from 1890 A.D). There are drastic changes between these periods which are eminent in the changing culture and ethos of the Mizos. Before the British missionaries' intervention into the Mizo society, religion was primitive, but the late nineteenth century witnessed the conversion of the Mizo community to Christianity, a result of the British missionaries' pioneers. With Christianity came education and improvement in various spheres of life. Most importantly the changing culture and traditions of the Mizos is highly evident.

Inherently similar to other cultures of the world, the Mizos have an abundant tradition of folklore. The folktale occupies high importance in identifying the culture of the Mizos. "It represents the archaic thought of mankind, their feelings and world- view. It articulates a culture and provides a part of the historical picture of the bygone ages"(Sen vii). Festivals, songs, rituals, games and indigenous beliefs are a part of their lives where the chief occupation was agriculture and hunting, a necessary and prestigious role of the men folk. Most of their stories and histories are spun into tales, and their beliefs and superstitions into sayings, anecdotes and proverbs. According to B. Lalthangliana, the Mizo forefathers have no doubt told and composed stories by the year 1350 A.D before settling in their present land (311). Perhaps the foremost collection of Mizo folk narratives in a written form was *Mizo leh Vai Thawnthu* (Tales of the

Mizo and Vai) (1898) by Major Shakespeare which consisted of several translated folktales. The second was *Legends of Old Lushai* (1919) by Frederick J. Sandy. These two pioneers were British government officials and the stories which they collected have been invaluable for the Mizos. The first published Mizo folktales in Mizo have been done by Nuchhungi in 1962 called *Serkawn Graded Readers: Mizo Thawnthu*(Mizo Stories). And P.S Dahrawka's seminal collection of folk tales in *Mizo Thawnthu*(Mizo Stories) (1964) is eminent because he also truly captures the sensibility of the Mizo folks and their ethos from the native's perspectives (Lalruanga 49-56, translation mine). Since then, the value of Mizo folk narratives have been realized by the Mizo people and till the present time of writing, there are a number of published Mizo folk narratives collected by various writers and researchers and even translated into other languages.

The term "folklore" was first proposed by William Thoms (1803- 1885) in his letter to the *Athenaeum* published in 1846 (Thoms 9). According to Robert A. Georges et.al,

The word *folklore* denotes expressive forms, processes, and behaviors (1) that we customarily learn, teach, and utilize or display during face -to -face interactions, and (2) that we judge to be traditional (a) because they are based on known precedents or models, and (b) because they serve as evidence of continuities and consistencies through time and space in human knowledge, thought, belief, and feeling. The discipline devoted the

identification, documentation, characterization and analysis of traditional expressive forms, processes, and behaviors is *folkloristics* (1).

The study of folk narratives/ folklore dates back to the nineteenth century and ever since then this discipline has been of significant importance. Every culture has its share of folklore in the form of tales, legends, myths, songs, riddles and jokes. Most of these are being mediated over generations within a group by oral means and observation, and by custom or practice. Throughout most of past tradition, collective memoirs were transmitted primarily by means of an oral tradition. “This oral art of taletelling is far older than history, and it is not bounded by one continent or one civilization. Stories may differ in subject from place to place, the conditions and purposes of taletelling may change as we move from land to land or from century to century, and yet everywhere it ministers to the same basic social and individual needs” (Thompson 5). Stories were told about heroic times and how social life was created as a moral community. The continuity of social life was provided by oral traditions in which narratives were elaborated and embellished in order to have dramatic effects upon listeners. Then as now, storytelling and mythical accounts provided the ingredients for shaping personal and collective identities (Eber et.al 39). Thus folklore is often considered to be the unofficial culture of a group. It is also the means by which information and attitudes are transmitted and interpreted within the group. According to Raymond Williams, “Culture is one of the central keywords in human knowledge generally, as well as in social science. It is not only that most of the central arguments and

concepts through which we make sense of the world are located within socially and historically located cultures, but the very idea of culture is situated as well” (Smith 21). Cultural analysis has been identified as an activity which involves reading the lives of people in a particular way. This involves identifying and interpreting the social existence of the people under consideration and demonstrates how their values and stories make sense. As an approach it attempts to respect ordinary lives. And as a dialogic process through which meanings are established and transformed, we can recognize that words have plural meanings, that the ways in which words and ideas are expressed never belong exclusively to the speaker or writer but are open to many interpretations. Documentary accounts and memories can enable us to build a powerful image through which we can empathize with the experiences of the past. Also it can represent experiences which were once commonplace and now appear shocking. We can acknowledge the effectiveness of oral testimony in providing powerful mental imagery (36).

Research into folklore began to distinguish itself as an autonomous discipline during the period of romantic nationalism in Europe. Herder ‘s work and his interpretation of *Volk* (folk) had tangible effects which implies primarily cultural- philosophical implications (Dick 68). According to Ernest S Dick, the first author to initiate the collection of medieval poetry was Ludwig Tieck (1773- 1853), who started the revival of older literature, and the first major collection of folk songs after Herder was published by Arnim and Brentano in 1805/08, and the third major collection of comprehensive presentation, retelling, and interpretation of over forty

German folk books and legends was by Joseph Gorres in 1807. The brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm ushered in a new period of folkloristic ventures, and a new era of methodological standards and editorial responsibility with their collections during 1811- 1835 . In recent years, their fairy tales have attracted critical attention and the collection has become a legend in its own right. For scholars of folklore, it served as a system of reference in our century (71-3). Grimms folklore activities aroused interest in fairy tales and animal tales and in folk song, and to mythology to Germanic philology and lexicography which they also pioneered. In a few decades this enthusiasm for folklore spread over north Europe- Scandinavia, Finland and Germany took up collection and study (Pound 101). Since then, the study of folklore became internationalized and leading scholars and anthropologists like James G Frazer, Andrew Lang, EB Tylor, Franz Boas and Stith Thompson (to name a few) have left insightful works in the field of folklore.

Modern folklore study embraces oral, customary, and material aspects of tradition equally, and it makes eclectic use of theoretical and methodological approaches from anthropology, linguistics, communications, psychology, and other relevant areas. Richard M Dorson in "*Current Folklore Theories*" (1963) has laid down bodies of folklore theory competing vigorously with each other in mid- twentieth century. Folklorists all over the world have studied folklore materials like beliefs; tales, legends, anecdotes, and jokes; ballads, songs, and oral epics; decorative designs and symbolic mythological motifs in graphic and plastic art; ceremonies, rituals, dramas, dances, and processions, and their special occasions; music, both

vocal and instrumental; magic techniques and procedures of all sorts; esthetic notions; games and children's rhymes; local and national heroes; special societies and orders; charms, prayers, incantations, riddles, proverbs, mnemonic devices; and a host of other customary practices regarded as desirable or necessary, or associated with religious beliefs (Bayard 7).

The Mizos too have their own tales of various genres in their folk- narratives and the beginning *hmanlai chuan maw*(a long time ago) usually announces the beginning of a forthcoming tale. Zipes denoted that folktales are often told primarily for entertainment although they may also have secondary purposes and they are subject to essential change as they are transmitted from one generation to another, from one culture to another. Not only with the changing cultures and epochs, folk narratives also underwent internal changes within the same culture. The transformation is done by the narrator and audience in an active manner through improvisation and interchange to produce a version which would relate to the social conditions of the time (2002: 33). Eventually the plot, motif, characters and the form of a particular story changes from such factors. This inconsistency of folk narratives is put forward by Linda Degh;

Rooted in their social environment, stories are extremely sensitive to group and individual attitudes; the greater their popularity, the greater their inconsistency. They have no "final" form: They stiffen and freeze when they are no longer told, as if they

were written on paper. As long as they are told, they vary, merge, and blend; a change in their social value often results in a switch into another genre (Degh 59-60).

The Mizos too have attempted collecting and classifying tales and till today, some relevant collections have been published by various writers and the various genres have been classified and grouped differently. The Mizo folk narratives have been classified and briefly analyzed by Lalruanga in his *Mizo Thawnthu Zirzauna* (A Broad Compendium of Mizo Stories) (2000). Here he has denoted that the tale genres should be properly classified and in need of serious study. He has rendered the classification as denoted below:

Tuan Thu (Myth): The Mizo myth comprises of the creation myth as well as beliefs that are related to spirits and supernatural beings. This may also include the Mizo beliefs related to the human soul and their journey to the other world “*pialrial*”¹. Some of the Mizo myths are collected and published accordingly by R.L. Thanmawia in *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu Vol. I* (Tales from the Mizo Community) (2008) and *Mizo Thawnthu (Mizo Stories) Vol- V* (2011) by Lalhmachhuana Zofa. These collections consist of various Mizo creation myths and how certain objects acquire their names; both the good and evil spirits as well as their spiritual beliefs in the after life. Thus we have myths on how the earth came into being, how the Mizo people emerged, how the first people were created, how lightning and the eclipse occurred; there are also the

naming of stars and animals as well as the myth of supernatural beings like *lasi*, *phung*, *ramhuai*, *dawthiam*, all these have an important place in the ethos of the Mizo culture².

Legend: Though many writers have published many stories and legends of the Mizo, a semblance of the complete collection may be found in Lalmachhuana Zofa's *MizoThawnthu* (Mizo Stories) *Vol. I* (2006). We have characters like *Chhurbura*, *Mualzavata*, *Samdala*, *Aihniara*, *Lianchia*, *Buizova*, *Saichawnkhupa* and *Pawngvina* who are all remarkable with their own traits and remain inherently uncontested³. Legendary places like *Lianchhiari Lunglen Tlang* (The hill where the legendary Lianchhiari mused with longing for her lover), *Thasiama Se No Neihna* (The birth place of Thasiama's mithun), *Zawlpala Thlan Tlang* (The hill of Zawlpala's grave); caves like *Chawngchilhi Puk* (The cave of Chawngchilhi), *Kungawrhi Kua* (The hollow crevice of Kungawrhi) and *Rih Dil* (Rih lake), are historical places located in the land, with deep significance.

Thawnthu (Tales): The Mizos have rich folktales which could be widely classified into (i) the complex tale (which consist of supernatural beings, magic and marvels, romantic tales, tasks and quests, the higher power, and may also include realistic tales) and (ii) the simple tale (which comprises of jests and anecdotes, animal tales and may also include legends and traditions)⁴. Tales of supernatural beings are varied and could be seen in tales like "Sichangneii", "Kungawrhi", "Lalruanga leh Keichala" (Lalruanga and Keichala), "Thlihranthanga

lehAithangveli” (Thlihranthanga and Aithangveli), “Chawngtinleri”⁵. Tales of animals too varied widely and stories of monkeys, tortoise, snakes as well as dogs and tigers are depicted. Similar to other cultures, these animal tales all act and conversed like humans, they work and have their own jhum, befriended one another and conversed together; they could play the flute, and perform household chores. Also, there are tales where these two lived in a world where the animals could speak and interact with the humans as seen in the tales like “Chemtatrawta”, “Runginu leh Thialtea”(Runginu and Thialtea) and “Samdala”. We even find relationship between human and a snake in “Chawngchilhi” where the female protagonist bore baby snakes.⁶ Jests and humoristic tales may include the legendary Mizo hero “Chhurbura”. This character is central in Mizo folktales due the numerous tales in which he is depicted as a simpleton, trickster as well as the wittiest. These multi characteristics of Chhurbura have made him one of the most favorites among the Mizos. ⁷

The idea that folklore can express a group’s identity is not new. In fact Alan Dundes has examined the interconnection between folklore and identity in “Defining Identity through Folklore” (1989) linking the importance of folklore in creating identities in ethnic, sexual as well as stereotypical identities. Thompson has stated that folklore goes through the hands of both skilled and bungling narrators, therefore they ‘improve’ or ‘deteriorate’ at nearly every retelling. However well or poorly such a story may be written down, it always attempts to preserve a tradition, an old tale with the authority of antiquity to give it interest and importance (1951: 4-5).

In fact, folklore could never be separated from the culture which created them. The cultural ethos, customs and practices of a particular culture are embedded in their folklore. Dan Ben-Amos has claimed that “folklore genres are verbal formulations of reality that encompass social reality, religious beliefs, and natural laws” (Rohrich ix). Most of the narratives stem from the imaginative and symbolic depiction of social realities. Folktales, were often told by gifted storytellers around a hearth “who gave vent to the frustration of the common people and embodied their needs and wishes in the folk narratives” (Zipes 2002: 6). Here folk narratives serve as both entertainment and depiction of the social life of the people. Zipes further states that not only did they “serve to unite the people of a community and help bridge a gap in their understanding of social problems in a language and narrative mode familiar to the listener’s experiences, but their aura illuminated the possible fulfillment of utopian longings and wishes which did not preclude social integration” (6). The subject may vary widely, and the purpose differs but “curiosity about the past has always brought eager listeners to tales of the long ago which supply the simple man with all he knows of the history of his folk... and often a great heroic past evolves to gratify vanity and tribal pride (Thompson 5). The tales embodies the past, the wishes and imagination of the people.

For historicism, all meaning is [therefore] historically determined. Therefore meaning is derived from the languages, beliefs, practices, institutions and desires of a particular historically located culture. Historicism takes into account that nothing means in

isolation; one cannot take a text or an idea and simply lift it out of the contexts in which it was produced so as to claim that it always has and always will mean the same thing. Rather, any meanings that a text might have are always related to the much wider cultural, political, economic and social institutions and practices of its context. Historicism is therefore interested in the processes of change, and the ways in which particular periods or cultures constructs the systems of power, morality and meaning through which they can understand themselves (Malpas 55).

The historicist claim of history and culture mutually embedded together is not new. For them, then, there are no eternal meanings or truths that exist entirely outside the processes of historical change: all meaning is historically mutable because it is situated in and generated by its context. To properly understand a text from the past, it must be explored in terms of the meanings and ideas that were in circulation in the context from which it emerged. In terms of the Mizo folk narratives, history plays a crucial role. The Mizo culture with their beliefs and practices add meaning to their narratives and form this view that history is inseparable to literary text as literature is the representation of history, and contains insights to the formation of historical moments.

In an attempt to portray the reality in folk narratives, the history and cultural factors need to be studied. Many folklorists believed that reality finds reflections in folklore in various forms,

as in history, religion, moral principles, society, and culture, as well as the mentality of the people. This collective identity forms the reality of a particular culture.

In *Interpreting Folklore* (1980), Alan Dundes in his preface states that,

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

However, does this mean that the marvelous folklore should be taken as real with all its distortion and magical elements? The Mizos have supernatural beings like *Lasi, ramhuai, phung, huai* , *khawhring, dawithiam, pheichham, khuavang*⁸ that make up a large part of the folklore. There are also marvelous encounters with the spirits and the other world as well as tales of talking animals and relationships between human and animals or supernatural beings. So, literally folklore denotes elements of the unreal with all its magical components and marvelous encounters. Due to this, it is often treated as a farce with its elements of the unnatural. It is often believed too that folklore is meant for children who haven’t quite differentiated between fiction and reality. Thus most of the folktales are told as bed time stories for children and has been implied that fairy tales [folklore] do not speak the language of everyday reality.

The familiar 'formula' "once upon a time" warns that we are not going to hear about real persons and places. The Grimms even have a few choice beginnings, e.g., "in days of yore when God himself still walked the earth, the land was much more fruitful than it is now" (Weber 96). When studying realism in relation to folktales, there are various ways to interpret folktale as a genre that is defined in contradiction to experience, reality and religious belief. A sampling of definitions reveals this recurrent criterion:

We understand a folktale to be a tale created from poetic fantasy, particularly from the realm of magic; it is a wonder story not concerned with the conditions of real life (Rohrich 1).

According to Vladimir Propp, "what makes folktale [folklore] attractive is its unusual narrative and its lack of correspondence with reality"(Propp19). In folk narrative, the strange/unusual procures dimensions that are inherently impossible. He further states that,

[Another] characteristic is that events that did not occur and could never have occurred are recounted with certain intonations and gestures, as though they did actually take place, although neither the teller nor the listener believes the tale. This discrepancy determines the *humor* of the tale. ...Wondertales, animal tales, and so forth, are permeated by a light, good-natured humor, which stems from the feeling that all this is only a folktale, not reality (20).

In contrast to this belief, folklore actually deals with reality and this is where the process of representation occurs. As stated before, modes of representation could change from one to another. Even though, a particular folktale may contradict the natural world with its elements of the unnatural, its representations could show us a much wider view of the realities and culture embedded in the tale. New Historicists claimed that the past reality can never be available to us in pure form, but always in the form of 'representations' (Selden 191).

A careful reading of the Mizo folktales reveals a number of recurrent themes: poverty, fear, class struggle, values, beliefs and everyday realities. The use of the past is the first mode of representation engaged by men and they are the source of information that links personal experiences. The past has had a considerable hold on human beings. The use of language and other symbols provide the raw materials for linking personal lives with each other and with environmental conditions. It is through the use of representation that social order is created, the world becomes meaningful, personal identities are shaped, and individuals find their place within the broader scheme of human affairs. The past is called into play when information is required. However this information is biased because people tend to repeat or recall a rewarding past and avoid those activities that are associated with pain and suffering. Maurice Halbwachs has mentioned that memory is collective (Eber 35). The Mizo forefathers labor from dawn to dusk in the jhum to provide food. Life was poor and simple. Since most of their time was spent at the jhoom, many incidents and adventures in their folk narratives occurred in the jhoom and the

forest. Moreover, due to poverty, it was difficult to feed an extra mouth and thus the theme of the evil stepmother and the plight of the orphans' became an important part of the folk narratives. The adversary of the hero or heroine may be in the form of his/her relatives. For some reason, to the composer of folktales, 'it is the woman in the family who is nearly always chosen for the part of the villain' (Thompson 113). Hence the Mizo narratives depict tales of "Mauruangi", "Thailungi", "Rahtea", "Rairahtea"⁹, orphans who were tormented by their stepmothers. The plight of these orphans was terrible and the Mizo cultural treatment of orphans is represented in these tales. The treatment meted out to orphans has however improved over the years in the Mizo society.

The poverty of the Mizo forefathers have also led to the construction of magical objects that could provide them unlimited food or resources in their folktales. Imagination and the fantastic aspect of the tales represent the inner thoughts and longings of the past. The economic depravity is mostly portrayed when characters in folk tales get gifts or asks for them or when they are granted three wishes, their ambitions are very simple: they dream of better clothes and better places in which to live, but above all they dream of food (Rohrich 96). The Mizos have Chhura's *Sekibuhchhuak*, a magical object which could produce unlimited rice and meat with a chant. There is also Chepahakhata's *Belte phai thei lo*, a vessel with unlimited food stored in it; Maurawkela's *Zawngkhuang*, a magic drum that fulfills the wishes of the drummer when played and Rairahtea's *Bahnukte* that fulfill wishes¹⁰. These magical objects are actually believed to

have existed and it concludes two points namely that the Mizo forefathers long for wish fulfillment and that they believe in the existence of magic. ‘The tale of magic actually corresponds to belief in magic;...magic and wonders do not separate true from false, they belong to stories passed down as true and are assimilated into general norms of belief’ (qtd in Rohrich 145).

The belief in magic and the supernatural are a living reality of the past Mizo society. The magic and wonder are embedded in various tales that may be grouped as supernatural beings or spirits which may be classified as evil or good. The Mizo pre-colonial culture believes in supernatural beings and religious rites and sacrifices that are a part of their lives. They believed that evil spirits or *ramhuai* could torment them with diseases, and sacrifices were made to appease the spirits through their priest who was called *Bawlpui*¹¹. Like a doctor, he would prescribe the kind of sacrifice which the family should observe in order to appease the suffering and the troubled (Sangkima 2004: 109). Likewise, they performed sacrificial rites to appease the spirits who were believed to have power over the sun, the rain as well as the spirit that reigns over the animals. Myriads of practices in the form of rituals and ceremonies are found in the pre-Christian Mizo society, and it is no wonder that they find reflection in the folktales. According to Lutz Rohrich,

The awareness that people are dependent on otherworld powers and knowing we cannot escape the presence of supernatural beings also represent basic religious thought (Rohrich 214).

The most common supernatural beings or spirits known by the Mizos are embedded in the traditional songs and tales. Some of these which exist in Mizo folktales are *khuavang*, “spiritual entities that existed all around us...and are guardians spirits that protected human beings” (Lalthangliana 258). The tale of “Kungawrhi” depicts the participation of the *khuavang* in human life. Another spirit called *lasi* had a tremendous mark in Mizo culture and folktales. They are believed to be beautiful and have authority and power over animals. They are close to human contact and stories of people and *lasi* falling in love or marrying each other are popular, as in “Chawngtinleri”. The human relationships with supernatural beings are also seen in “Sichangneii”, “Thlihranthanga leh Aithangveli” (Thlihranthanga and Aithangveli), “Thangsira leh Thangzaia” (Thangsira and Thangzaia), “Tlingi leh Ngama” (Tlingi and Ngama).¹² These tales involve a supernatural maiden who falls in love with or even marries a human being and the tale of “Tlingi leh Ngama”(Tlingi and Ngama) is especially a representative of the perception of the spiritual world by the ancestors. Their world and the other (spiritual) world seem closer than ever, where interaction between human and spirits are not strange phenomena. Thus the magical beliefs of the Mizos are their reality; they accepted it and are very real to them, even though they may no longer hold true to the present culture. This changing reality is represented in the folk

narratives as “human being’s views of reality are dependent on their conceptions of, and personal reactions to perceived phenomena and ways they conceptualize those phenomena relative to each other and to themselves” (Georges 33).

Although many situations in folktales are predominantly unreal, the folktale raises actual problems of general human significance. The folktale concerns everyone because it presents everyone’s reality. Although the formula “once upon a time” projects the events onto an indefinite past, the deeper reason for the folktale’s spread lies in its everyday actuality, its reference to everyday life (Rohrich 214). Rohrich further states that “the folktale touches all of our personal relationships... Everything in the story relates to people; thus folktales do not depict the landscape and nature. When animals appear in the folktale, and even when only animals appear, the tale is nonetheless “really” about human affairs” (214). The world of the human and animals are never far apart. Sometimes folk tradition is very careful in its choice of animals, so as to make the human actions as nearly appropriate as possible (Thompson 217). Animal tales in the form of the monkey who plays a flute, friendship between a monkey and a tortoise, a bear and a monkey and a porcupine and a deer, may prove this stance that animal tales are often interconnected with human lives. The characters portrayed are human in nature and they portray varying aspects, for instances– the monkey with a flute was envied by a bird, the monkey required to do his household chores, the tortoise and monkey going out together to pluck fruits and catch fish, the truce between a monkey and a bear, a bear having a spring of his own, and

lastly a porcupine and a deer fighting over a jhoom. The folktale's content is always a general reality and they are timeless events which everyone has experienced or can experience.

The Mizo folk narratives also represent reality not only in terms of portraying the historical past, it also reflects the realities of human nature. Almost every folktale contains serious conflicts which are as much a part of the folktale's normal pattern to achieve its happy ending. The theme of survival is central. Just as in reality, human life consists of obstacles and sufferings, folktales inadvertently represents this human struggle in the form of the hero journeying and stumbling among obstacles, defeating monsters or passing a test, and getting a reward for it and living happily ever after. This aspect of survival in the human spirit could be seen in tales like "Chemteii", who saved her father from a difficult test and gained the love of their chief; and tale of "Hluanchhinga" who saved his entire village from war from the oppressive neighboring village through his wits; and the tale of "Tumchhingi leh Raldawna"¹³, who gained their happiness by defeating the horrible being, Phungpuinu¹⁴ who impersonated Tumchhingi. The tale of "Thailungi"¹⁵ is also relevant with the various tasks Thailungi's brother has to go through in order to rescue his sister. As a rule, the folktale depicts the surmounting of obstacles, the harmonious solution of all problems, and the restoration of the natural order.

The folktale's egocentric attitude should also be mentioned here: the entire plot revolves around a single person, the hero; and only he or she connects the various episodes. It is also

striking that the folktale almost exclusively depicts individual problems while community problems are absent (204). Sympathy and antipathy apply exclusively to an individual hero. All this facilitates the tacit analogy between the folktale hero and the narrator. Narrators consider the hero's adversaries their own as well and depict everything that happens to the folktale hero as if they are going through it themselves. These shows that folktale is indicative of real experience. It is an experiential narrative and not "mere entertainment" (205). Motifs from real life serve to connect phantasy with reality and to bring the anachronistic world of the tales up- to- date (Degh 65). The narrator's reality is very much embedded in his narratives and thereby over the years the folktale evolves with the changing reality of the narrators. No matter how marvelous the tale has become, it still more or less contains the reality that the narrator has added in the tale. Many cultures have adopted folklore in educating the children while implementing the didactic nature of folklore. A traditional tale must suit the individual's subjective inner willingness to accept the text if it is to survive. A folktale must please the narrator in some way if it is to be retained and told again. A favorite tale says a lot about a narrator and what he or she likes in a tale. The audiences too are more interested in tales in which the heroes experience conflicts that are similar to their own (Rohrich 203). In this way, the folktale often becomes a concealed or even open statement about the narrator and reflects his or her personality throughout.

“The folktale accurately reflects the narrator’s hidden emotions, his minor and sublime, kind and touching, and ugly features. He can present himself as he is in the folktale, without being shy and without pretense.” (qtd. in Rohrich 204)

As August Nitschke has demonstrated, the tales are reflections of the social order in a given historical epoch, and, as such, they symbolize the aspirations, needs, dreams and wishes of common people in a tribe, community, or society, either affirming the dominant social values and norms or revealing the necessity to change them (Zipes 2002: 7). When gifted narrators told the tales to his audience, they participated actively by posing questions, suggesting changes to suit their ethos and in such way that not merely the narrator, but the audience as a whole represented elements of reality through their folklore.

If we look beyond the commonplace of every day life, society reflects a coincidence of values which can be attributed to the fact that the fundamental conditions of life are the same for all. The world is finite, in space as in possibilities, and it is contingent, with fortune or misfortune playing a crucial role. The good and the bad of the lower orders are little different from those of their betters. The work ethos is accepted by everybody, though not for everybody, since high birth, or success, or beatitude brings escape from labour. Hierarchy – social or supernatural – is affirmed by power and mitigated by luck. Folk wisdom and official values approve of reward and retribution, but experience, in

which the relation between cause and effect remains unclear, suggests that many explanations are supernatural and that resignation is the ultimate wisdom (Weber 96).

The inner realities of folklore still correspond to the present realities in terms of value. The social values of benevolence and Mizo *Tlawmngaihna*⁶ are seen in the past through significant aspects of the folklore, and this quality is still adopted by Mizo society. The concept of ‘good versus evil’ is highly portrayed and retributions are gladly accepted. The theme of the hero in contact with evil in the form of human/ supernatural beings can be seen in the folk narratives. The tale of “Tumchhingi leh Raldawna” (Tumchhingi and Raldawna) tells of a battle between Tumchhingi (the heroine) and Phungpuinu (ogress), and evil in the form of Phungpuinu is defeated. The story of “Kungawrhi” also has adversaries against the supernatural being *Khuavang* (a guardian spirit) who kidnapped her, but in the end she is rescued by Pawthira who defeated the *Khuavang* as well as his trickster brother. The story of “Chawngchilhi” who abused her younger sister and has an affair with a giant snake ends with the snake and Chawngchilhi being killed by the father. As a central theme of the folktale, the desire for happiness seems largely due to the social conditions under which folktale bearers live; narrators may occasionally find an alternative to the prosaic realities of their life in the folktale’s fiction (Rohrich 191). Happiness is often the result of doing good and defeating evil in the process.

In the folktale the poor man is almost always ethical, in contrast to the evil wealthy man (Weber 189). The portrayal of the poor man who could achieve greatness either by luck or by courage is another motif that is found in folk tales. “Liandova te Unau” (Liandova and his Sibling) is a tale that tells of poor orphan brothers who later achieve greatness and wealth in the end. The character of Liandova is meek and ethical, and his genuine love for his younger brother, is still used as exemplary advice in the Mizo household. The romantic tale of “Duhmanga leh Dardini”(Duhmanga and Dardini) also represents class struggle. The chief’s son who fell in love with a woman belonging to a class lower than him, faces many obstacles to be with his beloved. They are united only in death and this depicts the fact that social status and class are one of the factors that separates the rich from the poor. The tale of “Tuanpuii leh Chhawrtuineihlala” (Tuanpuii and Chhawrtuineihlala)also denotes class consciousness when Chhawrtuineihlala’s mother abused his wife Tuanpuii believing she is not worthy of her son and family, and approved her only when she is dressed in her royal attire. Folktales strongly emphasize upon social differences.

An attempt to portray all the inherent customs and culture through representation is not possible, and deeper analysis of tales will be dealt with in the other chapters. Representation will never cease to exist in portraying the reality of a specific culture. As long as a tale is told and transformed accordingly, it means that reality is never absent from the tale because, “the basic nature of folk tale was connected to the objective ontological situation and dreams of the

narrators and their audiences in all age group” (Zipes 2002: 33). The association of folklore with the past, glorious or not, continued. Progress meant leaving the past behind. From this perspective, the peasants were destined to lose their folklore as they marched towards civilization. However, assumption about the gloomy death of folklore is in part a result of the misguided and narrow concept of the folk as the illiterate in a literate society (Dundes 2005:399). Dundes later states that it is easy to believe that with the demise of folk or peasant culture, the deterioration of folklore was a matter of course. This is a narrow view on folklore because it is visible that there are still numerous active functioning folk groups (e.g., ethnic, occupational, religious) and that the peasant community is just one of many different types of “folk”. In fact, even as this one of formerly rural homogenous folk group becomes transformed into urban, heterogeneous, part-time folk groups, new types of folklore are emerging, some of which are actually caused by capitalism as in the creation of folklore from commercial advertisements (400). It must be noted that change per se is not necessarily negative. Change is neutral, neither good nor bad. It may be either; it may be both.

In terms of Mizo folk narratives, change is inevitable, especially after the post- colonial scenario. It is not surprising that the first collection of Mizo folklore was authored by a British colonizer as in other states of India. Narayan has commented that “those who set about systematically collecting folklore materials in the nineteenth century were a varied crew: administrators, missionaries, and the women attached through their husbands or fathers to the

colonial enterprise” (183). Although the occurrences, experiences, ramifications, and implications of the colonial encounter are different in many ways, all of them have the abiding commonality which is change. Resultant of the colonial experience, none of the colonies could not remain immune to acculturation nor could go back to the so called former precolonial condition. Changes are found to occur at the level of culture, politics and economy.

The changing culture with Christianity firmly embedded in the lives of the people brought drastic shift in the beliefs of the native people. The economic and social lives of the people improved with education and the Christian faith abolished beliefs in the Mizo spiritual beliefs. Cultural ethos and sentiments gradually changes even though certain attempts are being made to stick to traditions like the appearance of Mizo folklore in comic strips and cartoons that are meant for educating the younger generations of authentic Mizo folklore. The “modernization” of the society led many scholars (of folklore) to believe that folklore was dying or would die out very soon. And in fact some genres did disappear from oral tradition due to the impact of the modernization, but they continued to live on in other forms of modern media (Handoo 1). Folklores have been overshadowed, but to a great extent, they have managed to survive amidst the Christian ethos and Biblical narratives and allegories that facilitated Christian moral education. Thus the reality that was represented in Mizo folk narratives could not correspond with the changing conditions of the Mizo society;

...folk thinking was colored, and often fashioned or re-fashioned, by what their betters thought or wanted them to think. The obvious indoctrination here was the Church: Christian morality came to color the language and the thinking of even the humblest folk (Weber 112).

At the time of writing, there is the beginning of a period of change where new aspirations came to the fore in the form of preservation and restoration of ethnic culture and formation of basic culture and identity through folklore and traditions. This initiative has been taken by both the locals and the government. Traditional songs, dances, games and festivals are widely performed and celebrated by the Mizos today. However it is not possible to portray all folk performances in the contemporary society because of adaptations and changes that folk culture goes through. Amidst all this, folk narratives have become an important material in portraying the past folk culture.

The thesis will study the changing realities of the Mizo society in the post- colonial period in terms of folk narratives that still hold a place in the present society. With a more eclectic theoretical framework, one can state that folklore in general is not developing or dying out, but only that some genres or some examples of some genres are decreasing in popularity or usage (Dundes 2005: 403). By the same token, one can observe that folklore in general is not evolving or being born, but only that some genres or some examples of some genres are

increasing in popularity or usage and that occasionally new form of folklore are created. One need not, in other words, place the golden age either in the far distant past or in the far distant future. One may merely indicate that folklore is universal; there has always been folklore and in all likelihood there will always be folklore (403).

Glossary:

Bawlpu: an exorcist, a priest.

Dawithiam: a witch, a wizard, a sorcerer, a magician.

Huai: an evil spirit, a demon, a devil.

Khawhring: the name of a malignant spirit which closely approximates to what in English is known as 'evil-eye' that it may well be called by that name.

Khuavang: the name of a guardian spirit.

Lal Upate: Village elders who help the chief in his administration.

Lasi: 1. The fabled creator of animals. 2. The spirit which presides over hunting

Pialral: the Lushai paradise. (the abode of the dead)

Pheichham: the name of a one legged evil spirit. Its single footmark is said to be seen sometimes in the sand of lonely forest streams.

Phung/ Phungpuinu: a spirit, a ghost, a bogey, a spook, an ogress, a genie, a goblin, a hobgoblin. (Generally regarded as a female by the Lushais)

Ramhuai: an evil spirit, a demon, a devil, a nat.

Tlawmngaihna: : it means to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent (refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be proud or self respecting to give in, etc.

(Source: Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1988. Print.)

Notes:

¹ *Pialral* is the abode of the dead believed by the Mizo forefathers.

² *lasi, phung, ramhuai* are supernatural beings believed to be present among the humans by the Mizo forefathers. They make up the traditional religious belief of the Mizo.

³ These are legendary folk heroes where Chhurbura is the popular Mizo trickster, Samdala known for his outrageous laziness, Mualzavata for his super strength, Aihniara for his swiftness, Lianchia for his immense good looks, while Buizova is known for his melodious tone, Saichawnkhupa known as the ugliest Mizo and Pawngvina as the most temperamental.

⁴ The classification has been done in correspondence to Stith Thompson's *The Folktale* (1951).

⁵ Sichangneii was a beautiful heavenly maiden who married a human and had children, but in the end she returned to her world abandoning her husband and children.

Kungawrhi was conceived from a wounded thumb and was kidnapped by supernatural beings called *Khuavang* and was ultimately rescued by a hero, Phawthira.

Lalruanga was one of the most powerful magicians found in Mizo folktales and he befriended Keichala, a being who could transform into a tiger. They embarked on a journey together and became enemies in the end.

“Thlihranthanga leh Aithangveli” is a romantic tale where a human married a heavenly maiden Aithangveli but ultimately lost her to her kind.

Chawngtinleri was a beautiful maiden who was sold by her brother to become the wife of the supernatural *lasi*(the fabled creator of animals) ruler. She lived her life as a *lasi* queen and her relationship with the human world could be seen in many of the Mizo folktales.

⁶“Chemtatrawta” is a cumulative tale that involved both animals and human beings playing the blame game.

“Runginu leh Thialtea” (Runginu and Thialtea)is a short tale where human and animals co-existed side by side and conversed together.

Samdala who was known for his laziness also depicted animals and human conversing and understanding each other in the tale.

Chawngchilhi was a beautiful maiden who had an affair with a giant snake and bore its babies. She and her lover were killed by her father.

⁷ These varied kinds of folktales are denoted in P.SDahrawka’s *Mizo Thawnthu* (Mizo Stories)^{5th} Ed (2008), Nuchhungi & Pi Zirtiri’s *Serkawn Graded Readers: Mizo Thawnthu* (Mizo Stories)^{3rd} Ed (2010), *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu Vol-II (Hmangaihna Thawnthu)*[Tales from Mizo Community (Love stories)](2009) and *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu Vol-III (Hmeichhe hming*

chawi thawnthu)[Tales from the Mizo Community (Stories from female Mizo folks)](2012)by R.L Thanmawia, *Mizo Thawnthu* (Mizo Stories) *Vol-II* to *Vol V* by Lalhmachhuana Zofa, Margaret L Pachuau's *Handpicked Tales from Mizoram*(2008)and B. Lalthangliana's *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram*(2005) to name a few. Suffice to say that some of these tales are in translation while others are in the Mizo only.

⁸ See glossary.

⁹“Mauruangi”, “Thailungi”, “Rahtea” and “Rairahtea” are tales that depicted the cruel step-mother tormenting the step-children. After many incidents and adventures, these children fared well in the end.

¹⁰*Sekibuhchhuak, Belte phai thei lo, Maurawkela zawngkhuang, Rairahtea bahhnukte*: These are all magical instruments that could aid the owner in granting them wishes or providing them food and wealth.

¹¹See glossary.

¹²“Thangsira leh Thangzaia”(Thangsira and Thangzaia) are brothers who used to court heavenly maidens in the heaven, and were outwitted by Bakvawmtepu. Being hurt, they gave up their humanity and finally transformed to trees that bloom together every year.

“Tlingi leh Ngama”(Tlingi and Ngama) is a romantic tale of a couple. When the wife died, they continued their relationship in the land of the dead. But due to their differences, Ngama, the husband returned home only to return as a spirit to live happily with his wife in the spiritual world.

¹³“Chemteii” is a story about a clever daughter who outwitted their chief in answering his riddles thereby saving her father and she became the chief’s wife.

“Hluanchhinga” is the tale of a youth who saves his village from war through wit.

“Tumchhingi leh Raldawna” (Tumchhingi and Raldawna) is a love story where an evil ogress interferes to separate them. But they eventually have a happy ending by defeating the ogress.

¹⁴ See glossary.

¹⁵“Thailungi” is a story of a girl sold by her step- mother and eventually being rescued by her brother.

¹⁶*Tlawmngaihna* is an unwritten moral code, the desire to perform altruistic conduct for others.

The Mizos held this value highly and over generations the people have adopted this *tlawmngaihna* . See definition in glossary.

Chapter 2: Reality in the Unusual

Folk narratives have endured because not only are they entertaining, but also because they embody the culture's belief system and they contain fundamental human truths by which people have lived for centuries. Oral tradition about the past, survives in man's memories because it serves the interest of the society in which it is preserved. Folk literature, regardless of its place of origin, seems clearly to have arisen to meet a variety of human needs: the need to explain the mysteries of the world, the need to articulate our fears and dreams, the need to impose order on the apparent random, even chaotic, nature of life and the need to entertain ourselves and each other. The formation and transmission of traditional narratives from the perspective of time and space is a central subject within the science of folklore. Furthermore, folk narratives play an essential part in social and cultural life. An effort of the science of folklore is to uncover how traditional narration reflects and affects the spiritual life and conduct of human beings. The term 'folk narrative' is used in this study because the select narratives will include certain categories of folktale and legend. They will not be classified selectively but taken together under the ambit of folk narratives and will be studied on how reality and representation occur in the unusual elements of the Mizo folk narratives.

Folklore, like all other products of man's artistic endeavor, is an ideological manifestation of human creativity. The folk tale is an important constituent of folklore. The folk tales of different regions represent the thoughts, ideas, mental state, traditions, manners and

customs and even wit, wisdom and the creative imaginative power of the people of that region. They provide an insight into the present and past traditions and culture of the region from which they originate. Apart from being a reflection of the common people's culture, as folk narratives rarely stood the tests of common sense and experience, folklore also implies irrationality: beliefs in the unusual- ghosts and demons, fairies and goblins, sprites and spirits; it referred to credence in omens, amulets, and talismans. Folklore is too often made to stand for just about anything that didn't pass muster as scientific fact, had no objective reality, or lacked a literary or historical pedigree. In literature, the unusual is depicted as something possible and arouses emotions of horror, rapture and amazement... (Propp 19). From the perspective of the *urbane literati*, who conceived the idea of folklore, these two attributes of traditionality and irrationality could pertain only to peasant or primitive societies (Ben- Amos 11). The rural environment creates the background for such thought processes where most tales took place in a peasant village, the forest, the hunting expedition, village raid and wars. According to H.E Davidson, what might seem "primitives" people and their beliefs are far from being fixed and simple; complications have inevitably crept in, either through outside influences or from the rich and complex reactions of the human mind and the creative powers of imagination, inspired by natural surroundings and life lived close to the natural world. We have to remember that those following a slower and simpler way of life were not less intelligent than we are; moreover they probably had far more opportunity and encouragement to use their natural gifts for the creation of symbols and the

development of imagination and intuition (Davidson 2). Keeping this in mind, Zipes has agreed that most of folk tale motifs and symbols could be traced back to rituals, habits, customs and laws of primitive pre- capitalist societies. Thus such barbarous acts which occur in folk tales as

“cannibalism, human sacrifices, primogeniture and ultrageniture, the stealing and selling of bride, the banishment of a young princess or prince, the transformation of people into animals and plants, the intervention of beasts and strange figures were all based on the social reality and beliefs of different primitive societies. Characters, too, such as water nymphs, elves, fairies, giants, dwarfs, ghosts were real in the minds of primitive and civilized peoples...and they had a direct bearing on social behavior, world views, and legal codification (Zipes 2002: 7-8).

All cultures maintain beliefs that can be classified as folk beliefs, or common beliefs that are not necessarily grounded in scientific fact but are widely accepted as truth by most members of the group. The folk beliefs are “the unofficial articles of faith in the invisible mechanics of reality”(Harris 26). Folk beliefs appear in many different ways within a culture and often appear in the forms of proverbs or axioms, and in folklores. A particular belief of a folk could be identified in cultural artifacts or text and most of folklore involves belief at one point of time. The relation between belief and folklore has been laid down by Motz,

The concept of belief is so central to the discipline that it is hard to talk about folklore without talking about belief. The generic category of folk belief is an obvious example, as

are many aspects of folk medicine and folk art, as well as folk elements of religious practice. Rituals also are part of the practice of belief. They symbolize, enact, teach, actualize, challenge, or explore beliefs and mark the intersection of planes of reality. In many instances, in order for a ritual to succeed, it must crystallize belief in its participants. Perhaps less obviously, belief is also inherent in our definitions of folk-narrative forms. As we commonly understand folk narrative, it plays an important part in popular cultural discourse about the various modes of believing as well as ways of validating and applying beliefs. Memories endorse belief by attesting to personal experience. Myths are believed literally or metaphorically. Legends are believed, are believable, or discuss believability. Folktales are understood to refer to a fictional realm entered by the temporary and provisional suspension of disbelief. Proverbs often apply abstract beliefs to specific situations. In other words, many forms of expression we identify as folklore are involved in the practices of belief (340).

Not only do rituals, narratives, songs, and other forms of folklore enable us to discuss and debate belief, but they also generate and perpetuate belief. They can make an intangible and unverifiable concept appear in a concrete form that is apprehensible through the senses. Through sight, sound, scent, and movement, they reinforce verbal messages and invoke an emotional as well as an intellectual response in their participants. They create, as Victor Turner has noted of ritual symbols, a merging of emotional and rational perceptions of reality (1967:28-30). They elicit a

conviction (or realization, depending on one's point of view) that the intangible concept or entity is in fact real (351).

This belief system is highly functional in the realms of folklore that the unusual elements continue to be the focal point of the tales and stories. They are not just imaginary but they articulate the primal thoughts, emotions, religion and culture of the past. Aspects of the supernatural act as an integral part of belief constructions and behavior patterns, and in many cases have significant cultural function and effect. That is why each culture has its own lore of giants and goblins, fairies and demons, nymphs and dragons, magic and magical objects. The fairy tales of the Grimms contain such fantastical elements and unusual beings and till today they are being marveled by both children and adult alike that are widely popularized by the mass media all over. Do the popular masses believe in the existence of such fantastic elements in folklore/ fairytale is a question debated upon by many folklorists and the answers too are diverse and subjective. However, it is acceptable to say that a few only belief in fairytales today, but they featured powerfully in the belief system of the past. It is now implicit in the term fairytale [folktale] that the story told is not credible, that it does not command serious allegiance or faith. Fairytales [folktales] in this way face two ways: towards a past realm of beliefs on one side and towards a skeptical present on the other (Warner 20).

In studying folk narratives in the field of the unusual, it is necessary to trace the early native's religion and practices. In tribal religions authority lies in the persuasive power of

traditional imagery (Geertz 110). The religious perspective “moves from beyond the realities of everyday life to wider ones which correct and complete them, and its defining concern is not action upon those wider realities but acceptance of them, faith in them” (112). Early Mizo religion involves ancestor worship and supernatural forces and is animistic in character. Tradition denotes that there was a time when they were in a state of bewilderment and confusion. In such precarious situations, the people probably began to feel that they greatly needed divine providence. However they were totally at loss and full of apprehension about their future. Then they mooted that their forefathers should have a certain religion with a definite pattern of worship. On the strength of this belief, they began their religion with a simple chant, saying

“pi biakin lo chhang ang che, pu biakin lo chhang ang che”

“answer me whom our forefathers worshipped” (Sangkima 2004: 64).

The religious belief is ornamented with numerous sacrificial rituals and chants. Such rituals are performed according to their ailments and during special occasions. Liangkhaia has stated that such performances are vast in number because every ailment is treated with specific rituals that usually include sacrificing animals and birds (2008:30, translation mine). An interesting feature of the early Mizo religious beliefs is that “Mizo religion was not a religion of community worship but performable by each individual household separately provided it had the means” (qtd in Sangkima 2004:64). Also like other cultures, the belief in the existence of other subordinate good and evil spirits made up their religion.

The Mizo folklore comprises a number of supernatural elements and these have not been properly studied over the years. Many historians have too omitted most of these beliefs and the only traces of them are left in the folktales. Till today the folktale is one of the principal forms of entertainment and education. The pre- colonial Mizos believed in a number of supernatural elements and these are reflected in their tales. The first published folktale of the Mizos by Major Shakespear in 1898 has contained tales of the supernatural beings and it is evident that the survival of such tales over generations concluded that they are important. An oral tradition about the past survives in men's memories because it serves the interests of the society in which it is preserved. The informant passes it on either for his own private purposes or for purposes connected with his position or responsibilities, as when for instance he preserves the genealogies of the kings of his tribe (Davidson 74). In spite of the difficulties of finding a direct road to the past by means of popular practices and traditions, one way in which this could be done is by means of folklore. Mizo folktales are generally woven around aspects such as the supernatural, mythological, devotional and the historical. Physical and psychological manifestations, the appeasement of wicked spirits, horror situations, evil spirits, and sacrifice are the most common elements.

Most popular supernatural beings found in Mizo tales are *Phung/ Phungpuinu*(ogress), *Khuavang*(a guardian spirit), *Lasi* (the fabled creator of animals), *Ramhuai*(an evil spirit), *Keimi* (a being half man half tiger). The *Phung* or *Phungpuinu*, *Ramhuai* and *Keimi* are believed

to be malevolent beings and are often portrayed as an adversary against mankind. *Phungpuinu* is considered as an ogress and is seen in the tales like “Tumchhingi leh Raldawna” (Tumchhingi and Raldawna) (Dahrawka 21- 27) “Sichangneii” (76- 86) and “Chhura”² (234- 235). Being an ugly monster, she devours human beings. She is an image of terror and constantly intervenes in human affairs. In the Mizo society, children are often warned by adults to behave well or else they would be captured by *Phungpuinu*. Thus, the image of this creature holds terror and fright in the hearts of young children. However, one interesting point about this creature is that, though it is frightening and dangerous, the Phung is defeated or outwitted by the heroes, either through physical combat (the Phung is killed by Tumchhingi with a dao; while Tlumtea, Sichangneii’s son killed the Phung by cracking her skull) or wit (as in the case of Chhura’s tale).

Lasi(the fabled creator of animals) and *Khuavang*(a guardian spirit) are other supernatural beings that are often considered as benevolent creatures. They are believed to be capable of taking any form, but most time they appeared in human forms. In most of the Mizo folktales, the *lasi* are portrayed as beautiful and enticing. Lalhmachhuana Zofa has described them as beautiful magical creatures taking human form but whose eyes are slightly different in shape, and theyadore human beings especially huntsmen, and they could even interact with humans through dreams and are capable of loving humans (2006: 192-3 ,translation mine). They are the sole leadersof all animals. The Mizo ancestors believed that they resided in valleys and hill tracts and they have a queen named Chawngtinleri³. The Mizo ancestors in order to receive

bounty and blessings in their hunts sacrifice piglets to the *Lasi* (Liangkhaia 2008: 6, translation mine). Likewise *Khuavang* is also believed to be benevolent spirit, kind to human beings and have certain traits that are similar to *Lasi*. They too are considered as beautiful creatures. *Lasi* constitutes an important part of Mizo folktales, as seen in tales like “Chawngtinleri” (Zofa 2006: 20- 31), “Thasiama” (191-200) and “Zauhranga” (Dahrawka 31)⁴. The gap between the spiritual and the human world is narrow as these supernatural forces constantly intervene among humans. In the tale of “Chawngtinleri”, she was first a human, and she was given to the *lasi* chief as a wife, by her brother, in exchange for many blessings. She then became a famous *lasi* queen frequently seen in many other folktales as in the story of “Zauhranga”. She became the ruler of all animals while having the power to control them even in death. The story of “Thasiama” is well known for his affairs with *lasi*. He was blessed to be a great hunter, with abundant crops and livestock. He was also blessed with a long life span, so lengthy that he was fed up of life as he could no longer adjust among the younger generations. Eventually he cursed his maker and was finally put to death. The harmonious relationship between benevolent supernatural beings and human are widely acclaimed by the Mizo forefathers. The *Khuavang* too never harms human kind therefore no form of appeasement was made to them (Liangkhaia 2008: 29, translation mine) as in the story of “Kungawrhi”⁵ (Dahrawka 100- 110).

Another popular supernatural being is in the form of a heavenly maiden known as *Vanchungnula*⁶. She is believed to have resided in the sky. One notion about this heavenly abode

is that they are described as being very similar to the human world. Although magical, these supernatural beings lived and worked, eat and sleep and conversed like mankind. The boundary that separates the human and the supernatural is thin indeed in these folk narratives. Consequently, a similar argument has been presented by Peter Worsley,

"The primitive" does not conceive of two distinct worlds of reality, he points out. This world is not separated from another world in which mystical actions are appropriate, for in life after death people carry on the same mundane things as here (Hultkrantz 235).

Vanchungnula ('heavenly maiden') are described as beautiful, magical and are often married to human beings, in tales like "Sichangneii" (Dahrawka 76-86) and "Aithangveli" (15-20)⁷. The courting between men and such maidens are also seen in the story of "Thangsira leh Thangzaia"(Thangsira and Thangzaia)⁸ (Nuchhungi 59-64), the two brothers who climbed up the sky to court such maidens.

A few of the supernatural elements in folktales seem to have a link to living folk belief. Some of these ideas have already died and disappeared from modern folk belief. When the archaic world- view is no longer understood, new, more believable ideas replace older elements (Rohrich 57). The question arises as to why these unusual elements survived many generations and are still told by the people till today, if they are not real. The answer could be found in Zipes' comment;

Folk tales originated thousands of years ago, and we cannot be entirely certain about the conditions which gave rise to them. But we do know that folk tales were cultivated in an oral tradition by the people and passed on from generation to generation in essentially different basic patterns which have been kept intact over thousands of years. As Vladimir Propp has shown, there have been transformations of elements within the patterns, and these changes depend on the social realities of the period in which the tales are told (2002:39).

Here the role of the narrator proves very important in such transformation of tales. The actual supernatural being may not be presented as figures of reality but they represent the inner reality of human thoughts and concerns. There are no significant features that have been attributed to these beings. This shows that the tales are more concerned with the adventures of the hero/heroine as opposed to the actual characters which they encountered. The image of the supernatural beings faded and was replaced by symbols, that represented aspects of adversaries, trials, hardships, oppressors and rivals. The story of “Tumchhingi leh Raldawna”(Tumchhingi and Raldawna) demonstrates this point.

In this tale, the handsome Raldawna journeyed to win the hand of the beautiful heavenly maiden, Tumchhingi. When they returned home, Tumchhingi realized that she had forgotten her treasured comb. Hence, Raldawna went back to retrieve it and left his wife to rest in one of the branches of a tree. A Phung (ogress) who was on her way in the forest

saw the reflection of Tumchhingi and misconceived that it was hers. So happily, she sang a song of how beautiful she looked in the reflection with all her necklaces, though she wore none herself. Tumchhingi, amused by this spectacle giggled and claimed that the reflection was hers. The Phung climbed up the tree and eventually swallowed her up. Then wearing Tumchhingi's attire, she pretended to be her. Raldawna on his return was surprised and skeptical by the looks and personality of the Phung. However she claimed herself as his bride then together they went home. At their return, the Phung defecated and out of this came Tumchhingi who turned into a fruit with a hard peel, which was later found by Raldawna and he preserved this in their room. Tumchhingi would step out from the fruit in his absence and was ultimately caught by Raldawna. After narrating her story, Raldawna gave a dao to both women and the two women fought for their lives. The Phung was killed especially as Raldawna had given her a blunt weapon (Dahrawka 21-27, translation mine).

Here the story contains the motif of a young man in search of a bride, who after many crisis and misconceptions finally found her. The tale denotes that the Phung is ugly, and that even Tumchhingi could not resist laughing at her. The combat between Tumchhingi and the Phung also informs us that physical combat using dao is the form of combat in wars. The earliest weapon of the Mizo seemed to be the dao, before the used of spears and arrows (Liangkhaia 50, translation mine). The belief in magic is also predominant as not only the Phung, but the human

being Raldawna, who is the main protagonist practices magic in order to outwit their enemies. This tale depicts the real picture of belief in magic, where the early Mizo society is familiar with witchcraft and wizards (Liangkhaia 2008:7, translation mine). This story also reflects the aspect of transformation as in the case of Tumchhingi. “The ability to transform oneself is accepted as an obvious reality” in folk tale (Rohrich 82). According to Rohrich, the concept that humans have a single identity that could manifest itself in two or more forms may have existed before the notion of transformation. This world- view is not “premagical”; on the contrary, it teems with magical practices (82). Transformation predates the magic spell and it is much older than magical practices. Thus, the folktale still preserves this concept of transformation which was once a ‘reality’ in the past.

However, apart from these, the story also demonstrates an interior reality which is an adversary that mankind faced in their lives. Happiness and suffering could not be eluded. “It reflects a coincidence of values which can be attributed to the fact that, *alt fond*, the fundamental conditions of life are the same for all: ... a high incidence of illnesses and accidents, and fairly narrow limits to lived experience, compensated by frequent recourse to the supernatural. The world is finite, in space as in possibilities, and it is contingent, with fortune or misfortune playing a crucial role” (Weber 18). The Phung symbolizes the hardship encountered by the heroine in order to be united with her husband. Retribution is another inner reality that is witnessed in the story. The maxim “an eye for an eye” holds true in the folktale where the victim rose to avenge

himself. The archaic world view demands justice and this is meted out in terms of punishing the wrong doers in a cruel and violent manner. The tale also depicts the concept of retribution. We do not find Tumchhingi and Raldawna forgiving the Phung, instead Tumchhingi fights with her, killing the Phung with her sharp dao. Justice is met and everyone is happy. The idea corresponds to man's belief in fighting for justice. The folktale's epic structure requires the outright destruction of the adversary at the end of the tale.

Imagination is the organizer of meditation, in other words, the [mental] labor process through which natural drives, consciousness and the outer world are connected with one another (Zipes 2002: 32).

Imagination and the unusual or the supernatural are closely inter-related. They are a part of culture and they have close relevance with traditions and cultural practices. It has been stated before that the early Mizo religion comprises of a divine being under which a number of subordinate spirits and beings are present. The concept of the supernatural has arisen from what is natural, stated Sabbir,

To understand the process of how every supernatural entity takes the designation of "supernatural" we must visit the social history of human beings. Primitive people, back in BC, lived their lives through hunting, gathering, agriculture etc. They had little or no knowledge about most of the social events. They did not know what is thunder, sun,

storm, and they even did not know that the elephant is just an animal. As a result of their ignorance of about these things they regarded all as a supernatural because of their believe system. But all the above things are natural in nature. Through this process, these things became supernatural (4).

Lack of rational consensus contributes to the fantastic because it generates an interpretative crisis that results from the narrative's staging of conflicting perspectives. The supernatural is a concept formed from what is natural. Ignorance and imagination made up the supernatural. The statement distances the linkage with reality. How the tale is related to aspects of reality will be denoted in the Mizo lore, "Aithangveli".

Aithangveli was a heavenly maiden who lived above the sky while Thlihranthanga was a human who resided on land. While working in the jhum, Aithangveli heard about the handsome Thlihranthanga and she set out to find him. On her way, she met an old woman and asked for the skin that encompassed her. The old woman complied to be killed and gave it to her since she was too old. So disguised as an old woman, she reached Thlihranthanga's house where the family hired her to guard their herds in their jhum. Thlihranthanga's mother hated the old woman and often feed her with rotten food, while Thlihranthanga took pity on her. The old woman requested Thlihranthanga to make a swing for her in the jhum. She also asked him to make a noise when entering the jhum whenever he was about to deliver her lunch because she needed a sign since she used to

take off her disguise and enjoyed the swing with a happy tune. Days passed by and one fine day, Thlihranthanga entered the jhum without making any sound and was shocked to find Aithangveli on the swing looking so beautiful and that her beauty radiated around her. Thlihranthanga went home and devised a plan to marry her. He then went to his aunt, a priestess, and asked her to do him a favor. So he feigned sickness and rolled around in pain. Distressed, Thlihranthanga's mother went to the priestess and asked for a cure. The priestess replied that the only cure for his ailment was to marry the old woman in their home. Disgusted, the mother returned home and did nothing. Thlihranthanga then asked his father to consult the priestess again where he got the same answer. Despite the mother's disapproval, the marriage soon took place between the old woman and Thlihranthanga. At night he burned the skin that had clothed her and she took her natural form. Together they had a child and one day, Aithangveli's parents came to take her away to their heavenly abode. They came in the form of a hurricane. Thlihranthanga held on to her tightly, but failed. Then she was gone. The baby died and so did Thlihranthanga with a broken heart. After that, Aithangveli was asked to visit her husband's place. When she arrived, she revived her dead husband upon the condition to her in-laws that she would take her husband and child with her. Then she went to the grave and revived her child again. Happy and alive, they went to Aithangveli's heavenly abode and lived happily ever after (Dahrawka 15-20, translation mine).

This tale contains unusual elements which includes supernatural beings as well as magical practices. Tylor (1948 [1871]) and Frazer (1929 [1911]) have suggested that magical beliefs arose out of a need to understand and control the environment and that they are supported entirely by trickery, self- deception, and blocks to falsifiability (Winkelman et al 42). The Mizo belief in the supernatural is often understated. Aithangveli, a supernatural being had a physique as like the humans. She was so beautiful that her beauty emitted light. She has magical abilities and so did her parents. Today, none of the Mizos will believe in the existence of such creatures and will mostly be discarded as imaginative characters created by the ancestors. This is partly true and is not confined only to the Mizo society. According to Sabbir, man created the supernatural world in his own image and the belief in the ‘personified supernatural powers’ is universal. Everywhere man has created gods in his own image. Natural phenomena such as rain, storms, the wind, or the sun and even abstract philosophic conceptions may be personified so that they have the emotions and behavior of man. Like man, these supernatural beings judge, and like men they are good, bad, angry, pleased, frightful, benign, steadfast, capricious, lovable, and unlovable (8). The description of the supernatural beings as “personified supernatural power” which means the conception of the supernatural in terms of attributes of human beings, a projection of the self or ego that the supernatural is viewed as being composed of and controlled by man- like beings or forces which behave as men behave (Norbeck 36) applies to the beings found in the tale. Although the heavenly bodies acquired powerful magic which could even

resuscitate dead bodies, they lived and worked to earn their living like humans do, enjoy simple life pleasures and grieve and mourn like the humans. In short, the affairs of the humans and the supernatural beings are relatively similar. No matter how magical or powerful they are, they are still drawn from the image of man and his character. This is how reality finds reflection in supernatural beings. They are a representation of man's ignorance over the forces of nature and his environment. The primitive beliefs in the presence of spirits and unusual elements in the world are attached to these supernatural forces. The benevolent supernatural beings are created in order to enforce peace against the malevolent ones, who according to the Mizo beliefs spread illness and disease amongst men. These spirits create fear and terror and hence the early Mizos sacrifice animals in order to appease such spirits while they also made animal sacrifices to the benevolent ones for blessings in hunt and harvest (Siama 26, translation mine). This also applies to the Western fairytales as interpreted by James on the origin of the fairies.

It is conceivable that from the spirits imagined by animistic man developed our sprites, elves, hobgoblins and wild huntsmen; a crowd of supernatural beings generally more mischievous than harmful or malevolent. The offerings made to fairies by peasants in remote districts like those mentioned in the fairy tale point back to offerings made by primitive man to spirits of mountain, wood and stream (1945: 336).

The role of the "aunt" (the priestess) in the story also exhibits aspects of the Mizo religion where every village has its own priest. The role of the priest in the early Mizo society is

like that of the medicine man. When a man suffers from any illness, the priest is consulted where he performed several sacrificial rites according to the nature of the ailment. They constitute an important role in the Mizo society and this is reflected in the folk tales. They are a living reality for the early Mizos and till today, they are an important recorded historical factor in the early Mizo religion.

The folktale motif of humans and their relationship to supernatural beings is common in all culture. Thompson classified this tale along with the European tale, the “Swan Maiden” or the “Goose Girl” where the hero in his travels finds a goose transformed into a beautiful maiden. He then seized the maiden’s coat and refused to return unless she married him. From this point, the story could go into two directions of types (1) where after many trials and tasks they finally live happily ever after or (2) where the hero carefully hides the swan’s coat so as to maintain her human form, but in his absence the maiden found it, puts it on and disappears (88). The tale of “Aithangveli” is one which conforms to this first tale type, where the hero (a human being) and “Vanchungnula” named Aithangveli lived happily ever after. The Mizos also have tales that corresponds to the second tale type too as in “Sichangneii”, which is very similar to the story of the “Swan Maiden”.

There was once a man who lived by himself. Daily he went to the pond to fetch water. However for some days, the pond was always tempered before he reached it. An old woman advised him to hunt the ones responsible. The culprits were Sichangneii and her

sister who flew from the sky to take a bath in the pond. They were so beautiful that they emitted lights around them. At the advice of the old woman, the man seized the elder sister Sichangneii and took off her wings and tails, and married her. Years passed and they had six children and the couple worked in the jhum on alternate days as one needed to look after the children at home. When it was the husband's turn to take care of the children, he brought out the hidden wings and tails of his wife and let the children play with it. This made them very happy. When it was the mother's turn to stay home; with nothing to do the children were bored and unhappy. One day, the youngest son revealed to his mother the location of the hidden wings and tails. Happily she seized her wings and tails, wore it and flew away abandoning them. The father on his return was miserable and distressed at the thought of a life without his beloved wife. He then committed suicide and left the children orphaned with a whole new adventure of their own (Dahrawka 76- 8, translation mine).

The origin of such a tale is hard to trace despite the common motifs present in the tale type. In "The Human- Fairy Marriage"(1955) by H.N Gibson, the author lays down the origin of human-fairy marriage arising out of the blending of three distinct ideas which are;

1. A belief in elemental spirits, which later underwent a transformation in thought
2. A belief in the survival of the spirits of the dead, which later underwent a similar transformation.

3. Reminiscences of earlier inhabitants, crowded out by later immigrants, and driven into remote regions (358).

The tale evoked an ancient world view in which humans were part of the natural world, and it was related to the animals and spirits. The belief- system of the ancient world correlates to the first and second points of Gibson. The Mizo belief of life-after death where the spirit moves on and the belief in the spirits in nature itself is what encompasses the Mizo religion of the past. The theory is that under certain cultural and societal changes, with time the spirits underwent metamorphosis, into supernatural beings so different yet similar to the humans. The humans and fairies/supernatural beings are distinctions between the human sphere (civilization) and nature (the wilderness/ the unknown). According to Windling, the tale type (“Sichangneii”) ending with the loss of the fairy/ animal/ supernatural being symbolized is ultimately doomed to failure while the previous tale type (“Aithangveli”) ending with the reunion of the lovers expressed an almost universal longing to re-establish a lost intimacy with the natural world. The third point presented by Gibson involves pre- historic culture where immigration of a tribe was practiced. Hence marriage by capture from other clans may have taken place which fits the folktale’s motif- the captured supernatural being- the marriage- the family- escapes of the being. The difference in cultural contact and the other ethnic differences moulded the identity of the being as magical, supernatural and unusual by the superstitious minds of those days invested with magical significances.

The relationship between the supernatural and the human tales are varied among the Mizos and one of the most significant must be the story of “Chawngtinleri”, the *lasi* (the fabled creator of animals) queen. She was once a human being but was sold by her brother to be the bride of the *lasi* chief, Lalchungnunga in exchange for bounty in hunt. There are many *lasi* maidens under their chief all over and they have a weakness for *Pasaltha* (the Mizo huntsman/warrior known for their bravery and skills) who often wander in the forest to hunt. It is believed that those men who fell in love with a *lasi* were being blessed by the *lasi* in their hunts. Married to the *lasi* chief, Chawngtinleri came to be the sole protector of animals and they sometimes interfered in human activities. She had the magic to command animals, kill or resuscitate them. Hence in the past- Mizos when killing animals in their hunts believed that they were a gift from Chawngtinleri. Chants of appeasement (*hlado*) were made by the hunters, hence the song,

Chawngtinlerin Tan khamah run a rem,

Chhimhlei zau ve tumpang sial lenna

Chawngtinlerin Tan khamah run a rem,

Kawm kar zau ve kawpui dai lenna (Thanmawia 2008: 80)

Chawngtinleri’s abode is in the cliff of Tan

Wide is the space where the wild mithuns live

Chawngtinleri's abode is in the cliff of Tan

Spacious is the place where all animals live (Translation mine).

Those powers who govern the multiple currents of supernatural power are sometimes recognizable as dangerous, sometimes disguised as friendly, sometimes ambiguous. They can be seductive, they can tempt us with presents, or draw us into a conspiracy of terror (Warner 37). The tale of "Chawngtinleri" conveys to us the belief in the presence of para-entity with magical forces either good or bad which govern the world where all live together. Hence religion and folktale went hand in hand together in the earlier Mizo society. The appeasement and thanking the spirit through sacrificial rites and chants are among the most common features of the earlier Mizo religion. The dichotomy of good and evil in the forces encountered by the human in their lives comprises of beliefs in the unusual and the unknown. Not only good but evil lurks in every nook and corner of the world, and this association of evil and supernatural beings in relation to religion can be found in the tale of "Ngalsia"⁹.

Once a group of friend ventured into the forest to hunt where mysteriously one of the men named Ngalsia disappeared in thin air. After searching high and low for him, not a trace was found. After many years, on the same spot where Ngalsia disappeared, three huntsmen found him. They tried to take him back to their village to which Ngalsia refused because he already had a wife and two children. When asked their whereabouts, Ngalsia simply said that they could not be seen

easily and coaxed them to go home without him. The wife of Ngalsia was a spirit who could transform herself as a human being and hearing all the commotion, she was enraged with the three men for trying to take back her husband. First she removed their ability to speak and they stood dumb, surprised and scared. One of the huntsmen decided to shoot the being but she, hearing his thought grew angrier. However, after a while, she calmed down, undid her spell and eventually agreed to let the men take her husband home to his village. The men along with Ngalsia on reaching their village narrated the whole story and the strange incident spread far and wide (Thanmawia 2008:81-83, translation mine).

This led the Mizo forefathers to believe in the existence of Phung, (one who inflicts illness upon human beings). Hence, when someone is in terrible pain at the point of being dumb, they believed that it was the doing of the Phung; and some illness like epilepsy are attributed to the Phung and is called *Phungzawl*. In order to gratify this spirit, the Mizo ancestors performed animal sacrifices and this was how sacrificial rites began to exist in the Mizo religion (81-3, translation mine). This act constitutes a very significant action because sacrifice symbolizes an exchange: The one who makes the sacrifice gets a part of the forces of the one he is praying to. Sacrifice and prayer are used not only to appeal to spiritual forces but also to praise their powers (Deme 415). In these examples the seemingly fantastic tale are still a part of a believed tribal

tradition. The archaic relationship between the human and the spiritual realms becomes the foreground for a belief reality of the Mizo people.

Lutz Rohrich has mentioned that the folktales of the tribal in comparison with the European counterpart, the relationship between human and animal (para-human entities) is not strange or unnatural because the division between the two worlds have not yet been drawn (80). The tales of relationship with benevolent beings are accepted and listeners rooted for the success of their marriage but however there are figures that the Mizo people see as malevolent and an adversary towards mankind and unacceptable to the collective minds. The *Phung* is such one figure. Others come in the form of *Keimi*, who is half- man half- tiger. From the Mizo folktales, we can see that the *Keimi* (s) live and interact as like humans, having their own village and administration. The only difference is that they could transform into tigers on their own accord as depicted in the tales of “Lalruanga”, “Kungawrhi” and “Khualtungamtawna” (Dahrawka 28-59,100-110; Zofa 2006: 120-27)¹⁰. The history of animal- human relationship tales reaches back to legends of animal deities and their various mortal lovers, found in Sumerian, Babylonian, Egyptian, early Greek and, other ancient mythologies (Windling). Rohrich put forward that in tribal folktale

“the relationship between humans and animals is one of the main themes, particularly among hunters... folklore describes the original humans living in immediate contact with the other creatures. Animals had not yet become subhuman; they existed within the same

cosmos as man. Humans has not yet recognized the order of life as specifically human and therefore followed the natural order which put them on equal terms with animals. The simple human thinks only in human terms and assigns human characteristics to animals. Thus tribal folktales humanize an animals's adventures and transform a human's adventures into an animals. This interchangeability clearly shows the belief that humans can also tend to their affairs in the body of an animal" (77).

The European fairytales like "Beauty and the Beast", "Cupid and Psyche", "The Frog Prince" all have aspects of transformations of human into animals and vice versa. However, transformation into an animal is usually a tragic fate which degrades the victim into a non- human (79). In the comparative study of both tribal and European folktale/ fairy tale, it is interesting how the Mizo conception of such tales conform to the two. In the story of "Lalruanga"¹¹ (a very popular folk magician of the Mizos), the *keimi* (a being half man half tiger)/ human relationship is between friends, the hero and the *keimi*. Their friendship starts with competitions and outsmarting each other until they became mortal enemies. In the story of "Kungawrhi", a chief's daughter was rescued from the hands of a *keimi* who was engaged to her. In the story of "Khualtungamtawna", this hero wed a *keimi* wife called Keimingi which led to his death. Broadly generalizing, we find negative attitudes toward the *keimi* in Mizo folktale. In these three tales, *keimi* is an adversary, an enemy of the humans, and any kind of relationship is doomed to end. The tiger as a whole constitutes an important place in the hunting tribe of the Mizo. The wilderness and the danger it

could inflict caused the Mizo to fear and marvel it altogether. In the past, when a tiger is killed in a hunt, they celebrate an event which is known as “*Sapui Aih*”. The killing of a tiger was always celebrated hosted by either the chief or any of the village elders with plenty of *zu* and a feast prepared comprising the meat of mithun, pig, goat and dog. Nobody wandered around or went to work on such an auspicious day because of the belief that tigers easily snatched people away on that day. People would assemble together and the ceremony involved a dramatic mockery of the beheaded tiger by men who would dress in the garb of women. The purpose of this act was that people believed the scene would be witnessed by tigers all over the land and would judge their deceased friend as being a victim of women and considered weak and pathetic (Zawla 46-8, translation mine). Such is the relevance of the tiger in the Mizo society; hence the figure of *keimi* may be a representation of the marvel and fear of the tiger, the majestic beast as well as the cruel murderer. These contrasting emotions of the past Mizos made up the *keimi*, who had all the abilities like ordinary human beings, but could also transform into a wild tiger that killed human beings at every chance made the character of the *keimi* evil. Regarded to be an adversary against mankind, hence there could not be a peaceful treaty nor any relationship between them in any way. Despite the fear of such beings, there are clear dichotomies in the relationship between them.

Magic is another component of the supernatural element in folktale. Malinowski suggested that magic is universally characterized by dramatic emotional expression, imitation

and enactment of desired ends, the conferral of powers on material objects, the use of formulas or spells, phonetic symbolism, evocation of states by words, and mythological elements. He held that magic arises out of emotional tension and the spontaneous flow of ideas and has had numerous independent origins. It is used, he argued, in connection with things that are of vital interest to humans but elude normal technological and rational efforts. Its efficacy depends on unmodified transmission from generation to generation (Winkelman et al 42). Magic and magicians have been constantly being a part of the Mizo folktale. According to Liangkhaia, there have been magicians in Mizo villages during the olden days; however they practiced their magic secretly because they could be wrongly accused of cursing certain individuals (7, translation mine). So although there are instances of using magic in many Mizo folktales, some of the most notable ones are found in the tale of Vanhrika¹² who acquired his magic from a *Vanchungnula*; who later taught it to Lalruanga, one of the most popular Mizo folk magicians; and we find it later in the story of “Tualvungi leh Zawlpala”¹³(Tualvungi and Zawlpala) whose antagonist Phuntiha was a powerful magician. Here magic is seen neither as a disruptive force nor a respected trait. The dichotomy of good and evil does not interfere when practicing magic. While certain religions deemed witchcraft as evil and contemptuous, the early Mizo society does not condemn it and neither does it embrace it. Geertz has commented that the practicing of witchcraft

has been consistently to stress the harmonizing, integrating, and psychologically supportive aspects of religious patterns rather than the disruptive, disintegrative, and psychologically disturbing aspects; to demonstrate the manner in which religion preserves social and psychological structure rather than the manner in which it destroys or transforms it (143).

“Malinowski suggests that magic arises from spontaneous ideas and reactions (1954 [1927]: 78-79) when the rational processes and known means of resolving problems have been exhausted; this implicates unconscious (or primary) thought processes as basic to magic”(Winkelman et al 40). They are a supplement over man’s ability. In the early Mizo society, magic has always been a fundamental element that was present in the human world, thus they are neither shocked nor amazed by it. It is part of their reality. Reality denoted here is independently of our own volition (Berger& Luckmann 13). In Lacan’s account, the meanings that give us our sense of reality are always acquired from outside (Belsey 5).

“Magic tale” has also been suggested as a term that captures the idea of the form as it points to the pivotal role that enchantment plays, both in the action of the stories and the character of its agent (Warner 34). According to Marcel Mauss, “in magic we have officers, actions and representations: we call a person who accomplishes magical actions as magician...; magical representations are those ideas and beliefs which correspond to magical actions (23).

Folk and fairytales deploying wonders and inspiring astonishment depend on magic as causation; magic is part of the fabric of everyday reality, which is permeated with invisible forces. There are not many individuals in the Mizo folktale that could be coherently termed as magician amidst the many magical elements presented in tales. Vanhrika seems to be the first person who learns the art of magic from Vanchungnula, a daughter of Pu Vana whom he captured (Thanmawia 2008: 56-8, translation mine). From him, the human tends to learn magic. Vanhrika's story is brief and there are no details as to the means of practicing magic. His appearance was denoted in the story of "Lalruanga" who in turn captures him while he stole trapped animals laid down by Lalruanga. The story denotes that in exchange for his life, Vanhrika taught magic to Lalruanga. Instantly he practices his magic by placing the trapped rabbit and deer in a tiny container, and placing a bunch of banana leaves from the valley in a single tiny roll and finally transforming loads of wood into a single walking stick (Dahrawka 38, translation mine). "Dire necessity leads primitive man to seek for the most effective magical instruments he can find" (Barnard 68). The first three magical practices of Lalruanga consist of the daily rural chores and needs in the past society. Meat for food, leaves for plates, wood for fire- the daily needs of a Mizo family are the foremost ideas put into it with the use of magic. Magic as a form of wish fulfilment becomes an integral part in the interpretation of the unusual. To outwit opponents and defeating them, like Lalruanga defeated Keichala, and competing against other magicians like Hrangsaipuia and Zangkaki¹⁴ to acquire his wants- this adventures and magical deeds amaze the listener. And in

the field of folklore, the image of the magician grows from story to story, and from teller to teller, precisely because the people have their own personal problems or because of the picturesque interest which magic automatically excites (Mauss 41). A magician is seen in terms of his relationship with nature/ spirit or generally what is not understood by humanity. To control something which ordinary human cannot, renders the magician and his magic powerful.

The love story of “Tualvungi leh Zawlpala”(Tualvungi and Zawlpala) also includes the magician in the form of the antagonist, Phuntriha. Phuntriha in the story was a powerful chief and magician who could produce wealth. He poisoned the hero Zawlpala with his spell. In terms of magic, it is apparent that magicians cast their spell only for their own benefits and for defeating their opponents, hence the idea of good and evil does not corresponds much to their conduct. The hero Lalruanga defeated his enemies like Keichala and Hrangsaipuia with his magic and in turn was defeated and killed by Hrangsaipuia’s powerful witch sister, Zangkaki. The hero Zawlpala was outwitted by the enemy Phuntriha because of his promise and was later poisoned and killed. Hence, magic in Mizo folktale seems to be purely conducted to meet one’s needs and wants and this has a familiar trace to the ancient religion, where the Mizo forefathers not only worship or conduct sacrificial rites to both the malevolent and benevolent spirits. They offer peace to the two entities, asking for blessings and harmony at the same time. R. Thangvunga has stated that “types of witchcraft in Mizo folklore are mainly attributive and imputative, and never current in history” (19). Likewise, magic is "an attempt on the part of man

to tap and control the supernatural resources of the universe for his own benefit. . . . Magic serves man's egocentricity and is for him a short cut to spiritual bliss" (Deme 415).

Another type of magical/unusual element presented in folk narratives is depicted in the form of magical objects. These magical objects are mostly granted as a boon to humans by supernatural beings. Magical wishes that grant boons are found in folk narratives all over the world and came in all types like a ring, lamps, mirrors, cloaks, weapons and talisman. Some are single purpose items with the power to render the users invisible, carry them to distant place, serve food, assure victory in combat and endless wealth. In the majority of fairytales, the origin of the fantastical object is shrouded in mystery (Haldane 174). The existence of such objects is hardly questioned but accepted. The Mizo folk narrative is not a stranger to such magical objects. These objects are found in the tales of "Chepahakhata", "Maurawkela", and "Chhura".

Chepahakhata was an ugly villager shunned by young women and he led a lonely life. His fortune started by marrying a woman who practiced magic. She transformed a portion of the forest as a village and they became the rulers. Unaccustomed to such life, he loved to visit the villagers where everyone treated him well, so much that he hardly spent time at home. Frustrated by his behaviour, his wife and his daughter called him home several times to which he did not comply. Thus out of anger, the wife transformed everything to its original form and ran away with her daughter to Pu Vana (the supreme being who

created the universe and is omnipotent). Chepahakhata was alone and hungry. Finally the wife took pity on him and presented him a bounty, a magical pot called *belte phai thei lo*¹⁵, which contained unlimited food. He later used this magical object to outwit a *Vai*¹⁶ chief (Zofa 2006:108-113, translation mine).

“Maurawkela” is about an ugly villager, who was shunned by all the women in his village but he married the chief’s daughter. Forced to marry Maurawkela, the chief’s daughter was disgusted with his looks and hardly allowed him to come home inside their hut. Fortunately, Maurawkela in one of his travels bathed in a magical lake and transformed into a very handsome man. Then his wife fell in love with the handsome Maurawkela. Moreover, he found a magical *khuang*¹⁷, which fulfilled the owner’s wishes. Thus he elevated himself to the position of a chief and led a happy life with his family, with no fear against enemies (132-137, translation mine).

In the legendary story of “Chhurbura”, Chhura acquired a magical object called *Sekibuhchhuak*¹⁸ from a *Phung* (an ogress). Chhura devised a plan to catch the *Phung* by making a swing in his *jhum*. Daily he would swing, as he knew the *Phung* was watching him with envy from a distance. One evening, Chhura pretended to go home and he hid in the hut. Taking his absence as an opportunity, the *Phung* came out of hiding and played

upon the swing, when suddenly Chhura caught her. She begged him to let her go and in return she gave him *Sekibuhchhuak*, a magical object that could produce unlimited cooked rice and meat (Dahrawka 234-235, translation mine).

“What makes the old folk tales... vital is their capacity to harbor unfulfilled wishes in figurative form and project the possibility for their fulfilment” (Zipes 2002: 157). The existence of the magical objects found in these tales will be highly doubted and their realities discarded. Man finds expression in his folk tale either directly or through the medium of fantasy and imagination. The tale may be so fantastic that no traces of reality seem possible. However the fantastic tales, according to Bloch, is the most vital artistic expression of ordinary people- their projection of how they want themselves to change and transform society. The fantastic form of the [folk narratives] carries a realistic lode of what is open-ended and fragmentary but can still be realized. It plays upon the imagination not to open it up to escape into a never- never land but to make greater contact with reality. The escape is estrangement or separation from a defeating situation which induces a feeling of possible liberation (159). The mentioned tales are tales of an underdog (Maurawkela and Chepahakhata detested by society for their ugliness) and Chhura (who was constantly bullied by his brother which is seen in other Chhura tales in Dahrawka 2008: 209-244). The social status of these characters represents the common man. Discontents in social standings and in life are reflected. The good and the bad of the lower orders are little

different from those of their betters. The work ethos is accepted by everybody, though not for everybody, since high birth, or success, or beatitude bring escape from labor. Hierarchy- social or supernatural is affirmed by power and mitigated by luck (Weber 109). With no chance of improving the social structure, the only liberation could be demonstrated through the use of imagination and fantasy in the form of certain magical objects. The every day life of the common man combined with dreams and wishes can estrange the reader from reality. However, the magical tales give full expression to the dissatisfactions, hopes and dreams of the average people. The focus here is the representation of man's unfulfilled wishes projecting the possibility for their fulfillment through the mentioned folktales. The poor, ugly man gaining magical objects that fulfills his wishes denotes the struggle to succeed in life which is almost impossible without fortune and chance. The characters studied are given a chance to fulfill their wishes and as far as the story goes, they made good use of it. However, as mentioned before, the Mizo ancestors with their simple life yearn for simple things. This also applies in other culture folktales too. As stated by Weber regarding European fairy tales, "when characters in folk tales get gifts or ask for them, when they are granted three wishes and so on, their ambitions are very simple: they dream of better clothes and better places in which to live, but above all they dream of food- pots that will cook endless porridge, tables or table-cloths that set them- selves with meals, fairy bread that cannot be eaten out of existence, cubby holes that secrete bread and milk" (Weber 100). The presence of the marvellous, the fantastic is part and parcel of the dramatic

storyline and does not take anything away from the veracity of the tale and the use of the supernatural as a means to cope with man's original weakness constitutes a belief system that is still widely held today in many societies. The existence of the marvellous and the recourse to magical means by the hero symbolize his consciousness about his own weaknesses and limitations as a human being and his desire to transcend them. The motifs are similar in each culture. The early folk's reality finds reflections through their artistic fantastical tales and represented their inner longings, dissatisfactions and hope.

The realm of folktale and magic is not alienated from the pre- historic religion of primitives. They have sharp connection not only in the beliefs but in the instrumentalization of practices. Magic, like religion, is viewed as a totality; either you believe in it all, or you do not (Mauss 113). In both, words play an important role in performance. Normally verbal rites in magic are called spells. In magic we find almost all the forms of spoken rite which we found in religion: oaths, wishes, prayers, hymns, interjections, simple formulas (67). Warner has also commented that,

Of all the charged, active, enchanted elements in the tales, it is the words of the story that possess charmed life. Spells are formed of repetition, rhyme, and nonsense; when they occur in fairytales, they are often in verse – riddles and deities, and they belong to the same family of verbal patterning as counting out, skipping songs, and nursery rhymes (48).

The Mizo ancestor's religious rites and rituals are mostly accompanied by chants and prayers, with sacrifices of animals. Each priest and priestess occupies an important place in the village and they perform their duties according to the needs of individuals or families.

A very important and interesting unusual element found in the Mizo beliefs is the concept of life after death. Every religion has its own concept of the afterlife. Christianity took its roots in Mizoram with the advent of the British Christian missionaries who entered the land in 1891. Before that, the Mizos too have their own unique belief system regarding life after death. Sangkima has denoted clearly this belief.

The early Mizos believed that there were two final abodes for the dead- *Mithikhua* and *Pialral*. These two places were not far from each other. According to the general belief, *Mithikhua* was a resting place for ordinary and common people who could not fulfil certain sacrifices to be performed during their lifetime on earth. It was thought much inferior to and smaller than that found on earth. The general belief was that everything there was only an imitation of what they possessed in life on earth...

Another final resting place was *Pialral* ...[which] was supposed to have been located in a place opposite to *Mithikhua*... Here there was no need to work. The soul could enjoy anything as it did on earth and obtained food and drink without any labour. Everything was provided here. The soul lived a completely free life, it no longer suffered from

hardships and pain. In this abode only *thangchhuah* persons and their families would go with all their glories (1992: 54).

This belief hold true for the early society and their reality was unquestioned. In order to pass on to *Pialral* or *Mitthikhua*, the spirits need to undergo and pass certain routes that finally led them to their destination. When a person dies, their spirit transforms into an animal or insect and it hovers round the human world for three months. After that, he started his journey towards *Mitthikhua*. First he passed over a lake called *Rih Dil*, where again he climbed over a hill called *Hringlang Tlang*. From the hill top, he looked back at the human world and grieved. He then resumed his journey and reached a river called *Lungloh Tui* where flowers called *Hawilopar* grew along the banks. After quenching his thirst with the water and plucking the flowers, the longing for the human world disappeared. Then upon reaching his destination, a man called Pawla was posted to shoot the incoming spirits with his pellets, except children and *Thangchhuah* people. The *Thangchhuah* people reached a higher level called *Pialral* (Siama 27-28, translation mine).

This belief finds reflection in the tale of “Zauhranga leh Zawtleipuii”¹⁹(Zauhranga and Zawtleipuii). The couple had an exceptional son who was much loved by all. However he fell sick and died soon after. The parents mourned the boy called Lalthima so much that after three months when it was time for the boy’s spirit to move on to *Mitthikhua*, the father unable to let his son’s spirit leave, went to find the boy and grabbed him, while the boy pleaded him to let him

go. On his refusal, Lalthima's spirit turned into a caterpillar and later into other irksome creatures to repel his father in letting him go. Still his father could not let go. Finally the boy predicted that they soon would have a son more marvellous and exceptional than him, and saying this turned into a bee, stung the father and escaped (Dahrawka 34-5, translation mine). Details of the realm of the spirit may not be presented in this tale but the two worlds that of the human and spirit and the thin line dividing them as the beliefs of the ancestors is clearly evident. The story of "Zawltlingi leh Ngambawma"²⁰ (Zawltlingi and Ngambawma) (Dahrawka 156- 163) deals with similar ideas of this belief. According to Vanlallawma,

The Mizo belief in the immortality of the soul goes back a long way, much before recorded history. Somewhere around the year 1935 a priest (Sadawt) Hangpuia stated, "Our knowledge about the immortality of the soul is evident from the story of Tlingi and Ngama". According to Hangpuia, this story is the origin of *Mimkut*, which is one of the oldest of Mizo festivals and may also be the source of the Mizo belief in the immortality of the soul (6).

The story narrates the love affair between Zawltlingi and Ngambawma (also known as Tlingi and Ngama). They could not marry each other due to conflict in the family. In fact, the protagonist, Ngambawma was not even allowed to court Zawltlingi. Out of frustration, he cast a spell by taking the footprints of Zawltlingi and he placed it by

the fireside and it made her very ill. He then went to visit his love but before that he removed her footprints that were around the fireplace. Upon that Zawtlingi recovered. He did this several times in order for the family to accept him but gained no results. One night, the set of footprints fell into the fire accidentally, causing the death of Zawtlingi. Ngambawma was devastated and grieved deeply. He then grew a flowering plant called *Zamzo* by her grave. However, the flowers were often plucked by an animal. Ngambawma caught the animal red-handed. The animal explained that Tlingi had requested for that task from the spiritual world known as *Mitthikhua*. Excited, he forced the animal to take him to her. They were overjoyed at the reunion but there were so many differences in their perception of the world, like when hunting, the spirits captured a bear, but for Ngama it was the replica of a caterpillar. They went out fishing and the spirits caught the many dry leaves floating in the water, which according to them were fishes. The spirits could transform into insects and could take gigantic leap over the forest. Upon this dilemma, Ngambawma returned home to the human world. He then committed suicide and returned to *Mitthikhua* as a spirit. Thus Tlingi and Ngama were reunited once again. Ngambawma could then eventually fit in with the rest of the spirits (Dahrawka 156-163, translation mine).

This tale denotes ancient religious beliefs and society. The concept of the after life and primitive belief in pan-animism are reflected. Talking animals are common. Thus the hunting

society has the common motif of a helpful animal aiding the humans in their tales. The ancestors also viewed the living world full of strife, poverty and illness, thus they longed for the spiritual world *Pialral* where the supreme god called *Pathian* would feed them and where they would never need to work anymore. Thus the concept of the spiritual world could again represent a wish fulfillment of the people. As perhaps the oldest of all literary forms, the folk tale retains the immediacy of the common people's perspective which has always sought and indicated the possibilities for a better world (Zipes 2002: 156). Working from dawn to dusk to provide food for the table, the early Mizos worked hard for the family. Therefore the longing of the spiritual world which promised an easier life and unlimited supply of food is understandable. This wish is made concrete in the belief in *Pialral* which only a few could attain. The concept of *Pialral* is an embodiment of the Mizo ancestors' wish and yearning.

Meaning is constructed from the interpretation of all these marvellous tales. The present Mizos do not accept the probability or the reality of those beliefs anymore. Certain aspects were 'true' only within a specific historical context (Hall et.al 31). The meaning of objects is neither natural nor fixed; it is culturally constructed and changes from one historical context to another, depending on what system of classification used (134). The Western writers have written and collected folktales over the years and the versions of tales differ from one to another, and from culture to another. However, what is intrinsic in such varied works is the changes that evolved or were made over the years. As Zipes has presented in "The Battle over Fairy-tale Discourse"

(2012), countries like Germany has incorporated folktales and fairytales in its literary socialization process so that they could play a most formative role in cultivating aesthetic taste and value systems and in which they had participated heavily in the creation of beliefs and norms and symbolically reflected changes in the social orders of Germany. Fairytales have been written over the years that could propagate the ideologies of a particular country or individual. The classic fairytale with the primitive and feudal components were reworked and adapted to the bourgeois civilizing process and the subversion of the fairy- tale discourse increase immensely not only in Germany but throughout the Western world during the 1960s (136-67). This is how meaning and representation changed accordingly and how the ‘real’ could transform to mere fiction. The folk narratives were often without documented proof and as they were transferred orally from one generation to the next, from culture to culture they openedwide gaps for interpretation and rendering of the text in order to suit the present world.

As the narrator of a tale also determines the folk narratives characteristics fluctuation between reality and fiction, even though the folktale has been called “wishful fiction”, the folktale teller’s own wishes are often expressed unconsciously (Rohrich 24). Simply interpreting folktales as “wishful fiction” does not explain their essence. Human wishes and their fulfilment are not the only folktale’s theme. The folktale depicts the surmounting of obstacles (as seen in most of the select tales), the harmonious solution of problems, and restoration of order. Confronting and defeating adversaries and the struggle for happiness are one of the most

important basic themes of folktale. The theme of realizing happiness, the fulfilment of the search for happiness as seen in most of the select tales, make them delightful narratives and are themes common with the reality of man. The narrator's reality are imparted through the folk tale where he/she will select from a large number of tales which he has heard over the years only those which appeal and are meaningful to himself and his audience. He will not select them at random, but according to certain personal inclinations, philosophical or moral principles, emotional dispositions, and economic circumstances that affect him and his listeners (Friedl 129). In such way, the reality of the folktale changes with time. The very narration of both magic tale and fabliau suggests that the tale told is fiction, glorious magic or rollicking fun, and that storyteller and audience delight in what both subgenres can do for the mind and the heart (Ingwersen 82). The narrator and the audience might take them as fantasy and unreal events made up by the ancestors. However, these fantastic tales are not a complete product of the imagination. Folk narrative often undergoes changes. They could be a transformed historical reality. Customs, beliefs, social organization, and material goods that were an integral part of the historical reality have been eliminated, through a process of change from the narrator's world, and transformed into the fictive reality of folk narratives, where they survived (Ben-Amos xi). It follows that the relation to reality and the means of representing reality in folklore changes and develops as the people develop historically (Propp 35). In such way, the Mizo early beliefs, rituals and practices may have undergone transformation from

historical reality to fictive reality as the narrator's world does not coincide with such traditions anymore. Hence, they became fictive and became yet another entertaining motif in a tale. For the narrators they have ceased to be a historical reality and thus they have undergone a process of transformation from history into fiction, from reality into fantasy (xi). Hence, folk narratives can be examined functionally by their importance for society and the roles they play when a community uses them as a means of conveying its inner being, in describing the outer world, and in expressing the accidental and the recurring, the obvious and the incomprehensible, good and bad luck, beauty and danger as manifest in the world around us. The relevance of these tales with all its unusual elements will be determined on what stories we choose to tell, what we see in them, and how we tell them as Warner has broadly said,

That fairytales are cast in a language of the psyche, with the forests and palaces, snow, glass and apples symbolizing deeper, concealed truths, has become widely accepted; psychoanalytical methods provide entry into the stories' meaning, and, like the hotel maid's key, can open every door, including those that lead to forbidden chambers, the dark corners of humankind in general as well as the secrets of a particular individual. Fairy tales mean far more than the plots they unfold; they resemble dreams, which unfold as enigmas but can be deciphered. The scholar Maria Tatar has noted: "Fairy tales are still arguably the most powerfully formative tales of childhood and permeate mass media for children and adults... The staying power of these stories, their widespread and

enduring popularity, suggests that they must be addressing issues that have a significant social function- whether critical, conservative, compensatory, or therapeutic... Fairy tales register an effort on the part of both women and men to develop maps for coping with personal anxieties, family conflicts, social fictions, and the myriad frustrations of everyday life (108).

Consequently tales can be examined according to their genetic inherence and according to aesthetic points of view. However, they can also be analysed functionally by examining their importance for society and the roles they play. These can be examined when a community uses them as a means of conveying its inner being, in describing the outer world, and in expressing the accidental and the recurring, the obvious and the incomprehensible, good and bad luck, beauty and danger as manifested in the world around us.

Glossary:

Hawilo Par: The name of a mythical flower which grows on the road to *Mitthikhua* beyond the Hringlang Tlang. The spirits of the dead pluck and wear these blossoms in their hair and ears, and after that have no desire to turn and look back upon the earth which they have left behind.

Hlado: The hunter's cry or chant which is raised directly a wild animal has been killed in the chase, and also on the road home, and before entering the village.

Hringlang Tlang: The name of a mythical mountain on the way to *Mitthi Khua* from which the spirits of the departed look back and view with longing the world of man which they have left behind.

Keimi: A mythical tiger-man, a person possessing the magic power of changing himself or herself at will into a tiger, and back again into a human being.

Khuavang: the name of a guardian spirit.

Lasi: 1. The fabled creator of animals. 2. The spirit which presides over hunting

Mim Kut: The name of a Lushai feast or festival held in honour of the dead, at which the first fruits of certain vegetables, etc, and *chhang*, which is eaten at the feast, are presented to them.

Mitthikhua: Hades; the abode of departed spirits.

Pasaltha: A person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter.

Pathian: God, the Giver and Preserver of Life.

Pu Vana: The Supreme Being who created the universe and omnipotent according to the early Mizo beliefs (Sangkima 1992: 52).

Phung/ Phungpuinu: a spirit, a ghost, a bogey, a spook, an ogress, a genie, a goblin, a hobgoblin. (Generally regarded as a female by the Lushais)

Phungzawl: To have an epileptic fit; to be subject to epileptic fits; a person subject to epileptic fits.

Pialral: The Lushai paradise. (It is a higher realm than *Mitthikhua*. Only *Thangchhuah* could enter this abode).

Ramhuai: an evil spirit, a demon, a devil, a nat

Rih (dil): The name of a lake to the East of Lushai, said to be passed by departed spirits on their way to *Mitthi Khua*.

Sapui Aih: It is a ceremony held to celebrate the killing of a tiger.

Thangchhuah: The title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear the *Thangchhuah puan*. The possession of this title is regarded as a passport to *Pialral* or Paradise.

Zamzo: Amaranthus- a family of bright coloured flowering plants...The Lushais have a tradition that these flowers dazzle the eyes of the evil spirits so much that they cannot see human beings standing near the plants. It was probably this belief which originally influenced the people to cultivate the *zamzo* in the vicinity of their jhoom- houses where it is still frequently found.

Zu: Beer or any fermented liquor.

(Source: Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1988. Print.)

Notes:

1. These are names of mythical beings presented in many of the Mizo folk narratives.
2. “Tumchhingi leh Raldawna”(Tumchhingi and Raldawna) depicted the story of a couple about to be wed but the bride-to-be Tumchhingi was tricked and eaten by the Phung (ogress) during the hero’s absence. The hero married the Phung who disguised as Tumchhingi. The heroine was transformed into a fruit and often visited her lover’s home. Finally the hero recognized the true heroine and the Phung was put to death.
3. Chawngtinleri was considered the wife of the *lasi*(the fabled creator of animals) chief Lalchungnunga, the sole ruler of all animals and *lasi* in the forest.
4. Thasiama was a legendary figure known for his affair with *lasi*(the fabled creator of animals) and the boon he received from them.

In the tale of “Zauhranga”, he was a huntsman who encountered the *lasi* queen Chawngtinleri during his hunt. Zauhranga killed an enormous boar which the *lasi* queen revived and took home. However, after confronting the *lasi*, he was given back his prey.
5. The tale of “Kungawrhi”depicted a story of a beautiful maiden won unfairly by *Keimi* (half man half tiger) to be married. The story revolved around her being captured by *Keimi*, then *Khuavang* and finally her marriage to the man who saved her.

6. *Vanchungnula* literally means heavenly maiden. They resided in the sky and often interacted with humans.
 7. In continuation of “Sichangneii” tale, deserted by their parents, the children struggled to survive. Amidst their poverty, a *Phung* (ogress) constantly haunted and took advantage of the children. Finally the youngest, Tlumtea put an end to it by killing the *Phung*.
 8. “Thangsira leh Thangzaia” (Thangsira and Thangzaia) is a tale of brothers who used to court the heavenly maidens Lasiri and Lasari. The story revolved upon the transformation of the brothers into several beings.
 9. In Ngalsia’s story, he was the young man who vanished and married a *Phung* (ogress) and had children with her. He was later found and rescued many years later.
 10. Lalruanga was a powerful folk magician who befriended *keimi* (a being, half man half tiger), but eventually were at war because the *kemi* clan had killed Lalruanga’s brother.
- “Kungawhi” story consisted of an adventure in the land of *khuavang* (guardian spirit) where the hero Phawthira was stuck for years because of the betrayal of his brother.
- The tale of “Khualtungamtawna” depicted the story of a hero who married a *keimi* (a being, half man half tiger). Being a good hunter, he killed many tigers which made him

an enemy of the *keimi* clan. After many incidents between the rivals, he was defeated by his wife.

11. Lalruanga, an apprentice of Vanhrika was one of the most popular magicians in Mizo folktales. He used his magic to defeat his enemies and acquired wealth in the land of the *keimi*(a being, half man half tiger). He was captured and died at the hands of the witch, Zangkaki.

12. Vanhrika is often considered the first Mizo folk magician who taught his craft to others. He acquired his skill from a *vanchungnula*(heavenly maiden).

13. “Tualvungi leh Zawlpala”(Tualvungi and Zawlpala) story narrated the adventure of a couple where the magician Phuntriha married the heroine and killed the husband. However, the heroine Tualvungi committed suicide to lay with the protagonist Zawlpala in his grave. The two transformed into white butterflies and lived happily ever after.

14. Hrangsaipuia and Zangkaki are siblings, and the enemies of Lalruanga, the magician. Lalruanga killed Hrangsaipuia and Zangkaki took revenge by killing Lalruanga.

15. *Belte phai thei lo* literally means a vessel that could not be emptied. It is a magical object that generates unlimited food.

16. A *Vai* refers to a non- Mizo especially people from the plains.

17. *Khuang* is a Mizo traditional drum made from dry cow hides. It is a musical instrument still popularly used by the Mizos today.
18. *Sekibuhchhuak* is the name of a magical object that could produced unlimited supply of cooked rice and meat from both ends.
19. Zauhranga and Zawtleipuii are the parents of Lalthima (Lalruanga's brother). Zauhranga made futile attempts to hold on to the spirit of his deceased son Lalthima in this story.
20. "Zawltlingi leh Ngambawma"(Zawltlingi and Ngambawma) tale narrated the story of two lovers separated by death. The hero visited his deceased lover in the spiritual world. Contradictions of all sorts arose; hence the hero returned to his world, committed suicide and returned as a spirit to his beloved.

Chapter 3: The Hero in Mizo Folk Narratives

[The] oral art of taletelling is far older than history, and it is not bounded by one continent or one civilization. Stories may differ in subject from place to place, the conditions and purposes of taletelling may change as we move from land to land or from century to century, and yet everywhere it ministers to the same basic social and individual needs. The call for entertainment to fill in the hours of leisure has found most people very limited in their resources, and except where modern civilization has penetrated deeply they have found the telling of stories one of the most satisfying of pastimes. Curiosity about the past has always brought eager listeners to tales of the long ago which supply the simple man with all he knows of the history of his folk. Legends grow with the telling, and often a great heroic past evolves to gratify vanity and tribal pride (Thompson 5).

The oral tradition began by a need to both entertain and to preserve the history and culture of the people. Whereas it is difficult to study the historical origins of a folktale, its significance to society and its interpretation as a symbolic act has been fruitful in certain studies. Apart from the supernatural and mystical beings presented in folktales, there are fabulous tales of humans which does not lack the excitement and thrill, sometimes aided or hindered by the unusual elements of magical beings and foes of various kinds. These stories vary and are popular throughout cultures because “our ability to produce stories or ballads about heroism, actual or

imagined ...is one of the defining characteristics of humanity” (Seal & White xix). Stories that stem from basic human experience and containing vital information strengthen the common bond of a particular clan or tribe and enable human to learn about themselves and the worlds that they inhabit. The motif of the poor hero who gains fortune and fame in the end is found commonly in the world of folktales. Hence, there are tales of prince and princess, heroes and common folks withstanding tests and struggles, as well as gaining reward or punishment.

All over the world we find folk heroes in tales, myths and legends. The name of Hercules, King Arthur, Robin Hood are known commonly over the world by their tales of adventures and heroic deeds. Also they are adapted in movies and cartoons and become favorite heroes by many children all over the world. The study of hero myths goes back to at least 1871, when the Victorian anthropologist Edward Tylor argued that many of them follow a uniform plot, or pattern: the hero is exposed at birth, is saved by other humans or animals, and grows up to become a national hero. This has been followed by Austrian scholar Johann George von Hahn and Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp. Not only the structures, but analysis of the origin, function and subject matter of hero myths have been done by Otto Rank, Joseph Campbell and Lord Raglan to name a few and these studies are spurred by the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung (Segal 12-3). Since then hero studies have been made in relations to certain cultures and ethnicity and folklore have provided the ample requisite for such studies.

The Oxford Dictionary defines a “hero” as a “person who is admired by many for her or his noble qualities or courage” and “heroism” as “a brave and noble conduct” (558-9). However these definitions are not very applicable to folklore heroes. The question of what constitutes heroism is a pressing one and presents some intriguing difficulties in the field of folklore. The characters of the folktale are not always unreservedly or even significantly positive. Many folk heroes walk a thin and fuzzy line between the admirable and the reprehensible which we will later find in the select tales of Mizo folk heroes. No matter what quality they embody, folk heroes continue to appeal to people across often considerable time spans and distances. The reason put forwarded by Seal and White is that,

It is not simply their heroism we relate to but also their human foibles. Heroes are at once those things that almost none of us can ever be, yet they are still like us in so many ways – ways various enough to ensure that some hero or another will appeal to one or more groups of people and so come to be featured in their folk expressions (xxii).

Every culture has each own heroic tales passed down from generation to another, and whether their reality in history is proven or not, they are accepted, with all their unusual talents and possessions of supernatural elements. So the question sometimes arises if there are truths in these characters or are they only a fabrication of tales made up by the ancestors. The typical beginning of a folk/ fairy tale transport listener to another realm of reality. It takes him to the land of the marvelous, the fantastic and initiates him to the realm of valor and bravery, into the

world of beautiful maidens and demons. The tale weaves itself around heroes who undertake hazardous journey to obtain objects of their desire. The hero of these tales may be a prince or princess or a person of humble origins. He may be a brave knight or a helpless orphan. Whoever he may be, the tale takes him to a journey that ultimately transforms the hero forever. This transformation may be physical, social or spiritual. Klapp has stated that “existing studies of hero myths and legends show that heroes tend to conform to a type” (2). Hence, many studies have shown that much of hero myths of various cultures seemed to be composed of stories from a common repertoire, conforming to common features and presenting common motives. There are types of heroes who are very strong, always winning over opponents, and seemingly invincible; there are also hero type known for their wits and outwitting opponents through trick and cleverness. The victory of the clever hero is the perennial triumph of brain over brawn. Then we also have the unpromising hero type, the role of the dark horse or the ugly duckling, the poor and unfortunate, or unknown person who achieve success. The unpromising hero succeeds by some other means than cleverness, usually luck, miraculous assistance or modest toil. These hero types all embark on a journey to perform certain roles as in a quest, feat, contest and test.

The Mizo people too have such hero tales, and these are fondly narrated to children till today. The name of the main character is mostly denoted in the title of each Mizo folktale. The name ending with the letter ‘a’ denotes the male while the name ending with the letter ‘i’ denotes the female. The Mizo folktales of “Liandova te Unau” (“Liandova and his sibling”) (Dahrawka

2008: 60-75) depicts orphans, who endure all kinds of hardship and eventually gain fortune due to their humility and kindness is a popular tale that is often told to children. “Kungawrhi” (100-110) depicts the tale of the hero Phawthira, who underwent struggles, tests and deception in order to win over Kungawrhi. The tale of “Mauruangi” (Pachau 2013: 69-80) tells us about her sordid existence even as she was tormented by her step-mother and step-sister¹. She eventually married a chief and lived happily ever after. Here, the characters we find are usually stereotypical, where the hero and heroine are often isolated and are usually cast out into the open world or are apparently without any friends. Therefore, the protagonists must be aided by supernatural forces, such as a magical object or an enchanted creature in order to fight against evil forces. These tales not only depict the reality of the Mizo culture but of humanity as a whole in the past, where life was harsh and where one had to struggle in order to achieve success. In the world of folktales, success comes through miracles, chances and deceptions. Liandova and his brother received their wealth from chances and their virtues, Phawthira weds Kungawrhi by rescuing her and slaying his coward, deceptive brother in public, and Mauruagi marries the *Vailal*² (chief) with the help of talking animals and magic. It is a frightening world everywhere and one where one can do little to help oneself. The struggle to survive against adversaries, to find your place in the world, and to come to terms are the inner reality portrayed in these tales amidst the magic and supernatural. Zipes has also said that the reading of folk and fairytale with its many elements of the fantastic and gruesome nature “involves dislocating the reader from his

or her familiar setting and then identifying with the dislocated protagonist so that a quest for the *Heimische* or real home can begin” (Zipes 2012:172). The lives of these heroes at the outset are overshadowed by bitter and hopeless struggles; but their exultant victory, towards which the hero strives, is the hope and trust of the people. This hope helps the narrator/reader/ listener bear the burden of his destiny. They contain the universal idea that justice triumphs in the end. This is also a world where gratuitous gesture- kindness, selflessness is the greatest virtue. Virtues are held most high by the Mizo ancestors. Weber has commented this interrelation between folktales and reality,

If we look beyond the commonplaces of everyday life (and I have far from exhausted them!) can we discover an ideology which will give us a clue to deeper popular values? We can, but it is really no different from the dominant ideology, from the official ideology of Church and State. Like so much of popular culture, popular ideology appears mimetic. If it is not, then it reflects a coincidence of illnesses and accidents, and fairly narrow limits to lived experience, compensated by frequent recourse to the supernatural. The world is finite, in space as in possibilities, and it is contingent, with fortune or misfortune playing a crucial role (109).

The tale of “Kungawrhi” contains the narrative of the damsel in distress, about a chief’s daughter who was forced to marry *Keimi*³ through his trickery. On the realization that the chief would allow his daughter to marry *Keimi* (a being, half man half tiger), he

offered the men folk that whosoever rescued Kungawrhi would marry her without any bride-price[†]. Phawthira and his coward brother, Hrangchala set off for this mission. With a little help from *pathian nupa* (the supreme god and his wife) and magical seeds of fire, water, thorns and stone, the brave brother finally killed *Keimi* with his dao. However, their adventure took a turn when Kungawrhi was again captured by the *Khuavang* (a guardian spirit) while resting in their territory. Running after her, they entered the cave of *Khuavang*, and with much disputes and threats, Phawthira finally took Kungawrhi from them. In order to climb out of the cave, there was a tall tree with strong vines, where Hrangchala and Kungawrhi were the first to climb out. As Phawthira was still hanging on the vine, Hrangchala cut off the vine leaving Phawthira stranded. Phawthira planted another vine tree and waited for years to finally reach the outer surface of the cave. He journeyed directly to Kungawrhi's land, and seeing her together with Hrangchala, he murdered him on the spot, married Kungawrhi and lived happily as the new chief (Dahrawka 2008:100-111, translation mine).

Here the hero Phawthira could be included in the first hero-type mentioned before, the hero with good physical attributes aided by bravery and strength. His quest "definable as a prolonged endeavor toward a high goal, usually involving a series of feats, contests, and tests, before final attainment" (Klapp 20) made him conform to the world-view folk hero. This defender/ deliverer hero is found all over the world in tales and real life. According to Rohrich,

the inner realities of folktale are made sharply visible by the polar oppositions between characters and their contrasting attributes (Rohrich 210). So one of the most common tensions depicted is from the social realm, the nobody becoming a hero or rich as Phawthira, a common man becoming the chief in the end. Rohrich brings us to consider the finer nuances of this situation: the social differentiation comes as a challenge, as an artistic tension to move the story, but the hero must prove himself before becoming rich. He must actually give and sacrifice and only then shall he gain. "All success in folktale is connected to tests of worth" (212), and these tales may be of different kind, but always based in reality. The hero sometimes won with the help of the supernatural elements (as in the case with Phawthira here), which does not point to his weakness, but the support that he had from the supernatural is proof of his righteousness. *Pathian Nupa* considers Phawthira as worthy to be rescued from the clutches of the antagonist *Keimi*. The question of reality in this Mizo folktale is not in the matter of the brute forces of the hero, the supernatural elements or the fantastic quest or the reward. Instead its main motif is the representation of reality symbolically through the fearlessness, which leads to human refinement and maturation. The promise of reward too is symbolic for the folk hero as Rohrich has rightly commented,

The folktale's use of marriage to reward great deeds or accomplishment of difficult tests corresponds to the trials required to attain manhood in tribal societies. Before a young man may marry in these societies, he must prove himself at hunting or at war; he must

bag a certain animal or kill a certain number of enemies. These tasks the suitor must undergo embody a basic folk idea: A woman can, and must, set conditions before she gives herself away; a man must prove his masculinity to the woman, he must be capable of bringing offerings even if he risks losing his life (96).

“Thailungi” narrates a story of girl who was sold by her step-mother to a Pawih⁵ merchant in return for scrap-iron. The girl, Thailungi was then taken away by the merchant. Thailungi’s little brother couldn’t bear the absence of his sister so he travelled in search of her. On his way he met an old woman pounding sesame and asked his sister whereabouts. The old woman agreed to tell him on the condition that he must spill all the grounded sesame and gather every single bit again. The boy did so and the old woman referred him to an old man who was fashioning a wooden mortar for husking rice. The old man agreed to help him on one condition that he must hack the mortar in half and joined the pieces again. The boy fulfilled the task again and the old man referred him again to another old man leading a gayal. The old man agreed to help by letting him follow his gayal, and doing exactly what it did and this led him to a village where he was united with his sister Thailungi (Zofa 2008: 94-8 , translation mine).

Thailungi’s story depicts another adventure of the hero brother venturing alone to rescue his sister. Unlike the hero Phawthira, he is just a boy and knows nothing about combating opponents. However what these heroes share as a similar trait is the bravery and the will to finish

their quests. The young boy is formidable and the unknown world does not prevent him from accomplishing what he seeks. Phawthira may defeat his enemies by combat, violence and magic, while Thailungi's brother achieve his quest by doing the impossible three tasks put forward in the three encounters. The sequence of events- departure from home to a journey and then attaining the designation- is uniform in these tales. The reward in "Thailungi" is the unification of the siblings, not marriage as in "Kungawrhi". In his classification of folktale, Stith Thompson has said that of all the qualities which bring about universal admiration for a character in fiction, none is more compelling than faithfulness. Thus he has classed "faithfulness" as one of the important motifs of folktale and the quests of such heroes are found throughout the European continent, the British Isles and in Iceland (107-113).

These tales seems to echo and reinforce the dominant beliefs and social psyche of the Mizos which is highly patriarchal. The adventures taken by the male to achieve their destination involves going out in the open unknown world, tackling opposition and rescuing the captured maidens. Likewise, of tales of adventures and quests involve the journeys undertaken by the male even though the title denotes the name of the rescued woman. Societal roles which demand the male to work and venture into the wild, while the women are expected to stay at home in the Mizo society is reflected here. Hence, when the woman is displaced from her role, it is the task of the male to 'rescue' her and bring her back to her familiar place. The trials and adversaries met by the male hero conclude the male prowess and this was an asset that society deemed as

amust in a male. The folktale serves to stabilize the common law, values and norms, but at the same time challenging, overcoming and subverting. This is why these type of heroes cross borders as they are basically the representatives of patriarchal dominancy, preservation of rules, domestic life and public spheres as well as being the symbols of allegorical figures of courage, bravery, honesty and justice. The details of the inner reality are the reasons “we get inner satisfaction from the folktale” (214). Folktale is not religious in the sense of a particular religion, but deals with religious ideals as ethical questions. “The folktale is religious in the broadest sense, and it is no coincidence that collectors frequently claim that the guardians of folk tradition are usually pious people” (214). In Rohrich’s opinion, “human fate is the theme everywhere, even if the events are completely fantastic ... the folktale’s content is always general reality, timeless events that everyone has experienced or can experience” (215). The folktales as a genre is so focused on the fate of humans that “everything in the story relates to people, thus folktales do not depict the landscape and the nature” (214).

Likewise in the other tales of “Liandova te Unau”(Liandova and his sibling) and “Mauruangi”, a common motif is present. These are the type of folktale heroes who are the underdogs and are mistreated, and who finally achieve their happy endings after a series of events. However, unlike the tale of “Kungawrhi”, the heroes who are presented in these tales are not superior physically, but they are passive and they could be classed under the unpromising heroes. Liandova and his brother as well as Mauruangi are orphans, mistreated and bullied by

society (by the village people in Liandova's tale, and in the case of Mauruangi, by her step-mother and step-sister) as seen in the summary of these tales below.

"Liandova te Unau" (Liandova and his sibling) were brothers. Liandova was the older of the two and Tuaisiala was the younger. Abandoned by their widowed mother, they lived life in poverty. In order to eat, they dug yams or sometimes they would guard jhums for other people. They were often shunned and ridiculed by the villagers. But because of their humility and love for one another, they received help from an old woman who was a magician, and they discovered wealth in the abdomen of a snake. They also received a mithun from a great chief and finally Liandova married the chief's daughter and lived a wealthy life in the end (Dahrawka 60-75, translation mine).

"Mauruangi" is about a girl whose father married a widow who had a child of her own. Mauruangi became the object of insults and harsh treatment from her step-mother, while favoring Bingtaii, her biological daughter. Mistreated, she found refuge in her dead mother who had turned into a catfish and later into a tree. However, the stepmother figured this out and ordered for the demise of the catfish and the tree. As they grew up, Mauruangi and Bingtaii had a separate jhum where Mauruangi worked very hard even as Bingtaii lazily rested in her jhum. Then one day the servants of a *Vailal* (the name of a powerful non-Mizo chief) came across Mauruangi's jhum. Mauruangi offered them food

and because of her benevolence, they wanted her to be the wife of their chief, and Mauruangi agreed. With the execution of a proper plan, Mauruangi finally married the chief. However, the step-mother did not stop there but instead devised a plan to kill Mauruangi and she did by pouring hot water upon her. She made Bingtaii impersonate Mauruangi and became the chief's wife. Meanwhile a wild goat found Mauruangi's dead body, revived her and employed her as a nursemaid for her children. After a while, the servants found Mauruangi and took her back to the chief and a combat took place between Mauruangi and Bingtaii. The chief clothed Mauruangi with sufficient armour and she easily killed Bingtaii and they lived happily in the end. (Zofa 2008: 51-66, translation mine).

It is of the assumption that being a poor tribal society, the Mizo people could hardly afford an extra mouth to feed, hence the orphans were left to their own fate, without familial protection and thus the step-parents always seemed to favor their biological children, mistreating and abandoning their step-children because they implied extra burden to their economic condition. However, among the many folktales of the Mizos, these tales selected for study appear to be very popular. The orphan tale is very common in all parts of the world. The structure and motif too are similar in many instances. The orphan tales usually begin with the death of one or both parents or the expulsion of the child from the parent's home. The tales themselves are many and varied, but they share as their central core the journey and the impossible tasks that the

orphan must accomplish along the way to happiness. According to Max Luthi, “The blind, the disinherited, the youngest child, the orphan, the lost – these are the true heroes of folktale, for they are isolated and are thus freer than anyone else to engage in what is truly essential” (Luthi 65). In many folktales, the hero is an outcast because of his social status, poverty or a deformity. This isolation is far from being unique but is reflected in tales from across many cultures. The orphan is the quintessential outcast, operates in isolation, and thus makes the perfect hero. Similar to the first hero type, the orphan (the isolated hero) receive gifts. Miracles are at the service of these folktale heroes, (not that they seek for it) but are at their disposal when needed. The story of “Liandova te Unau”(Liandova and his sibling) denotes how they received wisdom and care from a kind old magical woman while Mauruangi received care from her deceased mother. However, the central representative of isolation and universal interconnection in the folktale is the hero. While all figures depicted in the folktale, objects as well as persons, are isolated and capable of entering into any kind of relationship (64). The tale depicts the narrow path taken by the hero even as he moves along in isolation, and to him (the hero), the tasks, torments, difficulties and dangers that confront him is nothing but opportunities toward his fate.

By following his own course, the hero also rescues other people, often without intending to do so. He may help other people without any self- interest in mind as in Liandova’s tale where they took pity on the great chief Lersia⁹ who dressed as a pauper and was ignored by everyone. In return, Liandova and his brother were rewarded handsomely by the rich Lersia. Mauruangi

was asked for her hand in marriage by a powerful chief, Vailal because of her benevolence towards the Vailal's servants. Selflessness and humility are the heroes' greatest weapon on their way to success, with a little bit of luck and help from outside. The tales depict the esteemed virtue of Mizo "tlawmngaihna"⁷ which is still held an important part of the Mizo culture. James Dokhuma in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*(Ancient Mizo Traditions) (2008) has summed up "tlawmngaihna" as the altruistic deeds done by Mizo men and women towards their duties, proving their selflessness without trying to gain rewards, yet evident in the society for the people to judge a person's worth. The men may prove their "tlawmngaihna" as in hunting, war, social activities, while the ladies may prove their "tlawmngaihna" in the household chores, caring for their men folk and other social activities (256-265, translation mine). *Tlawmngaihna* encompasses good virtues like humility and caring for others and many Mizo folktales reflect this altruistic behavior to teach and propagate it among the younger generation. The story of Liandova and his brother Tuaisiala, especially denotes an exemplary moral to teach in the Mizo society and are often narrated to children. The love which Liandova displays for his younger brother Tuaisiala is incredible. Being the older sibling, Liandova could work and earn, but nobody would pity his younger brother, who was too young and naïve to earn a living. Hence, Liandova would secretly feed his brother with yams when eventually they reached a point when they found a single *mim*⁸ which they divided between themselves. Hence the proverb,

*Sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi*⁹(Zawla 141).

Generosity is a blessing, selfishness a curse (Translation mine).

By studying folktale and culture Greenblatt has said that “we could grasp the way in which this culture of mixed motives and conflicting desires seemed to generate an interlocking series of models, a moral order, a set of ethical constraints ranged against the threat of anarchy, rebellion, and chaos” (228).

The orphans in these Mizo tales undergo obstacles and alienation from society. They have been cast out into the open world to fend for themselves. The isolation and alienation of the orphans according to Kimball represents the “eternal Other” (2). For every culture, the orphan tale depicts a reflection of man’s inner fear and abandonment, as well as striving for an identity, a home to find oneself. The way in which folktale places demands on the hero reflects attainment of maturity for an individual as Kimball has stated,

Orphans are a tangible reflection of the fear of abandonment that all human experience.

Orphans are outcasts, separated because they have no connection to the familial structure which helps define the individual. This outcast state is not caused by any actions of their own but because of their difference from the ‘normal’ pattern established by society.

Orphans are the reminder that the possibility of utter undesired solitude exists for any human beings.

...What the orphans seek, in fact, is a place to belong and the right to be there. In a typical coming of age tale, the hero or heroine seeks to break away from the family or

group, to stand alone in the world as an individual. In a coming of age tale with an orphan hero or heroine, the protagonist seeks a sense of belonging, of finding an appropriate place in the world, of coming home. In folktale, this homecoming may be quite literal as the hero or heroine marries royalty and goes to live in a palace. The difference between the ending of the orphan story and other folktales is that the orphan is not leaving the parent's home to become independent but finding a home after coming from nothing (2, 6).

The other hero type in consideration is the clever hero, a type somehow different from the previous hero types. He may be a trickster or a rogue outwitting his opponents with a trick or either vanquishes or escapes from a formidable opponent by a ruse (Klapp 20). However, there is a narrow gap between the definition of clever hero and trickster tales as Carroll has commented, that modern scholars tend to use an extremely broad definition of the term trickster itself, in that they tend to apply this term to any character that makes extensive use of deceptions. Although such a broad definition does lead to the conclusion that tricksters are ubiquitous, it does so at the expense of blurring together at least two- character types that are actually quite distinct. What Klapp called the 'clever hero' is a character who consistently outwits stronger opponents, where 'stronger' can refer to physical strength or power or both, while a trickster's activity is oriented toward the gratification of his enormous appetites for food or sex, and sometimes being a buffoon for his stupid actions (3). The narratives in consideration will be in accordance to

Klapp's "clever hero", the type that outsmart their opponents and are rewarded for their intelligence and wit. For this type, the Mizo tale of "Belbingtea" and "Chemteii" seems fitting.

There lived a youth called Belbingtea. He was a lively and adventurous man and one day he set off to fight the *Pawi* clan of the north. On his way he met a *sanghar* (a fox) and a tiger who insisted of going with him. After many days, they reached the *Pawi* village. Their chief, on the knowledge of Belbingtea's arrival told his wild hen to attack him. Belbingtea on that instant asked the fox to take care of the hen. The fox carried the hen and ate it. Next the *Pawi* chief asked his wild goat to attack Belbingtea, and in turn the fox jumped on the goat, carried it and ate it. The next animal that attacked was a wild bison and it was quickly carried off by Belbingtea's tiger again. The *Pawi* chief accepted defeat and asked what Belbingtea demanded. He asked for a ragged cloth, a broken comb, *saum* and *chingal*¹⁰. The chief was surprised at the demand but gave what was asked. Belbingtea then set for home. When night came, he rested in a cave that was inhabited by *ramhuai* (demons). The demons on their return sensed the presence of someone and they took a long stick to poke the intruder. At the tip of the stick, they could feel the texture of the rough cloth, and so they assumed that the being in their cave had long rough hair on its skin. This triggered fear upon them, and the bravest one among them was forced to enquire to the being in the cave again. When upon entering the cave, Belbingtea quickly slashed the face of the *ramhuai* with the comb dipped in *saum* and

chingal. He cried out in pain and ran towards his companions. His wounds were examined, and they were astounded because they felt that the teeth of the being in the cave were thin and sharp. They all ran away especially because the wounds looked as though they were beginning to rot and decay, due to the *saum*. The next day, Belbingtea woke up to discover that it was a treasure cave of the *ramhuai*. So he took as many treasures as possible and went home in great happiness (Zofa 2006:99- 103, translation mine).

“Chemteii”: Once there was a chief who was approached by two brothers for justice. The argument between them was regarding a mithun which they had inherited from their late father. The mithun had given birth to a number of calves and when it was time to divide it among the brothers, the elder one refused by saying their father had left it to him and hence there was no share for the younger one. Upon hearing the argument, the chief was at a loss for there were no witnesses. Hence, he arrived at the conclusion that whosoever could answer his riddle would have the mithun. The riddle was to name the fastest creature in this world. The elder brother at home thought for a moment and stated that the horse is the fastest. The younger brother was disheartened and could not arrive at a conclusion. His daughter Chemteii answered that the fastest in the world was the human mind. The chief then set another riddle for them and this time he asked them to answer

what could be the fattest creature in the world. The next day, the elder brother denoted that the pig was the fattest, while the younger brother denoted that it was the earth as it could hold everything. Impressed at the younger brother's answer, he asked him his source. The younger brother informed the chief that it was from his daughter, Chemteii. The chief again set another riddle for them asking what could be the most important thing in this world. The elder one gave his answer saying the wives are most important, while the younger one answered sleep, because while sleeping, everyone is equal to another. This impressed the chief so much that he asked the younger brother to take home cotton seeds and asked Chemteii to plant it, harvest it, made it into cotton and weave it and present the cloth to the chief the next day. Chemteii then asked her father to request the chief to prepare the tools required for weaving within one night so that she could prepare the cloth. The chief was amazed. Then he gave an egg to Chemteii's father and asked him to let his daughter to hatch the chick, take care of it and present to him the next day fully grown. Chemteii on the other hand, send the chief some rice and asked him to plant it, water it and grow it within the night for the chick feed. Finally, the chief impressed with Chemteii's wit, ordered her to present herself before him. After the final test, seeing her wisdom and beauty, the chief married her on the condition that she must not interfere in his administration. However, she broke the promise. She was then ordered to return to her father's house with the one thing she cherished most from the chief's house. The next day

the chief woke up to find himself in Chemteii's father house because he was the one thing that she cherished most from the house (Dahrawka 93-9, translation mine).

The form and nature of these tales are similar with other culture over the world. Unlike the first hero type (the formidable hero), these heroes do not rely on their physical strength but on their wit, and sometimes with help from outside through their journey or adventure; nor are these heroes passive and meek like the second hero type (the underdog hero). They are distinct in their treatment of their oppressors or opponents. However, the signification of their quests and adventure remains all the same. The journey taken by the heroes are that of self- discovery. But unlike the orphan tale, here the hero (as in "Belbingtea") left the comfort of his home to embark on an adventure and he returned home with wealth and fame. He embarked on a journey to attack the *Pawi* clan and was aided by talking animals to defeat the *Pawi* chief. He slept in the cave of demons whom he outsmarted with his wit and the frightened demons ran for their lives. In the cave lay the wealth of the demons which Belbingtea happily took home, being richer and famous more than before. At the very beginning, the hero is displaced from his own domain and is thrown into the wilderness. Free from the constraints of moral and ethical codes of social and cultural domain, wilderness becomes a site for self-awareness and self- realization (Kaushal 68). The hero here overpowers the forces that rule over the unknown through common sense, wit and cunning. The success of his quest lies precisely in his ability to maneuver, manipulate and negotiate his position. However, this is a tale of a hero, who desires to return, and is anxious to

be reincorporated in his own society. These encounters with the outside forces fetch him the status of a hero upon his return (69). On the other hand, the tale of “Chemteii” is situated not in the wilderness but in their village. Due to a dispute that took place between her father and uncle, the chief was approached for justice. The chief on the other hand imposed difficult and tricky questions/ riddles for the brothers, which Chemteii managed to provide answers for her father each and every time. Impressed by her cleverness, the chief eventually married her. The contest happens within the village itself thus the heroine does not need to venture out for a journey. Her journey lies within the realms of the four walls of the chief to prove her worth. Like Belbingtea, Chemteii succeeded in proving her worth through common sense and wit and is rewarded through marriage. Rohrich has said that ‘people in the folktale often marry for practical reason” (95) where we find the chief marrying Chemteii for her wit and not out of love. Rohrich also went on saying that ‘a peasant must take economic factors into account when choosing a wife who will provide important help with the work” (96). Interpretation of the tales once again takes us to the initiation rights for men and women to prove maturity and finding their place in the world. The man proves himself by venturing into the unknown and accumulating fortune and returning home a changed man; the woman proves herself worthy to be the chief’s wife through her cleverness and attain her rightful place near the chief. The search is completed.

In all these Mizo folktales, the social categories from which the various protagonists in these tales are drawn therefore comprise a clear pattern, in which the hero is consistently

recruited from a lower level of society. In general, these tales should be seen as examples of a more universal theme of popular culture, involving motifs of symbolic role-reversal and inversion, such as “the world turned upside down,” or “the last shall be first” (Perrie 129). In the context of these broad structures, the relative social positions of the various protagonists in the tales may be regarded as purely symbolic of superior and inferior status in general. The story gains dramatic strength from the contrast between the subordinate position of the main protagonist at the beginning of the tale and his triumph at the end. When there is a third protagonist, personifying justice or authority, he has an even higher status as in the story of “Kungawrhi” (Kungawrhi’s father, the chief) and in “Chemteii” (the chief), Lersia in “Liandovate Unau” and the Vailal in “Mauruangi”. In such cases the figure of authority serves as a device to reward the humble hero for his deeds and to punish the villain for his stupidity or avarice. The positive image of such figures legitimizes the values of the fair administration of chiefs and rulers.

The clever hero has two distinct characters as been mentioned before, and the latter is the trickster who is even hailed as a culture hero in many cultures. According to Thompson, the adventures of a trickster are inconsistent. Such a trickster may appear in three different roles: the beneficent culture hero, the clever deceiver, or the numbskull, and the series of adventures are likely to be a succession of clever tricks and foolish mishaps (319). There is a dual characteristic attributed to the culture hero/ trickster and because of that he may be “a bringer of culture”

(Bacwaden 332) because he took part in the creation myths, he has a role in the creation of the world as nearly all mythologies tell of the way in which various experiences of the Culture Hero result in changes of the contour of the land, the creation of mountains, rivers and lakes. Thus there are frequent stories of the origins of certain mountains or some other features of nature because of the adventure of the culture hero. Likewise, nearly everywhere, one can hear stories of marking on rocks which have been left by the culture hero in his wanderings (Thompson 310-13). The other characteristic is the trickster, the ambiguous and fascinating figure, a cruel lecherous cheat, an epitome of disorder but nevertheless the culture bringer also. He appears in many guises, both animal and human (Campbell 273). In the trickster, we find a “coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation [that] characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this or that, and yet is both”. Trickster is “at one and the same time, creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes and is always duped himself” (Abrahams 161). The complexity of this character has gained attention from scholars and attempts have been made to explain the merging of the paradoxical nature of the trickster/ culture hero.

In the Mizo folk tale, one such figure was Chhurbura¹¹. Myriad stories of Chhurbura existed which either proves his stupidity or his cleverness. One of the most favourite characters in Mizo folklore, Chhura as lovingly called has even been claimed to exist. Pachuau has said that,

The legendary trickster Chhurbura is still celebrated in lore and young and old are often termed as such depending on their wit or the lack of it in them. Serious research has also been conducted especially in terms of the actual existence of Chhurbura as a character, so much so that there are certain Mizo tribes who feel that they are descendents of Chhurbura. His existence has been deliberated upon at length and there are remnants of what appear to be his belongings, that suggest that he could have actually existed (2008: 20-21).

PS. Dahrawka also commented on the actual existence of Chhura because of the innate reality of his tales as compared to other Mizo folktales. Chhura's tale is one of the earliest folktales told to children and one that leaves a lasting impression till adulthood because of its humour. Chhura's tale seems to have been regarded the oldest oral tales of the Mizos hence the idiom "*Chhura rual*" (Chhura's contemporaries) is often used to denote old / ancient things. However, a deeper study of the tales also shows that Chhura was not as ancient as they proclaimed to be, judging from the settings and plot of the tales (where traces of the Pawi ,a rival clan are present) and because of the presence of the Hmar¹², a sub-clan of the Mizos, claiming the descendents of the great Chhurbura (212-13, translation mine). Then there is the account of his death where one version said that he died accidentally during his travels while some hold that he died as a chief, rich and powerful in society. Another version has denoted that he died while playing an entertaining game called *Nghengtawlah- Saiawnah*¹³ during a festival and because he was so

absorbed in the game he totally forgot to eat and drink and out of fatigue died while playing (Khangte 85). Whatever the case may be, without documents in an oral culture, it is impossible to prove any of the claims made by many. The tales themselves become eternal in the Mizo society and the popularity of Chhurbura in the Mizo sentiments remains uncontested. In the light of the popular culture hero/ trickster as being dealt by scholars across different culture, we will look upon how Chhura maybe party to this genre especially and in terms of his representation.

Chhurbura could be considered a culture hero by the fact that he was regarded responsible in shaping the world, by beating and hitting the solid earth with his big stone club, leveling parts of it, thereby creating hills, mountains, plains and valleys (85). According to this myth, he was responsible for giving humans an inhabitable land. Like the characteristic of a pure culture hero, with supernatural element, he could be regarded as a god.

Culture heroes and tricksters are paradoxical. They bring the gifts of civilization, and yet they break every taboo and shatter every moral boundary that civilization sets up. While bearing the gifts of fire, and with it reason and enlightenment, they represent as well the principles of inevitable chaos, disorder and the irrational (Bacwaden 338).

Likewise most of Chhura's identity is formulated on the trickster category, producing humour either in his stupidity or his cleverness. Out of the twelve tales of Chhura from *Folklore from Mizoram*(2013), seven tales are about his naivete and ignorance while five tales denote his wisdom and cunning in order to achieve what he wanted. Hence we find Chhura, a simpleton

who forgot the name of a dish and asked a Pawi to search its whereabouts (Pachauau 37), Chhura who forgot the art of whistling and pulled a whistling Pawi's tongue out because he thought he stole it (38), Chhura, who was cheated by his older lazy brother Nahaia in exchanging a house because the idea of a torn roof where one could look at the stars while sleeping sounded brilliant to him (40), Chhura, who wanted to pluck a ripe fruit but didn't because he couldn't climb the tree (40), Chhura, who didn't recognize his village and family just because he believed that by reversing the direction in his path, he thought all else was in reverse (41), Chhura, who was outwitted by Nahaia by claiming his magical *Sekibuhchhuak* (Horn of plenty) (43) and Chhura, who dug for yams with his lazy brother Nahaia and eventually, was cheated by him in acquiring all the ripe and succulent fresh yams while Chhura was left with the inedible ones (44). On the flipside of this character, in the other five tales, we find a whole new portrayal of Chhura, wise, brave and cunning. This could be seen in the tales where he coerced his mother-in-law to sleep with him (38-9); how he caught and managed to acquire the *phungpuinu*'s (ogress) magical object (41-2); how he managed to outwit the whole villagers of Mawngping¹⁴ and escape from their wrath (45-6); how Chhura managed to outwit his enemies from being captured in his field (46) and finally how a captive Chhura managed to cheat a Pawi traveler in order to exchange places with him, and returned with the Pawi's wealth while blackmailing the women of the village to sleep with him (47-8).

From these adventures of the trickster, the dual characteristic is the expression of ambiguity and paradox of a confusion of all customary categories. The existence of human beings is confined with needs, both positive and negative. Social restrictions and law are made to curb the inner gratifications of men's desire. Hence, the trickster tale expresses what human are capable of being: stupid, comic, cruel, cunning as well as witty and clever. According to Abrahams ,

The clown or trickster epitomizes the paradox of the human condition and exploits the incongruity that we are creatures of the earth in that we have need of clothing and spiritual ideals to clothe our nakedness, of money, and of language – of human institutions. Further he embodies the fundamental contradiction of our existence: the contradiction between the individual and society, between freedom and constraint (160-61).

From this point of view the culture hero is the source of needs for mankind, while the trickster represents the contradicting nature of mankind itself. The early Mizo society as mentioned before is altruistic in character and thus attributes such nature at a high esteem. So psychologically, the tales of Chhurbura could represent the suppression of the other egoistic and self-centered nature. Chhura does whatever is needed to satisfy his desires by using wit and sometimes even resorts to cruelty in order to achieve his wants, which is opposite to the morality preached in the Mizo culture, be it the acquisition of wealth/ power or fulfilling his sexual desires. Through the

trickery, that is negation and violation of his customs, Chhura condemns himself to contingency and unpredictability. Hence, it could also be the symbol of representing the generative situation of ambivalence and contradictions that the basis of culture engenders as Abrahams has stated that the trickster figure is, “created in response to a present and constant perception of opposition, of difference essential to human constructs”(164). The significance lies in the projection of the duality- god and human, life and death, good and evil, law and chaos.

What may be the most significant about Trickster vagrant behavior is that he is also responsible for human social behavior on various levels. For better and for worse, Trickster is responsible for the realities of social behavior as a kind of primal prototype. Having occurred in the “pre- human flux,” his choices and actions become existential reality (Ballinger 18).

On another psychological interpretation of the humour present in the trickster behaviour, Abrahams also said,

Freud and Bergson’s notion of the joke as an attack on control would seem more appropriate in that it accounts for the laughter produced whenever Trickster is discussed. For both the essence of the joke is that something formal is attack by something informal, something organized and controlled by something vital, energetic and upsurge of life ... (165)

Even when some of Chhura's bravery and wit are accepted; and even as he was hailed as a pure culture hero because of his boon towards humanity, it is his comic side that stands out, not pure stupidity, which makes Chhura merely seem less god-like and more human. The duality runs throughout the tales of this culture hero/ trickster and it may be because of this that they are central and popular in every culture's folklore. Recognition of these made people embrace the trickster as their reality is more reflected prominently in this ambiguous character as Zama has commented in her "re-reading" of "Chhura" tales,

So Chhura as trickster and clever hero, is seen as unbeatable in display of wit, resourcefulness, deceit, impudence and sense of humour. One wonders how he got away with it all. Values are rearranged in these tales and we see crime becoming comedy and being "wronged" means being made a fool of. As the culprit he gets away lightly. The key to this immunity seems to be not a callous indifference to moral values on the part of the observer, but that people love a good joke, even when it is on them – occasionally. We may further venture to state that like other tricksters, Chhura too fulfils, and serves specific psychic need. He evidently provides more than comedy, for any fool can do this. A more important function seems to be to provide a release valve for all the anti- social desires repressed by men who tell and listen to such tales, be it greed, avariciousness or forbidden sexual desires. His actions represent a way of getting around, or evading social taboos and other restrictions without actually upsetting the social order. In this manner,

tricksters like Chhura help man to expunge the pressures that might otherwise destroy both his ordered world and himself. The trickster takes on what we would in reality shirk from, yet applaud, for we see a reflection of our dark side in him (213).

If we divert a little bit from the trickster, the type of heroes that make up an important part of the Mizo sentiments are the tall tales of folk heroes. These are stories with unbelievable elements but may also be factual at some point. The Mizos have such tall tale figures that provide humour because of the blatant exaggeration of the characters. Similar to the trickster tale of Chhura, the narratives are in fragmentary and unfinished form and seem to be a segment or an episode. Its reality factor lies in the verifiable fact commonly known to be true, for it has been experienced or preserved in memory, and may also be supported by physical evidence, by an object that commemorates a past event (Degh 74). In this way they could fall into the ambit of legends too. The Mizo tales of “Aihniara”, “Buizova”, “Lianchia”, “Samdala” are some of the heroic figure known for their special quality or characteristic features.

Aihniara came from Selesih village and was known for his speed. He was said to be so fast that he could manoeuvre a speeding wild bison in the forest from behind. He was also said to run so fast that during a downpour he was not even wet from running between the chief’s house and the *Zawlbuk*¹³ (Zofa 2006:153-5, translation mine).

Buizova was another hero known for his soulful voice. His soulful voice was as popular as his ugliness. It was said that in order to listen to Buizova's song, one needed to hold on to something for support first, because his melodious voice touched the listeners in such a manner that their knees trembled and they would eventually fall down. No one could work on their fields while listening to Buizova. It was said that his voice could calm the wind and gently shake the leaves from the nearby trees (156- 65, translation mine).

Lianchia was another hero who was known for his good looks. It was said that he was born so ugly that fate intervened and transformed him. His good looks made him the most sought-after bachelor by women, young and old. His looks could even make his enemies run and surrender. It was said that one day he climbed the top of a tree and pronounced that whosoever could reach the top would marry him. To this, women of all ages competed the whole day in order to win his hand in marriage (168-73, translation mine).

Samdala was another prominent figure known for his laziness. The story of Samdala stated that he would not even climb a tree to pluck figs when hungry, instead he lay flat on the floor and opened his mouth while waiting for the ripe figs to fall inside. And

when a fig fell inside his mouth, he contemplated very hard to see if he felt like chewing and swallowing it (187-8, translation mine).

These are heroes with their own unique characteristics and the narration of these tales would still draw a smile upon the listeners. The exaggeration and the comic level of the tales overshadow the factual element provided (as the history of these characters is provided in scraps in the story). It calls for amusement and entertainment instead of amazement. Thompson has commented that a very considerable portion of the legendary stories among any people is made up of simple jests and anecdotes, sometimes of human beings and sometimes of animals (188). These said tales may be true for some, but also as Zender has commented, “it could be true, but it doesn’t have to be” (Rohrich 51). This in itself demonstrates that the boundary of reality runs through the middle of this genre. Regional and individual differences, as well as the ranging from humorous anecdotes about actual events to freely invented fantasies, has allowed jest to become the most common form of folk narrative today (52). So when the magic and the heroism of the tale lost its reality, jests flourishes and mixes with every other genre. The above tales presented are good examples of such hybridity. But beyond the joke and jest, these tales hold the accounts of the reality of the people of the past and their culture. Beyond the credibility, they are the reflection of the living people of the past, so prominent that their tales have been immortalized through generations. Pachuau has noted this connection with the Mizo culture,

Folktales are celebrated today, and are recorded both in the oral as well as their written dimensions. Researchers either from Mizo or English literature as well as history and culture studies continue to seek significant inputs from the folktale tradition, perhaps because it has a significant representation that dwells close to the reality that is perceived by the Mizos of today. In these simple, down-to-earth narratives the postcolonial generation seems to have sought and subsequently found solace... There are various references that speak of the continuity of an inherent acceptance towards the folk narratives of the Mizos. In contemporary literature, in day-to-day talk, there are still references that are made at length to the various protagonists of Mizo folktales, for instance, lazy people are often still referred to as 'Samdala' while the strong men may be regarded to be either 'Mualzavata' or 'Taitesena'¹⁶ (2013:20).

In most of hero tales, there is always a rival in the form of many things which deter the hero in many possible ways. This rival came in all shapes and sizes, from gods, supernatural elements, animals or humans; in fact it comes from family too. Villains provide the forces against which heroes strive. Hence the journey of a hero is not possible without the antagonist as they are the factor necessary for the maturation of the hero. Vladimir Propp, in his analysis of the Russian fairy tales, had concluded that a folktale had only eight dramatis personae, of which one was the villain, and his analysis has been widely applied to all other culture's tales. The actions

that fell into a villain's sphere are mainly in a story, where the villain caused harm to the hero or his family; when there is a conflict between the hero and the villain, either a fight or competition takes place; and when the hero is pursued after winning the fight or obtaining something from the villain (79, 84). The contest between the hero and the villain as perceived by the listener/reader has symbolic interpretation. Villain roles are correlative with hero roles. They help to create the heroic situation and heighten and intensify the significance of the hero. Hence, like the hero, the anti-hero/villain has his own role and a valid status in folklore. Several components which attribute to the effectiveness of the match between these two as a struggle between good and evil must be emphasized. The hero as the epitome of good (mostly humble, brave and adventurous) while the villain an epitome of evil (fearsome, proud and cruel). Except the trickster hero, the mentioned hero types face their opponents through different measures and the outcome is predictable. Every culture propagates what society deemed good morals and vices and these are reflected in their tales. The villains symbolize the negative, the unknown and fear of the people and this is represented in the form of demons, ogres, witches. They represent the power of nature that people feared and at the same time tried to conquer. So the encounter between these forces often happened in the forest, in the wild, set apart from civilization. Hence, the forest embodies the unknown and fear in the heart of the villagers as Weber promptly put it,

As in real life, forests are places through which one wends one's way uneasily, especially if one is alone, most especially if woman or child, not knowing what to expect from the

dark solitude. The sounds of forest or waste are not part of the villager's familiar symphony; their dwellers do not participate in the net of relations that makes one feel secure (97).

In the tales of "Kungawrhi" and "Belbingtea", the heroes battled their opponents in the forest, away from the village; Phawthira defeated the villain Keimi, the supernatural adversaries; while Belbingtea outwitted the demons in the forest too. These adversaries are faced in the open world and these battles could turn out the fate of the heroes- it could either be the start of a new life for the hero or it could be his end. These encounters with the forces of wilderness fetch him the status of a hero upon his return (Kaushal 69). So, the forest provides the elements of justice for the travelling hero, the fate that determines the hero's worth. There are also situations which force people to leave society and move into the forest. Like the Mizo folktale "Rahtea"¹⁷ (Zofa 2006: 142-5) who upon being tormented by his step-mother ran away into the forest and wanted to become an insect instead of returning home, back to society amidst the appeals of his family to return home. However, the underlying symbolism remains the same: the forest provides a space for the resolution of contradictions which cannot be resolved otherwise in the society in which men live. At the manifest level, the forest is nature, unadulterated and unpolluted by man and his culture, but an exploration into the latent semiotic significance of these narratives reveals that there is a complete universe of the forest constructed and conceptualized in opposition to the social reality where man leads an alienated life based on relations of exploitation- both of man

and nature-, is a sacred space where man gets regenerated in nature and becomes an integral part of the ecological system which nature created. As such, the universe of the forest has its own rules and norms. The rules and norms of the social system which are ideological constructs to consolidate and perpetuate power relations in a society based on the suppression of human desire cannot be imposed in the forest (Singh and Kaur 160).

The other folktales too present us with another villain type in the form of human beings. They are the traitors, someone who lives in close proximity with the hero. Their characteristic role is to overcome the hero not by strength or cleverness but by a contemptible action, unfairness, weakness or cowardice of which anyone is capable. The contemptible character of the traitor is exemplified in the motives of his actions, as in “Kungawrhi” tale, the hero Phawthira has a traitor brother Hrangchala who is a coward and is selfish. Chhura has a lazy and deceptive brother Nahaia who constantly took advantage of him. We may note that the traitors are usually placed close to the hero in social relationship. This renders the treachery more effective and poignant (Klapp 23). The hero may also encounter cruelty and prosecution from the stepmother and society. “Thailungi”, “Mauruangi” and “Liandovate Unau”, “Rahtea” tales denote us that human beings could be the most infuriating obstacles for one another and that the ‘enemy’ could be our siblings, family, neighbors. Human nature is complex hence the arch enemies of the select tales are from their community itself. The role of the evil step- mother/ step- sister is prominent in the form of folk and fairy tales and scholars all over the world have

studied and contemplated upon it. Stepmothers exemplify the “bad” mother who allows the fantasy of the “good” mother to remain. Mostly she is cruel, greedy, malicious, and jealous. The stepmother is one of the most common villainous character, and she is closely aligned with other hostile female characters, including witches, ogresses, enchantresses (Haase 640). The open hostility they show toward their stepchildren is a feature of narratives in many parts of the world, and not only in folk and fairy tales, they are found in adaptations and films. The human villains exemplify a wide variety of weak character from jealousy, selfishness and contempt to outright hatred and cruelty. The nineteenth century European fairytales have such common motif of the evil- stepmother, and studies have concluded the motif behind as the economic factor (Weber 94-8). Famine and economic crisis made children early to fend for themselves and imposed them to venture to the world to earn a living. Hence cast-out children tales became a popular theme in many of the European fairy tales. Likewise, the past Mizo society nevertheless poor and simple could not afford to take in orphans and destitute children even with the many good morals they hold. Moreover, Leyla Onal has a psychological explanation for the evil- step mother due to the societal role inflicted upon the women. The expectation of women for childbirth, caring of family and to be the model wife in a patriarchal society rendered women to strive for the ‘legitimate motherhood’. So when a woman acts outside of this societal norm, she is an outcast, a subject of rumors and negativity. The position of ‘legitimate mother’ can also serve for loathing other women, who aren’t confined to the expected societal norms like adulteress, barren or

childless women or bad mothers. Women became the favorite subject of condemnation due to her sexuality and reproduction factor (Onal 2011). Based on such reality, the evil female became a prominent figure in many folktales. These have further consequences till today. According to Marina Warner, the stepmother in the past are portrayed as evil due to the competition of women against each other due to their dependence on men, for the breadwinner's favor. And such it set sister against sister and the older generation against the younger. Even though the family structures today have changed beyond recognition, many of the traditional stories have stood still, and have come to perpetuate prejudices and hatreds even after the historical conditions from which they grew have faded. The splitting of mothers into "good and bad" as reflected in the popular conventions of the fairytale, has serious social consequences in a world of divorce, remarriage and single parents. In fairy tale a proper mother is above reproach, and stepchildren are led to believe they must never betray their own mothers by accepting a stepmother as kind and loving, not wicked. At present, the mother's corpse lie offstage in the fairy tale because the only mother good enough to be a Good Mother is a dead one (Warner: 1991).

Folk heroes come from many sources, including mythology, history, and religion. And folk heroes often do not inhabit only folklore. Many of the hero traditions of the world fall into certain generally well- defined categories: outlaw heroes, culture heroes, warriors, tricksters, lovers, occupational heroes, fantasy, supernatural figures, magicians, some fairytale characters, heroes of political struggles and many more. Not all folk heroes necessarily are heroic in the

sense of being immensely brave or clever, or otherwise empowered. Stunning success and the overcoming of all obstacles to attain the quest is not a necessary component of folklore heroism either. Plenty of real and mythic figures celebrated in folklore are heroic failures. The different qualities of folk heroes are complicated to be labeled good or bad since heroism is celebrated by folks in the form of bravery, cleverness, trickery and stupidity and sometimes to downright cruelty. Whatever types of heroes we care to mention and whatever attributes, positive or negative, they may display, most have in common a greater or lesser degree of ambiguity, anomaly and contradiction. Seal and White believe that this contradiction arises from the fact that heroes frequently straddle the chasms and the conflicts between social groups, between notions of good and evil, right and wrong, power and lack of it, the legal and the illegal. In other words, heroes are liminal figures, forever caught betwixt and between competing and usually conflicting aspects of culture. In their lore, they inhabit anomalous and ambiguous cultural spaces in which the 'normal' rules of behavior are suspended, thus allowing heroes to be heroic (xxix).

So as a whole, the rivalries and the struggle of the hero in folktale emphasized the hero quest on the transformation of his physical being, either physically or in awakening his inner self. Each hero begins his journey alone, and each has a purpose; each arrives at his destination through different resolutions. For some it is an adventurous journey, for others it is a tale of suffering and for some it is a journey towards self-realization. These are journeys which all

human kind will undertake during our lifetime. And it is apt to conclude that the reason for the presence of vast array of hero tales in every culture is because,

They represent our own fears and insecurities and provide a vicarious expression of how we would like to be able to handle our own problems, both personal and communal. It matters not whether folk heroes are portrayed as lords and ladies or as humble peasants or whether their victories are against serpents, ogres, or other monsters. Beneath the superficialities of character, plot, and story are the deep global structures of tale and ballad, the recurring motifs of conflict and confrontation. Tellers of tales and singers of songs select from these ancient motif menus to combine and recombine them into stories that are ever- changing in response to new and different circumstances yet remain powerfully consistent across centuries, continents, and culture (xxvi).

Glossary:

Chhura rual: an expression meaning 'Contemporaneous with Chhura', and equivalent to the English 'As old as the hills', 'Dating from times immemorial', 'Very ancient', 'Very old', 'Primeval'.

Chingal: lye, potash solution. (This strong alkaline solution, which is leached from wood-ash, often takes the place of soap and soda for washing purposes and is used in preparing and cooking certain articles of food. It is also employed as a depilatory.

Pawi: A name embracing all the tribes (such as Chins, Lakhers, Fanais, etc) who do not wear their hair- knot at the back of the head as the Lushais do.

Phungpuinu: (*Phung*) a spirit, a ghost, a bogey, a spook, an ogress, a genie, a goblin, a hobgoblin.(Generally regarded as female by the Lushais).

Ramhuai: an evil spirit, a demon, a devil, a nat.

Sanghar: a wild cat

Saum: to preserve fat pork, generally containing a small proportion of lean, by well boiling and putting it into gourds to mature. *n.* fat pork preserved in the above manner.

Sekibuhchhuak: Horn of plenty that could produce unlimited rice and meat.

Tlawmngaihna: it means to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent (refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be proud or self respecting to give in, etc.

Unau: a brother/ a sibling

(Source: Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1988. Print.)

Notes:

1. “Liandova te Unau” is a tale about orphan brothers living in poverty and finally accumulating wealth by supernatural help, luck and good virtue.

“Kungawrhi” is a tale of a maiden rescued by a hero who defeated supernatural adversary and eventually married her.

“Mauruangi” is a tale of an orphan girl prosecuted by her stepmother and with the help of magic and luck married the great Vailal chief in the end.

2. Vailal is the name of a powerful non- Mizo chief.
3. *Keimi* is a supernatural being made up of half man half tiger.
4. A bride price is compulsory in the tradition of the Mizos till today. In the past bride price may be paid in the form of *Sial* (mithun) and later, with guns. The present bride price of a Mizo girl is Rs. 420 which is more of a customary rite.
5. *Pawih or Pawi*: see glossary.
6. Lersia is the name of a great chief known for his wealth and benevolence.
7. *Tlawmngaihna* definition here has been translated from Dokhuma’s *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*(Ancient Mizo Traditions) (1992).

8. *Mim*: a nut
9. This verse is often chanted to propagate generosity towards others in the Mizo society.
10. *Saum*: *v.* to preserve fat pork, generally containing a small proportion of lean, by well boiling and putting it into gourds to mature. *n.* fat pork preserved in the above manner.

Chingal: *n.* lye, potash solution. This strong alkaline solution, which is leached from wood-ash, often takes the place of soap and soda for washing purposes and is used in preparing and cooking certain articles of food. It is also employed as a depilatory.
11. Chhurbura was one of the most lovable characters of the Mizo folk narratives. The tales depicted and studied in this chapter are taken from Dahrawka (2008) and Pachuau (2013).
12. Hmar refers to another sub clan of the Mpizo.
13. *Nghengtawlah Saiawnah* is a kind of folk game played during the olden days by both children and adult.
14. *Mawngping* is a village inhabited by people who do not have the organ to defecate.
15. *Zawlbuk* is the large house in the Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.
16. Mualzavata and Taitesena are heroic legendary figures known for their strength.

17. "Rahtea" is a story of an abused child. His stepmother wanted to sacrifice him to the spirits, but he ran away and was transformed into an insect (Zofa 2006:142-5, translation mine).

Chapter 4: Folk Narratives and the Mizo Culture

Folklore has been shared in every society in order to entertain, educate, and preserve culture. As emphasized in the previous chapters, folktales play an invaluable role, along with other cultural traditions, in bringing people closer together and ensuring exchange and understanding among them. As globalization and social transformation demand renewed dialogue among communities, educators and scholars are more motivated to protect and promote oral traditions and related cultural heritage. The influence of folklore is alive and well even today. Despite the advent of contemporary literature, folklore and folktale are unique and different from other types of literary fiction in many ways as they transcend the generations of people through orality. Through changing conditions, they continue to evolve and are shaped accordingly and never cease to be alienated from the culture that produced them.

Alan Dundes has stated that, “Regardless of whether or not one can see the advantages of employing the modern definition of folk in lieu of the more limited concept of ethnic group with respect to studying the onion- skin layering of the multiple identities of each individual, there should be no hesitation in having recourse to the materials of folklore to better understand the nature of identity” (1989:16). For him, folklore is not simply a way of obtaining available data about identity for social scientists. It is actually one of the principal means by which an individual and a group discovers or establishes his or its identity (35). Through folklore one could identify a culture’s beliefs, morals, and the social construction of reality. A people’s stories

help answer questions of identity and values. They touch on the very core of who they are, both personally and corporately. Cultural anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, and cultural researchers seem to agree that to investigate the idea of self, one does it by way of individual's stories, along with the stories of his historical, societal and cultural self. It is through these stories that many of ethnic, cultural, societal identity of an individual or a group could be revealed.

Folk belief includes a wide variety of behaviors, expressions and beliefs. Folk belief tends to be awarded to primitive cults and superstitions, but studies have shown that folk belief does not escape the realms of the urban culture and the civilized world. Superstitions and beliefs which suit a particular culture exist and an ample example will be a black cat crossing the road denoting bad luck; or breaking a mirror will result in seven years of bad luck. These western belief and superstitions make up their folk belief. According to Mullen, "belief exists at every level and in every context of society- official and unofficial, institutional and non- institutional, enfranchised and disenfranchised, the centre and the margins, and small and large groups" (Sims & Stephens 78). Belief is no longer seen as a defining element of the folk. Folk belief is not only confined to cultures outside the mainstream, but throughout the population. Belief and folklore are inseparable as Motz has denoted,

The concept of belief is so central to the discipline that it is hard to talk about folklore without talking about belief. The generic category of folk belief is an obvious example, as are many aspects of folk medicine and folk art, as well as folk elements of religious

practice. Rituals also are part of the practice of belief. They symbolize, enact, teach, actualize, challenge, or explore beliefs and mark the intersection of planes of reality. In many instances, in order for a ritual to succeed, it must crystallize belief in its participants. Perhaps less obviously, belief is also inherent in our definitions of folk-narrative forms. As we commonly understand folk narrative, it plays an important part in popular cultural discourse about the various modes of believing as well as ways of validating and applying beliefs. Memories endorse belief by attesting to personal experience. Myths are believed literally or metaphorically. Legends are believed, are believable, or discuss believability. Folktales are understood to refer to a fictional realm entered by the temporary and provisional suspension of disbelief. Proverbs often apply abstract beliefs to specific situations. In other words, many forms of expression we identify as folklore are involved in the practices of belief (340).

Likewise, Butler and others have discovered that folk beliefs are often expressed in other genres of folklore, such as narratives (memorates and legends), customs, rituals, foodways, proverbs, and rhymes. Folklorists have long recognized the need for a neutral term to designate traditional beliefs in order to avoid ethnocentric bias in studying human behavior: In 1930, Alexander Krappe wrote, "Superstition in common parlance, designates the sum of beliefs and practices shared by other people in so far as they differ from our own. What we believe and practice [sic] ourselves, is of course, Religion" (Green 90). In 1977, Lawrence W Levine noted that "in the

cultures from which the [African- American] slaves came, phenomena and activities that we might be tempted to dismiss as 'superstitious' were legitimate and important modes of comprehending and operating within a universe perceived of in sacred terms. To distinguish these activities and beliefs from religion is a meaningless exercise" (90). Religious and folk beliefs may be similar in terms of structure and function; their differences lie in the way they are perceived by different groups. According to John C Messenger in "Folk Religion", "Religious beliefs, to be so, defined, must involve supernatural entities toward which sacred attitudes are directed by groups of people... Every religion recognizes several or all of the following entities: one or more deities, spirits and demons, personal and impersonal power, one or more souls, ghosts, fate, luck, magic and witches. In addition, each religion attaches religious significance to certain objects and places, such as the insignia of a priest or the mountain abode of the deity"(218).

The primal religion of the Mizo before the conversion to Christianity (before the advent of the missionaries in 1894) is animistic. Due to the dearth of written records, it is not possible to trace the beginning of the Mizo sacrificial rituals and worship and how it developed. However, the traces of the religious beliefs and practices have been found in archaeological evidence, folklore, songs and through oral tradition. Among these, folklore plays an important role in recording the native's past beliefs and practices. Beliefs exist as folk knowledge and are then put into practice as customary behavior. It does not exist solely in the abstract but in actual practice

and hence folklore is not merely a reflection of an abstract cultural worldview; it exists in everyday life as a means of creating culture (94). Folk beliefs are often part of a complex cultural processes that involve not only belief but also values and other behaviors and that find expression in various genres of folklore and folk religion is a major area which is fundamentally concerned with the study of belief and associated behavior.

The pre and proto- historic and even the pre- modern Mizo, though incapable to scientifically identify or reasonably clarify the philosophical aspect of the forces of nature and its co- relation with human life, craved for something, a truth or a reality that is behind things and phenomena; and his aptitude for investigations were revealed by the various forms of belief, sacrifices and worship with which he tried to comprehend. His hunger and thirst for explanation of everything around him was unending. His mind sought to comprehend the identity behind the variety (Lalremsiama 20-1).

The religion of the non-literate Mizo society is vernacular in nature, that is, “by definition, religion as it is lived; as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it” (Green 714). Vernacular religious theory involves an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the religious lives of individuals, with special attention to the complex process of acquisition and formation of beliefs that is always accomplished by the conscious and unconscious negotiations of and between believers; to the verbal, behavioral and material expressions of religious belief; and to the ultimate object of religious belief (714). The vast array of the religion practiced by the

past Mizos are reflected in their folklore, and it is through this oral form that folklorist tends to decipher and record the past religious ceremony and rituals along with the conditions that enable them to perform it. The past chapters have dealt with the role of the supernatural in folktale and how they represent the trials and tribulation of mankind. In this analysis, folklore will be an instrument of portraying a culture's beliefs, society and nuances of the lives of the people. The select Mizo tales will be used to represent the past Mizo culture hence stressing the relevance of such tales to society and community.

Stith Thompson in "Myths and Folktales" (1955) has deliberated upon the dividing line between myth and folktale and came to a conclusion that it is difficult to draw a clear line between the two. Commonly accepted term is that myth "has to do with the gods and their actions, with creation, and with the general nature of the universe and of the earth" (484). However, gods or culture heroes of a primitive culture with treatment of seriousness as well as with buffoonery make it complicated if the native teller thinks of it as myth or ordinary story. According to James, unlike legends, sagas, aetiological or ritual myths, the folk tale are neither explanatory nor cultic in their purpose and content and being involved in the series of everyday life story of the folk, primarily they had a magico- religious content and purpose, and were an integral element in the religious, social and economic structure of a community (1962: 4).

The peasant like the primitive is a plain unsophisticated practical persons full of common sense but very much aware of the mystery and rhythm of life, often living under

precarious conditions of climate and environment over which he has little if any control. Confronted with such perplexing and hazardous situations he has resorted to ritual techniques devised to meet the requirements of unpredictable occurrences, or to codify fundamental beliefs, to strengthen accepted lore, enforce ethical and pious evaluations by formulating reasons for the established order, and endow its sanctions with a greater value, prestige and significance. Therefore, folklore and its customs, cultures and institutions have acquired a religious, moral and social content which has had a profound influence on the history of religion and its phenomena, touching the deepest needs and desires of the human spirit, its hopes, fears, passions and sentiments, and acting as the consolidating dynamic in the maintenance of the social structure (James 1962: 3).

The Mizo religion in the past, involves the belief that the whole world is thickly populated by invisible beings that may at any moment make their presence felt to man's advantage or disadvantage. Accordingly, to placate, to propitiate, to appease and sometimes to repel and ward off evil spirits and their influence he worshipped a host of spirits around him (Lalremsiama 21). This summed up the Mizo folk beliefs in spirits and supernatural entities, and it is not unusual that the folklore of the Mizo is made up of such strange phenomena. The tale of "Ngaiteii" indicates the significance of a spirit residing in nature and that appeasement had to be made in order for peace to prevail among the human and the spirits. In this tale,

Ngaiteii resided with her grandmother where they earned a living by working in their field. Close by was a lake and it was believed that Ngaiteii's father had drowned there. One day while working in the field, Ngaiteii felt considerably thirsty so her grandmother went to the lake to fetch a drink for her. Later, the old lady asked Ngaiteii to fetch water with a warning that she must not exclaim the words "*E khai!*" by the lake. However, upon seeing the dark murky water she could but exclaim the words, and hence she was captured by the spirit of the lake. As Ngaiteii had been gone for a long time, the old lady believed that Ngaiteii had been captured by her father's spirit and she jumped inside the lake to find her granddaughter. Having met the two, the old lady asked the spirit to let go of Ngaiteii. The spirit approved on the condition that she must return within a certain period of time. Happily the two went home to their village but Ngaiteii refused to return to the lake spirit. The spirit then tormented the villagers by flooding it immensely, whereby finally they threw Ngaiteii in the water before all the villagers perished (Nuchhungi 43-4, translation mine).

This kind of spirit is believed to reside in lakes and mountains and is popular in the Mizo folk religion. The story of Ngaiteii demonstrates the power that these spirits could wield and that sacrifice is needed to compensate for peace. Another Mizo tale that incorporates such belief is the story of "Tui Huai Lal Chhama" (A water spirit chief by the name of Chhama). In this tale,

Tui huai lal Chhama, the reigning spirit of a lake was a lazy fellow who spent most of his time sleeping all day long. In the nearby field, a couple worked daily where the wife planted a *ting* plant which grew near the banks and then disturbed the *tui huai lal* Chhama by growing through his nostrils. In anger, he ordered the death of the woman.

One day, Chhuihthanga, the husband of the dead woman, cleared his field and in the process weeded the disturbing *ting* plant. This made the spirit chief so happy that he transformed his daughter to a beautiful maiden and offered her to Chhuihthanga as a wife. The human complied by paying an abundant bride price to the spirit. With the gifts, the spirit chief held a grand feast of *Thangchhuah* where his son-in-law and daughter were also invited. Amidst the celebration, the rice beer or *zu* were served in a hollow mug, which didn't fare well for the human, Chhuihthanga. Annoyed at this, he left the celebration early. The spirits withheld Chhuihthanga's wife and refused to let her return to the human world again. Upon hearing the story of Chhuihthanga and his relationship with the spirit of the lake, it brought fear and terror in the hearts of the villagers. They deemed it very necessary to appease those spirits in order not to harm them (Thanmawia (2008): 84-5, translation mine).

These spirits presented in the tales were clearly of great importance to the past Mizo culture and it is in them that we perceived the pre-Christian beliefs and traditions. These tales not only embody the folk belief in the presence of *Huai* or spirits and the fear they emit in the hearts of

the Mizo people. Fear is the dominant factor that made the past Mizos susceptible and weak against nature. And this belief in the presence of malevolent spirits in nature in the past has been commented by Lalremsiama in “The Traditional Religious Belief of the Mizo” (2004),

Objects like trees, caves, water, rocks, mountains etc, and things of unnatural shapes and sizes whom he (the Mizo ancestors) believed had been inhabited by spirits or demons were feared. Sacrificial offerings were placed near these objects of the spirits but not for the objects themselves. These spirits, though not identified and named were known after the objects they inhabited. For example, the spirit believed to have inhabited a particular pond is called by the name of *Dil Huai*, of water = *tui huai*, of mountain= *tlang huai*. And so on and so forth. They had to placate not because they were nobler and better than men but because they were more powerful and cunning. All kinds of sicknesses and calamities were attributed to these evil spirits and to them were given fowls, goats, and dogs as propitiatory offerings. The only quality that is associated with them is power, and that power is always arbitrary, irresponsible and dangerous. These were the first group of spirits, the malevolent ones, who had tortured the simple and religious minded Mizo in their mountain terrains for hundreds of years (21-2).

Like the beliefs, traces of rituals and ceremony of the past Mizo religion could be seen in the sacrificial performance to appease the spirits which involved mainly the sacrifice of animals and the ceremony is conducted by priests called *Sadawt*² and *Bawlpu*³. These sacrificial rites are

so central in the lives of the Mizo that Sangkima has explained the enormous roles of the priests in the Mizo religion where by so many spirits were worshipped, hence requiring their services continuously (2004:126). An interpretation of rituals of such community discloses itself on the symbol that “ritual is at once a visual language and a vent of pent- up emotions and longings, hopes and fears... [it] gives visual and dramatic expression to the will to live, to the vital urge and rhythmic relations to life, in response to concrete situations and essential needs” (James 1962: 6).

The importance of the many forms of folklore as pedagogic devices has been documented in many parts of the world. Consider *Aesop's Fables*, the basis for so many of contemporary moral stories; and myths, the basis for so many answers to the mysterious universe and existence. Most stories often addressed subjects in veiled terms. Folklore proves central to the lives of the folk and its culture in education particularly, but not exclusively, in non- literate societies. Folk beliefs and customs, knowledge and wisdom and the question of ethnic and cultural identity are provided through folklore. Like many tribal groups, the past Mizos have had their own form of education, which is passed from one generation to another. This process seeks to open community life to all individuals and enable them to take their part in it. It passes on the culture, norms and standards by which it would have them live. Folklore performs salient functions of serving as sources of entertainment on cultural orientation and traditions of the people, educating the young of the various aspects of society. Since folklore portrays the values

and traditions of a society, where the young and adult learn through the events conveyed, the functions of this oral genre is eminent.

In many non- literate societies the information embodied in folklore is highly regarded in its own right. To the extent to which it is regarded as historically true, its teaching is regarded important; and to the extent to which it mirrors culture, it contains practical rules for the guidance of man (Bascom 345).

The pre- colonial period of the Mizos witnessed folklore as the main means of imparting education, where myths, legends, folktales, riddles, songs and proverbs are embedded with knowledge and moral teachings. The four functions of myth by Joseph Campbell hold true in terms of the Mizo myths- metaphysical, cosmological, sociological and pedagogical, myth imparts knowledge and explanation to the universe. Myth expresses a people's conceptions and assumptions about humankind's place in nature and the universe. The role it plays in education, wisdom and knowledge to the ancient culture has been immense as in religion and rituals, explanation and understanding of one's culture giving it uniqueness to the beliefs and views of a particular culture. People need to situate themselves in both time and space. Creation myth serves this need, they provide a temporal and spatial anchor. They provide a constructed identity through myth while aetiological myth provides an explanation to either human or natural phenomena. Creation myth is as extensive as the human experience in life itself. It stretched across time from the earliest accounts of man to the present. They could be found in almost all

racess and cultures. From the most primitive myths to the most sophisticated, similarities always abound, situational and geographical influences are nearly always evident, and many creation myths have been formulized into religions (Westfall 20). Mizo myths like “How creation came to be” and “How the mountains and lakes were formed”⁴ inform us about the creation of beings and the earth. In these myths, the deity called Khuazingnu was responsible for creating the earth and all that’s in it. However the earth being very arid and dry, Khuazingnu doused water from the sky making it fertile for vegetations to prosper, hence the explanation for rainfall. The dissemination of soil on earth all around was done by an earthworm who ate the little bit of mud they had and multiplied it by defecating. The mountains and lakes were formed by cutting a tall tree called Thingvantawng or the tree that touched heaven. When the tree fell upon the ground, it created huge craters and dents which later formed as rivers and streams. The educational value of these myths to the young is that it explained the creation theory and a reminder of the historical development of man and the primeval concept of thought and beliefs. From the moment man became aware of his own existence he began forming tales to encompass his experience as an accompaniment to his reflective thoughts. This archaic thought and perception is important in transmission of cultural identity and ethnic differences. And in the words of Westfall, “their solidarity through time added to their credibility and mystique, they became the words of ancestors, an ageless wisdom transcending death, accounts of reality beyond argument or doubt” (22). Malinowski also emphasized myth serving as “a warrant, a charter, and often even a

practical guide” (Thompson 1951:29) to magic, ceremony, ritual and social structure. The Mizo deity Khuazingnu plays a critical role in the Mizo religious beliefs as the Supreme Being- the creator of all within the universe. Also named Pathian or great god, the Mizo did not envisage him as a spirit at all (Lalremsiama 23). The interrelationship between myth and religion goes parallel in the case of creation myth with acknowledgement of the supreme god that governs all.

Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom...(qtd. in Thompson 1951:19).

The form of imparting social behavior and morality in a particular culture through folktale is a shared process. The folktale is varied and comprises of many sub- categories. One of the most popular forms is the animal tales which are found worldwide in different cultures. Animal tales are often embodied with human characteristic as the main characters. One of the most ancient type of story, fables, are animal tales. In these stories, the animal symbolize humans, often to make a specific point or teach a moral lesson, which is explicitly stated at the end of the fable. *Aesop's Fables* are among the best- known fables in the western culture, while *Jataka Tales* are well known in the eastern culture. Animal tales also conform to trickster tales

where the principal character in these stories is amoral, neither good or bad. Trickster tales appear in every culture, although the trickster animal varies from culture to culture. Brer Rabbit is a popular trickster character with American children. Native Americans identified the coyote as a trickster, while tales from the African tradition have a spider as a trickster (Stoodt 186). All of these animal tales are not always didactic but entertaining and humorous. They are brief and constitute an important factor in broadcasting the cultural values of a particular group. There is almost no dividing line between the animal world and the human world. Animals are endowed with speech and they possess human virtues as well as frailties. Sometimes folk tradition is very careful in its choice of animals, so as to make the human actions as nearly appropriate as possible. Thus, the bear is stupid, the fox sly, the rabbit swift and wily. But such careful workmanship in the composition of animal tales is not to be expected everywhere (Thompson 1951: 217). Annabel Peterson argues that,

The fable must always be understood in its social- historical context and, at the same time, has universal appeal because of the way it functions. Interpreted by specific cultures yet relevant throughout the ages, the fable speaks to unequal power relations and prompts those without power to speak in metaphoric codes that can emancipate both the teller and listener. Fables do not always end happily even when there is a resolution or a moral. They move readers and listeners to contemplate how they might act if they were in a similar situation. They are simultaneously disturbing and enlightening. Fables are not

preachy or moralistic in a strict sense because they expose the contradictions of human behavior more than they dictate principles of behavior. They explore the human condition rather than instruct how one must behave. They explain more than they sermonize. As exempla, fables warn and advise as opposed to prescribing behavior and manners. The listener and reader of a fable are always given a choice, and human agency is thus respected. Fables tell us that we all have choices to make (Zipes 2012:13).

In the Mizo folk narratives, we have animal tales consisting of various animal types and it is hard to pinpoint a specific character type to an individual animal. There is a tale of friendship between a monkey and a turtle (“*Zawngte leh Satel*”)⁵, where they venture out together to pluck fruits and catch fish. The monkey easily plucked the fruits while the turtle struggled. On another day, they went to catch fish in the water where the turtle easily caught many while the monkey drowned. This tale contains wisdom in the sense that people of different traits and characters exist and that it is hopeless to try to fit in other’s shoes. In another tale of a monkey and *vahmim*⁶(a kind of bird), the monkey was outwitted out of its flute by the crafty *vahmim*. Trusting the bird cost the monkey its flute which could also be interpreted as a life lesson in regards to trusting others. Another tale, “*Zawngte Pipu Uai*”⁷(the monkey on a swing), involves a monkey and a bear. The crafty monkey in this tale tormented the bear by letting him fall from a swing and even poured sizzling hot cooked rice in its stomach. The monkey did so as it lacked the physical prowess to challenge the bear hence used its wit instead. This is another tale celebrating

wit and cleverness against brawns. The monkey is popular in the Mizo folk animal tales, but from the example of the select tales, it is clear that a specific trait or character is not confined to the monkey, unlike many African tribal tales where the fox and the hare are the epitome of cleverness and wit. In the Mizo animal tales, many consist of the competition between different animals, testing their strength or wit in certain ways. Collectively, they seem to convey the lesson that the strong rule and the weak must obey or suffer. The weak risk defiance or opposition at their own peril, and no matter what kind of animals they are, their lack of power means that they ultimately have very little chance of successfully resisting a stronger opponent. It is interesting to note that here strength does not always confined to size and physical strength, but to wit and sometimes deception. We have tales of a wild cat befriending a mother hen and killing her whereby the egg avenges the hen by killing the wild cat⁸; a frog competing against a tiger and outwitting it in every game⁹; a war between a porcupine and a deer for a land¹⁰. The hierarchy and power relations in these tales are analogous to the human world that no matter what survival depends on being strong and clever. But unlike animals, human beings in reading/listening to the animal tales/ fables and reflecting on them can see that while humans have the same characteristics of being wild and violent, they also have the unique characteristic of reason that enables them to plan their future, and the environment and the ability to change behavior. Equality and justice are not always rewarded, hence these animal tales denote the harsh environment and the need for survival (Clayton 197).

In the simple tales, variants of etiological or explanation tales are important in educating a child to the environment he lives in. These tales provide not only answers to the child's question but also call their attention to a number of phenomena which they probably had not noticed and they offer explanations for them. "They have the effect of creating interest in established customs and practices and encourage children to ask questions in order to gain more knowledge" (Majasan 49). Examples of such Mizo tales are "Zawngte Phenglawng tum"¹¹ (The monkey who played a flute) where the opponent *vahmim*(a quail) lose its tail to the monkey and remains without it till today; "Ui leh Kel"¹² (A dog and a goat) tale which narrates how the dog lose its horn to the goat thereby proving their enmity till today; "Vawkpui leh Uipui"¹³ (A pig and a dog) tale which explains why the dog won a challenge to live with the humans against a pig whom he had outwitted.

When animals are endowed with human characteristics, it could be used to instruct on topics and issues of knowledge and social belief. The talking, acting, thinking animals could provide for children what they were already provide for the adults- a buffered engagement with a message of cultural significance. The lively animals would soften the didactic tone and ease the tension raised by dealing with issues not yet fully resolved or socially controversial. Because folktale is a primary device used to inculcate and socialize, an examination of popular topics and story lines reveal trends in cultural beliefs and changing concepts in society. By letting animals try out the roles of human, "we let them take the risks and absorb the punishments when plans

fail or solutions fall through” and the intellectual and emotional distance played by the animals grants listener “to become reflective and critical concerning life problems and life choices” (Burke 212).

The juxtaposition of good and evil is a common theme in folktale and this could be seen in many of the complex tales where heroes combat evils and reward and punishment are met in the end. The motif of the travelling hero and the difficult tasks imposed upon him are deliberated upon in the previous chapter hence it will not be dealt with. However, it is safe to say that such type of folk tales demand teenage audience as the tales involve world of fantasy involving superhuman struggles. They recount deeds of bravery in war and in special exploits which demand courage, ability and intelligence. The popular trickster tales are also relished at this age. The next category of tales is that of exploits involving dangers, cruelty and fear. Although these are presented in many of the complex folktales, they need to be analyzed for the impending motifs it contains. Gross and frightful characters presented in folktales have their own motif in sending out messages and meanings. Apart from them being unnatural or unusual, they represent the dark forces, the unknown terror and hence are creation of the fear of the native people. They heed warnings and precautions to the unknown, the dark, the forest, and the unexplained phenomena. Roughly termed as cautionary tale, it is a narrative that demonstrates the consequences of wrong doing and thus reinforces moral and behavioral norms (Haase 170). Cautionary tales tend to have unhappy endings, and a popular example will be the story of “Red

Riding Hood”. However, cautionary tales do not constitute a uniform genre but refers to various narratives with didactic plot. One such example in the Mizo folktale is the story of “Thinlanga” and the summary of the tale from Pachuau (2013) is as follows.

Thinlanga was a huge and frightful man possessing a horrible countenance with his liver exposed for all to see. He resided alone in the forest, away from others. One day, deep in the forest three maidens came to fetch firewood where they made a pact that who so ever is unable to lift her bale of wood shall be left behind. The last maiden who was unable to do so was left behind and as she was struggling with her bale asked the stranger behind her to help her. It was Thinlanga. He agreed to help on the condition that she must not peek at him. The maiden promised and was helped by Thinlanga, but out of curiosity peeked at him. Frightened and shocked at his appearance she ran wildly towards home with Thinlanga warning that if she ever tells a soul, he will kill her. The young maiden became ill and her encounter in the forest was asked by others. Finally she agreed to tell if they locked every hole in the house to ensure her safety first. That being done, she narrated her encounter with Thinlanga. However Thinlanga was eavesdropping and suddenly snatched the maiden from one of the forgotten gap in the wall, never to be heard from again (Pachuau 81-3).

The cautionary folk tale is not new and this is one example from Mizo folktale. Teaching fear to children through such tale inculcates critical thinking skills and safety. The unknown forces and

enigma in the wild forest inculcate fear in the simple villagers. And being susceptible to wild animals and beliefs in the dark forces and spirits, the Mizo ancestors would advise, especially children and women not to venture in the wild alone. The forest is an environment only the men folks would dare to venture and explore. Likewise, children are warned of the threat of being kidnapped in Native American folklore by “Basket Woman,” a cackling ogress who creeps up on children when they are out past their bedtimes. What is remarkable about this tale and others like it is that variants of the story exist or have existed in cultures all around the world almost simultaneously- which demonstrates that protecting children is a universal concern (Boudinot). Perrault’s “Red Riding Hood” is also a cautionary tale that warns young maidens to refrain from communicating with complete strangers as the outcome could be tragic.

In *Folktales and Reality*, Lutz Rohrich has exclaimed that “Folktales strongly emphasize social differences” (188). Among the various European tales he has studied, he concluded that the folktale commonly “pit large and small farmers, or farmers and workers, against each other (188). The social structure in folktale is another important denominator reflecting the culture and politics of a particular group.

Folktale kings frequently use any means available to prevent poor boys from entering their families and, hence, their social class (189).

Not only in European and Russian folktales, the social structure of class is predominant as the desire for happiness seems largely due to the social conditions under which folktale bearers live.

The conceptions of happiness are often modest and full of social inhibitions. The folktale's minor features are quite fascinating and often reveal the little man's joy in having possessions. In his monograph interpretation of fairy tales, the Danish folklorist Bengt Holbek discussed nineteenth century folktales as social allegories, whose meanings are determined by the realities of rural communities and analysis of beliefs has broadened to the interpretations of their social meaning (Holbek 1987). The Mizo folk tale also depicts this in numerous tales like "Duhmanga leh Dardini" (Duhmanga and Dardini), a love story between the chief's son Duhmanga and a widow's daughter Dardini.

The son of a village chief Duhmanga with his good looks and position was envied by many. However he fell in love with a widow's beautiful daughter Dardini. This was highly criticized by Duhmanga's parents as Dardini was called "*michhe fa*" meaning one born of low stature. Unable to hide their feelings for each other, the couple faced confrontations from the chief and his kin. Duhmanga, against the wishes of his parents took in Dardini as a wife. However, being a young man, the need to hunt and work in the forest/ field often forced Duhmanga to leave his bride with his parents. During his absence, twice the family threw her out and finally fed up with the abuses of the chief and his family, Dardini and her mother moved to another village. When Duhmanga returned and found out the reason as to why they left, he went in search of his beloved only to arrive on the day Dardini died due to child birth. Duhmanga mourned the death so

gravely that he couldn't leave his beloved grave and out of exhaustion and fatigue, died near Dardini's grave (Thanmawia 2009: 18-34, translation mine).

Parallel to this type of Mizo folk narratives, there are stories like "Lianchhiari leh Chawngfianga" (Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga) (Thanmawia 2009:101-109), "Laltheri leh Chalthanga" (Laltheri and Chalthanga) (110- 118) and "Tuanpuii leh Chhawrtuineihlala"¹⁴ (Tuanpuii and Chhawrtuineihlala) (86- 90).

Lianchhiari was the daughter of a village chief who fell in love with a *hnamchawm* (common people) young man called Chawngfianga. He was betrayed by the delegate sent to ask for the hand of Lianchhiari, thereby successful in separating them. Due to this betrayal, they lived their separate lives while yearning for each other.

Laltheri was a beautiful chief's daughter who fell in love with a *hnamchawm* young man Chalthanga. When Laltheri's relatives found out about their relationship, Chalthanga was murdered ruthlessly. The knowledge of her lover's death made Laltheri mourned deeply. She refused to wear clothes and refused to even eat. Her rebellious nature and vengeful heart made her family uneasy and made them regret their actions.

Tuanpuii was the daughter of a wealthy family who migrated to another village because of war and married Chhawrtuineihlala. However her mother-in-law detested and

abused her because of the markings on her neck and accused her of some ailments. Finally she left her husband due to the torments of her mother-in-law, and Chhawrtuineihlala's mother regretted being unkind to her only when she found out that her daughter-in-law was so rich that the markings on her necks were actually left by the many precious necklaces she used to wear. (Thanmawia 2008, translation mine).

The central theme in these stories is love and it also denotes how social status determines the fate of these people. In the said stories, either the male or female belongs to the higher social order (as being the son or daughter of a village chief), while the partner belongs to the weaker section of society in (being a widow's son/ daughter or being a *hnamchawm*). Zipes has pondered deeply the "power struggles" in folk and fairy tales.

Yet, if we reread some of the tales with history in mind, and if we reflect for a moment about the issues at stake, it becomes apparent that these enchanting, lovable tales are filled with all sorts of power struggles over kingdom, rightful rule, money, women, children, and land, that their real 'enchantment' emanates from these dramatic conflicts whose resolutions allow us to glean the possibility of making the worlds, that is, shaping the world in accord with our needs and desires (1979: 23).

Our knowledge of the Mizo folk tale stems from two sources- literary works and oral tradition. Since we have no knowledge of its origin, we cannot be entirely certain about the conditions which gave rise to them. The oral tradition handed from one generation to another in different

basic patterns as Vladimir Propp has shown in his analysis indicates that changes depend on the social realities of the period in which the tales are told (39). The said stories seem to be a product of the pre- colonised period and with the ascending of the Mizo tribe in the present land Mizoram from the sixteenth to seventeenth century, it is fair to state that these tales though they preserved aesthetic patterns, also relate to the elements and motifs which continue to reflect and speak to the conditions of the people and the dominant ideology of their times to a great degree. The social status which determines class conflict could be seen from the sometimes tragic fate of the lovers in the tales. The chief's son/ daughter marrying or falling in love with a commoner result in predicament from the social order of the Mizo community. Characteristic of these tales is the emphasis on class conflict involving progressive segments of the upper class against the commoner. The heroes struggling together against social conventions and sometimes ending tragically is a form of quest whereby it is no more different from the heroic adventures of the folk heroes that have been dealt with in the previous chapter. The emphasis is on love and the barriers that human made up to hinder it. The relevance to this kind of story may not only be the theme of love itself, but the struggle, the opposition and the sheer will to overcome it and attain unification, freedom and happiness in the end. As perhaps the oldest of all literary forms, the folktale retains the immediacy of the common people's perspective which has always sought and indicated the possibilities for a better world (156). Zipes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (1999) again commented,

[Marie- Louise] Teneze was correct when she placed her finger on power and oppression as the key concerns of the folk tales, and this is why the people, largely peasants, were predominantly attracted to the tale and became its prime carriers; the oral folk tales were those symbolic acts in which they enunciated their aspirations and projected the magic possibility in an assortment of imaginative ways... They also presented the stark realities of power politics without disguising the violence and brutality of everyday life (8).

Hence the punishment meted out to the lovers in these Mizo narratives is crude and brutal (Dardini died due to childbirth and her lover Duhmanga too died later; Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga were separated because of a jealous kin; Chalthanga was murdered by Laltheri's relatives; Tuanpuii and Chhawtuineihlala were separated by the greedy mother-in-law). Interpretation of these tales denotes the ideology of the popular masses. The dividing line between the social classes reigns supreme and opposing it leads to destruction or trouble. But at the same time since folktale "gives full expression to the dissatisfactions of average people", this could be an assertion of their hostility towards class structure and "[that] is why it remains such a powerful cultural force among them" (Zipes 2002:158). This social order is a human product, or, more precisely, an ongoing human production. It is produced by man in the course of his ongoing externalization (Berger69-70). In the study of German folk and fairy tales, Linda Deigh and Zipes concluded that the social structure of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie proves as the ultimate backdrop of their many tales, where the utopian desire of the common people rested in

overthrowing the feudal system of Germany. Hence in their later fairy tales the common man became the new hero who attains his own freedom and will to create his own identity (29-40).

Since folk beliefs and values are not the only aspect of an archaic, once- believed reality that we recognized in the folktale, we have seen that the folktale also provides historical information about actual ways of life. Though the age a specific folktale cannot be determined, many folktales could reflect the manners and customs of a particular culture. In the ambit of Mizo narratives, there are still the nuances of traditions like courtships between young men and women. The tragic love stories narrated thus depict the Mizo customs of courting, whereby dating takes place by working together in their jhum and walking home together and the young man courting the maiden at night in her home. No matter what social status they enjoy, one had to work in the jhum and perform tasks like everybody else. The role of the man and women were clearly differentiated where the female was incharge of all the chores at home and the male worked in the field and the forest, and his sole responsibility was to protect women and children from wild animals and enemies. Inter- clan feuds and rivalries often happened due to disputes and economic factors. Disruption and chaos often happened from such wars and migration took place constantly (Rosanga 44-50). The Mizo custom of beheading an enemy is also seen in the story of “Laltheri leh Chalthanga”, in which Chalthanga was beheaded and his head staked in a pole. Sangkima has put forward reasons for such practice in the Mizo culture,

Formerly, the Mizos were known to outsiders as *milula hnam* meaning “head- hunters”, the person who was most admired in the society was *mithat sa kap* which means “slayer of both men and animals”. Therefore, head- hunting among the people had three main purposes. In the first place, they needed heads for use at the ceremonies performed at the funeral of their Chiefs. A search for human heads thus usually happened quite soon after the death of a Chief. Secondly, the Mizos desired heads to supply themselves with servitors in another world. For this purpose, any head even that of an embryo would serve the purpose. Lastly, he killed man and carried his head to prove that he was a warrior, and a slayer of man. The head would be displayed as trophies at *sahlam* and at the *zawlbuk* (Sangkima 2004:65).

The famous Mizo folktale of “Chawngmawii leh Hrangchhuana”(Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana) also depicts the horrifying beheading of Hrangchhuana and the inter- clan war between their villages. The couple belonged to different villages and due to rivalry between villages; they kept their love a secret. When they were caught, Hrangchhuana was beheaded and his head was displayed by the locals to mock. Hurt but brave, Chawngmawii stole her beloved’s head and in order to fulfill his wishes, she ventured secretly to Hrangchhuana’s village to deliver the head to his parents. On returning to her village, she was caught and immediately put to death and their spirits together transformed into two bright stars, happily shining together in the night sky (Thanmawia 2009:58-62, translation mine).

Another interesting aspect of the past Mizo society is the *zawlbuk*. The *zawlbuk* is a house for the men folk serving three fold functions, it served as a place to sleep and it was a recreational centre for married and unmarried men; it trained and disciplined young boys; and it was an inn for a traveler. It was forbidden to women. The *zawlbuk* served an important educational place for learning for boys in the process of becoming a man. Being the nerve-centre of the Mizo society, it shaped the youths into a responsible adult members of the society (Sangkima 2004: 70). Not only because of the portrayal of *zawlbuk* in these mentioned tales of courtship, the institution alone is an important factor of the Mizo culture and need to be discussed for its role. It is a place where values of the Mizo community, the altruistic concept of *tlawmngaihna* and the courage to protect their children and women against any adversary are taught to the young boys; ideals that could never be taught in our present schools and institutions. Serving the Mizo community for a long period, the social custom of building *zawlbuk* and the values it hold could no longer withstand changes with the coming of the British colonizers. The ideals and meanings it used to stand for dwindled with changes in society and finally in the year 1938, it was abolished and hence it became an institution of the past.

The key to cultural understanding lies much in folklore and the above points show its close connection and the functions it plays upon a particular culture. Stories of people help in answering the question of identity, community, society, culture. Since folktales have been passed down through the oral tradition, they were honed for listening so they were easy to remember

and share. As a result, folktales make it easier for children to differentiate characters, follow a plotline or recall a sequence of events. Not surprisingly, working with folktales can also help children develop critical thinking and knowledge. While these tales are not only highly entertaining, they also play an important role in passing along core values or character traits. Folktales were often employed to share a common history, to reinforce cultural values or highlight important traditions and helped reinforce expectations about how to live a meaningful life. Over time, folktales subtly incorporated character traits like caring, resourcefulness, trust or courage into the fabric of the stories. Overall, folktales also model the elements of effective decision making. Characters in the folktales invariably encounter conflicts that require them to make difficult decisions and take action to resolve them. Folktales by their nature celebrate diversity. By experiencing stories from different cultures, communities can discover valuable insights about another culture's values, beliefs, history, practices and customs.

Throughout centuries human fear has induced the emergence and formation of folkloric phenomena. It is characteristic of human nature to fight against fear, trying to reduce or prevent it, and this aim reverberates in the folk narratives. The mediation of fear in folklore does not provide a tradition carrier relief from these fears, but proposes solutions to handle them. Hence there are folk beliefs in supernatural entity that made up the Mizo past religion. Fear creates these spirits that could harm and torment them and because of these fear, religious rites were performed to keep them at bay. The fear of the unknown and the mystery of the universe help in

creating myth which offers explanation on questions regarding the existence of being. The Mizo forefather's story relating to the creation and nature of the universe place them on familiar grounds hence enable them to come to terms with the unknown. Again because of fear, cautionary and animal tales are imparted for the safety of individuals. These realistic and didactic tales are narrated to give the listener the aura of being a true incident and that not by heeding to its teaching will result in crisis. And lastly, fear is predominant in the projection of social life in the past. Beyond the fear in the spirits, fear also dominates the society, where constant war and feuds occur between villages, where economic deprivation leads to war and people suffers from their social status in class hierarchy. From these it is possible to fathom that many of the issues, beliefs of the Mizo folks are made up by fear and this collective fear made up the many beliefs that the Mizos embraced.

Glossary:

Hnamchawm: the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan.

Huai: an evil spirit, a demon, a devil. A nat.

Michhe fa: Michhia (--chhe). A person not belonging to the ruling clan; an ordinary person of no influence; a person of no social standing; the common people.

Fa: an off- spring, a child.

Salam: (same as *Salu Lam*) a dance and feast held to celebrate success in the chase, and to *ai* the head of animal killed.

Thangchhuah: the title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts.

Ting: blue cotton yarn

Tlawmngaihna: it means to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent (refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be proud or self respecting to give in, etc.

Tui Huai: the water spirit

Vahmim: a quail

Zawlbuk: the large house in the Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.

Zu: beer or any fermented liquor.

(Source: Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1988. Print.)

Notes:

1. *Ting* is a blue cotton yarn plant.
2. *Sadawt* are the village priests, each clan has its own *Sadawt* in the early Mizo society ((Sangkima (2004): 108).
3. *Bawlpu* enjoys a lower status than *Sadawt* as he was engaged with the sacrificial offerings by the common people (109).
4. These myths are presented in Pachuau's *Folklore from Mizoram* (2013).
5. "Zawngte leh Satel" from Thanmawia (2008): 131-3, summary and translation mine.
6. "Zawngte leh Vahmim" from Thanmawia (2008): 133-4, summary and translation mine.
7. The tale is called "Zawngte Pipu Uai" meaning the monkey on a swing. In this tale, the monkey made a swing and enjoyed it immensely but a bear came and requested the monkey to allow him to enjoy the swing. Unable to turn the bear down, the monkey reluctantly let the bear sit on the swing, but not before he loosened the rope which resulted in the bear falling off. Delighted, the monkey assumed the bear to be dead and so it ran home and made a meal to eat along with the bear's meat. Upon its return, however the bear was still alive and angry. The monkey quickly explained that it went home to make a meal for the wounded bear. Then asked the bear to stretch its belly skin for pouring out the meal. The foolish bear did so, and being freshly off the fire, the hot meal scalded the skin of the bear. Hurt and angry, the bear growled but did not manage to

catch the monkey as it had already run away. (Thanmawia (2008):140-82, translation mine).

8. The story is called “Sanghar leh Arpui leh Artui” meaning the wild cat, the hen and the egg. It narrates a false friendship between a wild cat and a hen. The wild cat attempted every night to kill the hen by asking for a place to sleep. After several nights of failure, the wild cat managed to kill the hen. The hen had ten eggs and they wanted to avenge their mother, but nine eggs did not survive. The last surviving egg went on an adventure and searched for the wild cat that killed its mother. Finally, with proper plan and strategy, the egg avenged its mother by killing the wild cat (Thanmawia (2008):127-30, translation mine).
9. The tale of the tiger and the frog is called “Sakei leh Dawngthlek”. It narrated the story of a clever and witty yet domineering frog who challenged a tiger in three sports where it won all by outsmarting the naïve tiger. Finally the frog scared the tiger by stating that it ate a deer and a bear the previous day by vomiting some hairballs, which was the hair of the tiger stolen by the frog. The tiger scared ran away while warning the other animals of the ferociousness of the frog. In the end, a porcupine came to witness the much acclaimed frog. However the playful frog was accidentally killed by the porcupine’s quill (Thanmawia (2008):158-62, translation mine).

10. The porcupine and the deer story is called “Sakuh leh Sakhi Lo Inchuh” meaning the tussle for a jhum between a porcupine and a deer. The tale narrated the story of a hard working and clever porcupine owning a fertile jhum. The lazy deer envied the porcupine’s land and challenged it to a battle where the porcupine came out victorious (Thanmawia (2008):149-54, translation mine).
11. In this tale, the bird *vahmim*(a quail) envied the flute of a monkey and tried to outwit the monkey in many ways in order to steal the flute. At last, the bird succeeded in stealing the flute but the monkey managed to grab the tail of the bird. It is said that this was the reason why the *vahmim* bird is without a tail till today (Thanmawia (2008):146-8, translation mine).
12. “Ui leh Kel” meaning a dog and a goat is the story set in a time when dogs used to have horns. One day, the dog removed its horns while enjoying a piece of meat. Along came a goat who was mesmerized by the horns that it asked the dog if it could put it on and the dog agreed. As soon as the goat attached the horns atop its head, it ran away and hence till today the dog is without horns (Thanmawia (2008): 166, translation mine).
13. “Vawkpui leh Uipui” (a pig and a dog) is a tale between a pig and a dog where it was decided that the one who worked the hardest in the jhum would be rewarded by living with the humans. All day, the pig worked while the dog rested in the shade. Evening came, and the dog began to run around the field leaving its paw marks around. The

judges believed that it was the dog who worked harder because of the quantity of paw marks in the field and they rewarded the dog by letting it live among the humans (Thanmawia (2008): 170, translation mine).

14. The three Mizo tales have also been translated and summarized from Thanmawia's *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu* (2009).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The present study indicates that folk narratives with its diverse elements and surreal characters play an important part in deciphering and studying a particular culture. Through representation, the folk narratives of the Mizos have denoted that the Mizo people and the past culture and their reality could be traced meaningfully, and it has given us sufficient amount of materials to understand the symbols and hidden meanings of the past. It also denotes that representation and reality change accordingly and hence the meaning of folk narratives change considerably and adapt according to the contemporary ethos.

Eventhoughthestudyoffolkloredatesbacktothenineteenthcentury, folkloristics has been takenintoseriousacademicstudyonly fromthe1950sbyWesternscholarsandsincethenitsfieldhaswidenedconsiderablyovertheyears.Thedi fferentschoolsofstudiesandtheirifferentapproacheshavepaidthewaytothegrowingfieldoffolklore.F olkloreintheformoftales,legends,myths,songs,riddles,proverbsandjokeshavebeenanimportantfield ofstudyforresearchersandscholarsallovertheworld.

Intheearlierfolklore studies,theforersconcentratedexclusivelyuponruralpeasants,prefe rablyuneducated,andafewothergroupsrelativelyuntouchedbymodernways.Theiraimwastotracepres ervedarchaiccustomsandbeliefstotheirremotearigininordertotracethehistoryofmankind.InGerman y,JacobGrimmusedfolkloretoilluminatereligionoftheDarkAges.InBritain,EdwardTylor,AndrewLa ngandotherscombineddatafromanthropologyandfolkloreto‘reconstruct’thebeliefsandritualsofprehi

storic man. Large collections of material were amassed in the course of these efforts. Inspired by the Grimm Brothers, whose first collection of fairy tales appeared in 1812, scholars all over Europe began recording and publishing oral literature of many genres. Often the underlying impulse was nationalistic; since the folklore of a group reinforced its sense of ethnic identity. It figured prominently in many struggles for political independence and national unity.

As the scholarship of folklore developed, an important advance was the classification of material for comparative analysis. Standards of identification were devised by FJ Child, Antti Aare and Stith Thompson. Using these, Finnish scholars led by Kaarle Krohn developed the 'historical-geographical' method of research in which every known variant of a particular tale, ballad, riddle or other item was classified in order to study distribution patterns and reconstruct 'original' forms. This method dominated the field till the first half of the twentieth century. New trends began to emerge where interest was no longer confined to rural communities, since it was recognized that cities too contained definable groups whose characteristic arts, customs, and values marked their identity. Although some Marxist scholars continued to regard folklore as belonging solely to the working classes, in other circles the concept lost its restrictions of class and even of educational level; any group that expressed its inner cohesion by maintaining shared traditions qualified as a "folk", whether the linking factor be occupation, language, place of residence, age, religion or ethnic origin. Emphasis also shifted from the past to the present, from the search for origins to the investigation of present meaning and function. Change and adaptation within tradition were no longer necessarily regarded as corruptive.

In the view of 'contextual' and 'performance' analysis in the late twentieth century, a particular song, story, drama, or custom constitutes more than a mere instance to be recorded and compared with others of the same category. Rather, each phenomenon is regarded as an event arising from the interaction between an individual and his social group which fulfill some function and satisfy some need for both performer and audience. In this functionalist, sociological view, such an event can be understood only within its total context; the performer's biography and personality, his role in the community, his repertoire and artistry, and the occasion on which the performance occurs all contribute to its folkloric meaning. Since then new theories and approaches have been made by folklorists and contribution to folklore study continues to increase.

As the importance of folklore study began to be realized pioneered by the Grimms brothers, not only the European, but the other nations of the world follow. Hence there are numerous works of folklore from the Americans, Africans, Eastern and Asian cultures. And in spite of the growing technology, science and urbanization, folklore continues to retain its centrality in the heart of a nation, culture or community. As folk traditions are practiced by groups sharing a common identity, cultural expressions are meted out through the various genres of folklore like - performing traditions in music, dance and drama, traditional storytelling and other verbal arts, festivals, traditional crafts, visual arts, architecture and other forms of material folk culture.

Mizoram, a small state in the North East India is not a lie to folklore. It has, in fact a colorful folklore portraying its unique culture and customs, handed by the oral traditions from generation to generation for

hundreds of years. The Mizos people with its vast array of folklore continue to disseminate and safeguard it in the form of dances, music, games, myths, folktales and other material cultures. After being a literate society, the Mizos made effort in recording and safeguarding its folklore in written forms. However, it is impossible to keep trace of all due to the changing culture and ethos of the folk. And being handed through oral tradition, many of the folklore diminish, while few survive and some undergoing changes. The British colonizers were the pioneer in documenting many of the past Mizo culture and folklore. And in terms of folk narratives, it was the British officials and missionaries who documented and left a valuable heritage for the present Mizo society. Since then attempts have been made by the Mizos in tracing the past and today there are a few published folk narratives in the local dialect and fewer translation works. However, the present Mizo society have made several attempts in safeguarding its folklore knowing that the past history and culture need to be promoted in order to understand one's ethnic identity.

Scholarly studies of Mizo folk narratives have been few, but the present Mizo scholars are now turning towards this study in academic field and researches. The study of folklore arises from the need to understand and identify the past culture and group identity. Alan Dundes has stated that folklore creates individual, ethnic, cultural and sexual identity (Dundes 1989). Besides entertainment, folk narratives play a vital role in uniting a community, creating mutual understanding of society and enriching culture.

The study of Mizo folk narratives in terms of representation and reality proves central in the portrayal of the folk in the past society. The folk narrative is ambiguous needing in-depth study to understand the messages and the symbols it carries. These seemingly simple folk narratives

metaphorical and its representation and reality need to be highlighted. The cultural histories of everyday life help to understand the 'structure of feeling' or reality that underlies a particular culture and its shared values. The Mizos culture with their beliefs and practices add meaning to their narratives, history is inseparable from literary texts as literature is the representation of history, and contains insights to the formation of historical moments.

The folk narratives with all its elements of the fantastic and magical components earn the status of being 'unreal' and are often left to children's entertainment, as they cannot yet differentiate between fiction and reality. However, this is not the case as reality finds reflection in the most outrageous folk narrative. The folk narrative is a representational form of folk life, folk beliefs and customs, religion, mentality and the world-view of the ancestors which create them. Their realities are embedded in the marvelous and sometimes strange tales. The presence of supernatural beings as in spirits, ghosts, fairies, ogres, magicians, demons, sprites and many other entities in folk narratives should not be deemed as false and irrational. A study of such entities in relation to the culture, socio and economic results in deciphering the motifs and symbols that could be traced back to past rituals, habits, customs and laws of primitive societies. The question of the survival of supernatural beings in folk narratives even after the advent of Christianity in Mizoram proves its relevance to society as these supernatural beings undergo changes from past reality to inner-reality. From being a past belief entity, it transforms into a metaphor of fear, adversaries, trials and complications that hinder mankind in their daily lives. The universal theme of mankind struggling for survival relat

esto the Mizo and hence, the malevolent beings mostly represent the negative aspects of human life. The folk narrative is honest in its portrayal of the good and dark forces - the malevolent beings are grotesque and ugly while the benevolent ones are beautiful and kind, merely they become a representation of good versus evil. These changes depend on the changing social realities of the period in which it is told. Another portrayal of the supernatural in the guise of human beings living in separate realms and sometimes involving with the human world and attaining magical abilities are popular in the folk narratives. Here, also the psychological factor of the human mind comes into play. Man creates them to understand or explain what he is not capable of understanding. Hence, these supernatural beings work and live like humans; fall in love, marry and have children. This is what Norbeck termed as "personified supernatural power" (36).

The inter-

relationship between human and supernatural beings where the human world discloses a link into the other world also reflects the past belief reality of the Mizo. The concept of life after death and spirits living in another realm called *Pialral* are the religious beliefs of the pre-Christian Mizo folks. This finds reflection in many of their folk narratives as lovers continue to be united even after death. Magic and magical components are other fantastic elements that are popular in Mizo folk narratives. Magic serves man's egocentricity and is for him a shortcut to spiritual bliss (Deme 415). Man's longing for the ability to control the environment around him and to negate hardships and struggles make magic popular in folklore. In the case of the Mizo folk narratives, socioeconomic condition highly plays the dom-

ineering factor for the yearning of magic and magical objects. This simple man yearns for magic to provide him food on the table and safety from harm. Hence the most powerful magician and the numerous magical objects in Mizofolk tale applied or used magic for a simple meal, for doing household chores, by defeating enemies, when they could have all the wealth and riches they could ever think of. Folk thinking and the simple nuances in life that they desire are reflected from these tales involving magic.

Apart from the narrative itself, the narrator or the folk plays an important role not only in the transmission of tales, but also to the meaning of the tale. Over the years, folk narratives undergo changes according to the changing culture, and the narrator's reality is highly broadcasted as in view, perspective and interest in the tales. Erika Friedlinher research to the role of the narrator on folk narratives concluded that the narrator's reality are imparted through the folk tale where he/she will select from a large number of tales he has heard over the year only those which appeal and are meaningful to himself and his audience. He will not select them at random, but according to certain personal inclinations, philosophical or moral principles, emotional dispositions, and economic circumstances that affect him and his listeners (Friedl 129). Hence for the reasons, customs, beliefs, social organization, and material goods that were an integral part of the historical reality have been filtered, some eliminated and some changed accordingly. Their historical reality sometimes became fictive as they lose their meaning over the years. In such way, the Mizofolk narratives too are victims to changing reality - historical to fictive and then comes a time when it turns from reality to fantasy.

In terms of studying the folk heroes in Mizofolk narratives, they could be divided into a number of categories according to Klapp's classification (Klapp 1949). Broadly they are: The strong and formidable

eroes, the unpromising and underdog heroes, the clever and witty heroes, the trickster heroes, the legendary or tall-

tale heroes and others. No matter what kind of heroes they are, these folk narratives are seminal in the Mizo folklore because of the different qualities they have. They have a lasting impact on the Mizo folks because of the reality they represent-

be it their super attributes, their adventures, struggles, or the fact that they echo the Mizo sentiments and the culture that moulded them. Hence we have the glorification of courage, strength and bravery, cleverness and wit, as well as the struggle of becoming someone; and importantly, the representation of the ambiguous human nature and the humors of sometimes life and human characters present us. Not only the heroes, but the villain's role in folk narratives is important. They may be in the form of supernatural beings, human enemies from other sources and even family. Folk narratives villain show us that obstacles could come from anywhere and that overcoming or conquering them provides the salvation that the hero needs. The universal theme of good versus evil is also reflected in the war between the protagonist and the antagonist. This universal theme, which is very much a reality for the past Mizo folks still hold true for the present society, hence it may be the reason that these kind of folk narratives continue to be one of the most popular tales surviving till today, in a world where superheroes and supervillains dominate the media as in films, cartoons and action figures. The celebration of heroes from mythology to today's celebration of heroes (as in good deeds done towards humanity and even the acknowledgement given to soldiers and military forces) never gets old as human beings as a whole recognize that true virtues and good deeds need to be propagated for the survival of humanity.

In studying folk narrative, it is impossible to separate it from the culture that produces them. Hence the words, “folk” and “lore”. The folk people made up their folklore from their way of life, their beliefs and traditions. Hence, culture is part and parcel of folklore. The Mizos folk narrative too portray the past Mizo society in many ways. Their myths and tales reflect the past Mizo religion, their social life and social structure of their villages and the education imparted to the younger generation through oral tradition. Being an illiterate society before the coming of the British missionaries, the Mizo way of life and their traditions were handed through oral tradition hence making it difficult to trace and prove their history by present researchers and scholars. One of the important means of investigating the past history is through folklore.

The belief system is an important criterion in understanding people's culture. Folk belief is diverse, and in terms of folk narrative myth and folk tales play an important part in broadcasting them. Firstly, the primordial religion of the Mizos is reflected immensely in myth and folk tales, where we find the various beliefs in spirits and sacrificial rites and the reason for such beliefs. The myths provide a sense of our place in the social and natural worlds, a sense of meaning of lives and actions. Secondly, folk narratives function to pass on the information and wisdom of human experience between generations. It is then non-institutional form of education, in which both social values and technical knowledge are transmitted.

Stories emanated in prehistory from shared experiences, and this is still the case. It is through oral transmission that stories of different kinds form the texture of our lives. Tomasello demonstrates that children learn early in social contexts by becoming aware of the intentions of other human beings through imitation, instruction, and collaboration,

and he contends that learning is dialectical, plus involves understanding metaphor and different perspectives... Children are born into a particular culture niche that will influence how they began to know the world and benefit from the cumulative heritage of culture. They learn how language and narratives provide access to power, or deny access to it (Zipes 2012:7).

Fables or animal tales and cautionary tales are among the popular forms of folk narratives whereby wisdom and knowledge are transmitted. Folk beliefs and wisdom find reflection in such tales. It is true that in many parts of the world, folk narratives play a crucial role in bringing up a child to be a better citizen in his/hersociety. The Africans immensely made use of this kind of education in their society. The shared knowledge of the content of folklore strengthens community solidarity in many ways and serves to develop a flexibility of thinking and a critical consciousness about events and choices of action. Since the information transmitted in folklore is not transmitted as 'fact' or a 'single' answer, but is open to listener interpretation, it helps develop initiative and creative problem-solving in those to whom it is transmitted.

Apart from the simple folk tales, there is a group of folk narratives which is made up of stories between couples usually in love and struggling to attain unification but facing all kinds of hurdles from family and society. The Mizofolk narrative is rich in such kind of tales that mostly have a tragic end. A study into these kind of tales reveal not only the concept of love the Mizoheld, but also the social structure that made up the Mizopast society, the class system and sometimes the voice of the common people. The common motif prese

n in these tales which is the lovers belonging to two separate social hierarchy - one from the ruling family and the other from the lowest rank of society, portrays the class system of the past Mizovillage. The poor economic condition and egocentric attitude towards clan made the past Mizosociety a victim to class system. Hence we find romantic tragic tales of lovers dying for their love and sometimes reuniting in spirits. The motif behind such stories and their survival over the years could be either the need to inform future generations for such social traditions and politics; or it could be the common man's expression against such class conflicts, as Zipes has stated that the folktales retain the immediacy of the common people's perspective which has always sought and indicated the possibilities for a better world (156). Moreover, a study of the romantic fairytales in Germany by Zipes indicates that social realities are the reason for their transmission of fairytales - the common man form of expression against capitalism and the feudal system (Zipes 2002). Apart from the portrayal of the social realities of the past Mizosociety, an important form of institution that plays an important part in the lives of the past Mizos was the *zawl buk*. A place for the menfolk and for weary travelers, its role is more than just a resting and entertaining place for the menfolk. It serves as the place of education for boys and young men. The older men advise, teach, warn and punish the younger ones and mould them to be useful members of the society. The relevance of this *zawl buk* could be seen in many of the Mizofolk narratives, apart from the Mizoculture that has vanished today.

The study of these Mizofolk narratives indicates that folklore is not as simple art. Beyond its entertaining value, it calls for interpretation. Folklore is not nonsense or just fiction because of the fantastic elements

ts presented in it. It has a relation to history and towards reality. They are a representation of the life of the past ancestors and their beliefs. Vladimir Propp has laid down the relationship between folklore and history as “folklore is derived from reality and reflects it” (Propp 48). The trends in studying folklore in relation to history and its complications has been clearly put forward by Propp in studying Russian folklore;

Two trends are clearly observable in modern folklore. One develops the ideas of pre-Soviet scholarship and conceives history as a chain of foreign and domestic events. Events can always be dated exactly. They are caused by the actions of people who really existed, that is, concrete people with concrete names. The historical basis of folklore is understood as the reflection of such real events and persons. A scholar is expected to show which events and which persons are depicted in individual monuments and to date them accordingly.

The other trend proceeds from a broader conception of history. This trend differentiates genres. The historical basis for genres is diverse. For some of them it is possible to treat folklore as a representation of history and persons. For others such a narrow understanding of history is insufficient. The driving force of history is the people itself; individual persons are a derivative of history, not its impetus. From this point of view, everything that happens to a people belongs to history in one way or another (Propp 48).

The Mizofolk narratives fall to the second trend of Propp's theory in this study because of the absence of historical facts and figures, persons and names that are impossible to trace and events that could not be remembered in history. Nonetheless the folklore as a representation of reality is a commonly accepted term like how this study has selected, differentiated and interpreted the different 'genres' of Mizofolk narratives to suit the reality of the past and sometimes the present and how representation varies according to changing social realities. It has shown how historical reality could turn to fictive and from fictive to fantasy according to Dan Ben Amos' approach to folk tale and reality (Rohrichxi).

Propp also laid down three points on the relationship between folklore and reality which are;

1. Folklore is engendered by reality but does not contain any traces of the concrete reality or epoch that has engendered it.
2. The second type of relation of folklore to reality presupposes a fictitious plot that contains obvious traces of people's lives. Reality finds reflection even though such reflection was not the performer's aesthetic aim.
3. In the third case the performer tends to describe reality (49).

These three points could be applied to folklore genres in varying degrees. The first example will be how folktales with marvels and fantastical elements are a reflection of reality without any concrete evidence to support the individual and event as in "Reality in the Unusual" in the second chapter. The next type of relation of folklore to reality could be seen in folktales like animal tales and adventures of folk heroes where representation of human life is clearly visible. And the last type of folklore in relation to reality will be legends story

and cautionary tale where the narrator put extra effort in claiming the story real, no matter what subject and motif it contains. Hence these linkages with reality in Mizofolk narratives are sociological and its main aim is not only a fix representation of historical reality.

The study of folklore has become an important field, and India with its diverse cultures has been a storehouse of colorful folklores. Though India has a history of two centuries of collection of folklore literature, a scientific study was made only in a previous couple of decades. Jawarharlal Handoo has divided recognizing of Indian folklore into three divisions.

- 1). Missionary period 1800-1900
- 2). Nationalistic period 1900-1950
- 3). Academic period 1950 onwards (Nagaraju 280).

The tasks of collecting folktales were first done by the British Christian missionaries as they came into contact with regional people and these were published in many journals. According to Nagaraju, the folklore collected during the missionary period and nationalistic period were tainted with colonial attachment and nationalistic attachment. So it was only from the 1950s that scholars could study the complexities and colorful texts of folklore and was accepted as a serious field of study by the Kannada literates and from that, many universities in India have conducted research in folklore studies (281).

Likewise in Mizoram, the earliest collection of folktales was done by the British government officials posted in Mizoram. Later, the local people took up the collection and publication of folktales and today, a number of them could be seen in the local bookstores. However, there are only a few in translation to other lan

guage. Scholarly work on folklore/folk narrative have been but a few and it is a pleasure to say that today many scholars and researchers are embarking upon this field of study. The rich folklore of the Mizo along with its unique culture and traditions are worthy to be studied and investigated. Not only for scholarly studies, but giving attention to our folklore helps in the preservation and safe guarding of the folklore. Being handed through oral means, there must have been a vast quantity of folklore that disappears and vanishes along the way, thus it is the role of the present generation to preserve whatever is left. The meaning and nature of the folklore may change and might not have the same importance it had in the past. The pre-colonial period may be endowed with meaningful customs and traditions and folklore playing an important role in society. However, with the coming of the British and the Mizo conversion to Christianity had made folklore lose its value among the masses. Hence, the place of folk tale has been replaced by Biblical stories and Christian morality tales. The values that folklore used to have have been diminished to a large extent. Meanings and representations have lost its credibility and values in folklore.

But on the bright side, there has been the urge to rekindle this fading folklore in the Mizo community. People from various localities, towns and the city have come to value folklore and its dying art hence certain steps are being taken to safeguard and transmit it among the younger generation. Hence groups, schools and other institutions as well have made it a cultural must for many to learn the Mizo traditional songs and dances. The Mizo folk narratives have been included in the school syllabus creating awareness and at the same time propagating folk literature. A few comic books of Mizo folk tales and cartoons could be even observed today. Folklore has gone a long way from its oral tradition to today's technological world. Its meaning and

aluesmaychangesaccordingtotheculturebutitisofthebeliefthatitwillattainanothermeaning,anotherrepresentation,anotherrealityforthefuturegenerationtocome.

Glossary:

Pialral: the Lushai paradise. (the abode of the dead)

Zawlbuk: the large house in the Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.

(Source: Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1988. Print.)

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