

CONTEMPORARY MIZO THAWNTHU

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the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

LALLIANPUII RALTE

under the supervision of

PROF. G.J.V PRASAD



Centre for English Studies,
School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
New Delhi - 110 067
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Centre for English Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067, India

Date:

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "COMTEMPORARY MIZO THAWNTHU", submitted by Lallianpuii Ralte in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**, of Jawaharlal Nehru University has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other university and is her original work.

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(PROF. G.J.V PRASAD)

CHAIRPERSON & SUPERVISOR

Prof. GJV Prasad

Chairperson

Centre for English Studies

School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067

Date: 4.1.2011

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled "Contemporary Mizo Thawnthu" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.


(Lallianpuii Ralte)

M.Phil student

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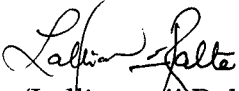
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(Lallianpuii Ralte)

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I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The Meaning of *Thawnthu*

With only an incredible story of how a hungry dog devoured the only leather parchment that contained the scripts of the Lushai people to explain the absence of literature in the land, the Mizos had to wait for the arrival of the Welsh missionaries to codify their language. Education thus received from the missionaries meant the Mizos had to wait further for the translation of the Bible, elementary books, journals and translations of Christian literature to come out until their own creative writings saw the light of day.

Prof. Margaret Zama, on the beginning of literacy of the Mizos says:

Any study on the society and the culture of the Mizo, cannot be completed without the mention of the year 1894, which was a turning point in their history. It was the year that two English Baptist missionaries of the Arthington Aborigines Mission, J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, found their way in to the then Lushai Hills, now Mizoram, to begin their missionary work with "this bloodthirsty race." They introduced literacy to the Mizo by giving them their alphabet. Lorrain puts it thus, "It therefore fell to our lot to reduce the language to writing in such a way that our system could be readily adopted by the people themselves. For this purpose we chose the simple Roman script..." (1973: V)¹

The Mizo creative story is a testament to the number of opportunities that education opened up for the Mizos. B. Lalthangliana in his book *Mizo Literature* attests, "The *Thawnthu* (Novel) is something that the early Mizos did not have, but only a precursor of it which was the folk tale. This new kind of literature which is far more interesting, sustained and credible than its predecessor, the result of the enlightenment the Mizos received from education was started by the first educated lot of people, and now occupies an important place in the literature of the Mizos."²

¹ Zama, Margaret Ch. "Globalization and the Mizo society", *Indian Folklife*, Serial No. 22, July 2006

² Pg 306, Lalthangliana, B. *Mizo Literature* (2nd ed.). Aizawl, my translation.

B. Lalthangliana in his book records and describes Mizo literature in his book from the time of its inception to the modern times. Regarding the development of the Mizo story he writes, "There was a lot of progress between 1966 to 200 in terms of story writing. As the land buckled under the insurgency during 1966 - 1971, our literature also experienced a roadblock, but recovered after 1972. One can even say that the development which it saw after 1980 has made up for the set back."¹

The Mizo thawnthu progressed in terms of the print, the cover design and its overall look. Thawnthu is one of the most read and best selling genres of all, the shorter ones being more favoured. However, the story that is told, the way it unfolds, the plot, the characters and the way they evolve hasn't flourished as well.

Especially, the Thawnthu writers have a long way to go in terms of building a sustainable plot. The troubles that inflict the characters are not well thought out yet. If the plot is not thick enough, the "love" that binds the characters cannot be deep enough. Our writers are founding deeply wanting in this regard."³

From the observation that B.Lalthangliana writes in this 1993 book on the history of Mizo literature, to commemorate the Gospel centenary of Mizoram, two very crucial things stand out in his critique. The first one is that he yearns for writers to make the plot more credible so that the "love" between the characters may be explored more deeply. This speaks volumes of the monotony of theme that the Mizo thawnthu has always carried. That a critic could generalize all existing stories as lacking in narrative to examine further the theme of love, demonstrates the lack of variety in Mizo thawnthu. Also, there is a deep problem of categorization of genres.

The second point that arises from the critic's observation is that he, B. Lalthangliana has put "Novel" within brackets after the category of Thawnthu, which means "Thawnthu" in Mizo is translated as "Novel" in English. All through his book,

³ Pg 462, *ibid.*

he equates thanwthu, which in Mizo simply means story, irrespective of whether it is fiction or real, with novel. However, almost all the “novels” which have been published from 1936 hardly qualify to be called a novel. ✓

Dr. R. L. Thanmawia who is an Asst. Professor in the Mizo Department of Mizoram University and author of 20 publications on Mizo literature says, “*Mizo literature hi piang hlim ang deuh, thang lai mek a ni a, English literature anga engkim sawi fiah tum a hun lo va; a history pawh hi chiang taka thliar a, hunbi siam te; genres hrang hrang te English term hmanga thliar sin leh zual te pawh a la hun lovah ka ngai. Mizo thawnthu phuahchawp ho hi fiction tia sawi hian a him ber a. Mahse a sei deuh hi Novel kan ti ve mai a, a vai hian novel tia sawi mai chang pawh kan nei a; mahse novel tia sawi chi loh hi a tam zawk hi a la ni rihin ka hria.*”

(Mizo literature is in its budding stage. It isn't time yet to define our literature according to the English model, nor is it time to historicise or categorise according to it. It is safest to call Mizo creative stories as fiction. But we still call the lengthier ones novels, though most of them do not have the length of a conventional novel)

It is because of this ambivalence of the term novel when applied to the category of Mizo creative prose writings, that one has resorted to the use of the word “thawnthu” in the original Mizo in for this research to indicate the same. ✓

This research aims to show the changing literary trends in the genres of short story and in contemporary Mizo creative writing through seven stories. The first works of fiction in prose, which began with Biakliana's *Hawilopari* written in 1936, are heavily moralistic. Critics see it as reflective of the depth of the influence of Christianity upon Mizos, but also regret the crippling restrictions it places on the literary caliber of their written works. As a result, characterization has its limitations,

and the black and white world of the first Mizo short stories lacked the length, plot and sustained interest that the grey world of the novel explores.

Dr. R. Thangvunga, in a paper presented under the title 'Mizo literature in relation to other literature' at the Poets' Meet cum seminar on Mizo literature in Aizawl between the 3rd - 7th October, 2001, says:

Mizos then and now are inveterate lovers of stories, perhaps to the extent detrimental to a profitable life.

Handwritten copies of translated novels were often read in groups by young people. World War II facilitated local composition on love themes. The few novels bearing on life in society, however, bear testimony to the writers' understanding of life and their narrative skills... One is wistful, however, for a novel sharp enough to slice through layers of frozen moral pretensions and guarded reticence, for a character to explode the unconscious.⁴

It is this kind of dissatisfaction, which despite the progress that is evident in Mizo creative writing, that this research will have as its foundation. However, the works of contemporary Mizo writers is indicative of a change in literary trend in Mizo creative writing, where the moralizing has been toned down to such an extent that one gets a thoroughly enjoyable and realistic piece of writing; for example, of social criticism not through Bible quotations, but humour or satire. This research will look into the content of seven Mizo thawnthu written by seven different writers published between 1993 to 2010. These are:

1. *Hun Awmluh Hunah* by Sangzuala
2. *Lungrang Laiawrha* by Lalhmingliana Saiawi
3. *Pasalthate Ni Hnuhnung* by C. Lalnunchanga

⁴ Pg 38, ed. Kiangte, Laltluangliana, *An Introduction to Mizo Literature*

4. *Rintei Zunleng* by Lalrammawia Ngente
5. *Thihsak Pawh Ka Ngam* by Darrokima
6. *Thunderbird* by Vanneihluanga
7. *Vaihna Vartian* by Mafaa Hauhna

Each chapter will deal with a separate story. There will be a summary of the story followed by a short critical appreciation of subject matter of the story.

These seven contemporary Mizo thawnthu vary in content, length, theme, style and objective and together they represent the skill and potential of the Mizo storyteller. Their writers have captured the moot points in contemporary Mizo society - the comic and the tragic- and have portrayed them in their stories through interrogation and critique, humour and satire.

✓ The research will also attempt through these stories, to focus on the identity of the Mizos in an ever-globalising world, how they evolve and protect their take on issues like religion, sex, alcohol, wealth, history and culture, and to a certain extent, politics - all the while focusing on the genres of novel and short story; the process of writing, editing and publishing and the impact it has on Mizoram amidst other genres.

Dealing with foreign words in writing

A literary genre in its budding stage has to deal with certain teething problems. One of the factors that a Mizo writer today has to deal with is that of using foreign words in his writing. Interestingly, among these writers there are some who want to highlight every foreign word in their writing while there are others who have adopted foreign lexicon into

their own or have suitably adjusted their tonality to match the local tongue. There are two possible ways of looking at this: one which sees the futility of being a linguistic purist given the times we're living in (where there are no Mizo equivalents to technical words of medical, technological and cultural discourses), and the other which advocates that it is precisely because we are being bombarded with so many different ideas, customs and lifestyle that there couldn't be a better time to stand firm on our feet and preserve our culture.

more aspects that pertain to theory could be denoted.

Mafaa Hauhnar talks about his opinion: "Trawng dang kan trawng ang ^{t(?)} maia kan lo hman thran tawh leh kan lo chûlnêl tawhho hi chu kan trawng ang maiin ka hmang a (sikul, flag, committee; tala, latrine, etc) amaherawhchu khawpui lama eng anga kan hriat tlanglâwn pawh ni se thingtlang kilkhawra rual-u zawkte'na an hriat thiam ve loh tur thumal "foreign word" hi chu hawrawp âwn (italicised)-a dah hram hram hi ka duh dan a ni a. Hei hi international press-a an kalpui dan tlanglawn ber pawh niin ka hria. Kan pipute neih ngai loh IT hmasawna leh thil dang avanga thumal thar lo piang (cyberspace, internet, texting, etc) te pawh hi Mizo lam dan anga lo dah ching (lo duhlianised kan ti dawn em ni ang) an awm zauh zauh va (Saibarspeiz, intarnet, litereichar, etc) hei hi ka pawm zawng a ni lo. Hetianga mahni leili mil zawnga a spelling lo ziah mai an chin avang hian khawchhak lam unau zingah pawh khian graduate pui "Taxi" spelling pawh hre lo va "teksi" lo ti ta nulh nulh an tam phah a ni. A tlukpui ang thlapa kan ngaih theih tura kan trawnga lo chher thiam an awm a, kan pawm tlan theih chuan a thra thlawt e (airport : thlawhna trumhmun, kerosene oil: khawndartui, etc). chutiang a nih loh chuan foreign word kha a nihna ang anga seng luh a, hawrawp âwna dah hi ka thlawp ber a ni. Chu chu kan trawng tihchinpenna ni pawhin ka hre lo."

(I write those foreign words that we have become as familiar with as our own words (eg, sikul, flag, committee, tala, flag, etc.). However, I try to

consider the ones in rural villagers who might not be familiar with certain foreign words as the ones living in towns, and I try my best to italicize those words for their sake. I think this is how they go about it in international press too. There are some who have, shall we say 'Duhlianised' IT terms such as cyberspace, internet, texting etc. into saibarspeiz, intarnet, litereichar etc. I disagree with this. Because we have twirled these words for our own convinience, we now have graduates who think the spelling of taxi is "teksi". We can either create words to have equivalent meaning to foreign words or use these foreign words as they are and italicize them.")

Lalrammawi Ngente says, *"Mizo novel emaw, writings emaw hrim hrimah hian borrowed words emaw tawng dang, Mizo tawnga a equivalent kan la neih chiah loh angte italicized emaw hi tha hrim hrima ka hriat avangin ka dah lui bawk a ni."*

(I insist on italicising borrowed words for which we don't have the equivalent in our language)

Vanneihtluanga agrees with his fellow writers, and adds, *"Tawng dang pawlh lova Mizo tawng chauh hman tum hi thil tih theih lohah ka ngai. Chutih rual chuan, kan thumal neih ve theih tho a nih chuan hman ngei tha ka ti. Khawvelah tawng thang nasa apiangin pawlhtu a ngah. A pawlhtu a tam avangin an sakhaw bu leh an literature a tichhe ngai chuang lo. Ka eizawna atanga ka experience chu, english, hindi leh korean movies Mizo tawnga kan dub te, kan zaithiamte mp3 leh, kan chanchinbute hi, tunlaia nasa taka Mizo tawng tidarhtu leh tinghettu a ni. 2020-ah chuan, Chakma belt tih lohah chuan Mizoram chhungah Mizo tawng kan hmang vek tawhin ka ring. A chhehvel Churachandpur, Tahan, Haflong... Mizo tawng hrethiamtu thangthar an pung bawk ang."*

(It's impossible to use pure Mizo today. At the same time, we should surely use our Mizo words if they already exist. The richer the language of a nation is, the more the foreign contribution. This does not affect their religious and literary discourses. What I have experienced in my career is that, the English, Hindi and Korean movies that we have dubbed, our talented singers' mp3s, our newspapers have all contributed in spreading and strengthening Mizo language. I believe that by the year 2020, except for the Chakma belt, all of Mizoram will speak in Mizo. There will also be a surge in the number of young people in the neighbouring Chachandpur, Tahan, Haflong who will understand Mizo.)

Editing could be more focused upon
Reader-Writer Relationship

For a tribe of people that boasts of rich oral traditions in the form of songs and folk tales, the existing Mizo people can prove to be quite hard to please when it comes to the new stories that are being produced. Could this be the reason of the sheepish apologetic explanations that authors today write out in their introduction? Mafaa suggests that it may be because the audience is not familiar with that particular genre.

He says, "*Ni e, Mizote chu thawnthu ngaina hnam kan ni a, kan oral literature hmasa ber ber pawh thawnthu a ni ngei ang. Amaherawh chu ziaka kan dah theihna hi kum 100 lo liam a la ni lo va, churang chuan Zotrawng chauh chhiar thiam tan hian lehkhahu chhiar tur a la tam lo va, hnam dang trawng chuan literary theory leh criticism (lit crit) bu zaa za tel teh meuh chhiar tur a awm tawh a. Keini zingah chuan bu hnih khat bak mumalin kan la nei lo va, a nawlpuiin kan tuipei si avangin thawnthu phuahtute hian a chhiartute educate-na ni pah fawmin an lehkhahu hi an sawifiah thin a ni. Kum 1997-a Chawlhna Tuikam ka tihchhuah khan mipui nawlpuiin poetry kan*

hriatna kha a la ler hle a, chuvang chuan chhiartute educate nan ka poetry tinah khan footnote-ah eng form leh style-a phuah nge, a meter leh a rhyme scheme thlengin ka sawifiah fai leuh va, chumi avanga poetry lam tuipui chho ta hi Zofate zingah awihawm lo khawpa tam an awm phah a, ka lehkhabu ang zula lehkhabu chhuak pawh hi ka chhiar theih chinah 20 chuang tal chu a awm ang. "If the poems speak to the reader, no explanation can change them. If they don't, no explanation can save them," tih hi ka ngaihdan kumkhua ni mah se hnam thrang lai chhiar tur neih la nei mang lo kan nih avang khan hreh chung chungka poetry kalhmangte sawifiah ta kha ka ni a. A inchhirawm lohzia ka hmu a ni. Tun hnai 2007-a "Thlaler Aurawl" ka ziah erawh kha chuan hma kan sawn ve zia tawh ka hmuhin pakhat mah ka sawi fiah duh tawh lo a ni. Hei hi thawnthu chungchangah pawh hian a dikin ka ring."

(Yes, we Mizos love our stories; our earliest literature must have been stories too. However, not even a hundred years have passed since we started having books to read in our language. For those who can read only Mizo, books on literature and criticism are far less than that those who can read other languages as well. All we have are just a couple of such books, but since the general interest for stories is great, we writers explain our writings in an attempt to educate them as well. When I published a book of poems called *Chawlhna Tuikam* in 1997, the knowledge that people had about poetry was still very superficial. So, to educate the readers, I included a footnote on every page to explain the form, style, meter and rhyme scheme of the poetry in question. Many Mizos took a liking to poetry because of this. I have since come across more than twenty other books who took my example. "If the poems speak to the reader, no explanation can change them. If they don't, no explanation can save them" may be my firm belief, but I had to resort to explaining my work for a readership that was still taking its baby steps. I did not regret it at all. However, in a more recent publication of mine called *Thlaler*

Aurawl which came out in 2007, I knew that we now knew enough and so I didn't explain any of it. I'm sure this holds true for stories too.

Dr. Thanmawia however holds a quite different view and he says, *"Ka ngaih danah chuan Thawnthu (fiction) leh Lemchan thawnthu (drama) te hi creative writing a ni a, thuhmahruai (introduction) leh mi dangin an sawi hawn sakna (foreword) ziakna turah ka ngai lo. Dan tur emaw kan ati a, kan ti zel mai a nih hi. Kan lehkhathiam zawkten an tan tlat a, mi kutchhuat apianga foreword ziak tuma buai phi tawk kan la awm bawk si a! Mizote hi Sermon sawi dawn pawha inbuatsaihna neih that theih lo thu emaw insawifiahna thil dang tikual chiam chi kan ni a. Kan nih angin mipui kan hmachhawn ngam loh vang a ni thei a, inngaihtlawmna chapo a ni thei bawk. Kan sim thei meuh lo chu a nih hi. Insawi thiamna a ni thei a, insawimawina a ni thei a; chhiartute kutah kan thu leh hlate hi kan la dah thlawp thiam lo a ni ber. Anmahni hla a bua chhuahte pawhin an phuah chhan zawng zawng leh an phuah laia an rilru leh thil dang dang an sawi fiah vek zel a; audience-ten tih tur an nei ve tawh thin lo chu a nih ber hi maw."*

(In my opinion, fiction and drama are creative writings and don't need to be explained in an introduction, nor does the author need someone else to write him a foreword.

We think that it is a norm which must be followed, and so we continue to do it. The educated people started the trend, and now people are groping around to write forewords for others. We Mizos have the habit of apologizing to the congregation for the ill-preparation of the sermon one is about to deliver. Maybe we aren't confident to face people as we are. Or it could be a kind of proud humiliation. We just can't seem to get past it. It could be an apology, it could be an explanation; more than that, it's simply the fact that we haven't learnt to submit our works into the hands of the readers. People who have published their own poems and songs in

books have divulged the reason of their composition, what went through their mind while composing and such other details, leaving the audience with nothing to think about.)

Another person who blames the author for an unnecessary introduction is Vanneithluanga who says:

"1. Mi thenkhat chu, anmahni chhungrilah, rawn táwntu an nei lo va, phawrh tur 'original' an nei lo va. Mahse, 'ziaktu lar tak' nih an duh si a, 'kutchhuak' an neih loh chuan thenkhat chu professor an ni thei dawn si lo va, DIK an zir chhuak a, an hria a, an thinlung atanga phawrh lovin an zir chhuah ang chu inthlahrung tak chungin an entawn a, thupha charwi chungin lehkhabu an ziak thin.

2. Chutiang mite chu mithiam kan tihte an ni si a, a nawlpui hian kan entawn a, anni pawhin thupha an charwi chuan, keinite pheih chu... an ti a, kan intihhmuh ta mai a ni.

Novelist inti ve si, FIMKHUR hi kei chu ka hrethiam lo. Ka nunna aiin keimaha art inpuangchhuak hi Pathian leh ka mihringpuite tan tan a hlu zawkah ka ngai.

Kei chuan, audience aiin author ka dem zawk. 1970 hma lama piangte chuan Kristian literature chauh hi literature dikah an la ngai maithei. Chutiang mil chuan mi tamtakin lehkhabu kan ziak reng a ni. Mahse thalaite hian chu chu an ning tawh. Thalaiten "Kan chep" an tih chhan pakhat chu, kan literature huang a zim lutuk hi niah ka ngai. Thalaite zinga lehkhathiam tamtakin Mizo literature chhiar lo va english novel an chhiar nasat chhan chu, Mizo an ngaihnepep vang a ni lo, Mizo literature hmanga an mamawh kan pek phak tawh loh vang ni zawkah kei chuan ka ngai.

Kristian hma thawnthute hi hausa tak, a nihna anga la explore tawh loh, nasa taka la phawrh theih tur niah ka ngai. Folk tales hi nuin a fate naupan laiin awih mutna thawnthua a hman chhung chuan hnam nun lairil luahtu a nih

theih ka ring. Mahse, kan nute chuan kan mut dawna thawnthu min hrilhin Liandova aiah Josefa, Tualvungi aiah Estheri... min hrilh ta tlat a. Kan roots lakah kan mikhual tial tial a, author thiam chungchuan tak tak lo chuan a values kaihthawh a har tial tial tawh ang.

Mahse, Mihring zawng zawngin engtik lai pawha collective ownership kan intawm chu hmangaihna, duhamna, sex, phuba lak chakna... te a ni ang. Entir nan, topic lian tak sex chungchang te hi, vulgar si lova novel tingaihnaawm tur tawka telh takngial pawh kan la ngam lo. Kan moral guardian te hian art an hre tawh lo hi a pawh hle bawh."

(Firstly, some people don't have inspiration to come up with something original. But they still want to be known as famous writers. Some know that if they don't have any works of their own; they may never get to be professors. These people have learnt what 'right' is, and they reluctantly write from what they have learnt, rather than write from their own hearts.

Secondly, the problem is that these are the ones whom we consider learned. The rest of us copy them thinking that is how it ought to be. I

I don't get the point of a person who calls himself a novelist while being so cautious. The art that comes from deep within me is much more valuable for God and my fellow men than what I am in person.

I blame the author more than the audience. Before 1970, only Christian literature was considered good literature. Many people wrote only on those lines. But the younger generation is fed up of such writings. One of the reasons our youth feels suffocated is because the confines of our literature is too narrow. The reason why I feel our young men and women prefer English novels is not because they don't like reading in Mizo, but because we haven't been able to satiate their wants with our writing.

I believe that the stories we had before Christianity have a wealth of meaning to be discovered in them. I'm sure folk tales even today can be an integral part of our lives as long as a mother tells them to her children. However, now the bedtime stories we hear from our mothers are about Joseph rather than Laindova, about Esther instead of Tualvungi. We're gradually becoming strangers to our own roots and only a skilled reader will be able to instill the same values from our modern stories.)

The contemporary Mizo writer thus has to work between the deeply interiorized literacy and a more or less residually oral stages of consciousness. He has to meet the challenge of coming up with a story the likes of which his people have collectively owned and loved from the time the Mizos can trace their history to. He has to break the stereotype that Mizo story telling is labeling itself and at the same time, deal with the inherent leanings that his Mizo background and psyche binds him to, all the while protecting all that is culturally valuable in an attempt to create a story that indicates the new and evolving Mizoram he lives in. With these things in mind, we shall study the seven Mizo contemporary thawnthu.

**II. SUMMARY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SEVEN
CONTEMPORARY MIZO THAWNTHU**



Summary and Critical Analysis of Seven Contemporary Mizo Thawnthu

Chapter 1: *Hun Awmloh Hunah* by Sangzuala

1.1 The Story

The story is set in the future and spans across cities, countries, continents and even different worlds and galaxies. The story begins in Mizoram, where the state Forest and Wildlife Force Department has organized an event called Wild Life Days. It is the last day of the week-long event and there is a request made by a stranger to exhibit his exotic animals to the audience. The main character, Lama, short for Lalhmingmawia, thus makes his dramatic entrance and enthralls the people at the state-of-the-art Neuva Stadium of the Mizoram Games and Sports Council. The event is witnessed by his childhood sweetheart, Lalrinmawii (Mamawii).

The appearance of Lama shocks Mamawii. Lama had left his parents' house a few years ago in a fit of rage. He loved animals and had many pets at home. One evening, while his animals are wandering in the garden, some of them break his father's prized glass diamond light. His father had always disapproved of Lama's pets. When he comes home from work, he rebukes his son for being careless. The fight breaks up what was an already strained relationship between father and son, and Lama leaves the house immediately.

Lama returns to his house at daybreak to release his pet animals and birds. He wanders about heading nowhere in particular when darkness falls and he decides to spend the night by the awesome cliffs. Soon, he hears a fight in the distance and quickly goes over. He finds out that a man was lying, injured by a wild beast. He was already acquainted with that species of animal in the Solitarium and so quickly tamed the beast.

Lama gets to know that the injured man Jim and his friends worked in a wild-life sanctuary and were searching for escaped animals. Seeing Lama's way with the animal, they offer him a job at their sanctuary and that is how Lama makes the Forbidden Forest his home.

Lama takes Mamawii to the Forbidden Forest to relate his story. He tells her that they are on a mission to communicate with the civilization under the sea. The civilization he talks about is very advanced. All the knowledge that mankind had persevered to get from the beginning of time was just a lifetime's research for them.

At the Core Wilde Marine Institute, Robert Duval Auditorium in Miami, Florida, Dr. Samuel Osbourne addresses a small audience and presents before them details of the expedition that they are about to undertake. And so a few days later, a seven man crew is sent to the deep bottom of the sea from Guam in Western Pacific in a seacraft called the Hawker which could withstand the enormous pressure of water even seven miles below sea level. The Hawker is equipped with the most advanced technology to study and record the structure of the sea bed.

They go down the sea until they reach a place where communication with the mother ship Leviathan is abruptly cut. Here the crew meets with wondrous sights of the sea, gigantic squids and enormous gorges, the likes of which don't exist in their world. Their Hawker is soon made to launch in the habited part of this underwater civilization. The citizens there are human-like. They have fins and gills for survival and are unisex. They communicate through telepathy. They are taken to a conference room where one of their leaders explains to the Expedition Challenger team where they are. They are told that they too inhabit the earth, and are guardians of the land humans inhabit. They are responsible for making

available to the human the technology to close the Ozone hole, and they are the ones who shift river tracts so that forests may thrive on land. Their main concern is the communication with the humans themselves that they haven't achieved yet because of the difference in the technological advancement between them and the humans. They are told that their solar system has 17 planets compared to the known 13, and that the last five planets ever share the same orbit. In fact, the largest among the planets is three times the size of Jupiter. Their efforts have been misunderstood and their machines have been mistaken for outerspace UFOs. They possessed every knowledge that the earth has even conceived since the beginning of time. Maybe, they are told, the only thing that keeps them from making contact with the humans is the will of God itself.

After a hospitable stay, the Core Wilde team are let out into their world. When they resurface in Portugal, they check the time and they realize that they haven't lost even a second between the time they lost contact with Leviathan and now. They had entered a time-warp, for they were in a timeless timezone all this while! (Hun awmlöh hunah)

Besides his adventure, he tells Mamawii about the girl he met at Core Wilde. Her name is Mapuii (Lalnunpuii) and she would be the girl Lama chooses over Mamawii.

Lama had a nemesis, Hymet Lalhminganga, who also worked for Core Wilde. Hymet traces Lama and releases a python into the sea to kill Lama when he goes swimming with Mamawii at the Forbidden Forest. The author devotes two whole chapters to their enmity. The men decide to fight it out in the Eastern Woods, and Lama leaves Hymet to die in their duel. Hymet is finally crushed to death by a huge rock.

The story comes to close with a happy reunion of Lama with his family, where his father's reformed life facilitates their reconciliation. Mapuii is introduced to the family and a new character Rina, whose life had once been saved by Lama rejoins Lama in the Forbidden Forest, ready for their next assignment.

1.2 Critical Analysis

The author Sangzuala says that he modeled his story on the novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne. *Hun Awmluh Hunah* is a refreshing Mizo thawnthu that is perhaps the first to transcend the usual geographical boundaries and take its characters to places where no other Mizo fictional character has ever gone. Though the author does not mention the year in which the story is set, it is obvious that it is in the distant future because in the narrative he says:

“Kuma veu a, kum dang pawh a lo vei zel a, hun chuan hman ata tawh tumah a la nhgak chuang lo. Mizoram hmel danglamzia hi a ngaihtuah peihte chuan mak an ti a; chik lehzuala chhut peihte erawh chuan a ram hmelhmang chu hun hluiah a kir leh a ni an ti ve tlat. Hnama chhiar vet ham mang loh ni hial awm lhawpa tlem, mahse tih tawh lamah chuan vantlang chung ni ve thei zel lhawpa hnam themthiam leh zei Zofate chuan an thanmawhbawk an paih thla a; tei rei peih an zir ve achinah chuan hnam hmasawn chak bera chhal an nit hung. Thankgthar fing tak tak an lo chhuak a, an rual ei nasa lutuk chuan inngirnghona a chhuah lek lek thin a; nimahsela, chutiang thil zawng thupui hlapuia la tur chuan an mawl tawk lo a ni ang, Mizo nih hi khawiah mah a zahthlak loh.

(Years and years passed as time and tide waits for no one. The way the surface of Mizoram had changed baffled even the most learned, some were convinced that land had returned to its virgin state. The people of

the sparsely populated land were second to none in their feats. They had moved beyond their stumbling blocks and had honed their skills and talent to perfection. They had learned to persevere and were the fastest developing people. The new generation brimmed with talent and knowledge. The competitive spirit almost posed a threat once but they knew better than to make a big deal out of it. They were proud to be Mizos wherever they went.)⁵

To go beyond the usual setting of Mizoram, a Mizo author's comfort zone, does not come easy for Sangzuala. In the foreword he says, "I have always been longing for a good fiction without an obvious moral conclusion and this book is borne out of that desire for an interesting novel. I couldn't possibly avoid all the foreign words, having based my story on advanced technology and in foreign countries. I have included a glossary of the terms I've used at the end of the book for the readers' reference."⁶

Let us follow the trails of one of the characters, Mapuii:

"She wrote down the more important things on paper. Why is it that even at the same altitude, the flowers that bloomed on the mountains of South America never survived in India? She compared the climate, soil, and considered all adaptable factors, the atmosphere, the heat and the cold of the Andes with that of the Himalaya.

She grew frustrated with the unyielding result. She took a deep breath and pushed herself back on the chair. Pondering, she tapped her pen on to the table.

⁵ Pg 27, Sangzuala, *Hun Awmluh Hunah*, my translation

⁶ Foreword, 1st paragraph, *ibid*, my translation

Well, it looks like she will have to ask Dr. Rakiba yet again. That's alright, busy as he may be, he'll surely find time to discuss it with her.

She began to doubt herself, her ability to carry out a scientific analysis of the plant and animal kingdoms. But this was her passion. How did she come to work here, she began reminiscing.

Her elder brothers were home just in time for her convocation. The family was happy, while missing the others who were still abroad. Her brother Zuala wanted her to work with him in Zurich; and her mother egged her on. They discussed the other prospects, but left the final decision to be taken some other day. Little did she know that her father had already taken that decision.

He had already arranged for her to work under her aunt's husband Rohminga at Core Wilde. She was so excited to take up her passion for a profession, though it meant that she and Zonunfawni wouldn't work together anymore. So what, she thought, they were all grown-ups now.

Her father took her to her first day at Core Wilde. She was quickly assigned her project. She would handle paperwork, but her project was far from that. A week later, she left home to be a full member of Core Wilde.

In the initial days she was trained with intense, grueling work. Sometimes she even questioned why she got herself into all of it. But somehow, she would always be one of the best performers.

The Aizawl centre must have found her fit enough to study further, for they sent her off two weeks later. This time, in Switzerland! For a year, even more if need be. The training would be the work itself. She could spend a fortnight with her family before going to Europe. She



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cherished those with her family as they went by; for they were gone much too soon.

She couldn't help the tears as she bade farewell to her family from her seat in the aircraft. She was too preoccupied to notice when the plane touched down and took off again from Kolkatta. All she knew was that they had flown for many, many hours, the naps she took in between provided some relief to the long journey.

It had been some time since they entered Europe, their whereabouts were dutifully announced by the crew now and then. The majestic and pointed peaks of the Alps at the distance looked beautiful.

She gazed with awe as they flew over the 4478 meter-high Matterhorn, the highest peak in Switzerland. She didn't even listen to the passenger next to her chatting away. Well, she was lost in the abyss of these mountains, in the abyss that for her was Mizoram.

The Aizawl centre was nothing compared to this one. Fortunately, she really didn't have time to miss home once their work started. She passed off a whole year without ever getting the name Schweizerische Eidtgenossenschaft right!

Though she was based mainly in Lausanne and Basle, her brother Zuala was in Zurich, and this lessened her loneliness. The hours that transformed her passion into a career flew by without her noticing. And she felt more and more at home in Berne, the capital of Switzeland.

The two official languages, French and Italian didn't bother her much, the problem was Romansch. All she could manage was just a smattering of their national language even after a year-long effort.

She prepared herself for a vacation once their training examinations were over. That vacation included a week-long visit to her brother Zualtea.

The trainees were divided into two groups - one group headed to Norway for the holidays and the other to the island of Ibiza. She prepared herself to go to Norway but somehow found herself among friends headed to Ibiza.

The Norwegian Kroner that she had received now had to be exchanged for the Spanish currency, Peseta. She did that just for the heck of it. It was Europe they were in, and you could just about everything with Euros."⁷

The author does away completely with the idea of pure Mizo dialogues which is impossible in a story describing multi racial characters and pan global activities. In his defence, he writes in the narrative, "*Mizo te hian hmanah chuan Saptawnga thil hming vuah lo tur hian sawi an nghah hle thina; amaherawh chu thanhnan thil, thisena lo inphum tel a ni tawh tlat. He thisen thanhnan, mi-ngo ngaihsan hi kum tam tak liam taa intan daih a ni tawh! Chuvangin, hmun hming leh hming hrim hrim, ram leh chenna thelengin Saptawnga hming nei an tam zawk. Chutiang bawkin chu Buannel Haven pawh chu Aizawl khawpui dawrpui hmun pakhat ve mai ani.*"⁸

(Long time ago, the Mizos would be wary of naming things in English. But the fascination and admiration of the Mizos with the whites had been so deeply ingrained in them for so many years that it manifested in the English names they gave to their own habitat. Buannel Haven is one of such places.)

⁷ Pg 80 - 84, *ibid*, my translation

⁸ Pg 30, *ibid*.

The dramatization, clarity, structure, characters, dialogue, and overall style of the story reads like a screenplay of a thrilling sci-fi motion picture. Take for instance the transmission between the Leviathan and the Hawker⁹:

They reach a different world altogether.

Bip bip Bip

“Arnon calling...Arnon from Leviathan calling...Lama, can you hear me?”

“This is Lama from Hawker, we can hear you loud and clear Arnie...you won't believe it Arnie...we've reached a different world!”

Sangzuala is well aware that he is taking the amateur Mizo reader into a world which requires a giant leap of faith and imagination. He says his his forward that one may choose to skip the parts which one finds overtly impossible and fanciful.

It is worth studying the fanciful world which Sangzuala has created for the readers. From the narrative we know that human civilization has achieved milestones in technology and environmental protection - the pressing issues of the present day world. Yet they still have milestones to cover. The characters live and breathe the world of animals and plants. Humans reign supreme over them and can tame these wild birds and animals. Yet, from the misdeed of Hymet, one can conclude that despite technological advancements, human rationality hasn't fully conquered the passionate feelings of hate and admonition. Hymet doesn't actually confront Lama, but surreptitiously orders the huge snake to his advantage.

⁹ Pg 126, *ibid*. Only the italicized words have been translated from Mizo to English, the rest appear as they are.

Another significant theme is the absence of religion and religious beliefs in their world. The Mizo characters do recall historical figures and literature but when Lama leaves Hymet to die, he says that if ever there is a place for the dead, he hopes to punish him again when he gets there. The only acknowledgment of God in the story comes from the citizens of the sea world civilization. Also, Lama's father is reported to have a reformed life, and the reason is attributed to neither spiritual nor otherwise. In the absence of religion and old social customs which prohibit acts such as pre-marital sex, the author is free to make his characters explore their physical needs. Only in this case, the intercom stops their intimacy in the absence of divine intervention!

"Exactly, that's why we should be happy while we can...like this," said Lama as he put his arms around her. Mapuii hugged him back they kissed passionately. Their mouth and tongue moved in ardent rhythm which aroused a burning desire that both had no intention of holding back,

Mapuii pushed Lama on to the chair and stood in front, her legs on either side of him. Lama held her at the waist and slowly caressed her back beneath her clothes.

She ran her fingers through his hair and nestled his head firmly in her bosom; he ran his hand up her back and down and onto her voluptuous, curvy rear while she was busy unbuttoning her shirt.

And while the buttons came off, he slid his hands underneath her shirt to undo her bra. He took her arm that caressed him and put it on her side, he pulled her shirt off from the sleeve and ripped off the black bra whose straps rested on her bare shoulders, revealing the beautiful body of the woman.

He fondled her firm, perky breasts and suckled her nipple. She moaned in excruciating pleasure of his warm mouth.

The man in front of her stood and held her tight, crushing her breasts against his chest. Their bodies fitted each other so well that she gave out quick, feverous breaths; she couldn't ignore his arousal pressing hard at her. The man slid his hand underneath her pants and fondled her rear. The touch of his hand on her bare skin made her crazy.

They kissed like maniacs, and while she was hurriedly unbuttoning her pants, the intercom beeped. Disappointed, Lama picked it up and listened to the voice on the other side."¹⁰

Besides heterosexual relationship, Sangzuala also describes a scene between Lucy and Mapuii, and uses the word *itawm*,¹¹ for the two ladies. This along with the imagery he uses changes one's interpretation of what would be a normal exchange between friends into the possibility that the male author is writing a subtle homoerotic scene.

"They sat on the sofa leaning against each other. These two friends could easily pass off as sisters.

They looked anything between sixteen to twenty years of age, effervescent and bubbly. While Lucy's father was English, her mother was a Columbian. She took after her mother's beauty and silhouette. Her father's deep blue eyes coloured hers, and though she was quite fair, the tinge on her skin spoke of her Columbian roots. She had befriended Mapuii since her early days here, and with such compatible personalities, the pair made the best of friends.

¹⁰ Pg 169-170, *ibid.*, my translation

¹¹ The word is used for sexual attraction. Here it is translated as 'desirable'

And Mapuii, who sat beside Lucy, what a beauty was she to behold! Her lively disposition, her well-formed contours, her virtuous heart all added up to her beauty, appreciated best by those who knew her well.

She took a lock of Lucy's long hair and tossed it around in the air.

"Your hair's really good, Lucy. I envy you".

Lucy looked up.

"No you don't!" she said, her eyes adding, "I can sense the ridicule". But Mapuii remained somber, and continued stroking her hair.

The silence was too much for Lucy to take. "Oh, c'mon!" she said, pushing her friend completely unaware. Mapuii dropped her glass of juice, and sprang aside to save herself from the spill.

They laughed at their silliness, looked into each other's eyes and giggled again. No two girls could ever be more desirable."¹²

The story is intended to read like a fast-paced science fiction thriller and a good portion of the book explains the numerous scientific terms and activities. Since the author intends the story to be a series, the scope of this book is too narrow to really explore the layers of its characters.

a more detailed critique is highly desirable.

¹² Pg 65 - 66, *ibid.*, my translation

Chapter 2: *Lungrang Laiawrha* by Lalhmningliana Saiawi

2.1 The Story

The story is set in the idyllic Mizo village of Saihlum during the 1st World War. The story starts with a conversation between two old men who belong to two of the eighty households of the village. While they are babysitting their grandchildren, they analyse the current scenario of what is being called the Great War. They're amazed that the invincible Kumpinu¹³ could take so long to win victory. But they were fighting the Zermans¹⁴ after all, they contemplate, who were also whites. Now the Bawrhsap¹⁵ was looking for young men to volunteer to fight on behalf of Kumpinu in Feren¹⁶. Sure enough, the village herald announced soon after dinnertime that the Sawlkhar¹⁷ was looking for brave warriors and young men to fight abroad. The incentive was that they would be exempt from tax and coolie service. The air was rife with talks of the proposition. The families with bachelors were the most anxious. The duty would surely all upon their sons and brothers. Even the older men were worried, only that they didn't show it as much. If only they were in their prime, they said, they would've taught those bullet-wasting Zermans some shooting skills.

The blame fell on the chief, who was accused of trying to win favour of the Bawrhsap by promising at least three volunteers to the C.I.¹⁸ In those days, the burden of being coolies for visiting government officials was enormous. It was so humiliating and tiring to carry their heavy luggage up and down the steep hills all along their journey. There was no dearth of abusive officials as well. The Mizos had no right to protest. All

¹³ Mizo pronunciation of Company, here referring to the East India Company

¹⁴ Germans

¹⁵ From Hindi "Bada Sahib," referring to the Governor

¹⁶ France

¹⁷ From Hindi "Sarkar," meaning Government

¹⁸ Circle Interpreter, a local British official

that the Mizos could muster was swear "Het tekika, sala teriama"¹⁹ back at the officials under their breath. The annual tax levied on them was two rupees, an amount so huge that many families had to toil hard to pay it. There was hardly any way to get employed; the only option was to carry kilos and kilos of rice on their back and travel on foot all the way to Aizawl to sell it.

Though the prospect of fighting in France was daunting, the tax and coolie exemption was so alluring that villagers started to consider the offer. Two young men, Ngenchhuana and Vawmkapa finally volunteered. The chief wished for a third member, but knowing that no one would come forward, he and his ministers decided to choose a man from the God-fearing lot. Just as his father had been afraid of, it was Huliana who was chosen.

The village of Saihum was still pristine. The weather was mild and there were still plenty of animals to hunt because water was abundant for the animals to thrive. Little wonder then, that the people of Saihum village were hale and hearty, and their maidens fair and beautiful.

In those days of the Great War, the village had a maiden, Chhuhathangi (Chhuahi), who was famous for her beauty even beyond the boundaries of their own village. Not only was Chhuahi beautiful, but she was clever as well. She knew better than not to please the hoards of young and older men who came to her house every night to strike a conversation with her. After all, it was with her that they chose to spend their post-dinner leisure time than at other damsel's house, and it was because they revered her for her beauty that they chose to crack only their most polite jokes in front of her.

¹⁹ A Bengali abuse

It so happened that a young man made a transit through Saihum and rested there for the night. He followed the other young men to Chhuahi's house. He fell madly in love with her and couldn't stop talking about her even after the men went back to Zawlbuk⁸ to sleep. The villagers took offence at the arduous and brazen comments that their guest made about Chhuahi. They wrestled and beat him up, and made him promise to leave their village first thing in the morning.

After the jhum clearing season of the year 1917 came to close, the people of Saihum prepared to sow their ash-covered fields. It was also time to bid farewell to the three young lads who would make their way to Aizawl to be sent off to fight in France. These three men were the pride of the village, and Huliana was the star among them. A handsome, courteous young man, he was among the strongest workers and wrestlers among the menfolk. His family was the first in the village to convert to Christianity. He could read and write as well. His family was well-off and he was very popular with the ladies. Lianggovi, a fellow believer, was his mist fanatic admirer. Her relatives would suggest her to Huliana's mother. But all the mother could do was to repeat his son's reluctance to marry yet. That was because he was so hopelessly in love with Chhuahi, that no other woman would do for him.

The early Christians would label the non-believers as simply "wordly". Even the wordly ladies would fall for Huliana. "If only Huliana would marry me", they would joke, "I'd happily convert to Christianity"!

The people of Saihum bade a tearful goodbye to Huliana and his friends. Lianggovi and some of the women relatives thought the worst, and wailed aloud. The men were much more composed. They're men, and it's their duty to fight the enemy, they said. Huliana's father prayed for

them, and the moving tune of the hymn the believers sang was enough for an emotional woman to want to be a Hrisitian^{9!} — *reference?*

When the villagers set out to their fields some days later to till the land, they got the news that some two thousand Mizos had been sent out to fight the German forces. They had been sent off in Aizawl with trumpets and drums. It brought some relief to the people of Saihum to know that the government itself took so much effort to see them off. They found comfort in their strength, some even to the extent of doubting the Germans' chances against their two thousand Mizo warriors. The young men who didn't go were left with the feeling that they lost out in the eyes of the ladies and regretted sitting back.

One night, one of Chhuahi's visitors noticed something different about her. He was a married man and his experienced eye caught the silhouette of Chhuahi by the fire as she moved the pot in which she cooked the next day's animal feed. Chhuahi had grown a little plump! Chhuahi, the pure, beautiful damsel of Saihum village, whose beauty elevated her to almost the status of a goddess was pregnant! Who could her man be? The menfolk put together their thoughts and ruled out Huliana. There just wasn't anytime or place for either Huliana or any other man to spend time alone with the homebound Chhuahi. The only time anyone would've had her was when she went on a trip to Aizawl.

The young men were furious. If only they hadn't worshipped her so. If only they had known she would want to lay with a man, they would've tried their chances on her, and some even swore they would've succeeded.

Chhuahi's family was the last to know. Her father fumed on hearing about her pregnancy. His youngest child, his only daughter, his beloved Chhuahi, whose beauty he was sure could fetch the hand of a government

official, was pregnant with the child of a man he had no idea about. Gone were his dreams of visiting Aizawl and staying at his son-in-law's official quarters.

It was indeed during the Aizawl trip that Chhuahi had found love. Incidentally, the house in which she lodged also had three bachelors from another village spending the night. One of them was Darkhuma, the guest who had fallen for Chhuahi and had been beaten up by the villagers. Chhuahi couldn't forget the incident and apologized to him on behalf of her men folk. They fell in love and expressed their passion for each other surreptitiously in the silence of the night.

That one brief moment of affection was to herald a lifetime of contempt in Chhuahi's life. Humiliated, her father disowned her and so did her brothers. They sent out emissaries to Darkhuma's village Sekawt. Chhuahi's father was determined to make Darkhuma pay for the customary child support, or better still, coax him to marry the mother of his child, and do away completely with Chhuahi. The emissaries reached Sekawt and asked around for Darkhuma, only to learn that he had died fending off a tiger only a month ago. To the villagers, Darkhuma was quite the gentleman, eager to help anyone in need. That he was a ladies' man was perhaps the only fault others could base their gossip upon. The emissaries found out that he belonged to the Lungrang tribe, a much lesser known tribe, and with this information, they went home.

The time came for Chhuahi to give birth to her baby. A boy was born with his chord wrapped around his neck, and so they called him Laiawrha. His father being from Lungrang tribe, he was hence called Lungrang Laiawrha. Chhuahi's father and brothers continued being merciless towards the new mother and the baby. There was no question of

throwing such a young infant and his mother out of the house, so it remained just a matter of time before Chhuahi and Laiawrha would be left to fend for themselves. But Chhuahi's mother would have none of it. She loved Chhuahi too much to castigate her on the one mistake she made in her entire life. She was determined to protect the dignity of her daughter and her grandson even from the rebuke of her husband whom she honoured so much.

Laiawrha was a weak child. His mother did not have enough milk for him to thrive. He struggled to reach the milestones that the other babies in the house easily achieved. With his mother toiling away in the fields during the day, the baby was left at the mercy and care of his grandparents who favoured his cousins over him. Chhuahi could sense the discord she created in the family, but wished at least her mother would cast a loving glance at her child. ✓

Time flew by and Chhuahi was gradually drawn to the ways of the believers, although she couldn't understand entirely some of the customs which were followed. The men who had been to France had come back safe. Since Chhuahi was now with child, he agreed to marry Liangovi. The Pastor would solemnize the marriage upon visiting Saihum. However, Huliana's stint with French prostitutes came up and he was subsequently excommunicated. They would no longer be able to get married in Church. Huliana decided to elope with Liangovi, much to the relief of Liangovi's parents. Believers from different villages were divided on the degree of celebration of marriage outside church. Unfortunately, Saihum's God-fearing people decided to ignore the marriage of their most celebrated bachelor. Eventually, Chhuahi and her son Laiawrha converted and were baptized by the visiting minister.

Laiawrha grew up to be an endearing boy. His bravery and luck often drew the attention of the villagers. There came a time when the Welsh missionaries set up a school in their village. Laiawrha was brilliant student. He even passed the Lower Primary exam and received scholarship to study further. But he discontinued his studies because of his unfavorable position.

In his growing years, there was a girl called Sakawlhi¹⁰ who used to bully other children. It was unusual for a girl to be so mean. Not only girls, but even boys would avoid her. One time, Sakawlhi beat up Laiawrha's cousin sister. Laiawrha decided to avenge his sister. This brave act proved to the community that even though Laiawrha was the child of a single mother, he took after his brave father who had died protecting his village from a wild animal. He had proved himself to the community at a young age and the community now had faith in him and looked upon him as someone who would become an invaluable member.

Laiawrha dutifully participated in the activities of the church. He didn't hold any feeling of animosity towards Sakhawlhi. He felt sorry for her because she was such an outcast and even invited her to practice songs with the choir. He defended her when someone made fun of her butch ways and the two grew closer each day. During this time, he was interested in a beautiful girl named Laleni. Laleni was a favourite among the young men. She was good to everyone, friendly and approachable. This made her a victim of gossip mongers who spread word that she was no longer a virgin. Laiawrha believed this rumour and somewhat affected his opinion of Laleni. Nevertheless he was still interested in marrying her. He sent out his relatives as the customary representatives to ask for her hand in marriage. Although Laleni wanted to marry Laiawrha as much, her family made excuses to deny their offer. Laiawrha wanted to

take a second chance at proposing to Laleni's family, but before the emissaries could be sent out, he slept with his friend Sakawlihi. It was a totally unintended deed which put him a great moral dilemma. He found out that Sakawlihi had deep feelings for him and felt sorry for the mess he had drawn her into. Now he had to own up in front of his church and marry her instead of Laleni. He was troubled about not being eligible to marry in the church anymore. He knew a lot of couples who had hidden their pre-marital affairs and married without being disciplined by the church. His conscience pricked him, and the more he ignored it, the bleaker became the line that divided the good and the bad.

Laiawrha finally decided to marry Sakawlihi and sent out his relatives to talk to the girl's family. In the meantime, Laleni, who thought things were still good between her and Laiawrha, began to wonder why he didn't insist on the marriage. They two of them met and made love. It was then that Laiawrha knew that Laleni had been a virgin all along and that she truly loved him. But things had gone too far and Laiawrha went ahead with the preparation to marry Sakawlihi. His mind knew no peace fearing Laleni would object to the marriage anytime. But Laleni held her peace and the story ends with Sakawlihi joyfully entering her new home.

2.2 Critical Analysis

Lalhmingliana Saiawi tells the story a Mizo village and captures the sentiments of the people at a very crucial stage in the history of Mizoram. What the author lacks in narrative skills and consistency of plot, he makes up with a detailed insight into the relationship of the villagers of Saihum village who find themselves in the midst of a gradual political and cultural change. The Lushai Hills had been annexed by the British in 1891.

The story is set in the year 1917, when the British were engaged in First World War. The first part of the book takes a look into the political weakness of the Mizos. Before the British expedition, in the traditional system of village administration, the village head, the chief who was called Lal allocated lands for settlement and cultivation. He was assisted by a council of elders, and it was his power and duty to administer the village, settle disputes and see to the welfare of even the poorest member of the village.

Here in the story, Saiawia captures the upheaval of an established hierarchy which has been replaced recently by a new set up. The Chief and his council of elders are now only the nominal heads of the village. Mizos could join the British administration by becoming circle interpreters and other officials to facilitate smooth relationship between the Chief and the officers-in-charge of the circle. This created a new social order where those employed by the British had a superior status over the common villagers, even the Chief himself. Saiawia brings this up when he describes the humiliation of the Mizo coolies who were abused by government officials:

Mizo kha an la tlawm ngaiwh ngawih mai an ni a. Chutianga tihnawmnahte chu an sepui ruah tuar tlawk tawk mai an ni. An tihduhdahte hriat phak lovah erawh chuan an han inseh ru ngam ve bawk a, "Het terika, sala teriama" tiin an han inhro sa ve bawk thin. Vaiin an han ti duhdah kha chu a zia tak a awm a, an Mizo pui hman lawka lal chhiahhlawh ni mai mai thinten an han tiduhdah-ve leh zel kha chu na an ti zual.²⁰

(The plight of the Mizos was pitiable in those days. All they could do was silently suffer the pain and abuse they received. They did swear back

²⁰ Pg 6, Saiawia, Lalhmingliana. *Lungrang Laiawrha*, my translation

"Het terika, sala teriama" to them once they were out of earshot. It was one thing being exploited by the non-Mizos, but the pain of being subservient to those Mizos who, not long ago were servants of their Chief, was totally unbearable.)

The powerlessness of the Chief is evident. The villagers no longer respect him and his decisions and in fact condemn him for making them choose between volunteering to fight for the war and being exempt from tax and coolie service. Saiawia writes:

An lal an dem hle mai. Bawrhsap laka tlaktlum tum em emah an ngai a, "Kan lal hian 'eng ti kawng mahin Bawrhsap lakah min chhan loving. 'Kan khaw tlangval 3 tal ka 37haw hang' tiin hman ni C.I. lo kal pawh kha a lo hrilh awm a nia," tihte thlengin an rel hlawm.

(They admonished their Chief. They accused him of trying to win favour of the Governor. "In no way will our Chief redeem us from the Governor. 'I promise to send at least three young men', he must have promised to the C.I. who came by the other day", they criticized him.)²¹

Saiawia throws light on the deplorable condition of the Mizo labourers. He says:

Chung lai chuan kuli kha Mizo phurrit a ni. Sawrkar mi han zin veivak reng reng kha an thuam phurhsak an ngai a, inthlahrunna nei reng reng lo emaw tih mai turin puanthuah leh thuamhnaw eng eng emaw kha rit tham fe an zin chhuahpui deuh zel a, pahovin chung an han phur taih taih mai chu a hahthlak bakah a tlawmthlak em em mai.

(In those times, being a coolie was an immense burden to the Mizos. They had to carry the belongings of every government official who was

²¹ Pg 5, ibid, my translation

travelling, and it seemed as if those officials packed their bedding, clothes and other possessions without ever thinking of the weight that it would amount to. The heaviness of their luggage only added to the humiliation of the Mizo men who carried them up and down the steep hills.)²²

The new system of taxation under the British rule was equally inconvenient. In the agrarian set up of the people of Mizoram, each household would pay revenue/tax to the Chief in kind. As part of the political appeasement agreed upon the Lushai chiefs and the British, the Chiefs would supply coolies whenever needed and the villagers would pay an annual monetary tax of two rupees. Currency was rare and trading one's goods and produce with currency was a challenge. Sawiawia writes:

Leiman kha kum tin cheng 2 a ni a, chhungkaw tam tak tan chu chu tuak fe a ngai. Han inhlawhfakna turte kha a awm ve mang si lova, tukkhum tawnga buhfai phura Aizawla zu hralh emawte kha a ngai thin. Chhungkaw baihvai zual, hmeithai emawte kha chuan leiman awl an dil thin a, a then chu an awl hial reng.

(The annual tax levied was two rupees, and many families had to toil hard to pay it off. There was no means of getting an employment, sometimes all they could do was to carry loads of rice on their back all the way to Aizawl to sell it. The more impoverished families would for exemption, some of them were even granted.)²³

When such was the misery of the villagers, the offer to join the British force and be exempt from tax and labour should've been a golden opportunity. However, the villagers were equally intimidated by the

²² Pg 5, *ibid*, my translation

²³ Pg 6, *ibid*, my translation

prospect of fighting in France. From the opening conversation of the two old men, Saiawia portrays the villagers' disbelief and perhaps suspicion of the power of the British, rulers of "the empire on which the sun never sets." However, the author also shows how deeply ingrained the myth that the whites are the most supreme race in the world is in the minds of the colonies through the two men. The men in conversation also concur that the Germans were equally good because they are also white. It is perhaps because of this reason, the belief of the white supremacy that the famed heroic Mizo warriors are shown to be reluctant to volunteer to fight in the story. The fact that Saiawia chooses to make his characters, especially the men, scared and apprehensive speaks volumes of his understanding of the human mind. A century since the British acquisition of the Lushai Hills, what we have today in our history books is perhaps only the reputation of the Mizo warriors as fierce, brave and gallant. Saiawia goes deeper and brings out the fallible side to these men:

Paho pawhin an hlau lo bik ani lem lo. Mahse anni zawngin an sawi nasa lo deuh mai ani. Anniho zingah hi chuan han insawi pawhraw tawh hi an awm: "Zerman sipaiho chu kan vanglai han ni se Mizo pasaltha tam tawkin awlan ngul sei reng rawng pua han bitum chin ka chak mang e aw. Anni angin silai kan hmet puak thlawn ve mai mai lo vang a, kan silai a rik tawh chuan an sipai pakhat tal an tlu ziah mai dawn a ni a," pa thenkhat chuan an ti. Chutia han tawng pawr ho chu putar, an vanglaia Sakte leh Hmar lo bitum tawhte an ni ber. An vanglaia an han chet that thinzia an sawi chak hle thin a ni.

(It wasn't that the men were not scared, just that they didn't say so. There would always be a few who would make audacious claims: "If only we were in our prime! How I'd love to see our warriors fight the Zermans with our Holland shotguns! We don't waste our bullets like them. One of their soldiers will surely fall with our every shot", some would say. They

were mostly nostalgic old men, who raided the neighbouring Sukte and Hmar tribes back in the days.)²⁴

The ignorance, vulnerability and subservience of the villagers is further revealed when they hear of the send-off given to their three men in Aizawl. The fact that these people find comfort in the number of Mizos who were sent shows how uncertain they were of their own strength.

Chuti taka sawrkarin a chawimawi a, rual tham fe maia an han liam tak thu an hriat chuan Saihum ho ngaih pawh a tha leh ta deuh a, thenkhat phei chuan, "Mizo pasaltha chute zat zatte chu Zerman sipai pawhin engtinngae an han ngam theih ang?" an ti hlawm a.

(They were relieved to know that the government had sent such a large number of men with such great fanfare. Some even wondered, "How can the German soldiers ever have a chance against so many of our brave warriors?")²⁵

In *Lungrang Laiawrha*, Lalhmingliana Saiawi probes the impact of the advent of a new religion into the lives of the people of Saihum village. Before the advent of Christianity, the Mizos of the olden days recognized one Supreme Being called Pathian, though most of their religious rites and offerings were directed towards evil spirits or Ramhuai who were believed to dwell in streams, hills, trees or anything out of the ordinary. In the story, Saiawia expresses the appeal the newly embraced religion of some twenty-odd members has on the non-believers. In the scene where Huliaana and his friends Ngengchhuna and Vawmkapa are sent off, the God-fearing lot, of whom Huliaana is a part, pray for the three of them and sing the Christian hymn "Khawvel hi bo mahse, Isua ka nei", which is a

²⁴ Pg 4, *ibid*, my translation

²⁵ Pg 20, *ibid*, my translation

translation of the popular hymn "Fade fade, each earthly joy, Jesus is mine" composed by Mrs. J.C. Bonar and which features in Sankey's Sacred Songs and Solos. The people are tearful; scared that it may be the last they'll see of the three lads. The consolatory song befits the situation in which they are.

1. *Fade, fade, each earthly joy,*

Jesus is mine!

Break every tender tie,

Jesus is mine!

Dark is the wilderness,

Earth has no resting place,

Jesus alone can bless,

Jesus is mine!

2. *Tempt not my soul away,*

Jesus is mine!

Here would I ever stay,

Jesus is mine!

Perishing things of clay,

born but for one brief day,

Pass from my heart away,

Jesus is mine!

3. *Farewell, ye dreams of night,*

Jesus is mine!

Lost in this dawning bright,

Jesus is mine!

All that my soul has tried

left but a dismal void;

Jesus has satisfied, Jesus is mine!

4. Farewell, mortality, Jesus is mine!

Welcome, eternity, Jesus is mine!

Welcome, oh, loved and blest,

welcome sweet scenes of rest,

Welcome, my Savior's breast,

Jesus is mine!

Saiawia writes:

Ngengchhuna nu phei chu a insum zo lova, rawl chhuah meuhin a tap a, a pasal chuan, "Em em a. Mipa a ni a, a tul takah chuan ral chu a do tur alawm. Damin a lo haw leh ngei ang chu. A Pathian a tha ang a, engmah em a zu ti loving chu," tiin a hnem a. "Hrisitianah²⁶ hian I inpe ve mai the ang. An Pathian hi a tha a ni. Hei an hlate pawh a that em hi," tiin Ngengchhuna nu chuan a chhang.

(Ngenchhuna's mother couldn't contain herself and wailed out loud. "Enough already! He is a man, and now that the need has come, it is his duty to fight against enemies. Let's hope his god is good to him, and that nothing will happen to him", consoled her husband. "I want us to be

²⁶ Mizo pronunciation of Christian

Hristians too. Their God is good. See how good their songs are!" she replied.)²⁷

Beneath the humourous exchange between Ngengchhuna's parents, one can sense the captivating appeal that Christian prayers and hymns have on them, especially at a time when they have no guarantee that their son will return safe. For the emotional mother, her husband's words aren't consoling enough. Ngengchhuna's family indeed convert in the middle of the book, when he returns home from France. The other man, Vawmkapa converts while he was in Europe itself.

The dilemma over converting into Christianity formed only half the deal for the villagers. The bigger challenge was to conform oneself to a new lifestyle dictated by the tenets of Christianity. One of the topics Saiawia focuses in his novel is that of alcohol consumption - a controversial subject in Mizo society even today. Traditionally, rice being the staple of the Mizos, local rice beer or zu as it is called in Mizo, used to be brewed and consumed freely in Mizo society in the olden days. Of course, the wealthier families would have surplus rice to brew into zu than poorer ones who would have just enough to eat and to stock for a rainy day. In describing the scenic life of Saihum village, Saiawia writes:

Saihum paho thenkhat hian zu hmuna zai leh lam an la ching hle a. Tlangval hi chuan khawtlang thliah leh thian zaho rual deuh tham lo chuan a hranpain zu an in mang lo. Pa hausa deuh thenkhat erawh chuan tu in berah emaw zu an han pu khawm a, an han rui a, khuang sei zet zut bengin an han zai a, an lam bawk thin. Nuthlawi upa leh pitar han tel ve zauh thin pawh an awm.

Zu hmun chu chutiang paho intihhlim vena ber a ni a. A tawh an hre viau a, mahse han tihsual deuh xhang hi chu an nei. Khawlaia rawn rui chhuaka rawn

²⁷ Pg 19, *ibid*, my translation

au ta lauh lauh pawh hi khat tak chuan an awm. An ruih sual chang chuan zu hmunah chuan an inhau a, insual pawh an insual hial thei. Chu chu thil vang lutuk sawi ve tura awm ting si a ni. Mizo zingah hian puitliang em han insual hi chu thil mak a tling.

Chutiang chuan Mizo khawtlang nun kha a mawi em em a, Nuam tak mai a ni. Zu in pawh kha thil buaipui awm tham a ni ngai lo. Mahse Kohhranin a hank hap a, Pathian thuawih tlem te mit hmuhah chuan zu chu sual a ni a, Kohhran miin a in a, hriat chhuah a nih vaih chuan dan chhung a tanga inhnawhchhuah nghal ani thin. Mizo rilruah zu kha thil tha lo hulhuala ngaihna a lo intuh tan ta.

(The menfolk were still fond of singing and dancing at their drinking place. The bachelors would drink only on social events as a group. The wealthier men would carry their beer pots to house, get drunk, and make merry with drums and dance. Sometimes, the elder women and unattached women would join them.

Drinking used to be the pastime of the men. Though they were responsible drinkers, there were few times when they drank a little too much. They would come out to the street shouting. Sometimes they even got into fights. Though these things happened, they were very rare. A Mizo adult getting into a fight was almost freakish.

Such was the refined and pleasant life of the Mizos. Drinking was never an issue. However, the Church was intolerant towards it. It was a brazen sin in the eyes of the few God-fearing people. If a believer drank and was found out, he would be excommunicated from the church. Slowly, the seeds of aversion towards alcohol began to be sown in the Mizos.)²⁸

A couple of pages later, the author describes Chhuahi's family:

²⁸ Pg 11-12, *ibid*, my translation

Chhuhthangi te chhung hi Pathian thu awihlo an ni a. Buh ngah thei, sial leh siali pawh nei, mi hausa chhungkua an ni bawk a, a pa Suakbanga hi induh ve thei deuh a ni. Zu hmun nuam ti pawl tak ani a, a rawn rui haw fo mai a, mahse chhungkaw ti mangang zawngin a khawsa ngai lo.

(Chhuhthangi's family was non-believers. They were well off and had plenty of grain, mithuns and even guns. Her father Suakbanga was a conceited man. He loved to drink and would often come home drunk. However he never created any inconvenience to his family.)

From the way Saiawia chooses to describe alcohol in Mizos' life, it clearly shows his stance on the issue of alcohol consumption in the society. What is striking is that he doesn't make the non-Christian Suakbanga an annoyance and anti-social even under the influence of the stimulant. At the same time, the author does not laud the practice, but only mentions its use for merry-making at a time when there was little scope for entertainment elsewhere in the society. He writes about the use and abuse of alcohol and the way in which one view began to dominate the other in Mizo society.

Another aspect of the lifestyle change that the converts had to deal with was to conform to a more rigid view of matrimony. Sex outside marriage was a sin. The consequence of it was excommunication. Although the traditional Mizo custom regarding premarital sex was also honourable, with the man having to pay the customary child support or marry the woman in case she got pregnant, the new religious order carried with it a kind of social stigma, that of being an outcast. In the story, Ngengchhuna and his family convert and await the visit of the Pastor to their village to baptize them. In the meantime, he realizes that his stint with the French prostitutes would cost him his membership with the Church, and Saiawia creates a comic moment where Ngengchhuna is

puzzled about which of the two - the baptism or the excommunication- he would go through first. Also, we have seen from the story how the villagers were divided about celebrating the marriage of Huliana with Lainngovi which was not endorsed by the church.

However, the refuge the new religion offered to the social outcast is perhaps the most crucial aspect of the story. It is most evident in the story of Chhuahi and her son Laiawrha. When Chhuahi is hailed as the immaculate damsel of the village, it is almost as if the men think of her as their own. They guard her virginity and are very possessive. They cannot bear to share her with Darkhuma, an outsider, and when they find out that it was him who has insulted them again by getting their lady pregnant, they completely change their attitude towards Chhuahi. She is now belittled with as much passion as she was revered. Her father and elder brothers disown her, and there is no mention of their reconciliation till the end. ✓

The child of a single mother is considered imperfect, wanting in Mizo society. In a patriarchal set up, the child who grows up without a father figure is stereotyped as being inferior, having been brought up by the hysterical, inferior parent. Laiawrha does not have a father figure throughout the story since his uncles and grandfather have disowned him and his mother. The only benefactor he has is his adopted uncle and his wife. This man was the one who stopped the young men at the Zawlbuk from fatally harming Laiawrha's father. Laiawrha, thus, has a lot to prove to the society to earn dignity back for him and the fallen woman, his mother. This is where his bravery matters. Even at a very young age, Laiawrha meets life-threatening challenge of other bullies and avenges his cousin for harassment. He does well in school as well. He quickly grabs the attention of the villagers, who have not forgotten how his father had

died. To show traits of his heroic father by acts of bravery was to promise himself to society that he had in him what it took to care for the village despite being raised by his mother alone.

Finally, it is in the Church that Laiawrha finds solace. He grows up to be an endearing boy who gives himself to the service of the Church in all his capabilities. He invites Sakawkhi, a misunderstood, awkward girl to join the choir. The Church seems to polish even the crudest of personalities as Sakawlhi becomes aware of her tomboyish demeanor and looks, and starts buying clips for her hair. A change in her outward appearance is indicative of the change she experiences inside as the infamous bully becomes capable of love. Saiawia carefully balances the old and new customs by making each one the place for retribution as well as the place of refuge for the other.

Lungrang Laiawrha is also significant for its portrayal of the simple, rustic life. The narrator is obviously addressing a contemporary audience as he painstakingly describes the reason behind even the most mundane yet integral part of village life. In his afterword, Saiawia says that Mizos at the time when he was writing this story had greatly advanced in storytelling compared to how the folk tales used to be narrated. An elderly Mizo man would beat around the bush, he says, make small talk as we went on giving details about the minor things in the story. Saiawia pretty much does that. He has so much to say about the context in which the story is set that it almost seems as if the context overwhelms the story itself. Take for instance when the author apologizes for breaking the narrative to talk about some minor characters:

Thil dang dang han sawi kai tul a awm leh tlat thin avangin kan thawnthu hming tumtu ber Laiawrha chanchin pawh hi kan sawi zawm lo leh rih thin a. Han sawi leh tawh ila.

(Because the need arises to talk about other things, we often sideline the story of the titular character Laiawrha. Now let's continue.)²⁹

This apologetic explanation is perhaps due to the fact that Saiawia is trying to fashion his novel and narrativisation on the English novels. Though his work aims at realism, it may not be consistent in its plot, time and space compared to his European counterparts. Despite that, what one gets is the quintessential Mizo storyteller who, with a tinge of nostalgia pours his heart out into the story. It is through this old style of storytelling that we learn the uncomplicated ways of the village. For example, if we go back to the two old men with whom the story started, after their conversation about the war, one of them realizes his grandchild has defecated. He shouts out to a dog, "Chiu hiah!". The hungry dog quickly makes its way to the baby and licks off the runny stool of the baby's buttock and leaves off after a few laps. Saiawia comments;

Naute kawthalo ek zawng uipui riltam meuh pawhin tui a ti vak lo a ni.

(Even a hungry dog detested the diarrhea-ridden loose stools.)³⁰

The story is abundant with insights like these and the humourous way in which Saiawia depicts them lends a kind of psychological depth to the characters which makes them seem to have a life independent of the text.

- a more coherent critique is desirable.

²⁹ Pg 126, *ibid*, my translation

³⁰ Pg 2, *ibid*, my translation

Chapter 3: *Pasalthate Ni Hnuhnung* by C. Lalnunchanga

3.1 The Story

The story is set in the year 1884. It is divided into two parts where the first part tells the story of the life of Mizos before the British Expedition. The story begins with a land dispute between two neighbouring Chiefs. The warring sides are Puilura, the Chief of Khiangzo territory and Sangburha, the Chief of a village south of Tuirial river called Tumhnawk. Sangburha sends his representatives to Puilura's village to warn them to keep off their lands. Four days later, three men who belonged to Puilura's village were shot dead by Sangburha's men on their way home from the fields. After the village mourned its dead, the villagers come out to the common ground and are addressed by their Chief. Puilura tells them that the time has come for them to defend their territory and since their enemies were so ruthless as to kill innocent men of their village, they should brace themselves for a bloody war with them, if need be. Some of the enraged warriors wanted to raid Sangburha's village immediately. But Puilura tells them that it is not revenge that they seek, but the right to hold on to their territory.

While the village was tense with an imminent war, the village of Khiangzo faced another kind of threat. They were being haunted by a tiger. The Mizos in the olden days lived under the constant threat of being attacked by wild animals. Perhaps this song describes best their sentiment:

Bo se bo se,

Bo se tih takah chuan;

*Sakei bo se, ral bo se, hri nen pathum.*³¹

(Be gone, be gone,

If indeed you will be gone,

Beast, enemy, disease all three be gone)³²

The author gives a detailed account of how the villagers got rid of the tiger.

“Early next morning, Puilura called upon Rohmingliana and Zakapa to follow the animal’s trail and plunder of the previous night. Just south of the spring, a stone’s throw away from it, they found the carcass of the pig, half of whose belly had been devoured upon. Rohmingliana said, “It couldn’t have wandered off far after such a huge meal”.

Zakapa added, “Here’s where it rubbed its paws; the print of its hind legs is big, it surely must be a male.” Unless threatened by humans, a tiger rests at only a short distance from its prey, in order to go back to devour it again when it was hungry.

Puilura commanded the village herald to alert the villagers. After breakfast, the people of Khiangzo came out to hunt the tiger down. The warriors, armed with guns, headed down the rugged plains surrounding the spring to wait for the tiger’s appearance and arranged themselves along the path it would come out. They spread themselves over a large area so as not to miss the tiger.

The people started banging their drums and gongs, and any other object that could amplify their fearless state and also to provoke the

³¹ Pg 39, Lalnunchanga, C. *Pasaltha te Ni Hnuhmung*

³² My translation

mighty tiger. The space where the tiger had feasted on its prey was quite confined, posing a great threat to the warriors who encircled it. With guns in their hands, the warriors led the rest of the villagers, even women and children. They translated their fury into a kind of zealotry as they organized themselves and howled so loud, it could pierce the skies open.

The warriors who circled in on the tiger shot their guns into the sky, the sound frightening even for the mighty beast. Rochera positioned himself near the trap they laid out. After sometime, the enormous tiger crawled out adjacent to where Rochera was waiting for it. Rochera was taken aback. "How big it is!" he marveled at its size. He shot at the tiger. The furious beast howled and jumped in pain. It attacked Rochera and gnawed at his shoulder. Hautuka rushed to the scene. He had a reputation of being a fainthearted person, cowardly backing out during raids. But this time, he went straight to the tiger and pressed his gun against it and fired his gun. The tiger howled aloud and let go of Rochera and fled. The others continued shooting at it and the mighty beast finally fell. Rochera was indeed lucky. Had the tiger jerked him around, his wound would surely have been deeper. 'Hautuka was by my side, and so I been given some more time in this world,' he used to say.³³

The heroic deed of Hautuka becomes very important to the plot of the story. The warring villages meet to discuss the dispute. Both sides agree that neither party was going to back down and so decide on war. They finalize on letting their warriors fight each other, and the last man standing would win the right for his people to acquire the disputed land.

The rules which the selected warriors would observe were:

1. All weapons except guns and catapult could be used,

³³ Pg 40 - 42, *ibid*, my translation

2. Anyone falling off the bridge, regardless of whether he was hurt or not, would result in his elimination,
3. Ten warriors would fight, and the least number of warriors standing in the end would lose
4. If he so wishes, a warrior may take on as many opponent as he wants
5. No one will behead the fallen enemy
6. The winners will hold the right to Zawlsang territory.

The two Chiefs agree on this treaty in the presence of their peers.

Back in the village a meeting is held by the Chief and his advisors to decide on the warriors who would go out to fight Sangburha's men. Amongst the warriors selected was Hautuka. Rochera knew that Hautuka, brave as he may be, held an aversion to killing fellow humans. He advised him to back while he still had time, reminding him that there was nothing embarrassing about it. The service was voluntary and not a compulsion. Hautuka knew that Rochera had the best intention at heart. But his pride pricked him and he couldn't bear the humiliation he would face if he backed out. He tells Rochera that he will fight, and asks for his shield to practice with.

As soon as he reaches home, Hautuka examines the shield, and he can tell that it is very strong. Carefully, he carves a circle from the inside with a knife. He uses sap and soot to cover up the mark. He thus tampers the bullet-proof shield of Rochera so that he could die in the duel. He had to die, since he is the only one to know of Hautuka's cowardice. Although his conscience pricks him, he just couldn't let go of his pride.

The day of the duel arrives and the author writes an engaging description of the two-day long duel in which Puilura's side win a hard-

won victory. In the challenge, Puilura loses his prized warriors, including Rochera, whose tampered shield costs him his life.

In the second part of the book, the people of Khiangzo have settled peacefully in the land that their warriors had won. The year is 1890 when the British Political Officer Capt. H.R. Browne starts levying tax and labour from each family of the descendants of Manga who inhabited south of the Lushai Hills. Puilura was often asked by his fellow Chiefs to join forces against the Government who were slowly acquiring land political power from the Chiefs. Puilura was a peace-loving man. To him, his fellow Sailo Chiefs were engaged in war with the British simply because they had asked for it. He thought that if he didn't interfere with them, they would bother to retaliate.

But Puilura had totally underestimated the British political ambition. The British knew that the Lushais knew the land better, and though their army outnumbered them and had better arms and ammunition, they could still lose if the Lushais joined forces. They finally approach Puilura with the same proposition. But Puilura is a Sailo Chief, and to him only the sun and the moon soar above him. He tells them that the land is his, and no one except him has the right to make laws in his land, and in no condition will the Chief pay tax to an outsider. The British arrest him but he remains adamant. Meanwhile, his son Saingura, a young, brave and able leader takes his father's position while he is held captive. The British Army led by Lt. Platt raid Puilura's territory. However, Platt is captured by the Mizos and Saingura takes him to his superiors to exchange him with his father. Little does he know that his father had died in their custody. The British officers lie to them and somehow acquire Platt. When Puilura's men find out, they are enraged. They take his body back home. The story ends with the confession of the

British officer Platt who has a new found respect for a tribe he considered beneath him. He acknowledges their honourable customs, and says that the best way to win over the peace loving people is not to interfere in their lives. The book finally ends with the Puilura's wife accepting the change that surrounds her and pays tribute to the brave men who fought to defend their land and their integrity.

3.2 The Analysis

In his foreword, the author C. Lalnunchanga writes:

"When the British and people from other places come to Mizoram, we often show them the lives of our forefathers through skits and dramas. We love to share the story of how we became Christians from the unfortunate incident of the murder of Mr. Winchester. On television and other media, we portray a Mizo man as a hunchback, stammering rustic.

✓ We've made our ancestors look so backward, having no social system or customs, living in jungles, only a little better off than apes. But the way we represent ourselves is so crucial to the younger generation as well as to how outsiders conceive us. Our forefathers may have lived a simple life, but I want the younger generation to know that they were by no means uncivilized and cowardly, and that's why I've put it in writing. I've studied and researched the topic to the best of my ability. "³⁴

"The world respects the brave, no matter what race they belong to. The English set out a number of times to invade Mizoram. The burning down of Sentlang, the invasion of the south, the first and second Lushai Expeditions were all done by the British only with the help of a massive army and canyons. This alone testifies how the British found it intimidating to occupy Mizoram.

³⁴ 1st paragraph, *ibid*, my translation

The Mizos fought with all they had to defend themselves when preyed upon the enemy - both man and beast. All warriors and younger men took it upon themselves the responsibility to defend their village. Jim Corbett writes in his book how a small rural Indian village was so traumatized by a tiger that all of the villagers fled away. In our case, if a tiger were ever to attack a pig, the Mizo men would loathe themselves if they weren't able to save the pig."³⁵

"I often feel that the younger generation lags behind our forefathers in thought and inquisitiveness. That they knew precisely the longest day of the year, could predict the amount of rainfall, divided the year into twelve months and invented ammunition for themselves says so much about their scientific knowledge. They had a well-worked out religion too. They were also already into trading. Their systematic social structure deserves praise above all. It was indeed so thoughtful of them to have assigned special responsibilities to all members - young and old, and children too."³⁶

Knowing his passion for our Mizo culture, in an interview I remind of the belief that no historical event can exist independently of and can be detached from, the subjectivities of scholars. One such instance is that of alcohol in Mizo culture. This is especially relevant in the light of liquor ban imposed on the state. Though the reason of inception of MLTP Act was clearly religious and meant for social order, critics cry foul and say that our history was tweaked and we were made to believe that Mizos have always been irresponsible drinkers when in fact alcohol has always been part of our everyday life and festivities in the olden days. In this book, Lalnunchanga has mentioned the chief and his elders drinking and

³⁵ 3rd and 4th paragraphs, *ibid*, my translation

³⁶ Page 8, last paragraph, *ibid*, my translation

*A post colonial
Theoretical
critique
could be
denoted here*

has never implied anything negative to it. What exactly do you think of the liquor ban in the state? What were his thoughts on the liquor ban in the state I ask? Similar to the question of alcohol, today we Mizos face the issues of homosexuality, class consciousness, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, etc. and often resort to the past in order to frame our present. A novelist will have before him the choice to either venerate or condemn our previous ways of life. What does he think his role is, in shaping the consciousness of the people, through his novels?

Lalnunchanga says, *"Thil eng pawh a thlirtu emaw, a thlirna hmun azirin emaw hmuh dân leh ngaihdân a inang lo va. Pator Nikhama chuan hman lai Mizo nun chu bawhlawh tak, zuin khawtlang nun a tihbuai em em, hurna leh uirena pawh hluar hle angin a ziak a. Heti lam hawi tho hian Rev. Liangkhaia thlir dân pawh a ni a. B. Lalthangliana leh K. Zawla te erawh chuan hmanlai Mizo nun chu thianghlim tak niin an sawi thung a. K. Zawla phei chuan Mizo chu zu in thiam tak hnam niin a sawi a. Rev. Zairema thlirna atang pawhin Mizo khawtlang nun leh inawpna chu a tha a ni."*

"Tuna Mizorama zu kan han khap ringawt hi chu a nuihzatthlak viauin ka hria. Prohibition kan siam a nih chuan alcohol pai thil reng reng chu kan phalrai tur a ni lo va, mahse Zawlaidi kan han zuar mauh mai a. "Zawlaidi hi zu a ni lo." Kan tawngvai mai mai a ni. Zawlaidi hi zu a nih lohvin zu chu eng nge? Khap burna kan kalpui zel dawn a nih chuan Zawlaidi hi zawrh theih a ni lo va, Zawlaidi kan zuar duh a nih chuan khapna hi kan hlip ngam tur a ni dawn lawm ni? Mizoramah hian an dân siam apiang hi bawhchhiat tura siam emaw tih tur a ni a, a lungchhiatthlak."

"Homo chungchang hi Mizo chanchinah pawh a lanna a rei tawh a, lesbian erawh hi chu hmanlai Mizo society-ah khan an awm vak lo a ni mai thei. Patil an sawi thin chu ka hre nual a, lesbian erawh chu ka la hre lo. Tunlaila Mizorama tuai leh homo an tam ta viau hi human right kan tih fo vang hi ni

maw? Mahni right hre hlur, duty erawh hre miah lo kan tam niin ka hria. Society-ah hian duty nei lo chu right pek ve loh hi a tha mai lawm ni ka ti deuh. Hman deuh kha chuan tuaiho kha vantlang thil tihkhawmnaah an inkiltawi thin a, tunah erawh chuan tuai nih an zak miah ta lo. Mipain tuai nih a zah tawh loh chinah chuan khawvelah hian zahthlak a vang viau tawh a ni."

(All things are subjective to an individual's perception of them. Pastors Nikhama and Liankhaia held the opinion the lives of Mizos in the olden days were sinful and alcohol wreaked havoc in the society, and the people were promiscuous and unfaithful. However, B. Lalthangliana and K. Zawla held the opposite view and said they lived a virtuous life. K. Zawla even stresses the fact that Mizos used to be responsible drinkers. Rev. Zairema also holds the opinion that the Mizos had a good social system

The present dry law in the state seems more like a joke to me. If alcohol is prohibited, then everything with alcoholic content should be prohibited. But we defend the sale of (the grape wine) Zawlaidi saying that it is not an alcohol. We're just sleep-talking. If Zawlaidi is not an alcohol, then what is? If we are to enforce total prohibition in the state, then the sale of Zawlaidi should be banned, or else the prohibition law should be removed altogether. It's almost as if laws are made in Mizoram to be broken.

Gays have been a part of Mizo society for some time, but cases of Mizo lesbians are much rarer. The reason why there is a surge of gays and transsexuals in Mizoram today could be because of what we call human rights. We often tend to know our rights very well, but not our duty. In my opinion, society shouldn't give rights to those who do not fulfill their duty. Not long ago, transsexuals were at the margins of society, but now they are not ashamed anymore. If a man does not feel ashamed to be a

transsexual, I don't think there's ever going to be anything to be ashamed of in this world.)

Chapter 4: *Rintei Zunleng* by Lalrammawia Ngente

4.1 The Story

Rintei Zunleng is the tragic story of a young man named Thanvawra (Vawra), who finds solace in the love of the titular character Rintei. The story begins with narrator, Siama, a benefactor of Vawra's, receiving a frantic phone call from him asking for help in the middle of the night. He begs to see him immediately and hangs up. This forms the opening enigma of the story and also sets the ominous tone and anxiety which is prevalent throughout the story. Vawra turns up a little later. Exasperated, he explained to his uncle Siama that he had decided to hang himself that night. But it was as if someone stooped him, for the rope broke while he hung, thus saving his life.

Vawra pours out his heart to Siama. He tells him there is no hope left for him in this world. Siama knows that it was a wrong time to argue with him at that point and simply tells him that God wants. Vawra agrees but argues that He doesn't want him to be happy either. What follows is a religious counseling of Vawra by Siama who finds out the extent of the former's disillusionment with religion. Vawra spends the night there and promises to return to tell Siama about his life.

Siama is a middle-aged man who lives with his dutiful wife and their young son. He is a devout Christian who, before his spiritual reformation, used to loathe drunkards. After his awakening however, he took it upon himself to care for and evangelise alcoholics. He used to take home drunkards lying wasted on the streets, feed them till they could take care of themselves again. It was through one such incident that Siama met Vawra, who had passed out in the neighbourhood. He took him to his house and made him sleep on their couch in the living room. On

waking up the next day, Vawra was embarrassed and apologized to the owners. Siama had often counseled young men like Vawra. Though they seemed to care, they would often steal their things before leaving. By and by, Siama got to know that Vawra was very different from the others. Though alcohol was his weakness, the young man had an integrity to him which was quite contrary to the despair that plagued him. Vawra believed that man was essentially tainted and it was beyond him to reform. God had sent his Son Jesus Christ to be the perfection that man could never achieve. If man believed in Christ, who represented perfection for him in front of God, it was enough. Man's effort to be good is ultimately futile, and so there is no use trying.

This could be more well edited

Siama gets worried for Vawra. He had promised to visit him soon and now days had passed since he attempted suicide. He goes out to look for him, fearing he might have passed out on the streets yet again, when he meets a neighbour who informs that a body had been found hanging from a tree. Siama fears the worse and rushes to the hospital mortuary. To his relief, the dead body that he is shown is not Vawra's.

One rainy day, while Siama is lost in thoughts about his own competence to evangelize other people, he is interrupted by the sound of the doorbell. It is Vawra who has come to thank Siama for looking out for him the other night. He thanks him for sincerely caring for him. He is so touched by his kindness that he tells him that he wants to confide the story of his life in him.

From this moment on, Vawra becomes the narrator and tells his story. He tells his uncle Siama that he hailed from a small village. Theirs was a normal family of four. They earned their livelihood through cultivation, and his hardworking parents produce enough for a

comfortable living. His mother was very attached to the Church and would regularly attend the service even after a hard day's work. She belonged to the spiritually ecstatic group of women who would break out into euphoric dance. His father was quite the opposite. He was a quiet man who didn't let his emotion show although he too was God-fearing. His younger sister and he also regularly attended church right from their early childhood. Those were the days when their family was the happiest.

When Vawra was about ten years old, his mother often got invited after service to continue their fellowship elsewhere. These were people who considered themselves spiritually more experienced than the others. His mother joined them and soon became a regular in their meetings. Vawra says that though she wouldn't go out too long but they missed all the same. His father warned her of these people, who found the existing Church administration and indoctrination lacking. They would gather to discuss the word of God according to their interpretation. They championed the love God has for us, and said that it was ultimately God's will that prevailed and we could do nothing against it. They reveled in the trembling, whirling, and shaking that affected them during their spiritually ecstatic worship services. Slowly, Vawra's mother changed her personality. Vawra says that he could sense a kind of guilt in her and her fellow ecstasics. Even at a young age, Vawra could sense they departed in their understanding of the Word from what was taught to him in Church.

Vawra voiced his concern to his father. His father was equally at a loss because his wife used to accuse him of fighting the will of God when he tried to control her. Soon, the mother's obsession with ecstatic worship became so immense that she neglected her home and family completely.

The ecstatic would pair up for a spiritual power surge. The pair would be made up of opposite sexes who would "cleanse" each other spiritually by running their hands over each other's body. The pairs would mostly constitute of married men and women like Vawra's mother, who found in each the spiritual compatibility that their real-life spouses couldn't give.

Vawra's mother's partner was a man called called Duha. He was one of the leaders and speakers of the group. Soon Vawra would witness one of their "cleansing" ceremonies. He was shocked at how his mother let Duha touch even the most private of her body parts, all in the name of the Holy Spirit. He was further shocked when he found that she didn't have an ounce of regret after the ceremony was done and that she could resume her life normally with her husband and children. ✓

The mother's wanderings soon affected the family. Vawra's sister detested her mother and her partner and fell victim to the gradual breaking of the family. His father knew his incompetence to reform his wife all too well. Vawra's sister, Tei, suffered from loneliness which manifested in a gradual physical weakness. When Vawra's father was away at the fields for a week at a time, his mother and her partner Duha made good use of the opportunity. Both children unfortunately witness them sharing their parents' bed. The impact of their mother's betrayal of her husband and her children is so great that Tei's health deteriorated. Disturbed and enraged, with no one to talk to, she died of loneliness and heartache. Vawra's father too passed away shortly. Vawra was then sent to live at his uncle's Duha's sister's house in Aizawl. ✓

Vawra's new aunt, Chhuangi, was married to a government officer. Together they has two children who studied outside the state. Chhuangi's

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husband Dinga was a corrupt man. Vawra used to notice men with briefcases coming in to see his uncle to seal some deals. His aunt was another religious fanatic. She and her group of friends used to get together at their house and have passionate discussion of the word of God, but only the parts that suited their guilt-ridden minds. They never practiced what they preached and for Vawra, the disillusionment with religion intensified with the passage of time. It had been three years that Vawra lived with his aunt's family when he was accused of stealing one crore rupees. Vawra had had enough of his aunt's two-faced nature that he decided to leave their house never to come back. He rented someone's basement and earned his wages as a labourer. In one of his work sites, he befriended a man Zamlova, who would be his best friend till the end. Together, they would make merry and drink and live for the day. Vawra's conscience often pricked him as he remembered his father's advice to be faithful to God. However, he had seen too many deceitful people abusing religion to even want to respect God anymore.

From here, the narration interchanges between Siama and Vawra. Vawra continues his story on how he met the love of his life Rintei. Rintei was an active member of the youth wing of the Church who would invite people like Vawra to attend church more often. Vawra really liked her but never thought the daughter of a well-off, respected, elder of the Church would reciprocate his feelings. But she did, and she let him know that she wanted to be serious about their relationship. She would ask him to come visit her at her house, as traditionally done by lovers, and get acquainted with her family.

Once, Vawra and Zamlova fought in front of Rintei's house. They were a little inebriated and though the tussle was over a trivial matter, the consequence would mar Vawra's relationship with Rintei for a long

time. On hearing the fight, the neighbours gathered and tried to break them off. The men who were reeking of alcohol are sent back home. Vawra completely ruined his first impression on Rintei's family. From now on, Vawra would loathe himself and consider himself undeserving of Rintei's love. He soon realizes that Rintei's parents are wary of their relationship and there was no way they would ever bless their union

In the meantime, Vawra's landlord dies in a road accident. This makes Vawra closer to the widowed landlady and her two daughters. Their cordial relationship is strengthened further as the women rely on Vawra for domestic chores that would require a man. The landlady, Thani, falls in love with Vawra. The young, beautiful, fair and lonely seductress soon starts an intimate relationship with her tenant.

Vawra is torn between his love for Rintei and the fulfilling carnal relationship he has with Thani. He knows that both women are in love with him too. But Vawra chooses Rintei over Thani and decides to propose marriage to her family. Having no family of his own, he requests his employer and his friend Zamlova to be the family emissaries. Sure enough, Rintei's family make excuses rejecting the offer. Their hopeless situation and deep love for each other pushed even the God-fearing Rintei out of her shell and she agrees to elope with Vawra. Their plans get foiled by Rintei's family who accuse Vawra of trying to kidnap Rintei. Vawra is taken to court where he finds out that Rintei had made a statement earlier denying their plan to elope. The lovers were actually set up but nevertheless caused a painful separation.

After sometime, Vawra learns that Rintei had been terminally ill all the time. Her family apologise to him and take him to her deathbed. She dies and with her she takes Vawra's hope and dreams to the grave. Vawra

too meets with a tragic death some months later when he falls of a cliff. Even in his last moments, he remains the lonely person whose circumstances prevented him from getting a firm grip on love and a meaningful life.

4.2 The Analysis

In the lengthiest published Mizo *thawnthu* yet, the author Lalrammawia Ngente dwells mostly on the hypocrisy of modern Mizo society. The story is based in the contemporary times and the characters and storyline conform to the realist novel. What stands out among the issues discussed in the story is the scathing criticism that Ngente makes of an increasingly popular sect within Christianity called the Truth Mission Evangelical Fellowship (TMEF). Although he never mentions the faction by name, the author reveals the crux of their doctrinal belief through the words of Vawra, which is unmistakably of TMEF. It is worthwhile to mention here that the author is an ordained elder of the Presbyterian Church. The TMEF's doctrinal interpretation is regarded blasphemous by the Presbyterian Church in Mizoram. In the story, Siam concludes that because Vawra has received the kind of teaching that rules out the reformation of man, his confidence and outlook is severely damaged. For Vawra, the Son of God who came to die for man's sins remains only a trophy representing God's pardon whereas Siam would have liked him to accept that because He died for us, we have the power to live a new life. But for Vawra, who won't blame Eve for the Original Sin, man has no agency. Just as the snake (Satan) had tricked a naïve Eve, man was just at the mercy of the powers above him.

The author seems to have shaped the character of Siam around his own evangelical self. There is a three-page introspection of Siam, where

he revisits the Christian literature that he has read and loved. Siana quotes and comments on the translations of classic Christian best sellers such as *He Came To Set The Captives Free* and *Prepare for War* by Rebecca Brown, *Why Revival Tarries* by Leonard Ravenhill, *The Church Subtly Deceived* by Alexander Seibel and other evangelists like Benny Hinn and Aimee McPherson and also sermons by Rev. Vanlazuata, again, another minister of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church.

In an interview with the author, I asked him how much of the church leader in him propel Siana to evangelise both Vawra and the readers about the controversial teaching of the TMEF and whether he worried about the criticism that the book could get, to which Ngente answers, "*Novel ziah hian rilruah a langin a zirtir hi eng nge tih tilang lo tura theihtawpa thup tum mah ila eng emaw tak vei zawng leh duh zawng pho chhuahna a ni lo thei lova. He doctrine leh belief hi thenkhat chuan dik an tih avangin an zawm mek reng a ni a. Hei hian thil tha lo tak tak a thlen theih avang leh taksa, rilru leh thlarau thlenga hruai bo thei a nih avanga a that lohzia a changtute hmanga han tarlang ka ni. Thenkhat chuan an sawiselin an bei hle ang tih pawh ka ring a. Mahse, Bible zirtirna dik tak phawk chhuak zo lova ka ngaih, kan ni tin khawsakna leh sakhuana thilah pawh min tibuitu a nih avangin hetiang hian ka han pho lang a ni. Sawisel an awm pawhin ka pawiti hauh lova, lo bei a, lo hua an awm a nih pheii chuan a hlawhtlingah ka ngai zawk. Hetianga zirtirna tam tak, Mizo mipuite min tibuai a, chhungkua, Kohhran leh mimal nun pawh hruaibotu laka kan lo fihlim theihna tura hmanraw tlawmte a nih beiseia han ziāk ta chiam ka ni. Heng zirtirna dik lovin mihring nun a kaihruaia a hneh theihzia leh a tawp chu chhiatna leh boralna a nihzia te, damchhung hunah ngei pawh chhungkaw buaina leh nun hrehawmna thlentu a nihzia ka thiam ang tawkin ka tarlang a, heta tang hian tam tak chuan an chhut thiam ka beisei.*"

(When one writes a novel, although one tries to be discreet as to what the moral of the story is, one cannot help oneself but write one's heart out. The doctrine and belief in question is accepted as the truth by many and therefore have left their denominations and joined it (TMEF). I have shown through the characters how misleading and damaging it can be to a person's body, mind and soul. I'm sure there will be many who will criticize me for this. But I felt the need to address something which doesn't quite reveal the true meaning of the Bible and yet can be such a menace to both society and religion. I really wouldn't mind any criticism or condemnation it gets, I would rather consider it successful. I wrote this with the hope that it might offer some answer to the discord these kinds of teachings cause to the family, the Church and the individual. I've have tried to warn about the power of blasphemous doctrines over people, and the tragic consequence that awaits those who believe and practice it, and have tried to show that even in this life, how damaging it can be to family and to life itself, and I hope that many will take these into account.)

Needless to say, the author sows the seeds of Vawra's tragedy in his mother. Siama says "*Thlarau mite rin lohna leh ngaihnepna thuk' tak chu a nu hnen atanga a rochun a nit lat mai si a. Chu a thirlunga nghet taka intuh avang chuan engtin tak nge Pathian mite a ngaihnep phah ang le tih ka ngaituah a*".

(For he had acquired a disdain for the spiritual from his own mother. How he must loathe all God-fearing people just because of that, I wondered).³⁷

We also read Vawra's account of his sister's feelings, "*Ka nu lakah chuan mikhual ang dakin a inthlahrung a, nu angchhunga muanna zawng ka farnu khan a tem ta mawlh lo a ni. Keipawh hian ka tem ta chuang lo*".³⁸

³⁷Pg 72, Ngente, Lalammawia. Rintei Zunleng, my translation

(She felt uncomfortable like a stranger in my mother's midst, my sister who sought solace never found it in my mother, and neither did I).

While Tei yearns for motherly love, her mother ignores her own child and cradles and cares for her partner. Interestingly, the way in which she shows her love for her partner is how she ought to have cared for her own daughter. Vawra says. "*Ka nu leh Pa Duha chu an in-nausen siak ni bera hriat chang ka nei thin. Ka hmuh tirh chuan mak ka ti a. A patling zawk Pa Duha chu nausen ang chiah hian a awm a, ka nu malchungah a mu a, a chul mu thin. A chang pheh chuan chaw te hi a fah in a fah a, ka nu chaun a thialsawm a; Pa Duha, a malchunga mu nguai mai chu a zu fah thin a. A changing ka nu hnute chu nausenin tuihal tak maia an hne dawh dawh ang hian ahne thin bawh. Hetianga an awmte hian mut pindan lam an pan chuang lo, kan thutna pindanah, ka awm lai pawhin an ti mai thin*".³⁹

(It seemed as if my mother and Pa Duha were up against each other to be the baby. I was amazed in the beginning. The man would act like a baby, sleep on my mother's lap and she would stroke him gently to sleep. Sometimes my mother would chew food, bend down to him and feed him. Sometimes he would suckle my mother's breast like a thirsty infant. They never cared to confine their affection to the privacy of the bedroom, they would do it right in front of me.)

Besides Vawra's mother we see three other significant women characters in the story. One is a minor character, Sangpuii, Siama's wife. She is the quintessential Christian wife who supports her husband in his mission to reform alcoholics. She puts up with the inconvenience of having drunk strangers at her home, some of them who would even rob

³⁸ Pg 92, *ibid.*, my translation

³⁹ Pg 110, *ibid.*, my translation

them. She is doting mother to their son Lalrinmawia and teaches him Bible stories and good manners, and takes him to church.

From Vawra's relationship with Rintei and Thani , we can see how he shapes his opinion on them according to their sexuality. Rintei is the God-fearing Christian girl, who will not disobey her parents or give in to pre-marital sex despite her strong love for Vawra. Her charm, her mild nature, sincerity and pureness are all so refreshing for Vawra, who grew up in a morally depraved surrounding. If at all he has any hope in life, reform himself and quit drinking, it is because of Rintei's love. Her impact on him is so great that she seems to fill in for the Redeemer that Vawra had consciously avoided. However, he falls into the arms of the lonely widow where societal and religious rules don't come between Vawra and his landlady. In the beginning, Vawra loathes himself for sleeping with Thani. He feels as if he has offended the daughters as well as their dead father. But the pleasure of the flesh, the intimacy of love that Vawra yearns for, which seems so distant with Rintei, is realized with Thani. In the end, Vawra decides to leave Thani for good to fulfill his relationship with the girl who promised herself only when she became his through marriage.

Toward the end of the book, a woman reports that Vawra had once said, "*Hmeichhia hi ka chhiatna a ni a, hmeichhia vang veka he dinhmuna tang hi ka ni. Chuvang chuan hmeichhia hi a huatin ka hua a nia*"⁴⁰

(Women are destructive for me. It is only because of women that I am stuck in this place. That's why I hate women.)

When we look at Vawra's life we find that the women in his life have done more harm than good. Infact, it is the men in his life who have

⁴⁰ Pg 549, ibid

been consistently good to him. His father was a rational, God-fearing man who loved him, he befriends Zamlova who stands by him through thick and thin, his benefactors like his employer and landlord and of course his Pa Siama are all men. I asked the author if he could ever allow a homoerotic reading of the story, and perhaps change the title to Vawra's Charm instead of Rintei's Charm, since it is Vawra whose charm seems to be the strongest in the story. Ngente replies, *"Ni e, a title hi ka ngaihtuah rei khawp mai. Inpuang ta ila, a title-a mipa hming dah ai chuan hmeichhe hming dah hi hian mi a hip ka rin vang zawka hetiang a title hi dah ta daih ka ni. Homoerotic literature anga an lo sawi a nih pawhin kei chuan ka hnial lova, an thlirnaah ka ngai mai. Chutih rual chuan Rintei leh Vawra inkar tih loh midang laka Vawra khawsakna hi chu hmangaihna tak tak tel lo, tisa initna leh induhna mai a nih avangin sex an hmang thin hi thil dik tak a ni dawn lawm ni? Vawra leh a thiante inkara inhmangaihna hi chu thian tha inhmangaihna a ni a. Hetih lai hian Vawra'n hmeichhe dang a en dan hi chu opposite sex attraction ang deuh pawhin a ngaih theihin ka ring. Tin, a title thuah hi chuan a thawnthu pumpui han thlir hian Rintei hian Vawra nun a thunun hle tih a chiangah ka ngai. A zun (charm) khan Vawra nun pumpui hi a phuar a, a chanchin hluite a sawi chhuahna chhan zawng zawng pawh kha Rintei zunlengin a phuar tlat avanga a rilru mangang leh hah Pa Siama hnena a inpuanna atanga hre chauhah ka inngai. Vawra nun kawitlat, sual lam awn tlat, beidawonna khat si kha Rintei nun leh ze mawi tak khan a khawih na em em thin a, mahse, a tum anga thil kal si lo khan an inkara hmangaihna chu a tipuitling zo lo a ni mai a. Rintei hmangaihna thianghlim leh puitling tak kha Vawra khan a nun enna darthlalangah hmangin a sual a zu hmu thin a. A inngahna berah Rintei kha a hmang niin a lang tlat zawkin ka hria a. Chuvang chuan, a title hi chu ka la tan tlat a, Vawra hming chhala thlak a nih pawhin literature world a nia lawm. A dik lohna ka hre hauh lova, ngaihdan tha zawk neitena ngaih dan an thawh chu hlu hleah ka ngai.*

(I took a long time to decide the title of the story. Truth be told, I chose a woman's name instead of a man's because of its commercial value. I wouldn't argue if the story is interpreted as homoerotic literature; it's the readers' judgement. At the same time, isn't it true that besides Rintei, all other relationship that Vawra had were based on lust or adoration and not love? The love between Vawra and his friends is platonic. Also, the whole story justifies the title. Rintei disciplines Vawra's life. He was spellbound by her charm and the reason he recounts his old life is because of her. The pure and mature love that Rintei offered Vawra straightened his crooked ways and gave him hope. She was the mirror in which he saw who really was. To me, Rintei was his foundation and so I defend my choice of the title. For those who think otherwise may do so, it is the world of literature that we're dwelling in, and any other reading people may have only makes the story richer.)


Chapter 5: *Thih sak pawh ka ngam* by Darrokima

5.1 The Story

This story is set in the village of Sialsuk. The story opens with the main character Rema getting into a fight with a much older girl. His grandmother rushes to them to break the fight. "Stop them, stop them, somebody!" hollered the old woman as she came hurrying up the road. A group of noisy children were standing in an excited huddle around what was obviously a spectacle of no mean entertainment. At a child's wary cry of "Rema's grandma!" the group broke apart sharply, every child casting cautious eyes around as to which direction the old lady might be approaching. As the tight circle loosened, the source of their entertainment became plainly visible.

A girl of about 13 years of age was tugging on the hair of a boy, yanking it so hard that he stood bent low before her as she rained thumps on his back. With his face only inches away from the ground, the boy was valiantly flailing his arms around but since he couldn't see much from his disadvantaged position, it wasn't of much help. The old woman was upon them now and in a loudly scolding voice, pulled apart the two deadlocked combatants.

The boy straightened up, his hair standing in a shock in the upward and forward directions of the yanking it had received, his mouth set in a pugnacious scowl. With the air of a victorious military general returning home in great triumph, he glanced around in the silence that followed. His opponent too stood, feet still aggressively set apart, and for a moment there was complete silence. The first sound that broke the void was not of human voices but something quite different. A resounding smack sounded on the back of the boy's head, followed by a loud thwack on his back.



"Lalremthang, how many times do you need to be told not to get into a fight? You just cannot learn!" As she scolded, his grandmother raised a threatening fist again and the boy threw up his hands in puny self-defense. His grandmother still hit him anyway but the blow that fell was a considerably softer one.

Things being what they were, the watching children began to wander away although a few more avidly curious stragglers stayed on in the hope that something might happen again. But with Rema's grandmother firmly dragging her errant grandson home, the last remnants of the crowd too disappeared.

As supper time approached, Rema appeared at the threshold of their house. That he was less than eager to enter was quite obvious as he stood unhappily eying the two cane walking sticks placed upright by the door. They told him clearly that his parents were home from their day's work which explained his reluctance to go in.

In a slightly raised voice, his father demanded, "Lalremthang, have you been fighting with Rinawmi again?" Rema only answered, "Yes," mentally going over the story he had concocted and feeling quite reassured by its believability. His father glowered down at him and continued in a distinctly unfriendly tone, "Why do you keep on picking fights? We've all told you often enough not to **but** you just cannot seem to stop. Perhaps I haven't whipped you soundly enough."

Toying with the knot of elastic around his waistband, Rema volunteered in his defense, "But she hit me first." His father was looking at him with skepticism plain on his face. His mother, still busily stacking firewood on the hearth, broke in, "What nonsense! I don't believe that for a minute. Why would she just hit you for no reason? You're a bad boy,

that's what, a bad bad boy." Without missing a beat, Rema said, "She tried to grab Lalzira's marble, the one that's his favourite, and when Lalzira wouldn't give it to her, she hit him and when I said, "Why did you hit him?" she said, "I'm going to beat you up too," and slapped me." Trying to see whether his father believed his story or not, he stole a glance at him but his father had turned away in another direction. "From now on, if you get into another fight with your elders, I will really whip you so hard you'll regret it sorely." And with that, his father disappeared into the next room.

The translated versions are coherent but surprisingly casual in tone, a more cultural context could've been rendered

As they had supper, Rema waited for another tongue-lashing but to his surprise, no one said anything more which left him quite discomfited. He hurriedly ate his meal and got up, and while he usually just threw his plate into the wash, this evening he laid down his plate with great care, quickly dipped his hands in the basin of water, brushed them half dry on his pants and was all set to go rushing outdoors like any other evening. The calm but decidedly cool voice of his father stopped him. "Rema, don't go out tonight. Stay indoors quietly." Rema looked back, glanced at his father and with a disgruntled look, went to the backyard.

In this & also in the other narratives

The urge to go out and play was so strong he felt he was going to die so he took off to bed. But he could not fall asleep. He looked at the clock on the wall which showed it was 10 minutes to 8 and still much too early to sleep even though he hadn't slept for ages. He could no longer hear the sounds of his friends playing and guessed they had gone home but was puzzled as to why they had stopped so much earlier than other evenings. Then he remembered something and his mind buzzed with conflicting emotions. Of course, it was Wednesday night which meant *Chitrahaar* at 8 pm. He realized all his friends had left to watch TV. He began to sorely regret having got into a fight earlier that day because

it had stopped him from playing with his friends and also having to miss Chitrahaar. Never again, he promised himself, would he ever get into a fight again on a Wednesday!

In another instance, Rema and Lalzira set out to hunt for dung beetles. They had already dug up two dung but since they still hadn't found their ideal, a full grown adult male which could stand up to Sawma's prize dung beetle, they kept digging. As they continued hopefully, Lalzira suddenly exclaimed, with the air of someone just struck by a great idea, "Hey, we forgot all about it but the dung pat we saw the other day must have swelled up good now." "Oh yes, let's go. Would anyone have got there ahead of us?" Rema wondered. Hurriedly they raced down the hill towards the village. Slightly beyond the village, at the foot of the hill was a fairly large area filled with nothing but bushes and grass. When the two boys got there, panting from their exertions, their eyes widened on hearing the sounds of other children. They continued to leap and bound down the hillside towards the direction of the sounds.

There they saw three little boys with a lactogen tin full of dung beetles. One was preparing an invasion of the little hill of dung that stood before them by patiently clearing the area around it. In an authoritative tone of voice, Rema boldly declared, "Te-a, that's ours!" The boys all turned around to look at him in startled surprise and Te-a declared, "This is the poop we made the other day. We said we'd get it when it was ready." Rema replied aggressively, "Don't you lie, Te-a, that's our poop. That's Lalzira's poop and mine was right over here." Roughly pushing away Liankima who was standing quietly to one side, Rema looked around for his supposed poop but didn't find any.

Te-a remained undaunted, repeating, "This is definitely *our* poop. Mapuia and I both defecated here. I'm not sure whose this is exactly but it's definitely ours." Rema walked right back over to the dung pile and exclaimed, "Here, I'm absolutely sure of it, this is Lalzira's poop, I memorized the way it curved and curled. And this pointy end.... It's his alright, isn't it, Lalzir?" And Lalzira agreed with great enthusiasm. There was nothing left to say for the less stout-hearted so Te-a and his friends left the scene, defeated.

A somewhat intriguing superstition widely held by children in those days was, "Dung beetles formed from human faeces make the fiercest fighters," which explained why they would often go to the outskirts of the village and discharge there, going back later to collect the beetles that homed in and bred there. And that was exactly what had caused the little altercation between the two groups of boys. After Te-a and his team left, Rema energetically dug into the dung pat, and just as he had anticipated, found a fully grown adult male beetle with a pronounced horn. The joy of the two boys at that moment cannot be adequately described. Rema kept looking at the beetle he had found and could not help smiling broadly with the greatest satisfaction. He did not even have the heart to put it away in the tin along with the rest but clenched it proudly in his fist all the way home.

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In another hilarious episode, the author describes the day the Director paid a visit to Rema's school. Rema was especially excited to go to school that day. The Director, was simply called the Chief, would throw sweets at the children who would scramble for them on the floor. As soon as he reached school, Lalzira approached him.

"Rema, did you wash yourself this morning?"

"No way! Just my face."

"The Chief's coming today; Mr. Thanga's going to inspect cleanliness they say."

"But today's not cleanliness inspection day."

"No it's not. But everyone's saying he will because the Chief's coming."

"So what? I washed my face in the morning."

"Rokhuma's gone home to wash himself..."

"No way am I going home!"

"It's ok, I don't think we'll get punished so hard, do you?"

Mr. Thanga does make an inspection and instructs the dirty boys what they should do, one by one - Sawma: needs to wash his feet,

⁴¹ From the translation by A. Hmangaizuali Poonte, unpublished.

Liankima: arms and feet, Rokhuma also has to wash himself all over again, Rema: hair, neck, arms and feet, Lalzira: has to take a bath. On hearing their instruction, each boy rushed home while the other children looked on. ⁴²

5.2 The Analysis

The story of Rema and his friends continue with their innocent misadventures. The book comes to an end with the death of Teresa, a girl who had stolen's young, innocent heart. On this tragic ending to a humorous story, the author Darrokima says, " *Ka thawnthu hi a dik tak chuan homour hlang deuhthaw a ni a, a nihna takah chuan hlimawm taka tawp tur ni awm tak hi a ni a, mahse, a chhiartute beisei loh dan deuhin ka kai her a. Hei hian chhan a nei ve a, kan Mizo thawnthu tam zawk, 90% pawh ti ila kan tisual kher lo ang, hlimawm taka tawptir hi kan tum deuh vek a. A tawpa piantharna leh inhmuhchhuahna ang chi, 'tichuan hlim takin an awm ta a' tih ang chi hi a tam lutuk a. Sap thawnthu ngaihnaawm tak takte han chhiar a, thiam tak mai a, ngaihtuah zui veng veng ngaia an titawp thin hi ka awt thei em em a. Chu vangin, ka thawnthu-ah pawh hian rem lo chung chungin tragic ending ka hmang ve ta a ni. Open ending kan tih ang chi te hi kan Mizo thawnthu-ah hian a vang em em mai a, kan chhiar zawh rual hian a tawp ringawt zel a, ngaihtuah zui tur hi a awm meuh thin lo a, chu pawh chu 'Thih sak pawh ka ngam - 2' ah khan ka han hmang bawk a. Part-I zawka tragic ending ka hman chhan pawh kha tragedy thawnthu tha tak tak ka awh em avang a ni a, rem lo chung chungin tikhan ka han ti ve tawp mai a ni."*

(My story is essentially a humorous story, and should've ended on a happy note, but, I've twisted it in a way that the readers would least expect. This has a reason, which is that we always give a happy ending to our stories, at least 90 percent of them. They often have the characters

⁴² Pg 91 - 92, Darrokima. *Thih Sak Pawh Ka Ngam*, my translation

reforming or realizing their mistake, and so "live happily ever after". I've always wanted to write like those English novels which have an ambiguous, though-provoking endings. That is why, even though it may not sit well, I have chosen to make a tragic ending to this story. There's hardly any Mizo novel with an open-ending, our stories just end with the book, and there's nothing left to ponder over, and I have done exactly that to *Thih Sak Pawh Ka Ngam*.)

The researcher's critical scrutiny
could've been rendered here -
as with all the other chapters too.

Chapter 6: *Thunderbird* by Vanneihluanga

6.1 The Story

he was wheel chair bound all the while.

Thunderbird is a short story and a first person narrative of a formerly wheelchair-bound person. He had been beaten up for speaking out against a certain person's corrupt practices in a local bar. When he landed up in the hospital, the families of the tormentors turned up for a "pseudo display of heartfelt pity and compassion"⁴³. A month passed by and doctors started losing hope of his recovery. Though he was determined to recover, every specialist he knew only confirmed his worse fear. He would have to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. They sold their house to pay for the medical expenses and rent a basement.

His younger son wanted the wheelchair for himself. They couldn't afford a new bicycle for him and so he promised his son the wheelchair when he would be able to walk again. The "Thunderbird" label fell off his son's cycle and they pasted it on the wheelchair. The wheelchair was hence called Thunderbird.

He tried to occupy himself with books and music, observed nature, counted vehicles passing by and other activities that he could perform from his wheelchair. But his depression always overshadowed the initial enthusiasm and would soon get bored. He realized what an inconvenience he was to his family, especially his wife. The more the love that his wife and kids showered on him, the more undeserving he felt to be receiving it. The hypocrisy of the outside world that used his misfortune for their political advantage further disillusioned him. He often contemplated suicide.

⁴³ Translation of Dr. Margaret Zama, published in *Heart of the Matter*, 2004

In the little scenery that their cramped house could offer, he began to observe three martins that would fly past his window. He began a love-hate relationship with them and gradually grew to love them. He felt that these birds seemed to understand him better than his fellow humans. With the change of seasons, the martins migrated elsewhere and he was left with only a herd of sparrows to observe.

He grew fond a specific sparrow who would eventually build a nest on the branch of a mongo tree nearest to him. The sparrow would put a twig in its beak and lay on the branch for a firm foundation. But the twig would fall down and the bird would repeat the process all over again. This touched him so much that he felt he needed to try to accomplish the impossible just as the sparrow, which in his case, was standing on his feet again. One day, when his family left the house for work and school, he attempted to stand. After several attempts, he gave up. But the little bird perched on his window sill who was watching him refused to budge even when he shooed it away in despair, as if egging him on to give it another try. Despite excruciating pain, he manages to stand up. When his family returns home, they revel in his achievement. The story ends with the hope that the same sparrow will help him to walk again.

6.2 The Analysis

Vanneihtluanga shows a profound understanding of the working of the depressed mind which could even contemplate suicide. The ominous tone of despair sounds so authentic that it reminds us of the year 2010 in Mizoram, where over fifty persons committed suicide, the state even observing World Suicide Prevention Day in the capital in September. It's heartbreaking to learn that a nine year old boy and a seventy year old man would want to end their lives by hanging themselves. Clearly, we

need to scrape through the pretentious surface of us being Christians, or being the second-most literate state in the country, or being the most peaceful state in the North-east and put these tags to good use. I ask the author whether figuratively speaking, if he thinks our society today needs these birds - which nowhere conform to the tenets of religion and culture we've set up for ourselves - to address those depressed individuals who might identify themselves with the protagonist's anguish, someone who can fly and tower above this bubble of modernity that we're trapped in. He answers, *"Mihring hi mi hrang vek kan ni a. Hrehawmna atanga thlamuanna kan hmuh theih dan pawh a inang vek lo vin ka ring. Ngaihtuahna zim tak hmanga society damna tura treatment inang vek pek hi dik ka ti lo. Economy-a derthawmna hian mahni inrin ngam lohna min siamsak a, unemployment problem leh hmabak chiangkhang lo hian thangthar nun a tingui a ni. Ziak leh chhiar thiam tamna state leh state muanawm nih te hi kan sawi rei ta hle mai. Thutak hmachhawna thalaite ke penna tur duan a nih loh chuan, kan rama nun hi a ninawm a ni thei ang. Thunderbird thawnthu hmanga ka thlir dan chuan: Thil siamchawp hmanga society damna hi ka ringhlel lo. Mahse siamchawp damna inngahna chu nature hmanga damna a ni. Ka Pathian hi nature a ni ka ti lo va, nature-ah pawh ka Pathian hi a inpuang ka ti zawk a ni. Ka thawnthua sava-te hi nature an ni. "Chawngzawng chu fakin awm rawh se" ka tih hian, "Lalpa chu fakin awm rawh se" ka tihna tho a ni. Chaklohna chakna tluka chak a awm lo. Nature changkansan hi hmasawmnaah ka ngai lova hnungtawlhna leh Pathian zah lohnaah kei chuan ka ngai zawk.*

(We all are different individuals. I'm sure the means in which we get out of our sorrows and find peace are different too. Trying to find a single treatment to solve all-our ills is being too narrow minded. An unstable economy discourages us, unemployment problems and the uncertain future has resulted in depression of the younger generation. We have been glorifying being the most literate and the most peaceful state for a

long time now. We need to face the truth and make plans for our youth; otherwise life will be boring for them. From the story's point of view, I think that it is not wrong to try to reform society through artificial means. But even the artificial is based on Nature. I'm not saying that my god is Nature, I'm only saying that my God reveals himself in Nature. The birds in my story represent Nature. When I say, "Praise the sparrow", I essentially mean, "Praise God". I find it disrespectful to God when man abuses Nature in name of development.)

Some narratives have been analysed in a much more greater detail while others such as these are incredibly brief in analysis. A more compact, proportionate analysis could've been rendered for all the narratives.

Chapter 7: *Vaihna Vartian* by Mafaa Hauhnar

7.1 The Story

The story is set in Gangtok, Sikkim, where the narrator has gone to continue his studies at the insistence of his friend, Sonam Lepcha. The two had met at the 11th National Jamboree in Bhopal during their Scouts days and had since become fast friends. In the last letter that they had exchanged, Sonam told him about the daughter of a Mizo pastor serving in Gangtok. He described Remi's beauty and attractiveness. He even mentioned that the post-graduate student of the English Department of Guwahati University was presently in Gangtok on a sick leave.

The narrator meets Remi and instantly falls in love with her. He is so enamored by her beauty that he recalls lines from a long forgotten poem of Christopher Marlowe. He soon learns that her feelings are mutual, and they let their love bloom in the beautiful highlands of Sikkim. However, they realize that that Remi is older by three years; she fears this would strain their relationship in the future. This makes her wary of commitment. The narrator tries his best to convince her that age difference won't matter in their relationship at all. He says, "Hlauthawng reng reng suh. Nang hi midang ni lova 'nangmah' I nih chhung chuan eng harsatna nge awm thei ang le. William Shakespeare-a paw'n kum 18 mi a nihin kum 26-a upa Anna Hathaway nupui ah a nei tho alawm"⁴⁴

(Don't you worry about it. As long as you are "you", and not somebody else, there can't be any problem. Why, William Shakespeare was only 18 when he married a 26 year old Anna Hathaway)⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Pg 21, Hauhnar, Mafaa. *Vaihna Vartian*

⁴⁵ My translation

Remi is not convinced and says that Shakespeare eventually left his wife and children to live in London. Then the narrator cites the success of the relationship between Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. Still, Remi proposes that they remain just friends. They argue and the desperate lover accuses her of trying to find excuses to break up with him. They do break up eventually, but the narrator cannot reconcile with the fact that Remi is no longer his. He likens his condition to the "phantom limb syndrome", where people who have lost their limbs. The syndrome is common in amputees, especially in the early months and years after limb loss. The brain still gets messages from the nerves that originally carried impulses from the missing limb. The narrator consoles himself with love poems and songs, the likes of E. E. Cummings and P.S. Chawngthu.

One evening, Sonam tells the narrator that Remi has fallen ill. After dinner, he heads toward the Pastor quarters. Her father shows him to her room where she is lying. She thanks him for coming over. The narrator thinks that it is best to limit conversation because of her frail health and so they pass the time listening to music and she slowly falls asleep. He leaves her but goes straight to visit her everyday after class. Her father tells him that she is improving but did not wish to see anyone. ✓

Perplexed, he finishes two bottles of the famous Sikkim Fireball Brandy and gets really drunk. Sonam suggests that he write Remi a letter. The narrator writes a letter expressing how much he loves her and longs for her and asks her out on a date the following Sunday. Remi replies his letter and agrees on the date. He goes to her house where she tells him that the next day would be her birthday and that she had hired a cab for them to go to Namchi and spend the day together. The next day, things go

as planned and they spend the day together surrounded by beautiful land, the air heavy with love and poetry.

After dinner, she reveals to him how she had fallen sick a month before they met. What was first thought to be the effect of pneumonia was actually the symptoms of lung cancer. Doctors had given only five to six months more to live, and they were leaving for Siliguri the next day. She tells him that as soon as she realized that their relationship was getting stronger, she knew she had to stop it. She then requests him to stop seeing her. It is her wish, she says, to freeze this moment of joy in his memory so that he may never know her pain and suffering ever in his life after she was gone. The narrator is shocked and finds it hard to take it all in. He has no choice but to face the ultimate test of love, to walk away from his love because of love itself. He runs far away from her without glancing back even once. After some time, he faces the rising sun, which promises a new beginning to the world. But for the narrator, break of dawn only brings him a day closer to Remi's death, and with her, love.

7.2 The Analysis

In an interview, Mafaa Hauhnar discusses his story and says, " *Ka thawnthu hi Mizoram pawna nghah a ni a, a changtunu (English-a master degree bei mek) leh a changtupa (aspiring writer) te hi English literature, a bik takin English poems-a tui em em an ni a, an inchhai tawnaah pawh Tennyson, Marlowe, Cummings, Elizabeth Berret Browning te an lo lang kha a awm lo hranin ka hre lo va. Tin hetih hunlaia Khawvela hla lama Mizoram thingtlang kilkhawr tak takah pawha an ngaihthlak chuah chuah Joshua Kadison-a zai an lâmpuite kha a fuh lohna-ka hre em em lo. A Sap hla leh poetry ngawr ngawr zuk thlurbiung tumna a awm lo va, inhmeh nia a lan chang leh a remchan chang chuan Mizo hla phuahtute phuah ngei PS Chawngthu hla-te pawh a lo lan nawlh nawlh kha. A setting hi Zokhua khawimaw lai chu ni se chuan Auden te ai*

chuan Awithangpa, Shelley te ai chuan Saikuti te an ri ngun zawk ngei ang le. Kan Mizo thawnthu hi Mizo thawnthu tih avanga kan ramri chhunga nghah fai vek thu a awm lo va. Hmanah rualawt takin kan critic hmasa Siamkima Khawhring chuan, a thiam fa chuan "Two Gentlemen of Chittagong" tih te hi phuah se tia kan thawnthu ramri zauh a trul thu thrahnemngai deuhin a lo sawi tawh. Interpreter of Maladies ziaktu Bengalinu (Jhumpa Lahiri) reng khan vai thawnthu ramri kha a zauh thiam mai (Bengal, Boston and beyond)."

(My story is based outside Mizoram, the heroine has a Master degree in English and the hero is an aspiring writer. They are especially fond of English poetry and so it is fitting that they express their love through the works of Tennyson, Marlowe, Cummings and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Also, during this time, the popular love anthem ("You will always be beautiful in my eyes") by Joshua Kadison could be heard playing even in the remotest corners of Mizoram. I don't think it is surprising that these two lovebirds would also dance to the song. I didn't intend to highlight only English songs and poems. I have also quoted love songs by our Mizo writers like P.S. Chawngthu. If the setting had been rural Mizoram, then I would have surely chosen Awithangpa over Auden or Saikuti over Shelley. There is no question of setting all our Mizo stories in Mizoram because they are Mizo stories. Saikima Khawhring, one of our pioneer critics used to urge writers to extend the boundaries of their writing and come up with things like "Two Gentlemen of Chittagong". Jhumpa Lahiri, the writer of *Interpreter of Maladies* took hers beyond Bengal to Boston and ever further.)

III. CONCLUSION

Conclusion

From the short summary of the stories, one brought out only the eminent points of contestation and appreciation, abandoning the detailed critical examination of all the possibilities the story had to offer, which makes it beyond the scope and objective of this dissertation.

The conflict of the past and modern life of the Mizo in this globalized world is iterated by Dr. Margaret Zama who says:

The Mizo identity is indeed undergoing through an intense introspection. The nostalgia for a romanticized past, crowded by visions of a once brave and honourable people, who practised the code of “tlawmngaihna” in letter and spirit, is strongly nurtured, while the present day notion of a progressive and enlightened Christian society is being brought under a scanner by the people themselves, and is not faring too well under its close scrutiny.⁴⁶

These social concerns and debates have been further discussed under the following headings:

Alcoholism

One of the main concerns and dispute in Mizo society today is the dry law imposed by the state government. The Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act (MLTP Act) came into force in 1997 at the behest of the civil society. The authors themselves are divided in their opinion on alcohol, and it reflects in their work. Saiawia, who is the intrusive narrator of his story, relates how drinking came to be considered as sinful in early Mizo society. C.Lalnunchanga’s noble warriors drank the local rice beer as part of their daily lives. The author never depicts them as having been under their influence. Vanneihluanga’s protagonist is beaten

⁴⁶ Zama, “Globalisation and the Mizo story”, *Indian Folklife*

up and handicapped because of his misadventure that started in a local pub. The Mizo youth whose favourable geographical position doesn't bind him from the law gets drunk on their local brandy. The future world, which Sangzuala says is free of the Mizos' stumbling blocks doesn't mention alcohol, and the relationship of the star-crossed lovers in *Rintei's Zunleng* is often strained with alcohol and *the* Darrokima's story about innocence and youth is clean of alcohol.

The ambiguity can be understood from the fact the government itself has modified, if not changed its stance on alcohol. In the 2007 amendment of the MLTP Act, the wines made from the juices of guava and grapes were to be removed from the category of liquor. This gave the government license to open up wineries for the grape cultivators of Champhai district. The government was cautious to lay out a strict distribution law, where the grape wine named *Zawlaidi* would not be sold after dark (which is as early as 4pm in Mizoram), and also there is a sale limitation. The recently concluded conference of the state's largest church denomination, the Presbyterian Church Synod, decided to ask the government to reduce the alcohol content in *Zawlaidi*.

Lalrammnawia says, "*Zawlaidi hming leh Grep juice hming atana an hmang hi inhmeh theiin ka hre lova, chuvang chuan Vawra kha ka in tir lo mai thei. A chhan chu Zawlaidi hi (magic charm) anga a hranpa ngata pi puten hminga an lo hman tawh a ni a. Hetih laia Zawlaidi hming awmzia tibo zawnga Grep juice/wine hming atana an hmang hi tha ka ti lova, ka tawm thei lo bawk.*

MLTP Act hi chu Kohhran rilru atang chuan a tha anga ngaih theih a ni a. Mahse, a implementation/execution lamah hian eng tikah mah kan hlawhtlin tak tak chuan ka ring lo. Chu ai chuan zu tha zuarin emaw, siam emaw leh mai ila, revenue tam tawh hi sawrkarin la ve thei zawk sela tha mahin ka hria. Zu tha lo, a ruka um, mihring nunna atan a paw em paw lovem tih pawh hriat loh

man to tak takin an leiin an in tho mai si a. Chuvang chuan regulate mumal se, zalen taka an zuar a nih pawhin in ve lo tura inzirtirna nei tha mai ila a tha hial lo maw ka ti thin.

Tin, zu hrim hrim hnawlna/khapburna a nih rual hian Kohhran lam atangin zu in emaw, zuar emaw han phuar/thunun a lo rem chiah lova, sawrkar lam leh mipui lam atanga nawrna leh phunnawina a lo tam phah ve bawk si a. Dan mumal tak siamin, khauh taka lekin MLTP Act hi hlip ila, tichuan, kan buaina tur tam tak hi chu kan pumpelh theih ka ring mah mah mai ka ti."

(I don't think the name Zawlaidi is a fitting name for the wine, and so I don't think I would have let Vawra drink it (had the book been written after the launch of the wine). Zawlaidi was a separate entity in itself, a name that was given by our forefathers. I don't like the way in which it has now come to be associated with a grape wine, so I don't accept it at all.

MLTP Act is good from the Churches' point of view. However, I don't think we can ever succeed in its implementation. Instead, I think it would be better if we started selling good liquor again so that even the government might gain some revenue from it. It is still better than consuming the over-priced, harmful local alcohol that has been furtively brewed. So I suggest that sales be regulated, and even if alcohol were abundant, people should be sensitized to keep off of it.

Although the government may prohibit alcohol, it is not right for the church to discipline or excommunicate those who abuse it. Therefore, I think having a strict code of rules regarding this and repealing the law completely will be of much better help.)

Mafaa moves beyond the name of the wine to the actual product itself and says that that is our good fortune that we have our own wine

product.

He says, "Hmun danga kan zin chuan an hnam zu eng ang nge a nih hriat tumin an local zu hi kan lam hmasa chawk thin a, chu'ngah chuan mahni hnam zu thra tak neite chuan chhuang takin min hlui thin. Thiante'n min rawn tlawh ve changin kan rakzu trawp leh zahpuiawm lutuk, tlanche chung a kan thlawr hi ka lo hlui ve ngam lo va, IMFL ka lamsak leh mai thin. Tunah hian vanneihthlak takin keimahni thar ngei grape atanga siam, thianghlim ve thawkhat tak, leh zahpuiawm lutuk lo Zawlaidi kan nei ve ta hi a lawmawm em em a. Sawrkar remtihpaina thlapin MLTP Act pawh ennawna zu a ni lo va, khap zingah a tel lo tih Chiang taka an tarlang chung pawhin Mizoram kohhran lian ber Presbyterian Synod chuan an Synod hnahnung berah Zu a ni e tiin thutlukna a siam a, kohhran lian ber dawttu Baptist pawhin an khap thu an sawi tawh bawk a. Kohran hrang hrangin an han entawn tliar tliar a, Saiha lamah pawh an khap a, hmun hrang hrangah thuneihna inpechawp pawlte'n an khap mek bawk a. Sikkim-a anmahni tharchhuah atanga an siam Fireball brandy, an threnrual thrate duhsak taka an pek thrin laiin keini ramah chuan kan Zawlaidi ve chuan i sawi ang hian thangchhiat a la a, kan insawiselsiak luai luai mai a nih hi.

(When we travel to other places we're curious to find out what their local wines taste like and the people proudly present them to us. When my friends come from outside to visit, I cannot give them the unhealthy local brew and so I end up buying IMFL for them. It is great that we now have a wine that's produced from our own grapes and is satisfactorily hygienic and appealing. Even though the government itself ruled out that the wine Zawlaidi is not an alcohol, the last Presbyterian Synod pronounced it an alcohol. Now even the Baptist Church is following suit, and so will the rest. While the Sikkimese gift their famous Fireball Brandy to dear

friends, our Zawlaidi will forever be entangled in a difference of opinion.)

Vanneihthluanga analyses the situation further and says that it is a political game, one which the government plays to get the vote of the church. He says, "Zu hi khawi ram leh hnamah pawh, necessary evil an tih ang hi a ni. Thunun theih a ni a, khap leh tihrem theih a ni lo. Mizorama zu khap hi zu khap tak tak tumna a ni lo. Vote hmuh tam duh vanga kohhrante laka lan mawi tumna atana thiltih a ni. He dan siamtu hian zu khap hlawhtlin tak tak a tum lo. Lalthanhawla a lal apiangin, "Zu kan khap" a ti satliah miah lo vang, "Kohhrante duh danin zu kan khap" a ti ziah ang. Zu thangah kohhran a awhtir a ni. Kohhran hian, biblical reference hi intehnan a hmang reng dawn. Engtikah mah zu khap hlip turin sorkar a nawr ngai dawn lo. Kan hre tlang vek. Zu khap hming kan pu ang a, sorkar leh kohhranah hriatthiamna level a sang tial tial ang."

(Alcohol is something like a necessary evil in every society. It can be regulated, but not be abolished and eradicated. The prohibition of alcohol in Mizoram is not a real desire for prohibition of alcohol. It is a devise to win the vote of the Church. The law was created with no real intention of abolishing alcohol. Whenever Lalthanhawla⁴⁷ is in power, he won't just say, "We prohibited alcohol", but will always say, "We prohibited alcohol according to the wish of the Church." He has made the Church get caught in the trap of alcohol. The Church will always use Biblical reference as a yardstick. It never ask the government to repeal the prohibition law. We all know that. We will be a dry sate only for namesake and the tolerance level will keep rising.)

Sexuality —

how is this related to any of the narratives?

⁴⁷ The present Chief Minister of Mizoram. The MLTP Act came into force in 1997 during his ministry

Another decision of the Synod was the excommunication of gays and lesbians living together as couples. It was further decided that the media should be watched out for any element of objectionable glorification of same sex relationship.⁴⁸ This could be an indirect acknowledgement of the popularity, power and influence of mass media in Mizoram than the Church has on its people today. Or, the Church is using the media as a scapegoat in the whole affair, where matters like the abolishment of Section 377 of the IPC and the subsequent legalization of homosexuality goes much beyond the grip of the media.

Vanneihluanga, who is not only a prolific writer, but also a social critic and co-owner of the Mizo television network Zonet. He was elected by the Chanmari Presbyterian Church to be an elder of their church, but he gracefully forfeited the nomination, fearing he would be forced to censor his thoughts and works because of this appointment. He says, "*Mimal leh soceity hi, mahni inenfiaha, inthununa, inchingfel hmasa tur kan ni. Chumi kan tih hmasak hnuah kan inthununna tibuai theitu thil dangte kan veng fel leh chauh tur a ni. Hei hi mihring leh society awmphung tur a ni. Kan ramah hian, zu laka mahni mimal, chhungkua, kohhran leh khawtlang inthunun hmasak tumna effort aiin, "Zu laka inthunun harsa kan ti si a, zu hi khap phawt mai ila..." tia zu khap tumna effort a lian zawk. "Ka sual ka sim ang," tih aiin, "Nangmah vangin ka sual a ni" tih thawm a ring zawk. "Public Park nuam tak, thianghlim tak neih I tum ang u," tih ai chuan, "Park ah chuan nula tlangval an chesual thin. Park chu nei lo mai ang u," kan ti mai a ni. "Zan dar 10 hnua dawr hawng peihte himna I ngaihtuahsak ang u," tih ai chuan, "Buaina a chhuah fo loh nan zan dar 10 hnua dawr hawn loh ni se," kan ti mai. Naupang*

⁴⁸ Nos. 67 and 68 of the Minutes of the Synod Conference, 2010

pawnto, lehkhachaih, tawlailir... an hmakhawthatna leh hlimna zawnsak ai chuan, "An chesual ang, khap mai ang" kan ti mai a ni.

Chu 'natna' tho chu kohhran pawh hian a vei a. Ama chhunga inchinfel hmasak tumna aiin, fel lo siamtu nia a ngaih, ama huang pawna mi a 'khap' theih loh pawh 'thunun' tal a tum thin. Kohhran hi physical leh material thilah a lian tial tial mah se, inkhawm chhung ngei pawhin a member inkhawmte rilru a chan loh chang a tam tial tial thung.

Gays/lesbian thu hi khawvel pumah kohhrante tan thu har tak a ni vek. Kohhran hian a memberte a zirtir hneh lo a ni mai. A hneh loh chhan pawn lam force, media etc. a puh hi a dikna chin awm mah se, a request thei a, a thunun theih a ni chuang lo.

Tin, ka chanchinbuah London-a Anglican Bishop-in gays a hriat thiam thu news-a ka chhuah hi, Synod-in, "chhuah suh" min tih theihna thuneihna an nei lo. News ka distort thiang lo. Welsh rama Kristian dinhmun chhiatzia hi ka thup thiang bawh hek lo. Thil thleng zinga thup leh puandarh bik neih hi media ethics kalh a ni.

377 hi British hun lai atanga kan neih a ni a. ...against the order of nature tih a awm lehngal a. Mipa taksa ah hmeichhe rilru a awm (vice versa) thei a. Hetiang ni tur hian Pathianin mihring hi chhul atanga a siam miau chuan, hei hi order of nature niah kei chuan ka ngai. Mahse, mi dang zalenna tibuai khawpin a khawsa em? tih hi criminal kan tehna turah ka ngai."

(The individual and the society should have as its priority, a correct understanding of itself, discipline and organization. It is only after we have successfully achieved these that we must look out for disruptive factors. This is how the individual and the society should function. In our state, instead of teaching ourselves, our families and our society to stay

away from alcohol, we say, "It's so hard to teach self-control, so let's first prohibit alcohol". "I have sinned because of you" is the popular sentiment instead of acknowledging our sins and saying, "I will leave my sinful ways". Instead of saying, "Let's build a nice, clean public park", we say, "Public parks are misused by promiscuous young men and women, so it's not good to have one". Instead of, "Let's work for the safety of those who open shops till late", we say, "Shops should close by 10 at night to avoid disturbance". Instead of looking out for children to have holistic recreational activities, we ban them fearing they'll hurt themselves. It's this same 'disease' that's plaguing the Church. Instead of working out its own internal disparities, it reaches out even beyond its authority to 'discipline' if it cannot 'banish' it. Although the Church may grow in physical and material wealth, there are many times when it cannot hold the interest of its own members during a service.

The topic of gays and lesbians is a controversial one for the Church all over the world. It only goes to show that the Church hasn't preached its members enough. That the Church blames outside influence and the media may be true to some extent, it can only request the media, never regulate it.

Also the (Presbyterian) Synod does not have the authority to tell me not to publish in my newsletter the news of the Anglican Bishop who was tolerant to gays. I cannot distort news. Neither can I hide the dismal state of Christianity in Wales. It is against the ethics of the media to be selective of what's making news.

(Section) 377 was formulated during the British period, and has *against the order of nature* written in it. The body of a man can have feminine thoughts (vice versa). If God has indeed made that man as such,

from the time he was in his mother's womb, I consider him to be in the order of nature. However, whether or not his action offend others should be the criteria for judging the criminality of his actions)

Didacticism and Censorship

One of the main changes in Mizo story-writing this research aims to highlight is the increase in the number of secular themes in our contemporary stories. If secular, by definition means not religious, one is left to wonder the extent to which the over-arching moral police patrol the territory.

From his experience Mafaa Huahnar shares, " *Ka lehkhabu kawm ka design a, ka chhuttir lai khan a kâwma nula saruak, hnungchhawna lo ding, a hnute tlem lang an hmuh khan "Khai a, Synod Bookroom-in an zuar duh lo vang a," ti a min venthawnpui kha an awm a. Mahse, chutiang chu a lo ni hauh lo mai. Synod Bookroom an zuar duh satliah mai a ni lo, a rawn lam hmasa ber pawlah an tang a, tun thlenga lehkhabu dawr mala min hralhsak hnemtu ber pawh an ni nghe nghe. ka lo rin anga sawisel a hlawh hlek lo hi mak ka ti zawk letling.*

Ni e, a bik takin Mizo-ah hian moral police an tam a. Writer-te hi sunday school zirtirtu emaw Mother Teresa emaw kan ni vek tura min beisei tlat pawl hi an la tam ngang mai. Kan Mizo Academy of Letters ngei ngeiin book of the year award an siama an lawmman pekte hnena an citation tam zawk hi en ila: a mi zirtir a thra, a mi kawhhamuh tum hi a entawn tlak tih ang thuar tham vel vek a ni hlawm a, art for art's sake hi kan la hmu thiam ve meuh lo a ni. Playwright Brendan Behan-a hnena i play hian eng thuchah nge a ken ti a an zawh truma a chhanna, "Message? What the hell do you think I am, a bloody postman?" a tih anga ânkhum ve phiar phiar chak ka ngah mai. Writer-in tum dang (mi zirtir tum etc) a neih a "ulterior motive" a neih chuan a art-ah a rinawm tawh lo va, uire a ni tawhin kei chuan ka hria a. Chuvangin Mark

Twain-a'n The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn bu-a "notice" a ziah: "PERSONS attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." a tih kha ka lawm em em mai a ni.

Literature chu hringnun darthlalang a ni a, thiam taka kan pho lan chuan tum lo mah ila thil tam tak zir tur kan hnutchhiah tho tho dawn. Tuna kan Mizo thawnthu tam zawkah hi chuan zirtir neih kan tum ulh lutuk a chu chuan a tingaihnaawm lo va, chhiar a tihahthlak a, a tilem zo vekin ka hria."

(When I designed the cover of my book and sent it for printing, people saw the naked woman on the cover who stood facing away with a part of her breasts bare, they remarked with concern, "The Synod Bookroom might not want to sell it." However, nothing of that sort happened. Not only did the Synod Bookroom want to sell the book, they they were the first to come and collect it, and to this day are the best sellers of the book. I am amazed that I got none of the criticism that I had anticipated.

Yes, the moral police are ubiquitous in Mizoram. There are many who still expect us writers to be Sunday School teachers or Mother Teresa. Our Mizo Academy of Letters, when it gives out the award for the Book of the Year, most of the citations say: for its moral teaching, the example it shows is commendable etc.; we don't value art for art's sake yet. When the playwright Brendan Behan was asked what message his play carried, there are times when I feel like quoting his answer, "Message? What the hell do you think I am, a bloody postman?" If a writer has an ulterior motive, he is unfaithful and loses his fidelity to art. That's why I love the notice that Mark Twain puts in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, PERSONS attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted, persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished, persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Literature is the mirror of life, if we faithfully portray life, then we will surely leave behind many things to learn. The Mizo stories that we have today are too didactic, and that makes it uninteresting and even unrealistic.)

The Impact of the Mizo Thawnthu Vs. Mass Media

One has discerned the voice of dissent of the modern Mizo society through the contemporary stories within the study of this research. If we look at the history of the world we know there have been texts in the past that stirred the sentiments of the peoples so much as to even shake governments at their foundation. Could the writer then, take the readers into his imagined world, address the conflicting ideas and perhaps together work them out in the realm of the story? One started off by saying that the Mizos love stories. How much of an effect does it actually have on the people today, what is its chance against electronic mass media?

According to Vanneihluanga, it is not Mizo nature to question and critique what comes our way. This gullibility has done us more harm than good. He observes, "*Mizo survival chu a huhova tanrualna a ni. A mala dikna aini a huhova phurna ngaihsan leh 'a hniak tam lam' zawh chu thil dika ngaih a ni. Politics-ah, lal kan ban atangin, mahni inrinhlelhna nasa tak kan nei a, lal aiawh atan Kohhran, Politician leh VC thlengin kan ring a. Khawiah emaw, min humtu awmin kan ring a, Burma zawm, Crown Colony, UNO... kan ti a. Sakhua, tawng, hmel leh nunphungah, keimahni ang deuh nia kan hriat apiang kan hnaih. Chuvangin Israela pem te, Sap kristian leh kan hmel ang pu Korean ngaihsan te thlengin kan uar ta zel a. Literacy-ah kan san avangin lehkha chhiar tur kan duh a, chhiar tur awm apiang kan chhiar. Hnial tum lo vin, zawm leh entawn nghal tumin lehkha kan chhiar fo. Chuvangin, literature hian kan hnam a nghawng nasa em em a ni.*

Entir nan, keiin ka ngaih dan chuan, 1966-a Mizo National Army ramhnuai luhtirtu chu Laldenga mai a ni lo, JT Edson, Joe Millard, western cowboys novel tamtak, Lalsangliana, JF Laldailova (Robin Hood) James Lianmawia te translation khan khatih laia tlangvalte kha a influence a ni. American cowboys ngaihsanna chuan India ngaihnepna leh hmelma anga enna a siamsak a ni.

Vawiinah Mizo thalaite nun influence tu lian chu novel aiin electronic media ni zawkah ka ngai. Hnam pumpuiin self confidence kan hloh avangin author aiin critics kan ngah zawk. Tuina vang ni lova hna duh vanga literature zir kan tam. Literature-ah hian kan senior thenkhatte hi an bo nasa. Inhmang thenkhat hian, literature nia an ngaih chu grammar, language, culture, tradition.. tih vel mai mai a ni fo. Hei hian thangtharte nunah novel hlutna a tihniam a ni.

Self confidence tel lova thu kan ziah thin avangin, 1) Zirtir tha tak nei, 2) Kohhran pawisawi lo 3) Thiam, changkang, mi hriat loh hria anga inlantir tumna 4) English novel a ruka entawn... 5) content aia author ropui zawk.. tih lampang hi tunlaia kan harsatna langarte niah ka ngai. Author tha tak ni tur, sum harsatna avanga ziak thei lo an awm nual bawk.

Tunlai hian, Mizo tawng ngeia film, tv serial... mamawhna a lo lian ve ta. University kan han nei a, kan pachhiatzia kan hre thar a, kan tuina lam aiin, mamawhna avangin, novel pawimawhzia hriatnaah leh ngaihsannaah kan thangharh mek niah ka ngai."

(The rule of survival for Mizos is "unity is strength". Instead of pursuing an individual interest, communal interest and popularity bears more weight. For example, in politics, when chieftainship was abolished, we were uncertain of own selves, and looked to the Church, politicians and even the Village Council for a replacement. We believed there was something to safeguard us, and so we considered Burmese conflation, Crown colony, UNO... We create affinity towards those with whom we share common religion, language, physical features and lifestyle. That's

why we want to emigrate to Israel, and think highly of the western Christians and the Koreans. Since we are highly literate, we are fond of reading and read whatever we can lay our hands on. We do not bother to critique, but read with the intention to assimilate it. That is why literature has had a great impact on us.

For example, in my opinion, Laldenga wasn't the only one who sent the Mizo National Army underground in 1966. J.T. Edson, Joe Milliard, a great number of cowboy novels, Lalsangliana, J.F. Laldailova (Robin Hood), and James Lianmawia's translations influenced the young men of those days. The fascination for American cowboys translated into a disdain and enmity towards India.

Today, I consider the electronic media to be a greater influence to the Mizo youth than novels. The whole tribe has lost self-confidence and that is why we have more critics than authors. More than passion, job obligation compels us to study literature. Our seniors in literature are lost. Some think that literature is just grammar, language, culture, tradition. This has pulled down the popularity of novels amongst the youth. ✓

Because we write with no self-confidence, we are wary of things like whether or not our stories are didactic, offensive to the Church, create the impression of crafted, advanced writer, more discerning than others, copying from English novels and laying more importance to the author than the content. There are people who would've made good authors, had it not been for their monetary constraints.

Lately, we have felt the need to have films and TV serials in our own language. With the establishment of our University have we come to

realize our dreary situation. More than our interest, because there is a need for it, we have come to realize the importance of novels.)

Dr. RL Thanmawia says, *“Mizo zingah chuan literary genres hrang hrangah hian thawnthu phuahchawp (fiction) hi hralh a kal ber reng a, chhiar tam ber a ni tihna a ni nghal a. Chhiar tam ber a nih avangin nghawng pawh a nei nasa ber turah ngai ila; mahse eng ang takin nge effect & impact a neih tih chu tawi tea sawi thiam a har hle. Chhungkaw inlaichinna thil te, khawtlang nun leh mimal nun inlaichinna thilah nasa tak chuan nghawng a nei ang tih a lang a. Tun hnaia thuziak, a bikin non-fiction hian thalaite hawiher hi a kaihruai nasa hle. Mahse mass media (Chanchinbu leh electronic media) te erawh hi chu tunlai mihring nun khalhtu chak ber chu a ni ta a nih hi.”*

(The Mizo stories make the best-selling books among the genres of Mizo literature, because it is the most popular. And since it is widely read, it has the maximum effect too. However it is difficult to estimate the degree of effect it has. It will have impact on family ties, social and individual relationship for sure. But today, it is the mass media which is the most influential in our lives.)

Lalrammawia Ngente adds, *“Novel hi khawtlang leh mihring inzirtirna pawimawh ber pakhat a la ni reng a. A bik takin Mizote zingah chuan ziak leh chhiar thiam kan tam a, mahse, thil chik taka zir a, ngaihtuah ai chuan ngaihtuah ngai lem lo, rilru pe tak sia thawnthu chhiar thiam leh peih an tamin a lang. Drama leh Poetry angte chu ka chhiar thiam lo, ka chhiar peih lo ti mai mai an la tam khawp mai. Chuvangin prose narration (novel, etc) ang hi chu Mizo mipui tam berin kan la chhiar thiam tawk leh kan chhiar duh tawk la niin a lang a. Chuvang chuan heng harsatna chi hrang hrang sutkian nan leh inzirtirna atan hian hmanraw pawimawh tak pakhat a la nih reng ka ring. Electronic media lam hmanga inzirtirna hi chu a hautak em mai a, duh angin*

kan la nei thei lo. Chuvang chuan man tlawm zawk, chhiar nuam bawk si Novel hi a la hlu deuh deuh dawn niin a lang.

Novel ziaktu mawhphurhna thua chuan kawng hnih awm theiin a lang. Pakhatah chuan Kristian ram kan nih angin a Pathian thu lam hawi zawnga novel ziah a, a ngaihnaawmna emaw, a literary value lam emaw thluk vak lem lova mi zirtir tum hrim hrima novel ziak a awm a. Hei hi a tam ber ni pawhin a lang. Hetiangah hi chuan a chhe lam tarlang vak lovin a tha lam ngawr ngawr an thlur thin a. A ending pawh victory of good over evil (happy-ending) a ni tlangpui.

Hetih lai hian a zirtir thup ru chung emaw, a chhiartuten an phawrh chhuah zawk tur emawa Novel ziak tam tak a awm tawh bawk a. Tin, fact and fiction inpawlh chiatin hringnun chhungril ber phawrh chhuah tuma a chhia leh a tha inpawlh chiata ziak a awm hlawm bawk.

Hetiang novel chi hnih hlutna hi a inang lo mai thei a. Inzirtirna (social reformation) hrim hrim atan chuan a hmasa zawk khi a tha mai thei a. Chutih rual chuan literature lama hmasawonna atan chuan a hnuhnung zawk ang khi thain a lang. Hei vang hian novel belhchian dawl leh tha ziah tuma hma lak zel hi novelist-te mawhphurhna pawimawh takah ka ngai."

(The novel remains one of the best media for social and cultural awareness. Although we have a large population of literate people, we often go for the types that don't require much thought. There are many who don't read poetry or drama. Therefore the novel is still the favourite among the people and precisely because of this; it becomes a very important tool.

Regarding the role of the writer, there can be two ~~points~~ of view, first of which is that since we are Christians, our literature should necessarily focus on its teaching. This kind of literature still dominates

our writings. However in the recent years, there are writers who have attempted at subtly revealing the hidden messages in their writings than give out obvious answers. They are those who skillfully intertwine fiction and non-fiction to take their writings to a different realm altogether. While the former kind may be good for social reformation, only the latter kind of endeavor will propel our literature to break new grounds.)

Story-writing as a career

The contemporary writers all agree that novels and short stories are the best-selling genres of all Mizo literature. But what are the economic prospects of story-writing? Can writing be a serious career in Mizoram? Lalhmingliana Saiawi quips, "Though we've reached quite far in writing, we need to do a lot more reading. We have among our senior government officials who are well-educated but not well-read. Reading shouldn't only be informative but should also be fun; perhaps we writers haven't achieved that effect yet. To those close ones I sold my book, I got back comments such as, "Look, it was so costly, we put it away in a safe place!", and "I don't read Mizo books" and "Why did you even want to write in the first place?" There is a village school teacher who once told me that because there was only one copy of the book being circulated in his village, and he never got his hands on it. Never did it occur to him to simply buy himself a copy!"⁴⁹

Lalrammawia Ngente explains the monetary side of story-writing in Mizoram, "

Novel hi literary piece-ah rau rau chuan Mizoten kan hriatthiam leh kan ngaihhlut ber a ni em aw ka ti. Kristian thawnthuah pawh other prose works-a ziah ai chuan novel-a ziah hi hralh a kalin chhiartu pawh an tam zawk niin a

⁴⁹ From the Afterword of *Lungrang Laiawrha*

lang. A chhan chu a chhiar thei ek ek tan novel hi chu chhiar a awlsam avang leh thawnthu a nihna avang hian Mizo zingah na na na chuan novel hi a ziaawm ber em aw ka ti. Chhiartu an tam a, a copy pawh a chhut tam ngam deuhva, mite pawhin a lawm deuh ber nia hriatna ka nei. A chhan chu Mizo Academy of Letters-in kum 1989 atanga kum tina Book of the Year an puan 21 zinga 11 chu Novel a ni.

Hetih rual hian a ziaktu (author) hian kawngro a su em em bawk a, Novelist-te hian mite hriat leh hlut an hlawh tan tawh avangin an novel chhuak thar chuan ngaihven hial a hlawh pha ve tawh. Tin, media lamte hian lehkhabu chhuak reng reng pholan emaw, review etc. an uar ve tawh a, hei hian nasa takin Novelist-te a chawikang a ni.

Writer tan sum leh paia hlawkpaina tur khawp ziah leh hralh erawh a la har hle a. Mizoram Publication Board-in an financed lah bu 200 thehluh a ngai a, a man (price) an tihniam em em bawk a. A chhutna man ngawr ngawr hi an tum tiin a sawi theih ang. Publisher anga sawi thin Press neitute lahin a ziaktute hlawkna tham sum an la pe thei lo bawk a. A ziaktute pawisa hlawh chu sawi loh, an lehkhabu ziah copy 50/100 vel chauh hlawha publisher-te chhuah tir pawh an pawisa lo. Chuti khawp chuan ziaktute hmakhua a la thim.

Tin, tlema hralh thei deuhthe pawhi copy 5,000 chuang hret an chhuah thei a, a hralhna tur mihring kan la tlem hi kan harsatna pakhat a la ni vein a lang. A chhut man hi hmun danga a material lak vek a nih avangin a to lo thei lova, chuvang chuan a zuartute hlawh nen pheii chuan hlawh a tam thei lo. Innghahna tak atan chuan eng lehkhabu mah hi a la rin tlak loh tiin a sawi theih ang.

Hetih rual hian Novel ngaihsanna a lo pung tan tial tial a, tunhma zawng ai chuan a ziaktu pawhin a hlawk phah chho zel dawn niin a lang a. Hei hian beiseina pawh a tisang hle.

(I feel that the novel is the most valued and understood of all literary pieces. Even Christian stories, which are written as novels sell better than other prose works. This is because it is easy to read and because it is a story. The readership is wider and so we can afford to print more numbers. In fact, out of the 21 Books of the Year that the Mizo Academy of Letters has named, 11 are novels.

At the same time, the author forms an important factor. Newly published novels are given attention to because the public has learnt to acknowledge and value the writer. Also, the media does its bit to review and highlight new releases, which is of immense help to the authors.

However, it is still a challenge for a writer to make a considerable profit out of writing. Those financed by the Mizoram Publication Board have to pledge 200 copies, and the price which is fixed is very less. It can be said that they pay for only the printing expenses. The press owners who are the equivalents of publishers cannot earn a profit huge enough for the writer. Never mind the writer's salary; they don't even mind fixing the number of prints to just 50-100. The future of writers is thus very bleak.

Also, even the best-selling books number to only about 5000, one of the reasons being that the population of Mizos itself is still small. The cost of printing cannot be cheap because the materials are imported, and with the commission of the sellers, the actual profit of the writer is very low. No book has ever had the potential to make writing a sole career.)

Promotion of books

Even though story-writing may still have a long way to go before it becomes critically and economically rewarding for the writer, there's hope in the form of the Mizo Academy of Letters (MAL). Dr. R.L.

Thanmawia, the present Assistant Secretary of the Academy shares some insight to its endeavours.

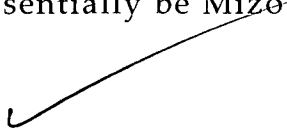
He says, *"Mizo Academy of Letters Pawl hi kum 1964 a din a ni a. Mizo thu leh hla, tawng leh culture tihhmasawn leh vawn him leh thehdarh chu a tum ber a ni. Member 160 vel an awm mek a, Kum tin Book of the year a thlang a; kum 3 danah Academy Award mi pakhat hnenah a pe a; Literary Magazine "Thu leh Hla' thla tin a tichhuak a; Aizawl leh district khawpui hrang hrangah te, Mizoram pawna Mizo hnahthlak awmho zingah te Seminar a buatsaih thin. Meet the authors, Symposium, Workshop leh consultation a huaihawt thin bawk. Book of the Year thlangtu hi member 5 an awm a, 3 chu E.C. member an ni a; pahnih pawn lama mite ruat thin an ni. Kum tin ruat thar thin a ni. Thlan dan tur Criteria hi siamthat a ni fo va, tuna hman laiah hi chuan - Originality; Creativity/Critical lama a san dan; language; General impression tihte a ni."*

(Mizo Academy of Letters was established in 1964. Its main objective is to develop, preserve and spread Mizo literature, language and culture. Every year it awards the title to Book of Year to the best publication of the year, gives the Academy Award to one person every three years and publishes a montly literary journal called Thu leh Hla. It organizes seminars in Aizawl and other district capitals, and even with those outside Mizoram. Besides these seminars, it also organizes events such as Meet the Authors, symposiums, workshops and consultations. The panel which selects the Book of the Year consists of 5 members, 3 of which are executive members of the Academy, and the other two are appointed from outside the Academy. This panel is changed every year. The criteria for judging is revised every now and then, but for the moment, books are judged on originality, creative/critical content, language and general impression)

In Mizoram, the period between 1990 to 2010 saw the state take a huge step of development. Like any other part of the world, Mizoram closed the last century with hopes of a promising new century. As the experience increased, so did the disillusionment. Political games became more and more menial as the power of money played a deciding role in elections. The Bamboo flowering phenomenon and the subsequent shortage of grains, which in the past had impoverished the Mizo people so much as to give them a political awakening, happened again in 2007. From the way the government handled the situation of rice shortage, it is hard to believe that it was this incident which cause the founding of the state of Mizoram in the first place. Criticism of the government spread as Mizoram welcomed and utilised electronic mass media among other technological advances. Of course, people would learn the hard way the merciless authority of the Internet through sex videos and images that circulated through the ever-increasing number of computers and mobile telephones. Mizoram tried to deal with the menace of alcoholism by prohibiting it, only to appropriate the part which would earn some revenue. The number of suicides and death caused by substance abuse also increased while they danced their way into the Guinness Book of World Records.

It was these times that shaped the milieu in which the writers of the seven selected stories wrote their work. These seven *thawnthu* belong to as many genres - social satire, historical novel, humour, science fiction and romance, the variety proving the creative freedom and awareness that contemporary writes have. They explore their choices and write stories ending them unlike conventional closures. Paradoxically, they write with no intention about their society for an audience with the complete knowledge of the power of the medium that warrants examination. These

contemporary times serve as testament to the conflict of identity of the writer derived from the residual role of the didactic storyteller, and hence the need to adapt the communal experience of telling a story into the isolation of a writer's desk. Perhaps the sentiment of contemporary Mizo *thawnthu* can best be recorded in the way writers today compromise foreign lexicon in their works. Through the interviews quoted in the paper, one can conclude that it is only a matter of time before the slanting words like cell phone, taxi, internet will stand proud and straight like their predecessors like Kamding (commanding officer), sikul (school), electric, committee etc. which have found themselves a home in the writers' hearts. So also will Mizo contemporary *thawnthu* develop, expand, improve its content and creative prowess and establish such a dynamic reader-writer relationship that will quintessentially be Mizo.



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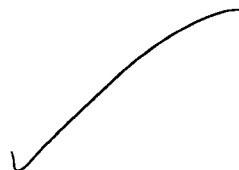
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