

**TAILORING THE TALE:
MIZO FOLKTALES AS A MEANS OF EDUCATION**

A dissertation submitted to the University of Hyderabad

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of the degree of

**Master of Philosophy
in the School of Humanities.**

By

Laldinpuii



Department of English

School of Humanities

University of Hyderabad

December 2009.

Department of English
School of Humanities
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad 500046.

Date: 31st. December. 2009.

This is to certify that I, Laldinpuii, have carried out the research embodied in the present dissertation for the full period prescribed under M. Phil., ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this dissertation was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

Signature of the Supervisor

Signature of the Candidate

Name: Laldinpuii

Enrolment No.: 08HEHL06

Head of the Department

Dean of School

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Supervisor, Professor Alladi Uma, who has been a constant support throughout my research work, who patiently read my writings, gave suggestions and put up with me when I had not met my deadlines.

I am thankful to the Head of the Department, Prof. Sachidananda Mohanty for his class on Research Methodology, for giving suggestions after reading my draft and for all his help.

I thank Prof. Sridhar who had taken our Literary Theory and Criticism class, who helped me with books and discussions as well as in all the ways that he could.

I am grateful to Dr. Suneetha Rani for her class on Writing from the Margins and Dr. Anna Kurian James for taking a course on Literature from the North East. These courses helped pave the way for this dissertation to take shape. I would like to thank Dr. Sunita Mishra who read my dissertation and offered constructive criticism.

I am very thankful to Mr. R. Nagarajan who has helped me sort out all the minute details of administrative business and who could call me by my name in the first few weeks of joining the department. The staff of the Department of English – Mr. Y. Sreenath, Mr. B. Ganesh, Ms. Smitha Swaraj and Mr. B. Suresh – deserve a special word of thanks for all their help during my stay in the Department.

I would like to thank Pu Hmaa of the State Archaeological Library and his colleagues, as well as the Librarian and the staff at Aizawl Theological College for their assistance.

I am thankful to Mrs. Lalthansangi Fanai, Lecturer of English at Government Aizawl College, Aizawl, for reading and correcting my translations of some of the Mizo folktales even though she had a busy schedule.

I thank all the people I had interviewed for this dissertation for sparing time for the questions I had for them.

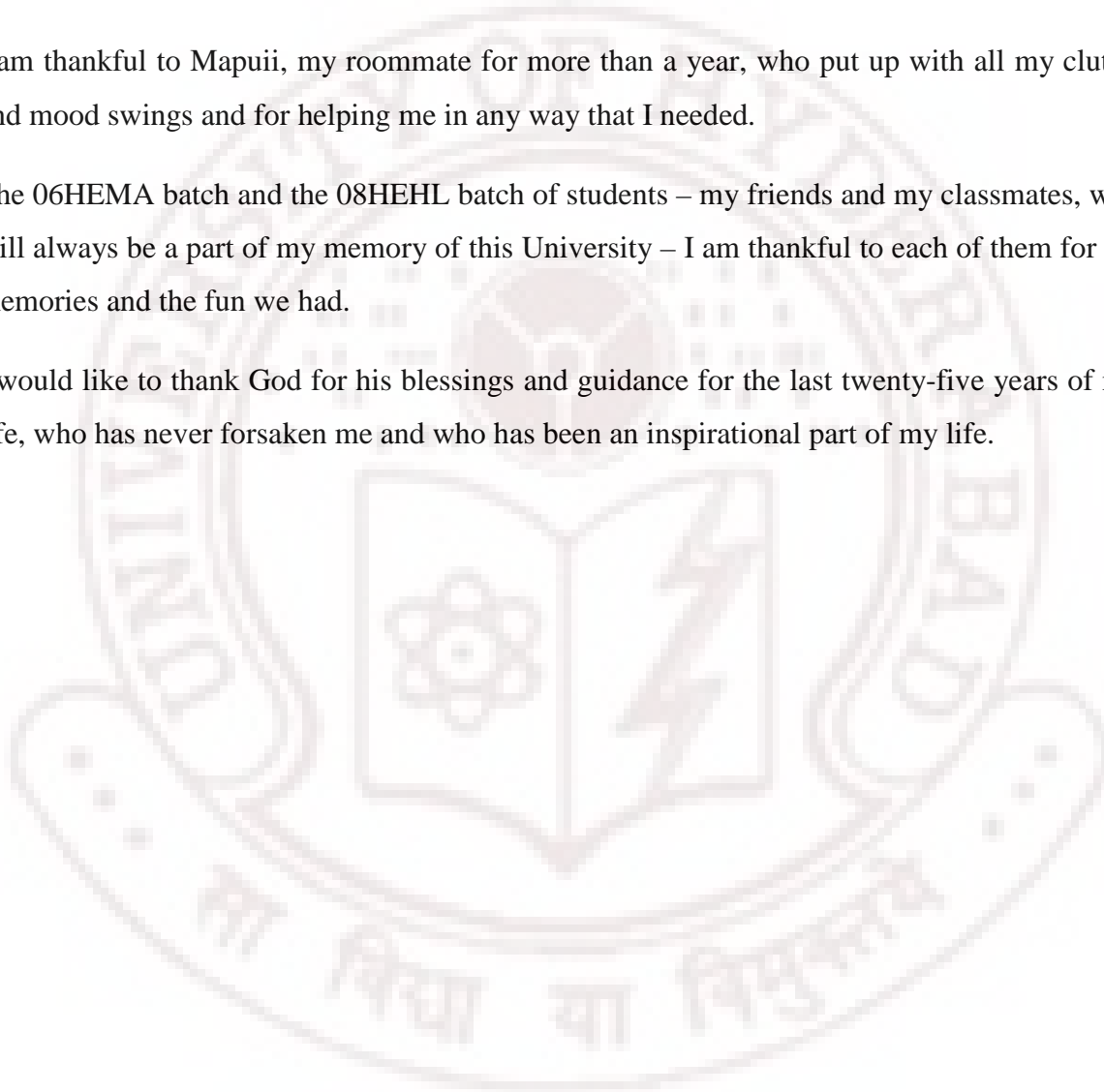
I want to thank my parents for all that they have done for me and their unconditional love, prayers and support; my brothers for always being there for me; and my grandmothers for their constant prayers and wishes.

I am very thankful to U Taia for all his encouragement, help and support and U Azuali who has been more than a sister during my time on campus; U Zara and Achhuana, my “elder brothers” on campus; U Sawmtea, U Nunui, U Thanpuia and U Zamtei for all their help throughout the years; Mami, a wonderful senior; and all the Mizos on campus who have made my stay so memorable. I am so thankful to Sanjeeta, who I have pestered countless times in the past and who was always ready to help out and Aren who was a constant friend. Thank you to Atalu, who has been a wonderful friend for the past couple of years.

I am thankful to Mapuii, my roommate for more than a year, who put up with all my clutter and mood swings and for helping me in any way that I needed.

The 06HEMA batch and the 08HEHL batch of students – my friends and my classmates, who will always be a part of my memory of this University – I am thankful to each of them for the memories and the fun we had.

I would like to thank God for his blessings and guidance for the last twenty-five years of my life, who has never forsaken me and who has been an inspirational part of my life.

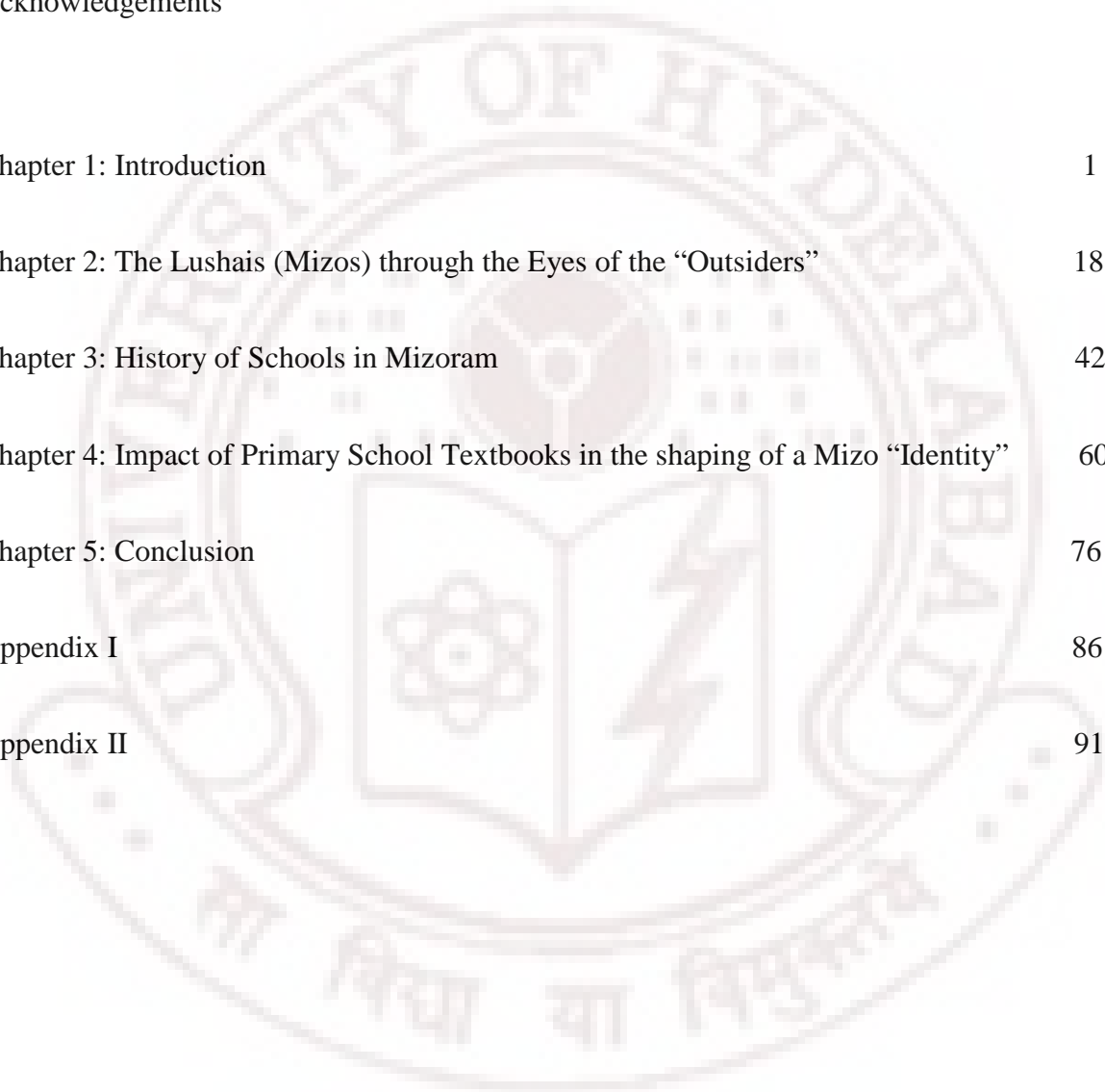


Contents

Certificate

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The Lushais (Mizos) through the Eyes of the “Outsiders”	18
Chapter 3: History of Schools in Mizoram	42
Chapter 4: Impact of Primary School Textbooks in the shaping of a Mizo “Identity”	60
Chapter 5: Conclusion	76
Appendix I	86
Appendix II	91



Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation will attempt to study the transformation of Mizo folktales from an oral form into a written mode in the form of educational texts in the Lushai Hills in the early twentieth century. The twentieth century witnessed the transition of the Mizos from a “tribal” society to a colonised “modern” society under the missionaries. Folklore in general has always been an important part of the culture of a community. The term “folklore” has a wide range of meaning as it “is the material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice. It may be folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other materials preserved in words” (Taylor 34). According to this definition, folktales are just a part of folklore.

The term “folklore” was first used by an English man called William Thoms in 1846 in a letter that was published by the London journal *Athenaeum*. Mazharul Islam traces the first use of this word in the following way:

William Thoms was the first scholar who coined the term folklore in English in 1846 to replace “popular antiquities” and “popular literature”. Using the name Ambrose Merton, Thoms wrote a letter to *The Athenaeum* and proposed “the good Saxon Compound, folklore – the Lore of the people”, with the hope that “the connection between the folklore of England (remember I claim the honour of introducing the epithet folklore, as Disraeli does of introducing Fatherland, into the literature of the country) and that of Germany is so intimate that such

communication will probably serve to enrich some future edition of Grimm's Mythology" (*The Athenaeum*, August 22, 1846, 862-63). In the footnote to the letter Thoms expressed, "It is only honest that I should tell you I have long been contemplating a work upon our folklore and I am personally interested in the success of the experiment, which, I have in this letter, albeit imperfectly, urged you to undertake" (1846, 863). The word is a hyphenated one, folk-lore, but later on the hyphen was omitted. This short but significant nature of the word helps us to understand what is folk and what is lore. "The manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, and so on of the olden time", is the view of Thoms as reflected in his letter and he believed that these were dying out. Besides, his influence on the study of folklore was partly responsible to the increasing awareness of a nationalistic spirit and romantic idea hidden in the elements of folklore which received the attention of scholars of the later half of the nineteenth century. (Islam 3)

The interest in folklore and folk culture in Europe gained momentum with the Romantic Movement in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Until the nineteenth century, documentation and collection of folktales was primarily based on the European sub-continent. However, the growing trend of imperialism and colonisation led to new efforts in the field of collection of folktales. The colonial interest in folktales was the outcome of ethnographic interest to enrich European knowledge about "savage societies". They were also useful in understanding the mentality of the colonised for better administration. According to William A. Wilson, the interest in the collection of folklore by the British and Americans involved "zealous scholar-patriots [who] searched the folklore

record of the past not just to see how people had lived in by-gone days...but primarily to discover 'historical' models on which to reshape the present and build the future"(Wilson 22). In India, the interest in folklore grew in the nineteenth century, either as colonial interest or as nationalistic movements. Stuart Blackburn mentions the connection between colonialism and the people of India through folktales in this manner:

As expressions of pre-colonial culture, folktales (and other forms of folklore) were central to the conflict between tradition and modernity that dominated cultural history in the nineteenth century; although this tension has a long history, it crystallised in the grand debate between Orientalists and anglicists in the first decades of the century and then, as European cultural forces penetrated deeper and deeper into Indian life, it stimulated cultural revivals and underpinned nationalist discourse at the end of the century (Blackburn, Print 144).

The modern English word "folk" is derived from the Old English word "folc" meaning common people, men, tribe or multitude. The old English noun came from the German word "fulka" which means people, army or a host of warriors (Wikipedia). One of the definitions of "folk" that the Oxford English Dictionary gives is this: "people from a particular country or region, or who have a particular way of life." The term "folk" gradually became associated with "backward" class of people who were usually uneducated. Mazharul Islam points out: "There was a time when the idea of folk was related to the primitive" (6). However, Alan Dundes has a very different view of the word "folk" as he writes: "Folk is not a synonym for peasant (as it was in the nineteenth century), nor is it limited to one stratum of society... The term 'folk' can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor" (Dundes 11). As already mentioned, the interest in folklore gained new

heights with the Romantic Movement and the concept of the “noble savage”. According to Mircea Eliade, “the journals of travellers in the newly-discovered countries were read and appreciated for a very special reason; that they described a blissful humanity which had escaped the misdeeds of civilisation and provided models for utopian societies” (Eliade 39). This belief in the natural goodness of man in the most “primitive” stage was one of the reasons that the colonisers were so keen on collecting folktales and studying them in the new colonies that they ruled over. Eliade further states: “The myth of the noble savage was but a renewal and continuation of the myth of the Golden Age; that is, of *the perfection of the beginning of things*” (41). The Romantic interest in the “exotic” could also be another reason for the colonisers to have an interest in the folktales of places that were far away from their homelands. The folktales provided an insight into the lives and practices of a community of people that were far removed from the colonisers and thus could have possibly paved the way for the concept of “Orientalism”, where the unknown or the alien is regarded as “backward” and “primitive”.

The collection of folktales from different parts of the world was guided with the colonial advantage in mind where the administrator had to have a better understanding of the people and their culture in order to rule over them. It gave the rulers a chance to study the “natives” and define their culture and understand the mentality of the people. Folktales are old as they have existed for many years but the concepts and study of folktales is quite recent. The collection and study of folktales in the colonial times would involve the collection of the tales from different sources, the growth of the discipline and an interest in the varied impacts that they had on the people and their lives. Then, there is the politics of performance, where the folktales were used in the colonial space to rule over the people and to show them, in

some cases, that they were “backward” and that they needed the help of the colonisers to make their living better. Although an interest in the folktales started with the Romantic concept, its use in administration seems to be quite paradoxical. The Romantics believed in the innate goodness of human nature but they saw the “simplicity” of the “folk” in the folktales: “The romantics, who extolled the very poetry the rationalists despised, reversed the attitude towards and valuation of the folk and its literature” (Ben-Amos 22). The attitude that the Europeans had of the non-Europeans as “backward” and “primitive” when seen from their yardstick would have led to the belief that even though they were “noble savages”, they were still inferior to the European minds. This gave the colonisers a valid reason to conquer lands and expand their rule. Hence, the folktales were important in the spread of the colonies.

One such territory where the folktales were used for the colonial enterprise was the “Lushai Hills”. The area which used to be formerly called “Lushai Hills” was a hilly tribal state, incorporated in the British Empire in 1890, situated in the North Eastern frontier of India surrounded by Chittagong hill tracts of Bengal and Chin Hills of Myanmar, Tripura, Assam and Manipur. The “Lushai Hills” became Mizo Hills District of Assam in 1954, which later became a Union Territory in 1972. In February of 1986, it became a state of the Indian Union. Mizoram is among one of the last states in India to become a full-fledged state and it has a distinct tradition and history. Many of these traditions and history are not in the written form but are rather in the oral form. The folktales, customs, practices, religious beliefs and social set-up of the people of Mizoram (formerly called “Lushai Hills”) have been written and recorded after the arrival of the British to the land. The administrators who set foot on the land in the latter part of the nineteenth century brought many changes to the land and the

people. The arrival of the Welsh missionaries in 1894 and the subsequent establishment of educational institutions brought about a change in this territory.

The word “Mizo” is a generic term applying to all the Mizos living in Mizoram and its adjoining areas of Manipur, Tripura, the Chittagong Hill tracts and the Chin Hills (Hluna 2). There are several sub-tribes among the Mizos. There used to be different languages for each sub-tribe; however, the lingua franca became *Duhlian*, the language of the dominant sub-tribe called Lusei (Lushai), by the time the colonisers set up their administration in the region. According to R. Thangvunga, the development and the subsequent use and popularity of the Duhlian dialect (which is now called “Mizo” language) rested heavily on the pioneer missionaries. In his essay “Aspects of Mizo Literature”, he writes:

In time the *Duhlian* dialect of the politically dominant Lusei clan became the *lingua franca* of the majority of communities under the umbrella of the Mizo nationality. This dialect received a further boost when Christian missionaries arrived in 1894, namely, Rev. F. W. Savidge and J. H. Lorrain, who reduced the language into writing, using a simple and effective phonetic Hunterian system of Roman script. (Thangvunga)

Folktales have been a part of the Mizo way of life for many generations. There are writers who believe that the history of the progress of migration is embedded in the folk songs and stories of the Mizo. R. L. Thanzawna writes that if the Mizo songs of the early times are studied, the places where they formerly settled can be clearly found: “Their [the

Lushais] stay in this valley of Run [a tributary of Chindwin] was marked by a number of songs and interesting tales” (Thanzawna). The inclusion of the name of a river or a mountain such as “Run” and “Lurh” in the tales and the songs will give one an idea of the places where the ancestors of the Mizos settled in the past. Therefore, there is history, geographical knowledge and information in these folk literatures.

If one were to formulate the nature of the Mizo folktales, it would include four major categories. The Mizo folktales may be considered a history of the people, a way of finding out about the past and their origin; the folktales may also be an expression of the thought of the people and a source to know about their worldview. Another aspect of the folktales is that they were a form of theorising about the natural world around them; for instance, the appearances of a bird or an animal, or natural phenomena like earthquakes and eclipses. The folktales were also important forms of moral and ethical lessons. The folktales are an important form of oral “knowledge systems” and the early missionaries might have been wise to this aspect and used them in the schools where the tales were transformed into book-based forms to impart knowledge. Apart from the use of medicines to cure the various ailments of the people, education became an important tool for the early missionaries to evangelise the natives. The missionaries and administrators were often ignorant of the local cultures and hence relied on the “native” materials that were available to them. For instance, Major A. G. McCall, in the last chapter of his book Lushai Chrysalis writes about a man called Pu Dara who had been an interpreter for Colonel Shakespear in his works (McCall 310).

Although there was no formal set-up of schools in early Mizo life, there was no dearth of “education” in different fields of life. With the arrival of the Welsh missionaries in the late nineteenth century, the term “education” took on another meaning in the life of the Mizos. The former type of learning where the young generation would be taught in different set-ups was replaced by the kind of education that required the children to have an institutional set-up. The education system as well as the lessons that were taught varied from one another. Before the establishment of the schools by the missionaries, the learning process of the children was through everyday life. They were taught the work they had to do at home and in the fields. They were taught the codes of conduct through proverbs; ethical and moral lessons were through the folktales; and the work of a man and a woman were clearly demarcated both in the home as well as in the fields. Although there was no “school” in the past, the place for learning was diverse and wide and the children were taught about their surroundings, and their understanding of the natural world was shaped by the folktales they heard from their parents and elders.

Mizoram has a literacy rate of 88.8% according to the census of 2001 making it the second highest state in literacy, next only to Kerala. Therefore, it may rightly be said that education is an important part of Mizo life. The inevitable fact is that the early missionaries had an important impact on the lives of the Mizos and this will be dealt with in later chapters. There will also be an attempt to explain why Christianity cannot be altogether separated from educational purposes.

There does not appear to be a word in Mizo for “folktale”. The most widely used word for it is “Pipute thawnthu” (stories of our ancestors) or “Hmanlai thawnthu” (stories of the past). If one were to look at the meaning of the word “folk”, there are several meanings attached to the word. One of the explanations is that it means “people in general”. Another explanation is that it means “people from a particular country or region, or those who have a particular way of life”. These explanations/meanings show that there does not seem to be any negative connotation to this term. However, the word “folktale”, as has been mentioned earlier, evokes a certain meaning which becomes synonymous with words like “uncivilised”, “exotic” and that which is something out of the ordinary. These associations that the term has could be a way of separating the “Great traditions” from the “Little traditions” that A. K. Ramanujan writes about in the Foreword to Folktales of India.

India is rich in folktales and folk literature. A. K. Ramanujan in the Foreword to the book Folktales of India discusses the presence of folktales in the history of different parts of India and how these cannot be entirely separated from the myths and legends, which are often referred to as the “Great Traditions” (Beck xvi). Ramanujan also writes about the theory that many of the folktales around the world may have originated from India. There are also many folktales which seem to have the same plot and motif but which differ in the events and names. He gives one example of a folktale that he heard from a Kannada woman in South India which is very similar to the Greek myth of Oedipus. The difference is that the protagonist is a woman and she kills herself by hanging herself at the end of the tale. The motifs and themes of folktales may be quite similar in countries all over the world but every tale will have a distinct feature which will make it unique to a particular place or area.

There are varying views on the term “folk literature”. There are some who feel that “literature” would mean only the written word while there are others like Mazharul Islam who share the view that “[f]olk literature includes those lores which do not have a physical existence, but find expression through language, oral or written” (11). In my opinion, literature should be inclusive of the written as well as the oral forms because there are so many cultures around the world which have a history of oral traditions. If one were to trace the history and tradition of great nations like Greece, one of the greatest epics The Iliad was first preserved in the form of an oral narrative and was only subsequently written down and recorded. India is also rich in folktales such as the “Panchatantra” and the “Jataka” tales among many others. Therefore, literature should include the oral forms as well.

The advantage or disadvantage of any oral tradition is its fluidity. One of the most prominent features of oral folktales is its ambiguity. There are no authors; therefore the tale belongs to everyone. Vladimir Propp writes: “Folklore works...never have an author, and this is one of their specific features” and he also states the following: “Folklore circulates, changing all the time, and this circulation and changeability are among its specific characteristics” (Propp 8). As the folktale is retold and passed on from person to person and from generation to generation, there are parts which are lost while there are parts which are added on to the tales. The general motif and theme may remain the same but the details might differ as the tale travels through time. There is an old saying in Mizo “Unau thawnthu sawi pawh a dang thin” which may be translated as “There will be varying versions of the same story even if it is told by siblings”, which in a way explains the complex nature of folktales. On the one hand, one may say that when folktales that have been orally passed on from one generation to another are written down and recorded, there is a loss of the fluidity of the tales.

Stuart Blackburn wrote in an article called “The Burden of Authenticity: Printed Oral tales in Tamil Literary History”: “In moving from the oral tale to the novel, the most demanding task for the new prose would be the representation of speech on the printed page” (Blackburn, “Burden” 136). Although Blackburn is writing about the evolving history of Tamil literature, this view may also be applied to the Mizo oral folktales as well as those in different parts of the world. However, it is necessary to record these tales in order to preserve them. On the other hand, if one were to consider the possibility of multiple readings that may be done of written works, it may be argued that even though the folktales may have been written down there is still the possibility of their being flexible. In today’s world of technology, Mizo folktales are slowly fading out as the earlier practice of story-telling has given way to televisions, magazines and internet. The integral part that folktales played in the lives of the Mizos will soon be forgotten if steps are not taken to promote and preserve the folktales. It is important to make use of the media that is available to the people, especially the younger generation, to promote an interest in the folktales. There may be tough competition from many directions but it is possible to use the media to the advantage of the folktales. For instance, there is a blog called www.mizowritinginenglish.com, which is looked after by a lecturer in a college. In this blog, there are Mizo folktales that have been translated and readers may also send in their translations to the administrator of the blog. In such a way, the media could be used to the advantage of preserving Mizo folktales. Television and other media may also be used in a similar manner to promote an awareness of the folktales.

The importance that folktales play in the history of the Mizos can best be understood by a closer study of the tales. There is physical evidence in different parts of present Mizoram where the folktales seem to have taken place. There are many places in

different parts of Mizoram which have folktales that relate to a certain rock formation or mountains. For example, a well-known folktale of Chawngchilhi and her snake lover ends with a giant snake that was born out of their union who devours young children. There is a cave-like structure near a village called Falam in the Chin Hills where it is believed that this snake of the folktale used to dwell in. There is a large stone in Champhai district which is believed to be the weaving place of Chawngtinleri, a heavenly maiden who married a human. Since she was no ordinary person, she needed a special place to weave and this place exists to this day. One may not believe in the folktales and the possible places which have stories attached to them. But they are a part of the history and literature of the people and it would be wrong just to dismiss them. Our ancestors might not have been “civilised” from our point of view but they had their own ways of trying to understand their environment. The concept of “history” and time might differ for a Mizo and a European; for a Mizo, there is belief in the cyclical nature of history and time as opposed to the European concept of a linear time and history. Such types of differences in the outlook and beliefs make it inappropriate that one set of people are judged solely by the yardstick of the other.

It is interesting to observe that one of the earliest collections of Mizo folktales in the Mizo language was Serkawn Graded Reader, a Primary School text book first published in 1938. This makes one wonder about the link that folktales have with education. Would the “education” that had been imparted through the Mizo folktales in the early days be useful in institutionalised set-ups? William R. Bascom lists education as one of the functions of folklore in his essay “Folklore and Anthropology” (Bascom 33). It would be significant to look at the ways in which folktales were used to teach children and how these would have helped in the shaping of a “Mizo” identity.

It is inevitable that my position and location will have an impact on the views and opinions expressed in this dissertation. As a practising Christian, it is difficult for me to criticise the early missionaries who had done so much work in my state. There may have been methods and practices that they had observed which might not be acceptable to me from my perspective; yet it is very hard for me to be critical of them. As a person who is in the twenty-first century, I might have the privilege to look back and find fault with the administration and evangelisation of the people by the Westerners in my state but there will no doubt be restraints on my views and opinions, both consciously and unconsciously. Being a practising Christian does not really affect the way I read the Mizo folktales. I am aware that my ancestors believed in certain spirits and had superstitions but that was because the world they lived in at that time was different from my world today. There will be variations in the outlook of the people depending on the environment and exposure that they encounter.

This dissertation will have three chapters other than the introduction and the concluding chapter. The second chapter will give an analysis of three works by British administrators which are among the earliest known records about the Lushais (or Mizos) which had been written down. This chapter will deal with two articles and a book which may be considered anthropological or ethnographical. There are various folktales that have been collected in these works and I will make an attempt to study the reasons behind their efforts.

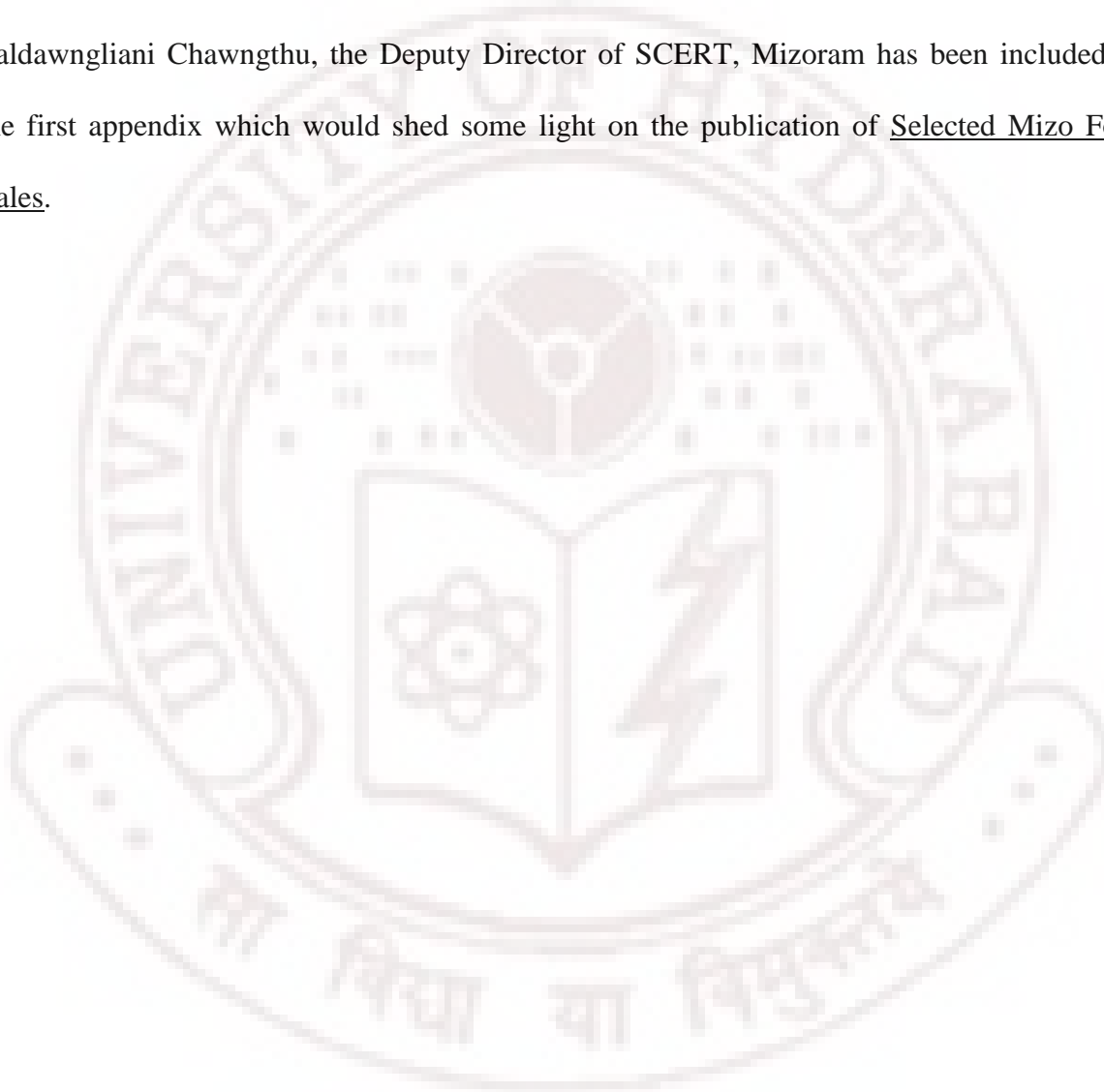
The third chapter will deal with the history of the establishment of schools and the educational system in Mizoram. As already mentioned, the arrival of the Welsh missionaries in 1894 brought the arrival of the “modern” education system in Mizoram. The

missionaries had the responsibility of creating the curriculum and the text books of the schools. There were books which were written by the missionaries as well as the “natives” and there were text books which were written in collaboration between the missionaries and the people of the land. Apart from tracing the history of the schools, this chapter will discuss in detail the Mizo text books that had been developed in the early part of the twentieth century.

The fourth chapter will contain the interviews that had been conducted by me, where the people who had studied the text books mentioned in chapter three express their views about these books. This chapter will also discuss Selected Mizo Folk Tales, a book which was published in 2008 by SCERT, Mizoram, which is a book meant to promote Mizo folktales as well as aid in the teaching of English. It will try to look at the trail of the Mizo folktales from the early twentieth century, when they were used to teach the Mizo language, to the twenty-first century, where they are being used to teach English.

The concluding chapter will provide an overview of the work and will contain my views on the educational aspects of folktales, from how these were first used in the traditional set-up, to how they were later used by the British to study the people they were going to rule over, to their use in Primary Schools to teach a language and values, to their use in the teaching of English. This chapter will also express the problems and limitations that were faced in the course of the research.

This dissertation has two appendices; the first one contains the interviews that were conducted and the second one contains the translations that were done by me of some of the folktales from Zir Tan Bu and Serkawn Graded Reader. A short introduction has been given to the interviews as well as the translations. Seven men who had studied the text-books and one woman who had been a Primary School teacher were interviewed. The interview of Laldawngliani Chawngthu, the Deputy Director of SCERT, Mizoram has been included in the first appendix which would shed some light on the publication of Selected Mizo Folk Tales.



Works Cited

- Bascom, William R. "Folklore and Anthropology." The Study of Folklore. Ed. Alan Dundes. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965. 25-33.
- Beck, Brenda E. F., et al, eds. Folktales of India. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.
- Ben-Amos, Dan. Folklore in Context: Essays. New Delhi: South Asian, 1982.
- Blackburn, Stuart. Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003.
- . "The Burden of Authenticity: Printed Oral Tales in Tamil Literary History." India's Literary History: Essays on the 19th Century. Ed. Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.
- Dundes, Alan. Folklore Matters. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989.
- Eliade, Mircea. Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities. Trans. Philip Mairet. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Hluna, J.V. Education and Missionaries in Mizoram. Guwahati: Spectrum, 1992.
- Islam, Mazhural. Folklore: The Pulse of the People. New Delhi: Concept, 1985.
- McCall, A. G. Lushai Chrysalis. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2003.
- Propp, Vladimir. Theory and History of Folklore. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.

Statistical Handbook Mizoram 2006. Aizawl: Directorate of Economics and Statistics,
Government of Mizoram, 2006.

Taylor, Archer. "Folklore and the Student of Literature." The Study of Folklore. Ed. Alan
Dundes. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965. 34-42.

Thangvunga, R. "Aspects of Mizo Literature." www.mizowritinginenglish.com. 21
September 2008.

Thanzawna, R. L. "Glimpses of Mizo Literature." www.mizowritinginenglish.com. 20
February 2008.

www.wikipedia.com (Folklore) 24 June 2009.

Wilson, William A. "Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism." Folk Groups and Folklore
Genres: A Reader. Ed. Elliott Oring. Utah: Utah State UP, 1989. 21-37.

Chapter 2

The Lushais (Mizos) through the Eyes of the “Outsiders”

Folklore has a wide range and it includes the folktales of the people. Alan Dundes explains: “Folklore includes myths, folktales, legends, proverbs, riddles, folk beliefs, costume, folk medicine, traditional foods, folk speech, charms, curses, games, folk music, folk dances, etc” (Dundes 9). M. H. Abrams defines “folklore” as “the collective name applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or primarily, by word of mouth and example rather than in written form” (Abrams 100). There have been a number of articles and books that deal specifically with the Lushais or the Mizos but two articles and a book that had been published in the twentieth century which deal with the people of the Lushai Hills may be considered for further study. Lushai Chrysalis (1949), “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” (1909) and “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and Their Neighbours” (1909) have been chosen specifically because they consist of folktales that had been collected by the British administrators and they could be seen as anthropological and ethnographical efforts. Anthropology is defined as “the social science that studies the origins and social relationships of human beings” while ethnography is defined as “the branch of anthropology that provides scientific description of individual human societies.” There is a difference between these two terms as can be seen from the definitions. Ethnography is within the field of anthropology and has a more narrow scope as compared to anthropology.

When one reads these works of the British administrators, there appears to be the presence of the “noble savage”. In the narratives of the book and the articles, the writers

appear to be sympathetic to the Lushais and their ways of life. In collecting and documenting the folktales, the writers often share their view that the people they were writing about had their own belief system and practices which might have seemed “backward” to a European; but these might not mean that they are “uncivilised”. However, the writers, who were also administrators in the region, did not hesitate to add that the people needed the presence of the administrators in order for them to make progress in the future. This may be seen as an ambivalent attitude on the part of the administrators.

The book to be studied here is called Lushai Chrysalis¹ and was written by Major A. G. McCall. This book is in the form of a guide book for future travellers or administrators who were preparing to travel to the Lushai Hills. On the one hand, the book may be considered a history book that records the early life of the Lushais and their ways of life, culture and social practices. On the other hand, it could be considered an anthropological work that studies the life style of a particular tribe of people called the “Lushais”. The two articles – “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” (1909) and “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” (1909) – are from journals in the United Kingdom that deal with the stories of the people of the Lushai Hills. The first article was written by J. Shakespear and the second was by J. Shakespear and T. C. Hodson. It would be interesting to observe the audience that these writers were targeting as well as their purpose in writing these articles and the book, Lushai Chrysalis. This book and the articles are one of the earliest written records of the Mizo folktales, and it is no wonder that they have been written by “outsiders” (the British administrators). Since there was no script for the Mizo language, the written records had to be

¹ The first edition of the book was published by the Royal Asiatic Society in 1949. According to the Preface, McCall began writing this work in 1939 when Lushai Hills was under the colonial rule. Therefore I have used this text as an illustration of a text by a British administrator.

prepared by the Britishers to “preserve” the history and culture of the people. J. Shakespear and T. C. Hodson were anthropologists as well as administrators who worked under the British Government carrying out extensive work on different tribes of the North-Eastern region of India. Major A. G. McCall was an important part of the administration that was carried out in the Lushai Hills and had stayed in the region for many years.

The articles “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” and “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” were both published in 1909 in The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and Folklore respectively. The writers of these articles had been administrators in the Lushai Hills and had written about their experiences and the people they had met in the course of their duty. In the “General Theme” that is found in the first few pages of the book, Major A. G. McCall states the following: “Anthropological terminology has been omitted by me to widen the field of readers, though the principles of anthropology have been strictly applied” (McCall 7). This gives one an idea that the author’s target audience seems to be of a wide range which would include academicians as well as non-academicians. In order to ensure that his book may be accessible to a variety of readers, he has clearly made an effort in his style of writing as well as the jargon he uses. When one reads the book, it appears to be a narration of a person’s journey into an unknown land. There are personal stories that are intertwined with the facts and history of the Lushais. Therefore, this book may also be considered as a travelogue in some sense. In this way, a book which may be considered an anthropological or ethnographical work may also be categorised as a travelogue and vice versa.

When one reads “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” by J. Shakespear for the first time, the most prominent feature that one finds is the anthropological nature of the article. It appears as though the writer has made a case study of the Lushais. Shakespear traces the link between different tribes by finding out the similarities in their religious practices, their customs, social ways of life, naming system and origin myths, among other things. He tries to ascertain the fact that these tribes might have originated from the same ancestor. The overt nature of the article cannot be denied because the journal it had been published in is an anthropological journal. In this article, there is just one folktale which is narrated – “The Tale of Grand-Daddy Bear and the Monkey”; however, there are passing references to the various tales that have been passed on from generation to generation of the Lushais and the important role these tales play in their lives. The article has a number of “urban legends” that involve the spirits and gods that the Lushais worshipped. For instance, the story of Dailova, who forgot to perform his annual sacrifice to the spirit (ramhuai) and who had to be violently reminded of this fact is narrated in this article. The reasons behind certain sacrifices offered to different spirits, the origin of magic among the Lushais and the origin myths are also narrated here.

Tales are stories that are full of actions and adventures, while legends are usually stories of ancient times about people and events that may or may not be true. Urban legends are “a kind of folklore consisting of stories often thought to be factual by those circulating them. Urban legends are not necessarily untrue but they are often false, distorted, exaggerated, or sensationalised” (Chhange 187). Mircea Eliade writes: “A myth always narrates something as having *really happened*, as an event that took place, in the plain sense of the term – whether it deals with the creation of the World, or of the most insignificant animal or vegetable species, or of an institution” (Eliade 15). Eliade further bridges the

connection between myths and legends in this way: “When no longer assumed to be a revelation of the ‘mysteries’ the myth becomes ‘decadent’, obscured; it turns into a tale or a legend” (16). Eliade continues: “In the language current during the nineteenth century, a ‘myth’ meant anything that was opposed to ‘reality’” (23).

There are several interesting facts that may be gathered from this article regarding the earlier lifestyle of the Lushais. The Lushais believed that there was a dual nature within every person: “[E]very person is supposed to have two souls, a wise and a foolish soul, and the struggles between these two account for the unreliability of men” (Shakespeare 379). The position of women in the earlier Lushai community did not appear to be very elevated because even in their belief about the afterlife, women do not seem to be spared hardships. The Lushais believed that on the path to the “Mitthi Khua” (the land of the dead), there is a certain junction where Pu Pawla sits waiting for the souls of dead people. He always shoots all the dead souls with a large pellet; the only exceptions are infants and the men who have performed a certain ceremony in their lifetime. However, Shakespeare states that: “[W]omen, whoever they may be, he always shoots at” (379); which means that according to the belief of the Lushais, women had no way of escaping the painful shot of Pu Pawla. Another interesting fact that can be found from this article is that at the time this was written, there were literates among the Lushais who could write because when Shakespeare describes the “Ai” ceremony of a man called Thangbanga, he mentions that “[t]he following description was written for me by a Lushai.” (380) This article contains valuable information about the Lushais, their historical background and customs and practices as well as provides the reader with a glimpse into the belief system and superstitions of the Lushais. The audience/reader that the writer anticipated when writing this article could have been

academicians in his homeland who were interested in learning about a race of people that they had never been exposed to before. This could have been one way of making use of their power to widen their “knowledge” of other races of people in the countries they ruled over. In a way, the folktales provided these readers in the motherland a kind of “education” of the “Orient”. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines “Orientalism” as “[a] term pertaining to the Orient as discovered, recorded, described, defined, imagined, produced and, in a sense, ‘invented’ by Europe and the West”. The exercise of collecting these Lushai folktales and their publication in journals and in books may be seen as a way of constructing an identity through available materials. According to Edward Said, “Orientalism” is “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (Said 1); he further states: “Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental” (2) and “[i]t is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength” (7).

“Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” was also written by J. Shakespear with notes by T. C. Hodson. As the title suggests, the folktales that have been recorded here are not confined to the Lushais alone. There are several tales that have similarities in their narration of certain events and occurrences and Shakespear has pointed these out. The tales may be similar but the tales have different names for the protagonists. There are primarily nine different folktales that have been included in this article and in some cases the varying versions have been included. The first folktale is a very popular one among the Lushais, that of Chemtatrawta, but in this article, Shakespear gives the version of the Aimol, which appears to be a censored version of the Lushai tale. All the events that follow

are quite similar but the main reason for the cause of the confusion differs. In the Aimol version, the prawn bites the protagonist in the leg, however, in the Lushai version, the prawn bites the protagonist in his private part. Could this have been the reason why the writer chose the Aimol version? The origin myth² of the Lushai, the Anal and the Thado all appear to be very similar – they all have a tale which suggests that they came out of the earth. The origin myths are depicted here probably for the collectors to establish the fact that even though there are tribes in places which are far off, they seem to have a link between themselves. The natural occurrences such as eclipses, earthquakes and thunder are all explained through folktales by different tribes. The remaining folktales that have been recorded are all from the Lushais.

There are two tales with Chhura as the protagonist; there is the story of Mualzavata, a Lushai legend; the tragic story of Chawngchilhi who fell in love with a snake; the story of Tlumtea, who courted a woman from heaven; the story of a father who abandoned his sons in the forest; the story of the bear and the monkey; and the monkey and the quail. It is interesting to observe that in all these tales, Shakespear has not made any attempt to state the morals behind the folktales. He does not mention that a particular folktale might mean something or the other to the listeners or that the events described in the tales could have a meaning which could throw some light on the lives of the Lushais. It is possible that Shakespear knew about the morals behind the folktales but did not want to state them in his writing. It could have been that he wanted the readers to find out these things by themselves, leaving space for the audience to interpret the tales in their own ways. However,

² The Lushai version of the origin myth is that their ancestors came out of “a cave in the earth” (“close to Vanhuilen’s village”) and were led by a great Chief called “Tlandrok-Pa”.

there is the possibility that the minds of the readers may have been influenced by the title or the distinctions that Shakespear made of the folktales he collected. There is one tale which Shakespear has included in this article which he claims is “a tale without an object” (Shakespear and Hodson 401). This particular tale is about a man called Thlang-pa-saisira and an evil spirit (woman) called Nu-hlu-pi, who captures him. He manages to escape, disguising himself as an old man and works for a family. When the father of the house comes to know that the old man is actually a handsome young man in disguise, he makes his youngest daughter marry him. The daughter is reluctant at first but obeys her father. Unfortunately, Thlang-pa-saisira dies at the hands of a water spirit (Tui Huai). Although Shakespear claims that this tale has no object, there are certain important things that can be found in this tale. The father, when learning of the true identity of Thlang-pa-saisira, offers to make a sacrifice to appease the spirit that has enslaved him. This reminds the reader that the Lushais were very staunch in their beliefs and they were ready to help out one another to purge the spirits. Another thing that is found in this tale is the obedience that the daughter has for the father. That she should marry an old man employed by her father is an example of the subservient nature of the Lushai woman. The advantage of obeying one’s parents could also be one of the morals that is found in this tale. Hence, it may be said that no folktale is without an objective. Folktales may have been used to explain the events in nature, as already mentioned before, such as eclipses, earthquakes etc., as well as the appearance of certain animals. Although Shakespear made no overt attempts to state the morals behind the folktales and seem to leave the interpretation to the reader, it is quite possible that his comments on the folktales may have affected the reading of the folktales in some sense.

As in the case of the first article, in this article “Folktales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” too, Shakespear repeatedly mentions that the similarities between the tales of the Lushais and the other tribes suggest that they could have come from the same ancestors. In the notes that T. C. Hodson gives at the end of this article, his conclusion is that the Lushais have a deep, understated connection with the Nagas (420). In the two articles, there are repeated attempts to construct a connection between the Lushais and the other tribes surrounding them. It is not clear for what purpose this was done but it could have been an effort to overlook the distinctive features of each tribe and try to club them together so that the British administration could run smoothly. Alan Dundes is of the opinion that “one of the most important links between folklore and identity has to do with stereotypes” (22). By giving several versions of a tale that appears to have a similar origin, Shakespear and Hodson might be trying to show that all the tribes of the North-Eastern region of India have a common ancestor. Thus, he in a way constructs a tribal identity through the folktales and formulates a cultural affinity among several tribes. This cultural affinity which Hodson proposes might be problematic for the people that he has studied, even though he might find it appropriate to make such assumptions. The “unified” tribal identity which he proposes might not be acceptable to the people he wrote about.

Lushai Chrysalis was written by Major Anthony Gilchrist McCall, who had spent some time in the Lushai Hills as an administrator. The main purpose of this book appears to have been an attempt to study a “backward” people and the ways they could be administered (7). The writer is aware that this exercise will be helpful for his countrymen who will have an opportunity to travel to the land about which he was going to write. Therefore, Major McCall has done an extensive study of the lifestyle, practices, customs and

beliefs of the Lushais. In this book, under the second chapter called “Spirit Glimmerings”, there is a section titled “Folk-Lore” which consists of thirteen folktales of diverse topics such as the belief in death and afterlife, love stories and animal tales. Although there is a certain section that is kept aside for the folktales, there are legends and tales that are intertwined within the narration of the book. For instance, in chapter one, the story behind the name of a particular village, Chhuhlawh, is given (23). In chapter two, the origin of the Lushai clan is traced through the story of Zahmuaka, whose great-grandson, Sailova, became one of the most powerful and greatest chiefs among the Lushais. The writer seems to be making an attempt to try to understand the people of the land he writes about: “In seeking then to penetrate the heart of the Lushai we must bear in mind that at least, traditionally, he is an animist at heart and in his approach to all problems and impacts” (68). McCall also writes: “On the basis of this association with the Supernatural, the Lushai would claim to be a highly cultured man rather than a savage” (68). These two comments of the writer suggest that on the one hand, he is open to accepting the possibility of the Lushais not being as “backward” as they (the British) perceive them to be. On the other hand, there appears to be a prejudice against the Lushais that they are indeed “savage”.

When Major A. G. McCall introduces the folktales of the Lushais, he gives a list of reasons as to why these tales were so popular. The tales could have been a means of escape from the daily hard work of the people, a way to “indulge their imagination” and a way to teaching and learning about one’s culture and tradition. All the tales included in the book have a few lines at the end titled “Remembrance for Posterity”. There are thirteen Lushai folktales included in this book. These tales range from popular figures like Chhura and Chemtatrawta to the tragic love stories of Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana to the animal

tales. There is also a tale where the village of death is described with the figure of Pawla who shoots at the dead souls with pellets. On the whole, this book has been useful for Mizos in later years as well as for non-Mizos for different reasons. For a person (an “outsider”), possibly from the West, preparing to travel to the Lushai Hills, this book would have been quite useful for a journey to an unexplored part of India. There is a personal angle to the book where Major McCall describes his arrival in and his departure from the Lushai Hills. This brings up the question as to whether the “objectivity” of an anthropologist could have been maintained while writing this book.

In one of her articles called “An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India Author(s)”, Sandhana Naithani writes: “British collectors of Indian folklore were also administrators, and their narrators were their colonial subjects; their folklore collections had intentional, incidental and potential administrative implications” (Naithani 184). This is true of the Lushais and the British who collected their folktales. In all the three sources mentioned above, the writers were British administrators who had been in the land for many years. Their purpose in writing these works could have been to share their experiences, to publish their findings to their contemporaries, or to keep a record of their administration in writing for future use. There are certain folktales and legends that have been included by both Shakespear and McCall in their writings. The stories about Chhura, Chawngchilhi, Chemtawta and the monkey and the bear are found in the work of both the writers. In “The Kuki-Lushai Clans”, there were hardly any folktales but it did include legends like the good spirit called “Lasi”, the belief in a life after death with Pawla in the path of the dead souls, and the folktale of the monkey and the bear, which are all found in Lushai Chrysalis. In all these tales which are common to the three works, there are elements

embedded in the tales and legends which could have given an idea about the lives of the Lushais to the reader. For instance, the story of Chemtawta has a number of animals included in it which could give a survey of the animals that could be found in the Lushai Hills. The love story of Chawngchilhi and the snake might give an idea of the fear that people have of snakes and the tragic end that a woman will meet if she disobeys her parents. The legends and tales about Pawla and his pellet reveal that the Lushais had a very clear cut notion of a belief in life after death and in their actions in the present life having an impact on their afterlife. Thus, there seems to be a pattern where the writers have chosen particular tales or legends which could create a vague identity of the Lushais, based on their views.

The word chrysalis means “pupa of a moth or butterfly enclosed in a cocoon.” One of the reasons that McCall could have used this particular word would have been to imply that the Lushai Hills was an area that was still not fully developed, which is still in the process of growing up. A chrysalis conjures up an image of a thing that is enclosed and in the initial stage of growth. If one were to bring together the image of a chrysalis and the Lushai Hills of that time, the comparison might have been appropriate from the point of view of A. G. McCall. The Lushai Hills was an area that had not been explored to a large extent, therefore, “enclosed”. It was an area that was still under the administration of the British, hence, in the initial stages of development. McCall might have had all these in mind when he chose this particular word for the title of his book. On the other hand, this choice of the word might not have been appropriate from the point of view of the Lushais because in their eyes, they might not have been in the process of development. Such assumptions could have been made from a Western point of view.

Major A. G. McCall describes the “General Theme” of his work, Lushai Chrysalis, and writes:

The main purpose of the book is to show the following points through the subject taken, viz., Lushai:-

- (a) What happens when a backward people are exposed, undirected, to stronger culture impacts.
- (b) The necessity for fostering development along healthy and appropriate lines in cases where the backwardness of a people is such as to preclude them from fostering their own ordered development.
- (c) The necessity for a closer link of understanding of the difficulties of such people with those in the Homelands, without which the flow of suitable officers prepared to labour, suffer, and endure must become progressively less.
- (d) The projection through appendices and photographs of proof that the treatment accorded to the Lushais resulted in their support in times of trouble.
- (e) The Book contains authoritative matter compiled by me, the author, over a period of nearly twenty years' close study under conditions of much isolation and hard living.
- (f) Anthropological terminology has been omitted by me to widen the field of readers, though the principles of anthropology have been strictly applied.

(McCall 7)

It is clear from these points that the British needed to know more about the people they were going to rule. They found it necessary to create a source which could be accessed by the present as well as the future administrators of the Mizo country. Therefore, it was necessary for the administrators to formulate a way of understanding the people they were going to conquer. The words used to describe the Lushais seem to make a hierarchy between them and the British administrators. For instance, according to McCall, the Lushais are “a backward people” who need outside help to make “development along appropriate lines.” The British who are posted in the Lushai Hills seem to be depicted in this General Theme as men who have made sacrifices for a better cause as they have to “labour, suffer and endure” while they are in this region. The author himself had to live through “much isolation and hard living” while writing Lushai Chrysalis. Hence, from the first few pages of the book, a gap has already been established, where the Lushais are placed at a much lower level than the Britishers. Folklore is one aspect through which a certain community may be better understood. Barre Toelken writes: “Folklore functions in part as an informal system for learning the daily logic and worldview of the people around us” (Toelken 27). Thus, for the British who had entered a foreign land, it was necessary to find a way to learn about the people they were going to rule over. One of the aspects of folktales is that there is an underlying moral or teaching embedded in them. Such subtle messages are an important clue to learn more about the customs and practices of the people whose folktales one is studying.

In Lushai Chrysalis, it is pertinent to note that Major A. G. McCall has included “Folk-lore” as a section in a chapter titled “Spirit Glimmerings”. Does it imply that for Major McCall, the tales are part of the ancient beliefs of the Mizos which cannot be separated from their religious practices? In the brief introduction to the thirteen tales that Major McCall has

collected, he writes of the important place that the folktales occupy in the minds of the people. It appears that in order to prove his point, he has affixed “Remembrance for Posterity” to each tale. Stating out the morals or the teachings of the folktales at the end might seem appropriate but one could beg to differ that it takes away the joy of discovering the underlying morals.

If a person who did not know anything about Mizo life and custom were to read these thirteen folktales, it would not be difficult for that person to form an idea about the beliefs and lives of the Mizos of that time. The belief about afterlife is found in “Pawla and Sanui”; love in the time of the terrible inter-village wars and rivalries is found in “Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana”; the value given to bravery and honour among men is found in many of the tales; the reason why certain stars shine brighter, why a lobster becomes red when it is heated (ways of nature) are found in the folktales. There might be questions about why a Christian would want to depict the afterlife in his collection of folktales. One explanation could be that since the writer is an anthropologist, he is applying “anthropological objectivity” and writing the tales as they are told. On the other hand, the depiction of afterlife that the people believed in could have drawn a comparison with the belief in life after death that is taught by the Christian missionaries, thus paving the way for the spread of Christianity. The Mizos believed that after a person dies, his or her spirit moves to another world and lives almost the same life as he or she had lived on earth; while the Christian belief is that after the physical body dies, the spirit lives on and will go to either heaven or hell. Could this be the “development along healthy and appropriate lines” that McCall mentions in the General Theme of Lushai Chrysalis? On the other hand, the folktales explain many things through the world view of the Mizos. It shows the readers that the Mizos

might have been considered “backward” from a European point of view; however, they had their own way of understanding the world and nature around them. They were not “uncivilised” as they were made out to be.

According to Major McCall, folktales can be a means of escape for people who live a hard life. The stories may be used for amusement or for entertainment: “In folk-lore a people can indulge their imagination, can seek to rise above the plane of life’s incessant hardship” (McCall 75). McCall does not seem to dwell on the educative aspect of the tales and is more interested in the social picture that can be drawn through a reading of the tales. Lushai Chrysalis was first published in 1949 and was primarily meant as a book to give information about a region which was then known as the “Lushai Hills”. Therefore, the main readers would have been people who did not have any information about that region and who were preparing to rule over the land. Thus, in a way this book may be considered a text book through which the British got to learn about an almost unknown territory and the thirteen folktales could have been a source of getting to know about the people and their customs through their popular stories.

As already mentioned, folktales are considered a source of education as well as a way of preparing the people for a particular worldview. There are tales that explain certain natural phenomena such as the eclipse, the sound of thunder, the reason why a particular animal has a certain appearance and ways of living. The Lushais seem to have formulated a certain view of the surroundings that they could see and have embedded these observations in their folktales.

The main purpose of these British writers seems to be that of assisting the administrative work of the British government. By collecting these folktales, these administrators paved the way for the Britishers to understand the people of the region and helped them to rule over these people. As Vladimir Propp asserts: “Folklore is an ideological discipline. Its methods and aims are determined by and reflect the outlook of the age” (3). Therefore, it was crucial for the British government to learn about the people they were going to conquer through the knowledge of their folktales.

An anthropologist is expected to have an “objective” view of the people he or she is studying. However, this “objectivity” comes into question most of the time. In the case of J. Shakespear, T. C. Hodson and A. G. McCall too one can question whether their point of view is subjective or objective because they are from an entirely different country, coming to a foreign land and working among people who are very different in their lifestyles, customs and practices. Therefore, Shakespear might have conducted “protracted inquiries lasting over fifteen years” (372) but his position as a British administrator will surely have an effect on his attitude towards the people he writes about in his articles. The Lushais have always been associated with head-hunting yet Shakespear writes: “Head-hunting was never a Lushai pastime” (375). In his other article with Hodson, Shakespear also puts his views thus: “[T]heir ideas of ‘les convenances’ are not ours, but who is to say which are right?” (388). When one reads these comments, it appears as if Shakespear is adopting the anthropological “objectivity” and is not passing any judgement on the people. However, one finds the same man writing about the advantage of the governance of the British when he writes that “but for our protection” the hamlets of different tribes would not have existed for a long time. Another comment that Shakespear makes about the Lushais which seems to be praising them yet is

quite degrading is this: “Such poetic ideas from a people so devoid of any higher feelings come as a surprise, and teach us not to judge hastily” (395). Thus, one finds that there can never be a point of view that is devoid of a person’s subjective position.

Folktales and customs are often thought to be reflections on the life of the people. For example, Shakespear’s observation that “the casual way” in which a character is introduced in a story is a reflection of the proceedings of court cases he had tried among the Lushais. Quarrels come up which turn out to be about something which is unrelated to the case at hand. In the article “The Kuki-Lushai Clans”, Shakespear writes: “The only cure I know for a bewitched person is to eat the liver of the person who has bewitched him” (384). This statement is corroborated by Mrs. Shakespear when she discusses the various plates that accompany the article “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours”. When discussing Plate XXIII which shows Darbilli, Mrs. Shakespear writes about how Darbilli fell ill and how the illness was attributed to a wizard. For her treatment, “the wizard was killed, and his liver procured” (Shakespear and Hodson 415) but Darbilli died before she could eat the liver. It is clear that the Lushais believed in this practice but there is no proof whether this belief actually worked or not. These observations seem to suggest that the life of the people is reflected in their stories and folktales. However, according to William Bascom, there are “striking divergences between folklore and actual conduct” (Bascom 33). There may be instances where connections could be made with real life, but one should realise that not everything that is done in the folktales and stories are to be seen as something which will be actually done and accepted. Alan Dundes mentions that “[i]t could even be seriously maintained that folklore provides one of the principal sources for the articulation and communication of stereotypes” (23). This could explain why the British administrators were

so keen on collecting the Mizo folktales. There was a way of formulating an identity of a stereotypical “tribal image” of the people they were going to conquer.

There are many Mizo folktales that have not been included in either of the articles or in the book mentioned in this chapter. One of the reasons for this could be that there was a constraint in space and availability of the folktales. In the article “Folktales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” by Shakespear and Hodson, there is a mention of the origin myths of different tribes; however, this was included to look at the similarities with the other tribes. In McCall’s Lushai Chrysalis the origin myth of the Mizos is not mentioned. Considering the fact that origin myths have an important place in the folklore of any community, it is surprising that it has not been included in the book. It will not be possible to mention all the popular and well-known folktales that have not been mentioned by these writers. However, one of the most striking absence is that of the story of Liandova and his brother that is found in a collection of Mizo folktales in the Mizo language (Lalthangliana 460). This folktale tells the story of a young man called Liandova who is blessed with riches and fame after he entertains a rich village Chief (who is in disguise). This is one of the most well-known folktales among the Mizos which teaches people to be hospitable to strangers. It also mentions the wealth that the Mizo Chiefs possessed. Yet this tale is not found in any of the three sources mentioned in this chapter.

Folktales are often considered sources of knowledge and learning; therefore the British administrators seem to have made use of folktales by collecting them and studying them so as to form a certain identity of the people. Thus, in a way, they helped the British

rulers to “educate” themselves about the land that they were to occupy. The presence of the British in several parts of India had a dual objective of ruling over the country as well as adding to their knowledge. The exercise of collecting the history and folktales of the Lushais served both these objectives. The publication of the articles in journals in Great Britain and the book by the Royal Asiatic Society (first edition) shows that the anthropologists/writers wanted to present the “exotic” to their people back home and give them a glimpse of the “Orient” which they had never got before. The three sources that have been discussed in this chapter are very important in the history of the Lushais because they are among the first written records of folktales and legends as well as the lifestyle of the people. There will be certain points on which the readers of the twenty-first century may not agree but one cannot deny the fact that these were important milestones in history. It is problematic that “outsiders” should have been the ones to keep a record for the Lushais but one needs to find a way to see the positive aspect of the efforts of the early administrators. It is up to the present and future generations of Lushais/Mizos to make use of the available sources of history and use them to their advantage.

“Folktales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” was read at a meeting on June 16th, 1909 at East London College. T. C. Hodson’s remarks which he made in this discussion are added as a note at the end of the article. The main point that Hodson makes is that from the article that had been presented by Shakespear, the most prominent feature is that the tribes whose folktales had been collected seem to come from a common ancestor. He shares his knowledge of the origin myth (of coming out of a hole or a rock), the reason behind the eclipse that the different tribes believe in, the influence that Hinduism might have had on the

Meitheis (of Manipur) and the practice of having a dormitory for young men in the villages. His main point becomes clear when he closes his notes with the following lines:

I cannot conclude without remarking how vividly this paper brings home to me the essential unity which underlies all the remarkable linguistic and ethnical variety of this part of Assam. The more I hear of Lushai folk and their ways and habits of thought, the more am I convinced that they differ from their neighbours the Nagas much less than we were brought up to believe. Differences there are, patent many of them to the eye, but there is fundamental unity, which we are apt to overlook or to under-estimate. (420)

It might be appropriate to make a brief mention of a handwritten newspaper that was in circulation in 1898. In an unpublished article by P. Thirumal and C. Lalrozami, titled “On the Discursive and Material Context of the First Handwritten Lushai Newspaper ‘Mizo Chanchin Laishuih’, 1898”, there is an analysis of one of the issues of the newspaper that is still available at the State Archives in Aizawl, Mizoram. The news items included orders that had been announced by Shakespear, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills at that time; reports of hunting expeditions and the animals that were killed; provisions for taking care of babies whose mothers had died while giving birth; facts about how the earth is round and not flat; and a short tale about the mother frog who tried to make herself as big as a mithun and died in the process. The presence of this handwritten newspaper shows that the Mizos had taken an initiative to promote the written Mizo script. The article mentions the following:

Three prominent names appear in the text. They are BorSap (Shakespeare or the White Prince of the Hills), the most powerful colonial administrator of the Lushai

Hills; Khamliana, a Sailo Chief on the decline who later rose to become the first literate and the most effective spokesman for the Lushais; Sauka, a commoner from the less visible Chawngthu Vanchiau clan, remarkably enterprising and a person who held several positions in the colonial bureaucracy, and taught the Mizo language to Lorrain, the missionary responsible for producing the script for the Lushai language. It appears that these three men participated in the writing of MCL.

Although this newspaper is very significant in the history of writing in Mizo script and there were Mizos who had a hand in the publication of this newspaper, it appears from the items that the superiority of the British is still being established through the written form.

The folktales that have been collected by the British administrators are not the only ones that were kept in the written form. The Welsh missionaries had also made attempts to record and preserve the folktales. The approach might have been different for the administrators and the missionaries but both their aims seem to be education. For the administrators, the exercise of collecting the folktales could have been to “educate” themselves and their successors about an unknown people and their culture; whereas for the missionaries, the folktales contained a knowledge system that could be used to “educate” the people as well as spread the gospel in a way. Therefore, the history of the establishment of the “modern” education system in Lushai Hills and the efforts made by the missionaries cannot be ignored. This will be taken up in the next chapter.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 7. Singapore: Thomson Asia, 2005.
- Bascom, William R. "Folklore and Anthropology". The Study of Folklore. Ed. Alan Dundes. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965. 25-33.
- Chhangte, Cherrie Lalnunziri. "'It Happened to a friend of a Friend': Urban Legends in Contemporary Mizo Society." Indian Literature: Sahitya Akademi's Literary Bi Monthly Journal 235.5 (2006): 186-195.
- Dundes, Alan. Folklore Matters. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989.
- Eliade, Mircea. Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities. Trans. Philip Mairet. New York: Harper, 1975.
- Lalthangliana, B. Pi Pu Zunleng. Aizawl: Lalthlengliana, 2007.
- McCall, A. G. Lushai Chrysalis. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2003.
- Naithani, Sandhana "An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India Author(s)." Folklore 112.2 (Oct.2001):183-188.
- Propp, Vladimir. Theory and History of Folklore. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.
- Said, Edward. Orientalism. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Shakespear, J "The Kuki-Lushai Clans." The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute

of Great Britain and Ireland 39 (1909): 371-385.

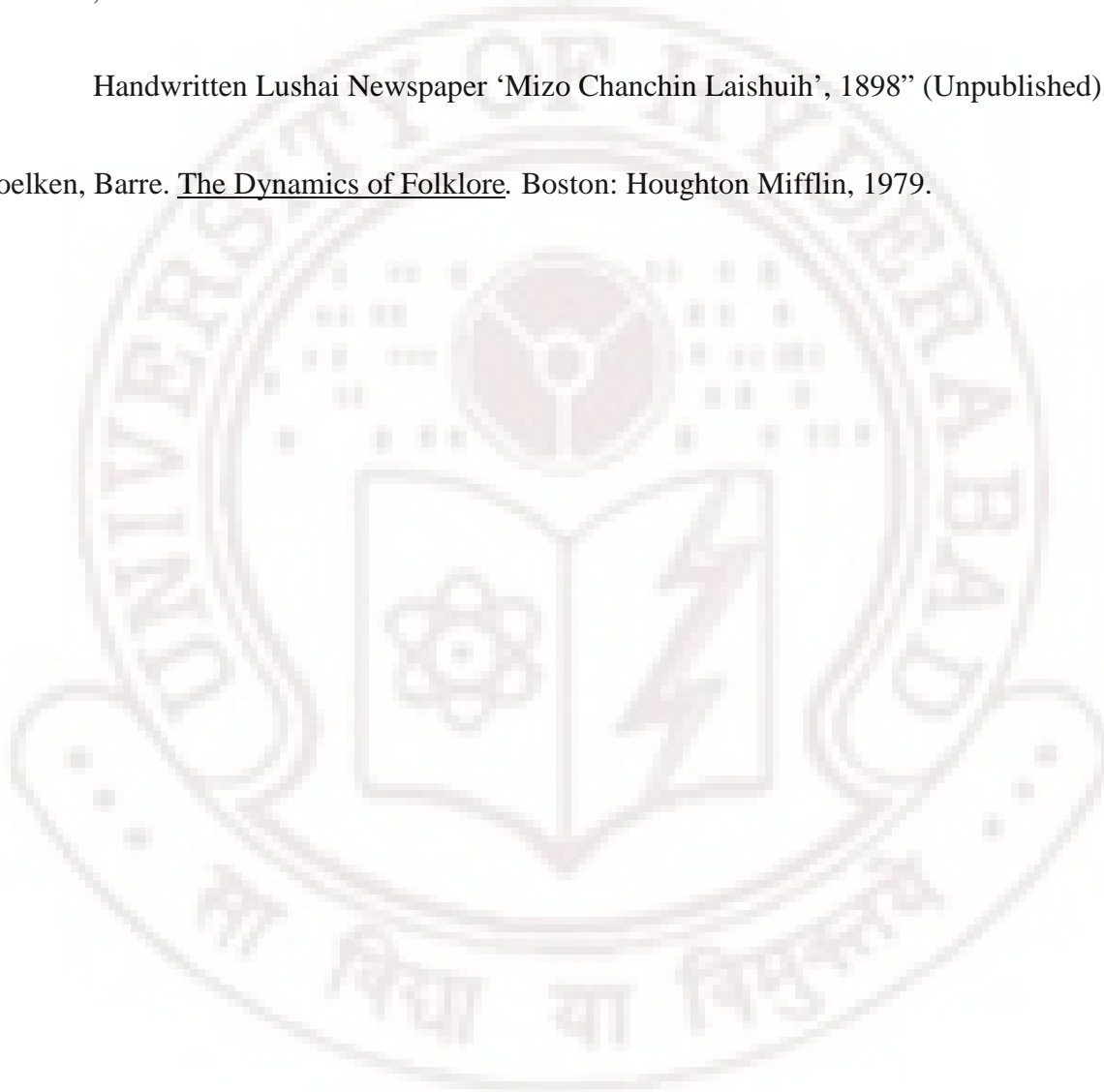
Shakespear, J and T. C. Hodson “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours.” Folklore

20.4 (1909): 388-420.

Thirumal, P and C. Lalrozami. “On the Discursive and Material Context of the First

Handwritten Lushai Newspaper ‘Mizo Chanchin Laishuih’, 1898” (Unpublished).

Toelken, Barre. The Dynamics of Folklore. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.



Chapter 3

History of Schools in Mizoram

The history of formal education in what is now Mizoram³ started with the arrival of the British administrators and the Welsh missionaries. However, it is wrong to assume that there was no “education” among the early generations of Mizos. There was a tradition of passing knowledge from one generation to the next through folktales, actions and proverbs; and this “education” was imparted in different places such as family mealtimes, in hunting expeditions, in “Zawlbuk” (the bachelors’ dormitory) and at public gatherings. According to several sources, the first school in Mizoram was started in 1893, which was a Primary School meant for the children of army officers (Lianzawna 7). There is a record of the list of students who appeared in the first Primary School exam, thus confirming that in 1893 there existed a school in Mizoram (Lalhmuaka 9). It appears that the main medium of teaching was not Mizo but Bengali. These Bengali medium schools might not have been very successful because, according to Lianzawna, with the start of the new schools by the missionaries, their students continued their studies in the new schools (5). However, with the arrival of the Welsh missionaries, the first school with Mizo medium of instruction was started in 1894. The pioneer missionaries J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge had developed a script for the Mizo language (Roman script) and they started teaching the Mizos how to read and write. In the history of the establishment of schools in Mizoram one fact that cannot be ignored is the close relationship that existed between education and Christianity.

³ Though the state of Mizoram was formed only in 1986, I use the term “Mizoram” to mean the territory comprising the present state of Mizoram.

According to Lianzawna, the schools in Mizoram were handed over to the missionaries from 1903 till 1952, when the District Council was formed (136). In 1903, a Mizo medium Primary School was started in Serkawn, in the southern part of Mizoram. The first High School was opened decades later in 1944 which makes one wonder whether the missionaries and the administrators were thinking of the well-being of the Mizos at all (Lalrimawia 128). It is possible that the main aim of education was to make the Mizos literate so that the missionaries could preach the Gospel. There is no denying the fact that the introduction of a script for the Mizo language brought about a change in the lives of the Mizos; however, it would appear that the initial aim of such a move by the early missionaries was more for conversion than development. Another aim of the missionaries for educating the people was that they needed the help of literate locals to help them in their work and their missions. Since most of the time they lacked the funds for employing outside help, they needed to train the locals to help them.

There is a close relationship between education and Christianity in Mizoram. There is evidence that before the Welsh missionaries developed a script for Mizo, Col. T. H. Lewin had made an attempt in this regard (Sangkima 145). T. H. Lewin (1839-1916) was a British administrator who had spent nine years in the area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is said that he had reached the Lushai Hills in 1866 and stayed in the village of a Chief called Rothangpuia. Lewin brought back with him a young slave boy who had been under Rothangpuia and learned the Mizo language from this slave. He is believed to be the first man who attempted to write down the Mizo (Lushai) language (Lalthangliana 84). Lewin had used the English alphabet to write Mizo sentences and words; he wrote it phonetically with the spellings appearing as they sounded to his ears. However, the missionaries later

developed a separate alphabet in the Roman script. The difference between the writings of Lewin and the later missionaries is that although Lewin wrote in the same script as the missionaries his use of the letters was different. B. Lalthangliana gave a sample of what Lewin wrote, a few lines of the folktale “Chemtatrawta” : “...Tchem tadroi kai-kuang pan a-kut a-tscet. A-hnit a ur a, ropui kima asha tlagh; hting varung akha-um va-rung tuka den-suk; varung chu-un in ling kim bun ahtai hteh...” (86). Lewin wrote in the same script as the English alphabet but it is very difficult to understand what he has written down.

When J. H. Lorrain and F. W. Savidge, the two pioneer missionaries arrived in 1894, they started a school even though there was no proper place for it. They taught the Mizo alphabet and also the Bible. The Sunday School was started where reading and writing were taught alongside the scriptures. The early Mizo textbooks used in Primary Schools had stories from the Bible and passages of the scriptures. Two of the most widely-used textbooks for children were Zir Tan Bu (“Book for Beginners”) and Zir Tirh Bu⁴ (“Book for Starters”) which were initially prepared by missionaries. Zir Tan Bu was meant primarily to teach the Mizo alphabet and to help the students develop reading and writing skills. Therefore, this book had the alphabet in different fonts, had simple sentences to read and had no references to the Bible. However, Zir Tirh Bu, which was originally prepared by David E. Jones⁵, a missionary, in 1915, had a number of stories and passages from the Bible as well as lessons which are related to Christianity.

⁴ It is difficult to translate the titles of the books since they are so similar. ZirTan Bu was taught to the students who were in “Pawl A” (equivalent to Lower Kindergarten of today) and Zir Tirh Bu was taught to the students in “Pawl B” (equivalent to Upper Kindergarten of today).

⁵ A later edition of Zir Tirh Bu was co-authored by Pasena, a Mizo.

If one were to look at the 1915 edition and the 1967 edition of Zir Tirh Bu, one will notice that there are slight changes in the content. As already mentioned, the 1915 edition was prepared by a missionary whereas the 1967 edition was a revised version of the earlier edition by the Mizoram Textbook Committee. The 1915 edition had 67 lessons which consisted of sentences that had to be read and understood. In the introduction to the book, David E. Jones writes that the teacher has to be responsible for the learning process of the students and should not be in a hurry to finish the lessons, thus emphasising the important role that the teacher plays in the life of the student. Among the lessons, there are at least nine that have connection with Christianity. Lesson No.31 is titled “Pathian Thu” (The Word of God) and this has ten lines about the love that God has for His people. Lessons 38 and 45 are about God and Jesus Christ respectively; there are lessons on Morning and Evening prayers, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and two passages from the Bible. Zir Tirh Bu is one of the first textbooks that the Mizo child reads in the Primary School. By including these references to God and the Bible in the lessons, the missionaries were in a way spreading the word of God through education. One of the reasons why there is a prominent presence of Christianity could be that these were initially also taught on Sundays, in the Sunday Schools.

The 1967 edition of Zir Tirh Bu has none of the lessons on God that the earlier edition had. There are lessons on etiquette and good behaviour, Mizo proverbs, different animals, traps and trees found in Mizoram and some poems. The only reference to Christian beliefs that one finds in this book is the inclusion of two parables from the Bible – “The Good Samaritan” and “The Prodigal Son” – and these two lessons end with a moral. Although there are no overt references to Christianity as in the earlier edition, this book also has the presence of Christianity, thus proving further that education for the Mizos cannot be devoid of the

influence of religion. It cannot be denied that Christianity is very much a part of the Mizo identity. In the earlier days, school teachers were given a high status in society. Since the schools used to be under the administration of the missionaries, there were strict rules to become a school teacher. The teachers were expected to be in the same league as the pastors and were also expected to be good Christians. They were respected wherever they went.

Another textbook that was used in schools at that time was also prepared by a missionary, Edwin Rowlands, and was called Bu Lai (Middle Reader) (1909). It was meant to be read after Zir Tih Bu and this had more lessons to be read aloud so as to improve the reading skills of the students. As in the case of Zir Tih Bu, this book has also been revised and reprinted. The earlier edition of Bu Lai had several passages from the Bible, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed and two Mizo folktales as well as stories from other parts of the World. It is interesting to note that one of the Mizo folktales included here is titled "Samdala" and the sub-title is "Laziness". In this folktale, the protagonist is a very lazy man who does not work, sleeps all day and worries whenever any kind of work opens up for him. At the end of the tale is the moral: "If you are lazy, you will become poor; if you are hard-working, you will be a very clever person" (Rowlands 10). The inclusion of this tale may be viewed from two angles, if not more. One view could be that the missionaries realised the need to put into writing the folktales of the Mizos and decided to include them in the school textbooks. They also discovered that these tales could be useful to motivate the children to become "good" Christians because the moral of the tales could be stated and the children could follow them. Thus, the folktales would prove to be quite helpful for education. On the other hand, another view could be that the missionaries picked this particular folktale for the book because of the theme of "laziness". The depiction of a man who is lazy and does

not work might have been a depiction of a Mizo. Could it be possible that this particular folktale was chosen to show another quality of a Mizo which was not highlighted so much? The other Mizo folktale that is included in this book is titled “Bak Thu” (The story of the bat) and this is about the battle between birds and animals and how the bat shifted sides, always siding the winning side. In the end the bat is left alone because both sides come to know that it is a turn-coat. The moral at the end of this folktale is: “If one does not choose a side, it will not be good for him.” This is among one of the most well-known Mizo folktales. There are stories from other parts of the World in this book such as “The Fox and the Grapes”, “Who will Bell the Cat?”, “The Two Travellers and a Bear”, “The Argument between the Wind and the Sun” and “The Wise Goat and the Foolish Goat”. All these stories have a moral at the end and in a way one could find that the inclusion of Mizo folktales among these stories might have been a way of showing the possibilities that the Mizo tales have. The morals that these folktales show appear to be similar in terms of the code of conduct and the way of leading a good life are concerned, irrespective of whether they are Mizo folktales or Western stories. The moral is given at the end of the lesson.

A Lai Bu (a reprint of Bu Lai of 1909) was reprinted after many years and the contents of the book were changed. The particular edition that I am going to use in this chapter is the 26th edition of the book that was published in 1978 by The Synod Bookroom. Among the thirty-one lessons, there are three from the Bible – a passage from Ephesians, a passage from the Gospel of John and a chapter from Psalms. There are Mizo folktales and lessons on well-known historical people of Mizoram. There is one lesson titled “Great figures” which includes Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad. There are also stories from outside Mizoram, just like the earlier edition and each story ends with a

moral. The outline of the earlier edition and the later edition of A Lai Bu appears to be the same – some lessons from the Bible, some folktales from Mizoram and stories from outside with morals at the end. However, the content differs in both the books and it would be useful to look at the ways these have changed. In the earlier edition, there were no references to India as a country and the most prominent lessons were the ones with some form of moral. Considering that the later edition was made after the independence of India, it is appropriate that historical figures from the country are added in the lessons. This could be seen as an attempt to find a way to come to terms with the fact that after the independence of India, Mizoram also became a part of the country. Even though there are heroes in the history of the Mizos, there should be an awareness of the great figures in India, in the larger context. Mizoram was in a state of unrest for about twenty years (1966-1986) when there was a demand for a separate nation from the Indian Union. If one were to look at the date of publication of this edition of the book, there would have been the unrest in the region. At such a time, when figures like Mahatma Gandhi, the “Father of the Nation”; Jawaharlal Nehru, the first President of India and Rajendra Prasad, the first Prime Minister of India are included in the lessons of a school, there could have been an attempt to spread awareness among the youth.

An exercise of collecting folktales, compiling and publishing them in a book involves a process of selection, editing and exclusion of certain tales. In one of his articles, as has been discussed earlier, Vladimir Propp views folklore as an ideological discipline that is governed by the context (Propp 3). It would be interesting to make an attempt to locate the textbooks that have been used in Mizoram to teach Mizo language in the time period in which

they were published. A closer look at the tales that have been included in the textbooks might also be useful.

Zir Tan Bu, Zir Tirh Bu, Serkawn Graded Reader (1938) and Mizo Titi (1957) were books meant for students in the early stages of schooling. The authors or compilers of these books must have been aware of their readers. Therefore it is not wrong to assume that there was a pre-conceived idea of trying to mould the stories in such a way that children would be able to understand them. Children are easily influenced by the things they learn in school and are often infatuated with their teachers. Hence it was crucial for the authors/compilers to keep all these in mind while making these textbooks.

Serkawn Graded Reader⁶ by Nuchhungi consists of three volumes meant for Classes I, II and III. In Book I there are ten folktales; there are no classifications within the book but if one attempts to classify these tales, there are four tales with women as protagonists, three tales with men as protagonists, two tales about animals and one tale about siblings. The tales with women protagonists usually portray women as weak and in need of a man to rescue them. For instance, “Kungawrhi Thawnthu” narrates the story of a woman under the spell of a half-man, half-tiger who has to be rescued by a “hero”. On the other hand, evil creatures are of the female sex, for example, in “Nuchhimi Thawnthu”, where the protagonist is captured by a female ogre. In the story “Sichangneii Thawnthu”, the protagonist is a woman from heaven who gets married to a man from Earth but abandons her husband and seven sons to return to her home in the heavens. Could it be a coincidence that

⁶ The first edition was published by Serkawn Christian Book Room in 1938.

the author/compiler has chosen these tales? It could have been a subtle way to teach children about what not to do in their lives.

The three tales with men protagonists – “Samdala thu”, “Rahtea thu” and “Kawrdumbela thu” – differ in their portrayal of men. Samdala is an extremely lazy person who does not work and is therefore the laughing-stock of people in his village as well as the animals in the forest near his village. Rahtea is an orphan who decides to run away from home to escape being killed as a sacrifice by his step-mother and eventually turns into a beetle. Kawrdumbela is an extremely ugly man who uses magic potions to transform himself and marries the daughter of his village chief.

The three remaining tales are about friendship, sibling rivalry and the battle between animals and birds. All these tales could have taken place anywhere in the world if one were to look at the themes and topics such as the woman in distress, the evil ogre, an extremely lazy man, a down-trodden orphan or an unlikely friendship, among other things. However, there are specific trees, plants and animals that are mentioned in many of these tales which locate the folktales at a particular place, namely, Mizoram. The practice of making baskets out of thin strips of bamboo (“The Story of Kungawrhi”); the fruit called “theipui” in “The Story of Samdala”; and the layout of a typical Mizo house that is described in the last part of “The Story of Nuchhimi” are a few examples of the location of these tales in Mizoram. It could be argued that there are similarities with other folktales in terms of the plots of the stories but there are markers in the tales which make them specific to the Mizos.

Mizo Titi by Lal Mama was first published in 1957 by the Mizoram Textbook Committee and the second edition was published in 1959. The author/compiler of this book, Lal Mama was the Headmaster of the Government Middle School in Serkawn, Lunglei. This particular book consists of fifteen lessons which deal with the history of the Mizos, covering diverse topics such as clothing, beliefs, historical milestones, war tactics and the advent of the “outsiders” (Vai). Most of the lessons have a story or a folktale included in it. This book could be considered a Mizo history book for young students as it spans a large period from the early days of the Mizos to the late nineteenth century. Written in easy-to-understand Mizo, it would have been very useful for the readers/students to learn more about their ancestors – their ways of life and their beliefs.

Zir Tan Bu, Zir Tirh Bu, Serkawn Graded Reader, and Mizo Titi were all published before the 1960's, before the formation of the present state of Mizoram in 1986. There could have been an attempt on the part of the authors/compiler to make the students have an interest in the history and heritage of the Mizos. It is possible that the folktales and stories included in these textbooks could have been influenced by the location of the authors/compiler. For instance, Nuchhungi, who prepared Serkawn Graded Reader does admit that she wrote at the behest of Mrs. Chapman, a missionary's wife. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, it is possible that she could have selected tales which could have taught Christian lessons to the school children. She admits that she wrote the tales from her memory but it is possible that she left out many tales which had violence and sufferings. Her position as a woman and being one of the earliest educated women among the Mizos might have affected her compilation of the folktales.

These books are no longer used in schools in Mizoram but it is quite possible that while they were in use they must have helped the students learn their language along with their culture and their history. They could also have been used as moral books which taught them how to live their lives, what to do and what not to do, how to live in communities and how to help out their fellow human beings. They must have also shown them that they had a history that could not be denied and which they ought to be proud of.

In the present times, the word “education” denotes a formally structured system which involves books, institutions and classrooms. However, the “education system” of the Mizos in the olden days spanned over their homes, in their fields, on hunting rounds and in the “Zawlbuk” (dormitories for bachelors). Sangkima wrote: “In Mizoram the education imparted to the people before the coming of the British was as important as modern education” (155). There was a system of education wherein knowledge in different fields of life was passed on from one generation to the next generation. Although this kind of “education” might seem to be insufficient when viewed from the present day, it was enough for the Mizos to live their day-to-day lives by learning the trades from their elders. There are various differences in the “education” that was imparted in the time before the arrival of the missionaries and the “education” introduced by the Welsh. Proverbs, beliefs and practices were all part of the education of a Lushai child. Knowledge of the ways of farming, hunting and doing chores was taught verbally and practically. The children might not have been aware of the written forms of language but their knowledge was useful for their everyday life. Cultural knowledge was handed down in a practical way.

Children are easily influenced by what they see and hear. Schools are important factors which mould their view of the world. If there is an opportunity to make them aware of their heritage from an early age, it would be good to begin in schools. The authors/compiler of the early Mizo school textbooks may have kept this in mind while coming up with the books. Zir Tan Bu and Zir Tirh Bu were both used to teach the Mizo alphabet and language. They also helped students to read and write. Language being an important identity-marker, these textbooks could have made a strong impact on the identity formation of the students. One has to keep in mind that these textbooks were a part of the syllabus and were not the only books of the schooling system, which means that the teachers did not concentrate on Mizo language and history alone.

Zir Tan Bu was prepared by Pasena and was meant for Primary School students. This textbook consisted of only one Mizo folktale about a monkey and a bird (an animal tale). This folktale appears to be an explanation of the appearance of a particular species of birds which the Mizos call “Vahmim”. It is the last lesson in the textbook and appears after a series of lessons that include the Mizo alphabet, sentence formations, Mizo proverbs and well-known Mizo sayings and expressions. It is interesting that the author of this book chose to include a tale about a monkey and a bird in his text because it is not one of the most well-known Mizo tales. The story is about a monkey who has a flute and a bird (called “Vahmim”) who longs to steal the flute from the monkey. The bird tries in vain to make the monkey leave its flute by telling it that its mother had given a list of things to do. Eventually the bird manages to persuade the monkey to take a nap but is still unable to steal the flute. Finally the monkey agrees to let the bird play the flute on the condition that it would hold on to the bird’s tail. The bird flies off with the flute and the monkey is left with the bird’s tail. The bird

refuses to return the flute and does not get its tail back, and this explains why the particular species of birds called “Vahmim” are believed to have short tails to this day.

This story has certain elements that could assist the students. First, it gives an explanation of the appearance of a bird which the students must have seen on numerous occasions. The cause of the bird’s short tail might not seem “logical” but it is part of the Mizo traditional story-telling. Second, there is an element of cunning on the part of both the characters in the tale. Although the students might be young, this tale might help them understand the ways of life, that there is evil in this world. Third, the tale could motivate the students to be sensitive towards animals around them as it portrays the monkey and the bird having feelings and thoughts. Hence, apart from teaching students how to read and write, the folktale at the end of the textbook opens up a wide range of possibilities of how to be aware of their culture and generate an interest in knowing more about their folktales and their history.

Zir Tih Bu was prepared by Pasena and Zosaphluia (David E. Jones)⁷. This book was meant to be a follow-up of Zir Tan Bu, to be taught in the next class and was co-authored by one of the early Welsh missionaries who had gone to Mizoram. There are no Mizo folktales in this textbook. However, there are four lessons that can be called “stories”. One is a story about flowers, two are from the Bible (The story of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son); and the last one is about the solar and the lunar eclipses.

⁷ David E. Jones was given a Mizo name by the people of the region to which he had gone as a missionary.

While Pasena is the author of both Zir Tan Bu and Zir Tirh Bu, the latter has a missionary as a co-author. This could explain the presence of Biblical stories in the text. The stories of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son are widely-known stories told to children in Christian families. By including these in a school syllabus, there is scope for the teachers to bring in Christian moral teachings into the classrooms. It could also be a way of instilling Christian identity to the Mizo children from an early age. The story of the Good Samaritan might have been useful in teaching the young students the importance of helping one another in times of trouble. The story of the Prodigal Son could have been discussed further as a metaphor to know more about the love that the Almighty God has for His children. Christianity entered Mizoram with the arrival of Welsh missionaries in 1894 and since then, the state has been declaring that almost the whole population has embraced Christianity. Hence this religion is an important part of the identity of a Mizo. However, this does not mean that the missionaries did not face any problems with the people of the land in the initial stages. There was resistance from the Lushais/Mizos in the beginning but the missionaries succeeded in converting the whole state to Christianity.

The last lesson/story in Zir Tirh Bu is titled “Awk” which means “Eclipse”. In this lesson the early Mizo belief about the eclipse is given. The folktale that explains the reason for an eclipse is that there is a spirit of a man who occasionally swallows the sun and the moon. At these times the Mizos used to make as much noise as they could by shouting and banging drums so that the spirit would spit out the moon or the sun. This lesson explains that these are beliefs that have no “rational” foundation and gives a brief scientific explanation for the reasons behind the eclipses. This story or lesson could have been used to

argue the fact that although the Mizos might not have had a “formal education”, in their own ways they tried to make sense of the world and the natural occurrences around them.

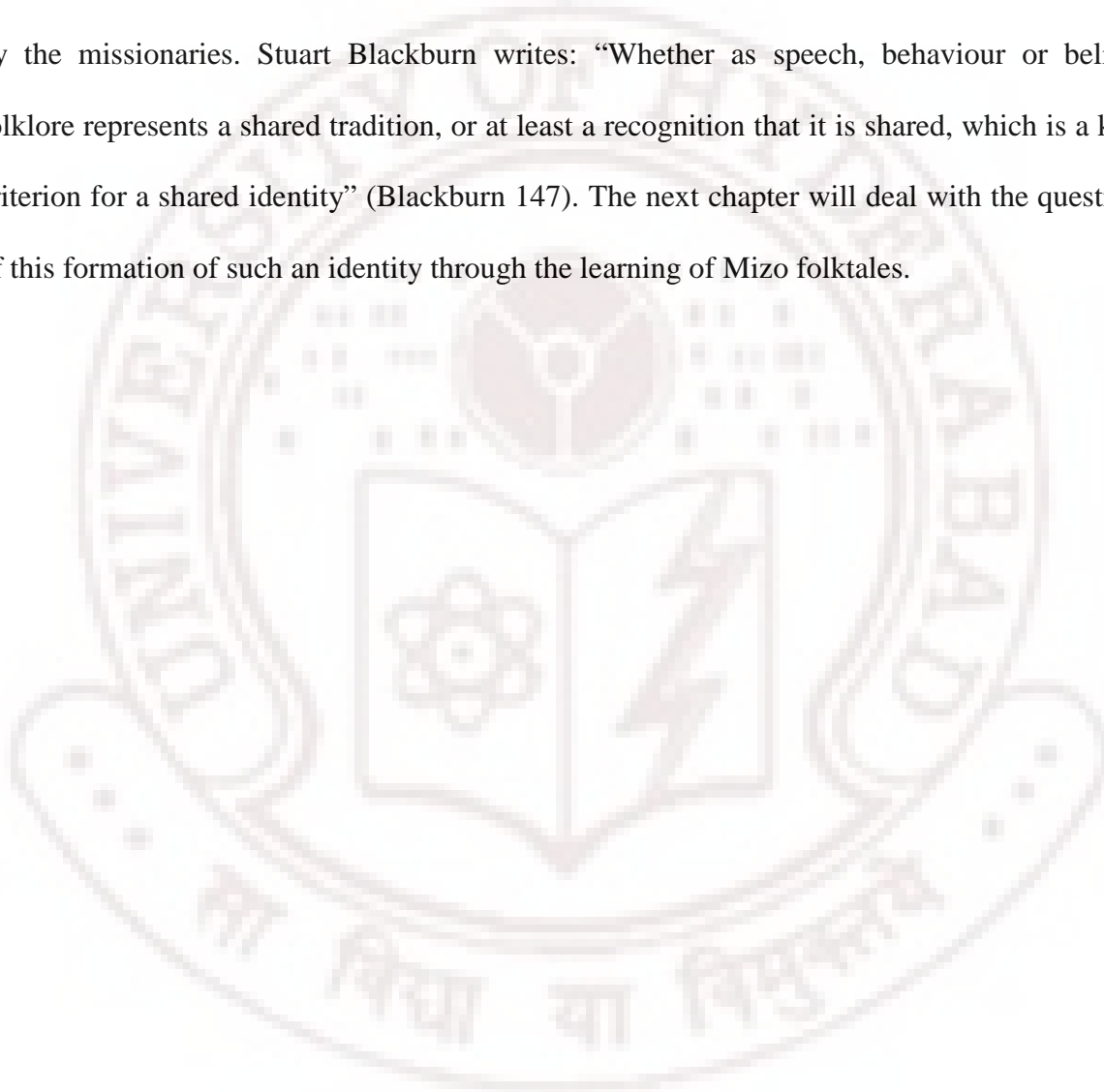
One of the observations that can be made from the study of these Primary School textbooks is that none of the books includes the Origin myth of the Mizos. A study of folktales generally includes an origin myth; yet all the compilers/authors of the textbooks seem to have omitted this important folktale. Could it be that the presence of the missionaries had an influence on them? The origin of the world and mankind from the Christian perspective would have clashed with the Mizo origin myth, which would not have been helpful in spreading the gospel. Perhaps this explains this omission. In the earlier chapter, it has been noted that the British administrators had included the origin myth of the Lushais as well as those of other tribes because their purpose was different from that of the missionaries. The administrators needed to understand the people of the region they were going to conquer, so they needed to know different aspects of their lives, hence the need to collect and write down the origin myths. On the other hand, the main aim of the missionaries was conversion to Christianity; therefore, the origin myths were left out. This shows that when a collection of folktales is made, there are certain aims and requirements which the compilers keep in mind and the tales are used to further their purpose.

The arrival of formal education in Mizoram had an impact on the social life of the people and many of the things that had been a part of the community were given up in the name of Christianity and development. The traditional practice of drinking “zu” (locally-made liquor) in social gatherings, the celebration of Mizo festivals and many other beliefs

and practices were slowly abolished with the development of education. The practice of consuming liquor had an important link with several practices of the Lushais. For instance, during ceremonies such as “Khuangchawi”, the consumption of “zu” becomes an important part. It could have been that the missionaries saw that the drinking of “zu” was not an isolated practice and since it was tied to the ancient beliefs of the Lushais, it had to be done away with, as it could have come in the way of Christianity. Another impact on the social set-up that education had was the deterioration of “Zawlbuk” (the bachelors’ dormitory). In the early days, “Zawlbuk” was the most important learning place for young men, where they were trained by their elders in the art of hunting, war, cultivation and different customs and practices. However, it would appear that these were replaced by schools and churches, and in the places where “Zawlbuk” of the early days used to stand there are now schools and churches. It seems that the learning process has shifted from traditional to “modern” agencies, as Sangkima writes: “Its [Zawlbuk’s] extinction was... inevitable when formal education was introduced among the Mizos. Informal education had to be replaced by formal education” (134). One may disagree with this view by pointing out that the education system that the Lushais/Mizos had before the arrival of the Westerners was also “formal”. It might not have been a system where there was a written work but the hierarchy of the elders was observed and the role of each person was clearly demarcated. Hence, it might not be right to call the former education system as an “informal” one.

In the history of schools in Mizoram, one cannot deny the fact that the missionaries played a major role in the development of education. The Mizo script, the Mizo school textbooks and the schools were in their hands. The literacy of the people is mainly the result of the hard work of the missionaries. However, there was a driving force behind all

these endeavours of the missionaries – conversion to Christianity. Therefore, education became an important tool for this mission and this is why whenever one delves into the past, the close connection between schools/education and Christianity cannot be ignored. The textbooks that had been prepared by the early missionaries might have been revised and reprinted but there will always be traces of the Christian teachings that had been inculcated by the missionaries. Stuart Blackburn writes: “Whether as speech, behaviour or belief, folklore represents a shared tradition, or at least a recognition that it is shared, which is a key criterion for a shared identity” (Blackburn 147). The next chapter will deal with the question of this formation of such an identity through the learning of Mizo folktales.



Works Cited

A Lai Bu. 26th ed. Aizawl: Synod Bookroom, 1978.

Blackburn, Stuart. Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India. Delhi: Permanent

Black, 2003.

Lalhmuaka. Zoram Sikul Zirna Chanchin. Aizawl: Lalhmuaka, 2000.

Lalrimawia. Mizoram: History and Cultural Identity 1890-1947. Guwahati: Spectrum, 1995.

Lalthangliana, B. Mizo Literature (Mizo Thu leh Hla). Aizawl: Lalrinthanga, 1993.

Lianzawna, C. Mizoram Education Chanchin. Aizawl: Rokhumi, 2005.

Mama, Lal. Mizo Titi. Lunglei: Mizoram Text Book Committee, 1957.

Nuchhungi. Serkawn Graded Reader. Aizawl: Nuchhungi, 2004.

Pasena. Zir Tan Bu. 21st ed. Aizawl: Synod Bookroom, 1978.

Pasena leh Zosaphluia. Zir Tirh Bu. 6th ed. Aizawl: Synod Bookroom, 1967.

Propp, Vladimir. Theory and History of Folklore. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.

Rowlands, Edwin. Bu Lai. Madras: Welsh C. M. F. Mission, 1909.

Sangkima. Essays on the History of the Mizos. Guwahati: Spectrum, 2004.

Chapter 4

Impact of Primary School Textbooks in the Shaping of a Mizo “Identity”

“Identity” can have many layers. It is a concept that is complex and hard to define. The “Mizo identity” can also be multi-faceted as it could be made up of, among other things, the gender of the person, the religious beliefs, the language that the person speaks and the way of life and practices. Education is another layer that may be added to a person’s identity. Michael W. Apple, in his book, Ideology and Curriculum, writes that education is “not a neutral enterprise” and that “by the very nature of the institution, the educator was involved, whether he or she was conscious of it or not, in a political act” (Apple 1). Therefore, it is no wonder that the Welsh missionaries in the then Lushai Hills thought it necessary to include the teaching of the Bible as well as the folktales and history of the people of the land in the textbooks of the Primary Schools. This could also be true of the Mizos who later compiled the school textbooks.

In the previous chapter, the contents of the Primary School textbooks and the varying contents of different editions had been discussed. This chapter will look at the impact that the books had on the children who had studied these books. I had interviewed⁸ seven people who had studied these textbooks and one retired Primary School teacher who had taught all these texts in the 1960’s. Since it had been many years since they had studied these textbooks, I was apprehensive about their recollection regarding the ways they were taught. But surprisingly, they were all very sure about their ways of learning and most of them could

⁸ For the actual interviews, see pages 86 to 90 in the Appendix.

still recite the folktales they had studied. I asked them about the way they learned the lessons, how the exams were conducted, other sources of folktales and the influence of these on their lives, among other things.

The seven people interviewed for this study were Pu Biaksanga, a retired Principal of Government Aizawl College, Aizawl; Pu Saichhunga, Principal of Dawrpui Vengthar Middle School; Pu Saimuana, a Government employee; Pu Laltluangliana Khiangte⁹, a lecturer at Mizoram University; Pu Liansailova, a librarian; Pu R. Vanramchhuanga, a Government employee and Pu C. Vanlallawma, a lecturer. The retired teacher who was interviewed was Pi Vanlalpari who used to work at Thakthing Primary School. All the people interviewed said that the main system in which they learned the folktales from their textbooks was by a process of rote memorisation; the teacher would read out the tales and they would listen, read the lines and then memorise them. After they memorised the lesson, they recited it to the teacher and this would be repeated individually and as a whole class. As far as they could remember, when it came to exams, they were asked to answer direct questions on the tales they had been taught. Sometimes the moral of the story might be asked but most of the time, the exams were mainly to test the extent to which they had memorised the lessons.

There are “Exercises” at the end of each lesson in Serkawn Graded Reader where the students are asked to narrate the stories they had learned that day to children who are younger than them, who have not attended schools yet. When I first saw this, I thought it

⁹ He is the author/compiler of Mizo Songs and Folk Tales.

might have been an attempt on the part of the author/compiler to uphold the oral tradition of the Mizos. In the course of the interviews, I asked each of them whether they remember doing this exercise practically. Pu Biaksanga admits that he did not specifically narrate the stories when he went back from school but he did remember being with friends and retelling the stories. He said that at these times, there must have been younger siblings of friends who heard the stories because most of the children were aware of the folktales in the texts before they attended the schools. Pu Saichhunga remembers telling the folktales to his younger siblings while Pu Saimuana admitted that he never narrated them to younger children but did narrate them when he was with friends. Pu Saimuana said that the most common way he retold the stories was with a circle of friends where each would narrate a story and the others would help out if any details or plots were missing. Pu Liansailova admitted that since he used to be an introvert, he never followed the exercise of retelling the stories to other children. Pu C. Vanlallawma also told me that he did not narrate the stories after the school was over.

On the question of other sources of Mizo folktales, the answers that were given varied from person to person. For someone like Pu Laltluangliana Khiangte, who had a grandfather who was interested in the study of Mizo folktales, there was no dearth of sources. He said that his grandfather and his mother used to narrate the folktales; so even if he had not been taught these in the Primary School, he would have had a good knowledge of his folktales. Pu Biaksanga is the son of Pi Nuchhungi, the author/compiler of Serkawn Graded Reader, and for him too, his mother was the main source of folktales. However, Pu Saichhunga, Pu Saimuana and Pu Vanengmawia agree that if they had not been taught these folktales in the schools, they might not have been so aware of them. There were elders and

parents to tell them the folktales but all three of them felt that the process of listening to the tales being read out, memorising them and then reciting them to the teachers made it easier to remember them for a long time.

On the question of whether the teaching/learning of these folktales helped in the formation of a “Mizo” identity for them, most of the people I interviewed said that they had not really thought about it in that sense but as they think about it now, they feel that it might have been instrumental in promoting certain value systems and ethics. Pu Laltluangliana Khiangte said that since the folktales that he had studied had been told as stories, he never felt that he was compelled to learn them. Instead, he said that his interest in the folktales grew as he was taught in schools. For him, there was an unconscious imbibing of the Mizo teachings and culture through these folktales. Pu Vanengmawia told me that he found it hard to say whether his identity was shaped in any way by his learning of the Mizo folktales in the Primary School; he admitted that he had never thought about it in that way. But he said that if he had not learned these things in school, he would have been quite ignorant of much of the history and practices of his ancestors. Another thing that he mentioned is that he became more aware of the names of birds and animals as well as plants around him. He felt that if all these made him more rigid in his identity, then his education had been instrumental in it. Pu C. Vanlallawma said that he did not have any other source of the folktales except through the school textbooks and therefore, it was very valuable to him. He felt very strongly that these folktales were identity-markers and were a part of his heritage. He also said that these stories gave him a “continuity,” from his ancestors to himself in the present time. One of the persons I interviewed, however, differed in his views from the others. Pu Saimuana said that even if he had not studied the Mizo folktales, he would not have been any different. According to

him, he would still have heard the tales from his parents or grandparents. He said that people keep on changing and there can never be a fixed identity; he will always be a Mizo by birth and that will not change. Pu Saimuana appears to share the view of Alan Dundes when he makes the following comments:

[L]ife begins with the loss of one identity and the acquisition of another. Life continues in much the same way, as different identities are variously acquired and some shed. (21)

and

An individual's sense of identity changes throughout the life cycle. (12)

On the question of the presence of Christianity in the Primary school textbooks, all the persons I interviewed remembered learning passages from the Bible. They could not recall any "Christian influence" on the folktales. However, they remember that they were taught Mizo proverbs and sayings and which they recited in class. Rather than Christian teachings, they remember Mizo value systems being imparted to them. For instance, they remember being taught to always obey their elders, no matter what; to be kind to animals and plants; and to respect their parents. Pu Saichhunga is of the opinion that all these moral values and ethics made the children aware of their responsibilities and they unconsciously cultivated Christian moral values as well. He said that it was more the promotion of values than promotion of Christianity. There were also lessons in the texts which challenged the age-old beliefs of the Mizos, which Pu C. Vanlallawma points out. In Zir Tan Bu, there are lessons which list out certain things like the evil spirits and superstitions that their ancestors believed in and they were taught that they were to no longer fear these things because

Christianity had banished all these fears. He felt that this in a way degrades the ancestors; so he found it problematic that there was a sort of hierarchy of Christian and traditional value systems.

Pi Vanlalpari, a retired Primary School teacher, on being asked about the ways in which the Mizo folktales were taught, answered my question by telling me that the lessons were read out in class. Then the students would read after her, memorise the stories and narrate them to her. She said that in the class, the teachers tried their best to explain the moral of the folktales and sometimes asked the students what they learnt from a particular story. In the exams, she recalled that most of the questions were asked about the events in the stories, as well as the moral of the story. She said that when she set the questions, she made it a point that she tested the memory of her students as much as she tested the things they could learn from the folktales. On being asked whether these folktales helped in the formation of an identity for her and her students, she said that she did not really think about the “identity aspect” but that teaching these made her feel that she was passing on knowledge from her ancestors. Pi Vanlalpari is the only woman I had interviewed in connection with the school text-books I had mentioned in the third chapter, however, in her responses as a teacher I find no difference in her responses when compared to the men I had interviewed.

If one considers the opinion of Paulo Freire in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, that education can become “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire 45), then it would appear that the early stages of learning in the schools in Mizoram were of the “banking concept of education”.

According to Freire, in this type of education, the oppressed have no thinking power to express their ideas and it is another tool of the oppressor. However, from the interviewees, it would appear that even though they had been taught in this way, they still felt that the lessons they had been taught helped them think about their identity, even in an instance when they thought that only the knowledge of the ancestors was being passed on.

Zir Tan Bu, Zir Tirh Bu and Serkawn Graded Reader were all used in Primary Schools to teach the students how to read and write in the Mizo language. Apart from these, the textbooks also imparted knowledge of the ancestors, their ways of life and their customs through the folktales that were included in them. Moral value systems were also imbibed by the students from the lessons they were taught. Christianity also found a place in the school textbooks where there were passages from the Bible included in the lessons. What will a continuation be like in the twenty-first century of this educational system that had made such an impact on the students in the past century? The answer might lie in a collection of Mizo folktales that had been published by a state institution.

In 2008, State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Mizoram, published Selected Mizo Folk Tales, a textbook for school children which consisted of eleven tales in English. The Preface to this book reads: “The growing trends towards the need and importance of English in the developing world has necessitated in going beyond the textbook to explore other means of teaching English” (iv). Thus, the book was meant to have a dual function – to teach English and to make Mizo children learn more about their folktales. A look at the content of this book and a comparison with the four books mentioned in chapter

three will be a worthwhile experience. As has already been mentioned, Mizo Titi was more of a history book interspersed with folktales; therefore there are no common lessons in Selected Mizo Folk Tales and Mizo Titi. Zir Tan Bu and Zir Tirh Bu also do not have any common tales with the SCERT text-book. Out of the eleven tales in Selected Mizo Folk Tales, there are five tales which are found in Serkawn Graded Reader. “The Story of Rairahtea” and “Mauruangi” are found in Book III of Serkawn Graded Reader; and “A Monkey and a Tortoise”, “The Great War of Animals” and “Sichangneii” are found in Book I.

Serkawn Graded Reader, Book III dealt with the folktales in detail and had subdivided the stories of the lives of the protagonists into different stages in their lives. Therefore, in Serkawn Graded Reader, the stories of Rairahtea and Mauruangi are dealt with at great length. However, in Selected Mizo Folk Tales, their stories are told in the shorter versions – Rairahtea’s story ends on a happy note with his getting married to a woman of his choice; and Mauruangi also gets married to “a great Chief from a very far off village and they lived happily ever after”. The initial suffering and hardships that these two characters had to endure are mentioned in the two tales in Selected Mizo Folk Tales but their problems after marriage, which are narrated in Serkawn Graded Reader, are not found here. It is not clear why the makers of Selected Mizo Folk Tales chose to end the stories in this manner. It could be that they wanted to reduce the length of the stories and give a happier version of the lives of the characters. It is possible that the compilers of the book may have been aiming to make the Mizo folktales end like Western folktales, which most of the time end with “and they lived happily ever after.” The two renditions of “A Monkey and a Tortoise” in both Serkawn Graded Reader and Selected Mizo Folk Tales differ in the details of the hunting they both go to, but the underlying lesson of the importance of friendship and the danger of being

unobservant is found in both the books. “The Great War of Animals” is discussed more in detail in Selected Mizo Folk Tale than in Serkawn Graded Readers. The present students may have found it intriguing to imagine a war that is fought between the creatures of the land and the creatures of the sky. It might generate a number of questions from the students. “Sichangneii” is almost the same as it is found in Serkawn Graded Reader – the story of a woman who came down to Earth, married a man but abandoned him and her seven sons. The strength and special power that each son has is different. At a time when children are fascinated by cartoon and comic characters with super-powers, it is a positive move on the part of the makers of Selected Mizo Folk Tales that they include a story where Mizo men have unbelievable powers and skills.

The folktales and stories found in the textbooks both in Mizo and English can be considered as varying versions of Mizo folktales. There may be differences in certain details and narrations but the messages that they contain appear to transcend time. There may be different versions through the years and it is possible that the location, position and gender of the author/compiler of a book of folktales might have an impact on the book. There have been a number of school textbooks that have included Mizo folktales and it is quite possible that these tales helped young students become aware of their past and of their ancestors, in a way assisting the formation of an identity from a young age. “Identity” has many layers and cannot be restricted to one idea alone; hence the folktales may have added a particular layer to the identity of young Mizo students while they were growing up.

Some of the school textbooks written in Mizo which were used in the earlier part of the twentieth century had folktales as lessons, with exercises at the end. These textbooks are no longer used in schools in Mizoram but it is possible that while they were in use they must have helped the students learn to read and write Mizo as well as made them aware of their history and customs, as is evident from the responses of the people who have been interviewed.

One of the possible reasons for the school textbooks being written in Mizo is to help the students start their learning in a language that they were familiar with. The schools in Mizoram were started by the missionaries and the books in the syllabus were also mostly chosen by them. There have been collaborations between a Mizo and a missionary, for instance in bringing out Zir Tirh Bu, and Serkawn Graded Reader. It is interesting to note that the missionaries needed the help of the “natives” in order to educate the Mizos.

David Corson states that “language is the central achievement necessary for success in schooling” (Corson 3). He also expresses the following: “Since all forms of knowledge are ‘filtered’ through language, the chief item of knowledge in any culture is its language” (3). It is no wonder then that the early missionaries placed so much importance on the development of a script and teaching the people to read and write in their own language. Language is an important identity-marker for a Mizo. As has been already stated the present script of the Mizo language was created by the early Welsh missionaries James Herbert Lorrain and Frederick William Savidge. They used the Roman script for Mizo and created twenty-five letters of the alphabet. Earlier, there had been no written script for Mizo as

information had been passed orally from one generation to the next generation. Although the Mizo script was created by “outsiders”, it has often been considered to be an advantageous development. There are some who are of the opinion that a script for Mizo language has helped in the preservation of the history as it could be recorded in writing. For the purpose of growth in “formal education”, a written script indeed helped the Mizo children make advances in the field of reading and writing. However, there could have been a loss of the other kind of “education” that had been taught in the everyday life of the Mizo community. It would appear that the “formal education” which came with the Mizo script gradually replaced the learning system that had been established in “Zawlbuk”, in the fields and at home.

Folktales have morals and teachings embedded in them and it is up to the readers/listeners to interpret them and find out the underlying purpose. A seemingly “simple” tale also contains a message within it. Apart from the morals that are taught, there are also animals, plants, characters, beliefs and customs of a community or tribe which are part of the folktales. When children/students learn these tales in schools, in their own language, there will be an advantage for them wherein they will learn to read and write in their own language and they will know more about their history and culture. Even if the present generation does not share the beliefs of their ancestors, it would be a way in which they can learn to respect their past and understand their heritage. Inter-village wars were frequent in the early Mizo life and people lived in constant fear of an outbreak of war. In Serkawn Graded Reader (Book II), there is a folktale called “Chala leh Thangi Thu” which depicts the tragedy of war and how it affects the lives of the Mizos. When Primary School children read and learn this lesson, it might have made them know that wars were a part of Mizo history and had

destroyed the lives of many people. On the other hand, this story could also make the school children appreciate the times they live in, where there are no more inter-village wars. When these kinds of tales are taught and discussed in Mizo, it would have been easier to explain and comprehend them rather than if they had been taught in another language.

It is interesting to note that in the earlier part of the twentieth century, Mizo folktales were taught in schools with the purpose of teaching the Mizo language and most of the textbooks were in Mizo. However, in the twenty-first century, the language of the folktales has been changed to English. The contents (folktales) are retained but the medium has changed. English language is considered to be a language of power all over India and Mizoram is no exception. As English is often associated with opportunity, jobs and wages, it is most often the desire of the parents to teach the language to their children. Could this change in language add to the “Mizo identity”? The arrival of a new century could possibly contribute another layer to the identity of a Mizo, wherein English becomes an important factor for development and opportunity. Another important fact is that in the official government records, the official languages of the state of Mizoram are Mizo and English. Hence, it would appear that English has become an “official” part of a Mizo.

Another aspect of Selected Mizo Folk Tales which makes it different from the earlier Mizo textbooks is that there is a footnote at the end of the first tale. In the Mizo textbooks, there were no such footnotes to explain or defend a particular practice of the Mizos. The first tale in the book “Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana” is the only one in the book which has a footnote. It explains the ancient practice of headhunting but it also

mentions that: “with the advent of Christianity in the late 19th Century the Mizos are now known as God’s tribesmen” (5). The positive effect of Christianity in the state is thus added along with the folktale in this book. In Mizoram, most of the people are Christians and it is no surprise that such a comment as this is found in a book meant for teaching English to school children. Religion is so much a part of Mizo identity that it cannot be denied a place in any part of their lives. It is no wonder then that the first tale in this particular book is the one with head-hunting and war between two villages; giving space for the footnote to explain that the popular concept of the Mizos as “head-hunters” needs to be reconsidered by others outside the state.

As already mentioned, one of the most common features of a folktale is that there is an underlying moral to the story no matter how “simple” the tale appears. In order to make this point more clear let us look at one of the tales in this book. The last tale in Selected Mizo Folk Tales is called “The Egg and the Stick”. It is a very short story that does not seem to make sense when one first reads it. It is a story of an egg and a stick that help each other out in their fields. When they are in the field of the egg and they are hungry, the egg fries itself and they both satisfy their hunger. On another day, they are working in the field of the stick when it suddenly begins to rain. The stick decides to start a fire by burning itself to keep them warm. If one were to dwell on the tale, it seems to be advocating the sacrifice one makes for a friend. Both the egg and the stick give up a part of themselves to provide comfort for the other. The Mizos have a saying: “Thian chhan thih ngam” (One who is not afraid to die in order to save a friend). One finds a sense of this saying in this “simple” folktale. If one were to look at the arrangement of the eleven folktales in Selected Mizo Folk Tales, it starts with a tale about a war between villages and ends with a tale about friendship; there appears

to be a progression from turmoil to peace, which might be seen as the path that the present state of Mizoram has gone through. From being called a place of “head-hunters” to being one of the most “peaceful” states in the North-East, the progression of the folktales in this book may be seen as a parallel.

Folktales were a way of understanding the world around the people who told the tales. There were explanations in the tales about the existence of stars, the reason why certain animals have a particular feature, the flowering of a tree at a certain period of time in the year and many other things in nature. In the present times these kinds of beliefs and teachings might not be acceptable anymore. However, as it was a part of a tradition and a history of a people, it is important that future generations continue to be aware of them. If a person is taught school textbooks in his/her own language and the lesson contains stories or tales about his/her culture and history, it would contribute to the shaping of an identity. In a way, Mizo might have an advantage over English as a medium of instruction to teach children in schools at the lower classes.

From the interviews that were conducted, one can conclude that there is a strong link between the education of young students, the folktales they had learned and the preservation of their culture. As already mentioned, the students might not have thought about all these connections while they were in school but as they grew up and thought about their lessons, they feel that had they not been taught the folktales, they might have lost out on many opportunities to know more about their culture and traditions. It is important to note

that none of the people interviewed for this dissertation criticised the textbooks that had been studied by them in their Primary Schools.



Works Cited

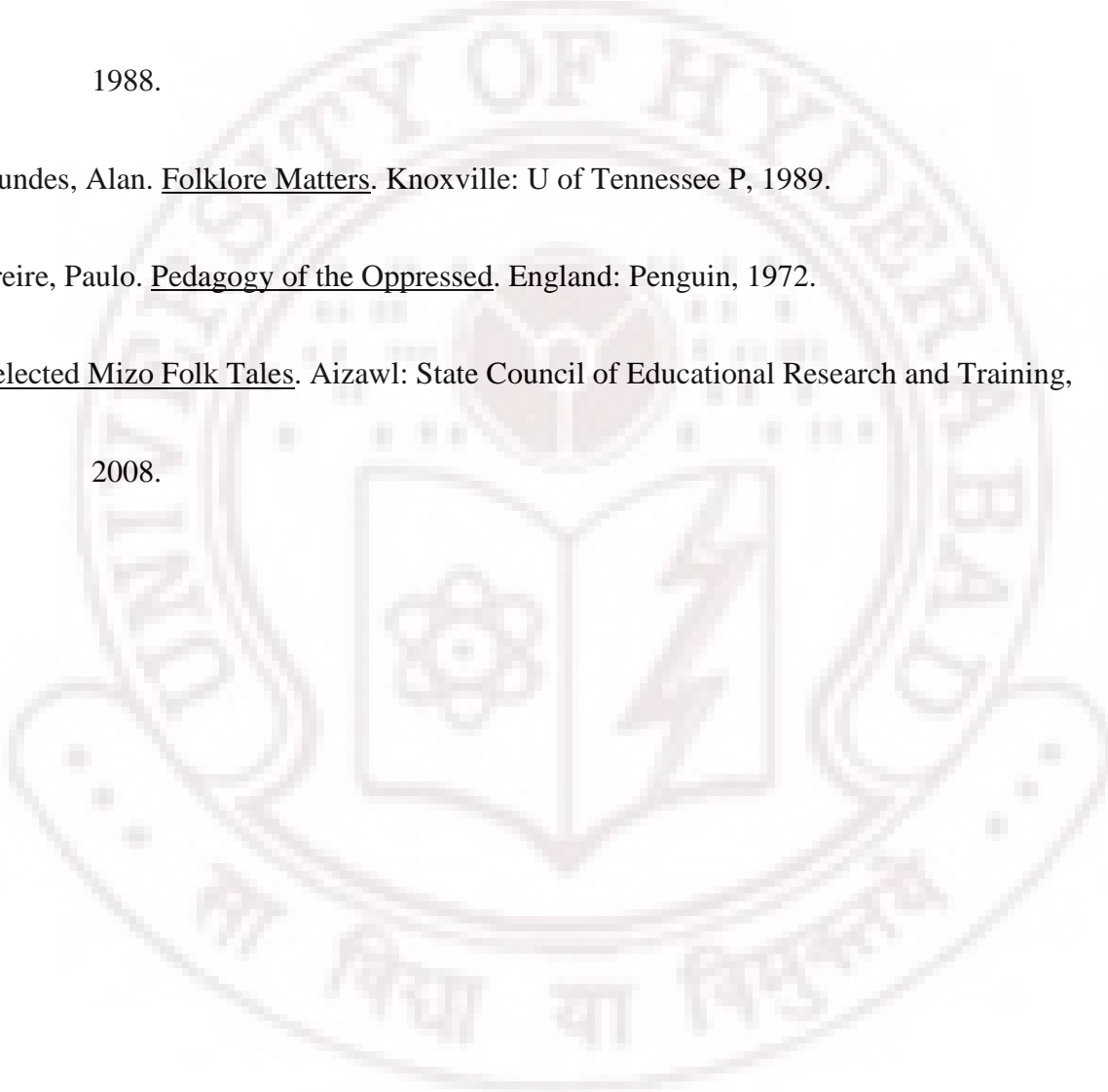
Apple, Michael W. Ideology and Curriculum. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004.

Corson, David. Oral Language Across the Curriculum. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1988.

Dundes, Alan. Folklore Matters. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989.

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. England: Penguin, 1972.

Selected Mizo Folk Tales. Aizawl: State Council of Educational Research and Training, 2008.



Chapter 5

Conclusion

The question of “identity formation” is always a sensitive issue which cannot be easily explained. In the case of a Mizo it is not clear whether there can be a clear-cut identity that is common to all the people of the state. For instance, there are differences in the language of the people living in the Saiha District (in the southern part of Mizoram) and those of the people living in the other Districts. The folktales that have been discussed in this dissertation are those found in the “Mizo” language (previously called “Duhlian” dialect). However, it is not possible to go into the details of this complication because of the constraints of time and a need for further study in this area. It may only be mentioned here to strengthen the point that “identity” is a very complex issue.

Alan Dundes writes in Folklore Matters: “I would contend that identity, both personal and social, is decidedly multiple in nature” (Dundes 6). There are various layers to the concepts of “identity” and “culture” and they may be said to be inter-related. Language can be a part of a person’s identity and culture and it could be one way of defining a person. Religion can also be another part of a person’s identity. How would education and folktales fit into this question of identity? Folktales have always been thought to have an educational value. Even the most seemingly “simple” tale will have an underlying moral embedded in it. The tales that had been used in the past, when there were no written forms, to pass on knowledge from one generation to another will obviously have educational value. The British collected and studied these to familiarise themselves with the people they were going to face;

they needed to better understand their “subjects” in order to keep them under control. The missionaries used them to teach reading and writing as well as to imbibe certain values and morals. In the present times, the SCERT, Mizoram is making use of the folktales to teach a language while at the same time invoking the Mizo children to take an interest in their own folktales and traditions.

Mizo folktales seem to have been through many changes, from the oral tradition to the written forms first in English (written by Britishers from oral recordings), then in Mizo (by the Mizos, sometimes in collaboration with Britishers) and again into English (translated by the Mizos). There can be no denying the fact that the folktales have lost their importance in the lives of Mizos. They are no longer narrated to children as they used to be done in the past. In an age of computers and growing technology, the number of Mizos of the present generation who know about their folktales is decreasing at an alarming rate. Efforts need to be made to revive an interest in the folktales before they are forgotten. When written records are kept, there is a certain level of preservation that is done but this will not be enough. I would agree with Stuart Blackburn when he writes: “[O]nce in the public sphere... the perception of folklore as part of the interior world of indigenous culture generated ambivalence towards it” (Blackburn 16). As mentioned earlier, there is of course the possibility of multiple readings of the written folktales even when the folktales are written down.

There is a growing interest among researchers in the field of folktales of the Mizos. There are books that have been published and websites dedicated to these studies.

However, the sources are still very limited and there are not many which are available in English, which was one of the main difficulties I faced. For a Mizo doing this kind of research, translations have to be done. If someone who does not know Mizo has a desire to do research in this area, there will be a few obstacles. Besides the exercise of translation and compilation of Mizo folktales, efforts need to be made to have a critical study of the existing folktales. It would also be beneficial for future researchers to look at the way these folktales have an impact on the younger generation and just how knowledgeable the youths are of their oral folk traditions. There is still so much scope for research in the area of Mizo folktales.

Any written work is subjected to multiple readings and the location of the reader plays an important part in the reading that may be rendered. As a woman who is educated, living in the twenty-first century, reading school text-books that were produced in the twentieth century, my reading will differ from many other readers of the same texts. The problems that I find in the school text books might not have been problematic to the people who had studied them in the past. Therefore, the readings I have presented in this dissertation are from my own particular location.

It would be helpful if the Mizo folktales are considered more than just cultural artefacts. They are important knowledge systems and are also sources of history. If we consider them as history and find ways of incorporating them in the lessons that are taught in schools, then there would be lesser chances of the folktales being lost. It is time to see the educational aspect of the Mizo folktales, to see them not just as tales but as important sources of learning, of sources which teach the need for ecological preservation and the preservation

of moral and ethical values. If we can appreciate the important place that the folktales had in the lives of our ancestors and continue to have in the lives of people in the present generation, there would be no fear of their being extinct.

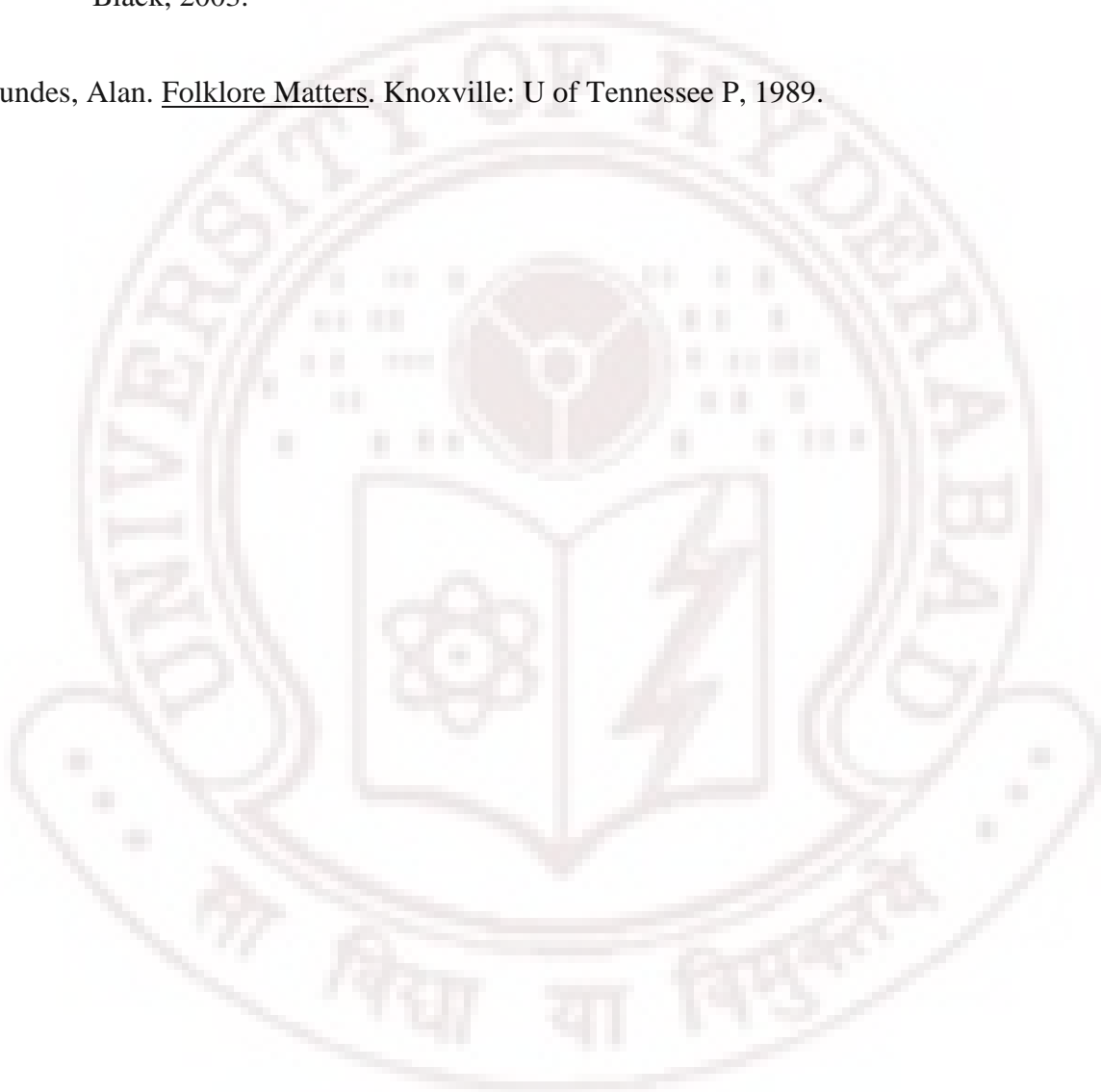


Works Cited

Blackburn, Stuart. Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India. Delhi: Permanent

Black, 2003.

Dundes, Alan. Folklore Matters. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989.



Select Bibliography

A Lai Bu. 26th ed. Aizawl: Synod Bookroom, 1978.

Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. 7. Singapore: Thomson Asia, 2005.

Apple, Michael W. Ideology and Curriculum. New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004.

Baral, Kailash C., ed. Earth Songs: Stories From North East India. New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 2005.

Barman, Bhaskar Roy. Folktales of NorthEast India. Delhi: Gnosis, 2008.

Bascom, William R. "Folklore and Anthropology". The Study of Folklore. Ed. Alan Dundes. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965. 25-33.

Beck, Brenda E. F., et al, ed. Folktales of India. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Ben-Amos, Dan. Folklore in Context: Essays. New Delhi: South Asian, 1982.

Blackburn, Stuart. Print, Folklore, and Nationalism in Colonial South India. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003.

---. "The Burden of Authenticity: Printed Oral Tales in Tamil Literary History." India's Literary History: Essays on the 19th Century. Eds. Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

Blackburn, Stuart and Vasudha Dalmia, eds. India's Literary History: Essays on the 19th Century. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

Corson, David. Oral Language Across the Curriculum. Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1988.

Dundes, Alan. Folklore Matters. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989.

Dundes, Alan, ed. The Study of Folklore. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Eliade, Mircea. Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities. Trans. Philip Mairet. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.

Elwin, Verrier. Myths of the North-East Frontier of India. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1999.

Freire, Paulo. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. England: Penguin, 1972.

Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6th ed. New Delhi: Affiliated East-West, 2004.

Handoo, Jawaharlal. Folklore in Modern India. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages, 1998.

Hluna, J. V. Education and Missionaries in Mizoram. Guwahati: Spectrum, 1992.

Islam, Mazhural. Folklore: The Pulse of the People. New Delhi: Concept, 1985.

Jong-yil, Ra. Fairy Tales of Ra Jong-yil. Korea: Design City, 2005.

Khiangte, Lalitluangliana, ed. Mizo Songs and Folk Tales. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002.

---. Mizo Drama. New Delhi: Cosmo, 1993.

Lalhmuaka. Zoram Sikul Zirna Chanchin. Aizawl: Lalhmuaka, 2000.

Lalrimawia. Mizoram: History and Cultural Identity 1890-1947. Guwahati: Spectrum, 1995

Lalthangliana, B. Mizo Literature (Mizo Thu leh Hla). Aizawl: Lalrinthanga, 1993.

---. Pi Pu Zunleng. Aizawl: Lalthlengliana, 2007.

Lianzawna, C. Mizoram Education Chanchin. Aizawl: Rokhumi, 2005.

Mama, Lal. Mizo Titi. Lunglei: Mizoram Text Book Committee, 1957.

McCall, A. G. Lushai Chrysalis. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2003.

Naithani, Sandhana “An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of
Nineteenth-Century India Author(s).” Folklore 112.2 (Oct.2001): 183-188.

Nongkynrih, Kynpham Sing and Robin S. Ngangom, eds. An Anthology of Contemporary
Poetry from the North East. Shillong: NEHU, 2003.

Nuchhungi. Serkawn Graded Reader. Aizawl: Nuchhungi, 2004.

Pasena. Zir Tan Bu. Aizawl: Synod Bookroom, 1978 (21st impression).

Pasena and Zosaphluia. Zir Tirh Bu. Aizawl: Synod Bookroom, 1967 (6th Edition).

Propp, Vladimir. Theory and History of Folklore. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.

Raheja, Gloria Goodwin, ed. Gender, Stories, Lives: Gendered Dialogues and Cultural
Critique. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003.

Rowlands, Edwin. Bu Lai. Madras: Welsh C. M. F. Mission, 1909.

Sanders, Seth. "Indian Unity, Diversity play out in historical debate over language." The University of Chicago Chronicle 22. 5: (2002).

Sangkima. Essays on the History of the Mizos. Guwahati: Spectrum, 2004.

Sen, Geeti, Sanjoy Hazarika, Mamang Dai and Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, eds. Where The Sun Rises When Shadows Fall: The North East. New Delhi: Oxford UP; India National Centre, 2006.

Sen, Soumen, ed. Folklore in North East India. New Delhi: Omsons, 1985.

Shakespear, J "The Kuki-Lushai Clans" The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 39 (1909): 371-385.

Shakespear, J and T.C.Hodson "Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours" Folklore 20.04 (1909): 388-420.

Singh, S. P. Folk Tales of North East India. New Delhi: B. K. Taneja, 2005.

Selected Mizo Folk Tales. Aizawl: State Council of Educational Research and Training, 2008.

Statistical Handbook Mizoram 2006. Aizawl: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Mizoram, 2006.

Taylor, Archer. "Folklore and the Student of Literature." The Study of Folklore. Ed.

Alan Dundes. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965. 33-42.

Thangvunga, R. "Aspects of Mizo Literature." www.mizowritinginenglish.com, 21.

September, 2008.

Thanzawna, R. L. "Glimpses of Mizo Literature." www.mizowritinginenglish.com, 20.

February, 2008.

Thirumal, P and C. Lalrozami. "On the Discursive and Material Context of the First Handwritten Lushai Newspaper 'Mizo Chanchin Laishuih', 1898" (Unpublished).

Toelken, Barre. The Dynamics of Folklore. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

Wilson, William A. "Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism." Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader. Ed. Elliott Oring. Utah: Utah State UP, 1989. 21-37.

Appendix I

Interviews

In order to give the readers an idea of the type of questions that were asked in the interviews that were conducted, I have included three of the interviews in this appendix. Each section will give a brief introduction of the person interviewed. There are slight variations in the questions that I asked each person. This is because the interviews were conducted more in a conversational mode and sometimes one question led to another.

1. **Pu Biaksanga** retired from the post of the Principal of Government Aizawl College in March, 2009. He was a lecturer of Political Science and is 62 years old. He is the son of Pi Nuchhungi, the author/compiler of Serkawn Graded Reader.

Q. Do you think that the exercises at the end of the lessons were a way of preserving the folktales? Did you pass it on to the younger children?

A. It might have been a way of preserving the folktales. I think we must have narrated the tales at home too because children who did not yet attend school knew of these stories. It might have been that their parents or their elder siblings told them the tales.

Q. In Zir Tirh Bu, there is a story called “Zawngte thawnthu” (The Story of a Monkey)¹⁰. How did you study the lesson?

¹⁰ See Appendix II

A. We learned it by heart. The elder children read to the younger ones, we learned it by heart and narrated the whole story to the teacher.

Q. How were the exams conducted?

A. Exams were initially done orally. In Class 3, we had a written type of exam.

Q. Do you think that studying the folktales added to your identity as a Mizo? What do you think is the effect?

A. The stories might not have made it so clear but the traditions and customs were embedded. The presence of a book with overtly Mizo subject helped the children. It safeguarded the traditions and when it is in a written form, it will be more durable.

2. **Pu Saichhunga** is the Headmaster of Dawrpui Vengthar Middle School and is 55 years old.

Q. How did you study the lessons?

A. The lessons were read out loud, there was no note taking. It did not feel like we were learning the tales by heart because we listened to them as stories and we remembered them.

Q. How were the exams conducted?

A. Direct questions were asked and we answered them in a written form.

Q. If you had not studied the folktales in school where would you have heard them from?

A. Elders and siblings.

Q. Did you pass on the stories to others?

A. Of course.

Q. Do you think that studying the folktales added to your identity as a Mizo? What do you think is the effect?

A. Now that I think about it, it did help. We learned a lot of Mizo characters and lifestyles, ways of life. Unconscious cultivation of Christian values from the books/texts. They made our value system stronger and they became embedded in our lives. Authors and writers of the past had made so much effort, they had a sense of the nation in their works.

3. **Pu Saimuana** is a Junior Engineer in the department of Public Health Engineering (PHE) of the Government of Mizoram. He is 57 years old.

Q. How did you study the lessons?

A. Teacher and the students read the stories.

Q. How were the exams conducted?

A. Not oral, all written question and answers. I don't have much memory of the exams.

Q. If you had not studied the folktales in school where would you have heard them from?

A. From parents, mostly. With friends, elder friends. In a friends circle, "Thawh khawm" (contributing), where we would sit together and one person narrates a story and if he forgets any part, another will continue to narrate it.

Q. Do you think that studying the folktales added to your identity as a Mizo? What do you think is the effect?

A. Even if we did not study them there might not be any difference. But our ways of life keep on changing. Education and Christianity came together little by little. Most of the stories we heard were just stories to us. But the lessons with the morals and values were really important in everyday life. I think there were more of the Mizo values than Christianity/Christian beliefs.

Interview of Laldawngliani Chawngthu, Deputy Director, SCERT.

Q. When Selected Mizo Folk Tales was prepared, what class was it primarily meant for?

A. Elementary classes, which means from Classes I to VII.

Q. Is the book currently being used?

A. The Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE) had included one story each in the newly-published Mizo English Reader for classes III and V. For Class III, “A Monkey and A Tortoise” has been included while for class V, “The Great War between Chungleng and Hnuaileng” has been included. You will notice that in the case of the second folk tale, Mizo words have been included so that the children reading this will be able to identify themselves with this story.

Q. When the book was prepared, was it intended to be a school textbook?

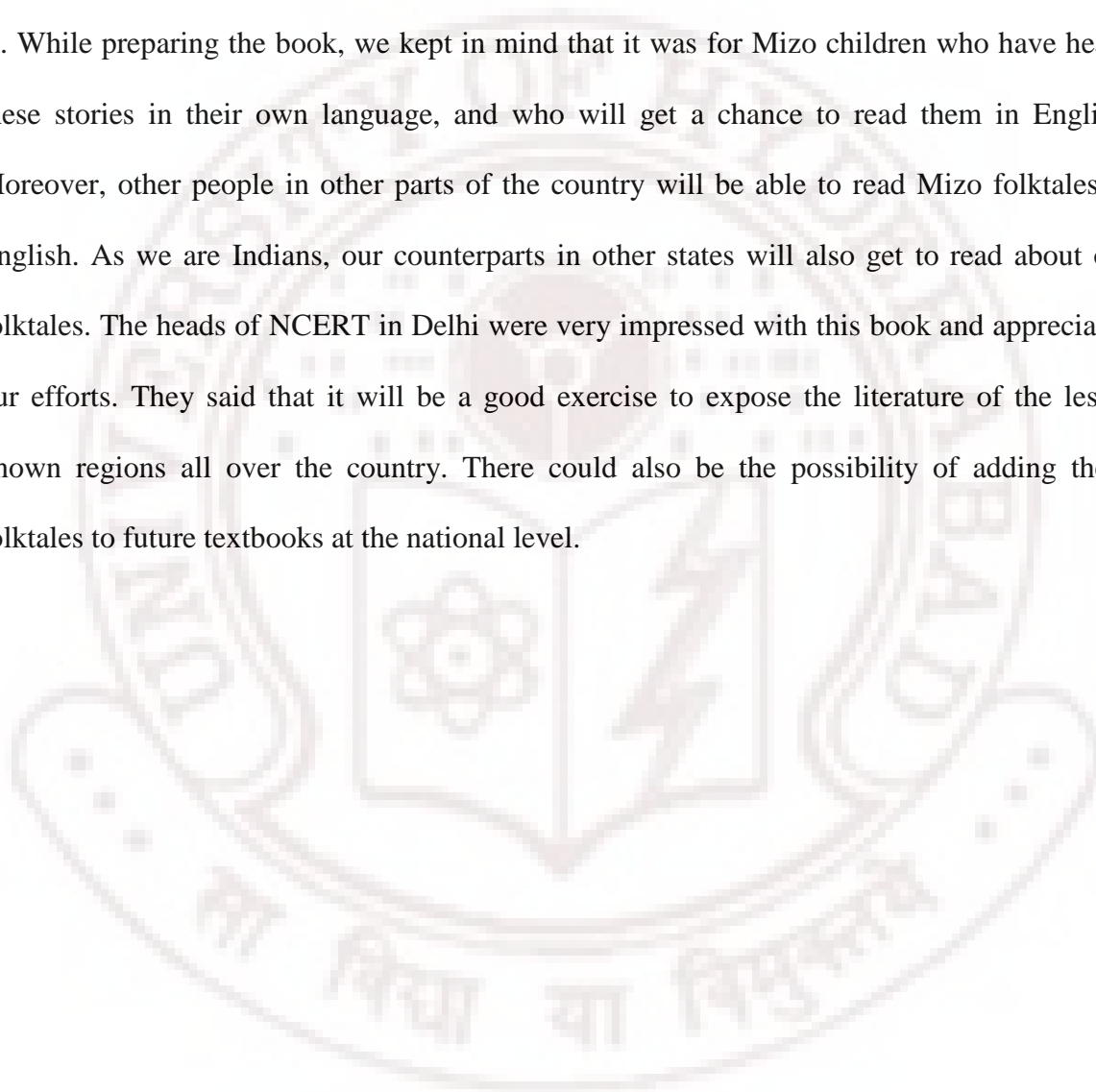
A. No, the book was meant to be a supplementary reading material for Mizo school children, an addition to their English text books, so that the school children may enjoy reading the stories and learn English at the same time. Therefore, keeping in mind the target group, the language, the diction and the narration have been used keeping children in mind. A “story-telling mode” is used, for the enjoyment of children.

Q. Were the translators men or women?

A. There were both men and women translators. It was a group effort of the people who are working in the office of the SCERT, through workshops. A lot of work has gone into the book.

Q. Is there anything more you would like to add?

A. While preparing the book, we kept in mind that it was for Mizo children who have heard these stories in their own language, and who will get a chance to read them in English. Moreover, other people in other parts of the country will be able to read Mizo folktales in English. As we are Indians, our counterparts in other states will also get to read about our folktales. The heads of NCERT in Delhi were very impressed with this book and appreciated our efforts. They said that it will be a good exercise to expose the literature of the lesser known regions all over the country. There could also be the possibility of adding these folktales to future textbooks at the national level.



Appendix II

My Translations

The following eight Mizo folktales were translated from two of the school textbooks that have been discussed in the dissertation. The first tale “The Story of a Monkey” is the only folktale found in Zir Tan Bu. From Serkawn Graded Reader Book I, I have translated “The Story of a Monkey and a Tortoise” and “The Story of Sichangneii” as these are also found in the SCERT-published book Selected Mizo Folk Tales. From Book II of Serkawn Graded Reader, I have chosen to translate the folktale that was discussed in the dissertation (“The Story of Chala and Thangi”). I have translated “The Story of Chepahakhata” because this particular folktale has an event where the wit of the Mizos is tested against that of the “Vais” (non-Mizos). Besides the folktales mentioned above, “The Story of Kungawrhi” and “The Story of Thailungi” were chosen because both had women as protagonists; “The Story of Duhmanga and Dardini” was chosen for translation as this folktale highlighted the social set-up of early Mizo/Lushai community where there was opposition regarding marriage between the rich and the poor.

ZIR TAN BU

The Story of a Monkey

A monkey was playing a flute and when a quail saw this, it was very envious of the monkey. The quail said to the monkey, “Your mother told you to fetch water”. “Already done,” came the reply. “She told you to fetch the firewood,” said the quail. “I have already fetched it,” replied the monkey. The quail then said, “She told you to lead the hens into their coop”; “She told you to feed the pigs”; “She had asked you to cook rice” and to all these the

monkey replied, “Already done.” Finally, the quail told the monkey, “Your mother had asked you to take a nap” and the monkey said, “Oh! That’s right!” and it went to take a nap.

While the monkey was asleep, the quail tried to take the flute from the monkey but the monkey woke up and the quail did not have a chance to escape. Then, the quail asked the monkey, “Can I play the flute for a little while as I perch on the door?” But the monkey said, “I am afraid you might fly away with it.” “Then you hold on tight to my tail,” said the quail. So the monkey held on to the quail’s tail. The quail flew away, leaving the feathers of its tail in the monkey’s hand, and this is why the quail has a very short tail even today.

After a while, the quail went to the monkey to ask for its tail feathers. “Give me back my tail, hm hm”, it said. The monkey replied, “Why don’t you exchange it with eight mithuns?” So, the quail said, “I would rather stay without a tail than exchange it with eight mithuns, hm hm.”

SERKAWN GRADED READER**BOOK I****The Story of a Monkey and a Tortoise**

A monkey and a tortoise went together to catch crabs. The tortoise went into the water and caught a lot of crabs. The monkey could not catch any crabs.

The tortoise asked, “Monkey, did you catch anything?” The monkey replied, “No, I did not catch anything because I do not know how to swim.” The tortoise said, “I have an idea, let us tie a rope around your waist and I will pull you wherever I go.” The monkey said, “All right.”

They both tied a rope around their waists. The tortoise went in followed by the monkey who died instantly. The tortoise came out of the water and asked, “Monkey, did you catch anything?” The monkey could not reply anymore. The tortoise asked again, “Monkey, did you catch anything?” When the monkey did not reply, the tortoise thought it was angry. “Here, take all the crabs I have caught,” said the tortoise and went away.

The Story of Kungawrhi

Once upon a time, a man was splitting some bamboos and accidentally cut his thumb. The thumb started bleeding and out of it came a beautiful baby. He decided to raise her as his daughter and named her Kungawrhi. As she grew up, she turned into a very pretty woman.

Once, a man-tiger took the footprint of Kungawrhi in the sand and dried it over a fire. Due to this, Kungawrhi became very ill and could not recover. So her father announced, “If anyone can cure my daughter, I will give her hand in marriage to that person without demanding any bride-price.” Hearing this, the man-tiger came and took the sand footprint of Kungawrhi from over the fire and she was cured. The man-tiger then married her. When they came to the outskirts of the village, the man-tiger told her to hold on to his tail and he started running very fast with Kungawrhi.

A woman who was gathering firewood in the forest saw this and went to Kungawrhi’s father to tell him what she had seen. The father then announced, “Whoever can rescue my daughter will have her for a wife.”

Two brave young men Phawthira and Hrangchala came forward to rescue Kungawrhi. After travelling for a long time, they came upon the land of the “khuavang” (a type of guardian spirit) but they were not allowed to enter. The man-tiger had turned himself

into a “khuavang”. Phawthira and Hrangchala said, “If you do not allow us to enter your land, we will punish you. Where have you kept Kungawrhi? At least let her come with us.” The “khuavang” replied, “Punish us if you can.” Phawthira threw his thingkul (a two-pronged hair pin) and a landslide destroyed some part of the village. However, they did not release Kungawrhi. Phawthira and Hrangchala punished the land of the “khuavang” in a number of different ways. Finally, Kungawrhi was released and she was brought home to her father.

The Story of Thailungi

There was a little girl called Thailungi and she had a stepmother. One day, she was pretending to sleep near her mother who was weaving. Just then, a Pawite trader from the East came to sell a big round iron and Thailungi’s mother said, “I will buy that from you in exchange for Thailungi.” The Pawite said, “But how will you do that?” The stepmother replied, “I will tell her to fetch water after some time and you can catch hold of her then.” Thailungi got up from her sleep and her mother told her, “Thailung, go and fetch water but carry only the old and damaged things.” Thailungi did as her mother told her and at the well she was captured by the Pawite trader.

After a while, Thailungi’s younger brother went home and asked, “Mother, where is my sister?” His mother replied, “She has gone to fetch water.” He asked her again and again so finally she said, “I have sold her to a Pawite.” Thailungi’s brother grew very sad and saying, “I will go to my sister,” he went out of the house.

He came across an old woman pounding sesame. “Where is my sister Thailungi?” he asked her. “If you spill all my sesame and then pick them all up, I will tell you,” replied the old woman. After he did as the old woman had told him, he said to her, “All right, now tell me what I want to know.” The old woman said, “Go to that old man who is carving wood and mortar and ask him your question. So he went and asked, “Where is my sister Thailungi?” The old man said, “If you can split my carved wood at the centre and then join it together, I will tell you what you want to know.” After the boy did as he was told, the old man said to him, “Go to that man who is leading the mithun.” When the boy asked the man, he was told, “Follow my mithun wherever it goes and do exactly as it does. If it lies down, you lie down; if it stands, you stand and if it eats grass, you should also eat grass. If you do all these, I will tell you what you want to know.”

The boy did everything as he was told and finally asked, “Tell me where my sister is.” The man with the mithun told him where his sister was and the boy found Thailungi and they were very happy.

The Story of Sichangneii

A man once made an artificial pool of water. He went to look at it every day and each time the water was always muddy and dirty. When it became an everyday occurrence, he grew very angry and said, “I will find out who dirties my pool.”

The next day, he woke up early in the morning and went to his pool. After some time, a beautiful woman with long wings flew down from the sky and bathed in the pool. The

man caught her and the woman said, “Let me go.” But the man did not let go and brought her home. He took off her wings and hid them. Then they got married.

They had six sons – Chhintheia, Kaptheia, Haitheia, Dotheia, Entheia and Tlangparela. The parents went to work in the fields on alternate days.

One day, it was the turn of the mother to stay at home with her sons. She asked them, “My sons, why is it that every time your father stays at home, you all have fun but when I stay home, you cry?” All her sons did not say anything, but the youngest said, “Well, mother, when father stays at home with us, he takes out these big wings and we play with them. That is why we never cry”. As soon as the mother found out where her husband had hidden her wings, she put them on and flew home to the sky.

When the father came home in the evening, he asked, “Where is your mother?” “She has flown to the sky,” they replied. Their father then said, “If your mother is not here, it will be better if I kill myself”, but his sons persuaded him not to do so. The youngest, however, said, “It’s all right, father, go ahead and kill yourself” and so the father killed himself and the six siblings became orphans. They missed their mother very much and when they looked up to the sky, they saw their mother working very hard.

Kaptheia (which literally means “one who can shoot”) shot many arrows one after the other and made a chain of them thus the six brothers climbed to the sky. Their

grandfather said, “My grandchildren, have you come for a visit? Let us go to the fields and do some work”. But his intention was to kill all of them because he found them to be a nuisance.

When they reached the field, the grandfather felled a big tree to kill the brothers. But Dotheia (one who can protect) shielded his brothers from the tree and they were unharmed.

When it was time to burn the fields, they went along with their grandfather. He set fire to the field and it seemed that the brothers would not be able to escape. But Haitheia (one who can dig) dug a deep hole where all of them hid and Chhintheia (one who can cover) covered up the hole and they were unharmed.

After the fire subsided, the grandfather went to the field and imagined that the ashes were those of his grandsons. However, he was shocked to find that all of them were alive. Their grandfather hated them very much and he sent them home to Earth.

When they were back on Earth, they missed their mother very much and they often looked up to the sky. Once, the people in the sky threw husk in the eyes of the brothers and they all became blind. They became very poor and made a living catching crabs.

However, Taunu (a malignant she-spirit) used to eat all the crabs that they caught. The youngest had by then grown up into a very strong man. He was very angry that all their hard work was being destroyed by Taunu. So he finally caught Taunu and killed it by smashing its head against a rock. Some part of its brain splashed on to his eye and he regained his sight.

The youngest brother applied Taunu's brain on the eyes of all his brothers and they regained their sight and lived happily ever after.

SERKAWN GRADED READER

BOOK II

The Story of Chala and Thangi

When they were young children, Chala and Thangi were very obedient and they grew up to be good people. As they grew, so did their love for each other. Their village was called Khawlung and it was suddenly attacked by the people from the east called "Pawi". Thangi was captured by the enemies but Chala managed to avoid being captured and so they were separated. When Chala heard that Thangi had been captured, he was devastated. He wept for Thangi and finally, he decided to look for her. He said, "Even if I die searching for Thangi, I will go because life is meaningless without her," and so he set off.

Thangi was in the land of the Pawi and had gone to their field alone. She was feeling homesick and could not do any work. She was sitting near the farm hut singing:

I wonder if he still misses me, does he think of me,

Does my lover still miss me?

At the moment Thangi sang this song, Chala was at the edge of the field and as soon as he heard the song, he recognised Thangi's voice, and so he replied with a song:

I still miss you, I still think of you,

I have come looking for you in the fields.

Chala went to Thangi, hugged and kissed her, and they were on their way to return to Chala's village.

They said to each other, "Now that we have found each other, let us nurture our love and let it grow." But on their way home, they had to cross a river which was flooded, brimming with water. So the man told the woman, "Hold on to my neck and I will swim to get us across." Unfortunately, the woman could not hold on and she was drowned. Chala searched for her but could not find her anywhere. He stayed on in the enemy's land for five days and six nights searching for Thangi but could not find her. He went back to his village alone.

When Chala reached his village, the people were drinking zu (liquor) and making merry but he did not join them nor did he drink zu. Since he could not bring his beloved back from the land of the enemy, he did not want to talk to his friends or any of the people of his village. He did not go out of his house for a couple of days.

When my beloved has drowned in the Tiau river,

How will I be able to drink zu and be merry?

So they were parted, very much in love but in great misery.

The Story of Duhmanga and Dardini

Once upon a time Duhmanga and Dardini were very much in love. Duhmanga was the son of the village Chief but Dardini was the daughter of a widow. Duhmanga very much wanted to marry Dardini but his parents were against the marriage because of the difference in their social status. However, Duhmanga married Dardini against his parents' wishes. Duhmanga was a very successful hunter who could shoot the heads of different animals.

One day when Duhmanga was away hunting, Duhmanga's parents sent Dardini home. But when Duhmanga reached home, he brought Dardini back and married her again. When this happened a second time, Duhmanga married a beautiful Chief's daughter from another village. But after three days, Duhmanga divorced his wife and took Dardini as his wife again. When he went on another hunting expedition, his parents sent Dardini home for

the third time. This time, Dardini's mother could not tolerate the insult anymore and married her off to a man in a faraway village.

When Duhmanga returned home and he did not find Dardini, his parents told him all that had happened. He could not eat or sleep for a long time. He waited three years for Dardini to return, and when she did not, he went out searching for her. When he reached Dardini's village, he found out that she had died while giving birth. He went to her grave and laid down beside her corpse and killed himself with his arrow. They buried him beside his beloved Dardini.

The Story of Chepahakhata

Chepahakhata was a very ugly man and because of this he did not get married for a long time. When he finally got married, fortunately for him, his wife was a good witch. She turned a banana grove into a great city and he became the Chief. Chepahakhata was a very happy and content man and he was blessed with a daughter. Once, Chepahakhata went around the city and the people treated him with so much respect that he did not think about the time he had spent outside the house. His wife told their daughter to ask Chepahakhata to return home three times but Chepahakhata was having so much fun that he did not heed his wife's call. After calling him for the third time and getting no response, his wife got very angry. So she turned the city back to a banana grove and she and their daughter went to Pu Vana in the sky.

When Chepahakhata woke up from his sleep, he found himself in a banana grove. He thought it was a dream but it was real, and he did not have anything to eat. His daughter saw his condition from the sky and said, “Mother, look! Father is hungry and is roaming around with no food to eat.” Her mother told her, “If you pity him so much why don’t you throw down the magic pot that always contains food.” So the daughter threw the pot to him and he never went hungry again.

Chepahakhata went to the village of a Vai (non-Mizo) Chief. Due to his ugliness, the Chief disliked him instantly and meted out a challenge for him. “Let us have a competition to see who can dish out more rice. If you lose, I will kill you.” The Vai Chief asked all his subjects to cook rice and the competition started. Chepahakhata won because of his magic pot. The chief got very angry and so he ordered that Chepahakhata’s pot be broken and he be tied to the tallest branch of a tree.

When Chepahakhata was stuck to the tree, he overheard a conversation between mynahs and drongos. The mynahs sided with the Vais and the drongos with the Mizos. Their discussion was on the topic, “Who is cleverer: the Vais or the Mizos?” The mynah said, “Vais are cleverer. If a mother and a daughter who look very much alike are brought to a meeting, the Mizos will not know who is the mother and who is the daughter.” The drongo replied, “That is so easy. Let them be severely beaten and the mother will cry, ‘Oh my daughter!’ and the daughter will cry, ‘Oh my mother!’.” Then the mynah said, “If a cow is brought whose head and tail cannot be told apart, the Mizos will not be able to tell the difference”. But the drongo replied, “They will shoo the cow, and it will run and they will

know which side is the head.” Chepahakhata kept all these things in his mind and the birds flew away.

After a short while, the Vais and the Mizos gathered together to test their wits. The tests were exactly as the mynahs and the drongos had discussed. Therefore, Chepahakhata knew all the tricks of the tests and in the end the Mizos were declared cleverer than the Vais. This made the Mizos very happy and Chepahakhata no longer had to be imprisoned on the branch of the tree.

