CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITIES IN SELECTED FOLKTALES OF THE LUSHAI HILLS AND THE KHASI HILLS

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By

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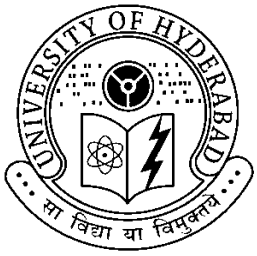

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Construction of Identities in Selected Folktales of the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills" submitted by Laldinpuii bearing Registration number 10HEPH05 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

This thesis is free from plagiarism and has not been submitted in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for award of any degree or diploma.

Parts related to this thesis have been

A. published in the following publications:

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Oral tradition, the passing on of history, customs, beliefs, stories etc., from one generation to the next generation has been a practice that has been in existence for a very long time. Many communities and tribes of people all over the world have had this tradition. In the absence of the written word and language scripts, passing on of knowledge by word of mouth becomes an essential part of life. Folklore and folktales are especially important among people who have an oral tradition because these contain not only stories but also lessons about values in society, cultural practices, societal beliefs and traditions, among other things. This dissertation will focus on the folktales of the Lushais and the Khasis and discuss how different collections of folktales seem to present different kinds of identities of the people to whom the folktales belong at certain points of time.

It is difficult to define what a folktale or folklore is because over the years, there have been different definitions. “Folklore” appears to have a wider connotation with “folktale” being one of the sub-genres within its categories. In its most basic sense, “folklore” means the lore (stories) of the folk (people) and it could be used to encompass people of different descent in different parts

of the world. India is also known to be a rich source of folklore with its numerous languages and regions with varying kinds of traditions and practices. One of the most well-known folktale collections was done by A. K. Ramanujan in 1992 which covered a wide range of folktales from all over India. There is a need to understand and study folktales in the present time because of the impact and effect they have had and continue to have till today. Interest in and curiosity about folktales have diminished with time and in the present day and age of heightened information technology and developments in various fields, the younger generation does not seem to be captivated by folktales and stories of the past. Since it is possible to trace the history of a people found in their folktales, it is important that the present generation understands and becomes aware of the existence of folktales and finds the relevance to their life and the life of their ancestors.

Folktale in the colonial times became an important tool for the rulers to understand the people while at the same time assist in the administration of a people who were still unfamiliar to them. Collections of folktales were a source of information for people who had never heard of the Lushais and the Khasis but were curious about the tribes, or for people who were planning on occupying the lands either as administrators or missionaries. According to Lynn Abrams, oral history "is a creative, interactive methodology that forces us to get to grips with many layers of meaning and interpretation contained within people's memory" (18). Due to the many layers of importance that the Lushai and Khasi folktales contained, it became important for the

administrators to be aware of and be familiar with the folktales for information and ideas about the people.

In the hilly areas such as the then Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills, folktales were the key to reconstructing the past as well as understanding the culture of the people. The absence of a written tradition places an important role on their oral traditions. During the second half of the 19th century, the colonizers attempted to establish their authority in the hilly regions of North East India. Initially, the colonialists faced the problem of defining the hill tribes for the purpose of governance. Colonialism required a clear sense of the tribes in their territorial boundaries, and their political, social and economic organization. Folklore became the site for the investigation of these questions and for the colonial production of knowledge in North East India. Christian missionaries too had their own interest in looking into the folktales when they noticed certain practices of the people in the hills contrary to their own systems of belief and religion. Hence, collections of folktales were initiated both by colonialists as well as Christian missionaries. A number of folktales were gathered and produced by colonial ethnographers.

The main focus of my dissertation is a careful examination of the works of the colonial administrators in the form of books/monographs and articles in journals. The primary texts for my study are in English. I will try to analyse to what extent the folktales included in the books reflect the customs of the people. For example, in *The Khasis* by P. R. T. Gurdon, most of the

folktales which are included do not seem to reflect the matrilineal practice of the Khasis. It might be a good attempt to try and understand why this is so.

There have not been any scholarly discussions of the folktales by the local people in the time frame of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. However, there have been works in the contemporary times done by the Mizos[1] and the Khasis, which will be taken into account in the course of writing the dissertation. The only discussions on the collected folktales of the time when the tales were collected happen to be in the form of portions of articles in journals and anthropological books by the administrators. There have been many subsequent collections of folktales by the people of the land and it would be an interesting endeavour to take a look at these in relation to the earlier collections done by the "outsiders". The inclusion and exclusion of certain folktales and the possible reasons behind these would be explored in some of the chapters of the dissertation.

The construction of the identity of the people is a major theme that will be studied in this dissertation. It would be interesting to see how relevant these identities are in the present context; for instance, the notion of "head-hunting" that is invoked time and again in relation to the Lushais and the Khasis from these states. There are writers who have written about the

[1] The explanation of the terms 'Lushai' and 'Mizo' will be addressed in the section "Lushai Hills/Mizoram" of this chapter.

relationship between head hunting, spirituality and agriculture, giving a new dimension to the practice of head hunting. When a person collects, records and writes down the folktales of a certain group of people, and presents these in the form of a book or an article, he/she will make some comments or observations on these folktales. For instance, in his book *The Khasis*, P. R. T. Gurdon calls some of the folktales "weird", "important", "pretty" and so on. For a reader who has not heard about the people he is writing about, these remarks will affect his/her reading and understanding of the tales. It would also be fruitful to look at the interpolations done subtly by the writers/collectors of the folktales.

There are times when we notice that there are connections between articles that appeared in the journals of the time and the books/monographs. There are also references to existing books in the articles and vice versa. Difference of opinion among the writers is also apparent sometimes. In the journal article titled "Leopard Men of the Naga Hills" by J. H. Hutton, the opinions of the writer are challenged by J. Shakespear in the comments that are made at the end of the article. The subjectivity of the writers comes in time and again. When such differences of opinion occur, which of the viewpoints is accepted now in the present times? When there had been differing accounts, what is the power politics that comes into play when a certain identity or opinion is privileged over another? How has the present day identity of the people that the colonizers had written about been shaped by the opinions of the past? Which account can be accepted as "authentic"? A host of questions such as these will be discussed during the course of the dissertation.

In an article titled “India on the Map of ‘Hard Science’ Folkloristics”, Heda Jason writes: “The first to pay attention to the lore of the simple folk in India were the well-educated British ladies and gentlemen of the colonial administration in the last quarter of the 19th century and the first quarter of this century [twentieth century]” (Jason 105). The reasons behind such an effort could vary – from being an interest in a people that were unknown, to it being an attempt to comprehend the land and the people and also to add to the knowledge system of the British. One might even say that these efforts were for administrative purposes as well as to enrich the knowledge of the colonial rulers. Richard M. Dorson establishes the relationship between the folklore studies in England and the collecting done in the new colonies in the nineteenth century in this manner:

> In the glorious century of the Pax Britannica, Englishmen travelled, taught, preached, and administered all over the globe. From some of these missionaries, travellers, and colonial officers resident in Asia and Africa and browsing in Europe came important collections and translations of folk traditions, directly stimulated by the interest and theories in the subject at home (Dorson 309).

The use of folktales as a colonial store-house of information and knowledge about an “exotic” people will also be dealt with. Sadhana Naithani, in an article called “The Colonizer-Folklorist”

lists out clearly the reasons behind a Britisher's interest in the folktales of India. While referring to the writings of Richard Carnac Temple, Naithani writes: "Whereas the collections of European folklorists in Europe were published and received as cultural goods or expressions of culture, Indian culture (in terms of religion, philosophy, and history) had to be studied for understanding the folklore" (5). In the same article, Naithani further mentions that the target audience of these folktale collections is already determined, as Naithani writes how "the texts were produced for readers in the home-country of the collector, where the tales were discussed as 'tales,' i.e., in terms of their narrative structures, thematic concerns, and types, dissociated from the meanings they had for their carriers, listeners, and believers" (12).

In the journal articles that I have read, the collectors of the folktales do not specifically mention the process of collection. However, in the anthropological books, there is a brief mention of how a certain local guide helped them to collect the stories of the people or how they learned the language themselves and talked to the local people. In the book *The Lushei*[2] *Kuki Clans* by Colonel J. Shakespear, in the fifth chapter titled "Folklore", he mentions at the beginning of many tales and beliefs which are collected there that what he records is a translation of the narration of a person. So, in a way, there appears to be a double change in the process of collection here – translation from the local language into English; and transition from an oral to a written text.

[2] Lushei and Lushai are used to refer to the same people; the difference is in the spelling.

Reasons for Studying Folktales of the Lushais and the Khasis:

The present states of Mizoram and Meghalaya are part of the north-eastern areas of the country called India. These two states used to be under the governance of Assam but later became full-fledged states in the Indian union – Meghalaya became a state of India on 21st January, 1972, while Mizoram became a state on 20th February, 1987. These two states were chosen for this study because of their oral tradition and the fact that the earliest collections of their folktales which were written down were done by non-natives. Another important fact to consider is that their folktales were written down in English, a foreign language, and these became important sources of research about the people in the past as well as in the present. Administrators who had lived in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) and the Khasi Hills (Meghalaya) included the folktales in monographs commissioned by their government, and the target audience or target reader for these monographs seem to have been their peers in the British administration and their contemporaries who had not heard about these people. The presence of Christianity and its influence in both these regions is another factor which led to the study of this topic. The presence of foreign administrators in their lands as well as the effects and impact that these events had on the people and their ways of life are some of the most important aspects of this study. It would seem that there was a "created" identity of some kind of the people of this region by the administrators which were later presented to other administrators in similar fields as well as the general public who were still very unfamiliar with the Lushais and the Khasis of the colonial times. Identity/Identities of the Lushais and the Khasis had been created and projected in some ways by the non-natives and there appears to be an effort on the part of the natives in the

present times to express themselves through their writings both in the mainstream collections from Sahitya Akademi (Laltluangliana Khiangte and Desmond L. Kharmawphlang) as well as in other publications.

There is a need to be aware of the existence of the collections of folktales initially done by "outsiders" which are later studied and responded to by the "native" people. Esther Syiem had this to say: "When the British came with a codified system of knowledge and power it would seem that the hill tribes were easily stripped of their own knowledge systems, where the evident result has been cited as, being an almost complete turn around from one's beginnings" (28). There may be similarities in the folktales of the Lushais and the Khasis; however, this dissertation will try to focus more on the differences between the two. The different states in the northeastern region of India have often been seen as similar in terms of the appearance of the people, the geography of the land, the society and its practices. This dissertation will make an attempt to show that although there are points of similarity there are many differences which cannot be overlooked.

The problem of transmitting an oral folktale through a written medium is something that needs to be addressed and evaluated from different angles. There are writers who feel that keeping a record of the folktales helps future generations in having a rich source of information; however, there are writers like Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, who have some doubts about the

transition from the oral to the written: “The printed pages literally ‘fix’ one version of a tale, a genre, giving the impression to the general public that it is the genuine, original model, whose variations might be questioned. This ‘fixing’ is opposed to the very nature of folk literature whose charm and beauty lies partly in its adaptability, flexibility and the existence of multiple versions” (14). Esther Syiem (2007) also writes about the difficulty in transitioning from an oral to a written form in the following words: “… stories keep renewing themselves in a society that is slow to surrender the art of story telling to the printed medium” (42). This question of how to negotiate between an oral tradition and a written one is one of the concerns in this dissertation.

Folktales are relevant in the present times because they hold information and clues about the past, in a way that may not be clear in the first reading, but will unravel with closer readings. There are underlying explanations and meanings found in the folktales and they are also regarded as history-keepers for the people to whom they belong. R. L. Thanmawia makes a direct connection between the oral traditions of the Mizos and the sense of social value and ethics that make up their society. He is of the opinion that the study and awareness of the Mizo folktales in the present times will be beneficial for the society as he writes: “All that the Mizos need to make their new life more rewarding and meaningful is to revive their old values in the society and give fresh blood to the Mizo entity” (82).

Identity may change with time; for instance, the Mizos are now identified with Christianity and high literacy rates. In the past, they had their own religious beliefs and practices with certain rites and rituals. They did not have a written script (although there is a folktale which suggests that they once had a script), yet in the last census of India (2011), Mizoram ranked third in literacy rate with 91.33% (after Kerala and Lakshadweep)[3].

Lushai Hills/Mizoram:

Mizoram, which had been a Union Territory from India's independence in 1947, became the 23rd state of India on 20th February, 1987. In the 2011 census, the population of this state was 1,097,206 (555,339 males and 541,867 females)[4]. During the British administration, this area was named the Lushai Hills and was under the area of Assam Hills. Mizoram of the present day is divided into eight districts. There is a difference in language and customs between the northern part and the southern part of Mizoram, but this dissertation will not go into these details. The use of the terms "Lushais" and "Mizos" for the people of Mizoram is hard to explain; "Lushai" was used primarily in the colonial records and writings, and "Mizo" is more of a post-Independence term. In this dissertation, these two terms will not be used interchangeably. The term "Lushai" will be used when referring to the writings of the colonial times whereas the term "Mizo" will be used with reference to the contemporary times. It is difficult to explain just who and what

[3] http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/mizoram.html
[4] http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/mizoram.html

constitutes these terms and in the course of this dissertation, one hopes that it will become clearer.

Joy L. K. Pachuau in her book *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India* talks about the complexity of identity among the Mizos by looking at the history-making process through colonial records, missionary writings and oral traditions. Initial collections of folktales were done by the administrators. Then, a few folktales were included in school text-books, mostly by missionaries, and later some were produced with the collaboration of a few of the newly-educated natives. It is difficult to determine what kind of "identities" were presented in the collections but an attempt will be made to have a close reading of the folktales to find out what was represented and promoted through the writings.

Mangkhosat Kipgen wrote that "[t]he early history of the Zos[5] is obscure, shrouded in myths and legends" (31). Folktales have been a part of the Mizo tradition for a very long time. They have been narrated by grandparents and parents to their young ones sometimes for entertainment and recreation and sometimes as moral stories. Kipgen also states: "Though the young people enjoyed telling stories, it was the elders who told the purposeful stories… They told stories about their own experience as well as retelling the stories that had been passed on to them from

[5] According to the definition given by Mangkhosat Kipgen in his book *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, Zo "is used to denote a tribe the many clans of which inhabit Burma (where they are known as Chins), North Cachar and Manipur (where they are known as Kukis), and Mizoram (where they are known as Mizos). They have traditionally been called Kuki-Chins or Chin-Lushais. In Mizoram proper they were called Lushais by the British" (6).

previous generations" (83). Initially narrated orally, the form of presentation changed with the development of the Roman script for the Mizos with books and collections of folktales produced in the language. What had once been transmitted orally could now be read out and shared. In the twenty-first century, the popularity of folktales among the Mizos has diminished, but there have been some attempts to revive the tradition as well. With the change in the fields of technology and the easy access to the internet, efforts have been made to raise an interest in these folktales and stories. Most recently, Jacqueline Zote, in collaboration with an illustrator, made a post on the internet about the various "creatures" that were part of the Mizo folklore[6]. In a digital age, it is refreshing to find that there are people who are still concerned with honouring and remembering the past of their ancestors.

Khasi Hills/Meghalaya:

Meghalaya became a state of the Indian Union on 21st January 1972, and at present it is divided into 7 districts. According to the 2011 census, the population of the state was 2,966,889 (1,491,832 males and 1,475,057 females)[7]. There are three major tribes in Meghalaya – the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. This dissertation will focus on the Khasis and their folktales. One cannot ignore the fact that there are differences among these three major tribes and there are political issues related to them and it is not an easy task to understand and explain it. It is necessary to recognize that there are differences in traditions, folktales and practices among these

[6] http://homegrown.co.in/from-giants-to-goblins-mizo-folklores-mythical-creatures-illustrated/
[7] http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/meghalaya.html

three tribes and although in the colonial times, Khasis and Jaintias were clubbed together, there are differences between them. However, this dissertation will focus on the Khasis and their folktales while acknowledging that they are not the only occupants of the state of Meghalaya.

The Khasi Hills under the British administrators will be dealt with in more detail in the second chapter. The influences they had and their impact on the people of the land, the Khasis, cannot be overlooked. Folktales of the Khasis had been collected and written down in English by the British administrators in a monograph about the people. As in the case of the Lushais, it was apparently important for the administrators to understand and be aware of the people they were going to rule over, hence the need to learn more about them. Unlike the Lushai Hills, the Khasi Hills were rich in natural resources and had more to offer for the administrators in various fields. This might have been an important factor that led to the British presence being more invasive in the Khasi Hills as compared to the Lushai Hills.

The Need to Study Folktales in the Present Times:

As mentioned earlier, folktales form an important part of the existence of the Lushais and the Khasis, and they are a part of the history of the people and have a bond which cannot be denied. Folktales which did not receive as much attention as they deserve need to be read and studied by the communities that produced them so that the rich culture and traditions of the people to whom

they belong get to experience a part of their past. Defining a tribe or a group of people is never an easy task and this dissertation is not trying to put a label or a concrete definition of the people it discusses. However, attempts need to be made to understand them so that the opportunity to make progress in the fields of folktale studies is taken up in future.

The transition of an oral language which did not have a script into a written language may not be easy; but the Mizo language and the Khasi language seem to be adapting well with the Roman scripts that had been developed by missionaries. An important factor to think about in the context of a written script is that in both the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills, the earliest known written folktales were initially recorded in English, a foreign language. When one studies these folktales, it would be important to keep in mind that they had been recorded in a language which was not the native language of the people who had inherited them.

This dissertation will consist of three main chapters apart from this Introduction and a Conclusion. The second chapter titled “Impact of Administrators and Missionaries on the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills” will focus on the presence of the British administrators and missionaries in the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills. In order to understand and study folktales that had been collected, recorded and written down by the administrators, it is necessary to understand the circumstances which led to the invasion by the British of the hilly areas. This chapter will trace the history of the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills and the reasons for the need

to learn about the presence of the administrators. It will look at the accounts written by the administrators as well as books which were published in more recent times. This chapter will focus on the reasons for the presence of the British in the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills and trace the impact they had on the people of the land.

Apart from the impact of the administrators, the influence and impact of the missionaries in the Lushai Hills and Khasi Hills is another factor which this chapter will deal with. The missionaries simultaneously spread the gospel to the people and also opened schools and hospitals in these areas. According to Vumson, who writes about the impact that the missionaries had on the Lushais "[t]he British administrators completely ignored education for their subjects, so that educating the people was wholly in the hands of the missionaries" (143). The impact that the missionaries had on the people is felt even in the present times with "Christianity" becoming one of the markers of identity for the states of Mizoram and Meghalaya. Joy L. K. Pachuau also mentions in her book that "[o]ne important aspect of Mizo identity is its adoption of and complete identification with Christianity" (5). The relation between knowledge and power will be dealt with in this chapter.

The third chapter titled "Folktales from the Lushai Hills" will deal in detail with the folktales from the Lushai Hills of the past and the folktales of Mizoram, published in later years. The folktales that had been collected by J. Shakespear and A. G. McCall in their monographs about

the people of the Lushai Hills are read and analyzed to determine if there was a particular identity that was projected through the writings. A close reading of the folktales and the underlying meanings that could have been attached to them will be discussed. This chapter will make an attempt to understand the target audience for whom the folktales had been collected and the need for gathering information about the Lushais. The important position that folktales have had in the lives of the Lushais in the past and the rich information and history embedded in them will be highlighted in this chapter.

Contemporary folktale collections done by the Mizos (B. Lalthangliana and Laltluangliana Khiangte) will also be studied and compared with those done by the administrators to see if there are similarities and differences in the representation of the identities. The question of whether there is a particular "Mizo" or "Lushai" identity that is representative of the people will also be addressed in this chapter. In the introductions and/or prefaces to all these collections, one can see hints and suggestions of what the collector intends his work to represent to his audience. The opinions and views of some of the contemporary Mizo writers about the folktales will also be included in this chapter. The problems of negotiating and appreciating folktales recorded by non-native writers and the need to understand the usefulness of these collections will be dealt with in this chapter. It is never easy to be objectively critical of the works done in the past but an attempt will be made to find a balance between criticizing and appreciating the works done in the past.

The fourth chapter titled “A Study of Khasi Folktales” will deal with folktales from the Khasi Hills, collected by non-natives, and Khasi folktales from the present state of Meghalaya. The collections from non-natives will be taken from the books by P. R. T. Gurdon and by Mrs. K. U. Rafy. These collections were one of the earliest records of the Khasi folktales and are important sources of history and research. One of the issues that will be discussed is the lack of transparency in mentioning the name of the native informant who helped in the collection and translation of these folktales. There are some folktales which appear in both these collections There are also folktales which are very different in nature and in the manner of presentation. The few pages of explanation and introduction to these collections give the reader a glimpse of what the writers wish to convey to the readers.

Khasi folktales by contemporary Khasi writers Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Desmond L. Kharmawphlang will be looked at to see what kind of identity the natives would represent through their collections. Comparison will be made between the folktales included by the non-natives and the natives and there will be an analysis of the kinds of folktales that have been chosen to be included in each of these collections. One of the most unique factors about the Khasis is the matrilineal system, where the clan of the mother (not the father) is passed on from one generation to the next, and the maternal uncle has more power in the family. But when one reads the collections of the folktales of the Khasis, the matrilineal system does not seem to be presented. Except for the collection of Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, where in one of the end-notes of the folktale there is a mention of the practice of the matrilineal system, none of the

folktales seem to reflect this practice. There cannot be one definite answer to the question of identity and representation of a people through their folktales, but this chapter will try to find a way to negotiate the representations of the past and the present. The words of the writers/collectors found in their books will also be analyzed and studied to have a better understanding of what their intentions were for the readers of their collections and how their audience would respond to the representation of the Khasis through their folktales.

The last chapter, the conclusion, will re-visit the ideas and issues that had been presented throughout the dissertation. The limitations of the study will be addressed as well as the opportunities for further studies and research in these areas.

I am aware of the inevitable multidisciplinary nature of my dissertation. I need to understand the construction of the identities as reflected in the folktales in the context of colonial historiography, theories of anthropology as well as through contemporary theories of identity politics.

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Chapter 2

Impact of Administrators and Missionaries on the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills

Folktales are storehouses of identities as well as culture, social practices and values. Jack Goody, in his book *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* mentions that folktales "are often specifically children's 'literature' and therefore cannot be taken as representative of adult thinking" (41), but this point is debatable. It is a known fact that folktales are narrated to children by parents and/or grandparents, but one cannot deny the importance of folktales as carriers of identities, culture and practices. Value systems of a people are embedded in the folktales that are carried on through generations. Oral folktales are handed down from one generation to the next from memory, through people. When they are written down, is there a loss or is it beneficial for the keepers of the folktales? This chapter seeks to address some of these questions.

Sangkima in his book *Essays on the History of the Mizos* is of the opinion that the Mizo language was "reduced to writing" (145); for him, the act of committing an oral language into writing amounts to "reduction." The fluidity and ambiguity of an oral language does get lost to some extent when it is fixed in the written form; however, at a time when "modernity" brought with it the written tradition, with its new inventions and technology, the survival of a language seems to have necessitated its existence in a written form. On the other hand, with the advance in

digital technology, it may be argued that it is quite possible today to record folktales in their original oral form and in all their variations, if any, and preserve them for future generations without ever "reducing" them to a written system. Going by the above argument it was inevitable that the folktales of the Mizos and the Khasis**,** in the beginning of the twentieth century, be written down for their availability to future generations. In this context, the intervention of colonial modernity cannot be ignored either. The first known written forms of the Mizo folktales were the anthropological and ethnographical works of the British administrators. Richard M. Dorson is of the opinion that when folktales are written down and kept in a printed form, they do not come to an end because "the narrator, the singer, and the craftsman keep on in their traditional ways whether or not their words and works have been brought to the attention of sophisticated audience" (466). It is important for researchers now to find a way to negotiate the impact that these written records have on their studies, keeping in mind that the earliest written folktales were by "outsiders" and also that they were written down in English, a foreign language.

British presence in the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills needs to be studied in order to understand the impact that they had on the people and their culture and history. An insight into the colonial past will be essential in understanding the identities that were constructed through folktales as the earliest versions of the Lushai and Khasi folktales were part of anthropological and ethnological works of administrators in the areas. It is important to take into account the impact that the British had on the people of these areas in order to have a better understanding of

the later works that were written about them. One cannot claim that a study of the British presence will allow us to gain an insight into the process of collection of folktales, yet it is an endeavour that has to be taken up. The construction of an identity through folktales collected from the people of these areas is a larger issue that will be dealt with. One needs to understand how and why the British occupied these areas in the hills. There appears to be a connection between the exercise of collecting the folktales and the attempts to conquer the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills. In order for the administrators to understand and study the people they were to rule over, they needed an understanding of the Lushais and the Khasis. The understanding of the subjects is an important exercise for the administrators to exert their power, and this knowledge would have been useful in devising tactics to rule over the people and their land. Foucault's idea of power may be used to read the presence of the British in both the Lushai and Khasi Hills. There is a strong connection between knowledge and power, according to Foucault's theory. Therefore, it was important for the administrators to have as much knowledge as they could gather of the people they were to conquer in order for them to exert their power. Collection of folktales became an important source of gaining knowledge of the people of the land.

The arrival of the British gave way to the advent of Christian missionaries in many of these areas. In looking at the history of the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills, the role of the missionaries becomes an important part of the study; therefore, it is necessary to include sections of this in the present chapter. Manorama Sharma writes: "The importance of the role that Christianity played in the historical developments in many of the societies of North East India

can never be denied, and therefore, this religious variant needs to be given serious considerations in any historiographical study of North East India" (37). On the changes in the field of education that came about with the arrival of the missionaries, and the purposes of establishing such an education, Laldena writes that "educational institutions served double purposes: first, as a means of teaching the Christian truth, and secondly, as a means for recruitment or training of future native workers" (91). There is a need to find a balance to read the works of the missionaries and place them in a context which would be beneficial for the person studying it many years after their presence. This need for negotiating the past with the present may be summed up in the words of Sharma: "There is no doubt about the fact that Christianity has played a big role in the historical evolution of societies in North East India, but this role needs to be analysed from much truly secular perceptions than has been done so far" (43); hence, the necessity to include the history of the presence of missionaries.

It appears that the administrators in India became aware of the existence of the Lushais when trouble started between these "hills men" and the "plains men" especially in the tea gardens which were important economic assets. There are written records of complaints submitted to the British administrators in the late eighteenth century regarding some of these "hills men". Initially, the British administrators had no interest in pursuing these men from the hills and left them to their own lives. There are also records which show that the chiefs were made to retain their individual rule in their areas. However, when the attacks became more frequent and more dangerous, the administrators seem to have been compelled to intervene. It would appear that the

British had the security of the people in mind when they entered the hills. On the other hand, one could argue that the British presence marked the beginning of an invasion into the lives and culture of the people. It is compelling to think that these tribes had existed for hundreds of years without the intervention of the British to help them in their affairs. At the same time, one cannot deny that there were perks related to the arrival of the British such as roads being built, hospitals and formal education being introduced, as well as the arrival of missionaries who brought with them many "civilized" ways of living. It is, however, difficult to imagine what it would have been like had the British decided to leave the tribes to their own devices and let them work out their grudges against each other. There are several books that mention the encounter between the British and the hills men. According to Birendra Chandra Chakravorty, "The Jaintias were the first hill people of the North-East to come into direct contact with the British when their territory was overrun by the latter in 1774, but it was not permanently annexed by them" (15). Such encounters in the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills will be discussed in more detail.

British Presence in the Lushai Hills:

The British made their presence felt in the Lushai Hills in the nineteenth century. Birendra Chandra Chakravorty writes that there was a raid by the Lushais on the people of the plains area that had happened in 1849 but it had little impact and they were left to themselves after a small expedition was organized by the administrators (22). There was a lull for many years after this raid. However, in 1860, a major raid happened in the plains of Tipperah wherein hundreds of

British men were killed and many captured. It appeared that this had been done by the subjects of Rutton Poiya, a Lushai chief (50). After several attempts to subdue this outbreak of violence, the Lushai chief surrendered to the British and efforts were made to have a "friendly" relationship with this chief as well as the other ruling chiefs of the area. A. G. McCall, in his book *Lushai Chrysalis,* writes: "From 1834 to 1841 the protection of settlers in British India from the fierce depredations of the raiding LUSHAIS was entrusted to a Manipuri Chieftain named TRIBHOWANJIT SINGH" (37). This Manipuri chief was provided with arms and ammunition to carry out his duty. So, it may be said that initially, the British did not intend to enter into an administrative relationship with the Lushais; rather they were content with leaving the checking of the Lushais' advances to a neighbouring chief.

In the history of the Lushais, the invasion of the land by the British is marked by two distinct occurrences which were later named as "Vailen"[8]. The first of these invasions is said to have occurred in 1871, following the capture of Mary Winchester[9] by the Lushai chiefs Bengkhuaia and Savunga from a tea plantation in Alexandrapore. The British under General Brownlow, with the help of Captain Lewin and the Lushai chief Rothangpuia, were able to rescue Mary Winchester from Bengkhuaia. Although the Lushais resisted the attack, they finally surrendered

[8] "Vailen" literally translates to "the coming of the *Vais*" (non-Mizos). The history of the Lushai Hills records two events of "Vailen"; the first during 1871-1872 and the second during 1888-1890.

[9] Mary Winchester was the 6-year-old daughter of James Winchester, a tea plantation owner in Alexandrapore. She was captured and her father was killed on 23rd January, 1871 when their plantation was attacked by the Lushais. This attack and capture of Mary Winchester led to the first "Vailen" (1871-1872). Subsequently, Mary Winchester was returned to the British.

to the British power. Since the main purpose of the expedition seemed to be the return of Mary Winchester, the British did not occupy the Lushai lands but made the Lushai chiefs aware that they were capable of keeping them under their control. This incident is considered an important event in the history of the Lushais and is still mentioned today because of the repercussions of the invasion. After this expedition, several agreements were made with the Lushai chiefs. The terms that had been agreed upon after this expedition were as follows:

> (1) Government agents should have free access to Lalbura's villages;
>
> (2) the guns taken at Monierkhal and Nugigram should be surrendered, and
>
> (3) a fine of two elephant tusks, one set of war-gongs, one necklace, ten goats, ten pigs, fifty fowls, and 20 mounds of husked rice should be paid. (Chakrovarty 59)

After the military expedition of 1871-1872, the Lushai chiefs seemed to have been left to themselves. In 1877, there was an intra-village war which was mainly between the Eastern and the Western Lushais. Deputations from Sukpilal's village were sent to the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar in July of 1877, "asking for British help against the eastern chiefs" (Chakrovarty 68). The Chief Commissioner acted as an intermediary between the Eastern and the Western Lushais and they were able to resolve their issues. The Lushai famine ("Mautam") of 1882 was another

event that led to British intervention. Due to the famine, Lushais were unable to harvest enough crops to feed themselves which led to them raiding the plainsmen.

The second "Vailen" appears to be an attempt on the part of the British government to drive home the point that the Lushais were subjects of the British monarchy and would have little to no power in their land. Vumson writes that the chiefs who had made an arrangement with the British in the first "Vailen" had passed away and their successors in different parts of the land felt angry that they were subjected to surrender to an outside force. They retaliated against the British by carrying out attacks on villages and keeping captives from these attacks. According to A. G. McCall, "[t]hese renewed onslaughts compelled the distant government to admit that it was no longer possible to continue a policy of appeasement towards a people whose basic standard and values of approach to mutual problems differed so greatly from their own" (53). The people in power finally decided to send another expedition which they termed "The Chin Lushai Expedition of 1889-90". The British official Mr. McCabe wrote:

> I cannot reiterate too strongly how firmly I am convinced that burning a Lushai village and then withdrawing is no punishment. We must hunt the enemy down from camp to camp and jhum to jhum, destroy his crops and granaries and force them by want and privation to accede to our terms. We cannot expect the chance of a fair stand up fight and in Jungle Warfare of the type met with in these hills, we must anticipate

> that one's losses in actual fighting will exceed those of the enemy. Exposure and starvation are our strongest allies and with their assistance I believe that the Lushai will very shortly be craving for peace. (59-60)

This expedition was carried out in two columns and was a success for the British. As Vumson records it:

> The object of the Southern Column was:
>
> 1. Construction of a mule road to Haka, thus connecting Burma to India,
>
> 2. Establishment of posts along the route so as to secure complete pacification and recognition of British power, and;
>
> 3. Subjugation of Zo clans which were still neutral to British rule. (124)

The Lushai Northern Column's objectives as found in Vumson's book, according to Carey and Tuck who gave the details are as follows:

> On the 19th March Lieutenant Macnabb, with a column of 100 men, 39thGarhwal Rifles, with two guns, under the command of Lieutenant

> Mocatta, started for Tyao. The object of the expedition was entirely peaceful, firstly to meet and confer with the Thlantlang Chiefs and explain to them that the Government insisted on their abstaining from all raiding, and secondly, to meet messengers bearing information and letters from the Superintendent, South Lushai Hills. (126)

An important outcome of this "Vailen" was the disarmament of the people. According to Vumson, over ten thousand guns were collected from Zo country. Rev. Liangkhaia writes that between the two "Vailen", the second one is of more significance because the British decided to stay on in the land (147). After the expedition, the British established themselves in the Lushai Hills. Captain Shakespear was placed in South Lushai Hills in charge of Lungleh, Darzo and Fort Treager, while Captain Browne was placed at Fort Aijal.

According to Rev. Liangkhaia, the years following the "Vailen" were a time of unease and fear among the Lushais as various rumours started pouring in. There was the talk of the British taking away all the young men to work in the tea plantation; and of the women and children being taken away to faraway places never to return to their land. He recalls that it was a time which was dark and people were collectively fearful of their uncertain future. However, he writes that after these initial doubts and confusion, the British slowly established themselves in the land and in the hearts of the people.

Chakravorty writes that in 1898, on the first of April, the Lushai Hills was placed under the Chief Commissioner of Assam (79). However, for the betterment of administration, it was decided that there would be an officer, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, under whom would be placed the administration of civil and criminal justice. The Lushai chiefs would have independent reign over their subjects in the villages. However, the Superintendent would be in charge of them all.

Missionaries and Their Work in the Lushai Hills:

The arrival of Christianity in the Lushai Hills is associated with the arrival of J. Herbert Lorrain and F. W. Savidge, missionaries who reached Sairang on 11th January, 1894. As Kipgen notes, Lorrain and Savidge were received by a political officer, but were not helped in any way by him because the government was not allowed to provide assistance to the missionaries heading for the Lushai Hills (194). These men followed the route which had been used by William Williams, a missionary who had tried to preach the gospel in the Lushai Hills several years prior to this but did not complete the task. Lorrain and Savidge developed a script for the Lushai language and in this they had some help from a book called *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in the Lushai Dialect* which had been prepared by T. H. Lewin, a British administrator in 1874. Although Lewin did not prepare a script for the language, the book assisted Lorrain and Savidge to some extent. With the formulation of a script for the Lushai language, the missionaries began formal education of the Lushais. Laldena points out the dual nature of

education in the work of the missionaries. He says that "… the involvement of missionaries in educational programmes was to be viewed as supplementary to the primary task of communicating the 'spiritual' message to the people" (90). The presence of Western missionaries and the introduction of Christianity to the people of Lushai Hills was a significant milestone in the history of the Lushai Hills and this aspect cannot be ignored when looking at the past. Formal education, literary advances in the form of translation[10], healthcare and changes in different fields were a part of the presence of Christianity and its impact on the lives of the Lushais. School textbooks[11] prepared by some of the early missionaries included folktales alongside Bible verses, stories from the Western world along with stories about Lushai men; all these were a part of the process of ascribing an identity in some way.

Writers have highlighted the impact that the missionaries have had on the lives and practices of the people of the Lushai Hills in the past and the present. As with all changes, Christianity has had its advantages and disadvantages. Kipgen is critical of the "western garb" (316) that came with the coming of Christianity. He points out that in the beginning, when Christianity was introduced in the Lushai Hills, the converts rejected everything that was part of their past. Kipgen writes: "Like the missionaries, the first Zo Christians believed that the converts must be protected from anything that was deemed to be 'heathen superstition'" (317). He believes that a part of their Lushai identity was lost with the acceptance of the new religion. This, however,

[10] Refer to Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 from Mizoram State Archives CB 5 G 59.
[11] Refer to Appendix 4 from Mizoram State Archives CB 20 G 244.

changed with the revival movements which happened at different times in the twentieth century (1906, 1913, 1919 and 1930 were some of the years when the Revival movements happened on a large scale.) Kipgen is of the opinion that as years passed by, the Lushais had been able to negotiate their "ethnic" identity with Christianity and had taken certain aspects of their culture into the realms of worship in Christianity.

Rev. Z. T. Sangkhuma, in his book *Missionary-te Hnuhma (The Traces of the Missionaries)* lists a number of advantages and disadvantages of the presence of missionaries in the Lushai Hills. He writes that among the many works that were taken up by the missionaries, the most notable ones and which are still relevant to the present are the introduction of formal education and the establishment of schools, Sunday schools, Bible written in the Lushai (Mizo) language, composition of devotional songs, establishment of a theological college, opening of a hospital, the abolition of slavery (*bawi)*, the introduction of the press and the knowledge of the *solfa*[12] for singing songs. According to Sangkhuma, the effects on the missionaries which could be seen as disadvantageous were the change in the use of language, the change in the dressing style of men and women, loss of Lushai poetic words and idioms, the decline of dancing in public gatherings and the rejection of many customs and practices which were identified with being a Lushai. He gives three main reasons for this kind of rejection – firstly, a "new life" was brought about with the arrival and acceptance of Christianity; therefore, articles and musical instruments which had been used before they became Christians were seen as unclean (175). Sangkhuma states that

[12] A system of using the solfa syllables (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti) to sing songs.

from the perspective of the present day, it is clear that this rejection meant the loss of parts of the Lushai culture; but one has to understand that at that time in history, the Lushai Christians believed that they were making a great sacrifice for their faith. Secondly, the admiration that was felt for the foreign (White) missionaries led to a desire for all things that were "western". Initially, it appeared that the missionaries did not have much of an effect on the Lushais, but when they showed that they had control over the distribution of salt, the Lushais saw them in a different light (177). Thirdly, the missionaries conducted the affairs of the new religion in their own way, from the lyrics of songs of the new Christian hymns and music, to the restriction of the use of drums (an integral part of Lushai singing and dancing), the missionaries excluded many cultural practices and identity markers from the worship services. It is interesting to note that the book *Marvellous Mission* by Rev. Vanlalchhunga lists only the positive aspects of the missionaries. Apart from the advantages stated by Sangkhuma, Vanlalchhunga lists the improvement of the position of women in the society, the cleanliness maintained in the villages and economic stability among the positive outcomes of the arrival of Christianity. According to him, the abolition of "Zawlbuk" (dormitory for young men) is also part of the positive aspects because "…it sowed the seeds of better relationship and understanding in the family and also created good and healthy society" (220).

British Presence in the Khasi Hills:

Helen Giri, in her book *The Khasis under British Rule 1824-1947,* wrote*:* "The acquisition of the Diwani of Bengal in 1765 by the East India Company ushered in the first contact between the Company and the Khasi Hills" (34). As it was the case with the Lushais, so also in the case of the Khasis, it was the raids on the plains that led to British intervention in their land. The Khasis were seen to be threats to the British and hence, military operations were carried out against them from time to time. Promaiha Nath Dutta mentions a "note-worthy" incident which happened in 1789 wherein Lieutenant Cheape burned down the village of Barakeah, a village that had caused havoc in the plains area. This was "the first occasion when the British force entered the Khasi Hills and destroyed a village. It struck terror among the Khasis" (41).

The Khasis and the British appear to have had not much trouble after this and the "syiems" (chiefs) of the Khasi Hills were left to rule over their own villages in peace. An incident which came to be known as the "Nongkhlaw Massacre" occurred on 4th April 1829 where the Khasis, led by their "syiems" attacked and murdered Lieutenant Bedingfield and Lieutenant Burlton, and their sepoys (Giri 66). This incident made the British to attack the Khasi chiefs and subdue them in their own lands. The chiefs who willingly submitted themselves "were allowed to retain their territories" (Dutta 73). However, the cases of the chiefs who took an active part were different. The British invaded their villages, demanded a price for the trouble they had caused and were made to realize the repercussion of their actions. As Dutta points out: "Although the Government

generally avoided annexation of territory, the most recalcitrant chiefs were often compelled to abandon large parts of their territories or dependent villages which were recognized as separate states by the Government" (74). The British made their presence known in many ways and were able to establish their rule in the Khasi Hills.

Missionaries and Their Work in the Khasi Hills:

P. G. R. Mathur records that the first contact of the Khasis with Christianity was in 1813 when a disciple of William Carey called Krishna Chandra Pal started missionary activities among the hill tribes. However, these missionary activities were shut down in 1838. It was only later in 1841 that the Welsh mission under the leadership of Rev. Thomas Jones and his wife began their work in these areas. The early converts to Christianity met with strong resistance from their peers as well as from the chiefs of the villages. U Kirot Singh of Nongkhlaw and U Kiang Singh of Jaintia Hills were among the chiefs who strongly resisted the arrival of Christianity through the missionaries.

The impact of Christianity is felt in the fields of education, literature, health and printing. The missionaries' work is greatly linked to the field of education. Schools were set up which provided education as well as gospel to the people. A. B. Lish is an important name associated with the education of the Khasis. According to Dutta, he opened three schools in 1834 – "one at

Cherrapunji, the second one in the British station at Cherra and the third at Mawsmy" (184). Although Lish opened these schools, it is Thomas Jones who is considered the founder of missionary work in the Khasi Hills. Thomas Jones, after his arrival in 1841, followed in the footsteps of Lish and established schools in Cherra, Mawsmy and Mamloo. In 1854, the Governor-General started making grants for education to the mission among the Khasis. So we find that by now, not only the missionaries, but the government also was making the connection between education and the mission activities. The introduction of the printing press, the translation of certain sections of the Bible and the continuing spread of education through the mission schools were all part of the impact of Christianity.

The role of Thomas Jones, a missionary, in the field of Khasi literature is summed up in the work of D. R. L. Nonglait:

> When Thomas Jones found that the Khasis had no script of their own he devised a new script using the Roman alphabets, which he was already familiar with and which he found are more accurate and suitable in the transcription of the Sohra dialect. Thomas Jones and his wife worked very hard to write books in Khasi and soon started basic education for the Khasis along with Christian teaching. Through his untiring and sincere efforts he published the first Khasi primer using Roman script entitled *Ca Citab ban Hicai Ca Citien Cassia*, from

> which modern Khasi Literature in its written form evolved and flourished. Thus the real beginning of Khasi Literature was initiated by Thomas Jones and he was therefore honoured and remembered as 'the father of Khasi Alphabet and the founder of Khasi Literature' (39).

According to Nonglait, not only did Thomas Jones develop a written script for the Khasi language, he also became instrumental in the starting of Khasi written literature.

The opening of a medical mission in 1883 by Dr. Griffiths gave another dimension to the missionary activity. Health began to take an important part in the activities of the missionaries. One may say that the agenda of the missionaries was not only to spread the gospel but also to leave an impact on the people through different means, hence the introduction of schools, printing press and hospitals. Another way of looking at this situation is to say that this indirect way of evangelizing the people would have been beneficial for the missionaries, as people were otherwise suspicious of their activities.

Mathur writes, "Both Christianity and Western education were factors inducing socio-economic change at the initial stage. But these should be seen in the correct historical perspective. Both these factors were interlinked and were intended to reinforce the British authority in the area" (135). From this remark we can make out that Mathur is very critical and

suspicious of what he sees as the hidden agenda in the work of the missionaries. On the other hand, Pranab K. Das Gupta, writing about the positive influence of the advent of Christianity in present day Meghalaya writes: "The Christians are, however, the most prosperous and the most powerful section of the community and this is a fact which is bound to exercise an influence among the people. Good houses, good clothes, cleanliness and prosperity are the outward and visible signs of the members of the church" (161).

It is no secret that the coming of Christianity had its share of positive and negative impact. Loss of earlier cultural practices and beliefs was one of the major losses suffered consequent to the arrival of the new religion. Mathur notes that in the initial stages, there was a conflict of opinion among the two major denominations – the Welsh mission and the Roman Catholic. The Welsh mission was of the opinion that there should be as little interference as possible in the cultural practices; however, the Roman Catholics wanted a complete surrender of the converts. Eventually, the people lost interest in their own culture and practices as these had been considered "heathen" and "devilish" by those who converted them.

Education became an easier way to evangelize the people. As H. G. Joshi pointed out, reading would lead to curiosity which would in turn pave the way to preach the gospel (113). The agenda of the British government had always been the governance of the people first and foremost as is evident from the words of Promaiha Nath Dutta who quotes the Lieutenant General of Bengal:

"To educate the Cossyahs [Khasis] is… a duty the discharge of which is forced upon the Government as a means no less of governing the hills than of improving the condition of the people" (191). Dutta weighs the pros and cons of the arrival of Christianity among the Khasis. He admits that there were advantages from the advent of the religion such as better healthcare, education, literature and "modernity". However, he also notes that the embracing of Christianity meant that the influences from mainland India were stopped abruptly and this led to a loss in an exchange of ideas and knowledge that could have been beneficial to both parties (201-202). Dutta also mentions how Western influences and ideas were incorporated within the teaching of Christianity which led to the exaltation of all things Western as opposed to the rejection of "native" customs and beliefs.

S. S. Khongkliam writes in his book *Religion of the Khasi* about the problem that arose in the schools started by the missionaries in the Khasi Hills. When the British government gave educational grants to the Christian missionaries for education, the school textbooks that were produced were infused with Biblical texts and stories, which Khongkliam says was "an instrument for propagating Christianity" (100). He also writes that the "negative attitude" which the missionaries showed towards the traditional Khasi religion created problems and there was a divide between the Khasi Christians and the followers of the Khasi religion.

Effects of the Presence of "Outsiders" in the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills:

The presence of the British in the Lushai and Khasi Hills had a lot of connection with economic gain for the administrators. Wealth in the form of cash and objects were included in the deals the chiefs made with the administrators. For instance, certain amounts of money were demanded from the chiefs as punishment for their raids on the plains; elephant tusks and animals were demanded as punishment, and objects of wealth such as necklaces and war gongs were also demanded. Apart from this economic gain, one might say that the wealth of folktales collected and recorded from the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills added to the growing wealth of the British administrators. The worldview of the British squashed the existing worldview of the Lushais[13] and the Khasis.

Another factor that led to the presence of the British in the hilly areas appears to be the issue of the security of the people. There were many inter-tribe/inter-village wars and the submission of a certain tribe or village to the British authority ensured British protection against their enemies. In return for this kind of security, they had to pay off a certain amount of money. The northeastern parts of India also offered a strategically important position as a frontier, which the British never forgot in their transaction with the native chiefs. The lime mines in the Khasi Hills, the prospect of building roads through the Khasi and Lushai Hills which could be beneficial for

[13] There have been changes in the Mizo/Lushai identity after the British left. The identity with relation to the whole of India has changed. For twenty years (1966-1986) the people fought the Indian government to have an independent nation; but this struggle ended with the signing of the Peace Accord in 1986 and Mizoram became a state on 20th February 1987. Although it would be interesting to trace these changes, the present dissertation will focus on the time period of the British presence and will not deal with the years of the struggle.

the British trade and commerce, and the wealth the land offered in terms of raw materials were a crucial component of the reasons for the British wishing to have a strong presence in these areas.

Foucault's concept of power is that power shifts from one to the other, it cannot be possessed. Knowledge comes with power, it is the "material effects of dominant power regimes" (McNay, 148). That "Power produces knowledge" is an argument that could be applied to the presence of the British in the Lushai and the Khasi Hills. The power that had once been in the hands of the ruling chiefs of the Lushais and the "syiems" of the Khasis would have produced knowledge of a different kind in the past. However, the "knowledge" that comes with the "power" of the British presence would have a very different and new effect on the people of the land. The presence of missionaries also brought with them another kind of knowledge. The knowledge and understanding of the World that had existed in the Lushais' and the Khasis' worldview was rendered obsolete and outdated with the arrival of the new knowledge advocated by the missionaries and the administrators.

One cannot deny the fact that the missionaries' works in the fields of health and formal education brought about changes in the society. This could be connected with Foucault's idea that knowledge, in any form, is a positive thing (McNay "Foucault and Feminism", 149). This idea of power as a positive product is also seen in Merquior's book on Foucault: "The cause of power is its capacity to do something other than repress" (109); power is everywhere (111) but it

does not mean that everything in society "bears the imprint of power as a defining feature" (115). The idea of power/knowledge highlights the fact that power and knowledge are not stagnant and that they are constantly moving. If one were to read these in connection with the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills, it would not be wrong to assume that with the change of hands in power from the Lushais and the Khasis to the administrators, there is also a gradual change in the knowledge systems of the people.

Everything that the British did had a purpose to serve their ends. Occupancy of the areas, the surveys and expeditions made were all for the benefit of the British rule and empire. It might not, therefore, be wrong to assume that the exercise of collecting the folktales, myths and legends of the people was done to serve some higher purpose than the "preservation" of a tradition and a culture. They must have been found advantageous for the British movement in and out of India. In order to rule over the people, the British administrators needed to have a better understanding of their subjects. The collection of folktales, myths and legends were some of the sources that served this purpose. Manorama Sharma reminds us that many of the works done by the administrators are "valuable sources of information" but at the same time "one must keep in mind the fact that these writings, whether it is of P. R. T. Gurdon or … Shakespear, developed ideas which reflected, consciously or not, the political and ideological interests of the British" (63). The advantages were more for the administrators rather than the people of the land.

Kanchana Mahadevan is critical of the British who are often seen as the ones who have brought "modernity" to India and its people. "The challenge provided by colonial modernity is that one needs to take differences amongst human beings seriously while reconstructing freedom." (208) With the presence of the administrators, freedom of the Lushais and the Khasis diminish which could be seen as one of the effects of colonial modernity. Dilip M. Menon's essay concentrates on religion (especially Christianity) and how religion becomes an important part of developing modernity. The attitude of missionaries towards the people they preach to can be summed up in this line: "Evangelical Christianity saw inequality and superstition as the defining features of the indigenous world-view, starting off a chorus of assent as much as revivalist dissent." (1663) It is true that administrators and missionaries brought about changes in the lives of the Lushais and the Khasis in many aspects, it might have been at the cost of their freedom and their practices. Whether these losses are worth the "modernity" that was introduced to them is a question that does not have a clear-cut answer.

For an administrator to understand his subjects, a formulation of their identity was important, and it seems that this was attempted to some extent with the writing of several books and collecting of folktales of the people of the Lushai Hills and the Khasi Hills. This is not to say that the Lushais and the Khasis had not had an identity for themselves earlier through their practices and beliefs. It would appear that the administrators had worked out an identity for the people of their conquered lands, one that was in sharp contrast to an identity they (the Lushais and the Khasis) had constructed for themselves. The Lushais and the Khasis had new identities imposed

on them, which included head-hunting, animism, superstitions and beliefs that have been documented in the anthropological books written about them. This kind of constructed identity becomes problematic when they are read in the present times.

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Chapter 3

Folktales from the Lushai Hills

Lushai Hills under the British rule has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2; therefore, this chapter will not go into the details of the history of this area. The collection of folktales was first started by the administrators of the Lushai Hills[14]. This is a significant fact of the history because written records had not been made of the Lushai folktales prior to the intervention of the British. The absence of a written form of the Lushai language meant that the folktales had been passed on orally till then from one generation to the next. With the arrival of the missionaries in the Lushai Hills, the alphabet of the language was rendered into a Roman script and this paved the way for the folktales to be collected and recorded in the written form. It is necessary for the Lushais to find a way to negotiate the presence of the first written collections of their folktales in anthropological books that were written about their ancestors. It is true that certain stereotypes and prejudices might have existed in the creation of such collections; however, in the present day and age, such collections are an important record of the understanding of the relationship between the Lushais and their administrators.

[14] Khiangte, Laltluangliana. *Mizo Songs and Folk Tales* (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002) pp. xiii and Lalthangliana, B. *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2005) pp. v.

Folktales Collected by Administrators:

Books by the administrators that were commissioned by the British government, therefore, had a specific agenda when they were written. A look at the Prefaces of the books will give the reader clues to the aim of printing such books for publication. The introduction of folktales in an anthropological book is significant for a better understanding of the people who are being written about. A. G. McCall was clear about this when he wrote "… a glance also at his folk-lore will afford an additional insight into the Lushai outlook on things in general" (66). In the Introduction to the *The Lushei Kuki Clans,* Shakespear admits to the difficulty of writing such a book and the challenges he faced. He also wrote of how there were omissions in his work. He states his main aim thus:

> I have purposely avoided enunciating any theories and making deductions, considering it wiser to limit myself to as accurate a description as possible of the people, their habits, customs and beliefs (xiv).

Folktales were not merely tales for the collector but an important tool to understand and become familiar with the Lushais. Not just the stories but also the beliefs, outlook and opinion of the people. One of the major questions that arises from the collections done by the administrators is the almost invisible "native" helpers who helped them in collecting and translating the

folktales. In official records, the names of the translators are clearly stated[15], however, in the collections of folktales they are not mentioned or acknowledged.

J. Shakespear had 11 folktales interspersed with comments and discussions in a chapter titled "Folk-lore". A. G. McCall had 13 folktales in his book in the chapter titled "Spirit Glimmerings". McCall does not make a classification of his collected folktales whereas Shakespear does differentiate between the folktales in his collection. Shakespear divides the "Folk-lore" in the following manner:

> A numerous class of legends deals with the creation of the world and the first appearance of mankind thereon and other natural phenomena; another class accounts for the names of hills and rivers; a third class reminds one of Uncle Remus's tales of the doings of Brer Rabbit; but there are also a great many which are simply tales and which are generally a trifle obscene (92).

Another difference between these books is that McCall gives a moral at the end of each of the folktales in his collection while Shakespear does not do this in his book.

[15] Refer Appendix 3 from Mizoram State Archives CB 12 G 157.

The Target Audience and the Possible "Identities":

It is clear from the "Introduction" and **"**Preface" of the *Lushai Chrysalis* by Major A. G. McCall and *The Lushei Kuki Clans* by J. Shakespear that the target audiences for their books were their contemporaries in their country back home and not the subjects of the books. They seem to fulfill the need to understand the "identities" of the Lushais for people planning to travel to the Lushai Hills, and to give them an idea of what they might encounter if and when they arrived. Another purpose could have been an introduction of these tribes to a race of people so different from the audience that they would be fascinated and be in awe of this tribe of people in a land so far away from them. The Lushais were, according to the standards of the audience, an "uncivilized" people, but they had their own traditions and belief system.

Let us take a detailed look at the folktales from the two books in order to make an attempt to understand the "identities" projected through them by the collectors. There are eleven folktales in J. Shakespear's *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (1912) which are intertwined with "superstitious" beliefs. These are:

1. How the solar and lunar eclipse occurs,
2. Chhinlung,
3. Water spirit and Ngaitei,
4. Origin of Tuichong river,

5. The tale of granddaddy bear and the monkey,
6. The bear's waterhole,
7. Rimenhoihi,
8. Chhura and the crab stew,
9. The tale of him who demanded his sister's bride price,
10. Chawngchilhi and the serpent, and
11. How mankind first learned the black arts.

Natural occurrences are explained through "How the solar and lunar eclipse occurs"; it gives the reader a chance to see how the Lushais dealt with and tried to understand something as significant as eclipses that were not part of an everyday event, but which they had witnessed. This folktale must have been a way of making sense of the world around them. The origin story of the Lushais is included in the book. "Chhinlung" narrates the story of how the Lushais came out of a great cave/rock.

The beliefs and superstitions of the Lushais can be found in "Water Spirit and Ngaitei" wherein the protagonist's father, who has transformed into a water spirit after his death, demands that his daughter join him in the after-life. Sacrifices and offerings to the spirits of the water, the

forests, the rocks etc., were an important part of the Lushai customs and practices. Another example of a folktale which helped in understanding the surroundings of the Lushais is the tale titled "Origin of Tuichong river" which explains how this particular river came into existence and why it was given this name. Animal tales are also included in Shakespear's book, which narrate the unlikely friendship between a bear and a monkey. Another animal tale "The bear's waterhole" appears to be a tale to teach the listener about the importance of respect and understanding one another.

A folktale about a beautiful woman is found in "Rimenhoihi". The knowledge of other kingdoms outside the Lushai Hills is found in this folktale. The threat of invasion from an outside force/ kingdom is very much present in the narration of this folktale. The comic character of Chhura, who is well-known among the Lushais, makes an appearance in the folktale "Chhura and the crab stew". The protagonist in "The tale of him who demanded his sister's bride price" does not have a name but is referred to only as "him/he". This folktale is about a man who is not so clever, who receives unbelievable gifts but keeps getting tricked by an old woman.

"Chawngchilhi and the serpent" is included under the sub-heading of "Snake worship". Shakespear is quick to note that the Lushais do not worship the snake but they had folktales which explained the origin of the fear of "rulpui" (the great snake). "Chawngchilhi and the serpent" may be read from different angles. It could be read as the folktale which explains the

origin of the fear of the “rulpui” (the great snake); it could also be seen as a cautionary tale which warns young women against the dangers of disobeying their parents.

Under the sub-heading “Witchcraft”, the folktale “How mankind first learned the black arts” is found, which narrates how Keichalla, Lalruanga, and Hrangsai-puia learned the art of magic from Vahrika, who got the knowledge from the daughter of Pathian (god). The folktale ends with a statement: “Nowadays also there is magic, but those who know it won't teach it without payment” (110).

One finds some identity markers and a kind of identity for the Lushais from the collection done by J. Shakespear. The belief system and superstitions of the people are highlighted through some of the folktales such as the belief in water spirits through Ngaitei’s story; the fear of the great snake in the tale of Chawngchilhi; the belief in the power of magic in the tale of Vahrika who passed on his knowledge to other men. The attempts to understand and explain the world around them are done through folktales like the explanation of eclipses and the formation of rivers. The status of women in the society is also found to some extent in the folktales with women as protagonists as seen in the folktales of Chawngchilhi, Rimenhoihi and Ngaitei. Women did not appear to have such a good position in the Lushai society where they worked hard and made their contributions to the society and to their family but they were under the control of the men in their lives.

There are thirteen folktales in A. G. McCall's *Lushai Chrysalis* (First published in 1949). These are:

1. How the mushroom started,
2. Chhura and Chengkek,
3. Chawngchilhi,
4. Chemtatrawta,
5. Pawla and Sanui,
6. The Widow's Son,
7. Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana,
8. Sibuta and Dari,
9. Monkey and Bear,
10. Hunting Party to Tan,
11. Zaphunga,
12. Thinlanga, and
13. Hmuichukchurudini.

Unlike J. Shakespear who had sub-divisions and categories for his collection of folktales, McCall does not have such divisions for his collection. Another difference between these two collections is that McCall has an item called “remembrance for prosperity” at the end of each folktale, a form of moral which one could understand from the folktale.

The appearance of a mushroom and its existence in the world is explained through the misfortune of two Lushai sisters who loved each other very much, who went in search of food for their family, but ended up being turned into a mushroom. The Lushai explanation of the existence of a mushroom is explained through this folktale; perhaps an attempt on the part of the people to explain the sudden appearance of mushrooms which spring up in unlikely places. The well-known comic figure of Chhura appears in the folktale of “Chhura and chengkek” wherein his laziness becomes the focus of his foolishness. Chhura is a man who is often presented as a fool but who also has a witty side to him. It is quite likely that McCall included one of the many tales of Chhura in his collection perhaps to present two sides of a Lushai man. The love between a young woman and a snake and the consequences of that kind of love on the woman and her society is highlighted in “Chawngchilhi”. The impact that the action of a person has on people and things around him is narrated in the folktale of “Chemtatrawta”. The belief in the after-life of a Lushai is found in “Pawla and Sanui” which tells the folktale of the journey of a Lushai man and a woman after their death. The importance that is placed on the status of a man who has

hunted many animals in his lifetime is found in this folktale. The importance that is placed on the status of a Lushai man who has hunted many animals in his lifetime is found in this folktale. The actions of man during his lifetime affects his way of living in the after-life, hence he needed to live a fruitful life if he wanted to enjoy the world of the after-life. "The Widow's son" is a folktale which is not so well-known among the Lushais which tells the tale of a man who was in love with a Chief's daughter, but was unable to win her love because of his lack of common sense.

"Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana" is the folktale of the love between the youths of warring villages; the sacrifices they make for each other and their subsequent deaths which resulted in their turning into stars. This folktale highlighted the history of violence of war and the consequences on the people. It also explains the name given to Venus and Mars by the Lushais. "Sibuta and Dari" is the folktale which highlights the social problems that existed in the Lushai society regarding the gap in terms of social status. An animal tale "Monkey and Bear"[16] narrates the animosity between these two animals and the dangers of not being honest with others. The spirits and nymphs which the Lushais offered sacrifices to and worshipped are mentioned in the folktale "Hunting Party to Tan". It talks of love that had existed between humans and spirits which could sometimes result in the success of a hunter. The bravery of a Lushai man in the face

[16] "Monkey and Bear" from McCall narrates the tale of a monkey trying to trick a bear which is similar to "The Tale of Granddaddy Bear and the Monkey" from Shakespear's book. These folktales are not to be confused with another folktale involving a bear and a monkey from Shakespear's book titled "The Bear's Water Hole" which narrates a different relationship between the two animals.

of an enemy is narrated in "Zaphunga", who fearlessly defended his people against the attack of the Mirongs. "Thinlanga" is the name of an evil spirit who roamed around looking for his next victim; this folktale reminds the listener to be wary of keeping secrets to oneself if told in confidence. "Hmuichukchurudini" was a dangerous woman who preyed on children. This folktale narrates how a girl (Nuchhimi) outwitted Hmuichukchurudini and saved herself and her sister from this dangerous woman.

The British must have been wary of the Lushais when they first encountered them; they were a race that was foreign to the world of the British. In order to understand them and conquer them, they needed a way to gather information on this race of people, and collection of their folktales became an important task in this context.

In a thesis submitted by Lawmsanga, while discussing the phenomenon of a new form of singing and dancing in Mizoram called the *Puma Zai*, he explains the need to look at these art forms in a new light. He writes that J. Meirion Llyod, a former missionary who had resided in Mizoram, belonged to a different era and his opinions came from "European imperialistic, colonial and political perspectives".[17] Although Lawmsanga is writing about a song here, and not a folktale, it is possible to extend his comment on the *Puma Zai* to study the folktales of the

[17] Lawmsanga, *A Critical Study on Christian Mission with Special Reference to Presbyterian Church of Mizoram*. University of Birmingham, 2010. Pp 16.

Lushais to study the attitudes of the colonial ethnographers/anthropologists who had collected and recorded them.

Within an academic discipline, discourse theory may include new methods but will be confined to certain established norms. For instance, a particular text might be read in different ways by students of different disciplines. Let us take the example of the book *Lushai Chrysalis.* This book is a monograph written by Major A. G. McCall and has several sections on the lifestyles, customs, beliefs and folktales of the Lushais. For a student of Anthropology, this book will provide valuable insights into the practices and lifestyles of the Lushais in the nineteenth century. For a Literature student, the folktales and the myths intertwined within the text will be of interest. For a History student, the battles and the ruling of the chiefs would be important documents for study. In this way, one text could be read in multiple ways in accordance with the discipline of the reader.

Folktales Collected by the "Native" Writers:

This section will take a look at two books by native Lushai/Mizo writers – *Mizo Songs and Folk Tales* by Laltluangliana Khiangte (2002) and *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* by B. Lalthangliana (2005). The main purposes of creating such collections are stated by these writers in the Preface and Introduction to their books. An attempt will be made to undertake a close

reading of the folktales collected and the "identities" propagated through these books. There will also be a study of these collections in relation to the collections of the administrators and the differences and similarities, if any.

Laltluangliana Khiangte, in the Introduction to his book, writes that the main aim was "to highlight the uniqueness and salient features of Mizo folk-literature" (v). He further writes that initially the collections of folktales were done by non-Mizos and he felt the need to collect and translate them into English. He is appreciative of the works that had been done and the efforts that had been put in to bring out such collections: "I must not forget to record my heartfelt gratitude to the earlier writers and their valuable work" (xv). However, one of the purposes of his collection is to present the folktales in his own way. He writes that most of the folktales in his collection were from those he heard from his grandfather and his mother. He is hopeful that this collection will pave the way for further studies in the field of Mizo folktales and oral literature.

In *Mizo Songs and Folk Tales*, Laltluangliana Khiangte has translated 28 folktales into English. He has categorized them into five (5) headings – "Chhura: Undisputed hero of Mizo Folk Tales" (which has 10 folktales); "Memorable Accounts of Men Folk" (5 folktales); "Tales of Women Protagonists" (6 folktales); "Tales of Love and Compassion" (4 folktales) and "Animal Tales" (3 folktales). The character of Chhura, who is always portrayed as a comic character whose actions evoke laughter among the readers is an "undisputed hero" according to

Laltluangliana Khiangte. This could be the reason why there are ten folktales with Chhura as the protagonist in this collection.

"Lengkawia", "Chemtatrawta", "Rahtea", "Sazaltepa & Bakvawmtepu" and "Kawrdumbela" are the five folktales in the section "Memorable Accounts of Men Folk". These folktales vary from each other and are mainly about the bravery and honour among the men. "Lengkawia" is a tale about the adventures of the protagonist who is a brave hunter who caught *Phungpuinu* (female hobgoblin) and was able to defeat and scare off a number of hobgoblins. The bravery of a Lushai man is praised and remembered through this folktale. "Chemtatrawta" is one of the most well-known Mizo folktales which narrate the story of a man who was bitten by a prawn while he was sharpening his sword in the river; the consequences of the actions of the prawn lead to a series of events causing trouble for many animals and an old woman. It resulted in the punishment of the culprit prawn in the end. "Rahtea" is the story of an orphan who escapes his stepmother who planned on sacrificing him to the spirits by transforming himself into a dragonfly. The image of an "evil stepmother" which is common to many fairytales is found here. "Sazaltepa & Bakvawmtepu" is a folktale about the relationship between a cunning animal and a kind man. In "Kawrdumbela" we find the folktale of a man who comes across a good luck charm in the form of a bird which helps him marry the daughter of a chief. There is also a physical transformation of the protagonist which helps him win the heart of his wife. The social set-up of the Lushai society is reflected in a certain way in this folktale where wealth and good looks are given importance when courting a young woman.

"Thailungi", "Hmuichukchuriduni", "Chhawnlaihawihi", "Rimenhawii", "Ngaiteii" and "Kelchawngi" are the six folktales in "Tales of Women Protagonists". The titles of the folktales are the names of each of the protagonists. Thailungi's story is one of poverty leading to the sale of the protagonist to a foreign man; however, the love of her brother saves her from a life away from her village. Hmuichukchuriduni is the name of a woman who is fond of entrapping children and keeping them captive. This particular folktale is about the defeat of this woman by a young girl called Nuchhimi. The love among siblings and their willingness to make sacrifices for each other is found in the folktale of Chhawnlaihawihi who has seven brothers who take care of her. When she is captured by a man and taken away, her brothers do all they can to rescue her. Rimenhawii is a folktale of a beautiful married woman whose beauty attracts the attention of a chief from the plains. This folktale reminds the reader that the Lushais were in contact with people from outside their land and they were aware of their existence. Ngaiteii's folktale is about a water spirit which demands the sacrifice of Ngaiteii in order to appease it and keep the village safe. The folktale about Kelchawngi is one of the most shocking folktales because it narrates the story of how Kelchawngi misheard her mother's instruction and makes a meal by killing her sister.

The four folktales in the section "Tales of Love and Compassion" are "Chawngvungi and Sawngkhara"; "Tlingi and Ngama"; "Tualvungi and Zawlpala" and "Chala and Thangi". As the

title of the section suggests, these four folktales are of the love between men and women who risk their lives for each other. Sawngkhara was so much in love with Chawngvungi that he used a magic potion to make her fall in love with him. In the unfortunate folktale of Tlingi and Ngama, the story goes that Tlingi died of pining for her lover. When Ngama found out that his lady love had gone to the village of the dead, he found a way to meet her in the afterlife. A beautiful woman named Tualvungi and her husband Zawlpala decide to present themselves as siblings when they arrive in a new village to avoid confrontation with the village chief; this leads to the chief marrying Tualvungi. Zawlpala, unable to bear their separation, dies and Tualvungi kills herself to join her husband in death. Chala and Thangi are lovers who get separated after an inter-village war breaks out. Chala made a lot of effort to rescue Thangi and he is successful in finding her in another village. However, their happy reunion is short-lived as Thangi drowns while they are crossing a river. According to Lalzarzova, the love between a man and a woman and the sufferings they endure for each other's sake in these folktales show "that they [the Mizos] worship love, appreciate honesty; and this love and honesty blending together till death is not newly acquainted with them, but a practice adhering to them since time immemorial" (488).

The last section of the book "Animal Tales" has three folktales – "Two sisters go in search of a cucumber"; "Monkey and Swing" and "The Bear, the Tiger and the Monkey". The first folktale is of two sisters who have a fight over some cucumbers that they found. It tells the story of how the mushroom came into existence. "Monkey and Swing" might be read as a folktale that warns against trying to cheat others; it is about a monkey unwilling to share its swing with a bear which

eventually leads to the monkey trying to outwit the bear but failing miserably. "The Bear, the Tiger and the Monkey" is a folktale about the importance of sharing nature's riches. When the bear finds a clear water source in the forest, he wants to have it for himself and keeps the monkey as a guard. When the tiger comes across this water source, there is a confrontation between them resulting in their deaths, leaving the water to the monkey.

B. Lalthangliana's collection of folktales *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (first published in 2005) has sixty Mizo folktales. This collection has too many folktales to go into the details of each of these. Although it is not possible to have a chronological order of folktales, he divides them into two broad sections – the folktales prior to crossing Tiau river and after the crossing of this river. He states that he has made this crude division based on the "names of the rivers, mountains, environment and style and mode of telling stories" (311) mentioned in the folktales. He admits that this division is not perfect and that he made this attempt as best as he could. In the Preface to the book, B. Lalthangliana writes: "It is noticeable that the Mizo people are slowly and gradually forgetting their culture, tradition and folktales. Thus, to make the younger generation aware of the old system, is the main purpose of this book" (iv).

B. Lalthangliana has collected twenty-six (26) folktales which he places at the time before the Lushais crossed the Tiau river and twenty-four (24) folktales after the crossing of the Tiau river. He also has ten (10) folktales about Chhura, which cannot be placed in a timeline like the other

folktales because these are believed to have "originated in the early stages however [they] continued to develop in the later stages" (313). He believes that these folktales "teach us about the moral laws, civic sense, evils of war, sacrifice for the cause of others, importance and greatness of love and many other civil and moral values and ethics" (313-314). These would help and aid in the "development of human beings and the society" (314). Apart from these elements, the themes of techniques of warfare, the transformation of the human body into birds, animals or trees, themes of supernatural elements; themes about knowledge of the existence people of a different race, possibly stronger than themselves, and the rich and boundless gift of nature are seen in these folktales.

There are a number of folktales that appear in the collections of the administrator as well as in the "native" writers' books. It will be interesting to look at these folktales and see which of the folktales are common to the collectors and the difference in the versions. Out of the eleven folktales found in J. Shakespear's book, the sixty in B. Lalthangliana's collection, and the twenty-eight in Laltluangliana Khiangte's book four of the folktales are common:

1. Water Spirit and Ngaitei/ Ngaitei saved her native village/ Ngaiteii.
2. The tale of granddaddy bear and the monkey/ The swing and the Monkey/ Monkey and Swing
3. Rimenhoihi/ Rimenhawihi/ Rimenhawii

4. Chhura and the crab stew/ Chhura/ Chhura loses his Crab Curry.

In Shakespear's version, the water spirit falls in love with Ngaitei and when she refuses his advances, the water spirit wreaks havoc on Ngaitei and the people in her village. The water spirit is a separate being which demands the love of Ngaitei. Since the version that appears in Shakespear's book is a short one, it shall be included here.[18]

> "There is a legend that the king of the Water Huai fell in love with Ngai-ti (loved one) and, as she rejected his addresses and ran away, he pursued her and surrounded the whole human race on the top of a hill called Phun-lu-buk, said to be far away to the north-east. As the water kept on rising, to save themselves the people threw Ngai-ti into the flood, which thereupon receded. It was the running off of this water which cut up the surface of the world, which Chhura had levelled, into the deep valleys and high hill ranges of which the whole world as known to the ancestors of the Lushais consisted." (95)

In B. Lalthangliana's version, the water spirit is the spirit of Ngaitei's father who had passed away and was pining for the love of his daughter. In Shakespear's version, Ngaitei is taken away by the river spirit whereas in B. Lalthangliana's version, her grandmother rescues her from her father's water spirit but eventually she is sacrificed for the survival of the whole village. As

[18] For the contemporary versions, please refer to Pg. No. 144 (Appendix 5).

compared to Shakespear's version, the water spirit in the contemporary version has a direct connection with the protagonist. The belief system of the Lushais is subtle but present in this version. Because the river is the place where Ngaitei's father had drowned, it was always believed that his spirit would be in the waters. The father is unable to let go of his daughter even in death and wishes her to join him. Ngaitei's father in the form of the water spirit may be seen as a threat for the people of the village, but an interesting aspect of this is that there is a possibility of the spirits in nature to have connections with the dead. So, in a way, when the Lushai is making sacrifices and appeasing the spirits, there is a certain sense of connecting with their dead ancestors. The contemporary version lays more emphasis on the sacrificial gesture of the woman and the love that a father has for his child. The grandmother making efforts to rescue Ngaitei is also a touching side to the tale. It gives us an angle of the familial love that is present in Lushai family set-ups. In B. Lalthangliana's version and Laltluangliana Khiangte's version, Ngaitei is reluctant to return to her father's spirit in the water, but she makes the sacrifice in order to save the people of her village. The contemporary versions have a folk song praising Ngaitei and lamenting her sacrifice at the end of the folktale. The two versions of the song are given below:

(From B. Lalthangliana's collection)

"People were sad and they had a song in her remembrance:

Dear Ngaitei, we have you to offer,

To appease the flood's anger.

You are now with your father dear.

And that would make both of you happy, we are sure.

But Ngaitei, we still miss you much,

And we want you to know as such."

(From Laltluangliana Khiangte's collection)

"The people of the village shed bitter tears over Ngaiteii's sad fate for long afterwards and she is yet remembered in this sorrowful song:

Dearest Ngaiteii, we pray to you,

The anger of the southern sky,

And the heavily rushing waters high,

Have now been stayed and calmed, dear;

You saved us all Ngaiteii, yes, you,

So do not suffer any more, do not fear,

Dearest Ngaiteii …. Oh dear….

The above haunting lines in memory of Ngaiteii are still being sung by children in the Mizo villages when they enjoy moonlight nights."

The folktale about the bear and the monkey playing on the swing is an animal tale which is a short tale. Shakespear's version is given below[19]:

> "The Monkey made a swing and was always swinging in it. One day Granddaddy Bear saw him and said, "Oh, Monkey, let me have a swing." The Monkey replied, "Wait a minute till I have hung it more securely." Then he climbed up and bit the cane nearly through and jumped down again crying out, "Come on, Granddaddy Bear, have a swing." The bear got in and swung, the cane broke, and he fell down. The Monkey, intending to eat him, had gone and fetched some cooked rice (to eat with the bear's flesh). But though Granddaddy Bear fell down he was not killed. The Monkey, being terribly afraid, said, "Oh, Granddaddy Bear, hearing you had fallen I brought some rice for you," and gave him all he had brought." (97)

There are variations which will be pointed out but the similarity appears to be that in all the three versions, the monkey initially tricks the bear which could be read as a smaller animal fighting against a larger animal in its own capacity. In Shakespear's version, the tale ends with the monkey trying to make amends with the bear after it had tricked the bear into swinging on a gnawed rope. B. Lalthangliana's version ends with the monkey tricking the bear again by serving hot cooked rice on the bear's belly skin, thus giving an advantage to the monkey to trick the bear and torture him with the hot rice. In Laltluangliana Khiangte's version, the monkey fails in his

[19] For the other versions of this folktale refer to Pg. No. 153 (Appendix 5).

attempt to trick the bear in the end and is left with no swing and no food to eat. In an M.Phil dissertation by Esther Lalparmawii titled "Variation in the Tale: A Study of Translated Mizo Folktales"[20], the reasons behind variations in the folktales are studied. The purpose for such animal tales could be to show the readers or the listeners of the folktales an idea of what to do and what not to do to others around them. It could also serve as a folktale that teaches the listeners the consequence of trying to advance at the cost of others around us. All the three versions have different endings but the main purpose of the folktale appears to be a lesson in living in harmony with others.

Rimenhoiyi's story in J. Shakespear's book is an abridged version, as the writer mentions in his writing: "The following tale is interesting as showing the great prestige the Tipperah chief enjoyed among the Lushais, who call him 'Rengpui'. There are many versions of this tale, some of which are very long. I have been obliged to abridge it considerably."(98) When a collector like Shakespear makes a comment on the existence of different versions of a folktale and his decision to abridge it from the folktale that he is aware of, we find that the act of choosing one out of many versions and abridging it indicates the "collector's point of view". Shakespear had been "obliged" to present an abridged version because of the length of the folktale (according to the quote) but it becomes the choice of the collector which version he/she chooses and the way it is presented in the book, which eventually leads to the kind of identity and ways of life

[20] Lalparmawii, Esther. *Variation in the Tale a Study of Translated Mizo Folktales.* MPhil dissertation submitted to University of Hyderabad, 2011.

represented through the folktale. This version tells us that the Lushais were aware of the existence of other kings/chiefs outside their lands and that they could be more powerful than the Lushais[21].

> "Rimenhoiyi married Zawlthlia. Their house was of iron. They had an eight-fold iron door. They beautified the inside with iron and brass things. They also had a window (i.e., Zawlthlia was Thangchhuah) and a platform to sit on—in fact they wanted for nothing.
>
> Rimenhoiyi planted flowers, but there was one flower she had not, called "nipuipar"(bright sun flower—a creeper with scarlet flowers). When her husband was about to go in search of it he said to her, "Please don't go outside the house," and having filled the brass vessels with enough water to last her many days, he went off. However, the supply ran short and the lady went to the stream to wash, and one of her hairs was carried down and swallowed by a fish, which was caught by the cook of the king near the mouth of the river; and from out of the fish the cook pulled this immensely long hair, and it filled a winnowing basket." (98)

B. Lalthangliana's version ends with Rimenhawihi being rescued by her husband and getting rid of all their problems. The earlier version (Shakespear's version) might be an example of how the Lushais had interactions with outsiders and how they had been defeated at times, whereas the

[21] For the full version of the folktale and the other versions refer to Pg. No. 148 (Appendix 5).

later version shows the Lushai man courageously fighting for his wife and defeating the people who had captured his beautiful wife. The "outsiders" mentioned in this folktale are the "Tipperahs" (probably from present day Tripura) in Shakespear's version. Shakespear points out that there are different versions in the ending of this folktale and mentions this in his book:

> "According to one version, they resorted to the same subterfuge that Abraham and Sarah employed when entering Egypt and lived happily till, the king's suspicion being aroused, Zawlthlia was summarily slain. According to another, Rimenhoiyi married them both, but as she showed a preference for Zawlthlia the king killed him." (98)

B. Lalthangliana's version on the other hand does not specifically mention any name of the king, but just says that it is a king from the western side of their dwelling place ("*thlangtiang"*). In Laltluangliana Khiangte's version too there is no specification of the chief who sought the name of Rimenhawii. He is mentioned as "a chief from the plains". The writer ends this folktale with the lines: "The story of Rimenhawii may lead one to believe that this was the beginning of the contact between the people of the plains and the Mizos" (140). Apart from the bravery of the husband who rescues his wife from a chief from outside, the contemporary versions highlight the contact of the Lushais with people from areas outside their lands. On the one hand, we have the version of the folktale as depicted in an abridged version by Shakespear where the readers are made aware of the existence of different longer versions and different endings. On the other

hand, we have the contemporary writers who give one version each where both the versions end on a happy note, with the husband defeating the chief who had taken his wife. It is interesting to observe that Shakespear's version gives two endings – one, where Zawlthlia (Rimenhoiyi's husband) is killed by the chief; and another, where Zawlthlia is killed but brought back to life through "a wise woman learned in charms". Shakespear's ending gives a more "exotic" picture of the fate of Zawlthlia and Rimenhoiyi on their contact with outsiders whereas the contemporary versions seem to showcase the bravery and strength of the man who defeated his wife's captors; thus showing that in choosing to present a certain version of an existing folktale, the decision of the writers/collectors and their perspectives are reflected through their decisions.

There are two folktales which are found in J. Shakespear's collection and in B. Lalthangliana's alone which are not included in Laltluangliana Khiangte's book. These are:

1. Chawngchilhi/ Chawngchilhi and the serpent
2. Origin of Tuichong river/Origin of the Tuaichawng river.

Chawngchilhi and the snake that she fell in love with is one of the well-known tales of the Lushais. Shakespear's version goes like this:

> "Once upon a time there was a girl called Chhawng-chili, who was in her father's jhum. At the bottom of the jhum in a hollow tree a snake had its

nest, and the snake loved Chhawng-chili very much. Whenever they went to the jhum she used to send her younger sister to call the snake, who used to come up and coil itself up in Chhawng-chili's lap. The little sister was very much afraid of the snake and did not dare tell her father. When the girls were going to the jhum, their parents always used to wrap up some rice and vegetables for them to take with them. On account of her fear of the snake, the little sister could not eat anything. Then her sister and the snake ate up all the rice and the vegetables, and the little sister stayed in the jhum house all day and got very thin, and her parents said to her, "Oh, little one, why are you getting so thin?" but she always said, "Oh, father, I can't tell you"; but her parents pressed her to tell them, and at last she said, "My sister and the snake make love always ; as soon as we get to the jhum she says to me, ' Call him to me,' and I call him, and he comes up and coils himself up on her lap, and I am so frightened that I cannot eat anything, and that is why I am so thin." So they kept Chhawng-chili at home, and her father and younger sister went to the jhum, and her father dressed himself up to resemble Chhawng-chili, but he put his dao by his side; then the little sister called the snake, who came up quickly and curled itself up in her father's lap, and he with one blow cut it in two, and then they returned to the village. On the next day Chhawng-chili and her sister went

> to the jhum and her little sister called the snake, but her father had killed it." (107)

The events of both the versions are almost the same, but the endings are different[22]. The tale in Shakespear's book ends with the killing of the offspring of the snake lover by a Chin, but in B. Lalthangliana's version, the offspring of the Chawngchilhi and the snake causes a major earthquake which leads to the death of all the people who had consumed the flesh of the snake. Shakespear's version appears to give a simpler, more clear-cut end to the problems of the snake that was terrorizing the people. The snake is to be feared but it is not undefeated. B. Lalthangliana's version, however, seems to have a warning of some kind wherein even after the death of the snake, it could still evoke chaos and destruction in the lives of the people.

In Shakespear's collection, the origin of the Tuichong river came about because of the "self-denial" of a girl called Tui-chongi who, to quench the thirst of her sister Nuengi, changed herself into a river to provide for her sister and this Tuichong river flowed all the way to lands outside the Lushai hills (95). The folktale goes on to narrate the marriage of Nuengi with a Chittagong chief. However, the first wife of the chief became jealous and tried to drown all the sons of Nuengi in the Tuichong river. The river, who now has the spirit of Tuichongi takes care of her sister's sons and the folktale has a happy ending for Nuengi when all her sons are returned to her and the plans of the chief's first wife are revealed. In B. Lalthangliana's version, the folktale is

[22] For the full folktales of both the versions refer to Pg. 156 of Appendix 5.

almost the same – the theme of love between sisters, the sacrifice of an elder sister, the appearance of a non-Mizo chief and the happy ending. One of the differences is that the chief who marries Nuengi is a Bengal chief. In both the versions, the wife of the chief is killed and Nuengi becomes the chief queen. In both the versions, the sacrifice made by a sister and her love for her sister and her sons is prevalent in the narration. The consequence that one's actions have on oneself is also found in the case of the death of the chief's first wife.

There are four other folktales that are found in all the three collections of A. G. McCall's, B. Lalthangliana's and Laltluangliana Khiangte's books. These are:

1. How the mushroom started/ Two sisters went in search of cucumbers/ Two sisters go in search of cucumber.
2. Chemtatrawta/ Man who sharpened swords/ Chemtatrawta
3. Monkey and Bear/ The swing and the Monkey/ Monkey and Swing
4. Hmuichukchurudini/ Nuchhimi and Hmuichukchuruduni/ Hmuichukchuriduni.

In A. G. McCall's version of the folktale of the mushroom, the title suggests that the folktale is an explanation of the existence of something in nature. Although the folktale does tell the story of the two sisters who went in search of food for their parents, the main focus seems to be the

origin of the mushrooms. In B. Lalthangliana's version, the selfishness of the younger sister leads to the elder sister getting stuck in the soil. The mushrooms spring from the elder sister's feet which get stuck when the younger one yanks her out of the soil, resulting in the growth of the mushrooms. Below is given B. Lalthangliana's version of the folktale[23]:

> "Of the two sisters who went in search of cucumbers, only the younger sister found plentiful of them. The elder sister asked her young sister to give her one cucumber as she was feeling very thirsty. She asked repeatedly but was refused. So she sang a request to the Earth to swallow her. The rich soil where the ants made their hill actually welled up and enveloped her. The young sister ran home in fright and told the parents what had happened. They sent her back to the forest to bring back her elder sister. She went and sang that their parents had bought for her sister many brass ornaments so that she should come home and collect them. Very slowly she emerged from the earthen hill that covered her. Before she was totally free the young sister stopped singing. Part of the old sister's feet was left in the soil. From those remains, mushrooms grew out every year." (54)

Laltluangliana Khiangte's version is almost similar to this, except that the elder sister's foot gets stuck in the soil because they are in a hurry to get away from "head hunters". These three versions emphasize the relationship between sisters where even after a fight there is hope of

[23] For the other versions refer to Pg. No. 160 (Appendix 5).

reconciliation. While McCall's version seems to be more about an explanation of the origin of mushrooms, the contemporary versions only mention the mushrooms in passing; the focus seems to be on the relationship of the characters.

"Chemtatrawta" is one of the most well-known folktales among the Mizos and it is fitting that McCall, Lalthangliana and Laltluangliana have it in their collections. In all the three versions, the fault of the mischievous lobster which randomly bites Chemtatrawta on his testicles and the steps leading up to a chain of events that end with an old woman defecating at the source of the water supply of a village are almost the same. However, the end of the folktale slightly differs in the versions. In A. G. McCall's book, the lobster is punished by poking it with a *hnahthial* (a type of plant) and the lobster cursing this plant leading to its scarcity in the land. In B. Lalthangliana's version, the folktale ends with the lobster escaping in a stream, but not before it is poked with sticks which leads to its shaggy appearance. Laltluangliana Khiangte's version has two endings to the folktale – one ending says that the lobster escapes in a stream, while the other ending is similar to McCall's version which narrates that the lobster is injured with a *hnahthial* branch and the lobster curses this plant before it dies of its injuries. The effects that one's actions have on people around them and the need to respect each other seems to be conveyed through this folktale. The appearance of the lobster and the scarcity of a particular plant are also explained through this tale.

The contemporary versions of the third folktale in the list has been discussed earlier, therefore, it will be enough to point out that A. G. McCall's version is similar to Laltluangliana Khiangte's version where the monkey loses the swing and food to the bear, who it had intended to cheat. However, in B. Lalthangliana's version, the monkey gets the better of the bear and after tricking the bear into breaking the swing, the monkey burns the bear with hot broth that it had prepared. In this version, the bear loses to the monkey.

"Hmuichukchurudini" in McCall's collection is a woman who tricks unsuspecting children to take them captive. This version gives one an idea of the layout of a Lushai house – such as the two types of bed (*Khumpui*: Inner and family bed, and *Khumai:* outer bed, less private), a hearth for cooking, a verandah for storing bamboo water holders etc. The folktale ends with Nuchhimi's parents setting traps for her captor and the death of Hmuichukchuridini. In B. Lalthangliana's version titled "Nuchhimi and Hmuichukchuruduni" one finds that the names of both the captive and the captor are listed. The chain of events are mostly similar, except that in McCall's version it is a goat that kills the captor while in this version a dog, a pig, a goat and a yak which finally kill her. The traps set up in the woman's house are done by the relatives of Nuchhimi (not just her parents) which suggests a strong sense of community in this folktale. Laltluangliana Khiangte's version "Hmuichukchuriduni" is more similar to McCall's version than B. Lalthangliana's version, especially where the parents of Nuchhimi set up traps for the captor out of anger over the death of their younger daughter.

Paul Thompson writes: “Through local history a village or town seeks meaning in its own changing character and newcomers can gain a sense of roots in personal historical knowledge” (26). The history of the Lushais through their folktales is gathered by the “newcomers” (the British). The “identities” that have been portrayed through the collections by the administrators in the Lushai folktales have focused on the religious beliefs and superstitions; the moral codes of conduct of the people; the explanation of natural events and appearances of animals, plants and trees; the status of women in the society; the hierarchy and status of social classes in the Lushai society and the belief in the after-life.

From the perspective of the contemporary collectors, several identity markers are found in the folktales. The re-invention of Chhura by Laltluangliana Khiangte into a heroic figure is one of the differences found in the collections. Margaret Ch. Zama, writing on the role that oral narratives play in Mizo literature, writes about Chhura: “In him is fused both positive and negative traits, and is in many ways a reflection of the various aspects of the native Mizo character” (209). A figure that had always been regarded as a foolish man who was lazy and good-for-nothing is seen in a new light in the contemporary collection. Another Mizo writer, Lalruanga, calls Chhura a “hero” and comments: “According to one view, he was the silliest of all simpletons and to other view the most clever among all the wise men” (191). He continues to say that “The story of Chhura represents more than 80 per cent of the Mizo humorous tales”

(193), therefore Chhura is an important part of Mizo folktales and for Lalruanga, this makes Chhura a "hero" in the Mizo folktales.

An increase in the number of collected folktales ensures that there is a wider variety of tales and characters to be presented to the readers/audience. The inclusion of folktales that might shock the readers (for example, the folktale of Kelchawngi who cooked her sister while her parents were away) would serve the purpose of presenting an image of a past that had flaws and imperfect ancestors. Folktales such as these give the reader a chance to reflect on the idea that the Mizos have moved a long way changing their ways of life and habits. Values and morals were taught through the folktales and this is reflected in some of the folktales that B. Lalthangliana and Laltluangliana Khiangte have collected. R. L. Thanmawia writes thus on Mizo values: "The most important factor which drives man, and the society as a whole, to the fore front is the social values" (76). He goes on to write that in many of the folktales of the Mizos, there is an element of adoration of strong characters who defeat enemies, those who fight against evil spirits and of great hunters.

The representation done by the administrators could have been a means of establishing the fact that the British were very different from the Lushais. Paul Thompson, in his article writes: "Reality is complex and many-sided; and it is a primary merit of oral history that to a much greater extent than most sources it allows the original multiplicity of stand-points to be

recreated" (28). In collecting folktales, the "native" writers were, to some extent, recreating identities that had been given to them through earlier collections by the administrators. The underlying elements such as belief systems, superstitions, position of women in the society, the wide gap between different classes of social status, the origin of plants, animals and rivers, the importance given to bravery and valour among men etc., are found in both the collections of the administrators and the "natives". However, the intended audience of these writers is not the same – the administrators wrote for their peers (fellow "non-natives") whereas the contemporary writers wrote for their fellow "natives" in the hope that it would revive an interest in the history and folktales of the Mizos. The identities portrayed can never be the same in these cases. The administrators presented a race of people who were to be understood in order for them to be able to do a better job of governing them. The "native" writers on the other hand, are presenting their ancestry and history to a generation which, in their opinion, need to be more aware of their past. The medium (folktales) may be almost similar but the way they are presented and the identities embedded in them are very different in these collections.

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Chapter 4

A Study of Khasi Folktales

The present state of Meghalaya in the north-eastern part of India was once called the "Khasi Hills" under the rule of the British in the nineteenth century. The presence of the British and its impact and influence had been discussed in the second chapter. This chapter will focus on the folktales of the Khasis. Oral tradition played an important role in the transmission of folktales from one generation to the next in the Khasi community. With the arrival of the administrators and missionaries, the language experienced a change in the form of a written script. Thomas Jones, a Welsh Presbyterian missionary learned the local Khasi language soon after his arrival in 1841 and developed a Roman script system of writing for the language. It is crucial to mention here that Manorama Sharma had made a note that Mr. Alexander B. Lish had previously made attempts to have the Khasi language written in Bengali script, but this did not work out (12). With the development of a written script, the history and customs of the Khasis were recorded and written by different sections of the public. Folktales, which had been orally handed down were now available in the written form.

Folktales have been instrumental in understanding and studying certain cultures and people. Soumen Sen writes: "Even without a written, chronological history, the pre-literate folk

communities do have a history which can be constructed only by a significant analysis of their folklore" (10). It becomes all the more important to take into account the Khasi folktales that have been collected in the past in order to have an idea of the identity that had been constructed in the past as well as in the present times. For the Khasi folktales, P.R.T. Gurdon's book, *The Khasis* (1914) is used as a reference point for comparison with Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's book *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends* (Published in 2007). Between the fourteen Khasi folktales in P.R.T. Gurdon's book and the twenty folktales in Nongkynrih's book, there were nine folktales that were similar, although there were variations in the narration. The fourteen folktales found in Gurdon's book are as follows:

1. The Waterfall of Ka Likai,

2. The Dingiei Hill,

3. Concerning the origin of the Siems of Shillong,

4. Kyllang and Symper,

5. The Siem creating stone at Mawsmai,

6. Why there are spots on the moon,

7. "Sohpet Bneng" Hill,

8. How the dog came to live with man,

9. The "Thlen",

10. About the river “Rupataylli” in Duwara,

11. The Kupili,

12. The village of Maw-pun-karytiang,

13. The Siem of Malynieng, and

14. U Manik Raitong and his flute.

The twenty folktales in Nongkynrih’s books are:

1. The Seven clans,
2. The Purple Crest,
3. The Lost Manuscript,
4. The Animal Dance Festival,
5. Luri Lura, the Animal Fair,
6. The Peacock and the Sun,
7. Death in a Hut,
8. Ka Nam and the Tiger,
9. The Sun and the Moon,

10. Ren and the River Nymph,

11. The Man-eating Serpent, U Thlen,

12. The Legend of Ka Pahsyntiew,

13. The Fight between Kyllang and Symper,

14. The Death of Lapalang, the Stag,

15. The Child-devouring Stone,

16. The Race between Ka Iew and Ka Ngot,

17. U Suid Tynjang,

18. The Legend of Ka Lidakha,

19. Ka Likai, and

20. U Manik Raitong.

From the above lists, one can see that there are similar folktales that have been collected by both Gurdon and Nongkynrih. There are tales that have been omitted and tales that have been included. Let us look at the folktales that are common to both the collections:

1. The Waterfall of Ka Likai/Ka Likai

2. The Dingiei Hill/The Seven Clans
3. Concerning the origin of the Siems of Shillong/The Legend of Ka Pahsyntiew
4. Kyllang and Symper/The Fight between Kyllang and Symper
5. Why there are spots on the moon/The Sun and the Moon
6. "Sohpet Bneng" Hill/The Seven Clans
7. How the dog came to live with man/Luri Lura, the Animal Fair
8. The "Thlen"/The Man-eating Serpent, U Thlen
9. U Manik Raitong and his flute/U Manik Raitong.

The first common folktale found in both the collections is a tale about an unfortunate woman named Ka Likai whose second husband murders her daughter and tricks her into eating her flesh. Some parts of Gurdon's version of the folktale are given below[24]:

> "The water-fall of Ka Likai is one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the Khasi hills. Its stream flows from a certain river from the village of Rangjirteh and passes by the village of Nongriat. The fall can be seen distinctly from the village of Laitkynsew. What a beautiful fall it is when viewed in the autumn. It is also a very high fall. There was in olden days

[24] For the other versions refer to Pg. No. 170 (Appendix 6).

> in the village of Rangjirteh a woman called Ka Likai. She was a poor woman who had a husband. When she had given birth to a child, the husband died. Whilst the child was yet a baby, she experienced much trouble in taking care of it on account of her poverty. After the child was able to walk, what a pleasure it was to her to see it growing, and able to play with other children. Then that woman married another man; but he did not love the little child, and many a time he got angry because she could not take care of him more, on account of that child… She shrieked and threw herself down, and then ran to the precipice and cast herself down it. All the villagers wondered, but no one ventured to prevent her as she held a *da* in her hand. From that time the waterfall was called the "Fall of Ka Likai."" (162-164)

In P.R.T. Gurdon's version of the story, the marriage between Ka Likai and her second husband is mentioned briefly and the tension which was present between the man and his step-daughter is narrated. However, the main reason given for the murder is that the man was jealous of the affections of Ka Likai towards the child and so he kills her. In Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's version of the folktale, the background story of Ka Likai is told. The happy marriage she had, the love that she showed for her daughter to the extent that she did not want to marry again but was persuaded by her friends, the courting of U Snar (her second husband) and the subsequent murder of her daughter are told in more detail. Both the versions of the folktales end with Ka Likai plunging to her death from the waterfalls. In Gurdon's version, Ka Likai's leap to death is

attributed to the fact that she was too shocked at the death of her daughter and the consumption of the daughter's flesh by Ka Likai. However, in Nongkynrih's version, Ka Likai reflects on the misfortunes that had followed her and she decides, "Yes, death is the only true and constant comrade of my wretched life. Death, yes only in death will I ever find my peace" (127). So, in this version of the folktale, it is not because of the death of her daughter but more so because of her past sufferings that Ka Likai leaps to her death. The contemporary version gives us an insight into the complexity of the character of Ka Likai. It seems to give the power of choice to the woman to end her life rather than live on with the guilt of the death of her daughter. One way of looking at this choice is that Ka Likai decided that she no longer wanted to live under the control of her husband and chose death over life. On the other hand, the concept of death as an alternative for freedom is problematic. There is a certain respect for Ka Likai when she realizes the futility of life in the constraints of her husband and decides to end her life but there is also the sadness in the fact that death is the most plausible exit for her from a patriarchal power.

Origin myths are included in the book by P.R.T. Gurdon as well as the book by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih. However, the ways these myths are presented differ in some sense. In Nongkynrih's collection, the first three folktales are a continuation of one after the other. It is possible to read the three in isolation as well as a continuum. There is no concept of "Hell" in the Khasi tales in Nongkynrih's book. There is the Heaven (*Ka Bneng*) from which the Khasi tribes originated and the Earth (*Ka Khyndew*) upon which they were sent to work. P.R.T. Gurdon's version has some parts which mention the origin of the Khasis. One of the most important

folktales that is part of the Khasi tradition is the Sohpet Bneng. Gurdon has in his book only one small paragraph of the folktale on the Sohpet Bneng[25], as given below:

> "In olden days, when the earth was very young, they say that heaven and earth were very near to one another, because the navel-string of heaven drew the earth very close to it. This navel – string of heaven, resembling flesh, linked a hill near Sumer with heaven. At that time all the subjects of the Siem of Mylliem throughout his kingdom came to one decision, i.e. to sever the navel-string from that hill. After they had cut it, the navel-string became short; and, as soon as it shortened, heaven then ascended high. It was since that time that heaven became so high, and it is for that reason that they call that hill which is near Sumer "U Sohpet Byneng."" (173)

Considering that it is one of the most prominent origin folktales of the Khasis, it is surprising that an elaborate narration such as the one found in Nongkynrih's book is missing from Gurdon's version. It is possible to speculate that the importance given to the tracing of the origins is more prominent in the "native" writer's work than in the British writer's book. One could argue that the subjectivity of the writers comes into play in this part. The decision to include only an abridged version of the origin folktale of the Khasis by Gurdon appears to be a comment on what types of representation he wants to portray of the Khasis. It is possible that for Gurdon, the importance of the folktale lies in the explanation of a "hill that is near Sumer" and not so much on the origin of the people. However, for contemporary Khasi writers like Nongkynrih and

[25] For the other versions refer to Pg. No. 196 (Appendix 6).

Kharmawphlang, because the folktale is central to the explanation of their origin, it becomes important to tell the story in a detailed manner; hence the length of the folktale becomes very different from the one given by Gurdon. The folktales in Gurdon's book "The Dingiei Hill" and "'Sohpet Bneng' Hill" are both found in one folktale, "The Seven Clans", in Nongkynrih's book.

The folktale related to the origin of the Siems of Shillong has a shorter version in the colonial book as compared to Nongkynrih's longer version[26]. Gurdon seems to have given a gist of the tale, mentioning the union of a heavenly woman with a man from earth.

> "The Siem of Shillong is a very great and powerful chief in the Khasi Hills. He is generally known throughout the Khasi Hills as the "god king." By the term "god king"is meant that God has been pleased to give over to him the largest portion of the Khasi country, i.e. the kingdom of Shillong, to rule. If you seek for the origin of these "god kings," you will find there is great uncertainty about it. At any rate there is a tradition amongst the Khasis to the following effect. In olden days a rumour got abroad that there was a woman in a cave called Marai, which is situated near the present village of Pomlakrai, at the source of the river Umiew or Umiam. She was a young and very beautiful damsel. Of the reality of the damsel's existence there is no question. Many tried to catch her, but they could not,

[26] For the other versions, refer to Pg. 183 (Appendix 6)

owing to the narrowness of the cave. There came, however, a certain very clever man who went to entice her by showing her a flower called "u tiew-jalyngkteng." The damsel then came (out) near to snatch the flower, but the man went on holding back his hand until she came out into a more open place, when he seized her. He then brought her to his house and carefully tended her, and afterwards he married her. That damsel was called " Ka Pah Syntiew, the flower-lured one," because that man caught her by coaxing and enticing her with a flower. That man, who came from the village of Nongjri in the Bhoi country, was called the Nongjri Kongor. After she had given birth to daughters and sons, she returned to the same place whence she had been captured, and from that time forth she never came out again, however much her husband and children called and implored her. Her children increased in stature and in wisdom, and the people hearing of the wonderful origin of their mother, came from all parts of the country to look at them. The children also were very clever at showing their humility and good manners in the presence of the elders. All the people (in return) loved them and considered them to be the children of the gods, and did homage to them. It occurred to the nobles and leaders of the Shillong Raj to appoint them Siems because (they said) the children had been born of a wonderful woman, who, it seemed very clear, was the daughter of the "god Shillong." Therefore they gladly decided to appoint

> them Siems in the country of Shillong (i.e. the present Khyrim and Mylliem States). The children thus became Siems, and they were called "Ki Siem- Blei" (the god kings) of Shillong. (166-168)

Gurdon's version lays emphasis on the origin of the Siems of Shillong who are said to be of a celestial origin. His version of the folktale is short as compared to the version of Nongkynrih probably because he is more concerned with the story of the Siems and not so much on the story of the mother, as it is the case in Nongkynrih's version. Gurdon's focus seem to be more on the sons of Ka Pah Syntiew who eventually rule over the land and he chooses to omit the stories of the mother and her daughters (which Nongkynrih includes in his collection).

Nongkynrih's version tells the tale of the daughter of a chief spirit called U Lei Shyllong who was sent to live with the humans. She had been sent by her father as a token of thanking the humans for offering obeisance to him. This tale is concerned with how there was a supreme god called "U Blei" but also several spirits under him who too were powerful. The belief system of the Khasis is found in some sense within this folktale. The Siems of Shillong were the children born out of the marriage of this daughter of Shyllong, Ka Pahsyntiew and a man called Kongngor, a brave man. Hence, the Siems had been attributed with having celestial elements within themselves. In Nongkynrih's version of the folktale, there is a belief system intertwined with the folktale, where the worship of more than one supreme god came into practice. "It was not till a village elder, a man of great wisdom and understanding of the mysteries of life, had

started making sacrifices to the chief of the spirits, that the villagers learnt about propitiating and paying obeisance to more than the one supreme God that they knew" (73-74). Nongkynrih thus offers an explanation to help the readers understand the logic behind the appeasing of the various spirits in nature. This explanation is missing in Gurdon's version. However, the ending of the folktale appears to be more or less similar in both the versions. Ka Pahsyntiew leaves her husband and children to return to her home, leaving behind her children who have celestial powers within them. Another interesting variation is that Gurdon writes of the "children" of Ka Pahsyntiew and how they eventually became the Siems of Shyllong, which suggests that they were all male. On the contrary, Nongkynrih's version has the presence of two sisters, the eldest and the youngest among the siblings. It is in the ancestral house of the Syiem that the eldest sister lives "in accordance with the customs of the land" (78). This is one of the rare references to the importance the women had in the family life of the Khasis.

The folktale as "U Manik Raitong and his flute" in Gurdon's book and as "U Manik Raitong" in Nongkynrih's book is a popular and well-known story among the Khasis. Their versions are slightly different[27]. The first parts of Gurdon's version of this folktale are given below:

> "In the northern portion of the Khasi Hills which borders on the Bhoi country there lived a man, by name U Manik. The people nicknamed him "U Manik Raitong," because he was an orphan, his parents, his brothers

[27] For the full folktale and the other versions, refer to Pg. 210 (Appendix 6).

> and sisters, and the whole of his clansfolk having died. He was very poor in addition. U Manik Raitong was filled with grief night and day. He used to weep and deeply groan on account of his orphanhood and state of beggary. He did not care about going out for a walk, or playing like his fellow youths. He used to smear himself with ashes and dust. He used to pass his days only in weeping and groaning, because he felt the strain of his misery to such an extent, he made a flute upon which to play a pathetic and mournful tune. By day he used to work as a ploughman, whenever he was called upon to do so. If nobody called him, he used to sit inactive at home, weeping and groaning and smearing his rags with dust and ashes. At night he used to bathe and dress himself well, and, after having eaten his food, he used to take his flute and play on it till morning. This was always his practice. He was a very skilful player. He had twelve principal tunes. There lived in the same village a queen. Her husband, the Siem, used to be absent from home for long intervals in connection with his public duties. One night, when the queen heard the strains of U Raitong's flute, she listened to them with very great pleasure, and she felt so much compassion for him that she arose from her couch at midnight and went to visit him." (186)

Both versions tell the tragic love story between Manik Raitong and the Siem's wife; they both also show the audience the talented Manik Raitong in the field of music. The difference between

the two versions is that Nongkynrih tells of a love that had developed between the tragic lovers in their youth. Manik Raitong is an orphan and so he is rejected by his beloved Lieng Makaw's mother and forbidden to see her any more. This leads him to focus on music and he excells in playing the flute. After many years, the Siem was to take a wife. Hence his marriage is arranged with Lieng Makaw. After a few months into their marriage, the Siem goes away to battle. Lieng Makaw has a difficult time adjusting to her new environments. On top of marrying a stranger, she is left to attend to matters in the absence of her Siem. She hears the music played by Manik Raitong and is led to his house where they come to know that they had been in love in their youth. They start seeing each other and subsequently have a baby together. It is interesting that Nongkynrih's version gives the reader an idea of why the wife of a Siem would have had an affair with a person who was seen as an outcaste among the people. The love that they have for each other is rekindled after many years thanks to the musical talent of Manik Raitong. According to Esther Syiem, this is attributed to "*U Manik Raitong*'s dedication to his art, through which he celebrates the best of himself and consequently the best of the human race" (92). Therefore, the Siem's wife is able to connect with him through his music. Both the versions of the folktale end with Manik Raitong being burned alive as a punishment for his illicit affair with the Siem's wife and the woman (Lieng Makaw) leaping into the fire to join him in death. At the place of the funeral pyre grew bamboos with leaves upside-down. Esther Syiem finds this significant and she writes: "Its metamorphosis into a cluster of bamboos with downward pointing leaves is a simple assertion of the kinesthetic qualities of art, which must reflect change and

growth. It is a statement effectively made for it demarcates its own space and enunciates its own terms" (101).

H. O. Mawrie, a Khasi writer, in his discussion of the place and role of *U Blei* criticizes Gurdon's understanding of the importance of it when he writes: "It is of no wonder, therefore, that Gurdon found it vague for he considered it in isolation, and so considered it is bound to appear truncated and strange" (9). For a "native" writer like Mawrie, the folktales are an extension of the belief system of the Khasi. He is of the opinion that they cannot be read in isolation and that the beliefs of the Khasi are intertwined with the folktales or stories that have been in existence within the community. He views the folktales as examples of moral lessons that are taught among the Khasis. They are not to be taken literally but metaphorically. For instance, in the folktale about the sun hiding away after a feast and celebrations, it is not because of the disappearance of the sun that the world is in darkness; it is the presence of a darkness in the animals that causes it. According to Mawrie, there are lessons that are embedded in the Khasi folktales. "Kyllang and Symper" and "The Fight between Kyllang and Symper"; "Why there are spots on the moon" and "The Sun and the Moon"; and "How the dog came to live with man" and "Luri Lura, the Animal Fair" are folktales which explain the appearance of certain physical elements and natural phenomena around them.

In order to come to terms with what Mawrie has suggested, let us look at some of the opinions of the administrators in the Khasi Hills who have kept a record of their views of the people. In a report titled "Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills 1853" submitted to the Government of Bengal, A. J. M. Mills gives his opinion of the Khasis when he writes about the change in the "character" of the Khasi people. He mentions that the Khasis "were formerly described as an upright simple people, but from an association with civilization and wealth have become arrogant, deceitful, and untrustworthy" (5). However, he also points out that although "their moral character may have deteriorated, the advantages they have derived and are deriving from their connexion with our Government are great, and numerous civil wars, which continually distracted the country, have been put down" (5). On another topic, when describing the work done by the missionary Rev. William Lewis, Mills writes about how the missionaries, through their teachings and actions, were making efforts "to dispel the darkness and superstition of the people" (25). Mills also writes that the Khasis "are without the invidious distinction of castes and without, I may say, religion" (25). In a response to this report, C. Beadon, Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, wrote to Mills and shared his observation that the people of the Khasi Hills may be presumed to be "of a barbarous character" and are "said to be accompanied with cruel ordeals" (115). It is not possible to assume that the opinions expressed in these writings were shared by all the administrators in the past; however, it might have been a general view of the people in power in the colonial times. Therefore, one may form an opinion that when a certain kind of idea of a tribe or a group of people have been established, it is quite possible that it may affect the representation of the people.

It is not possible to read the collection of folktales discussed in this chapter without taking into account the context in which they were collected and recorded. The position of the writers/collectors and their target audience is another aspect that needs to be discussed. In the Preface to *The Khasis,* P.R.T. Gurdon writes:

> This account would perhaps have assumed a more elaborate and ambitious form were it not that the author has been able to give to it only the scanty leisure of a busy district officer. He has been somewhat hampered by the fact that his work forms part of a series of official publications issued at the expense of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, and that it had to be completed within a prescribed period of time. (v)

Gurdon mentions that it was a governmental endeavour, that he did not have as much time as he would have liked to have to write this book and that he had more things to say than he could manage in the book. Against this in the "Prelude" to *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends,* Nongkynrih writes: "It is very important, therefore, to understand the allegorical nature of the stories, so that they are not simply read as fantastic tales from yet another exotic tribal culture" (x).

The purpose of Nongkynrih coming up with this book appears to be an attempt at presenting a new dimension to the Khasi folktales as well as the Khasi identity through the folktales. He is aware of the "twin objective of instruction and entertainment" offered by the Khasi folktales and this seems to be one of his objectives in publishing the book.

In a review of *The Khasis* by P. R. T. Gurdon, W. Crooke writes that this is "the first of a series of monographs on the *wilder tribes* of Assam" (240) (Emphasis added). He notes that the matriarchal institutions of the Khasis are "remarkable" and worth studying. Regarding their folktales, his review is that "the account of their rules of taboo is valuable" (242). Crooke is of the opinion that Gurdon has made an incredible attempt in writing and recording the various aspects of the Khasis and their traditions and history. Although there are criticism and critique of some parts of the book, Crooke, on the whole, commends the efforts. The "matriarchal institutions" of the Khasis is mentioned in this review; however, it does not seem to reflect too much on the folktales in the collection.

When one looks at the different versions of the Khasi folktales, it is possible to form an idea regarding the belief systems, the purpose of the folktales, certain identity markers that are embedded in the tales and so on. In the "Prelude" to his collection, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

writes: “To explain the inexplicable, to comprehend the incomprehensible, they [the Khasis] always found a story” (x), thus explaining the important place such tales occupied in the lives of the people. These tales also served the “twin objective of instruction and entertainment”. Esther Syiem writes that “Folk literature in its oral form, has always represented a complex of information and sensibility that resists erasure” (30) sealing the prominent place that oral literature has in the minds of the people. Esther Syiem is of the opinion that in a changing world, folk literature also changes in some sense, yet there is a need to hold on to the values and teachings that it conveys.

Mrs. K. U. Rafy’s collection of Khasi folktales *Folk-Tales of the Khasis* was first published by MacMillan in 1920. There is very little information in the book about the author; however, this collection has been referred to in several articles about the Khasi folktales and culture. From the short “Foreword” that Mrs. Rafy has included in her collection, it is noted that some of the folktales had been printed in a Calcutta (Kolkata) newspaper called “The Statesman”. One can infer that she had an audience of Indians as well as foreigners in mind when she published these folktales. One of her main aims in publishing this collection appears to be a form of entertainment for the readers: “I shall consider the book amply rewarded if it bears the fruit I anticipate, by rendering more cheerful an hour or two in the life of its readers during these busy and strenuous times” (vii). There are 32 folktales in this collection:

1. What causes the eclipse,

2. The Legend of Mount Sophet Bneng,
3. How the peacock got his beautiful feathers,
4. The goddess who came to live with mankind,
5. The formation of the Earth,
6. U Raitong (The Khasi Orpheus) ,
7. The tiger and the monkeys,
8. The legend of the Iei tree,
9. Hunting the stag Lapalang,
10. The goddesses Ka Ngot and Ka Iam,
11. U Biskurom,
12. U Thlen,
13. How the dog came to live with man,
14. The legend of betel and tobacco,
15. The stag and the snail,
16. The leap of Ka Likai,
17. The shadows on the moon,

18. U Ksuid Tynjang,

19. What makes the lighting,

20. The prohibited food,

21. The cooing of the doves,

22. How the colour of the monkey became grey,

23. Ka Panshandi, the lazy tortoise,

24. The idiot and the hyndet bread,

25. U Ramhah,

26. How the cat came to live with man,

27. How the fox got his white breast,

28. How the tiger got his strength,

29. How the goat came to live with man,

30. How the ox came to be the servant of man,

31. The lost book, and

32. The blessing of the mendicant.

From the list above, one can see that the collection is a mixture of different Khasi folktales. Although not much is known about the writer and it is not clear if Mrs. Rafy was the wife of a missionary or an administrator, her collection has become an important part of the history of Khasi folktales and cannot be left out as it was among the earliest collections of Khasi folktales.

In the collection by Mrs. Rafy, the origin of the Khasis in "The Legend of Mount Sophet Bneng" is the second in the list. Origin myths/stories are always an integral part of a people and it is not less so in the case of the Khasis. Folktales which explain the occurrence of natural phenomena such as eclipses and lightning, the appearance of certain animals and the domestication of particulars animals, goddesses and their relationship with humans, the formation of the earth, social practices such as the tradition of offering betel and tobacco to guests and many other folktales are included in this collection. One of the most well-known folktales among the Khasis, the one about U Manik Raitong, is given a title in the book "The Khasi Orpheus". This could indicate that in the opinion of the writer/collector, U Manik Raitong's story is no less important than that of the Greek figure of Orpheus. It could also be read as a parallel drawn between the two legends wherein the love of a man far exceeds the limitations of mankind and both U Manik Raitong and Orpheus have exceptional musical skills that could move the hearts of the land of the dead. It is not clear whether Mrs. Rafy is subtly suggesting that the Khasis are not much different from the Western legendary figures in terms of love and music or she is making connections with Orpheus in order to give her non-Indian readers an idea the lesser known Khasis by including the figure of Orpheus in the title.

According to Manorama Sharma, an "analysis of these tales … tells us not only about the values of early Khasi society, but also about the level of development of that society" (14). One of the folktales in Mrs. Rafy's collection is "The Lost Book". It is a tale about a Khasi man and a foreigner seeking the advice of god in order to appease him and live according to his wishes and "to restore their knowledge and to reform their mode of worship" (137). They were each given a book which, unfortunately, the Khasi man lost while crossing a river. When he returned, he narrated his experience to his people and this is explained as the reason why there is oral tradition in the Khasi society. This folktale is not included in Gurdon's collection but is found in Nongkynrih's. Khasi language is most often seen as an oral and not written language, so is it possible to assume that there had been a script once for the language but it got lost along the way? Or, could it be that the presence of people from outside the region with a language form so different from them created a folktale which told of scripts in the past? It is not possible to know just what the answer is, but this particular folktale might have been influenced by the changes in the Khasi society, although one can never be sure. According to Lynn Abrams, "oral sources derive from subjectivity – they are not static recollections of the past but are memories reworked in the context of the respondent's own experience and politics" (7). Therefore, it is quite possible that this folktale might have been reworked. Esther Syiem is of the opinion that "the tale of the lost script must be understood within the logistics of a society that is keen to review itself in the light of similar changes taking place elsewhere in the world" (16).

Mrs. Rafy's collection is such an important and essential part of the history of Khasi folktales because it is varied and contains folktales dealing with many aspects of the Khasis. Reading this collection of folktales, one can form an idea of the people known as the Khasis – their origin tale which narrates how the tribes came to Earth from the heavens ("The Legend of Mount Sophet Bneng"), how the dog, the cat, the ox and the goat were domesticated by the Khasis (one folktale for each of the animals), their belief in goddesses who sometimes have human-like qualities ("The goddess who came to live with mankind" and "The goddesses Ka Ngot and Ka Iam"), the important reason behind the social practice of offering betel and tobacco by the hosts to the guests ("The legend of betel and tobacco"), and various other explanations of the world. The "identity" that comes from reading the folktales of this collection is one of a people who had their own codes of conduct for living, of a people who had belief systems which were not the same as those of the intended readers of the book, and a people who had a rich history of incredible men and women.

In 2006, Sahitya Akademi published *Khasi Folk Songs and Tales* (Documented and Translated into English by Desmond L. Kharmawphlang) which consisted of six Khasi folktales

1. A Tale of the *Takalong* cucumber,
2. The Farmer and the Tiger,
3. The Syntong Rynghang Tigers,

4. Lightning and the Lynx's Sword,
5. Ka Khwan (A Tale of Greed) , and
6. The Old Fox and the Tiger.

It is the first in a series of such collections at the initiative of the Akademi. In the "Foreword" to the book, G. N. Devy mentions the limitations of the book as he writes: "These volumes are not to be seen as exhaustive compilations but only as representative sampling of literature in the respective language. It is hoped that the general reader in the respective languages, and the students of literature, history, anthropology and tribal culture will find them of sufficient interest" (ii). The folk songs and folktales are written in English and Hindi, which would cater to a wider variety of readers/audience. From the "Foreword", it may be concluded that the intended target readers are both the users of the Khasi language as well as others who might be interested in such literature. Since the collection has a very limited number of folktales, it is not possible to say that it is an adequate "representation" of Khasi identity; however, the readers will be able to see a "sample" of a Khasi through the folktales.

As mentioned earlier, the Khasis have a matrilineal system wherein property and titles are passed down through the mother's side of the family. In the three collections of Khasi folktales that have been discussed in this chapter, there have not been overt allusions to this system.

However, in Desmond L. Kharmawphlang's collection, the first folktale "A Tale of the *Takalong* cucumber" has a note at the end of the tale explaining the matrilineal system of the Khasis. This folktale tells the story of a man named Jop who is determined to find a woman as beautiful as the *takalong* cucumber. Jop endured many hardships and suffering in order to get the woman he was looking for and in the end, through many twists and turns, he returns to his village and lives a happy life with his wife. The sense of the community that is prevalent in a Khasi village is found in this folktale wherein when Jop decides to leave his village in search of the woman, the other villagers assure him that they will help his mother with the work in their field. The explanation of the matrilineal system is essential in order to explain why the chieftainship is inherited by him from his maternal uncle and why he succeeded his uncle as the chief. As written in the end-note: "he succeeds his maternal uncle as it is passed down from maternal uncle to nephew and not from father to son as it is practised normally. It must be noted that father and children do not belong to the same clan" (120).

The folktale "The Farmer and the Tiger" explains the reason why foxes often attack goats domesticated by man. An agreement is made between a Khasi man and a fox in this tale wherein the fox assists the man in capturing a dangerous tiger; in return for the efforts, the fox is promised the gift of goats from the man. This is a sample of many folktales which narrate the relationship between man and animals which is often found in the other collections. "The Syntong Rynghang Tigers" is set in a place that is in existence at the present time. It tells the folktale of men who could turn themselves into tigers at will with the help of a stone deity.

However, due to the greed of this clan, they lose their favour with the gods and the clan slowly declines to a point where only one of them survives. The lone survivor eventually dies in the end and this becomes the end of the Syntong Rynghang clan. There are several Khasi beliefs and practices embedded in this folktale; for instance, the worship of a deity in the form of a stone is mentioned, the custom of offering betel nuts and leaves to a guest (when a young woman meets the last of the clan for the first time), the importance of seeking the parents' approval for a young woman are some of the practices found when one reads this folktale.

Lightning is personified as *U Ni* Ba in the folktale "Lightning and the Lynx's Sword" where the matrilineal system of the Khasis is subtly alluded to, where the maternal uncles make arrangements for the funeral of *U Ni Ba's* mother. "Ka Khwan (A Tale of Greed)" is a folktale of a woman, who, because of her greed, was called *Khwan* (the greedy one) and in the end, she loses her daughter. The female protagonists (the two sisters, the orphan and the daughter of *Khwan*) are not given names in this particular folktale. The only female character who has a name is *Khwan* whose name has been given to her by the people of her village because of her greedy nature. However, the husbands of the two young women – U Munj (half-man, half-snake), husband of the orphan woman; and U Sah (a snake), husband of *Khwan's* daughter – are given proper names. It is surprising that a collection by a Khasi from a matrilineal society would contain a folktale where the names of the women are not given an importance. It could be a hint at the existence of patriarchy even in a society that practices a matrilineal system. "The Old Fox and the Tiger" is an animal tale of betrayal and cunning plan on the part of the fox that

eventually kills the tiger and gets benefits from the wife of the dead tiger. Kharmawphlang does not give a moral at the end of the folktales nor does he give an introduction to the collection. There are no origin folktales here. None of the well-known Khasi folktales (such as Ka Likai, U Manik Raitong, the Thlen etc.) are found in this collection and Kharmawphlang gives no explanation about the process of selection of the folktales. The difference between his collection and the earlier ones is the mention of the matrilineal system in his end-note to one of the folktales. Is it possible that, as G. N. Devy mentioned in the Foreword, these are just samples of the Khasi folktale and are not to be seen as accurate representations? Or, could it be that Kharmawphlang is intentionally including Khasi folktales which have not been so widely known in order to present a wider spectrum of the Khasi "identity"? Upon reading the folktales, one will be able to understand that there was and still is a strong relationship between the people in the tribe where they help each other out in times of need, be it in the home front or in the agricultural fields. There was a time when the Khasis believed in and worshipped stone deities. Man respected the animals around him and was aware of the need to have a connection with the world around him. Forbidden love existed in the face of opposition from parents. The greed of any kind will eventually lead to the downfall of a person. The matrilineal system is an integral part of the Khasi identity. Kharmawphlang appears to be presenting all these aspects of the culture of the Khasis through his small collection of folktales.

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih is very clear about his intentions for the readers in his "Prelude" to his collection of Khasi folktales. The Khasi worldview, the moral aspect of the folktales, the

entertaining and instructive uses of the folktales are some of the features he wishes to convey. His collection is varied and seems to present a Khasi "identity" which has a rich tradition and cultural practices, an identity which is no less than any other identity in the world. He is aware that his collection cannot give a full idea of the Khasis and their past and identity but is optimistic that his collection will pave the way for many more collections from other writers.

When one reads the collections of Khasi folktales from P. R. T. Gurdon, Mrs. K. U. Rafy, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, different kinds of identities appear. Gurdon, who was writing at a time when his contemporaries were still quite unfamiliar with the Khasi tribes, was making a collection which could have presented an idea of a certain people with their customs and traditions which were so different from the readers. S. S. Khongkliam is of the opinion regarding Gurdon's collection that "[t]he Khasi thinkers seem to have used myths and other ideas in their attempts to give rational explanations of the mysteries of the world" (17). Mrs. Rafy seems to have made her collection more for the reading pleasure of her audience, while simultaneously introducing them to a tribe of people with their own ways of understanding of the world around them. Hence, these two collections had origin folktales, animal folktales and explanations of natural occurrences and appearances of animals. It is possible that in introducing such folktales to their readers and a wider audience which consisted mainly of their peers, they were creating an identity of a tribe of people who were different but those which needed to be understood. The collectors Gurdon and Rafy being non-natives, there will be many problems with the selection and presentation of the folktales. However, it is

important to remember that the written records that have been left behind by these writers continue to gain importance even in the present times. One of the major problems with these collections is that there is no real mention of the informants who had helped them in collecting these folktales. Credit is not given to the people who helped them in these collections. Although it is true that Khasi initially being an oral language, authorship cannot be assigned to their folktales, there would have been translators and/or narrators who had been employed by Gurdon and Rafy, who remain behind the scenes and are not mentioned or given due acknowledgement.

"Identity" is a topic which is addressed from time to time in everyday life, in writings, in speech and all walks of life. It is difficult to pin-point exactly where an identity of a person or a tribe of people exists. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to look at the identity/identities of a tribe of people called the Khasis from the northeastern part of India specifically through collections of Khasi folktales by non-Khasis and the Khasis themselves at different points of time. What has emerged from these folktales is that the Khasis are a tribe of people who had their own belief system (be it worship of stone deities, goddesses and gods), who have a strong sense of community with the practice of helping out those in trouble. They are cordial and respectful in their treatment of guests. They have a special connection with animals both domesticated and undomesticated. They have created folktales in order to understand and explain the phenomena around them in ways that were available to the people. They have tried to impart knowledge and advice through the passing on of the folktales. For P. R. T. Gurdon and Mrs. Rafy, who are non-Khasis, the identity that came through their folktale collections is being

represented more to their peers and not so much for the people they were writing about. It is an explanation of some kind to readers who were still unaware of the Khasis or people who were partly aware of the tribe. Therefore, there was a need to present as much variety as they could find through their collections. For Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, writing at a time when the Khasis are not unfamiliar to the readers and for whom the main target audience are the very people they are writing about, it is essential to present an identity that has existed for many years to create a sense of pride in the history and tradition of the Khasis. Mawrie writes that a "mode of Khasi thought can be seen in their folktales… The stories are told not only for amusement but also for the purpose of giving moral lessons, advice and instruction to the story teller's kith and kin as well as to future generations" (106). Although there can never be a perfect alignment in the collections of folktales from Gurdon to Nongkynrih, it cannot be denied that they are essentially for the future generations of the Khasis. The collections made by the non-Khasis and the Khasis cannot be said to be perfect representations of the people, but the effort made by the collectors is commendable. It becomes important for the readers of the present to be aware of the folktales and find a way to make use of them in the best possible way.

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Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation concentrated on the folktales of the Lushais and the Khasis and attempted to understand the representation of a people from different perspectives. “Identity/Identities” can never be static and continue to change at different periods of time. The representation of a people by the “outsiders” or the “insiders” cannot be studied without considering the context from where they had been collected at that particular point of time. With the passage of time, the Lushai identities and the Khasi identities gradually changed and there was a transition. It is not an easy task to negotiate between the folktales collected and recorded by the administrators and the folktales later collected by the people of the land. However, a balance needs to be struck between these collections and there is a need to understand and appreciate the works of the past even if one does not agree entirely with them.

The collectors of the Lushai folktales and the Khasi folktales which have been studied in this dissertation have been identified as “non-natives/outsiders” and “natives/insiders”; however, it is important to note that this demarcation cannot be clear-cut. For instance, among the “non-native” collectors, the agenda of an administrator like P. R. T. Gurdon and a non-administrator like Mrs. K. U. Rafy will not be the same. Among the “native” collections, there are collections which are

done under an agency like Sahitya Akademi (Laltluangliana Khiangte and Desmond L. Kharmawphlang) and collections which are published under private publishers. Although there are differences, the collectors are not homogenized. These differences need to be remembered when one reads and studies these collections. Their genders may or may not have affected some of their collections and the representation of the people they have dealt with. However, this dissertation did not deal with the gender issues and this could be one of the fields in which further studies of the Lushai folktales and Khasi folktales could be taken up. It would be interesting to have a reading of the folktales from this perspective to find out if their decisions and collections are affected by this.

The reading and study of Lushai and Khasi folktales will eventually aid in the recovery of traditions and histories that had been in existence for a very long time. Attempts have been made in this dissertation to look at existing folktales in different collections to re-interpret the identities that have been constructed by people within and outside of the communities. It is not possible to say which of the identities represent the "real" Lushais and Khasis because identity keeps on changing; however, from the readings that have been done, what emerges is that the writers have given representations from their perspectives in the kinds of folktales they choose to include and exclude from their collections. There have been cases of folktales being abridged by the administrators like Shakespear and Gurdon, who claim that they have done it because the folktales are lengthy and they had to make the decision. When comparisons are made between their versions and the contemporary writers' versions, one can see that there are elements that

have been omitted. In any collection, the perspective and point of view of the collector will always be found through the kinds of folktales they have collected and the way they present it to the readers. Whether one chooses to accept or reject these representations is an entirely different issue.

Folktales will always be sources of history and culture for a people who used to have an oral tradition, therefore, for the Lushais and the Khasis the need to be aware of their own folktales and the requirement to study and continue to learn from their culture is an important aspect. In the earlier religious practices and beliefs of the Lushais and the Khasis, the element of a sense of harmony with nature, the spirits in the forests and animals around them was found in the rituals and sacrifices. It is not quite possible to say whether the arrival of Christianity and the subsequent conversion of the people changed this attitude of the Lushais and the Khasis. The fear of spirits of the forests and of the elements around them did diminish with the spread of Christianity but it appears that the sense of balance and harmony that was witnessed at the time of their religious practices and beliefs seem to have diminished in some way. Christianity did bring in elements of "modernity" to the Lushais and the Khasis but it also eliminated many of their traditional practices and customs which had been a part of their life. It would have been preferable if the gospel of Christianity had found a way to negotiate the co-existence of the traditional ethics with the new religion.

As a researcher who is from one of the states (Mizoram) that has been studied in this dissertation, I am an "informed insider" for the Lushai folktales. However, there were aspects of the folktales that I had not thought of earlier which became apparent to me when I started reading them; for instance, my attitude to the Lushais often referred to as "head-hunters" has changed. I have come to realize that this label was a part of a Lushai identity at a time when war between villages was frequent and the belief that the spirits of the captured heads of men and women would be beneficial to the after-life. It was more related to the beliefs and religious advantages of the Lushais and less about the "savage" and "barbaric" nature of the people. The folktales are embedded with advice for better living, moral values, stories of great love between man and woman, stories of great sacrifices and many more which can be discovered anew in reading and trying to understand my ancestors who had passed on these folktales.

For the Khasi folktales I am an "outsider" being introduced to a land and a people I thought I was more or less familiar with but which held so much to discover. Although there are similar-looking folktales among the Lushais and the Khasis, one cannot deny that they are unique in their own ways and it is not possible to club them together into a lump under "North East India". The matrilineal system of the Khasis is a fascinating aspect of the Khasi society which marks it very differently from the Lushai society. However, the matrilineal system does not seem to make much of a presence in the Khasi folktales that have been studied in this dissertation. Perhaps this could be one of the areas that could be further studied by researchers interested in this field.

The purpose of collecting folktales was different for the administrators who considered their collections as sources of information, education and a means of understanding the people they would rule over. For the "natives", it was a way of presenting their past and traditions to the people of the land; it was entertainment in some ways for the younger generation; they were expected to garner interest in the past through a written record and as a means of creating a bridge for the generations who have lost interest in their ancestors. Whatever the purpose may be, readers will be able to find certain identity-markers through the folktales presented to them.

The collections of folktales that have been selected for the dissertation are all in English and not in the "native" languages. There are problems with reading the folktales in translations and in some cases there are no mention of the people who had helped in the translation of the folktales. However, I cannot deny that the existence of the folktales in English has been beneficial in my study especially in the case of the Khasi folktales which have been easily accessible because they were translated initially by the administrators and later by other people. The collections done in the early part of the twentieth century of the Lushai and Khasi folktales are not satisfying but they helped shape the later collections of folktales and for that I am grateful. Folktales are complex and since they are part of an oral tradition, writing them down and recording them in a written form might diminish some of the factors that have been passed on from generations. One needs to find a balance between the written (inflexible) and the oral (flexible) forms of folktales.

Through the reading and study of the Lushai folktales and the Khasi folktales, I hope that this dissertation has established that there are many differences between the states which are often identified as "North East India". There may be similarities in physical appearances of the people, geography of the land and ways of life; however, there are many factors which differentiate the states from each other. There are differences in language, food culture, customs, history, folktales etc. which show the differences in identities. The recovery of the diversity of the people is one of the purposes of this kind of work. Homogenization of the "North East" region has existed for quite some time now and it is time to realize that there exist diverse varieties of people with their own history and they need to be recognized.

There is scope for more research work in the areas of folktales and oral narratives in the Lushai Hills and Khasi Hills as well as the various states in the northeast of India. As mentioned earlier, the matrilineal system of the Khasis which is such an integral part of the society and their identity which does not seem to be reflected in the collection of folktales is one aspect that may be expanded and studied. A reading of the Lushai folktales from a feminist perspective could also be an interesting study where folktales which deal with gender issues are studied and analysed. The discourse of the collectors of the Lushai and Khasi folktales in the case of the administrators appears to be from a point of view of a conqueror. There is a certain level of curiosity and fascination on the part of the administrator who has arrived in a foreign place. The

aspects of discourse and ideology could provide scope for further study in the case of both the Lushai and the Khasi folktales. Research is a never-ending process and is expected to continue in various ways. I have hinted at a few possibilities. There are aspects of Lushai and Khasi folktales that have not been covered or mentioned in this dissertation which will hopefully be taken up in future studies.

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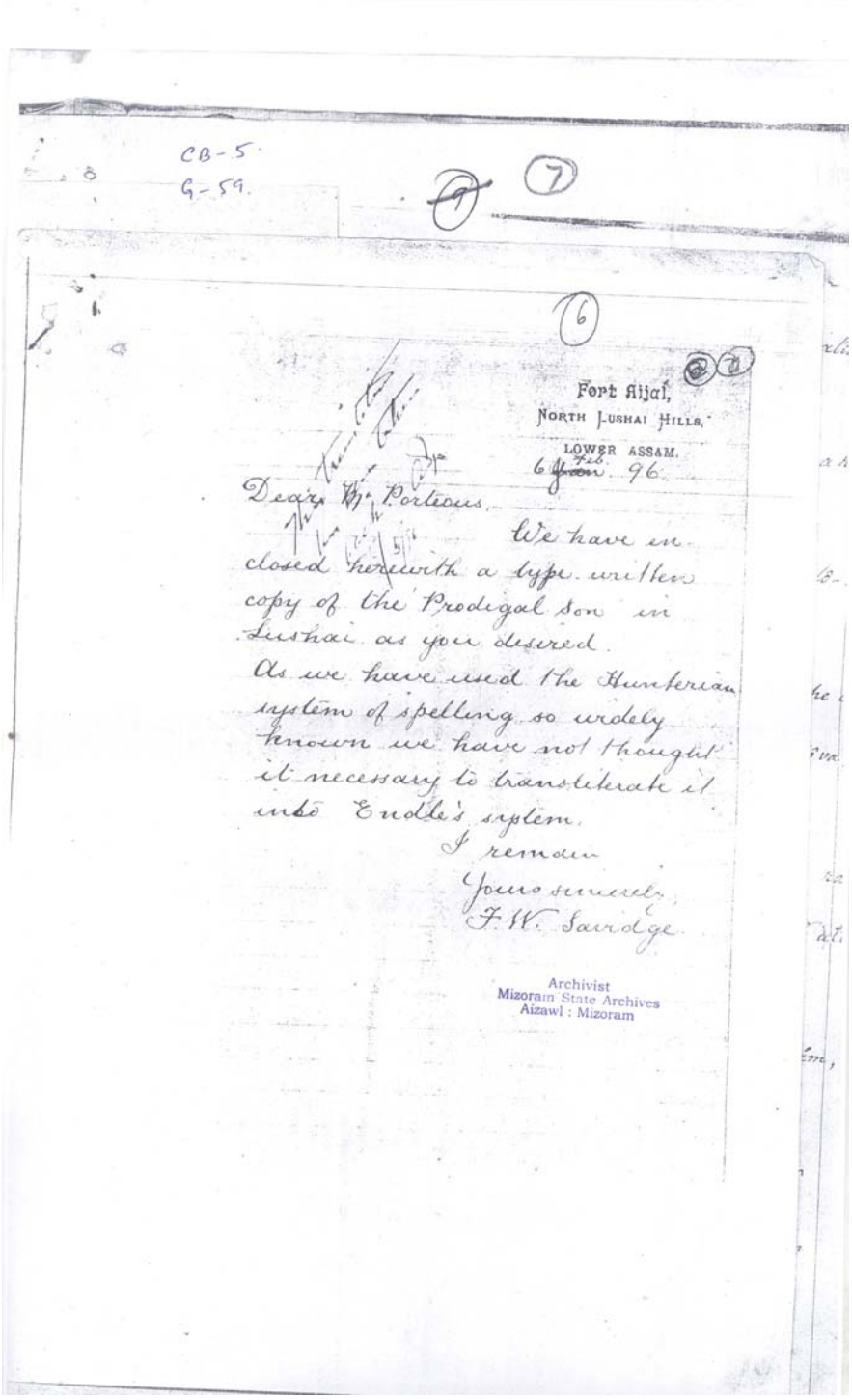


CB-5
G-59.

Fort Aijal,
NORTH LUSHAI HILLS,
LOWER ASSAM.
6 Feb. 96.

Dear Mr. Parsons.

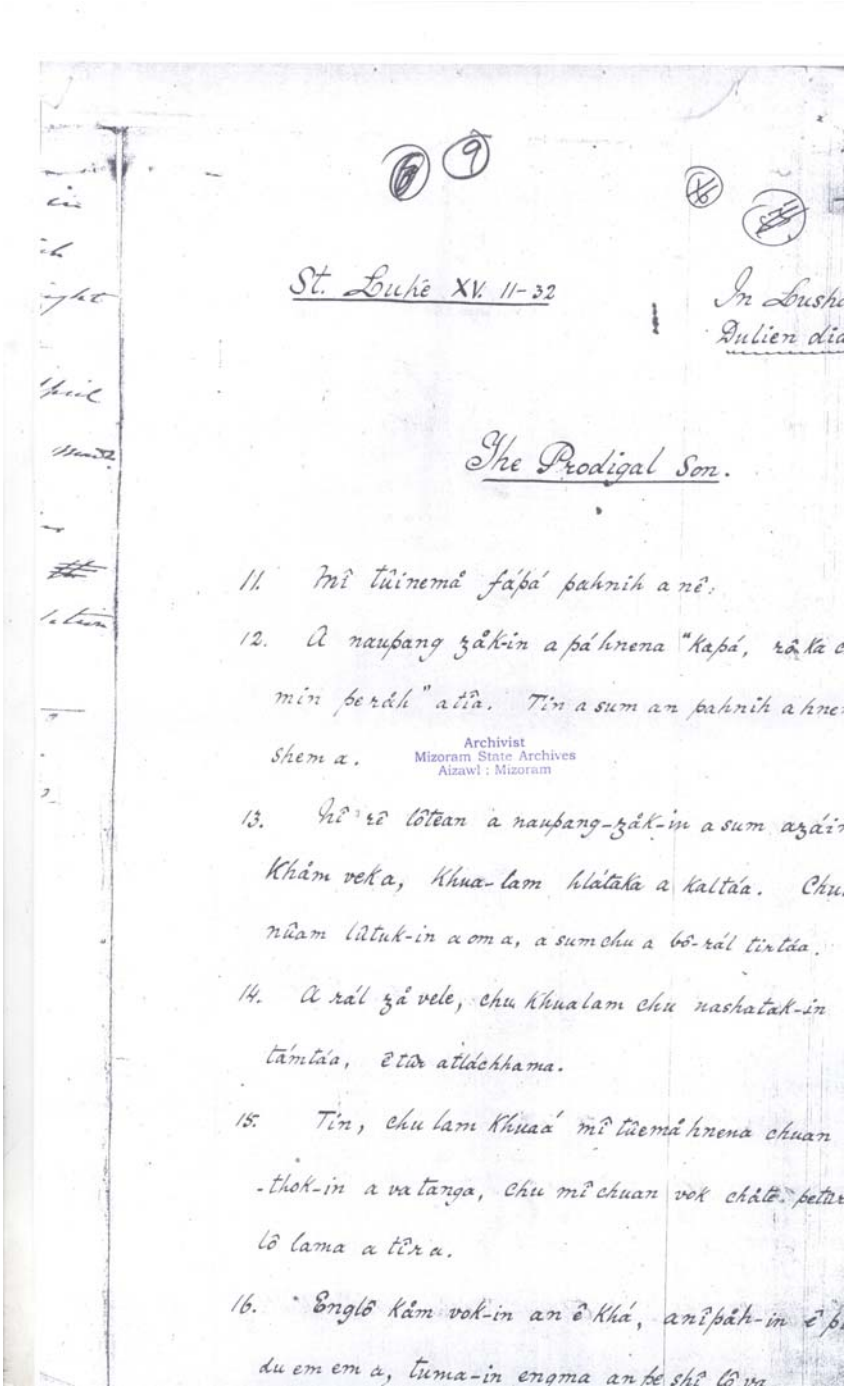
We have enclosed herewith a type written copy of the Prodigal Son in Lushai as you desired.

As we have used the Hunterian system of spelling so widely known we have not thought it necessary to transliterate it into Endle's system.

I remain
Yours sincerely,
F. W. Savidge

Archivist
Mizoram State Archives
Aizawl : Mizoram

Appendix 1: Letter from F. W. Savidge regarding the translation of "The Prodigal Son" (From the Bible) from English to Lushai Language.



St. Luhê XV. 11-32

In Lushe
Julien dia

The Prodigal Son.

11. Mî tûinemâ fápá pahnih a nê:

12. A naupang zák-in a pá hnena "Kapá, rô-ka c
min pe ráh" a tîa. Tin a sum an pahnih a hne
shem a.

13. Hê ni lôtean a naupang-zák-in a sum azái
Khâm vek a, khua-lam hlátaka a kaltáa. Chu
nûam látuk-in a om a, a sum chu a bô-ral tirtáa.

14. A ral zâ vele, chu khualam chu nashatak-in
támtáa, ê tûr atlâchhama.

15. Tin, chu lam khuaá mî tûemâ hnena chuan
-thok-in a va tanga, chu mî chuan vok châtê. petu
lô lama a tîr a.

16. Englô kâm vok-in an ê khá, anî páh-in ê p
du em em a, tuma-in engma an pe shî lô va

(8)

17. A hár le vele "Kapáhnena in-hlâfáte châ ê shen lô va, nê antamvênen, Kê-lá-chu heta riltám-in Ka thî dâm a.

18. Ka thô-vanga, Ka páhnena Ka va shoi anga "Kapá, vánamî chunga le nangma mit hmû-in thil Ka tî sual e

19. Ka hming î fápá vua tlák Ka nî lô ve; îhnena in--hlâfá pakhat angin min shîem ve râh" atîa.

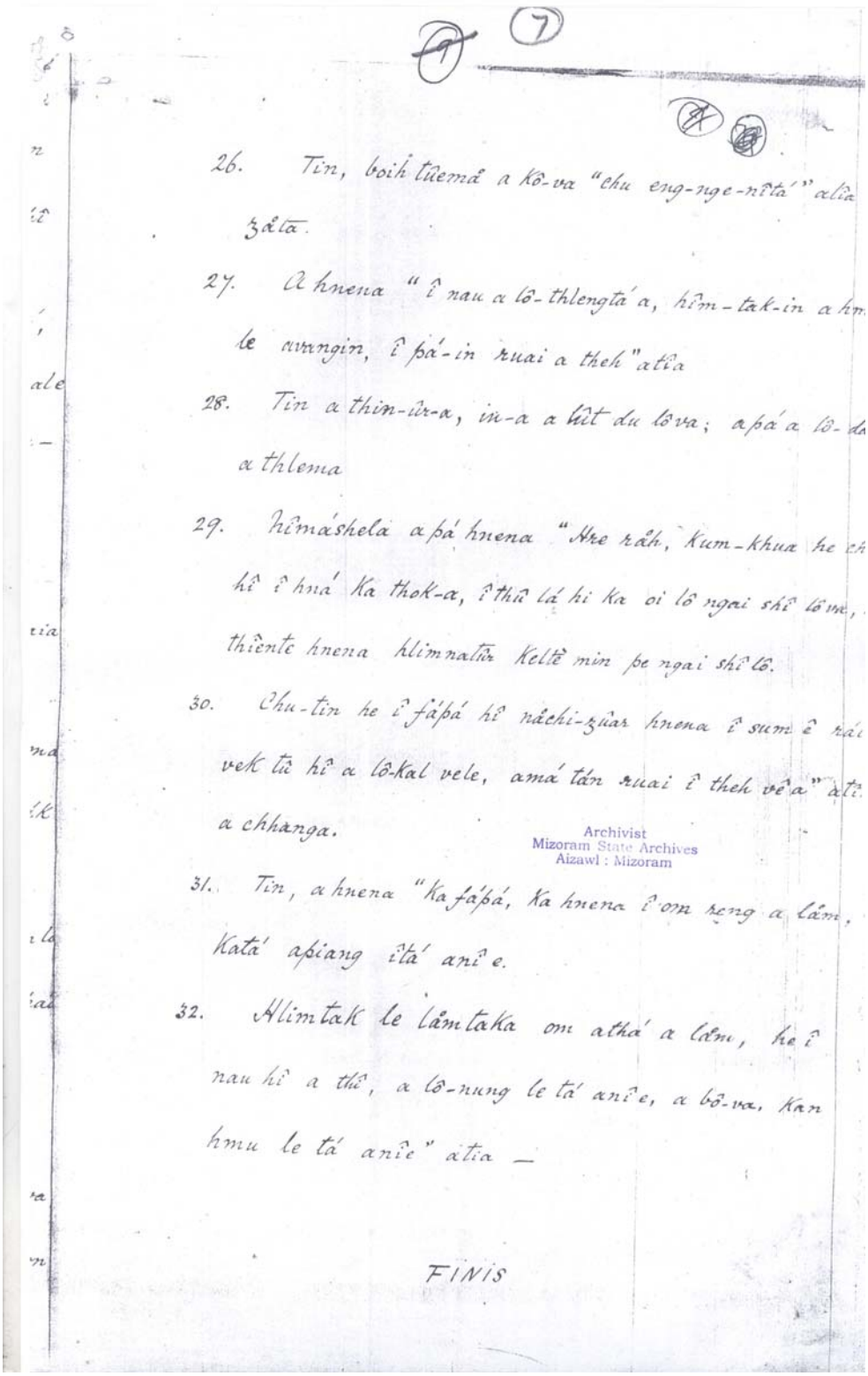
20. Tin, a thô-va, apáhnena a kal-táa; Chutichuan hlá-taka a láom lai-in a pá-in a lô hmûa, a thongaia a tlána, a ir-achuktuaa, a fâp-a.

21. A hnena a fápá-in "Kapá, vanamî chunga le nangma mit hmû-in thil Ka tî sual-e, Ka hming î fápáa vua tlák Ka nî lô ve" atia.

22. Nîmáshela a pá-in a boih-tê hnena "Pian thá ber han la thuê âla, han shin-tîr râh-û, a kuta zungbuntê, a hephai phêkoh te bun tîr râh-u.

23. Hlim tak-in î ê-ang-û

24. Ne Ka fápá hî a thî, a lô nung le tá anî e; a bô-va han hmû le tá anî e" atîa. Tin, hlimtak-in an om tan-táa.



(7)

26. Tin, boih tûemâ a kô-va "chu eng-nge-nîtá'" atîa zâta.

27. A hnena "î nau a lô-thlengtá a, hîm-tak-in a hm le awngin, î pá-in ruai a theh" atîa

28. Tin a thin-ûr-a, in-a a lût du lôva; a pá a lô-da a thlema

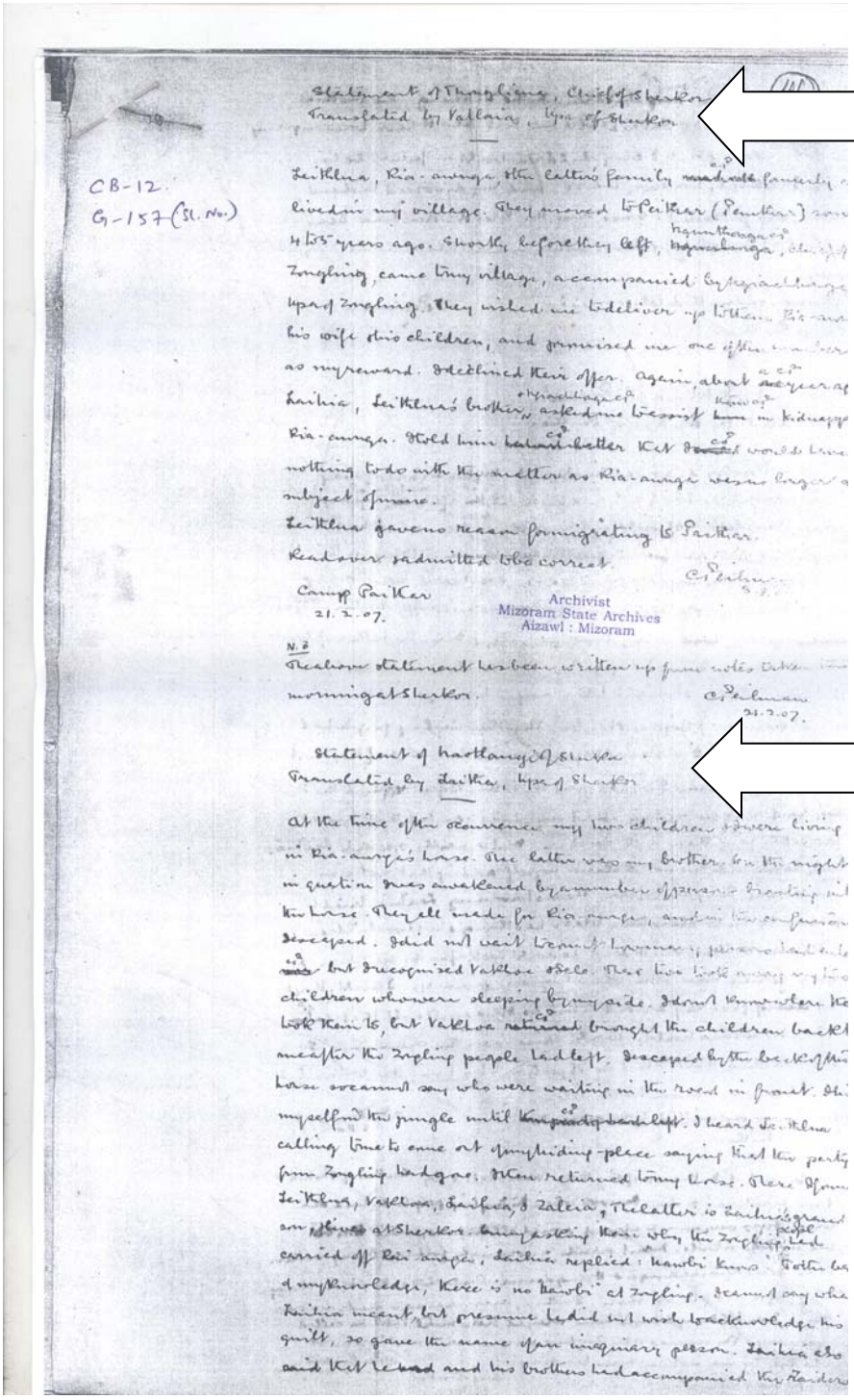
29. Hîmáshela a pá hnena "Ate râh, kum-khua he ch hî î hná Ka thok-a, î thî lá hi Ka oi lô ngai shî lô m thîente hnena klimnatûr Keltê min pe ngai shî lô.

30. Chu-tin he î fápá hî nâchi-zûar hnena î sum ê rái vek tê hî a lô-kal vele, amá tán ruai î theh vê a" atî a chhanga.

31. Tin, a hnena "Ka fápá, Ka hnena î om ṛeng a lâm, Katá apiang îtá aniê.

32. Alimtak le lâmtaka om athá a lâm, he î nau hî a thî, a lô-nung le tá aniê, a bô-va, Kan hmu le tá aniê" atîa —

FINIS



Statement of Thangliana Chief of Sherkor

Translated by Vallaia Upa of Sherkor

Statement of Laothangi of Sherkor

Translated by Laitha Upa of Sherkor

Appendix 3: Court transcripts with the names of the "native" translators

(47)

in order to save me c[illegible] children. In the morning, the brothers changed their tactics. Leitha told me that I should have to accompany him to Shetkor, & that I & my children would in future be his slaves. I declined, however, to do so, and my divorced husband, Akhuma, also protested. Since then the three brothers have been detained at Lungleh, so I have not been able to broach the subject again.

Read over & admitted to be correct.

C. S. Gilmore
S.D.O.

Camp Saithar
21.2.07.

Statement of Akhuma of Saithar
Translated by Leitha of Saithar

Statement of Akhuma of Saithar

Translated by Leitha of Saithar

I am Haothanga's divorced husband. My house is a long way off Kia-anga's so I did not awake until the after most of the Zongling people had left. I should not have known even then what had happened but overheard people talking in the street about the Zongling raid, & also overheard them saying that Kia-anga & his family had been carried off. As Kia-anga's sister is my divorced wife, & I am the father of her two children, I hurriedly got up to ascertain what their fate had been. I ran straight to Kia-anga's house, & met there Ngiachhawnga, Bopu, & Khibo. The other Zongling people had gone on ahead. I addressed Bopu, & warned him that if they hurt either of my children I would sue it. To this Bopu replied that he knew nothing about my children but that I would probably find them with Leitha. Subsequently I spoke to Leitha. The latter told me not to alarm myself adding that no harm would come to my children. The next morning Leitha tried to persuade me to allow him to take Haothanga & her two children with him to Shetkor. He said he would look after the children, & would return them to me when they were grown up. I would, though, not of course give my consent to this, as I knew full well that in years to come trouble would arise over the "chawman"; so I told Leitha that I had no objection to his taking the mother, but that I would not consent to his taking the children.

Read over & admitted to be correct.

C. S. Gilmore
S.D.O.

Camp Saithar
21.2.07.

Statement of Kithanga of Saithar. Translated by Leitha of Saithar

I am Kiachha's sister. I awoke when the Zongling people entered our house. I was very much afraid & cried all the time, until Khibo told me to go outside. I went outside accordingly followed by my mother. There I saw Ngiachhawnga & Hrengdanna. The latter asked Ngiachhawnga which of us was to be his share. On this, Ngiachhawnga made me over to him. I went to Hrengdanna's house & stayed there until Telkhoa called me away. The names of the Zongling persons mentioned herein were told me by my mother since her escape.

C. S. Gilmore
S.D.O.

Read over & admitted to be correct.

Camp Shetkor

(48)

Statement of Hrangduma of Saizaw.
Translated by Zatleia of Sherkor

I knew nothing about the conspiracy to kidnap Ria-aunga & his family until Vakloa ~~came~~ woke me up ~~when~~ one night about a year ago. He told me that he & some men of Zongling had caught Riadla at the river, & that they had now come to carry off his father. I asked him whether he had taken the 'Borsap's' permission. He said he had not done so but would report the matter without delay. I then asked him whether he was not afraid to act without the S.D.O.'s permission. He replied in the negative, adding that Thangliena, Chief of Sherkor, knew all about the conspiracy & had given his sanction. This being so, I dared not interfere. By Ngiachhaunga's orders, Vakloa made over to me Kitiano, Ria-aunga's daughter. He did so of his own free will, & not by at my request. The girl was not made over to me as hush-money. She did not remain in my house one night even, as I immediately made her over to her aunt, ~~Ngo~~ Hottangi. When our villagers had collected to resist the Zongling people, Vakloa & Laikia ~~mislead them by saying~~ frightened & turned them away by saying that Rai-aunga was their slave, & that they could do with him as they pleased. They also said that they were willing to take all responsibility, & would report the matter to the S.D.O.

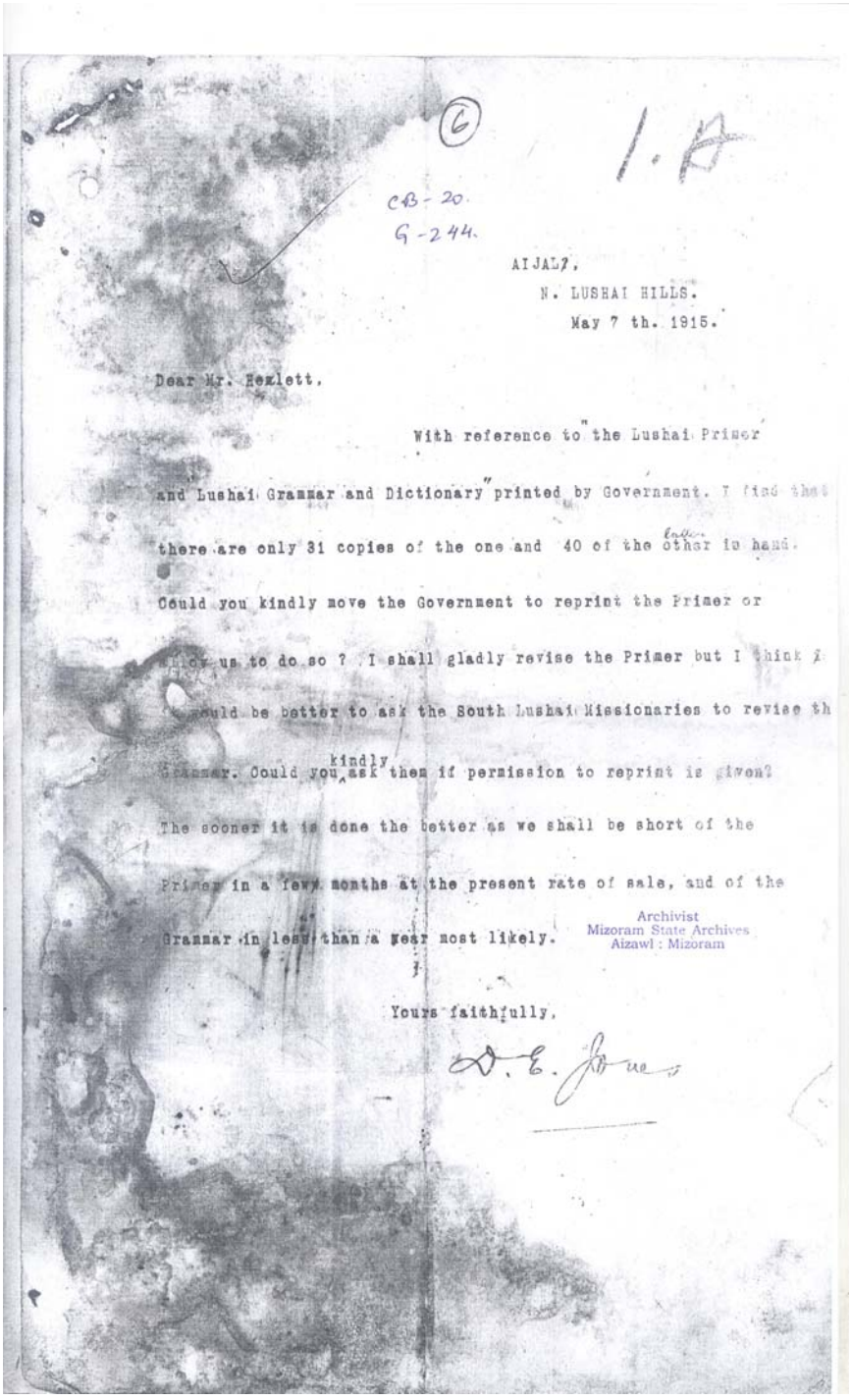
Read over & admitted to be correct.

Camp Sherkor
20.2.1907

C. Feilman
S.D.O.

Statement of Hrangduma of Saizaw

Translated by Zatleia of Sherkor



(6) 1.B

CB-20.
G-244.

AIJAL?,
N. LUSHAI HILLS.
May 7 th. 1915.

Dear Mr. Hexlett,

With reference to "the Lushai Primer and Lushai Grammar and Dictionary" printed by Government. I find that there are only 31 copies of the one and 40 of the other (latter) in hand. Could you kindly move the Government to reprint the Primer or allow us to do so ? I shall gladly revise the Primer but I think it would be better to ask the South Lushai Missionaries to revise the Grammar. Could you kindly ask them if permission to reprint is given? The sooner it is done the better as we shall be short of the Primer in a few months at the present rate of sale, and of the Grammar in less than a year most likely.

Yours faithfully,

D. E. Jones

Appendix 4: A reference to the school text-books written by missionary printed by the government.

Appendix 5

Lushai folktales that are common in more than one collection

The folktales which are common in J. Shakespear's book, B. Lalthangliana's collection and in Laltluangliana Khiangte's book:

1. Water Spirit and Ngaitei/ Ngaitei Saved her Native Village/ Ngaiteii.
2. The Tale of Granddaddy Bear and the Monkey/ The Swing and the Monkey/ Monkey and Swing
3. Rimenhoihi/ Rimenhawihi/ Rimenhawii

I. (A) **Ngai-ti (From Shakespear)**

There is a legend that the king of the Water Huai fell in love with Ngai-ti (loved one) and, as she rejected his addresses and ran away, he pursued her and surrounded the whole human race on the top of a hill called Phun-lu-buk, said to be far away to the north-east. As the water kept on rising, to save themselves the people threw Ngai-ti into the flood, which thereupon receded. It was the running off of this water which cut up the surface of the world, which Chhura had levelled, into the deep valleys and high hill ranges of which the whole world as known to the ancestors of the Lushais consisted.

(B) **Ngaitei Saved Her Native Village (From B. Lalthangliana)**

A young orphan called Ngaitei had to live with her grandmother who used to take her to the forest to collect yam. Her father was drowned in a lake where they looked for yam and as she was thirsty she went to the lake. She did not know what made her to shout "Ho" but as soon as she had said that her father, the ghost appeared and took her away. Soon her grandmother knew that she was lost. She went out in search of her. On seeing a red deer she asked:

"Could you tell me where Ngaitei is?"

"Sure, Granny, she is now at her father's place"

She went on and met a partridge and told her to go to the place where the ghost of Ngaitei's father lived. At last she got there. Ngaitei's father at first was reluctant to return the girl. The old woman therefore had to promise to send back the girl to him soon. But the given promise was not to be kept.

The ghost became angry and caused a great flood. Threatening even to drown the village where Ngaitei lived. People got alarmed and threw her cloth in the flood. The flood subsided a little. Then it swelled again. People got alarmed and threw little Ngaitei herself in the flood and it subsided forever. People were sad and they had a song in her remembrance:

Dear Ngaitei, we have you to offer,

To appease the flood's anger.

You are now with your father dear.

And that would make both of you happy, we are sure.

But Ngaitei, we still miss you much,

And we want you to know as such.

(C) **Ngaiteii (From Laltluangliana)**

In olden days there was once a comely young orphan girl named Ngaiteii who lived in a village with her grandmother. They used to dig for yams in their jhum which did not have much water and which was now said to be haunted by the ghost of Ngaiteii's father. They were both digging for yams one day when Ngaiteii said she felt very thirsty. Her granny fetched her some water to drink from the pool.

However, she complained of feeling thirsty again a little while afterwards. Her granny told her to go and drink from the pool herself this time, but warned her to be very careful and never on any account utter the word “HOW”. When she reached the pool and saw its dark waters, curiosity got the better of her and she called out “HOW” and no sooner had she done so than she toppled into the well.

As a considerable time elapsed without Ngaiteii returning her granny was worried about what must have occurred; so she went down to look for her.

On the way to the pool she met a pair of red deer and asked them, “Oh! Parents of Khite, (Khite-the young of red deer) have you seen my grand daughter, Ngaiteii?” They replied:

“Yes we saw her on the other side of the Tuipui and Tiau rivers, where Ngaiteii’s father has taken her.”

So, she later met a pair of partridges and on questioning them they answered exactly as the red deer had done.

At length she arrived at the great pool and on seeing Ngaiteii there, she also jumped in.

“Where is your father, child?” She enquired. And Ngaiteii said he had gone to work in the form of a serpent but would be back in the evening.

He came back in due time and after he had changed into human form, Ngaiteii’s granny said she would take the girl back to be with her.

“You may do so,” her father agreed, “but only for a few days, mind, as I am quite lonely here and want her to stay with me.”

Ngaiteii had no intentions, however, of sharing a lonely life with her father in the gloomy waters of the deep pool; so she never bothered her head about returning from the village.

Her father at last became impatient at her continued absence and demanded her return by suddenly causing the surrounding areas to overflow with with angry sounds of water "Ngai…ngai…ngai" rising from the rushing waters. The entire village was about to be submerged. Knowing the demand when some one threw a piece of cloth belonging to Ngaiteii into the waters the flood subsided.

However, after a short interval the waters commenced rising again and on this occasion Ngaiteii's comb was thrown in and the flood abated.

This proved but a short respite, however, as the waters started swelling rapidly once again to an alarming extent and with much greater turbulence. The dismayed people then realized that Ngaiteii's father would not rest content unless Ngaiteii herself was returned to him.

It seems that there was no course left to save the whole village from total destruction other than to sacrifice Ngaiteii to the floods, and this the sorely distressed people were reluctantly compelled to do, although the girl was loved by everyone.

Immediately after Ngaiteii was swallowed up by the raging waters, the floods subsided, with equal rapidity, and from that day onwards the village has never had to suffer from even a single high flood over all the years.

The people of the village shed bitter tears over Ngaiteii's sad fate for long afterwards and she is yet remembered in this sorrowful song:

Dearest Ngaiteii, we pray to you,

The anger of the southern sky,

And the heavily rushing waters high,

Have now been stayed and calmed, dear;

You saved us all Ngaiteii, yes, you,

So do not suffer any more, do not fear,

Dearest Ngaiteii …. Oh dear….

The above haunting lines in memory of Ngaiteii are still being sung by children in the Mizo villages when they enjoy moonlight nights.

II. (A) **Rimenhoiyi (From Shakespear)**

The following tale is interesting as showing the great prestige the Tipperah chief enjoyed among the Lushais, who call him "Rengpui." There are many versions of this tale, some of which are very long. I have been obliged to abridge it considerably.

Rimenhoiyi married Zawlthlia. Their house was of iron. They had an eight-fold iron door. They beautified the inside with iron and brass things. They also had a window (i.e., Zawlthlia was Thangchhuah) and a platform to sit on—in fact they wanted for nothing.

Rimenhoiyi planted flowers, but there was one flower she had not, called "nipuipar"(bright sun flower—a creeper with scarlet flowers). When her husband was about to go in search of it he said to her, "Please don't go outside the house," and having filled the brass vessels with enough water to last her many days, he went off. However, the supply ran short and the lady went to the stream to wash, and one of her hairs was carried down and swallowed by a fish, which was caught by the cook of the king near the mouth of the river; and from out of the fish the cook pulled this immensely long hair, and it filled a winnowing basket. The king sent for the owner of the hair, and after many episodes she was brought to him. Zawlthlia returning found his wife gone, but with the help of the domestic animals he traced her, and, on arriving at the foreign king's village he saw slaves fetching water ; and, ascertaining that it was for the new queen, he put one of the nipuipar into the vessel, so Rimenhoiyi knew he had arrived. According to one version, they resorted to the same subterfuge that Abraham and Sarah employed when entering Egypt and lived happily till, the king's suspicion being aroused, Zawlthlia was summarily slain.

According to another, Rimenhoiyi married them both, but as she showed a preference for Zawlthlia the king killed him.

With the help of a wise woman learned in charms Zawlthlia was brought to life in a more beautiful form, and the king was so struck by the improvement in his appearance that he asked to be allowed to undergo the same treatment, and was duly killed, but, unfortunately for him, was by some accident restored to life in the shape of a dog; but in this shape he seems to have found more favour in the fickle fair one's eyes, and a child called Uithovi was born, who, being very poor, begged for some land of Zawlthlia, who had become king of the Tipperahs, and was told to take as much as a buffalo hide measured. By cutting the hide into a very thin strip he was able to measure a considerable area of ground, but, not content with this, he voyaged far till he reached the place where money was to be found, and he became very prosperous. "Nevertheless it was said that to the present day Kumpinu (the Company's Mother—i.e., the late Queen), who is a descendant of Uithovi's, cannot get the better of Rengpui (the Rajah of Tipperah). If the Sahibs fight against Rengpui, all their crops fail, and much sickness occurs among them. Pathian once threw down a cannon from the sky, and a great number of Kumpinu's sepoys tried to move it, but could not, while a few of Rengpui's men were able to drag it away."

(B) **Rimenhawihi (From B. Lalthangliana)**

Zawlthlia had a wife who was the most beautiful woman called Rimenhawihi. Her hair was exceptionally long. She wanted to have a look at her self very often and she went to the river several times a day. One day at the river bank one of her hair got loose and without her knowledge was carried down stream by the river current. A big fish swallowed it and it was only one strand of hair, it filled the entire stomach of the fish. A fisherman caught the fish and when he cut open its belly he found the wonderfully long hair.

He went to the king and presented that long hair to his majesty who guessed correctly that a beautiful woman must live somewhere up the fine stream. Without having seen the woman he fell in love with her. He sent his men to investigate. Searching on both sides of the river they

slowly went up stream and came to a house built of metal. Rimenhawihi shut all doors and remained inside because Zawlthlia was absent. The kings men knocked at the door to gain entrance to the house. But she did not allow them to come inside. They asked:

"Who are you"

"An ordinary woman who eats only vegetables."

They went back to report it to their king. He ordered:

"Go back and find her name."

They appeared at her door again and asked for her name. She said it was Rimenhawihi but it was too long to remember. They went back and they could remember only "men" part. The king insisted that he must get the full name. They came again and this time they could give the full name of the woman to their king. Then the king ordered them to bring the woman. But she remained inside the house and refused to open the iron doors. Some men went up the roof and from there they dropped fruits. At first she ignored them. When they started dropping fruit of good taste and sweet smell she could no longer remain inside. She came out to collect them and a man got a chance to take hold of her lovely hair. She would not allow any harm done to her hair and she opened the door to let the kings men come in. They prepared to take her away and she took a skein of thread to mark the way she went. Then she also told her pet animals to tell her husband when he came back to follow the track to get her back.

Zawlthlia came back home and the pets told him what had happened and what he should do to see her again. The dog said that the kidnappers went west and the way would be marked by a thread. He followed the thread and at night fall he caught the kidnappers asleep at a camp in the forest. He could easily kill all of them and rescued his wife. They lived happily ever after.

(C) **Rimenhawii (From Laltluangliana)**

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful woman. Her name was Rimenhawii and she had a handsome husband called Zawlthlia. Zawlthlia was very proud of his wife, and Rimenhawii was equally conscious of her beauty. Her charms and beauty was further enhanced by her beautiful hair which was the envy of all the girls, and many people would come from distant villages to have a look at it.

One day, as she was having a bath in a river, one strand of her hair came out and was carried down the river. After a while, the hair was swallowed by a fish. The hair was so long that the fish suffocated and died. Down the river in a distant land, there was a king. This king was very fond of fish and he would send his servants daily to catch fish from the river.

One day, his servants brought the fish which had consumed Rimenhawiis hair. When the fish was cut open, one strand of very long hair was found inside. They were greatly astonished and they took the hair to the king. The king was equally astonished and intrigued, and he decided to find out the owner of the hair.

After carefully enquiring from his servants how they came by it, the king instructed them to follow the course of the river upstream till they found the proud possessor of the hair.

He was sure that the owner was living somewhere up the hills and the hair must have floated down the river. After many days of travelling up the course of the river, they reached the village of Rimenhawii. She was at home, but her husband was away visiting relatives in some other village.

Before going on this journey, the careful husband Zawlthlia had built a strong house, and had locked Rimenhawii inside the house so that no one could see her, far less abduct her in his absence.

The visitors from the plains were at a loss about what to do. They dared not return home without at least ascertaining the name of the lady. So they sang to her.

O thou, dweller in the house of steel and brass

Tell us what thy name is.

Rimenhawii replied, also in a song, which means

No name, no name have I,

I live on pure water,

I live on pure vegetables.

So, the messengers committed this song to memory, returned to their king and told him what they had seen and heard. The king was not satisfied and he sent them back to get her name. The Messengers came back and repeated the same request to Rimenhawii. Feminine pride in her beauty overtook her and she gave them her real name, saying:

I am Rimenhawii,

Also called as Menchanghawii

For the messenger, Rimenhawii or Menchanghawii was too big a word to remember and they committed to memory only the syllable “men”. This did not satisfy the king. He knew that “men” was not the full word but only a part of it.

Accordingly, he asked them to go again and not to come back without the full name of the lady. And on this occasion, the king told them to fetch the lady irrespective of whether she had a husband or not.

The messengers took with them all kinds of delicacies, sweets and fruits and went back to Rimenhawii. This time too her husband was away.

However, there was a small hole in the roof for light, and through this hole, the messengers passed down the delicacies they had brought with them. Rimenhawii was completely indifferent

in the beginning but when an orange was thrown in, the temptation was too strong and she stood up to catch the orange.

As she stood up, they caught her and pulled her out to be taken to their king.

Interestingly, as she was being carried away, Rimenhawii told her dog and hen as to how her husband could trace her. When he returned and found his wife gone, Zawlthlia enquired his neighbours if they knew anything about what had happened to her, but no one could tell him.

Disappointed on all sides and in great dismay, he turned to his dog and hen who told him the marks by which he could trace his wife. Rimenhawii had left a trail of cotton thread as she was being carried away; and following this trail, Zawlthlia overtook the Kings servants, killed them and returned home with his wife.

Once again they lived happily ever after and were blessed with many children. The story of Rimenhawii may lead one to believe that this was the beginning of the contact between the people of the plains and of the Mizos.

III. (A) **The Tale of Granddaddy Bear and the Monkey (From Shakespear).**

The Monkey made a swing and was always swinging in it. One day Granddaddy Bear saw him and said, "Oh, Monkey, let me have a swing." The Monkey replied, "Wait a minute till I have hung it more securely." Then he climbed up and bit the cane nearly through and jumped down again crying out, "Come on, Granddaddy Bear, have a swing." The bear got in and swung, the cane broke, and he fell down. The Monkey, intending to eat him, had gone and fetched some cooked rice (to eat with the bear's flesh). But though Granddaddy Bear fell down he was not killed. The Monkey, being terribly afraid, said, "Oh, Granddaddy Bear, hearing you had fallen I brought some rice for you," and gave him all he had brought.

(B) **The Swing and the Monkey (From B Lalthangliana)**

A monkey made a swing and spent almost all his time riding it with a song. A bear saw it and asked for permission to try it. The monkey told it to wait while it checked the ropes so that they could stand the weight of the bear. In fact it bit them and made them weak. When the bear rode the swing the ropes snapped and it fell. The monkey thought the bear was dead. It had a broth ready and with an intention to take it with bear meat it went to what it thought was the remains of the bear. As soon as it came close to it, the monkey knew that it was mistaken. The bear was alive.

"I'm so sorry that you had this trifle accident, take this hot broth".

"Well, we haven't any cup to put the broth, have we?"

"Get your belly flattened and extend it a little. I shall pour the broth on it".

The broth was very hot indeed. When poured on the belly of the bear, it burned all the hair on it.

(C) **Monkey and Swing (From Laltluangliana)**

Once upon a time there lived a monkey whose great delight was to swing merrily in the air, even at the cost of his meals.

One day while he was swinging away with his little eyes blinking, looking here and there, the whites showing clearly when in ecstasy he would be swinging high and then low, a big cumbersome bear appeared near the swing.

So, seeing the joy which the monkey was experiencing, he asked the monkey,

"Monkey, will you please let me sit on your swing that I may enjoy myself for a little".

But the monkey, when he climbed to the top, secretly gnawed through the ropes in such a way that the swing ropes would not stand much weight.

However, when the monkey came down he said to the bear in quite an offhand way:

“Now I think you can have a try”.

So the monkey started to prepare for himself a big meal, saying to himself:

“Soon the bear will swing too high and come down with such a bang that he will surely kill himself, and he will make for me a very sweet meat, as all bears taste so right and sweet”.

Certainly it was not long before he heard the bear falling and he went at once to the swing only thinking of the meal he hoped to have very shortly.

When he got there, instead of finding a bear which was dead, he found one which was furious and angry. To try and hide his discomfiture the monkey said to the bear:

“I heard you falling from my swing and so I came running to help you and have brought some food”.

However, the bear had seen through the monkey’s wicked device. Lunging at the monkey he only just missed him, but the monkey had to make off up to the tree tops and there wait while he saw the bear eat up the carefully prepared meal he had intended for himself and neither could he now swing.

So the bear adequately turned the tables on the monkey for his wickedness.

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There are two folktales which are found in J. Shakespear’s collection and in B. Lalthangliana’s alone which is not included in Laltluangliana Khiangte’s book. These are:

1. Chawngchilhi/ Chawngchilhi and the Serpent
2. Origin of Tuichong river/Origin of the Tuaichawng river.

IV. (A) **Chhawng-chili and the Rulpui (From Shakespear)**

Once upon a time there was a girl called Chhawng-chili, who was in her father's jhum. At the bottom of the jhum in a hollow tree a snake had its nest, and the snake loved Chhawng-chili very much. Whenever they went to the jhum she used to send her younger sister to call the snake, who used to come up and coil itself up in Chhawng-chili's lap. The little sister was very much afraid of the snake and did not dare tell her father. When the girls were going to the jhum, their parents always used to wrap up some rice and vegetables for them to take with them. On account of her fear of the snake, the little sister could not eat anything. Then her sister and the snake ate up all the rice and the vegetables, and the little sister stayed in the jhum house all day and got very thin, and her parents said to her, "Oh, little one, why are you getting so thin?" but she always said, "Oh, father, I can't tell you"; but her parents pressed her to tell them, and at last she said, "My sister and the snake make love always ; as soon as we get to the jhum she says to me, ' Call him to me,' and I call him, and he comes up and coils himself up on her lap, and I am so frightened that I cannot eat anything, and that is why I am so thin." So they kept Chhawng-chili at home, and her father and younger sister went to the jhum, and her father dressed himself up to resemble Chhawng-chili, but he put his dao by his side; then the little sister called the snake, who came up quickly and curled itself up in her father's lap, and he with one blow cut it in two, and then they returned to the village. On the next day Chhawng-chili and her sister went to the jhum and her little sister called the snake, but her father had killed it. So they came back to their house, and found their father lying on the door just inside the door sill. Chhawng-chili said, "Get up, father, I want to scrape the mud off my feet" (on the door sill), but her father would not move. So Chhawng-chili scraped off the mud from her feet, and stepped over the sill, and her father struck up and killed her. In her stomach there were about 100 small snakes. They killed them and killed them, but one escaped and hid under a dry patch of mithan dung, and grew up and used to eat people, and when it got bigger it wriggled into the "rulchawm kua"—i.e., "feed snake hole"—and people of all villages used to feed it. After a time it was not content with goats and pigs, but demanded children. One day a Chin who was travelling noticed his host and hostess weeping, and on asking the reason was told it was the day for giving a child to the snake. "I will kill the

snake," he replied, and, being provided with a goat, he slew it, and wrapped its flesh round his dao and forearm and offered it to the ralpui. When his forearm had been swallowed, by a quick turn of his wrist he disembowelled the monster. The place where this took place is on the Aijal-Champhai road, some forty miles from Aijal. The Biate or Bete claim to have been the people who fed the snake.

(B) **Chawngchilhi**

At their slashed and burned cultivation plot, Chawngchilhi and her younger sister worked. They were given food by their parents to eat during the course of their work. Yet, the young girls got more and more thin. They knew it was starvation and they checked why this happened. The young girl said that the elder sister had a snake for a lover and when she sang a song the snake appeared and ate all their food. The father was angry, he went to the cultivation plot with the young daughter. There he told the girl to sing and entice the snake to come.

When it came, the father cut it into three pieces and killed it. They did not tell that to Chawngchilhi. Next day she went to their cultivation plot and called the snake by a song as usual. It did not come and she went to look around. She found her lover being cut into three pieces. She brought these pieces home. Their father was sleeping at the entrance of the house, one piece of dead snake fell on the chest of her father. He got up with anger and cut up Chawngchilhi into several pieces. As she was killed, several small snakes came out of her womb. Her father also killed them except one. It escaped into a crack in the earth and it grew into a big snake. It swallowed chickens. Then it swallowed dogs.

The villagers one day tried to catch it by a noose. But it slipped into a hole. People tried to draw it out but they failed to do so. At last they dug up the hole and cut it to several pieces. The pieces were then cooked and eaten. Its head was given to a widow. She put it in a pot and boiled it. When she touched it with a ladle it shouted to her to be careful so as not to spoil its eyes with it. She was so frightened with it that she threw it out. It fell on a field for gourds and one gourd grew as big as a house. When night fell, cocks warned by crowing that all strangers should leave

that village. Soon there was a big land slide from the nearby hill and except the widow, all villagers who ate the snake got killed.

V. (A) **Origin of Tuichong River (From Shakespear)**

As a sample of the second class of tale, the following story regarding the origin of the Tui-chong river, which joins the Kurnaphuli, near Demagri, may be taken :—

Nine miles from Demagri, on the Lungleh road, the traveller has to cross the Tui-chong river, one of the largest tributaries of the Kurnaphuli, on which Chittagong stands. This river, according to the Lushais, owes its origin to the self-denial of a girl called Tui-chongi, who, with her little sister Nuengi, was walking on the hills whence the river rises. It was April, and the sun blazed down on them. Nuengi began to cry for water. "How can I get you water on the top of a hill? Don't you know that all the springs are dry, for are not the jhums ready to be burnt?" "Water, water, or I shall die," wailed Nuengi. "Would you rather have water than me?" asked Tui-chongi. "If I don't get water, I shall die, and then of what use would you be to me?"replied the spoilt child. So Tui-chongi, to satisfy her youngest sister's thirst, changed herself into a river, and Nuengi drank and was satisfied. But the water flowed down among the hills and burst its way into the country of the Bengalis. The king of the Bengalis was astonished to see so mighty a river flowing past his palace, and sent some of his people to find out whence it came. They journeyed many days, till at length they reached the source of the stream, and there sat Nuengi, who, now that her thirst was satisfied, would gladly have had her sister back again to show her the way home. The explorers were astonished to find so beautiful a maiden sitting thus in the middle of the jungle, and decided that it would be wise to take her back to their master, who liked pretty girls. So Nuengi was added to the harem of the king of Chittagong, and in time became the mother of a most lovely boy. The king's chief wife, on seeing the child, thought to herself, "If my lord sees this jungle woman's brat, he will assuredly love her more than me who am childless." So she had the child thrown into the river, which flowed under the palace

windows, and frightened Nuengi into keeping silence on the matter. Tui-chongi, however, in spite of the change in her circumstances, remembered her little sister, and cherished the child so that he grew and throve. In the same way six more children were born and thrown into Tui-chongi's fostering arms. When they were grown up Tuichongi told them the circumstances of their birth, and sent them to dance on the roof of their father's palace, who, hearing the noise, came out to see the cause of the disturbance. When he saw seven handsome young men he was much astonished, and asked them who they were. "We are your sons," they replied. "Why do you lie to me?" said the king; "liars have short lives in my kingdom." "Nay, O king, we lie not; we are Nuengi's sons"; and they told him their story. So the king smote off the head of the bad queen, and installed Nuengi in her place.

(B) **Origin of the Tuaichawng River (From Lalthangliana)**

The little sister Nuengi was somewhat a spoilt child because her elder sister Tuaichawngi always tried to please her at any cost. One day they were walking on a ridge of water divide where the rivers have their sources. It was a very hot day. Suddenly Nuengi demanded:

> “Water! Water! I shall die of thirst.”
>
> “Dear child, wait until we get to a village over there.”
>
> “I can’t wait till then.”
>
> “Look dear. I can change myself into a river and you can have your fill of water. Remember I shall then be lost to you forever.”
>
> “Remember without water, I shall die and you being human or river is nothing to me.”
>
> “Drink water and be satisfied. Good bye.”

So saying big sister Tuaichawngi became the Tuaichawng river and flowed down to the land of Bengal. The king of that land was much surprised and sent a big man to find out where it started

and how it started. When they came to the source they found Nuengi, a frightened child. They took her back to their king who took her as a member of his harem.

Some years later she was blessed with a son. The chief Queen who had no child, was afraid that Nuengi would become the king's favourite. She let one of her servants to take the baby and throw it in the river. Tuichawngi still remembered her young sister very well and knew that the boy now discarded in the river was her son. The boy was saved and brought up into manhood. Six more sons were discarded in the river and they were all saved and brought up together. Tuaichawngi then told them that they were the sons of the king and they were sent to dance on the palace roof. The king heard the commotion on the roof and on investigation he knew that they his seven sons of Nuengi. As a result the chief Queen was executed and Nuengi was made as the chief Queen.

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There are three other folktales that are found in all the three collections of A. G. McCall's, B. Lalthangliana's and Laltluangliana Khiangte's books. These are:

1. How the Mushroom Started/ Two Sisters Went in Search of Cucumbers/ Two Sisters Go in Search of Cucumber.
2. Chemtatrawta/ Man who Sharpened Swords/ Chemtatrawta
3. Monkey and Bear/ The Swing and the Monkey/ Monkey and Swing

VI. (A) **How the Mushroom Started (From McCall)**

Two sisters together were searching larger cucumbers in a field. The younger picked up a number the other sister seemed unsuccessful. So the elder asked the younger to give her some,

but the younger said she wished to take them home so that all could eat them with their own parents. This greatly upset the elder sister who thereupon called on a clay mound in the soil to swallow her up:-

"Swallow me up, O strong clay mound,

my little sister no cucumber can give

swallow me up, O strong clay mound"

Then gradually she actually did sink until at last only the top of her head could be seen.

Shortly after when the other sister returned home and her parents came in from the fields, they said to her "Where is your sister?"

The younger sister replied truthfully that she had allowed herself to be swallowed up in the ground because she had refused to give her a cucumber. The parents were of course very distressed and told her to go back at once and try to call her to return. So she went calling:-

"Sister, sister, please do come back,

Mother will buy you rich amber beads

Father will buy you great brazen bells."

Her sister then came out rising higher and higher till only her knees remained.

Unhappily just at this stage a cry was raised that the head hunters were coming and so they wrenched at the elder sister but this caused her to lose her legs which were left in the ground, turning into mushrooms which grow in this way to this day.

REMEMBRANCE FOR POSTERITY

We must love our parents so much we would do anything for them, but we must be over-careful we do nothing which might bring unhappiness to them, no matter what we may feel ourselves.

(B) **Two Sisters Went in Search of Cucumbers (From Lalthangliana)**

Of the two sisters who went in search of cucumbers, only the younger sister found plentiful of them. The elder sister asked her young sister to give her one cucumber as she was feeling very thirsty. She asked repeatedly but was refused. So she sang a request to the Earth to swallow her. The rich soil where the ants made their hill actually welled up and enveloped her. The young sister ran home in fright and told the parents what had happened. They sent her back to the forest to bring back her elder sister. She went and sang that their parents had bought for her sister many brass ornaments so that she should come home and collect them. Very slowly she emerged from the earthen hill that covered her. Before she was totally free the young sister stopped singing. Part of the old sister's feet was left in the soil. From those remains, mushrooms grew out every year.

(C) **Two Sisters Go in Search of Cucumber (From Laltluangliana)**

Long long ago, two sisters together were searching for larger cucumbers in a field. The younger sister picked up a good number of cucumbers but the other sister seemed unsuccessful even after a long search.

So, the elder asked the younger to give her some, but the younger said she wished to take them home so that they could eat them with their own parents.

This greatly upset the elder sister who thereupon called on a clay in the soil to swallow her up:

> Swallow me up, O strong clay mount,
>
> My little sister no cucumber can give,
>
> Swallow me up, O strong clay mount.

Then gradually she actually did sink until at last only the top of her head could be seen.

Shortly after when the other sister returned home and her parents came in from the fields, they asked her, “Where is your sister?”

The younger sister replied truthfully that she had allowed herself to be swallowed up in the ground because she had refused to give a cucumber.

The parents were of course very distressed and told her to go at once to try to call her to return. So she went calling:

Sister, sister, please do come back,

Mother will buy you rich amber beads

Father will buy you great brazen bells.

Her sister then came out rising higher and higher till only her knees remained.

So, unhappily just at this stage a cry was raised that the head hunters were coming. So they wrenched at the elder sister but this caused her to lose her legs which were left in the ground, turning into mushrooms which grow in this way to this day.

And believe it or not, it is said, that was how mushrooms came into existence.

VII. (A) **Chemtatrawta (From McCall)**

Once upon a time there was a man called CHEMTATRAWTA. He had gone down to the river and seeing a good useful looking stone he sat himself down nearby to sharpen up his dao. But he had not been there long before he felt a terrific pain and he found that a lobster had pinched one of his testicles, and he became infuriated. He seized a big bamboo nearby, up which a KHAWM creeper was climbing, but this so enraged the creeper that it stung a wild fowl with its vicious fruit, and the wildfowl became wild with fury also and within no time had scattered away the whole of the unfortunate ants’ nest, and the ants in desperation, being in no mood for courtesy,

nipped the testicles of a wild boar, who at once, in his pain uprooted a plaintain tree which, crashing down, disturbed a peaceful bat having its daily snooze and seeing an elephant the bat pitched right on to the elephant's very trunk, and this so upset the elephant's dignity that he rushed at the house of a poor old woman, trampling it down underfoot like a matchbox, terrifying the poor old woman so much that she was unable to avoid leaving her excrement too near the village fountain water supply.

The village people, now observing the old woman's indiscretion, surrounded her in anger and called on her say was that [*sic*] the elephant had pulled down her house to explain that she had done such a vile thing, but all she could and this had upset her [*sic*]. So they went along to the elephant and asked the elephant why he had trampled on the woman's house and the elephant quite quickly said because the bat had actually alighted on his nose, while the bat explained that he had been disturbed by the boar who said he had been bitten on the testicles by the ants who said they would have done nothing if they had been left alone by the wild boar who said he had been bitten on the testicles by the ants who said they would have done nothing if they had been left alone by the wild fowl who said that he had only been upset because of the cruel assault of the Khawm creeper who blamed Chemtatrawta who then was also very angry and exclaimed that he only cut down the bamboo on account of the pain caused him by the lobster who had nipped his testicle. So it came about that at last the lobster was called on by all to explain what he had meant by such an insolent attack.

The lobster now found himself in an awkward position and murmered hesitantly "Er-Er-Er- if you put me into the fire I will become red, and if you put me back into the water again I will become pale".

So the people not being satisfied put him into a fire and the lobster became redder and redder – so they put him into the water and he became paler and paler but he was able very soon to recover from the heat so swam off again trying to make for his river home, but before he could

reach it the men chased him and with a hnathial[28] stick tried to kill him. Although they could not do this the unfortunate lobster was so injured by the hnahthial stick that he died. But before he actually died he cursed the hnahthial stick saying: "Curse on you for your cruelty to me – let you die down before again your seeds can mature", which may account for the scarcity of such plants to this day and for the fact that they do not mature before they die down.

REMEMBRANCE FOR POSTERITY

Take care of our actions. If we make a mistake beware lest we put others to trouble. Our actions are often reflected on many far beyond our realisation.

(B) **Man Who Sharpened Swords (*Chemtatrawta)* (From Lalthangliana)**

One day a man who sharpened swords sat by the bank of a stream and started sharpening a sword. While he was thus engaged, a prawn pinched him on his testicles. With anger he cut a creeper that climbed up a bamboo near him. As it was a gourd creeper, one gourd fell with his stroke and it hit a jungle fowl. The fowl in anger destroyed an ant hill. The ant in anger hit the wild pig's private parts. The wild pig in anger unearthed the roots of a banana plant where a bat lived. The bat in anger got inside the trunk of an elephant. The elephant in anger destroyed the hut of a widow. The widow in anger dirtied the stream used by all villagers. The matter was reported to the headman and he traced the culprit who made the water dirty. He found the widow. Then she explained that it was the elephant which made her angry. The elephant in turn said that it was the bat which made him angry. The bat in turn said that it was the pig, the pig, the ant, the ant the fowl, the fowl the gourd, the gourd the sword sharpener, and the sword sharpener the prawn. At last the prawn was asked why it did that mischief. It could give no suitable answer. But it gathered up all its wits and said quickly.

"Look, I am a strange creature. Put me near fire and my complexion turns red. Put me in water, it becomes white."

[28] Hnahthial – Zingiberacae, Phyrnium Capitatum (Parry)

Out of curiosity the headman first put it near a fire. It turned red. Next he was put in the stream. It turned white and it ran to hide in the rocks. Villagers thrust sticks inside all the cracks in the rocks. So now prawns are ugly with distorted faces.

(C) **Chemtatrawta (From Laltluangliana)**

Once upon a time there was a man called CHEMTATRAWTA (Sharpener of dao). He had gone down to a nearby stream and seeing a useful looking stone he sat himself down near it to sharpen up his dao.

But he had not been there long before he felt a severe pain and he found that a lobster had pinched one of his testicles and he was infuriated.

He seized a big bamboo nearby, upon which Kha-um creeper was climbing, this so enraged the creeper that it struck a wild fowl with its vicious fruit.

The wild-fowl became wild with fury likewise and scratched furiously at the earth with its foot. Within no time it had scattered an ant nest, and the ants in desperation being in no mood for courtesy, nipped the testicles of a wild boar, who at once, in his pain uprooted a plaintain tree which, crashing down, disturbed a peaceful bat having its daily snooze.

The bat seeing an elephant perched right on to the elephant's very trunk, and this so upset the elephant's dignity that he rushed at the house of a poor old woman, trampling it under foot and smashing it like a match-box.

So, terrifying the old woman, who out of anger and fright left her excrement too near the village water supply.

The villagers observing the old woman's indiscretion, surrounded her in anger and called on her to explain why she had done such a vile thing. So she told them what the elephant had done to her house. The villagers then went to the elephant and asked the elephant why he had trampled

on the woman's house and the elephant quite quickly said because the bat had actually alighted on his nose.

While the bat explained that he had been disturbed by the boar who said he had been bitten on the testicles by the ants, who said they would have done nothing if they had been left alone by the wild fowl who said that he had only been upset because of the cruel assault of the Khaum creeper, who blamed Chemtatrawta who then was also very angry and exclaimed that he only cut down the bamboo on account of the pain caused to him by the lobster who had nipped his testicle.

So it came about that at last the lobster was called on to explain what he had meant by such an insolent assault/act, which resulted in all those problems.

The lobster now found himself in an awkward position and murmured hesitantly "Ehmm-Ehmm-Ehmmm- if you put me into the fire I will become red, and if you put me back into the water again I will become pale."

So, the people not being satisfied put him into a fire and the lobster became redder and redder as he predicted.

Then they put him again into the water. He became paler and paler. The lobster very soon was able to recover from the painful test and so he swam off again trying to enjoy his river home.

Here comes the story of Chemtatrawta. But in some corner some one said that before the lobster could reach its home, the men chased him and with a Hnahthial stick they tried to kill him. Although they could not do this the unfortunate lobster was so injured by the Hnahthial stick that he died. But before he actually died he cursed the Hnahthial stick saying:

"Curse on you for your cruelty to me – you will die before your seeds can mature" which may account for the scarcity of such plants to this day and for the fact that they do not mature before they die.

VII. (A) **Monkey and Bear (From McCall)**[29]

Once upon a time there lived a monkey whose great delight was to swing merrily in the air, even at the cost of his meals. One day while he was swinging away with his little eyes blinking, looking here and there, the whites showing up clearly when in ecstacy he would be a swinging high then low, a big cumbersome bear appeared near the swing.

So, seeing the joy which the monkey was experiencing, he asked the monkey – "Monkey, will you please let me sit on your swing that I may enjoy myself for a little?"

The monkey replied quite politely: "I am afraid my swing is hardly strong enough to hold such a big man as yourself. Before you could get on I must climb up to see if it is securely fastened on to these two trees".

But the monkey, when he climbed to the top, secretly gnawed through the ropes in such a way that the swing ropes would not stand much weight. However, when the monkey came down he said to the bear in quite an off hand way: "Now I think you can have a try". So the bear got on.

As soon as the bear got on, the monkey, already counting his chicken before they hatched, started to prepare for himself a big meal, saying to himself: "Soon the bear will swing too high and come down with such a bang that he will surely kill himself, and he will make for me a sweet meal, as all bears taste so rich and sweet".

It was not long before he heard the bear falling and he at once raced to the swing only thinking of the meal he hoped to have shortly. When he got there, instead of finding a bear which was dead, he found one which was furious and angry. To try and hide his own discomfiture the monkey said to the bear: "I heard you falling from my swing and so I came running to help you and have brought some food".

[29] The two versions from B. Lalthangliana's and Laltluangliana Khiangte's books have been given in III (B) and (C)

The bear, however, had seen through the monkey's wicked device. Lunging at the monkey he only just missed him, but the monkey had to make off up to the tree tops and there wait while he saw the bear eat up the carefully prepared meal he had intended for himself and neither could he now swing. So the bear adequately turned the tables on the monkey for his wickedness.

REMEMBRANCE FOR POSTERITY

To cheat those who wish us no harm is to make trouble for ourselves needlessly.

Appendix 6

Khasi folktales that are common in more than one collection

Folktales that are common to the collections by Gurdon, Rafy and Nongkynrih:

1. The Waterfall of Ka Likai/The Leap of Ka Likai/Ka Likai

2. The Dingiei Hill/The Legend of the Iei Tree/The Seven Clans

3. Concerning the origin of the Siems of Shillong/The Goddess who came to live with Mankind (A Legend of the Shillong Peak)/The Legend of Ka Pahsyntiew

4. Why there are spots on the moon/What caused the Shadows on the Moon /The Sun and the Moon

5. "Sohpet Bneng" Hill/The Legend of Mount Sophet Bneng /The Seven Clans

6. How the dog came to live with man/How the Dog came to live with Man /Luri Lura, the Animal Fair

7. The "Thlen"/U Thlen, the Snake-Vampire/The Man-eating Serpent, U Thlen

8. U Manik Raitong and his flute/The Legend of U Raitong, the Khasi Orpheus/U Manik Raitong.

I. (A) **The Water-Fall of Ka Likai (From Gurdon)**.

The water-fall of Ka Likai is one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the Khasi hills. Its stream flows from a certain river from the village of Rangjirteh and passes by the village of Nongriat. The fall can be seen distinctly from the village of Laitkynsew. What a beautiful fall it is when viewed in the autumn. It is also a very high fall. There was in olden days in the village of Rangjirteh a woman called Ka Likai. She was a poor woman who had a husband. When she had

given birth to a child, the husband died. Whilst the child was yet a baby, she experienced much trouble in taking care of it on account of her poverty. After the child was able to walk, what a pleasure it was to her to see it growing, and able to play with other children. Then that woman married another man; but he did not love the little child, and many a time he got angry because she could not take care of him more, on account of that child.

One day when she went to carry iron ore, her husband took the child and killed it. When he had cut up the body into pieces, he prepared curry with it, and placed the curry where the mother would come and eat it. When he had finished doing so, he threw the head and the bones of the child far away, but he forgot to throw away the fingers, which he had placed in a basket where the betel-nut was kept. When the mother returned from her journey, she inquired "Where is the child?" "She has just gone somewhere, I don't know where," he said. She remained silent awhile; then she said, "Is there any rice and curry?" He said "Yes, it is ready," and went out at the same time. When she ate, she found the curry very tasty, and she thought that he had got the flesh of a young pig from someone who had performed a sacrifice. When she had finished eating, she took up the betel nut basket, but found the fingers of her child there. She shrieked and threw herself down, and then ran to the precipice and cast herself down it. All the villagers wondered, but no one ventured to prevent her as she held a *da* in her hand. From that time the waterfall was called the "Fall of Ka Likai."

(B) **The Leap of Ka Likai (From Rafy)**

"The Leap of Ka Likai " is the name given to a beautiful waterfall on the Khasi Hills, a few miles to the west of Cherrapoonjee, which, at certain points, is visible from great distances, while the roar and the echoes of its waters are to be heard for miles. The view is one of exceptional beauty, and many visitors are attracted to see it. The clear chattering stream is seen emerging from its wild mountain home, dashing over the high precipice into the shadows of a deep gorge, flinging upwards, as it falls, clouds of tremulous spray, which wreathe and coil around majestic rocks,

creating countless small rainbows which dance and quiver in a maze of palms and ferns and blossoming shrubs.

The place is so remote and so still, as if every sound had been awed into a hush, except the thunderous boom of the torrent with its distant echoes moaning and shrieking like a spirit in anguish, that the whole locality seems weird and uncanny, suggestive of terrible possibilities. This, probably, accounts for the gruesome tradition amongst the Khasis which has been associated with this waterfall from time immemorial. It runs as follows:

Once upon a time there lived a young married woman called Ka Likai, in the village of Kangjirteh, on the hill above the Falls. She and her husband lived very happily together and rejoiced in the possession of a baby girl of great beauty. The young husband died when the child was still a babe, and from that time Ka Likai's whole heart became wrapped up in the child.

She found it very hard to earn enough money to maintain them both, so she was persuaded to marry again, thinking to have her own burden lightened, and to obtain more comforts for her child.

The new husband was a selfish and a somewhat brutal man; he was exceedingly jealous of his little step-daughter, because his wife paid her so much attention, and when he found that he had been accepted as a husband by Ka Likai merely for the benefit of the child, he was so mortified that he grew to hate her and determined to do her some mischief.

He became sulky in the home and refused to go out to work, but he forced his wife to go every day, and during her absence he bullied and ill-treated the child. One day Ka Likai had to go on a long journey to carry iron ore, and this gave the cruel stepfather the opportunity he sought to carry out his evil purpose, and he killed the child. So depraved had he become and so demoniacal was his hatred, that he determined to inflict even a worse horror upon his wife; he took portions of the body and cooked them against the mother's return, and waited in silence for her coming.

When Ka Likai reached her home in the evening, she was surprised to find her husband in a seemingly kinder mood than he had shown for a long time, having cooked her supper and set it ready for her, with unusual consideration. She noticed the absence of the child, and immediately asked where she was, but the man's plausible answer that she had just gone out to play dispelled every misgiving, and she sat down to eat without a suspicion of evil.

After finishing her supper, she drew forward the betel-nut basket to prepare betel and pan to chew, according to custom after a meal. It happened that one of the hands of the murdered girl had been left by the stepfather in this basket, and the mother at once saw and recognised it. She wildly demanded the meaning of the awful discovery, whereupon the man confessed his crime, and also told her how she herself had eaten of the flesh of her own child.

The terrible and overwhelming revelation took away the mother's reason. She rose distractedly, and, running to the edge of the precipice, threw herself into the abyss. Ever since then the Falls have been called " The Leap of Ka Likai," and the doleful moans of their echoes are said to be the echoes of Ka Likai's anguished cries.

To this day, when widows with children are contemplating second marriages, they are cautioned to be careful and to use judgement, with the warning, "Remember Ka Likai".

II. (A) **The Dingiei Hill (From Gurdon)**.

Dingiei Hill is one of the highest peaks in the Khasi country, resembling in height and size the Shillong "Peak" which lies opposite and to the north of it. There are many villages on this hill belonging to the Shillong Siem. In olden days on the top of this hill grew a gigantic tree overshadowing the whole world, the name of that tree was "ka Dingiei." The Khasis came to a determination that if this tree were cut down (lit. destroyed) the world would become good and would have light, for as long as it (the tree) remained standing, the world remained dark and unfruitful. They accordingly came to an unanimous decision to fell it. When they cut (the tree)

during the day and went back next morning, they found that the marks of cutting had been obliterated. Thus they cut each day, and next morning they found that the marks had disappeared. This was the case always. Then they marveled [*sic*] why this thing was thus. They asked questions and they investigated; ka phreid (a very small bird) said "all this has happened because a tiger comes every night to (the foot of) the tree and licks the part of the tree which has been cut." Thereupon the men, having plied their axes and knives the whole day in cutting the tree (instead of carrying them away as usual), tied them to the incisions, with their edges pointing outwards. So when the tiger went as usual at night to lick the incisions, the sharp blades of the axes and knives cut his tongue. Thenceforth the tiger ceased to go to the tree; and as the tiger ceased to lick the incisions, the mark was not obliterated as before. So their work went on progressing every day until ka Dingiei fell. Thus the world received light, and cultivation throve, and there was nothing more to stand in the way of the light of the sun and the moon. It was for that reason that the name of "U Lum Dingiei" was given to the hill. Nobody knows what became of the tree, for since the time it fell its species has died out and there is no seed of it (to be found) anywhere on the earth from which it can be grown.

(B) **The Legend of the Iei Tree (From Rafy)**

Some eight or ten miles to the west of the town of Shillong is seen a prominent hill range, a place much renowned in Khasi folk-lore. It is known as the Mountain of the Iei Tree, and is a very romantic spot even in the present day, although divested of its former reputed glory. Its slopes are studded with thriving villages and cultivated fields, which appear from a distance like a bit of British landscape. At its foot the river Umiam (the wailing river) curves its dolorous way to the plains, at times leaping wildly over rugged precipices, scattering its spray in the sunshine, at other times lying almost motionless in the bosom of a valley, reflecting the beauty of myriad trees in its clear depths.

According to tradition, this hill, and the land around it, was the most fertile land in the world; broad acres lay under cultivation' and its forests yielded the largest and most valuable timber. It was also famous for the grandeur of its scenery; fairies and nymphs were said to have their haunts in its green glades, birds of lovely hues lived there and made their nests amid flowers of sweetest scent; there happy maidens loved to roam, and there young lovers met and plighted their troth. Such was the Mountain of the Iei Tree in the days of the Ancients.

On the summit of the mountain there grew a tree of fabulous dimensions—the Iei Tree—which dwarfed even the largest trees in forests. It was of a species unique, such as mankind had never known; its thick outspreading branches were so clustered with leaves that the light of the sun could not penetrate through and the earth beneath its shadow became barren and unfruitful.

The fame of the tree spread abroad and people from many lands came to see it, but there were none who dared to cut a twig or to scratch its bark, as it was commonly believed that the tree was the abode of some unknown and powerful god, to offend whom would bring destruction.

The Iei Tree continued to grow through many ages, and year by year its malevolent shadow spread further and further, and the area of the barren land increased season by season until at last it became a serious menace to the world, and the very existence of mankind was at stake. People could no longer live on the slopes of the mountain, cultivation became impossible for many miles around, and the one-time prosperous families had to wander abroad as homeless fugitives, fleeing from the ever-pursuing, ever-threatening shadow. The pathways and pleasant nooks whence of old had echoed the merry voices and laughter of children were now become the lurking-places of dragons and the prowling-grounds of savage beasts whither no man ventured to roam.

A Durbar of all mankind was summoned to consider the situation and to devise some plan to save the world from its impending doom. After long and solemn deliberations, it was resolved to mobilise a party of the bravest and most skilled wood-cutters to go into the mountain to hew down the Iei Tree so as to admit the sunlight once more to the earth. In the course of time the

wood-cutters came and entered the mountain, defying all danger and risking the possible wrath of the unknown god whom they believed to haunt the tree.

When they reached the Iei Tree, they plied their axes with skill and toiled vigorously till night came on, but the wood was so hard and so tough they only succeeded in cutting a little below the bark that day. They consoled themselves, however, by reflecting that so far there had appeared no signs of anger from the unknown god forasmuch as no misfortunes had befallen them; so they retired to rest, sanguine that by perseverance their gigantic task would in time be accomplished.

Next morning they returned early to their work, but, to their consternation, they saw that the incisions made by them the day before at the cost of so much labour were obliterated, leaving the trunk of the tree as solid and unscathed as before. Many of the woodcutters were so superstitious that they feared to approach the tree again, for they were now confirmed in their fear that the place was enchanted; but when their more stoical comrades reminded them of the great peril in which mankind stood, they plucked up courage, and for another day they toiled laboriously, only to find their work obliterated next morning.

As no personal harm had befallen any of them, the wood-cutters determined to continue their attack, but no matter how patiently they worked during the day, the tree would be healed up in the night. They grew more and more mystified and discouraged, and the strain of living in that weird region was becoming intolerable. At last they decided to return to their fellow-men, preferring to endure the foreseen doom of the shadowed world rather than face the unknown and mysterious terrors of the land of the Iei Tree.

As they sat, gloomy and disconsolate, brooding on their defeat, a little grey bird—Ka Phreit, the Khasi wren—came, chirruping and twittering, close to the wood-cutters, and she began to talk to them, urging them to keep up their courage, as she had come to help them. Now, in spite of their spiritless condition, the woodsmen could not help laughing to hear Ka Phreit—the smallest of all the birds—so impudently offering to help them—the picked wood-cutters of the world—to cut down a tree. But when the wren saw them laughing, she chirruped and twittered still louder, and

drew still nearer, and with great excitement she said, “No doubt you are great and wise, for you have been chosen for a great task. You are unable to perform it, yet when I come to offer assistance, you laugh at me. It is true that I am the smallest of all the birds, but that has not hindered me from learning the secrets of this forest, which you must also learn before you can cut down the Iei Tree".

On hearing the sage words of the wren, the woodmen felt ashamed for having laughed at her, seeing that she meant nothing but goodwill towards them ; so they got up and saluted her, and begged her pardon, and asked her to teach them the secret of the forest. Thus mollified, Ka Phreit informed them that the tree was not healed by any supernatural agency as they had supposed, but that it was U Khla, the big tiger, who came every night to lick the tree and to heal it, for he did not want it to be cut down, as its shadow made it possible for him to prowl for prey in safety.

This news cheered the wood-cutters' hearts and they lost no time in beginning another attack on the Iei Tree, and when night fell, instead of carrying their axes home as before, they planted them in the tree edge outward.

When the tiger came to lick the tree that night (all unconscious that the wren had disclosed the secret to the men), the sharp blades cut his tongue, and he fled in terror, bleeding and howling, and never more returned to hinder the work of the wood-cutters, who, now that they were able to carry on their task undisturbed, succeeded in time in cutting down the Iei Tree.

Thus Ka Phreit, the smallest of all the birds, helped mankind to bring back sunshine and prosperity to the world.

(C) **The Seven Clans (From Nongkynrih)**

In the beginning there was nothing but a vast emptiness on Earth. God had created only two beings – Ramew, the guardian spirit of Earth, and her husband Basa, who later came to be identified with the patron god of villages. The two lived happily enough for a time, but one thing

began to plague their minds: they had no children. They wanted children, wanted them intensely, because Ramew and Basa realized life without them would be terribly lonely and monotonous. They prayed to their God, U Blei, to bless them with at least a child – or two – so that their line could continue.

"O God, our Master, our Creator! O God, Giver and Keeper of Life!" they called upon him. "We have been living on Earth, absolutely alone, for many years now. While we love each other and are happy with our own company, we wish our love to be fruitful. We wish to have children, the product of our love, children who would lighten our days and ease the monotony of our existence. It doesn't seem right, O God, Keeper and Giver of Life, that the Earth you created should remain barren and empty like this. O Master Creator! We have each other now, but what about the future?"

After many such entreaties, God granted them their wish and gave them five children of great powers and accomplishments, five children that people have come to call elemental forces. The Sun was their first daughter, followed by their only son, the Moon, and three other daughters, Water, Wind and Fire. Fire was the last born, the womb-cleaning one, and it was always her duty to be at home, to cook their meals and tend to their daily needs as custom demanded.

Ramew was delighted to see her children grow up and prosper. She was particularly delighted to see how they worked at reshaping the world into a pleasant land, giving life to tall trees and beautiful flowers everywhere.

And yet, amidst all that plenty and peace, there seemed to be something wanting. That such loveliness should go untended and uncared for! That such plenty should benefit no one! It was not right, she felt. Ramew turned to God again.

"O God, our Master, our Creator! O God, Giver and Keeper of Life!" she beseeched Him. "Please forgive me if I seem ungrateful and unhappy with my lot. I am indeed contented and pleased to see my children so powerful and accomplished. They have done wonders here on Earth. They have turned it into a pleasant land of peace and plenty. There are trees and beautiful

flowers everywhere. There are fruits and plants of every kind and description. But it pains me to see that so much loveliness and abundance may one day go to waste, with no one to benefit from them. Because, my God, my Creator, my children, though bestowed with outstanding gifts, powers and accomplishments, are yet ill-equipped to look after all that they have created. The Sun and the Moon are too busy roaming the universe, tending to their myriad duties. Water has its limitations and cannot travel the world freely. Wind is not suited for caretaking on her own, nor is Fire. Both of them can run wild if not properly tended. You see, my Lord, we need someone who would not only be the heir to all this bounty but someone who would be a caretaker of all these creations and watch over all my children, so that they do not become excessively wayward."

God, who understood the yearning of Ramew and who had watched her labour hard and long to make the world a fitting place for her life, promised to indulge her wishes. He issued a decree declaring two powerful spirits of the mountains as the guardians of Earth.

But instead of seeing to the welfare of the many living things, these sibling spirits began to tussle for power. This resulted in a terrible fratricidal battle, the scars of which can be seen till today.

Responding to the complaints of Ramew against the mountain spirits, God then placed the responsibility of ruling Earth on animals, with the Tiger as the presiding administrator. But this also did not work as the Tiger began to rule like a despotic overlord and encouraged the law of "might is right" everywhere.

When, eventually, matters went out of control and degenerated into a state of pandemonium, Ramew once more raised her complaints with God and pleaded with Him for wise and conscientious overseers who would be a blessing on and not a curse to life on Earth.

God, who is just and benevolent, listened with sympathy to the pleas of Ramew and came to the conclusion that none but the sixteen clans living in Heaven would be fitting caretakers of Earth. Accordingly, he summoned the greatest council ever held in Heaven to elect the future guardians of Earth. After days of careful deliberation, God eventually declared that seven of the sixteen

clans living in Heaven should descend to Earth, to till the land, to populate the wilderness, to rule and govern and be the crown of all creation. And from then on they would be known as the "Hynniew Trep", or the Seven Huts, the Seven Families, the seven Clans, who would later become the ancestors of the seven sub-tribes of the Khasi people, encompassing the Khynriam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Maram, Lyngngam and the now never-heard-of Diko.

God had provided for happiness on Earth, endowing the soil with riches and the fruits of plenty through the children of Ramew, then made a covenant with the Seven Clans and as a token of that covenant, He planted a divine tree on a sacred mount called Lum Sohpet Bneng, which served as the Golden Ladder between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Man. This covenant declared that so long as the Seven Clans adhered to the three principles of *Ka Tip Briew Tip Blei*, *Ka Tip Kur Tip Kha* and *Ka Kamai ia ka Hok*, that is, so long as they were secure in the Knowledge of Man and God, in the Knowledge of one's Maternal and Paternal Relations, and so long as they lived on Earth in such a way as to earn Righteousness, they would never be left alone, but could come and go as they pleased between Heaven and Earth, through the Golden Ladder at Lum Sohpet Bneng – literally, the Mount of Heaven's Navel. The mountain is so called because it acted as an umbilical cord between God and Man, for even as a child is joined with the mother through this thread of flesh and blood, so also is Man joined with God.

Everything was now well with the world. And as long as Man remembered God and his divine decree, as long as he behaved in a manner befitting his celestial lineage, he prospered in life and never suffered real grief in any way. His life on Earth was one long tale of happiness.

But it is not in Man to be content with happiness alone. Like everything else in this world, he is essentially two-edged, capable at once of great good and great evil. Soon, he began to tire of tirelessly following the dictates of God; he wanted to branch out on his own, to determine his life independently, according to his own instincts and inclinations. In this manner he strayed away from the principles of ka Tip Briew Tip Blei, Ka Tip Kur Tip Kha and Ka Kamai ia ka Hok. Greed, the mother of all evils, sat supreme in his heart, and in his craving for power and pelf, he trampled on the rights of others. He began to cheat, to swindle, to steal and even kill to gain what

his avaricious heart desired. Respect for fellow men, through which alone Man could approach God, was completely forgotten, as men tried their best to outwit each other for the sake of wealth, their new god.

God, on his part, was greatly vexed by Man's rebelliousness. He was sorely grieved that Man had chosen to ignore and slight the covenant, and since this was quite meaningless now, He decided to break off his ties with Man and closed forever the Golden Ladder to Heaven through Sohpet Bneng. Away from the remaining Nine Clans in Heaven, and bereft of God's guidance and blessing, the Seven Clans remained helpless orphans on Earth, amidst a new kind of darkness that bred all sorts of evil in the minds of men. Their Golden Age had ended.

But where did this darkness come from? As evidence of His displeasure, God made an oak tree, situated on another sacred mount, grow day by day to a monstrous height and width, so that its shadow expanded to eclipse whole portions of the Earth in pitch darkness. The perpetual darkness caused by the branches of *Diengiei*, the name then given to this "Tree of Gloom", made standing crops wilt and threatened to destroy all plant life, as well as making Man himself vulnerable, a prey to wild beasts and many other evils.

Man panicked. But as is characteristic of him, instead of first turning inwards to examine his soul, then conceding his own aberration and approaching God with a repentant heart, he proudly sought his own solution to the ever-worsening crisis that menaced his very existence.

He convened an extended council to which male representatives of all the Seven Clans were summoned. After hurried consultations, the council resolved to bring down Diengiei, which was even then enlarging itself alarmingly. In passing the resolution, the council declared:

"We do not know the cause of this terrible darkness, nor why Diengiei has suddenly grown so malevolently huge. But we need to seek the reason immediately. What we need to realize is that our very survival is threatened; we must act quickly and decisively. We must bring down this Tree of Gloom before its foul shadow destroys us. In order to do this, each family must send at least one man, equipped with a large knife and an axe, to carry out the task."

Work on toppling Diengiei commenced immediately. The men chopped and hacked away from dawn to dusk, lopping off a bit of the trunk each day. But always, when they came back the next day, they found the tree whole again. It looked like it had never been touched.

The men were dumbfounded, and some of them grew apprehensive, for it seemed that the tree had mysterious powers. How could they fight something that could heal itself as soon as it was cut?

While they sat brooding, in fear and confusion, a little wren called Phreit came flying to the paddy fields nearby. The bird had never seen men in such gloom before, but on learning the cause, it offered to reveal the secrets of Diengiei:

"It is not what you think, O men. Diengiei may have the power to grow with the swiftness of a bird's flight, but it does not have the power to heal itself. I know its secrets and I'm ready to help should you wish me to. All that I ask is that you allow me to feed freely in your paddy fields so that I too may survive."

By then the men were so thoroughly demoralized and desperate that they were prepared to listen to just about anyone with new ideas. Once the deal was struck, Phreit told them that it was not the magic powers of the tree that were responsible for its extraordinary recovery, but the licking of its trunk by the Tiger as soon as the men retired to their homes for the night. That was how the gashes filled up as fast as they were made.

The Tiger (a symbol of all that was evil and cruel) wanted Diengiei to stand, as the expanding eclipse caused by its growth made his hunting easier. In fact, he was looking forward to the time when the whole world was totally blanketed in darkness, so that he could then start preying on Man too. To foil the evil designs of the Tiger, Phreit advised the men to fortify the portion of the trunk that they had hewn by placing knives and axes against it each night.

Encouraged by this revelation, the men hustled back to the task, and at the end of their day's work, set their axes against the tree. The next morning, instead of a healed trunk, they discovered

bloodstains on their axes and, later, they learnt that the Tiger had lapped his tongue to shreds, then, terrified, had fled the place for an unknown destination. They were elated. They fell upon the tree with fresh vigour and after some weeks found they had cut it down. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

The pact made with the little Phreit marked the first gesture of Man towards repentance and humility. And that was why God had granted Man success in felling the Diengiei.

III. (A) **Concerning the Origin of the Siems of Shillong (From Gurdon).**

The Siem of Shillong is a very great and powerful chief in the Khasi Hills. He is generally known throughout the Khasi Hills as the "god king." By the term "god king" is meant that God has been pleased to give over to him the largest portion of the Khasi country, i.e., the kingdom of Shillong, to rule. If you seek for the origin of these "god kings," you will find there is great uncertainty about it. At any rate there is a tradition amongst the Khasis to the following effect. In olden days a rumour got abroad that there was a woman in a cave called Marai, which is situated near the present village of Pomlakrai, at the source of the river Umiew or Umiam. She was a young and very beautiful damsel. Of the reality of the damsel's existence there is no question. Many tried to catch her, but they could not, owing to the narrowness of the cave. There came, however, a certain very clever man who went to entice her by showing her a flower called " u tiew-jalyngkteng." The damsel then came (out) near to snatch the flower, but the man went on holding back his hand until she came out into a more open place, when he seized her. He then brought her to his house and carefully tended her, and afterwards he married her. That damsel was called " Ka Pah Syntiew, the flower-lured one," because that man caught her by coaxing and enticing her with a flower. That man, who came from the village of Nongjri in the Bhoi country, was called the Nongjri Kongor. After she had given birth to daughters and sons, she returned to the same place whence she had been captured, and from that time forth she never came out again, however much her husband and children called and implored her. Her children increased

in stature and in wisdom, and the people hearing of the wonderful origin of their mother, came from all parts of the country to look at them. The children also were very clever at showing their humility and good manners in the presence of the elders. All the people (in return) loved them and considered them to be the children of the gods, and did homage to them. It occurred to the nobles and leaders of the Shillong Raj to appoint them Siems because (they said) the children had been born of a wonderful woman, who, it seemed very clear, was the daughter of the "god Shillong." Therefore they gladly decided to appoint them Siems in the country of Shillong (i.e. the present Khyrim and Mylliem States). The children thus became Siems, and they were called "Ki Siem- Blei" (the god kings) of Shillong[30].

(B) **The Goddess Who Came to Live with Mankind (A Legend of the Shillong Peak) (From Rafy)**

Shillong Peak is the highest mountain in the Khasi Hills, and although it bears such a prosaic name in our days, the mountain was a place of renown in the days of the Ancient Khasis, full of romance and mystery, sacred to the spirits and to the gods. In those days the mountain itself, and the whole country to the north of it, was one vast forest, where dwelt demons and dragons, who cast evil spells and caused dire sickness to fall upon any unfortunate person who happened to spend a night in that wild forest.

In the mountain there lived a god. At first the Ancients had no clear revelation about this deity; they were vaguely aware of his existence, but there was no decree that sacrifices should be offered to him. After a time there arose among the Khasis a very wise man of the name of U Shillong who was endowed with great insight to understand the mysteries, and he discovered that the god of the mountain was great and powerful, and sacrifice and reverence should be offered to him, and he taught his neighbours how to perform the rites acceptably. The name of the deity

[30] The Shillong Peak is thought to be the seat of a powerful blei or god, who has his abode in the wood close to the top of the "Peak."

was not revealed, so the people began to call him "U Lei Shillong" (the god of Shillong) after the name of the man who first paid him homage. Then gradually he came to be called "the god Shillong", and in time the mountain itself was called the mountain of Shillong, and from this is derived the name of the present town of Shillong.

Possibly the god Shillong was, and remains, one of the best-known and most generally reverenced of all the Khasi gods, for even on the far hill-tops of Jaintia altars have been raised to his service and honour. Although sacrifices are being offered to him at distant shrines, the abode of the god is in the Shillong mountain, more especially in the sacred grove on the summit of the peak itself, which is such a familiar landmark in the country.

Judging from tradition, this deity was regarded as a benign and benevolent being, forbearing in his attitude towards mankind, who were privileged to hunt in his forests unhindered by dangers and sicknesses, and the dances of mankind were acceptable in his sight. He frequently assisted them in their misfortunes and helped them to overcome the oppression of demons. It was he who endowed U Suidnoh with wisdom to fight and to conquer U Thlen, the great snake-god and vampire from Cherrapoonjee, and it was by his intervention that Ka Thei and her sister were delivered from the grasp of the merciless demon, U Ksuid Tynjang.

Tradition also points out that this famous deity had a wife and family, and three at least of his daughters are renowned in Khasi folk-lore. One of them transformed herself into the likeness of a Khasi maiden and came to live with mankind, where she became the ancestress of a race of chiefs. Two other daughters, out of playfulness, transformed themselves into two rivers, and are with us in that form to this day. This is the story of the goddess who came to live with mankind:

Many hundreds of years ago, near the place now known as Pomlakrai, there was a cave called the Cave of Marai, near to which stood a high perpendicular rock around which the youthful cow-herds of the time used to play. They gathered there from different directions, and passed the time merrily, practicing archery and playing on their flutes, while keeping an eye on their herds.

The rock was too high for them to attempt to climb it, and it was always spoken of as "the rock on which the foot of man never trod".

On a certain day, when the lads came as usual to the familiar rendezvous, they were surprised to see, sitting on the top of the rock, a fair young girl watching them silently and wistfully. The children, being superstitious, took fright at sight of her and ran in terror to Mylliem, their village, leaving the cattle to shift for themselves. When they told their news, the whole village was roused and men quickly gathered to the public meeting-place to hold a consultation. They decided to go and see for themselves if the apparition seen by the children was a real live child, or if they had been deluded by some spell or enchantment. Under the guidance of the lads, they hurried to the place on the hill where the rock stood, and there, as the boys had stated, sat a fair and beautiful child.

The clothes worn by the little girl were far richer than any worn by their own women-folk, so they judged that she belonged to some rich family, and she was altogether so lovely that the men gazed open-mouthed at her, dazzled by her beauty. Their sense of chivalry soon asserted itself, however, and they began to devise plans to rescue the maiden from her perilous position. To climb up the face of that steep rock was an impossible feat; so they called to her, but she would not answer; they made signs for her to descend, but she did not stir, and the men felt baffled and perplexed.

Chief among the rescuers was a man called U Mylliem Ngap, who was remarkable for his sagacity and courage. When he saw that the child refused to be coaxed, he attributed it to her fear to venture unaided down that steep and slippery rock. So he sent some of his comrades to the jungle to cut down some bamboos, which he joined together and made into a pole long enough to reach the top of the rock. Then he beckoned to the child to take hold of it, but she sat on unmoved.

By this time the day was beginning to wane, yet the child did not stir and the rescuers were growing desperate. To leave her to her fate on that impregnable rock would be little less than

cold-blooded murder, for nothing but death awaited her. They began to lament loudly, as people lament when mourning for their dead, but the child sat on in the same indifferent attitude.

Just then U Mylliem Ngap noticed a tuft of wild flowers growing near the cave, and he quickly gathered a bunch and fastened it to the end of the long pole and held it up to the maiden's view. The moment she saw the flowers, she gave a cry of delight and held out her hand to take them. U Mylliem Ngap promptly lowered the pole and the child moved towards it, but before she could grasp the flowers the pole was again lowered; so, little by little, step by step, as the men watched with bated breath, the little maid reached the ground in safety.

U Mylliem Ngap, with general consent, constituted himself her champion. He called her "Pah Syntiew", which means "Lured by Flowers," for her name and her origin were unknown. He took her to his own home and adopted her as his own daughter, cherishing her with fondness and affection, which the child fully requited.

Ka Pah Syntiew, as she grew up, fulfilled all the promises of her childhood and developed into a woman of incomparable beauty and her fame went abroad throughout the country. She was also gifted and wise beyond all the maidens of the neighbourhood, and was the chosen leader at all the Khasi dances and festivals. She taught the Khasi girls to dance and to sing, and it was she who instituted the Virgins' Dance, which remains popular to this day among the Khasis. Her foster-father, seeing she possessed so much discretion and wisdom, used to consult her in all his perplexities and seek her advice in all matters pertaining to the ruling of the village. She displayed such tact and judgement that people from other villages brought their disputes to her to be settled, and she was acknowledged to be wiser and more just than any ruler in the country, and they began to call her "Ka Siem" (the Chiefess, or the Queen).

When she came of age, U Mylliem Ngap gave her in marriage to a man of prowess and worth, who is mentioned in Khasi lore as "U Kongor Nongjri". She became the mother of many sons and daughters, who were all noble and comely.

After her children had grown up, Ka Pah Syntiew called them all to her one day and revealed to them the secret of her birth. She was the daughter of U Lei Shillong, the mountain god, permitted by her father to dwell for a period among mankind, and at last the time was at hand for her to return to her native element.

Not long after this Ka Pah Syntiew walked away in the direction of the cave of Marai, and no one dared to accompany her, for it was realised that her hour of departure had come. From that day she disappeared from mortal ken. Her descendants are known to this day as two of the leading families of Khasi chiefs, or Siems, and in common parlance these two families, those of Khairim and Mylliem, are still called "the Siems (the Chiefs) of Shillong," or "the Siems of the god."

(C) **The Legend of Ka Pahsyntiew (From Nongkynrih)**

In ancient times it was said that spirits haunted the forests on the hills around what we now call Lum Shyllong or Shyllong Peak. The chief of these spirits dwelled on the highest and most thickly wooded hill. In those times, the people of the villages surrounding the hills did not know much about rites and rituals. It was enough for them to pray to God, U Blei, morning and night. Although they knew about the hill spirits and were afraid to go anywhere near them, they did not think it necessary to make offerings to them. It was not till a village elder, a man of great wisdom and understanding of the mysteries of life, had started making sacrifices to the chief of the spirits, that the villagers learnt about propitiating and paying obeisance to more than the one supreme God that they knew.

The elder had learnt the rites from the people of Sohra, who worshipped God, U Blei, through the mediation of certain gods and goddesses. He had seen how the people prayed to U Mawlong Syiem, the chief of the spirit world in the countryside around Sohra. He had watched the religious ceremonies performed for U Suitnoh at Laitryngew, so that he might look after the well-being of the people.

The elder wanted his village to have its own guardian god. So he taught his people how to pray to the chief spirit of the hills, whom he called Shulong or the Self-Begotten. From that time on the chief spirit became known as U Lei Shulong, or U Lei Shyllong as he is known today. By and by, U Lei Shyllong became the patron god of the villages situated around Lum Shyllong, and everyone throughout the length and breadth of Ri Hynniew Trep, the land of the Khasis, began to pray to him.

This pleased U Lei Shyllong very much. He sent for his daughter and directed her to go and live among his human subjects. The goddess turned herself into a beautiful maiden and went to live in a cave called Krem Marai, near the village of Pomlakrai on the peak called Lum Shyllong. It was a lonely spot. Only a few boys and girls went there once in a while, to graze their cattle and goats nearby. But it didn't take the exploring children long to discover the lovely lady sitting in the sun by the entrance to her cave. This strange and beautiful woman, sitting all alone in the middle of nowhere, struck terror in their hearts and they fled the scene to report the matter to their parents and elders.

Soon, word of the mysterious woman at Krem Marai spread like wildfire to the four corners of Ri Hynniewtrep. The people, who were quite superstitious in those days, began to avoid the place for fear of the strange woman whom they thought was some kind of spirit.

One man among them, however, was not afraid. His name was Sati Mylliemngap, an elder from the village of Nongkseh, respected for his wisdom and insight. The rumour about a beautiful woman alone in a cave in the wilderness inspired his adventurous spirit and he resolved, come what may, to pay her a visit one day.

Sati set out for the cave on a splendid spring morning. Along the way, birds sang their love songs; wildflowers, nameless, rainbow-hued, danced in the breeze; the scented air seemed to urge him on, as if to a predestined rendezvous.

Near the cave, he picked his way carefully through the undergrowth. Every now and then he stopped to look for the maiden. Suddenly, there she was, sunning herself at the cave's entrance –

just as the children had described. She had a little orchid in her hand, a *Lamat long*, the black-eyed bloom.

Sati's jaw dropped as he gazed at her in wonder at her strange loveliness. Her skin was fair, and as smooth as spring water. Her eyes were blue as the clear sky. She was not dressed like a Khasi girl. Her robe was a creamy yellow, of a cloth quite different from silk spun by the villagers. She wore no *jainsem*[31], which was quite unheard of for a local girl. As Sati stared at her, she caught sight of him and, with a little cry, disappeared inside the cave, which even bold Sati could not bring himself to enter.

But that was not the end of it. Sati stayed where he was, calling out to her: "Dear Kong[32]," he said. "Why do you run from me. . . Don't be afraid. . . I mean you no harm."

When she did not come, he pleaded and coaxed her with gentle words of endearment: "I'm an old man with neither strength nor inclination to harm you. I'm old enough to be your father; come talk to me . . . all I want is to help you."

Nothing worked, however, and exhausted, he sat down for a while, to think. It wasn't long before an idea struck him. He had noticed some wild flowers blooming some distance away. Since the maiden seemed to be quite fond of flowers, he quickly went off to pick and fashion some into a bouquet, which he laid before the cave entrance. Then he called aloud:

"I give up. I'll leave now and not pester you again. But before I go here are some flowers as a token of my goodwill. Please accept them. I'll put them here and go."

That was exactly what he did. But having gone a little way, he doubled back by another path. He hid quietly by the side of the cave and waited. After a while, the shy maiden peeped out. She looked around to make sure the coast was clear, and stooped to pick up the bouquet.

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[31] Khasi outer garment comprising two long cloths of cotton, silk, etc. , draped over the shoulders
[32] Honorary Khasi title meaning Miss or Sister

This was what Sati had been waiting for. He ran up to her and overpowered her in one grasp, while all the time trying to calm her fears and crying, "I mean you no harm. . . Don't be afraid. . . I just want to know more about you. . ." After a while, the woman calmed down a little.

Sati begged her forgiveness for playing such a trick on her. Once more he told her that he did not mean to harm her, and that, to the contrary, he had only wanted to help her. He said the people in the villages had become very agitated and fearful on coming to know about her stay in the cave. It was only to prevent anything untoward happening that he had come, at the request of the village council of elders, to find out more about her, and why and how she had come to dwell in those lonely backwoods.

Reassured by the gentle manner of her captor, and convinced that she was talking to a true representative of the village council, the goddess revealed everything to a very astonished and reverential Sati. She told him how her father, happy with the people's unbounded faith in him, had sent her to be the proginetress of the Syiem clan, which would later become the ruling clan of Hima Shyllong. For the time being, however, she urged Sati not to disclose anything of all this except to the council of elders, which must also be sworn to secrecy.

The now elated Sati paid his obeisance and, promising to do exactly as she had told him, took her home. At home the goddess caused quite a sensation. People, neighbours, friends and relatives flocked to Sati's house to catch a glimpse of the strange woman. Sati introduced her to them as his adopted daughter, Ka Pahsyntiew, "the one lured by flowers". He chose the name, as the goddess had not wished to reveal her real name to anyone.

Meanwhile, the elders of the council met, and having learnt everything about the goddess from Sati, resolved to get her married to the most eligible bachelor in the land: the bravest, the strongest, the wisest and the most handsome youth they could find. After a long, hard quest they finally chose a youth from the Ri War[33] village of Nongjri, a young man called Kongngor whom

[33] Villages bordering present-day Bangladesh

they brought to Nongkseh for the weding – which was the biggest and the most memorable event of those times.

The moon was new, the moon was full. Time flew by and life for the couple slipped from one happy year to another. Pahsyntiew gave birth to many charming sons and daughters who grew up to be strong, intelligent and noble-hearted. They were the pride of the land, loved and respected by all. Kongngor, who doted on his divinely exquisite wife and dedicated his entire life to the welfare of his family, thought their happiness could never end.

But then, one day, Pahsyntiew called her children to her. As they sat before her with their father she said, “My dear Kongngor, my children. For so long I have hidden my true self from you, thinking only of your happiness.Now the time has come when I must go back to my own world. I am the daughter of U Lei Shyllong, sent by my father to give the people their own rulers. And rulers are what my sons shall be. I have done my duty and must return. Your father is a capable man, my children. I leave you to him with my blessing. . .”

Kongngor and his children were heartbroken. There was much crying and questioning, but since it was decreed that Pahsyntiew should return to her own kind, there was nothing anybody could do about it. With a pained heart and tearful eyes Pahsyntiew blessed her children and left the house for her cave at Krem Marai and was never seen again.

Kongngor and his children grieved for her for a long time. But with the love of the people they were able to overcome their sorrow. By and by, true to the words of Pahsyntiew, Kongngor’s eldest son was made the Syiem or king of a new state formed from the villages surrounding the peak of Shyllong, which later became Hima Shyllong or the State of Shyllong. The new Syiem ruled his people well. With the help of his able brothers his state grew large and strong. In no time at all it became one of the most powerful states in the “land of the thirty syiems and twelve dolois”, which is another name for Ri Hynniew Trep.

The people were greatly pleased with all this and together with their Syiem's mother, Pahsyntiew, at Nongkseh, they performed all the ceremonies of the state. And here, in accordance with the customs of the land, lived the syiem's eldest sister, the syiemsad.

When their only other sister, the youngest of the family, grew up, she was married to a young man from Mylliem. For reasons not very clear to us today, soon after her sister's marriage, the syiemsad moved to Nongkrem, some kilometres away from Nongkseh, her original home. Following her relocation, the iingsad of Hima Shyllong was also transferred to Nongkrem where it remains until today.

IV. (A) **Why There are Spots on the Moon (From Gurdon).**

In olden days there was a woman who had four children, three girls and one boy. Their names were these, Ka Sngi (sun), Ka Urn (water), Ka Ding (fire), and U Bynai (moon). These four children belonged to rich gentle folk. The Moon was a wicked young man, for he began to make love to his elder sister, Ka Sngi. In the beginning the Moon was as bright as the Sun. When the Sun became aware of his bad intentions, she was very angry. She took some ashes in her hand and said to him, "do [*sic*] you harbour such an incestuous and wicked intention against me, your elder sister, who has taken care of you and held you in her arms, and carried you on her back like a mother does; now I will cover your brow with ashes, you wicked and shameless one; begone from the house." Then the Moon felt very much ashamed, and from that time he gave out a white light because the Sun had covered him with ashes. What we see like a cloud (on the Moon) when it is full, are the ashes which adhered from the time the Sun covered him with them. The three daughters, however, remained at home to take care of their mother, until she grew old and died.

(B) **What Caused the Shadows on the Moon (From Rafy)**

In the early ages there lived a family of deities, consisting of a mother and four children—three daughters and one son. They lived very happily for many long years, the children showing great respect to their mother and to one another. Their names were Ka Urn (Water), Ka Ding (Fire), and Ka Sngi (the Sun), and the boy was called U Bnai (the Moon). They were all very noble and beautiful to look upon, as became their high destiny, but it was universally agreed that Ka Sngi and U Bnai, the two youngest, possessed greater beauty and loveliness than the two elder sisters. In those days the moon was equal to the sun in brightness and splendour. When U Bnai grew up he began to show somewhat wayward tendencies; he came and went at his own will, without consulting his mother or his sisters, and consorted with companions far beneath him in rank. Sometimes he would absent himself from home for many days, and none of his family knew whither he wandered. His mother often remonstrated with him, as is right for every mother to do, and she and his sisters endeavoured to guide him into more decorous habits, but he was wilful and self-indulgent, thinking that he had a right to more liberty than his women-folk allowed him. By degrees he abandoned himself to a life of pleasure and wild pursuits, paying no heed to the advice and warnings of his elders. Once he followed some of his low associates into the nether regions and spent a long time in that land of goblins and vice. After a while his thoughts came back to his family and his erstwhile radiant home, and a longing to see them came over him, so he quitted the nether regions, and left his evil companions, and returned to his home and his kindred. He had gazed so long on the hideous faces of the inhabitants of the dark world, that he was dazzled by the beauty of his sister Ka Sngi, who came to meet him with smiles and joy for his return. He had also lost the right perception of duty and honour, and, instead of greeting her as his sister, he went to his mother and with unbrotherly wantonness demanded the hand of Ka Sngi in marriage, saying that he had travelled throughout many worlds, and had seen the sons of all nations, but there was no suitor to be found in the whole universe whose beauty could match that of Ka Sngi, except himself. Consequently he said that it behoved his mother to give countenance to his suit and to arrange the marriage. This caused the mother much grief, and she dismissed her son from her presence in dishonour. Ka Sngi, when she heard of his design, was enraged because of his unchaste proposal, and in anger she went forth to seek her brother. When

she found him she forgot her usual dignity and decorum, and, lifting a handful of hot ashes, she threw it into U Bnai's face. The ashes scorched his flesh so deeply that the marks have remained on his face to this day. Ever since then the light of the moon has been pale, marred by dark shadows, and that is the reason he does not show his face in the day-time.

(C) **The Sun and the Moon (From Nongkynrih)**

My readers already know that Ramew, or Mother Earth, was the first of God's creations, and that her husband was Basa, who later came to be identified with the patron god of villages. They had five children of great powers and accomplishments. Among these five children were Ramew's first daughter, the Sun, and her only boy-child, the Moon. Because of the nature of the work entrusted to them when they grew up, they were sent by Ramew, in consultation with God, to the heavens, far away from their Earth-bound sisters, Water, Wind and Fire.

Alone in the sky, the two built a palace where they lived happily together, each loving and respecting the other as befitted a good brother and sister. The two never had any misunderstandings and shared their work willingly. Unfortunately, this quiet, idyllic routine was not fated to last forever. The Sun and the Moon had been living alone for too long in the same house, and soon the Moon developed strange yearnings and passions for his own sister, a lovely woman whom the whole universe acknowledged as the most beautiful and glorious in all creation.

To be fair to the moon, though, these yearnings did not sprout of their own, for they were encouraged to grow in his heart by the influence of spring, a season 'presided over by the spirit of mischief and madness', the madness of love, that is, which rose from the Earth to consume even a celestial being in the sky. But his sister was such a virtuous soul and had such a sense of propriety, such purity of thought, that it was quite impossible for him to approach her with such insanity. Indeed, a mere glance at her shining face and brilliant eyes, which seemed to look at him with the light of God Himself, was enough to discourage him from his impure thoughts. For

some time, then, he suppressed his incestuous passions, considered by all to be among the most evil of desires.

One day during the fifth moon, however, while he was out observing the effect of the spring showers on the life of Nature, he noticed the bees flitting from flower to flower as if they were testing the sweetness of each blossom's nectar of love. He heard birds in blooming copses singing love songs and cooing to each other. He saw little animals frisking about and fondling each other, and marked that even fierce brutes called each to each softly and made love. The sight of all these creatures mating so fired his heart and overwhelmed him with lust that he became quite crazed. Now truly possessed, he hurried his flight to where his sister was, shut the inner eye of his soul tightly, protested his love for her, and in the same breath asked for her hand in marriage.

At first the Sun thought she had heard her brother wrong, but when she realized that he was in earnest and that he did not see her as his sister any more, she blazed out in fury and said, "You shameless creature! How dare you address such dirty words to me, your elder sister, who has bathed, cuddled and taken care of you like a mother? Get out of my house immediately! I would rather live alone than with a brother who is worse than the lowliest criminal!"

Banishing the Moon from her house, however, did not appease the anger of the Sun. She wanted to lay a curse on this brother who had degraded himself to the status of a beast. She wished to put a mark on him so that all heaven and earth should know his evil deed and avoid him for ever. Before he fled her house, therefore, she scooped up a basketful of ash from the hearth and emptied the whole of it over him so that he was covered from head to foot with it, and is so to this day.

Sobered and shamed beyond measure by the words and terrible rage of his sister, the Moon hastily departed from there to hide himself from her in the darkest part of the universe. And as he did not want ever to run into his sister again, he began from then on to venture out only at night.

That is why today we see the Moon shining in the darkness of the night with a pale and hazy light, the result of the ash flung at him by the Sun.

V. **"Sohpet Byneng " Hill (From Gurdon).**

In olden days, when the earth was very young, they say that heaven and earth were very near to one another, because the navel-string of heaven drew the earth very close to it. This navel-string of heaven, resembling flesh, linked a hill near Sumer with heaven. At that time all the subjects of the Siem of Mylliem throughout his kingdom came to one decision, i.e. to sever the navel-string from that hill. After they had cut it, the navel-string became short; and, as soon as it shortened, heaven then ascended high. It was since that time that heaven became so high, and it is for that reason that they call that hill which is near Sumer "U Sohpet Byneng."

(B) **The Legend of Mount Sophet Bneng (From Rafy)**

Sophet Bneng is a bare dome-like hill, about thirteen miles to the north of Shillong, and not far from the Shillong-Gauhati highroad to the East, from which it is plainly visible. Its name signifies the centre of heaven. From the time of the creation of the world a tall tree, reaching to the sky, grew on the top of this hill, and was used by the heavenly beings as a ladder to ascend and descend between heaven and earth. At that time the earth was uninhabited, but all manner of trees and flowers grew in abundance, so that it was a very beautiful and desirable place, and they of heaven frequently came down to roam and to take their pleasure upon it. When they found that the land in the neighbourhood of Sophet Bneng was fertile and goodly, they began to cultivate it for profit, but they never stayed overnight on the earth ; they ascended to heaven, according to the decree. Altogether sixteen families followed the pastime of cultivating the land upon the earth. Among the heavenly beings there was one who greatly coveted power, and was unwilling

to remain the subject of his Creator, and aspired to rule over his brethren. He was constantly seeking for opportunities whereby to realise his ambitions. One day it happened that seven families only of the cultivators chose to descend to the earth, the other nine remaining in heaven that day. When they were busy at work in their fields, the ambitious one covertly left his brethren, and, taking his axe secretly, he cut down the tree of communication, so that the seven families could not return to their heavenly home. Thus it was that mankind came to live on the earth, and it is from these seven families—called by the Khasis "Ki Hinniew Skum" (the seven nests, or the seven roots)—who descended from heaven on that fatal day that all the nations of the earth have sprung.

VI. (A) **How the Dog Came to Live with Man (From Gurdon).**

In olden days, when the world was young, all the beasts lived happily together, and they bought and sold together, and they jointly built markets. The largest market where all the beasts used to take their articles for sale was "Luri-Lura," in the Bhoi country. To that market the dog came to sell rotten peas. No animal would buy that stinking stuff. Whenever any beast passed by his stall, he used to say "Please buy this stuff." When they looked at it and smelt it, it gave out a bad odour. When many animals had collected together near the stall of the dog, they took offence at him, and they said to him, "Why have you come to sell this evil-smelling, dirty stuff?" They then kicked his ware and trampled it under foot. The dog then complained to the principal beasts and also to the tiger, who was at that time the priest of the market. But they condemned him, saying, "You will be fined for coming to sell such dirty stuff in the market." So they acted despitefully towards him by kicking and trampling upon his wares. When the dog perceived that there was no one to give ear to his complaint, he went to man, who said, "Come and live with me, and I will arise with you to seek revenge on all the animals who have wronged you." The dog agreed and went to live with man from that time. Then man began to hunt with the assistance of the dog. The dog knows well also how to follow the tracks of the animals, because he can scent in their footprints the smell of the rotten pea stuff which they trod under foot at Luri-Lura market.

(B) **How the Dog Came to Live with Man (From Rafy)**

In the happy olden days, when the animals lived together at peace in the forest, they used to hold fairs and markets after the manner of mankind. The most important fair of all was called " Ka Iew Luri Lura " (the Fair of Luri Lura), which was held at stated intervals in the Bhoi (forest) country. Thither gathered all the animals, each one bringing some article of merchandise, according to the decree which demanded that every animal that came to the fair should bring something to sell. No matter whether he was young or old, rich or poor, no one was to come empty-handed, for they wanted to enhance the popularity of the market. U Khla, the tiger, was appointed governor of the fair.

Man was excluded from these fairs as he was looked upon as an enemy. He used to hunt the animals with his bow and arrows, so they had ceased to fraternise with him and kept out of his way. But one day the dog left his own kindred in the jungle, and became the attendant of Man. The following story tells how that came to pass.

One day U Ksew, the dog, walked abroad in search of goods to sell at the fair. The other animals were thrifty and industrious, they worked to produce their merchandise, but the dog, being of an indolent nature, did not like to work, though he was very desirous to go to the fair. So, to avoid the censure of his neighbours and the punishment of the governor of the fair, he set out in search of something he could get without much labour to himself. He trudged about the country all day, inquiring at many villages, but when evening-time came he had not succeeded in purchasing any suitable goods, and he began to fear that he would have to forgo the pleasure of attending the fair after all.

Just as the sun was setting he found himself on the outskirts of Saddew village, on the slopes of the Shillong Mountain, and as he sniffed the air he became aware of a strong and peculiar odour, which he guessed came from some cooked food. Being hungry after his long tramp, he pushed his way forward, following the scent till he came to a house right in the middle of the village,

where he saw the family at dinner, which he noticed they were eating with evident relish. The dinner consisted of fermented Khasi beans, known as htung rymbai, from which the strong smell emanated.

The Khasis are naturally a very cordial and hospitable people, and when the good wife of the house saw the dog standing outside looking wistfully at them she invited him to partake of what food there was left in the pot. U Ksew thankfully accepted, and by reason of his great hunger he ate heartily, regardless of the strange flavour and smell of the food, and he considered the *ktung rymbai* very palatable.

It dawned on him that here, quite by accident, he had found a novel and marketable produce to take to the fair; and it happened that the kindly family who had entertained him had a quantity of the stuff for sale which they kept in earthen jars, sealed with clay to retain its flavour. After a little palaver according to custom, a bargain was struck, and U Ksew became the owner of one good-sized jar of *ktung rymbai*, which he cheerfully took on his back. He made his way across the hills to Luri Lura fair, chuckling to himself as he anticipated the sensation he would create and the profits he would gain, and the praise he would win for being so enterprising.

On the way he encountered many of the animals who like himself were all going to Luri Lura, and carrying merchandise on their backs to sell at the fair : to them U Ksew boasted of the wonderful food he had discovered and was bringing with him to the market in the earthen jar under the clay seal. He talked so much about it that the contents of the earthen jar became the general topic of conversation between the animals, for never had such an article been known at Luri Lura.

When he arrived at the fair the dog walked in with great consequence, and installed himself and his earthen jar in the most central place with much clatter and ostentation. Then he began to shout at the top of his voice, " Come and buy my good food," and what with his boastings on the road and the noise he made at the fair, a very large company gathered round him, stretching their

necks to have a glimpse at the strangelooking jar, and burning with curiosity to see the much advertised contents.

U Ksew, with great importance, proceeded to uncover the jar; but as soon as he broke the clay seal a puff of the most unsavoury and foetid odour issued forth and drove all the animals scrambling to a safe distance, much to the dog's discomfiture and the merriment of the crowd. They hooted and jeered, and made all sorts of disparaging remarks till U Ksew felt himself covered with shame.

The stag pushed forward, and to show his disdain he contemptuously kicked the earthen jar till it broke. This increased the laughter and the jeering, and more of the animals came forward and they began to trample the *ktung rymbai* in the mud, taking no notice of the protestations of U Ksew, who felt himself very unjustly treated. He went to U Khla, the governor of the fair, to ask for redress, but here again he was met with ridicule and scorn, and told that he deserved all the treatment he had received for filling the market-place with such a stench.

At last U Ksew's patience wore out, he grew snappish and angry, and with loud barks and snarls he began to curse the animals with many curses, threatening to be avenged upon them all some day. At the time no one heeded his curses and threats, for the dog was but a contemptible animal in their estimation, and it was not thought possible for him to work much harm. Yet even on that day a part of his curse came true, for the animals found to their dismay that the smell of the *ktung rymbai* clung to their paws and their hoofs, and could not be obliterated; so the laughter was not all on their side.

Humiliated and angry, the dog determined to leave the fair and the forest and his own tribe, and to seek more congenial surroundings; so he went away from Luri Lura, never to return, and came once more to Saddew village, to the house of the family from whom he had bought the offending food. When the master of the house heard the story of the ill-treatment he had suffered from the animals, he pitied U Ksew, and he also considered that the insults touched himself as well as the dog, inasmuch as it was he who had prepared and sold the *ktung rymbai*. So he spoke

consolingly to U Ksew and patted his head and told him to remain in the village with him, and that he would protect him and help him to avenge his wrongs upon the animals.

After the coming of the dog, Man became a very successful hunter, for the dog, who always accompanied him when he went out to hunt, was able to follow the trail of the animals by the smell of the *ktung rymbai*, which adhered to their feet. Thus the animals lived to rue the day when they played their foolish pranks on U Ksew and his earthen jar at the fair of Luri Lura.

Man, having other occupations, could not always go abroad to the jungle to hunt; so in order to secure a supply of meat for himself during the non-hunting seasons he tamed pigs and kept them at hand in the village. When the dog came he shared the dwelling and the meals of the pig, U Sniang; they spent their days in idleness, living on the bounty of Man.

One evening, as Man was returning from his field, tired with the day's toil, he noticed the two idle animals and he said to himself— "It is very foolish of me to do all the hard work myself while these two well-fed creatures are lying idle. They ought to take a turn at doing some work for their food."

The following morning Man commanded the two animals to go to the field to plough in his stead. When they arrived there U Sniang, in obedience to his master's orders, began to dig with his snout, and by nightfall had managed to furrow quite a large patch of the field; but U Ksew, according to his indolent habits, did no work at all. He lay in the shade all day, or amused himself by snapping at the flies. In the evening, when it was time to go home, he would start running backwards and forwards over the furrows, much to the annoyance of the pig.

The same thing happened for many days in succession, till the patience of the pig was exhausted, and on their return from the field one evening he went and informed their master of the conduct of the dog, how he was idling the whole day and leaving all the work for him to do.

The master was loth to believe these charges against U Ksew, whom he had found such an active and willing helper in the chase: he therefore determined to go and examine the field. When he

came there he found only a few of the footprints of the pig, while those of the dog were all over the furrows. He at once concluded that U Sniang had falsely charged his friend, and he was exceedingly wroth with him.

When he came home, Man called the two animals to him, and he spoke very angrily to U Sniang, and told him that henceforth he would have to live in a little sty by himself, and to eat only the refuse from Man's table and other common food, as a punishment for making false charges against his friend; but the dog would be privileged to live in the house with his master, and to share the food of his master's family.

Thus it was that the dog came to live with Man

VII. (A) **The "Thlen" (From Gurdon)**

In olden days there was a market in the village of Langhiang Kongkhen, and there was a bridge sacred to the gods there. All the children of men used to frequent that heavenly market. They used to pass by Rangjirteh, where there is a cave which was tenanted by a gigantic "thlen." When they went to that market, as soon as they arrived at Rangjirteh they were swallowed up by the "thlen." The "thlen" did this in obedience to an order he had received. If ten people went there, five of them were swallowed up; half of them he devoured, and half of them he let go. But anyone who went alone was not touched by the "thlen", for it was necessary for him to leave untouched half (of the number of those who went). When many people had been devoured, and when they saw that all the children of men would be destroyed, whether they were Khasis or plains people, they held a great durbar at Sunnai market to which both Khasis and plains people went. They considered together as to how to devise a means by which they could slay the "thlen" which had devoured the children of men. After they had deliberated for a long time they decided to adopt the following plan. In the grove that is close to Laitryngew, which is called " the grove of U Suidnoh," there was a man called "U Suidnoh." They counselled together to get "U Suidnoh" to make friends with the "thlen." This Suidnoh was a courageous man who did not care

for any one. He used always to walk alone; so when he went to the "thlen", the latter did not eat him because there was no one else with him who could be let go. The people advised U Suidnoh that he should go and give the "thlen" flesh every day, either goats, or pigs, or cattle. After he had done this for a long time, the "thlen" became tame, and was great friends with U Suidnoh. When both of them became very intimate thus, the children of men advised U Suidnoh to build a smelting house. So he built a smelting house and made the iron red-hot, and, holding it with a pair of tongs, took it to the "thlen." When he arrived he said to the "thlen", "Open your mouth, open your mouth, brother-in-law, here is some flesh." As soon as he opened his mouth, he threw the red-hot iron down his throat. The monster then struggled and wriggled so violently in its death agony that the earth shook as if there had been an earthquake. When U Suidnoh saw the death struggle of the "thlen", he fainted (from excitement). The quaking of the earth startled all the children of men, and they thought that something had happened. When U Suidnoh did not return home his family went to look for him, for they knew that he had gone to feed the "thlen" with red-hot iron. They found him there lying in a faint. When they had revived him, they asked him why he had fainted thus. He replied, "When I was feeding the 'thlen' with red-hot iron, he struggled and wriggled and I fainted. Come, let us go and see what has become of him." They then went and found that the "thlen" was dead. They then published abroad all over the world that the "thlen" was dead, and they convened a durbar to decide about eating him. In the durbar they came to the following understanding, i.e., that the Khasis should eat half, and the plains people half (of the body). After they had come to this decision in the durbar, they then went to take him out of the cave, and they lifted him on to a rock. They there cut into pieces the "thlen's" carcass. The plains people from the East, being more numerous, ate up their share entirely, not leaving anything for this reason there are no "thlens" in the plains; but the Khasis from the West, being fewer in numbers, could not eat up the whole of their share; they left a little of it. Thus, because they did not eat it all, the "thlen" has remained with them. U Suidnoh gained for himself fame and honour, which he enjoys up to the present day. The Khasis, therefore, when they find that the hair or the clothes of any one belonging to them have been cut, refer the matter to U Suidnoh, and they sacrifice to him. The Syntengs also have their "thlen", but he differs much

from the Khasi "thlen". The Syntengs also believe he is a kind of serpent, and there are some families and clans who keep him and worship him like a god. They sacrifice to him a pig only; they do not propitiate him with human blood as the Khasis do[34].

(B) **U Thlen, the Snake-Vampire (From Rafy)**

U Thlen is one of the legendary Khasi gods, whose worship is limited to a few clans and families. From participation in it all right-thinking Khasis recoil with loathing and horror, inasmuch as it involves the perpetration of crimes, for this god can only be propitiated by offerings of human sacrifices, with many revolting and barbaric rites.

The clans who are reputed to be the devotees and worshippers of the Thlen are regarded with aversion and fear throughout the country, and to them are attributed many kinds of atrocities, such as the kidnapping of children, murders and attempted murders, and many are the tales of hair-breadth escapes from the clutches of these miscreants, who are known as Nongshohnohs. Within quite recent times murders have been committed which are still shrouded in mystery, but which are said to have indications that the victims were killed for the purpose of Thlen sacrifice.

The following folk-tale purports to give an account of the origin and propagation of U Thlen, the most remorseless and cruel of all the Khasi deities.

According to tradition the Hima (state) of Cherra was, in olden times, the haunt of many famous Bleis (gods) who dominated the lives of men. These deities were said to dwell in certain localities, which in consequence came to be recognised as sacred places, and frequently to be called after the names of the Bleis. Foremost among these gods was U Mawlong Siem, and the

[34] For further details regarding the Khasi superstition of the "thlen," the reader is referred to the portion of the Monograph dealing with human sacrifices. It may be mentioned that the " thlen's" cave is at a place called Pom Doloi in the territory of the Siem of Cherra, where there is also a rock called " Dain Thlen" (the cutting of the "thlen"). Another version of the story explaining why there are still " thlens " in the Khasi Hills is that there was an old woman who lived at a place called Mawphu, a village in a valley to the west of Cherrapunji. This old woman forgot to eat her share of the "thlen's" flesh, the result being that the species became repropagated.

hill where he was supposed to dwell is called after his name to the present day, and the inhabitants of certain villages still offer sacrifices to him.

In common with mankind, U Mawlong Siem is described as having a family, who, also in common with mankind, took pleasure in dancing and festivity. It is said that people sometimes hear the sound of revelry and the beating of drums within the mountain, supposed to be the drums of U Mawlong Siem beaten to the accompaniment of the dancing of his children, the sound of which invariably portends the death of a Siem or some great personage.

The only one of his family whose name and history have been transmitted was a daughter called Ka Kma Kharai, which signifies one that roams about in trenches or hidden nooks. She was well known in the Bleiworld, and she possessed the power of assuming whatever form she pleased. She often assumed the form of a woman and mingled with mankind without anybody suspecting her identity. Many of the Bleis sought her in marriage, but U Mawlong Siem, her father, would never give his consent, lest his prestige be lowered among the Bleis.

There was one suitor whom Ka Kma Kharai specially favoured. He was the god of Umwai, but her father forbade the union so sternly as to dispel all the hopes of the lovers. This so angered the young goddess that henceforth she rebelled openly against her father, and by way of retaliation she encouraged the attentions of strange and undesirable lovers.

When it was discovered that she was with child, she fled from her home, fearing the wrath of her father, and put herself under the protection of her maternal uncle, who lived in the Pomdoloi cave, and was one of the famous dragons, or Yak Jakors of the country. In this cave a son was born to her, who proved to be a monster of hideous aspect, having the form of a snake and the characteristics of a vampire, who could be appeased only when fed with human blood. This monster they called U Thlen.

Unlike his mother, U Thlen could not transform himself into any likeness but that of a snake, but he had power to diminish or to enlarge his size at will. Sometimes he appeared so small as to be

no bigger than a string of fine thread, at other times he expanded himself to such dimensions that he could swallow a man bodily.

In those days there was much intercourse between the Bleis and mankind. The latter were privileged to attend the Iew-blei—the fair of the Bleis—at Lynghingkhongkhen, the way to which passed the Pomdoloi cave, and many unwary and unprotected travellers fell a prey to the greed of U Thlen and his associates.

The commonest mode by which these poor unfortunates were lured to their doom was through the blandishments of Ka Kma Kharai, who approached them in the form of a woman merchant, and dazzled them with the brilliancy of the jewelry she offered for sale. She refrained from killing her captives on occasions, but induced them by promises of riches and immunity to pledge themselves to the services of U Thlen, her son. To such as these she gave a magic ring, known in ancient lore as the Yngkuid Ring (Sati Yngkuid) which was believed to possess magic that enabled the owners of the ring to obtain all the desires of their hearts, but this magic was dormant until the owners fulfilled their obligations to U Thlen and brought him human victims to feed upon.

The method by which U Yak Jakor captured his victims was to waylay lonely travellers and to club them to death. U Thlen himself, when he grew old enough, also hunted men to death, so that between the three murderers the ravages made upon mankind were becoming grievous and intolerable.

Mankind sought divinations and offered sacrifices to the gods for the cessation of these atrocities, upon which a Durbar of the Bleis was called. U Mawlong Siem, who was a powerful Blei and a blood-relation of the murderers, overruled the Durbar, declaring that no authority could deprive the Bleis, or the demons, of any power they possessed, be it for good or for evil; but to mitigate the distress of mankind a decree was issued, restricting the number of people to be devoured to half the number of captives. If U Thlen captured two victims, one was to be

released, if he captured ten, five were to be released. It transpired, however, that this decree helped but little to allay the sufferings of mankind, for murders continued at an appalling rate.

Mankind again sought divination and took counsel together, and it was made evident that the only one who could successfully help them was U Suidnoh (the fleeting demon), an erratic and insignificant being who haunted the forest of Lait-rngew to the north of Cherra. The Khasis hitherto had never recognised him as worthy of homage, but they went to offer him sacrifices then, according to the divinations. U Suidnoh volunteered to rescue them, but affirmed that the Snake could never be overcome without the sanction of a Blei, and inasmuch as the Bleis of the Cherra Hima had already refused their aid, he urged them to go and sacrifice to U 'Lei Shillong—the god of the Shillong mountain—and to invoke his aid and win his favour. So mankind offered sacrifices to U 'Lei Shillong, and received his sanction to wage war against U Thlen.

U Suidnoh, equipped in all his strength, went forth to Pomdoloi and ordered the Khasis to bring to him many fat pigs and goats. These he killed and carried regularly to feed the Thlen in the cave, and this was the manner in which he made his offering. He bored a large hole in a rock roofing the cave, so that the carcases might be passed down without being seen by U Thlen, and so he would not discover that they were not human bodies. He assumed the voice and manner of a Thlen worshipper and called out: "My uncle, I have brought my tribute, open your mouth that I may feed you." U Thlen is described as being slothful and sleepy, never rousing himself except to seek food. When he heard the call from above he would shake himself and expand to a great size, and open wide his jaws, into which the meat offering was thrust. In this way mankind had respite for a time, and the hunting of men ceased.

It was evident, however, that they must resort to some other measures, for it was impossible to continue to keep up the supply of fat animals. The Khasis began to grumble at the extravagant proceedings of U Suidnoh, but he always replied to their complaints with the words, "Koit, koit" signifying that all was well. After a time he told them to hire the services of U Ramhah, the giant, to assist him in his final struggle against the vampire. When U Ramhah came he bade him

build a smelting-house near the cave, and to make a pair of giant tongs, and such was the strength of U Ramhah that it only took him one day to build the smelting-house and to make the giant tongs. Next day U Suidnoh told him to heat a large piece of iron, and to bring it when it was red-hot in the big tongs to the rock on the top of the cave. When this was done U Suidnoh called out according to his custom : " My uncle, I have brought my tribute, open your mouth that I may feed you" ; so the Thlen shook himself and expanded his body to a gigantic size, and opened his jaws for the offering, whereupon the red-hot iron was thrust in. Upon this there followed the most terrible contortions of the Thlen's body, as he tossed about, writhing in his death agony, till the earth shook so violently that U Suidnoh and U Ramhah swooned from the concussion. When the disturbance subsided, and they had revived, they looked into the cave and found U Thlen lying dead.

U Suidnoh sounded a big drum to summon the people together, and great jubilation and dancing took place when it was announced that their enemy was dead. From that time the Khasis have offered sacrifices to U Suidnoh, and he is held in great honour.

The people held a council to consider how to dispose of the body of the Thlen, and it was decided that to make their triumph complete it was better to prepare a feast and to eat the body of U Thlen, so the carcase was dragged out of the cave and was divided on a flat rock into two portions. One portion was given to the people of the plains from the East, to be cooked after their manner, the other was given to the Khasis from the hills and the West to be cooked after their manner. The marks of the axe are said to be seen on the rock to this day, and the place is called *Dain Thlen* (the cutting of the Thlen). The hole which was bored by U Suidnoh in the top of the cave is also said to be visible to this day.

It happened that more people came to the feast from the plains than from the hills; moreover, they were accustomed to eat eels and snakes, so they considered the Thlen meat very palatable and savoury. They ate the whole of their portion and departed to their villages happily, and they were never afterwards troubled by Thlens. On the other hand the Khasis were unused to the flesh

of reptiles, and they found the Thlen meat very unsavoury and strange-flavoured, so that when their feasting was done, a great portion of the meat remained uneaten.

This caused no little perplexity, for it was deemed possible for the Thlen to come and reanimate the unconsumed portions of his body, so they kindled a big fire to burn all the fragments of meat to ashes, after which they gave a glad shout, believing themselves forever safe from the ravages of U Thlen.

A certain woman, whose son had neglected his duties and stayed away from the feast, was sorely troubled in her mind, fearing that some ill luck might befall him, and a curse come on the family, because her son had wilfully disregarded the feast of conquest. While helping to gather the fragments of meat for burning, she surreptitiously hid a piece in the fold of her dress to take home to her son. When she reached her house she put the meat away in a covered vessel pending her son's arrival. When the son returned he brought news of many misfortunes which he had met that day, and particularly of the loss of much money, which loss he attributed to his neglect of the important feast; but when his mother told him how she had contrived to bring him a little of the Thlen meat, he was somewhat cheered, hoping that by this participation he might be helped to retrieve his fallen fortunes. To their dismay, when they uncovered the vessel, there was no meat left, only a tiny live snake wriggling about. They were preparing to destroy it when the little snake began to speak to them in their own tongue, beseeching them not to kill him. He said he was U Thlen come back to life, and that he was there by the decrees of the Bleis to bring them good fortune for as long as they gave him harbour and tribute.

It was a great temptation, coming as it did, when they had met with great losses, so, without thinking much of the consequences, they allowed the Thlen to live, harbouring it in secret without the knowledge of outsiders.

When U Thlen had fully regained his vitality, he demanded human sacrifices from them, which made them shudder with horror. But U Thlen was relentless, and threatened to devour them as a family, if they did not comply with his request, and when they saw one member of the family

after another beginning to languish, fear for their lives drove them to hunt their fellow-men and to murder them, to propitiate U Thlen and to keep his good favour. Gradually U Thlen cast his sway over other families also, and won them to give him tribute. As his devotees increased he reproduced himself mysteriously, so that in place of one Thlen living in a cave where everybody knew him to be, there arose many Thlens, living concealed in the houses of the Nongshohnohs who, to preserve their own safely and the goodwill of U Thlen, have become men-hunters and murderers, of whom the Khasis live in deadly fear to this day.

VIII. (A) **U Manik Raitong and His Flute (From Gurdon)**

In the northern portion of the Khasi Hills which borders on the Bhoi country there lived a man, by name U Manik. The people nicknamed him "U Manik Raitong," because he was an orphan, his parents, his brothers and sisters, and the whole of his clansfolk having died. He was very poor in addition. U Manik Raitong was filled with grief night and day. He used to weep and deeply groan on account of his orphanhood and state of beggary. He did not care about going out for a walk, or playing like his fellow youths. He used to smear himself with ashes and dust. He used to pass his days only in weeping and groaning, because he felt the strain of his misery to such an extent, he made a flute upon which to play a pathetic and mournful tune. By day he used to work as a ploughman, whenever he was called upon to do so. If nobody called him, he used to sit inactive at home, weeping and groaning and smearing his rags with dust and ashes. At night he used to bathe and dress himself well, and, after having eaten his food, he used to take his flute and play on it till morning. This was always his practice. He was a very skilful player. He had twelve principal tunes. There lived in the same village a queen. Her husband, the Siem, used to be absent from home for long intervals in connection with his public duties. One night, when the queen heard the strains of U Raitong's flute, she listened to them with very great pleasure, and she felt so much compassion for him that she arose from her couch at midnight and went to visit him. When she reached his house, she asked him to open the door, so that she might pay him a call. U Raitong said, "I can't open the door, as this is not the time to pay visits," and he went on

playing his flute and dancing to the music, with tears in his eyes. Then the queen peeped through one of the chinks of the wall and saw him, and she was beside herself, and breaking open the door she entered in. Then U Raitong, having stopped playing, was annoyed that, to add to his misfortunes, this woman had come to trouble him thus. When she tried to beguile him, U Raitong admonished her and sent her away. She departed just before day break. U Raitong then took off his fine clothes, and putting on his rags, sprinkled himself with dust and ashes, and went to plough as was his wont. The queen, however, ensnared him by another device, and whilst the king was still away in the plains, she gave birth to a male child. When the Siem returned, he was much surprised to find that she had borne a child during his absence, and however much he asked her to confess, she would not do so. So the king called the elders and young men to judge the case, and when no proof was found concerning this business, the king appointed another day, when all the males (in the State) should appear, each man holding a plantain. On the appointed day, all the males of the State having appeared, the king told them all to sit in a circle and to show their plantains, and said, "We will place this child in the midst, and to whomsoever the child goes, he is his father, and the adulterer. We will beat him to death with clubs according to the law." Accordingly, when all the people sat in a circle, and the child was placed in the midst, he went to no one, and, although the king called and coaxed him much, he nevertheless refused to go. Then the king said, "Remember who is absent." All replied, "There is no one else except U Manik Raitong," The Siem replied, "Call, then, U Raitong." Some of the people said, "It is useless to call that unfortunate, who is like a dog or a cat ; leavehim alone, oh king." The king replied, "No, go and call him, for every man must come." So they called him, and when he arrived and the child saw him, the child laughed and followed "U Raitong." Then the people shouted that it was U Raitong who had committed adultery with the queen, The king and his ministers then ordered that U Raitong should be put to death outside the village. U Raitong said, "Be pleased to prepare a funeral pyre, and I will burn myself thereon, wicked man that I am." They agreed to his request. U Raitong said to those who were preparing the funeral pyre, "When I arrive near the funeral pyre, set fire to it beforehand, and I will throw myself in, and you stand at a distance." Then U Raitong went and bathed, dressed himself well, and, taking his flute,

played on it as he walked backwards to the funeral pyre ; and when he arrived close to it, they lighted it as he had told them to do. He walked three times round the pyre, and then planted his flute in the earth and threw himself into the flames. The queen, too, ran quickly and threw herself on the pyre also. After U Raitong and the queen had been burned, a pool of water formed in the foundations of the pyre, and a bamboo sprang up whose leaves grew upside-down. From U Raitong's time it has become the practice to play the flute at funerals as a sign of mourning for the departed.

(B) **The Legend of U Raitong, the Khasi Orpheus (From Rafy)**

A few miles to the north of Shillong, the chief town of the Province of Assam, there is a fertile and pleasant hill known as the Hill of Raitong, which is one of the most famous spots in ancient folk-lore, and for which is claimed the distinction of being the place where the custom of suttee—wife-sacrifice of the Hindus—originated. The legend runs as follows:

Many ages ago there lived a great Siem (Chief) who ruled over large territories and whose sceptre swayed many tribes and clans of people. As befitted such a great Siem, his consort, the Mahadei, was a woman of great beauty: her figure was erect and lissom and all her movements easy and graceful as the motion of the palms in the summer breeze ; her hair was long and flowing, enfolding her like a wreathing cloud ; her teeth were even as the rims of a cowrie ; her lips were red as the precious coral and fragrant as the flower of Lasubon; and her face was fair like unto the face of a goddess. Strange to relate, the names of this famous royal couple have not been transmitted to posterity.

It came to pass that affairs of the State necessitated the absence of the Siem from home for a protracted period. He appointed deputies to govern the village and to control his household during the interval, while the Mahadei, who was unto him as the apple of his eye, was placed under the joint guardianship of her own and his own family. When he had made all satisfactory

arrangements he took his departure and went on his long journey accompanied by the good wishes of his people.

Among the subjects of the Siem was a poor beggar lad, who was looked upon as being half-witted, for he spent his days roaming about the village clothed in filthy rags, his head and face covered with ashes like a wandering fakir. He never conversed with any of the villagers, but kept muttering to himself incessantly, lamenting his own forlorn and friendless condition.

His name was U Raitong. Formerly he had been a happy and well-cared-for lad, surrounded and loved by many relatives and kindred, until a terrible epidemic swept through the village and carried away all his family and left him orphaned and alone, without sustenance and without a relative to stand by his bedside in time of sickness or to perform the funeral rites over his body when he died. Overwhelmed by grief and sorrow, U Raitong vowed a rash vow that all the days of his life should be spent in mourning the death of his kindred ; thus it was that he walked about the village lamenting to himself and wearing ragged clothes. His neighbours, not knowing about the vow, thought that sorrow had turned his head, so they treated him as an idiot and pitied him and gave him alms.

His condition was so wretched and his clothes so tattered that he became a proverb in the country, and to this day, when the Khasis wish to describe one fallen into extreme poverty and wretchedness, they say, "as poor as U Raitong".

At night time, however, U Raitong considered himself free from the obligations of his rash vow, and when he retired to his rickety cabin on the outskirts of the village he divested himself of his rags and arrayed himself in fine garments, and would play for hours on his sharati (flute), a bamboo instrument much in vogue among the Khasis to this day. He was a born musician, and constant practice had made him an accomplished player, and never did flute give forth sweeter and richer music than did the sharati of U Raitong as he played by stealth in the hours of the night when all the village was asleep.

The melodies he composed were so enthralling that he often became oblivious to all his surroundings and abandoned himself to the charms of his own subtle music. His body swayed and trembled with pure joy and delight as he gave forth strain after strain from his sharati; yet so cautious was he that none of his neighbours suspected that he possessed any gifts, for he feared to let it be known lest it should interfere with the performance of his vow.

It happened one night that the Mahadei was restless and unable to sleep, and as she lay awake she heard the faint strains of the most sweet music wafted on the air. She imagined that it was coming from the fairies who were said to inhabit certain parts of the forest, and she listened enraptured until the sounds ceased. When it stopped, a feeling of great loneliness came over her, so overawing that she could not summon enough courage to speak about the strange music she had heard. She went about her household duties with her thoughts far away and longing for the night to come in the hope that the music would be wafted to her again.

The following night, and for many successive nights, the Mahadei lay awake to listen, and was always rewarded by hearing the soft sweet strains of some musical instrument floating on the air till she imagined the room to be full of some beautiful beings singing the sweetest melodies that human ears ever heard. When it ceased, as it always did before daybreak, the feeling of desolation was intense, till her whole mind became absorbed with thoughts of the mysterious music.

The fascination grew until at last it became overpowering and she could no longer resist the desire to know whence the sounds proceeded. She crept stealthily from her room one night, and following the direction of the strains, she walked through the village and was surprised to find that the music emerged from the dilapidated hut of U Raitong.

The heart of the Mahadei was touched, for she thought that the fairies in tenderness and pity came to cheer and to comfort the poor idiot with their music, and she stood there to listen. The strains which she could hear but faintly in her own room now broke upon her in all their fulness and richness till her whole being was ravished by them.

Before dawn the sounds suddenly ceased, and the Mahadei retraced her steps stealthily and crept back to her room without being observed by any one. After this she stole out of her house every night and went to listen to what she believed to be fairy-music outside the hut of U Raitong.

One night, when the power of the music was stronger than usual, the Mahadei drew near and peeped through a crevice in the door, and to her astonishment, instead of the fairies she had pictured, she saw that it was U Raitong, the supposed idiot, who was playing on his sharati, but a Raitong so changed from the one she had been accustomed to see about the village that she could scarcely believe her own eyes. He was well and tastefully dressed and his face was alight with joy, while his body moved with graceful motions as he swayed with rapture in harmony with the rhythm of his wild music. She stood spellbound, as much moved by the sight that met her eyes as she had been by the charm of the music, and, forgetful of her marriage vows and her duty to her absent husband, she fell deeply and irrevocably in love with U Raitong.

Time passed, and the Mahadei continued to visit the hut of U Raitong by stealth, drawn by her passionate love for him even more than by the fascination of his sharati. At first U Raitong was unaware that he was being spied upon, but when he discovered the Mahadei in his hut, he was greatly troubled, and tried to reason with her against coming with as much sternness as was becoming in one of his class to show to one so much above him in rank. But she overruled all his scruples, and before long the intensity of her love for him and the beauty of her person awoke similar feelings in him and he fell a victim to her wicked and unbridled passion.

The months rolled on and the time for the return of the Siem was advancing apace. People began to discuss the preparations for celebrating his return, and everyone evinced the most lively interest except the Mahadei. It was noticed that she, the most interested person of all, appeared the most unconcerned, and people marvelled to see her so cold and indifferent; but one day the reason became clear when it was announced that a son had been born to the Mahadei and that her guardians had locked her up in one of the rooms of the court, pending the arrival of the Siem. She offered no resistance and put forward no justification, but when questioned as to the identity of her child's father she remained resolutely silent.

When the Siem arrived and heard of his wife's infidelity he was bowed down with shame and grief, and vowed that he would enforce the extreme penalty of the law on the man who had sullied her honour, but neither persuasion nor coercion could extract from the Mahadei his name.

It was necessary for the well-being of the State, as well as for the satisfaction of the Siem, that the culprit should be found ; so the Siem sent a mandate throughout his territory calling upon all the male population, on penalty of death, to attend a great State Durbar, when the Siem and his ministers would sit in judgement to discover the father of the child of the faithless Mahadei.

Never in the history of Durbars was seen such a multitude gathered together as was seen on that day when all the men, both young and old, appeared before the Siem to pass through the test laid down by him. When all had assembled, the Siem ordered a mat to be brought and placed in the centre, and the babe laid upon it; after which he commanded every man to walk round the mat in procession and, as he passed, to offer a plantain to the child, inasmuch as it was believed that the instincts of the babe would lead him to accept a plantain from the hand of his own father and from no other.

The long procession filed past one by one, but the babe gave no sign, and the Siem and his ministers were baffled and perplexed. They demanded to know what man had absented himself, but when the roll was called the number was complete. Someone in the throng shouted the name of U Raitong, at which many laughed, for no one deemed him to be sane; other voices said mockingly, "Send for him"; others said, "Why troubleabout such a witless creature ? He is but as a dog or a rat". Thus the Durbar was divided, but the ministers, unwilling to pass over even the most hapless, decided to send for him and to put him through the test like the other men.

When the Siem's messengers arrived at the hut they found U Raitong just as usual, dressed in filthy rags and muttering to himself, his face covered with ashes. He arose immediately and followed the men to the place of Durbar, and as he came people pitied him, for he looked so sad and forlorn and defenceless that it seemed a shame to put such an one through the test. A plantain was put into his hand and he was told to walk past the mat. As soon as the babe saw him

he began to crow with delight and held out his hands for the plantain, but he took no notice of the well-dressed people who crowded round.

There was a loud commotion when the secret was discovered, and the Siem looked ashamed and humiliated to find that one so unseemly and poor was proved to be the lover of his beautiful wife. The assembly were awed at the spectacle, and many of them raised their voices in thanksgiving to the deity whom they considered to have directed the course of events and brought the guilty to judgement.

The Siem commanded his ministers to pronounce judgement, and they with one accord proclaimed that he should be burned to death, without the performance of any rites and that no hand should gather his bones for burial. In this decision all the throng acquiesced, for such was the law and the decree.

U Raitong received the verdict with indifference as one who had long known and become reconciled to his fate, but he asked one boon, and that was permission to build his own pyre and play a dirge for himself. The Siem and the people were astonished to hear him speak in clear tones instead of the blubbering manner in which he had always been known to speak. Nobody raised an objection to his request, so he received permission to build his own pyre and to play his own dirge.

Accordingly on the morrow U Raitong arose early and gathered a great pile of dry firewood and laid it carefully till the pyre was larger than the pyres built for the cremation of Siems and the great ones of the land. After finishing the pyre he returned to his lonely hut and divested himself of his filthy rags and arrayed himself in the fine garments which he used to wear in the hours of the night when he abandoned himself to music; he then took his sharati in his hand and sallied forth to his terrible doom. As he marched towards the pyre he played on his sharati, and the sound of his dirge was carried by the air to every dwelling in the village, and so beautiful was it and so enchanting, so full of wild pathos and woe, that it stirred every heart. People flocked after

him, wondering at the changed appearance of U Raitong and fascinated by the marvellous and mysterious music such as they had never before heard, which arrested and charmed every ear.

When the procession reached the pyre, U Raitong stooped and lighted the dry logs without a shudder or a delay. Then once more he began to play on his sharati and marched three times round the pyre, and as he marched he played such doleful and mournful melodies that his hearers raised their voices in a loud wail in sympathy, so that the wailing and the mourning at the pyre of the unfortunate U Raitong was more sincere and impressive than the mourning made for the greatest men in the country.

At the end of his third round U Raitong suddenly stopped his music, planted his sharati point downward in the earth, and leaped upon the burning pyre and perished.

While these events were taking place outside, the Mahadei remained a close prisoner in her room, and no whisper of what was transpiring was allowed to reach her. But her heart was heavy with apprehension for her lover, and when she heard the notes of a sharati she knew it could be none other than U Raitong, and that the secret had been discovered and that he was being sent to his doom.

As before, the notes of the sharati seemed to call her irresistibly, and with almost superhuman strength she burst open the door of her prison. Great as was her excitement and her desire to get away, she took precautions to cover her escape. Seeing a string of cowries with which her child had been playing, she hastily fastened them to the feet of a kitten that was in the room, so that whenever the kitten moved the noise of the cowries jingling on the floor of the room would lead those outside to think that it was the Mahadei herself still moving about; then she sped forth to the hill in the direction of the sound of the sharati and the wailing. When she arrived at the pyre, U Raitong had just taken his fatal leap. She pushed her way resolutely through the dense and wailing crowd, and before anyone could anticipate her action she too had leaped into the naming furnace to die by the side of her lover.

The Siem alone of all the people in the village had withstood the fascination of the dirge. He sat in his chamber morose and outraged, brooding on his calamity. Just when the Mahadei was leaping into the flames a strange thing happened in the Siem's chamber—the head-cloth (tapmoh) of his wife was blown in a mysterious manner so that it fell at his feet although there was not enough breeze to cause a leaf to rustle. When the Siem saw it he said, "By this token my wife must be dead". Still hearing sounds coming from her room, he tried to take no heed of the omen. The foreboding, however, grew so strong that he got up to investigate, and when he opened the door of the room where the Mahadei had been imprisoned he found it empty, save for a kitten with a string of cowries fastened to its feet.

He knew instinctively whither she had gone, and in the hope of averting further scandal he hurried in her wake towards the pyre on the hill, but he was too late. When he arrived on the scene he found only her charred remains.

The news of the unparalleled devotion of the Mahadei to her lover spread abroad throughout the land and stirred the minds of men and women in all countries. The chaste wives of India, when they heard of it, said one to another, "We must not allow the unholy passion of an unchaste woman to become more famous than the sacred love of holy matrimony. Henceforth we will offer our bodies on the altar of death, on the pyre of our husbands, to prove our devotion and fidelity." Thus originated the custom of suttee (wife-sacrifice) in many parts of India.

The Khasis were so impressed by the suitability of the sharati to express sorrow and grief that they have adopted that instrument ever since to play their dirges at times of cremation.

The sharati of U Raitong, which he planted in the earth as he was about to leap to his doom, took root, and a clump of bamboos grew from it, distinguishable from all other bamboos by having their branches forking downwards. It is commonly maintained to this day that there are clumps of bamboos forking downwards to be found in plenty on the Hill of Raitong.

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