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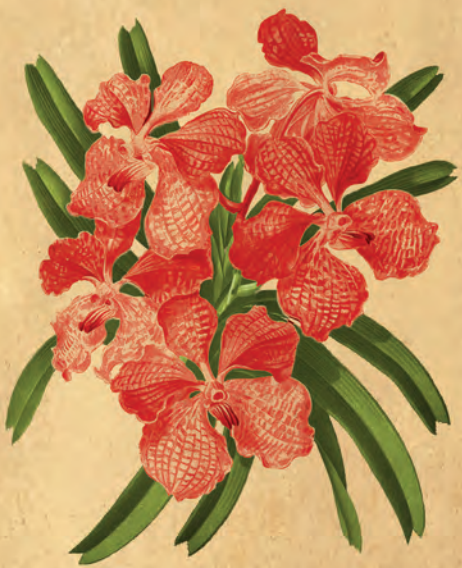

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

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The Journal is published by the Department of English, Mizoram University which has been awarded Departmental Research Support under UGC Special Assistance Programme (UGC-SAP/DRS II). The objective of the Journal is to provide an informed scholarly dialogue on topics that are pertinent to literature and culture studies. The focus is both theoretical and interdisciplinary and endeavours to explore new perspectives in order to create a discourse of learning.

The Journal welcomes well researched articles from Humanities and the Social Sciences. Articles should be sent directly as email attachments to the editors. Sections will be provided for input on creative writing as well as book reviews. Submitted manuscripts are considered for publication with the understanding that it has not been already published, or submitted for publication elsewhere. The final decision of selection of articles for publication rests with the editors.

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FOREWORD

MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies (MZUJLCS), a bi annual refereed UGC approved journal of the Department of English,Mizoram University has once again brought forth articles that make for worthy reading in arenas that are pertinent to both culture as well as literature. I take this opportunity to remind our readers that the journal can also be accessed, as in the past, at http://mzujlcs.wixsite.com/mzujlcs.

The present volume has focused upon the issue of marginality.While addressing this issue, we must remind ourselves that the idea of marginality is getting closer, to being just that: in terms of being 'an idea' because increasingly ,as most of the articles in this volume would reiterate marginality is now seemingly located at the centre and no longer at the periphery as it was, in the not so recent past.

Questions concerning minority communities, as well as literature of the diaspora alongwith issues that are pertinent to literature of protest, as well as that of the notion of post colonial identities have been addressed within the ambit of the journal. It has also sought to put forth queries that are pertinent to the theme of marginalisation.For instance,what does literature have to denote in terms of the conflict between the global as well as that of the local, in terms of identities? Is there a dominant politics of historiography ,and if so, then who defines the paradigms that comprise the same? Can there be a wider framework in terms of addressing marginality in literature? Who defines what is marginalised? Also, is there a place for marginalisation and politics in terms of literature? These and

many other issues have been posited in this very eclectic volume,even as critical essays have nestled alongwith the creative ambit in what one must affirm as an inherently seminal compendium.

Margaret L.Pachuau
Professor and Head
Department of English Mizoram University

EDITORIAL

It is with immense pleasure that the editorial of the present issue of the journal is written after a long and tiresome work of editing. We have received a number of articles on various issues. However, with due respect and appreciation to all who have sent their articles, we are constrained to select only fourteen based on the thematic parameters outlined in our Call for Papers circulated earlier.

The articles selected in this issue deal with various aspects of marginality such as the conflict between the global and the local, minority-majority dichotomy, re-assertion of indigenous identities in the postcolonial years, marginality caused by gendered existence, problem of geographical and historical locations of refugees, etc, seen in the different texts analysed by the paper contributors. An aberrant marginality is the case of 'democratic' state's silencing of its own people in which the state acts as a protagonist in the process of marginalization through its ideological and repressive apparatuses.

Most articles included in this issue try to interpret and analyse socio-cultural, political and economic spaces created in the due course of history where the marginalised peoples struggle in various ways to gain access to knowledge resources and equal participation in the development of societies. Some articles argue that marginality is not a matter of 'small numbers', to borrow Appadurai's phrase, but a case of ideological dominance of a group of people by another while some other read the culture of violence, associated with societies under political conflicts, as the reflection of marginalization. It is also interesting to note that cultural

activities performed in various ways such as festivals are also reflective of how elements of marginalization are registered in our cultural artifacts. Thus, language, cultural performances, literary texts, etc are the main areas the contributors have explored and identified marginality as an aspect to critically engage with.

Readers may find that a large space is given in this issue to the articles that deal with the literature and culture of India's Northeast. This is because of the theme we have outlined in the Call for Papers and the same is very close to the nature of political and social life of the people of this region. We also feel that literature and culture of this region should be given more academic attention in the wake of globalization and postcolonial reawakening.

We, at the Department of English, Mizoram University, are happy with the overwhelming response of the paper contributors and hope that the same will continue in future too.

Thongam Dhanajit Singh
Editor

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Victims at Border: Questioning the Politics of Victimization in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*

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I

Border is always in dialogue with a number of nuanced and polyvalent factors in terms of culture, politics, economics, migration, to name only a few and thus is fraught with complexities. Border is of various types including cultural, political, territorial, social, religious, ethical, among others. Border exists where two adjacent nation-states edge together and virtually turns out to be an interface between the two neighbouring nation-states. Commercial trading and human displacement, among others, constitute the grave and inevitable reality at border. In other words, border is, at times, a point of conflict between two nation-states at different levels and at once a mere territorial marker of difference. Whereas invisible border between nation-states, unofficially and tacitly, permits citizens of both the nation-states to travel freely and carry out commercial transactions, heavy patrolling backed up by tight fencing, at the border, often make it difficult for citizens of a nation-state to cross the border. It often leads them to take resort to illicit means to cross the border. Sometimes, political unrest followed by economic declining, cultural conflicts, religious rows, among others, within a nation-state indirectly and unofficially pushes citizens living at border either to sneak

out their own nation-state or to be victims of it. Mohsin Hamid has made a brilliant attempt to contextualize victimhood across the border as far as the migration of Refugees is concerned in *Exit West*. In the garb of Refugee uprising, Hamid has laid bare how victimization is carried out politically at border. The protagonists of the novel- Saeed and Nadia, who have to experience victimization for frequently migrating from one location to another. This article is intended to intervene into the political act of victimization at border critically and to question Hamid's take on victimization so far refugee politics is concerned, taking recourse to some relevant theoretical paradigms.

II

Increasing rate of crime at border insists that the act of victimization is of equal importance to the act of crime in the sense that in order to examine the impact of crime on common folk, the act of victimization needs to be taken into account. In other words, the consideration of victims of a crime is necessary to carry out investigations pertaining to that crime. B. Mendelsohn is thought to be the first person who has underscored the pertinence of taking victim into account along with the consideration of the offender. Later on, a number of Victimologists including Hans Von Hentig, Henry Ellenberger, Schater, to name only a few, have made telling contribution to the growth and expansion of Victimology as an interdisciplinary branch of study. Whereas in *Criminology, Penology and Victimology,* Ahmad Siddique understands Victimology as a "scientific study of any loss which a person suffers physically, emotionally or financially due to any illegal activity" (547), N.V. Paranjape in *Criminology, Penology and Victimology* has comprehended it as:

> . . . the scientific study of victimization, including the relationships between victims and offenders, the interactions between victims and the criminal justice system; that is the police and courts, and correctional officers. It also includes connections between victims and other social groups and institutions. . . . (763)

Paranjape's comprehensive definition of Victimology is suggestive of that any sort of action that offends a person or a group has to be subject to Victimology. Here, one may raise a question whether victims are responsible in victimization carried out by offenders. In support of the contention, one may straightaway refer to Stephen Schater who has left an observation in *Victim and His Criminal* that victims certainly play huge role in victimization either consciously or unconsciously. According to Schater, victimization is possible because of one's knowing or unknowing participation in it. One may turn critical of this contention and may counter it back that if a person is unable to decipher the victimization ploys of offenders and becomes a victim of vicious ploys of an offender all of a sudden or if a person fails to withstand hostile blows of an offender and gives in victimization, should he be booked for allegedly having a key role in victimization? One may work it out in this way that victim is someone who is the subject of one's offence and thus plays no active role in victimization. One may contest the above argument by referring to the Routine Activities Theory propounded by Cohen and Felson, who opine that victimization is contingent upon three conditions- "suitable target", "motivated offenders" and "absence of security" (Paranjape 766). Following Cohen and Felson, one may contend that victimhood constitutes of one's failure to follow the criminal dictates of an offender and

thus one's inability either to resist criminal blows or to strike back at a criminal in equal terms, in a way, contributes to the occurrence of crime and therefore a victim bears responsibility in crime.

Victimology consists of two disparate root words- victima and logos. The study of victim gets a new dimension when UN Declaration insists that victims need to be treated with respect and dignity. Quinney has offered an interesting insight in the domain of Victimology: "the victim is a social construction in the subject-object relationship in a crime situation" (Quinney qtd. in Ahuja 387), thereby opening up the debate whether victims should be kept in the straitjacket of legality or should be subjected to interdisciplinary overtures. Quinney has meant to say that victimization is a social phenomenon which is consequent upon the interaction among several politico-cultural factors. P. Rock in a seminal article "On Becoming a Victim" argues in the line of Quinney that 'victim' is an identity which is a multifaceted phenomenon stuck in the society:

> 'Victim', in other words, is an identity, a social artefact dependent, at the outset, on an alleged transgression and transgressor and then, directly or indirectly, on an array of witnesses, police, prosecutors, defence counsel, jurors, the mass media and others who may not always deal with the individual case but who will nevertheless shape the larger interpretive environment in which it is lodged. (Rock qtd. in Hoyle and Young 14)

Victimization occurs at different levels and therefore is multidimensional. Operation of power in the act of victimization is regulated by some potent agents who view

victimization as a means for retaining socio-cultural and political status quo. Thus victim blaming should be supplanted by victim facilitation because a victim is a prime witness to the crime committed by some offenders.

The increasing importance of 'victim' in the contemporary society has been addressed by Zedner in "Victims":

> Victims, once on the margins of criminological research, are now a central focus of academic research. Crime surveys, both national and local, and qualitative studies of the impact of crime, of victim needs and services have furnished a wealth of information which has permanently altered the criminological agenda. . . . As a result the victim has moved from being the 'forgotten actor' to key player in the criminal justice process. (Zedner qtd. in Walklate 8)

It shows that victims can make valuable contribution in the probing of crime in a society. Ruling authorities in a society often employ victimization as potent strategy to gag marginal voices and to sustain power. So, a victim is an affected person who is supposed to have full legal rights to seek justice for his sufferings. But, in reality, justice is often denied to victims for having occupied a weaker position. Lorraine Wolhuter, Neil Olley and David Denham in an influential work *Victimology: Victimisation and Victims' Rights* have raised laid emphasis on 'victim compensation' and 'victim protection' possibly because the politics of victimization, in reality, does not let victims seek judicial compensation and protection thereby making victimhood more miserable and wretched.

Border studies emerges as an important area of research which takes into consideration the how borders play significant

roles in determining one's ethnic, national, political, cultural, among others, identities. Sometimes, a border splits a wide region into two halves which bear almost same socio-cultural, religious, political, among others, ambiences. Citizens of either side of a border learn to protect the sovereignty and integrity of their respective nation-states and gradually become intolerant towards the citizens of the neighbouring nation-state. So, it seems quite clear that a border is a site of political contestations which draw the attention of the scholars of Border Studies. Gloria Anzaldua in *Borderlands: La Frontera* has pertinently observed: "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (3). What she has argued is that there is a sharp discrepancy between border and borderland. In other words, she has freed the concept of border and has replaced it by borderland which is more inclusive and politically charged. In *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text,* deterritoralization of the concept of border has also been put forward by D. Emily Hicks who thinks: "Border writing offers a new form of knowledge: information about and understanding of the present to the past in terms of the possibilities of the future" (31). It implies that border negotiates with cultural, political, ethnic, among others, heterogeneities and therefore is problematic.

Border is a site where distribution of national wealth is unfairly carried out inasmuch as people living across the border are supposed to possess less power than those in the centre. Unequal distribution often leads citizens of a nation-state to cross the border to earn daily wages. Criminalization of the

concept is border crossing is untenable in the sense that border crossing sometimes becomes necessary to sustain lives for those wretched people who cannot avail basic necessities of life. Ruling authorities tend to criminalize border crossing intending to make people victims of it. It is supposed that victimization is carried out to unburden the responsibility of marginal people at the border and to play politics with them. Justice is a distant reality for those people who are forced to give in victimization and to bear with the pangs of being at the border. The impact of Globalization at the border crossing is an inescapable reality and has altered conventional negotiations of border with its other socio-cultural parameters.

III

This section is designed to take up Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) which revolves round the worldwide refugee upsurge in the context of intense global connectivity among people, following the rapid developments in the arena of technology. In order to initiate the discussion, one may argue that the existence of porous border triggers victimization and the people who cross border out of immediate necessity become the targets of victimization. In support of this view, one may argue that the anonymous city has to witness Civil War inasmuch as refugees infiltrate into the city thereby putting security and safety of the natives at the jeopardy. He may draw the following textual reference to affirm this view:

> Refugees had occupied many of the open places in the city, pitching tents in the green belts between roads, erecting lean-tos next to the boundary walls of houses, sleep[ing rough on pavements and in the margins of streets. Some seemed to be trying to recreate the rhythms

> of a normal life, as though it were completely natural to be residing, a family of four, under a sheet of plastic propped up with branches and a few chipped bricks. (Hamid 23)

One may turn critical of the above observation and argue that refugees are themselves responsible for being tortured and tormented in that city inasmuch as the city does have room for them. Thus, the question of victimization does not stand to reason. One may draw the following textual reference to point to the fact that the forceful entrance of refugees triggers torment and torture to them: "Others stared out at the city with what looked like anger, or surprise, or supplication, or envy. Others did not move at all: stunned, maybe resting" (Hamid 23). On the contrary, it can be put forward that victimization at the border is bound to happen when refugees become desperate to step in that city, overcoming strong military surveillance. The following reference can be cited to how ruling authority carries out massive raids at the border to stop infiltration on the one hand and how natives are thoroughly checked whether they are helping refugees out:

> There were two checkpoints on their way, one manned by police and another, newer one, manned by soldiers. The police did not bother with them. The soldiers stopped everyone. They made Nadia remove her helmet, perhaps thinking she might be a man disguised as a woman, but when they saw this was not the case, they waved her through. (Hamid 23)

It makes it clear that victimization is a reality at the border and cannot be avoided by people who have to cross border.

Interestingly, whereas Saeed and Nadia cannot dwell in the city because of the outbreak of political turbulence, they ultimately choose to assume refugeehood to sneak out it. While both of them, at one point, were in the centre of the city, choose to occupy refugeehood thereby intending to explore the margins of the society. While taking shelter in a refugee camp, both of them witness the sharp tensional anxiety of refugees regarding the scuffle between the "danger" of being ousted from there by natives and their vulnerable hideouts:

> . . . they saw what looked like a refugee camp, with hundred of tents and lean-tos and people of many colours and hues- many colours and hues but mostly falling within a band of brown that ranged from dark chocolate to milky tea. . . . The island was pretty safe, they were told, except when it was not, which made it like most places. Decent people vastly outnumbered dangerous ones, but it was probably best to be in the camp, near other people, after nightfall. (Hamid 100-101)

The tensional anxiety coupled with the apprehension of refugees of being assaulted physically and psychologically in the makeshift camps push them to give in victimization of a different sort- they have to keep themselves locked up within the camps and cannot make access to entertainments of any sort. In other words, extreme boredom in the camps is no less than physical victimization in any degree: "Days passed like this, full of waiting and false hopes, days that might have been days of boredom, were for many . . ." (Hamid 108). In addition to the earlier observation, one can argue that the business of "people smuggler" at the border affirms that victimization is a hardcore reality and the victimhood of one group of people is exploited by another group:

> The man said that he was a people smuggler, and had helped people escape their city, and was doing the same thing here, because he knew all the ins and outs. He agreed to help Saeed and Nadia, and he cut his rate in half for them and they were grateful, and he took their payment . . . . Nadia knew they had been swindled, such things were common, and Saeed knew it too . . . . (Hamid 109)

It seems quite obvious that the political tension between natives and refugees in a given a spatio-temporal locale contributes in the victimization of refugees. At this moment, one may contend that eradication of border could bring an end to victimization and a deterritoralized universe could be a better alternative. But this argument seems to me untenable in that the issue of border cannot be reasonably left out of consideration inasmuch as border is a physical reality. One may drag a reference from the text to consolidate this standpoint:

> Without borders nations appeared to be becoming somewhat illusory and people were questioning what role they had to play. Many were arguing that smaller units made more sense, but others argued that smaller units could not defend themselves. (Hamid 155)

It is thus very clear that border problematizes victimization in that it leads people living at either side of a border to engage themselves in identity politics. Hamid himself has obliquely propounded a proposition that if people inhabiting either side of a border try to know the others who cross the border, victimization could be nipped in the bud: "No natives lived in the dormitories, for obvious reasons. But natives did labour alongside migrants on the work sites, usually as supervisiors or as operators of heavy machinery . . ." (Hamid 176). Hamid's

intervention into victimization of refugees could be questioned on the ground that it is not the liability of a nation-state to provide adequate accommodations to refugees for an indefinite time on humanitarian ground. The inclusion of refugees in a nation-state might incite ethnic riots between natives and refugees. Futhermore, it can be counter-argued that victimization is political act and thus no nation-state wants to put an end to it. One may again put forward a contrapuntal argument that nativeness is evanescent and relative, and therefore, no identity position is permanent. In other words, Hamid has questioned centre-margin binary supposing that the two positions are subject to subversions and therefore, victimization cannot be a wise coup on the part of any ruling authority to sustain territorial sovereignty.

But this proposition of Hamid cannot be corroborated in that nativeness is constitutive of one's proximity to socio-cultural, political, religious, economic, among others, specificities within a spatio-temporal locale. Therefore, ethnic conflict between natives and migrants (here refugees) cannot be reduced to the mere tension between centre and margin. Although, people migrate through time, neither natives nor outsiders want to tolerate each other because of their ethno-national consciousness that is firmly inculcated in their minds through literary and cultural productions and hence it is difficult to alter the attitude of people at praxis.

IV

Finally, at the close of the discussion, it can be plausibly mooted that border is a site where victimization occurs and as the existence of border is ineluctable reality, victimization can never cease to happen. Hamid's attempts to alter the

perceptions of common readers concerning victimization at border are laudable yet unacceptable and untenable.

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Colonialism and Travel Writing on Northeast India: Looking through Hooker's *Himalayan Journals*

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Colonial Narratives and Representation of the Orient

Contemporary studies on colonial ethnography and travel writings in the postcolonial contexts have become compelling for more than one reason. Colonialism and ethnography have variously re-/constructed and deconstructed diverse colonised and ethnic identities in ways that they have become referents for historical understanding of communities and ethnic groups, their ways of life, and they invite multiple contestations. Ethnographic narratives like different official documents, travel writings, biographies, and autobiographies are explored for writing history of people and places as:

> In fact through ethnographic texts those oral communities are historicized. Historicisation of tribes is a product of the anthropological machine as no other knowledge archive was available except their folk culture and existing material practices as significant components of pre-colonial knowledge which were not considered valuable for colonial ethnography. Therefore they were constructed over and over again with assigned identities without participating in the making of their own history. (Baral 89)

This mode of exploring colonial textual resources has contributed immensely to the construction of various postcolonial discourses. An understanding of people and their customs and cultures from sources other than the mainstream history books have brought the discourse of the marginal to the centre and with this endeavor, many colonial texts are examined from the postcolonialist point of view that attempts to understand how the natives and the colonised were constructed in these narratives.

An important aspect of the colonial narratives is the Eurocentric representation of the Orient. In his famous book *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said has highlighted the discourse of power and representation of the Orient ideologically, politically, sociologically, culturally and epistemologically. Said says:

> It is rather a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an *elaboration* not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it *is*, rather than expresses, a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of

> power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with Ideas about what "we" do and what "they" 'cannot do or understand as "we" do. (12)

A stereotyped image of the Oriental people as "irrational," "barbaric" and "uncivilised" was constructed which, in the terms of Said, can be called the "orientalisation on the Orient." Said finds this a discursive knowledge production of the Orient. Referring to the concept of colonial orientalism and Said's *Orientalism,* McLeod points out that, "*Orientalism is a Western fantasy,*" and says,

> Orientalism is first and foremost a *fabricated* construct, a series of *image* that come to stand as the Orient's 'reality' for those in the West. This contrived 'reality' in no way reflects what may or may not actually be there in the Orient itself; it does not exist outside of the representation made about it by Westerners.... Orientalism may be fundamentally *imaginative,* but *material effects* result from its advent. (41-2)

McLeod highlights the major characteristics of stereotyping the Oriental as:

> 1.The Orient is timeless, 2.The Orient is strange, 3.Orientalism makes assumptions about race, 4. Orientalism makes assumptions about gender, 5.The Orient is feminine and 6.The Oriental is degenerate. (44-46)

Such representation can also be viewed as sites of "cultural control" (to borrow the concept from Jan Mohamed and Lamming as cited in Ashcroft et al, 2008: 9) and "authority" (Foucauldian concept as used by Said, 1978). Colonial representation of the Orient is a major concern for the postcolonialist and decolonialist thinkers in an attempt to undo the misrepresentation. An understanding of it is important in order to critique such mis/-representation and the different forces of imperialism.

J. D. Hooker's *Himalayan Journal*

The colonial texts about North-East India (NE hereafter) are very few in number as many parts of this region were not occupied by the British for a long time. Still they throw light on different aspects of life of the people of NE at those times in one hand, and on the other, help us to understand different aspects of the process of colonialisation in NE. At the same time these writings also show how the 'natives' of NE were viewed and represented in the colonialist discourse and narratives. One such work is Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker's *Himalayan Journals*[1], a travel book dedicated to Charles Darwin. Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817 –1911) was an English botanist and explorer who travelled around the world to collect zoological and geological specimen. On November 11, 1847 Hooker left England for his three year long Himalayan expedition; he was the first European to study the plants of the Himalayas. He wrote a number of books on the plants of India, such as, *Flora of British India, A Sketch of the Vegetation of the Indian Empire*; a series *Flora Indica* and *Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya* together with Thomas Thompson.

In *Himalayan Journals,* Hooker not only wrote about the flora and fauna of the region but like any other colonialist wrote about the people he visited in course of his original project. His travel was facilitated by the colonial administrators and in order to familiarise him of/about the people who lived on his route and more so to know whether these people were friendly to travelers or not. In course of his travel he visited Khasi Hills as well. He titled the chapter on Khais as *Khasia Hills* in which he wrote about the people of the present Khasi Hills. *The Journal* is a testimony to how the experiences of a botanist-traveler reveal the events of history. *The Journal* can be read as a colonial document for historical understanding of the people of Northeast, in particular, the Khasi people. Reading through Hooker's *Himalayan Journal*, an attempt is made to show how alternative history could be produced using works from other genres and texts written by non-historians other than official histories in order to highlight the colonial process of knowledge production and representation of the colonial and pre-colonial NE.

Representation of Northeast India: the Eurocentric Gaze

The Journal is not simply a work on botany but a document that introduces the NE to the 'Western readers' making this region subject to the 'eurocentric gaze'. Hooker's text is interesting in the sense that he mixes up scientific study of the plants and animals of the region with ways of life of different groups/ communities of people he encountered on his route with the subjectivity of a colonialist. This mixing up of obejctive and scientific with subjective and prejudicial makes *The Journal* a document more than what it is known for. Further, the very title of the narrative as a journal undercuts

our understanding of a narrative simply as a record of a journey. The journal thus combines a typical mode of colonial knowledge production that seeks objectivity with a lot of its content that could be fictional. Hooker was both a traveler and a naturalist. He had to therefore unravel the mystry of the easrten Himalayas as refered to by Dr. Falconer, who invited him to India:

> He also drew my attention to the fact that we were ignorant even of the geography of the central and eastern parts of these mountains, while all to the north was involved in a mystery equally attractive to the traveller and the naturalist. (HJ, Preface,vii)

The places of NE for him were "mysterious". Being unexplored by the colonialists this region was an unknown territory for them. The preface of the book shows that the rulers had very little or no knowledge about the people and places of NE compared to 'well known Egypt, Aden, Ceylon, and Madras'; hence this region was considered as an 'exotica' to be explored. However, this exploration of a naturalist was not free from political turmoil and Euro-centric imperialist outlook. The geographical location of the NE is also not free from such depiction. Although Hooker admired the natural beauty poetically, at the same time, he also pointed out the 'hostility' of the native climate to the Europeans:

> At the north foot of the Khasia, in the heavily timbered dry Terai stretching for sixty miles to the Burrampooter, it is almost inevitable death for a European to sleep, any time between the end of April and of November. Many have crossed that tract, but not one without taking fever. (HJ 266)… Leeches and mosquitoes were very troublesome, the latter appearing in clouds at night …. (HJ 258)

Hooker started his journey from Sikkim which was a dependant state of the British Empire. Accounts of encounter between the coloniser and the colonised can be found in many places of this travel narrative. These encounters are reflective of a resistance by the natives to the coloniser-outsider; at the same time they also bring out the gap in cultural perception between the British and the natives. "The British political agent to Sikkim, Dr. Archibald Campbell, attempted on numerous occasions to secure permission for Hooker to take his expedition into the region, but time and again they were refused. Finally, they resorted to the bellicose language of empire and threatened invasion by military force if a suitable arrangement could not be agreed upon"[2]. This incident is reflective of the imperial forces that the colonisers used to dominate over the natives.

The 'unwelcome' gesture of the natives in Tamloong of Sikkim in the name of custom and tradition was considered by Hooker and Campbell as 'contrary to etiquette' - conduct that shows- "incivility and the unfriendly tone" (HJ197). One may note that their understanding of the native traditions and customs are viewed from the Eurocentric position of superiority. Again resistance by the Khasis to the advent of the coloniser is termed as 'savagery'. To quote from Hooker:

> On the first opening up of the country, the Europeans were brought into sanguinary collision with the Khasias, who fought bravely with bows and arrows, displaying a most blood-thirsty and cruel disposition. This is indeed natural to them. (HJ 273)

The Khasis who fought with indigenous weapon are termed as "blood thirsty and cruel" compared to the British who fought

with guns. "Cruelty" and "blood-thirsty" is seen as a natural trait of the Khasis. This type of accounts by the coloniser showed how the 'native' was negatively stereotyped. This type of description was not made only of the Khasis even of other communities of the region. Hooker described the 'Bhoteeas' as always "…a queer, and often insolent people, whom I was long ago tired of trying to understand…" (HJ 202); The 'Garrows', …are still in a savage state"- he mentions about the Garo tribes. Human sacrifices and polyandry are said to be frequent amongst them, and their orgies appear detestable to Hooker; "their country is very unhealthy" (HJ 273.); "the natives as collectors, and … coolies, … are averse to rising early, and are intolerably filthy in their persons…(HJ 273.); The Khasias are superstitious, but have no religion (HJ 276.) The Nagas are compared to the Tartars and their men folk are described as naked (HJ 332). These descriptions underline negative stereotyping of the natives.

Apart from descriptions of coloniser/colonised encounters, the book also reveals certain events of battle between the different native communities in the beginning of colonial period in this region. Such descriptions very well fit into the colonial/ist history writing. Hooker describes about the migrant 'Munnipories':

> The Munnipore valley has never been explored by any naturalist, its mountains are said to be pine-clad, and to rise 8000 feet above the level of the sea. The Rajah is much harassed by the Birmese, and is a dependant of the British, who are in the very frequent dilemma of supporting on the throne a sovereign, opposed by a strong faction of his countrymen, and who has very dubious claims to his position. During our stay at Silchar, the

> supposed rightful Rajah was prevailing over the usurper; a battle had been fought on the hills on the frontier, and two bodies floated past our bungalow, pierced with arrows. (HJ 329)

In his description of the Kukis, he described them as barbaric saying that:

> To the south-east of Silchar are interminable jungles, peopled by the Cookies, a wild Indo-Chinese tribe, who live in a state of constant warfare, and possess the whole hill country from this, southward to beyond Chittagong. Two years ago they invaded and ravaged Cachar, carrying many of the inhabitants into slavery, and so frightening the people, that land previously worth six rupees a biggah, is now reduced to one and a half. (HJ 330)

The unrest and the political turmoil that existed before the rule of the British in this region can be understood from these accounts. These accounts also give a glimpse of the demographic changes that took place in the pre-colonial period.

Hooker endeavoured to understand the local cultures and traditions and religion. Interestingly, his understanding of this is coloured by European 'glossing'. For example, his depictions of the 'Munnipore' dance (Manipuri Raas Dance):

> The performances began by a copper-coloured Cupid entering and calling the virgins with a flute; these appeared from a green-room, to the number of thirty or forty, of all ages and sizes….They commenced with a prostration to Cupid, around whom they danced very slowly, with the arms stretched out, and the hands in motion; at each step the free foot was swung backwards

> and forwards. Cupid then chose a partner, and standing in the middle went through the same motions, a compliment the women acknowledged by curtseying and whirling round, making a sort of cheese with their petticoats, which, however, were too heavy to inflate properly. (HJ 331-32)

Hooker also tries to understand the social system which shows a sort of inadequate and faulty understanding of it. Nonetheless, this understanding and interpretations are blurred and biased that creates a binary between the source and the interpreter. About the matrilineal system of the Khasis he wrote:

> Marriage is a very loose tie amongst them, and hardly any ceremony attends it. We were informed that the husband does not take his wife home, but enters her father's household, and is entertained there. Divorce and an exchange of wives is common, and attended with no disgrace: thus the son often forgets his father's name and person before he grows up, but becomes strongly attached to his mother. The sister's son inherits both property and rank, and the proprietors' or Rajahs' offspring are consequently often reared in poverty and neglect. (HJ 275)

While comparing the system of law and justice, Hooker distinguished between 'their' law and 'our' law. A white-supremacist undertone is very clear in such a description. Telling about the first encounter between the British and the Khasis he says:

> … murders continued very frequent as preludes to the most trifling robberies, until the extreme penalty of our

> law was put in force. Even now, some of the tributary Rajahs are far from quiet under our rule, and various parts of the country are not safe to travel in, their country is very unhealthy, and is said to contain abundance of coal, iron, and lime. (HJ 279)

The colonial process of 'otherisation' of the natives is very clear in this passage. Contrary to the western humanistic idealism, the colonized natives are treated as dispossessed communities and excluded from the fold of universalism. This reveals that the Western concept of universal humanism does not apply to the natives.

Northeast India and the Colonial Market

Hooker's account describes the commercial and pecuniary interest of the colonizers too as it notes how some of the vegetables were introduced in some of the areas of NE and how were they marketed. He mentions that potatoes were introduced amongst the Khasis about twenty years ago before his visit by Mr. Inglis, and 'they have increased so rapidly that the Calcutta market is now supplied by their produce'(HJ 277). The forest-produce from the NE moved to the European markets. For example, orchids from NE got a ready market in England that drew large profit for those who could export them. Hooker gives a tentative list of the price of NE products:

> A gentleman who sent his gardener "with us to be shown the locality, was more successful: he sent one man's load to England on commission, and though it arrived in a very poor state, it sold for 300£, the individual plants fetching prices varying from *SI.* to 10£. Had all arrived alive, they would have cleared 1000£. An active collector,

> with the facilities I possessed, might easily clear from 2000£. to 3000£., in one season, by the sale of Khasia orchids. (HJ 322)

The expedition of Hooker is symbolic of the colonial advancement upon the pristine nature of India. As Hooker explores the flora and fauna of India, it gets unfolded before the 'Western Eye' that also paved a way of colonial invasion and domination at least in exporting the local plants and produce.

Colonial Linguistics and Nomenclature of Defamiliarisation

Even naming of plants and places are not free from being Anglicised. The names of some of the ethnic groups are also changed by the British. Hooker says:

> With regard to the spelling of native names, after much anxious discussion, I have adopted that which assimilates most to the English pronunciation.(HJ, Preface, xviii)

Here are some examples of them:

> Bhoteeas (Bhutias), Mahometans (for Muslims), Dorjiling (Darjeeling), Bhotaii (Bhotai), Mahanuddy (Mahanadi), Burrampooter (Brahmaputra), Kujoor (Date-palm, called *Khejur* in Bangla), Siligoree (Siliguri), Sunderbunds (Sunderbans), Birma (Burma), Munnipore frontier (Manipur), Gowahatty (Guwahati), Chillong hill (Chittagong hills), Kinchinjunga (Kanchanjunga), Joowye (Jowai), Jyntea (Jaintia), Khasia (Khasi), and Garrow (Garo).

Plants which were locally known as "Loodoo-ma " by the Bhoteeas and " Nomorchi" and "Kole-pot," by the Lepchas

were renamed as *Deca-lsnea* in honour of Hooker's friend Professor J. Decaisne, an eminent French botanist, while another plant was named as *Cathcartia* in honour of the memory of J. F. Cathcart, official of the Bengal Civil Service (HJ 198). By adopting such nomenclature, the local plants are defamiliarised to the local natives of the land. This type of nomenclature is symbolic of the process of colonization as well as linguistic imperialism. Hooker also coined some new words with Indian root words such as 'salaamed' (HJ 201). These spellings and nomenclature form a part of 'colonial linguistics'.

The Narrative of Otherisation

What started as a travel of a botanist-naturalist resulted in documenting not only the natural resources of the region, but also taking note of the commerical aspect of his exploration. The account of the people and places, their culture, tradition and rituals from NE as given by Hooker shows that his study is not free from the 'colonial project' of controlling and containing the local people and aslo to idenitify plants and products which could be exported to Europe. *The Journal* can be seen as a document that reveals the history of the early period of the advent of the British in this region around the 1850s. Hooker's account displays how the colonialist attitude of 'white supremacy' is reflected even in a travel writing of a naturalist. This type of texts also helps us to understand how the native is understood and constructed in the colonial narratives.

Hooker's journal problematises the binary of *them* and *us* which is central to the colonial project. It not only negatively stereotyped the people he met but the native point of view or

the native voice was always erased in his narrative. This type of narrative is one-sided, and whatever looks different or foreign to the traveler and challenges his own cultural values are represented as useless. One such example is the most intricate and accomplished Manipuri dance form. Even where the traveler is not competent to understand a social practice it is rubished off as a primitive practice, for example, an anthropologist or a sociologist would go to the intricaries of a matrileanial society of the Khasis whereas it was totally useless to Hooker. Tribes with their myriad practices which in today's context are echo-friendly and developed over centuries after the tribe's engagement with nature are considered unimportant to the imperialist traveler. Further there is always an explicit and implicit reference to the Western Christian values which was not invoked the way the British behaved but considered important as part of native behaviour to be considered civilised. What colonialism actually did is- it colonised the people by force and then decalred them primitive. Thus the expression primitive in one stroke erased all their cultural values and world views. Hooker's document reflects the imperialist orientalism as, "The unequal power relation that defines the colonial project has dominated ethnographic works. Differences in race, culture and ways of life have always provided the occasion how a particular ethnic group is constructed and an identity assigned to it (Baral 86). Baral mentions that, "Nineteenth century ethnographic study was guided by two basic principles: one is race and the other is imperialism" (86). Baral's contestation is that, the differentiation is made under the colonial perspective that reinforces the binary of the "civilized/barbaric or primitive" that excludes the "native point of view (Baral 85). Thus Hooker's *Journal* can be seen as a colonial

"anthropological machine" of othering the ethnic people of the North East region of India.

Notes

[1]Joseph Dalton Hooker. *Himalayan Journals* http://library. British council. org.in/ViewIndiaCollection.asp. accessed on 6th Oct. 2008. All quotes from *Himalayan Journal* are taken from this e-library copy and the same is referred to in this paper as HJ within parenthesis followed by page number.

[2]http://www.plantexplorers.com/explorers/biographies/hooker/joseph-dalton-hooker-02.html as accessed on 6th Oct. 2008

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Maintaining a Conspiracy of Silence: *The Tuai* in Mizo Culture

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The Mizos are a people inhabiting the present state of Mizoram in the Northeast of India. Being an oral culture (with writing introduced only after the colonial encounter), folklore becomes an important means of knowledge circulation. Power, according to Foucault, is the way in which knowledge circulates in a culture ie., what we think and how we think is largely distributed by unseen forces in a social network or a social system. And it is by means of discourse that knowledge circulates and promotes a certain kind of pervasiveness, a certain kind of thinking, social constraint or limitation of freedom. In an oral culture like that of the Mizos, folklore becomes an agent of effective social control and conditions the thought processes of its members, imbibing in them certain ideologies and social norms, thus functioning as a Foucouldian 'power regime'.

A society's understanding of gender, in terms of masculinity and femininity, is also subjective to the networks of power, a result of the conditions of production and reproduction, reinforced by the cultural, religious and ideological systems prevailing in a society. Foucault describes culture as 'a hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion'.[1]

Oral narratives, in the form of tales and songs are salient in the Mizo oral genres. In Mizo folktales, masculinity is exalted and women are projected as inferior with limited wisdom and physical strength which necessitates their exclusion from the arenas of power. However, it is one thing to position a subject or a group as inferior and quite another to deny their presence. It is this absence of the *tuai* 'transgender' or any other sexual deviant from the Mizo oral narratives that is quite intriguing and it is curious that this has escaped the notice of scholars who have documented and published Mizo folktales. The question that seems to arise on this marked absence is whether a conspiracy of silence has deliberately been maintained or there are no sexual deviants in Mizo culture. If the answer to the first query is yes, it consequently calls for possible explanations as to the cause and as for the latter, it seems quite improbable given the fact that terms for these categories are present in the Mizo lexicon, which in turn brings forth a second argument whether this 'silence' is an impact of the colonial homophobia or rather, the patriarchal imposition of compulsory heterosexuality, calling in Charlotte Bunch, a lesbian theorist, who sees heterosexism as "the cornerstone of male supremacy" [2] and Monique Wittig[3], the French feminist who calls heterosexuality a "political regime".

Apart from this marked absence of the third gender, the Mizo oral tales and poetry seem to be devoid of homoerotic themes. Treating this silence as an 'unspeakability' resulting out of Mizo patriarchy, it may be suggested that the absence of the transgender in folktales is to enforce compulsory heterosexuality, the cultural expectation that all individuals are innately and immutably heterosexual and that same sex orientation is "unnatural". Thus by this absence in folk narratives, sexual deviance is kept out of public domain.

However, beyond the dominant narratives, there are some concealed narratives that do not gain wide circulation, one among which is a version of the story of Tuaisela largely ignored in the well-known and one of the oldest folktales "Liandova te Unau" (Liandova and his brother). This version has never been documented or published though when one visits Vangchhia in Champhai district of Mizoram, one might stumble upon a mound marked as Tuaisela's grave. Here, one might be told about the last days of Tuaisela, the brother of Liandova. In the well-known tale of *Liandova te Unau* , the two brothers were left orphaned by their mother who, after the death of their father, went off to marry another man. The story narrates the pitiful condition of the young orphans until they chanced upon a great fortune in the belly of a python. The story follows a detailed account of Liandova- how he multiplied his wealth, how he married well and settled in life and so on, Tuaisela seems to have strangely been kept out of the narrative altogether once he turned into adulthood. According to the concealed version, Tuaisela was a *Tuai* and therefore became a social outcast, shunned even by his loving elder brother Liandova, which is quite strange because the story tells of the love between these brothers who used to share even a kernel of corn. That such a loving brother should abandon his younger brother because of his sexual deviance speaks much about the social stigmatization of deviants, though this does not directly speak about its absolute intolerance because the story says that Tuaisela became a male hustler who wandered from village to village until he met his death at Vangchhia. Looking at folklore as an 'autobiographical ethnography'- 'a people's image of themselves' (Alan Dundes), it is not surprising that Tuaisela's account has been totally obliterated from the narrative.

Going to our second argument whether the "Great Silence" might be a result of the colonial impact, homophobia has been said to be a result of colonial influence and christianisation in many cultures who had otherwise accepted such alternate sexuality with regard but it does not seem to be so clear in the case of Mizo cultures with the lack of written documents coupled with complete Christianization of the entire population. However, the colonial decree issued on 22nd April, 1909 (Oder No.3) by the then Commissioner of Lushai Hills, HWG Cole may be referred to in this context. The order states that "in future all *tuai* who are clearly of the male sex have to abandon wearing women's clothes and they should behave like men, pay revenue and do *cooly* work. Chiefs should report the cases of any *tuai* whose sex is doubtful. The chiefs are bound to report all cases of unnatural offences that come to their notice whether or not any complaint has been made to them. Failure to do so is liable for severe punishment." Again NE Parry who was the superintendent of Lushai Hills from 1924-28 wrote in his book *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* that all cases of sodomy had to be reported to the superintendent to be dealt with by him and added that "sodomy however is rare in these hills" (56).

In the context of our discussion, it might be helpful to take a little detour to throw some significant light on the lasting colonial impact on the Mizos even long after the British had left India. Even though Northeast India was for the most part isolated from the rest of India before the British annexation, Mizoram, with its steep mountainous terrains can claim to be the most inaccessible and isolated and it was much feared as the 'land of black magic' (tales about powerful magicians abound in the folktales). The Lushai Hills was annexed into

the British administration in 1891 but the colonizers found it difficult to pacify the 'unruly' and 'wild savages'. So, they felt that the missionaries could accomplish the task for them by bringing in the gospel as is evident from David Scott's (Chief Commissioner of Assam) letter to Bayley, Secretary to the Govt of India dated April 27, 1825(Dena 20) proposing to invite missionaries to start humanitarian activities among the hill tribes of Assam arguing that nothing permanently good could be obtained by other means than gospelling and later affirmed by J. Shakespeare, the Superintendent of North Lushai Hills in his letter to the Secretary of the Chief Commissioner of Assam in June 1898 : "their (missionaries) valuable work had materially assisted in the pacification of the Lushais."(Dena 20-21) This "civilising mission" which began with the arrival of J.H Lorrain and F.W Savidge to Lushai Hills in 1894 had a lasting impact on the people and became so psychologically indoctrinated that the *sap pa* (the white man) could never go wrong because it was he who saved them from darkness and they readily allowed themselves to be stripped of all that which identify them as Mizos and instead adopted the thoughts and mannerisms of the white man. This phenomenon can be termed as what Mc Call calls 'black coatism'. Thus, it is very likely that the colonial decree on *tuais* must have been received by the people more as a religious demand than a colonial dictate, which is obvious from the statement given by the General Secretary of the YMA, Lalbiakzuala, on the issue of the 2009 Delhi High Court's verdict on Section 377: " …I believe that the 1909 order (HWG Cole's) is still good for the Mizo Christians" and the Executive Secretary of the Mizoram Synod, Rev Zosangliana Colney also claims that the British administration had laid down the

order with Christianity in mind("Now Mizos Fall Back") With the hangover of the 'civilising mission' still pervading the consciousness, it becomes easy to overlook the fact that the order has more to do with the demand for labour by the British imperialist. Seeing gendered division as a necessary component of capitalism, queer theorists argue that sexualities that were not deemed "productive" are demonised: "Gender, sexuality and race are cultural discourses historically and materially bound to the labour of production and reproduction- and to unmet needs"(Hennessy ix). Hence the subject itself seemed to be condemned into silence and a conspiracy of silence was necessarily maintained in a way certain things were considered taboo to be spoken about in tribal societies. Because of the oral nature of folk narratives, certain things can be suppressed from being revealed.

However, apart from folklore being a medium of social control, it can also serve as a medium of subverting accepted norms. In this respect, the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque comes into significance when contemporary Mizo culture is taken into scrutiny. Carnivalesque, seen as an act of rebellion against authority, breaks down social hierarchies and constructed authority. The contemporary phenomenon of provocative dances in church, gay fest, cross-dressing, performances by transvestites invoking laughter and cheer in social gatherings and other practices bordering to the grotesque can be seen as a subvergent of church hierarchy and seems to offer liberation from norms of decency. The queer who has always been ostracized and stigmatized by the society now seems to be more daring to come out in the open, rejecting the nomenclature of *tuai* and adopting a new identity as *pherh.* In marked contrast to the earlier 'absence' from social

discourse, the *tuai* seems to dominate the present discourse. The church and social organizations like the MHIP, YMA, MZP and MSU are viewing with concern the threat posed by the determined presence of the queer population in Mizoram. This phenomenon is seen by the church as the 'resurgence of evil' which can be cured with religious healing, while some blame it on the influence of Korean style of effeminate men and organizations like the YMA propose strict action against these 'unnatural sexualities'. It is seen as a challenge to Mizo culture which had always celebrated masculinity to the highest degree. The best blessing that a person can give to a new-born child is to become *a pasaltha* (a brave) and in the Mizo traditional belief, only a *pasaltha* can have access to *pialral* (equivalent to paradise) after death. Mizo culture heroes like Taitesena, Khuangchera, Pawthira and Hrangchala all represented valour, aggressiveness, strength and bravery and these stereotypical role models are ingrained in the Mizo psyche through lores, customs and traditions and the new adopted religion also re-affirms the patriarchal norms. Thus when the heteronormative assumptions of the Mizo patriarchal society are contested, it calls for remedial measures, opening discussions and social discourse. However the very fact that the Mizo society has engaged on discourses on the subject of the queer itself can be seen in the light of Michel Foucault's assertion in his *The History of Sexuality*, *Vol.I* that the mere fact that one is speaking about a subject rather than condemning it to silence and non-existence has the 'appearance of a deliberate transgression' and anticipates 'the coming freedom'.

Notes

1. *L'hermeneutique du sujet. Cours au Collège de France*, 1981-1982. (Paris: Gallimard Seuil), 173.

2. Charlotte Bunch, qtd in Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960*, (Urbana And Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 270.

3. In her essay "The Straight Mind", Monique Wittig, a French theorist of material feminism, sees heterosexuality not as a natural normative but as an institution politically constructed that needs to be overthrown. The gender categories of 'man' and 'woman', seen as economic and political categories, make sense only within the framework of the heterosexual system and the distinction between the two ('political concepts of opposition') will vanish once this political regime of heterosexuality ceases to exist.

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Sexism in Mizo Language

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INTRODUCTION

Sexist language expresses a bias in favor of one sex over the other and in most cases the favor is towards the male gender. The language used by an individual reflects the attitudes of the society in which the individual belongs. Women are considered to be the weaker sex in most society, which is also the case in the male centered Mizo society. Since earlier times there were things like 'work fit only for women' and 'work fit for men.' Women were considered to be solely responsible for house chores, were rendered powerless and their social standing subordinated to the men. Patriarchy runs deeply in the veins of the Mizo community and this is reflected in the language. Such kind of attitude has been passed down from generation to generations and the language which has also been inherited, is greatly influenced by such discriminatory attitude towards the women. However, since the Mizo society is patriarchal it is not merciful towards the men who they deem are not up to par with societal standard of how men should be. The study also delves into this issue as well. This paper sought to explore the various aspects of language which has been affected by sexism along the gender-neutral terms used in the language.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC SETTING

Mizo is a language spoken in Mizoram, a state in the North Eastern region of India and belongs to the TibetoBurman family. An article on the history of the language by DarchuailovaRenthlei in 'Aspects of Mizo Language,' have mentioned that each tribe in Mizoram had their own specific dialect which differs from one another due to regional differences. However, the lingua franca of Mizoram is considered to be the Lusei dialect although how or when it has been adopted or accepted as the common dialect is indeterminable. It has been assumed to have originated during the Sailo kings rule whose dialect has been adopted by the general population and used up to this day. The language had no script till the end of 19th Century till the advent of the Welsh missionaries who studied the language and developed a script. The script was Roman and developed based on the common dialect of the general population i.e. Lusei, which was then used in the translation of the Bible and in educational institute solidifying its status as lingua franca of Mizoram. Lusei has also been interchangeably used with Duhlian. However, the blanket term adopted for the lingua franca of Mizoram is popularly said to be Mizotawng(Mizo language).

SEXISM IN WORDS

Sexism towards women

In Mizo society, the perception of women and their status greatly influences certain words relegating the female gender to a subordinated position. The men are considered the superior being and their status more elevated which can be observed in terms related to male gender.

1. The description of male and female in Mizo itself demonstrates how male-centric the language is. The terms used in referring to female is'hmeichhia,' a combination of 'hmei' meaning *mistress* and 'chhia' meaning *bad.* Whereas that of male is 'mipa' which is a combination of 'mi' meaning *person* and 'pa' referring to *male*. This description shows how the society has trivializes and denigrated women and their status. This shows a tendency involving words that clearly restricted in reference to on sex or the other where the words related to female gender have less favorable meaning.

   Mipa- *male*

   Hmeichhia- *female*

2. There are also some sexist terms which only have a female counterpart and none for the male gender. Such term includes 'hmeithai' which is an expression for *widows* in Mizo. Since the beginning there have been a social stigma against a woman who is without a husband or whose husband has died. The widows were expected to live in the outskirts of the village where it was more dangerous as enemies or wild animals were bound to attack first. Also, children of widows are subjected to more criticisms by the society in terms of their character. Such is not the case for a man without a wife. He is not subjected to as much social scrutiny as the widow and there is no equivalent word for a widower in Mizo.

3. Another example for this is 'hmei' meaning *mistress*. This refers to the woman who is a lover of a married man and having an extra marital affair with him. Often fingers are pointed towards such woman while the man is subjected to less prejudice even though both committed the same

wrongdoing. On the other hand, when a married woman is involved in an extramarital affair, the lover is simply referred to as 'ngaihzawng' simply meaning *lover* or 'bialpa' simply meaning *boyfriend*. No fingers are pointed towards the boyfriend and his character is never questioned. In both cases, the morality and character of the women involved are questioned. 'Hmei' in comparison to its counterparts is more negative and has less favorable meaning.

4. A classic example for this is 'nawhchizuar' meaning *prostitute*, a reference used solely in terms of a woman.As stated in *The Concise Learner's Dictionary of Mizo* by J.V Vanlalngheta, 'nawhchizuar' is '*a harlot, prostitute, call-girl, whore, loose woman*.'

5. Sexist language of Mizo includes female oriented words which contain elements referring to the character and morale of a woman. Words like 'sihhnip' 'lepchiah' 'buanchaklo' are exclusive words that pertain to *sexually promiscuous women*. These words refer to a woman who sleeps around or is easily swept away by lust or who avidly changes male companion. The society often does not question the promiscuity of men and hence no alternative words for the opposite sex is found for these terms.

6. 'Thianghlimna' literally translated as *to be clean* is used in referring to*virginity* and is often highly considered in the Christian society of Mizo. In general, it refers to both men and women but too often the description inclines more towards the female gender. It would not be farfetched to say that the term is exclusively female

oriented in the Mizo society as virginity is often hardly questioned in a man. This is also taken as a defining factor for a woman or a girl in the community as a woman who has lost her virginity before marriage is considered a loose woman, whose morality and character is often questioned. The men hardly or, it may be safe to say, never face such prejudice regarding their 'thianghlimna.'

7. It is often easy for a woman in a Mizo society to be a 'hmeichhenasa', 'nu nasa,' and 'hmeichhe rapthlak'generally referring to '*a woman who is too much*'. As Mizosociety is a community where proper decorum and politeness are held in high esteem, any person disrupting such norm is considered to be ill mannered or troublesome. But such is a case in the society that a woman who disrupts the social standards or goes against it stands out more than a man. Often women are called out for being a 'nu nasa,' or 'hmeichherapthlak', '*a woman who is too much'*.However, such is hardly ever the case for a man as his actions are often brushed off as him being more privilege as a male and entitled to creating a little trouble. More often than not, these terms are derogatorily used to describe outspoken women.

8. Women in Mizo society are always subjected to societal scrutiny. When a girl gets married the first question asked about her is whether she is a 'mofel' or not, meaning *a good daughter-in-law* or *wife*. The character of the groom is never questioned or scrutinized, rather they would question whether he is from a good family or if he has a job or not. This is because, in the society, a man being able to provide for the wife is a winning factor that triumph over everything else. The term 'mofel' is deeply

embedded in the Mizo society that a girl child is told froma young age to be a 'mofel.' And often the opposite 'mosual' meaning *a bad daughter-in-law* is also used to describe a daughter-in-law who is not up to par with the standard of the in-laws. Another term to describe another kind of daughter-in-law is 'mothatchhia' meaning '*lazy daughter-in-law'* referring to a daughter-in-law whose work habit within the household falls short of expectation. In a community such as the Mizo, women are expected to know what to do within the household, to do work without any complains and in cases where she is juggling work and household, she is expected to do both efficiently. This makes her reliable and a 'mofel.' However, if she seems to fall short on how she manages the household chores she is often deemed 'mothatchhia.' In these expressions, the women are described in terms of their work ethics in the house of her in laws.

9. Divorce is another aspect in Mizo society where the age-old sexism is seen to influence the language. A man is allowed to 'ma' his wife meaning that he is allowed to bring home another woman and throw out his wife on the spot. A woman is not allowed such privilege, however, she is permitted to 'sum chhuah' literally translated as '*bring out the money*' if she wants to divorce her husband. Another term used when a woman wants a separation is 'tlan' meaning '*to run away.*' In this case, if a woman wants a divorce, she runs away from home and seek shelter at friend's or her family's home. It is to be noted that, if a woman wants a divorce, she is the one who leaves the house but if a man wants a divorce, he tells his wife to leave.

Sexism towards men

There are often stereotypical perception of a man and a woman based on the generalization of how men and women should behave and what they should do. A man who helps with house work, a job considered to be solely done by women, is often subjected to mockery and jest of the community calling him a 'thaibawih,' meaning '*hen pecked*.'

SEXISM IN PROVERBS AND SAYINGS

There is a number of Mizo proverbs that reflect sexism:

1. Hmeichhe fin in tuikhurhnar a pel lo.

A woman's intellect does not cross the boundaries of a well.

This means that there is a limit to the ability of a woman's intellect. It implies that a woman is not as intelligent or as clever as a man. It degrades the intellect of the female gender.

2. Hmeichhia chu an bumnangai ah vawisarih an bum nawntheih.

A woman can be deceived seven times with the same trickery.

Similar to the first one, there is also an implication that women are quite dense and thick. It means that, she is so gullible and brainless that you can deceive her over and over again with the same trickery.

3. Hmeichhialeh pal chhiate chu a thlaktheih.

You can always replace a woman like you replace a worn out or shabby fence.

This saying implies that a woman is like a mere object in your land that you may replace her anytime you think she is worn or shabby. It indicates how replaceable women are, degrading them to the status of a mere superficial object, a fence.

4. Pawnfen fengtlak a ni.
   Worthy of wearing a skirt. (Unworthy of wearing pants.)

This is usually used to criticize men who are incapable or are incompetent. The wearing of a skirt implies something debasing. It is considered an insult of the worse kind for men.

5. Hmeichhe tihawm tawklek a ni.
   Something a woman would do.

This, like the previous saying is utilized when criticizing a man who does something that is considered as unbecoming of the standard upheld by men in the community. Or in cases when something bad happens and the culprit is a woman, it is often said '*Oh! no wonder!That is something a woman would do.*'

6. Hmeichhia leh chakaiin sakhua an neilo.
   Women and crabs have no religion.

A woman has no authority over her faith or religion regardless of what faith she follows or believes in, when she marries she has an obligation to follow or believe the same faith as her husband. She has no say in the matter and whatever religion she follows has no relevance after marriage.

7. Hmeichhe thu thu nisuh, chakai sa sa ni suh.
   Words from a woman are no word as crab is no meat.

Crab meat is not considered real meat by Mizo people. So, here there is a comparison of the word of a woman to crab meat, implying that it is not worth listening to nor is it worthy to be taken seriously.

8. Hmeichhetawng men ah thlakrawh.
Throw a woman's speech into a pit.

A woman's speech should not be given any relevance as it is preconceived that whatever she says will not be important.

9. Hmeichhe riltamin chawbel an len a, mipa riltamin thlawhhma an zauh.
A hungry woman increases the size of her rice pot while a hungry man increases the size of the field he owns.

Meaning a woman who wants to succeed has to excel in her house hold responsibilities whereas a man who wants to succeed ventures outside and increases his assets.

10. Hmeichhialeh uipui chu lo rum lungawi ve mai mai teh se.
It is better to leave a growling bitch (female dog) and an upset woman unappeased and to leave them to their own devices till they are content.

In this a woman's feelings are being completely disregarded. It means that you should just leave an angry woman be and not try to appease her hurt feelings as it is a waste of time. Here, the status of a woman is again degraded to that of a mere dog indicating that her feelings are only as important as that of a dog.

11. Hmeichhe vau loh leh vau vau loh chu pawng tual tual.
An uncontrolled woman and an untended field tend to go wild.

This implies that women are incapable of any sense of decorum without the guidance or control of a man. It means that a woman needs to be controlled by a man. If not, they are likely to go wild and have loose character with no moral values just like overgrown field when they are not tended regularly.

12. Hmeichhe thihul thak ang.
    Like a menopause woman.

This expression is used to imply something barren or dry. For example, it can be used as an expression for saying how penniless one is or to tell how one has no opinion on a certain matter.

13. Hmeichhia leh uite chu a chul nel peih peih a ni mai.
    Women and dogs goes to whomever gives them attention.

This is used to imply that women are gullible and that they will leave their current lovers for any other who pays more attention to them. It compares women to dogs who gets excited even with strangers willing to play or give them attention.

Social stigma towards spinsters

In Mizo society, there is a deep-rooted stigma towards a 'nula senior,' an *unmarried woman* or *spinster*. Even though the society does not lack in its share of 'tlangval senior,' *unmarried men* or *old bachelors*, 'nula senior' solely is a derogatory term. The 'tlangval senior' are hardly ever described in terms of their marital standard. It is often assumed that, there is a defect in a woman's character or some other unfavorable reason within her that leads to her being a spinster and unwanted for marriage by men. They are often the butt of jokes in Mizo society.

The following sayings and common jokes are an example of how the society shows their sexist attitude towards spinsters.

1. Nula senior chu an khirh duh.
   Spinsters are difficult.

2. Nula senior chu hrawn an hahthlak.
   Spinsters are hard very difficult to live with.

3. Nula senior chu an zun a hingbik.
   The urine of spinsters has stronger odor.

4. Nula senior chu thu an duh.
   Spinsters are opinionated.

5. Nula senior chu an phunchiar.
   Spinsters are grumbly or fastidious.

6. Chhulkhawhar.
   Lonely ovary.

7. Nula senior chuan cooker anpawmphit thei.
   A rice cooker can whistle when simply held by a spinster.

SEXISM IN PHRASES

1. Duh loh rai ang.
   Like impregnating a woman you don't like.

This means unhappy or sulking about something.

2. Hmeichhebuanchak lo
   A woman weak in bed.

This implies women who are unable to resist the sexual advances of a man.

3. Faluhloh a leng.
   Living without child.

This indicated a woman who is unmarried, a virgin and is without a child, a spinster.

GENDER NEUTRAL TERMS IN MIZO

1. Pronouns in Mizo are gender neutral. Where English has he, she, him, her or it, Mizo simply has 'a' pronoun whose meaning varies depending on the context in which it is utilized.

For example:

1) *A* local.
He/she *is coming.*

2) Lianin ka lo kal *a* ti.
Liani said ***she*** *will be coming.*

3) Lianan ka lo kal *a* ti.
Liana said ***he*** *will be coming.*

4) *A* tliak a.
It *is broken.*

2. The use of titles in Mizo is also fairly equal unlike English where there is just a Mr to indicate a male whereas the different titles of a woman Ms. and Mrs. identifies the woman by her marital status. Mizo has the following designated titles:

Tlangval or Tv.- *for an unmarried man.*
Nula or Nl.- *for an unmarried woman.*
Pu- *for a married man.*
Pi- *for a married woman.*

3. Occupational nouns and job titles are quite neutral in Mizo society even though there are some clear distinctions on what are considered male and female oriented jobs. Some occupational titles are regarded strictly male like Police, motor khalh (*driver*), elektriksiam (*electrician*), and mechanic, sa sat (*butcher*) and so on. Likewise, there are certain occupations

which are considered strictly female like nurse, chawhmehzuar (*vegetable vendor*), puanthui (*tailor*), and various others.

The titles of most professions in Mizo are gender neutral and both genders are associated with such. The morphemes 'nu' indicating *female* and 'pa' indicating *male* are usually added after the profession to indicate gender.

Table 1: Occupational titles that are common gender in Mizo

Common	Gloss	Female	Male
Dawrkai	*Sales person*	Dawrkainu	Dawrkaipa
Zirtirtu	*Teacher*	Zirtirtunu	Zirtirtupa
Daktawr	*Doctor*	Daktawrnu	Daktawrpa
Ziaktu	*Author/Writer*	Ziaktupa	Ziaktunu
Samsiamtu	*Hairdresser*	Samsiamtunu	Samsiamtupa

CONCLUSION

Various aspects of Mizo language are explored in this study, which includes words, idioms and phrases, and proverbs and sayings. The main focus is to investigate the sexist language in Mizo and to ascertain which gender is more subjected to sexism. It does not come as a surprise that Mizo being a patriarchal society, the sexist languages were mostly misogynistic and directed towards the women. Although sexism towards men was also seen, the evidence found was next to nothing and the overtone less insulting. This study concludes that the worst that a man can be in a Mizo society is to not be manly enough in accordance to the societal standard. Gender neutral terms were also looked at which includes Mizo pronouns and some occupational titles.

The study conducted has shown that misogyny runs deep in the patriarchal society of Mizo. Observation of the evidences shows how women were prejudiced against since earlier times which reflect in the language. Even though times have changed and there are less apparent expression of misogyny, however, the sexist mindset and outlook towards women has changed very little. This could be a result of unrealistic expectation from the women folk in today's society where expectations from women does not move forward with time, as the society has in other aspects,which has inadvertently led to sexist attitudes. The advent of Christianity could be claimed as one of the reason sexism is deep rooted in Mizo society as it clearly indicates the status of men and women where women are regarded inferior to men.

Sexism in language is an unconscious reflection of the society. Only by changing the social attitudes toward gender equality can there be a true change in the sexist language. One important way to eliminate sexist language is to improve the status of the women through awareness and social reforms. Though it may take some time for the change to be actually seen, it is vital that these social reforms take place to be truly free of sexist language.

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Binary and Beyond:
Exploring Gender Dynamics in Nee Devi's *Lei Mana Amatang*

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> And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called "the sex," meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. (Beauvoir, 26)

Critiquing subordinating of women on the basis of biology, theology, philosophy and psychology, Simone de Beauvoir examines dualities and their operations that have been placed to create and continue male superiority in gender dynamics. By 'othering', the 'Subject' turns woman into an 'object' to be gazed, thereby depriving woman of her 'self', identity and hence, her voice. 'Othering' is not limited to woman as a gender category only; it is also the basis for dismissal of non-binary genders in the gender spectrum by the dominant narrative. As in other patriarchal societies, in the Meitei community of Manipur, any deviation from what is considered 'normal' gender performance is either negated or swept under the carpet. According to Judith Butler "gendered body is performative…it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitutes its reality" (Butler 136).

Nee Devi's short story collection *Lei Mana Amatang*[1] (2009) depicts what has always existed but spoken of in a hushed tone and she develops her stories within these acculturated gender performances of the binary. Her protagonists are individuals trapped and subjected to violence owing to their gender, and seeking to venture beyond the conditioned. Where writers "handled [subject of sex] subtly to avoid criticism in an otherwise orthodox Manipuri society where open discussion on sex is taboo" (Singh 106), Devi posits her characters within the discussion and negation of the same taboo in a realistic setting of the everyday Meitei world, thereby questioning and dismantling hegemonic gender structure.

Elizabeth Kennedy and Madelaine Davis are of the view that heteronormativity is challenged in a 'butch-femme' lesbian relationship, where butch is the 'masculine' partner and the femme, the 'feminine'. Butches do not see themselves as trying to be man but as "'masculine' women who made explicit the existence of lesbianism…overtly resisted what they saw as heterosexist norms. In this way, butches differed significantly from femmes who often did not visibly appear to be all that different from heterosexual women" (Kennedy and Davis discussed in Sullivan 27)[2]. Sullivan, however, asserts that though not neatly fitting under dualities as we understand, "butch-femme identities/ relations do not exist outside the dominant regimes of power/ knowledge" (29). One can examine if this dominant regime of knowledge is the knowledge of gender construction of a particular culture that eventually becomes an undeniable part of an individual's understanding of gender identity. In 'Manglaaknaba' (Caught in Nightmare), Somo[3] earns, takes care of Laisna, and they live together in Somo's house. Somo is the one who *drives*

Laisna to her parents' place; Laisna is the one who *brings in the tea*. When Laisna does not return one night, loneliness engulfs and Somo remembers *telling* Laisna of the disadvantages of waking up late every morning and *teaching* Laisna of the ways of the world (61-2). Somo is thus the masculine, active, rational, adult partner, and Laisna, the feminine, passive, emotional, and infantile in their lesbian gender dynamics. Laisna 'the feminine' is depicted as the weak one when she is swayed by her mother's demand to marry a 'real' man. Rena Laishram states, "All other relationships are regarded as extension of father-son relationship or supplementary to it. The desire for male descendant among the Meitei is intense"(49). In such a highly-structured Meitei society where families are recognised by clan system and males (sons) are the clan heads, union of the likes of Somo and Laisna's which will bring no biological offspring have no place and importance. As Laisna's mother says, "people don't marry and have children for fun. Their children will shelter them when they get old" (61). Somo is mocked as "fake" man and their life, "imaginary" by Laisna's mother (61-2). Though their gender roles lay within the system and binary of gender division, Somo and Laisna's denial of the man-woman domestic partnership and subversion are seen as breaking the rules and hence, their partnership is never acknowledged.

Female bonding or solidarity has played important role in shaping the Meitei society; from the workings of the all women-market, Ima Market (Mother's Market), to powerful women movements in Manipuri history. Instances can be cited of the two *Nupilals* (War by Women) in 1904 and 1939, or the present-day *Meira Paibis* (torch-bearing women vigilantes). Manjusri Chaki-Sircar notes "the vital presence of female

power" in the Meitei society of Manipur and attributes this "as a kind of feminism…recognized in women's individual self-reliance and collective solidarity" (10). If such female solidarity/ partnership in the Meitei socio-economy and religious areas is permitted, why is female bonding of sexual nature not sanctioned? Were women movements allowed because of their conception and confinement in the public (male) space, where their sexuality can be controlled? It is interesting to note that the first *Nupilal* was fought against male bonded-labour by the then British regime and the *Meira Paibis* observe their foundation day as *Paari Kanba Numit* (Save-the-Son Day). Thus, it would not be a wrong assessment to say that female bonding is denied when it does not benefit their male counterparts and individual (and not collective) woman exercises their sexuality within private/ domestic space where patriarchal structure of the family runs deep. Laisna's mother considers Somo's and Laisna's relationship a phase of youth and tries to set Laisna up with "real" men. These curbing and vigilance was never an issue with Somo who was brought up with 'masculinity' among boys. The sexual connection between Somo and Laisna is not mentioned explicitly in the story but cannot be denied when Laisna is referred to as the *helloi* (nymph) who seduced Somo by Somo's mother. It would be a constriction if Somo is placed solely within the butch women identity, "Somo's challenge is not just against family and society but also Somo's own mannerism and body. Though Somo did not think of [Somo]self as man, Somo could not accept [Somo]self as woman either" (56). Because of their resistance to heteronormative roles, the 'masculine' or butch in lesbianism are often persecuted and subjected to violence (Sullivan 27). Somo's suicide attempt in the end of the story

can be seen as an infliction of this violence, not only at the physical level, but psychological also, resulting from rejection and denial of one's gender identity. The question of conditioning which Beauvoir discusses extensively in *The Second Sex* is seen in the complexity of biological essentialism and Somo's nurturing during the growing up years. Somo is depicted to "have an innate grit" and Somo's grandfather brought up Somo as a grandson. But when it comes to real sexual choices and domestic partnerships, Somo is constantly reminded that Somo is not a man and hence not worthy of being Laisna's partner. This is one of the many issues of subordination and marginalisation faced by queer identities and converging this to female queer identities who are marginalized two-fold, Somo questions:

> What kind of society is this that wants to seize other's right in their own hands! What kind of forced and oppressive norm is this that says only man and woman should be life partners? Is the tie of body worth more than the tie of souls? Is love an inner emotion or an outer one? Does love need permission? (65)

In a disturbing crime in "Chinjakki Waari" (Story of Food), Thoinu's daughter is raped by her landlord, whom the girl addresses as Uncle. In the absence of her own father who left her mother along with two younger siblings, the daughter and her mother was given a sort of "home" by Lalita, the landlady, who treated Thoinu like her own sister. Lalita emphathises with Thoinu's ill-fated past and a female bonding or sisterhood grew between these two women. As an extension, Thoinu's daughter also became a part of this bonding, embodying the ethos of the powerful collective women.

However, this bonding is within the domestic space, where patriarchy has a strong hold and it is shown when in a traumatic turn of events the girl is raped, shattering the idea of home and 'father figure' and leaving her in a state of "disbelongingness". The duality of home and homelessness comes into play here. When not in opposition, the 'other' is treated as an appendage to the 'Self'; their belongingness, dependant on the acceptance by the 'Self'. If we consider the patrilocal set up of the Meitei society in this duality, a man never has to search for a home, while a female is 'homeless' or a 'refugee'. Thoinu herself was raped by her previous landlord because of whom she left her rented room and moved to Lalita's. The pain of the mother is transferred to her daughter, her victimized body to her daughter's body, thereby depicting a continuation of objectification and subjugation by the male gaze. When a woman's existence is reduced to her gazed body only, we negate her humanity, thereby equating her to an object generations after generations, mothers after daughters, creating a chain of sexual violence. The story ends with a dead Thoinu, her life leaving her home and her body which is seen only as flesh by men, "in other words, women are really men's prey" (37).

'Radheshyam' explores the psychological trauma of Radheshyam, a husband and a father, the earner, the head of the family, who is subjected to sexual abuse one evening in a dingy lane in a market in Imphal. He is unable to neither come to terms with the incident nor share it with his wife. He tells her of the robbery to which his wife replies, "Let it be. It [The money] was not that much…, Why should a man [be disheartened] only for that…! 'Why should a man' these words made Radheshyam felt weaker. His eyes were again filled with

tears" (73). In the family structure, Radhesyam is "for good or bad the head of the family…as a wife living under the protection of her husband, a lot has change [for her] in the couple of days.' (74-5) On learning her husband's ordeal, Bidyarani cried and looked at her weeping husband with sympathy, "even if the society does not know, he is her husband. His torturing of himself with his inability to confess tells he is a man" (77). This brings us to the stereotype of the 'silent' man, the one who bears and suffers but does not share, the emotional inept. A momentary reversal of role occurs when the husband after succumbing to an 'object' is provided his manhood by his wife. "Why would you be disheartened?...Is that a man's thought? Aren't you a man?' (77).

In the Meitei society, one of the earliest instances of gender non-conformity can be traced to the Lai Haraoba rituals. The important functionaries of this ritual are the *maibis* (preiestesses) and the *maibas* (priests). Among other roles, the *maibis* are "mediums, receiving oracles from the lais [gods]" and more likely to be possessed (Parratt 33). When a male *maiba* becomes possessed "he traditionally wore woman's apparel of the *maibi* and was spoken of as the 'male maibi'"(33). However, the acceptance of this gender non-conformity is related to the realm of the spiritual, the religious, and the collective memory and hence in the domain of the public. What happens when gender non-conformity is in the everyday life of the ordinary individuals who has no protective alibi of being possessed, or chosen by a 'higher power'? In 'Leikangda Nanthuba' (The Unexpected Fall), Anjana is an independent woman from an affluent family. As she wished to marry a man equal to her (at least in societal position), she married late and without properly knowing her husband. Only

a few days after the marriage, Anjana declares she wants to return to her paternal place. On pestering for the grounds of her return, she finally confesses that she and her husband have no fondness for each other. Anjana's husband is effeminate and he thinks she is masculine. Their expectation from each other as husband-wife and man-woman do not fit their reality and it became their reason for separation. Anjana found her hsuband's mannerism "*kaida-amani"* (strange, weird). She also came to know of his embroidery skills, friendship with his locality's girls and his *eta sannaba* (a close friendship between two female; a sort of female bonding) with another woman. Anjana's visiting relations were filled with confusion and dismay when her mother finally asked, "Is he what they call *homo*?" (58)[4] As they were sitting in an uneasy silence to the realization of reality, Anjana's husband came "his body swaying" and said in a emotional tone, "Yes, yes, I am a *homo*…I don't want a woman who threatens like a man…You must've thought I wanted you. It's just that I could not bear to look at my mother [who must have wanted her son to marry] you are the one who is of nowhere. You disrespect me in my own home…You frighten me [sarcastic]. Leave. Take back all your belongings. How would I have known [that you are 'masculine']…" (58). Layered complexities in analyzing performativity and failure of the binary in understanding gender identity and fluidity is evident in this story. On the one hand, Anjana's physical/ outward appearance is that of a woman or 'feminine'. Nowhere in the story is mentioned that she has masculine traits. It is only that she controls her own agency in her life; she married late, waited for the right man, is financially independent and when she found out that her husband is not what she expected (though the expectation may be an extension

of what society expects a man/ husband to be) she exercises her agency and decides she does not want to be married anymore. She has a voice and is not subdued. It is this same voice and agency that her husband thinks as her 'masculinity'. On the other hand, though her husband's physical appearance and behavior may be 'feminine' his bullying of Anjana's decision and voice in "his home" makes him no less than any other 'man.' This story overturns the gaze and places the husband as the object and Anjana as the subject. Also, Anjana is the initial decision-maker, the 'active' and not a follower of her husband's decision and hence, subverts her role as the docile. But though certain norms are reverse or not conformed to, their relationship fails because in spite of accepting non-conformism in their own self, they expect the other to fall within the realm of conformity and rejects if their criteria is not met. In the end of the story, Anjana remembers her once-suitor the stubborn and insistent Indramani who now becomes her male "ideal".

Hélène Cixous talks about the need for women "to write her self, must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies…Woman must put herself in to the text" (857). On writing of the gender marginal and not just of woman, Nee Devi brings into focus the struggle of the everyday gendered identities and how they conform, deconstruct, and/ or negotiate their lives within constraints and ironies of the binary. She opines that literature is of the marginal[5] and this is also asserted in the opening dedication of *Lei Mana Amatang*: "for those unable to die". There is an intense gloom in this dedication of the wish to end and (perhaps) the lack to will to fulfill the same. In the context of the short stories discussed above, it

points to an existential crisis of the gender marginal. In the tragedy of these stories, we find narratives of the 'other' in their own voices and what emerges is reclamation of narratives and authorship. When the 'Object' starts to tell their own story, they subvert and become 'subject' producing an alternative view of the world from the gender non-conformist, women, the private, and the self.

Notes

1. *Lei Mana Amatang* is in Manipuri language. Free translations of the short stories cited in the paper have been done by the author of this paper.

2. Elizabeth Kennedy and Madelaine Davis' observation of butch-femme is discussed by Nikki Sullivan in *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*(26)

3. Somo's full name is Somorani in the story. While Somorani is a female name, when shortened to Somo, is a male's name. Also whether the writer intended to use gender-neutral pronoun for the gender "queer" protagonist or came naturally as a use of gender-neutral Manipuri language is uncertain. In the translations, Somo is repeatedly used instead of using gendered pronouns.

4. Homo in the context of the Meitei society is not necessarily homosexual. It is rather a term roughly used for effeminate males.

5. Nee Devi. Personal interview. 25 September 2018.

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Deconstructing the Heteronormative Belief in Aarons' *Prayers for Bobby*

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The concept of Jacques Derrida's 'deconstruction' has made possible an alternate view of the Holy Bible from what is the normal acceptance. Deconstruction has allowed the modern man to even read the Bible from another perspective however sacrilegious it may sound to an orthodox follower. However, the birth of postmodernism brought with it a free passage way for everyone to have a wider perception into things which were deemed fixed and even taboo. In short it brought about a liminal space which shook the once thought fixed ideas and concepts.

Bible is indispensible when talking about Leroy Aaron's *Prayers for Bobby* as Bible and the Church are very central to the lives of the protagonists. In the book one can see Bible and the 'Words of God' in a different light and from different possible angles. Before her 'coming out' Bible occupied a very central place in her as everything she did she did it according to the 'Words of God'. However, the thing that confused her also brought about her liberation from the clutch of ignorance.

Looking at the relationship between Ignorance and sin and guilt first one can see that it is with the context of religion that sin and guilt are dealt with and with regards to this book Christianity is central. The story follows a conservative

Presbyterian mother (Mary Griffith) who reaches out to the gay community for support after driving her homosexual son to suicide. The concept of sin haunted Mary before her ultimate liberation and she instigated her fear into her son, Bobby, which again haunted him and finally drove him to his end, freeing him from the internal fear of sinning. Mary being a staunch Christian woman held a belief that "the Bible is the revealed word and as such the unquestionable authority on pious or sinful conduct" (Aarons 1995: 96) and when she learned about Bobby's sexuality she told Bobby that he is committing a sin therefore must change his ways by praying and going to Church. As a result of this belief she ceaselessly nagged Bobby with Bible verses and sermons due to her firm believe that God will 'heal' Bobby from his 'sin'. This is the height of her ignorance. She limited her knowledge within the parameter of religion alone and was afraid to go beyond the line that after Bobby committed suicide she was devastated as she was not ready to accept that Bobby went to the burning fires of Hell because of his sexuality. This drove her to seek the ultimate truth in order for her to be at peace. During this quest there was a clash in her ideology. What she deemed right and what she began to accept as right were making her uncomfortable. In short she experienced a liminal period in her life which manifested in her constant fretting to find answers to her many questions regarding the Gospel.

When it comes to the Christian beliefs, homosexuality is definitely a sin backed up by various verses from the Bible itself but in this book, *Prayers for Bobby* sin has been deconstructed and offers the readers alternative interpretations of the Bible mainly through Larry Whitsell, a pastor in the Metropolitan Community Church (the gay church) whose work

of attempting to find a way to reconcile sexuality and religion Mary initially called "the devil's work".

With her interaction with Whitsell Mary's eyes were opened to the new possibilities and what she deemed sinful before crumbles. It has long been a general assumption that the Bible itself is the guide by which the Christian could measure and deal with homosexuality. Here, it is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah which the people who condemn Homosexuality like that of Mary Griffith called upon to prove that God Himself had made his judgment clear. Certainly, if God punished these two ancient cities on the ground of Homosexuality then they are no doubt fulfilling the will of God by supporting it. This led to the naming of one of the homosexual acts as "sodomy". However, the possibility of examining this cannot be ignored.

D. S. Bailey in his book *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (1955) examines the scripture carefully and writes:

> The story does not in the least demand the assumption that the sin of Sodom was sexual, let alone homosexual. Indeed, there is no evidence to show that vice of the latter kind was prevalent there. (5)

If this view of Bailey is correct, then how it is that mankind has made this association these many centuries? To this Bailey answers:

> It is clear that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was an historical event, and that it was due to natural and not supernatural causes... If it had **any** foundation in fact, we still know nothing of the sin for which it was

> believed that they had been punished; there is no reason to suppose that it was sexual, still less, that it was homosexual. (7)

This scholarly study of Bailey points out the confusion in the translation process and suggests that this has been the prime genesis of the widespread misunderstanding.

In the book, Whitsell also explained a modernist view of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, a story that had been handed down as an oral account before it was codified in Genesis. Whitsell said:

> Progressive biblical scholars interpret the sin of the cities to be inhospitality rather than sodomy. In biblical times, the refusal to grant hospitality was an extreme breach of the social contract. The art of the townspeople in threatening the angels whether it had been rape, murder, or some other form of violence was in this view the essential sin of Sodom, the kicker that assured God's action. In that era, when consensual homosexuality activity did not exist as a known "condition," rape of any kind would have been seen as a society-threatening deviation an abomination, the most extreme act of inhospitality. (252)

Whitsell goes on to explain how not until the Christian era that the sin of Sodom became connected with homosexuality as a practice. He also explains how the fathers of the Christian church adapted the writings of the Roman historians, Philo and Josephus in the first century A.D. a period of great moral turmoil and that it became fixed for all time.

Michel Foucault in the first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1978) said with regards to the birth of 'Homosexuality' as a

category, "We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized ... the homosexual was now a species"(Foucault 43) Along this line, one can say that Bobby was deemed 'homosexual' even before he had a sexual relationship with another male because of the categorising which Foucault talks about. It is no longer related to behaviour alone but an identity which society forced upon and condemned as a result of the widespread of confessional system. This confession is what Foucault criticised in many of his books. In relation to this James D. Faubion in a book he edited titled *Michel Foucault: Power* (2000) writes:

> This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. (331)

Faubion writes about how this "subject" can have two meanings: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self- knowledge. Both of these meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to.

In the story one can see that Bobby suffered hardship just after confessing his sexual orientation first to his brother, Ed and then to his family. What supposed to be therapeutic for Bobby turned out to be a source of his misery as his family; mostly his mother failed to accept Bobby's homosexuality. This failure is mainly cause by Mary's ignorance about the knowledge of homosexuality and her fear to move beyond the

boundary of Christian beliefs in order to save her son from his misery. She forced Bobby to change and did every possible thing in order to 'heal' her son. This convinced Bobby to a certain extend that he was a sinner even though he himself knew that he could not be changed. With regards to this Hans Bertens says, "We obey power, are loyal to it, even to the point of policing and repressing ourselves, because it makes us feel what we are" (153)

In his diary Bobby wrote:

> October 6. "Psalms 119:9-11 say a person can stay pure reading God's words and following its rules. It's not that easy. If we store the words in our hearts they will hold us back from sin. But that doesn't work for me. I hold words in my heart and sin anyway". (Aarons 190)

He does what he can to change and liberate himself from the thing that his mother, church and society calls "sin" and "abnormal" as their church still follows the traditional power technique which James D. Faubion calls 'pastoral power'. He calls the quest 'Operation Alter Ego.'

> It is my goal to achieve a sense of pride and worth as a human being. Despite the fact that perfection will never be a possession of mine or anyone else on earth, I believe that I have the right to discover the fact that I am a unique and special individual worthy of God's love and worthy of seeing my dreams come true. (Aarons 188)

He even went to a psychiatrist as his mother insisted that he do so, what he did not know is that he was forced to walk the path of the wrong kind of knowledge, the kind of knowledge which condemns all kinds of "abnormality", the kind which

the society and Christianity accepts. However, one can see in the book that all these attempts made by Mary Griffith to 'heal' his son and also Bobby's attempts to purge himself from the 'evils' within him failed. For Foucault, confession has become an omnipresent aspect of people's daily lives, one no longer think of the power pushing them toward confession as a constraint placed upon them. On the contrary, one have come to think of confession as a way of finding truth, a form of liberation from the repressive powers that try to silence them.

Moving into the topic of sexuality, one can say that Judith Butler doesn't really rely much of her presentation on the Bible. However, while Butler ignored the Bible, two Bible scholars Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone in *Bible Trouble* (2011) have adopted biblical imagery to argue that heterosexuality is not the biblical standard—there are an "infinite number" of possible sexualities. Hornsby and Stone relate the idea of "queerness" to chaos and heterosexuality to creation, asking, "But is chaos entirely negative? More importantly, can it be avoided entirely? Should we even attempt to avoid it entirely?" (x) They conclude that the association with chaos is actually a positive aspect of queer theory.

So, in light of Butler's and others' belief that there is no defined standard for appropriate sexual conduct, why are homosexual behaviour, bisexual behaviour, bestiality, and others considered taboo? Once again, Butler draws on the ideas of Michel Foucault and the Panopticon, writing that people are forced to "perform" heterosexuality by the powers that be or face punishment:

> It is a compulsory performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it

> ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions. (314–315)

Of course, the church has not been as receptive to the ideas of queer theory as the secular world has, but, as with feminism, queer theory has not been without its influence on Christianity. Homosexual behavior has been the sin issue that more and more Christians are struggling or refusing to call "sin."

> The biblical standard for sexuality goes back to Genesis 1: 27:
>
> So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (*King James Version*)

Man in Genesis is explained as being created as "male and female." These categories are not without purpose. God's expectation for sex and marriage is set forth just one chapter later, in Genesis 2:24–25:

> Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (*King James Version*)

So, from what it is believed to be, God's intention is that one man would marry one woman, and that they would share sexual intimacy only with one another, as the Bible's repeated prohibitions against adultery and fornication would attest. And if there was any doubt about the veracity of these verses, Christ himself reaffirms the male and female division as well as God's intention that marriage and therefore sex occur between one man and one woman. Mark 10: 6-8 in the Bible goes:

> But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. (*King James Version*)

In a recent book titled *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate,* author Justin Lee walks readers through his own struggle with same-sex attraction. A professing Christian, Lee explains that he did not ask for or want to have a sexual attraction to other men—and he spent his teenage and beginning college years celibate and in counselling with pastors and ex-gay ministries, in the hope that the feelings would dissipate. They did not. So, Lee chooses to reinterpret Scripture in an attempt to justify homosexual behaviour. The latter part of his book walks readers through a series of pro-homosexual arguments that attempt to refute passages condemning homosexual behaviour as sin. Unwittingly or not, Lee reveals his own postmodern view of Scripture:

> Because of Paul's teachings on grace and sin, and because of the way Jesus read and applied Scripture, I could no longer justify condemning a loving, committed, Christ-centered relationship based solely on gender. . . . The standards Jesus and Paul applied—the same standards that allowed me to put aside culture-based biblical rules about food or hair length or head coverings—didn't just *allow* me to do the same on this issue; they *required* it. To do otherwise was being inconsistent. (205-6)

Many Christians have adopted Lee's line of thinking, saying that there is an equivalent amount of love and Christ centeredness in same-sex relationships, and decided that there

is nothing special about God's design for men and women after all.

In *Prayers for Bobby,* Bobby was a homosexual when it comes to his sexuality but what about his heart which is supposed to be the most important yardstick to judge a person? As a person, Bobby was a guy with a kind and loving heart that everyone who knew him loved him. Even as a child Bobby "was loved and valued. He was a happy child who displayed a sunny disposition and gentle manner"(100). "Bobby was a gentle spirit, almost too good and too obedient, yet endearing and lovable"(101). All these great and noble characters of Bobby were later overshadowed by his sexuality and his socially acceptable positive traits were ignored. His homosexuality was at his center and the only thing by which others judged him. So, there was a constant conflict within him between what he wanted and the wants of the church and the society which had been conditioned in him to be the truth. As a result he failed to keep a long term relationship with anyone even if he liked them very much.

Bobby even went to Portland to stay with his cousin sister Jeannette with the hopes to "better" his life and freely express his sexuality but his mother's Christian doctrine never left him, it followed him and shackled him , so tight that whenever he attempted to indulge in some 'gay activities', his guilt forbade him from going far. This caused conflicts within him and he could not bear it anymore so he ended his life by committing suicide. From all this, it can be concluded that Bobby was killed by the ignorance of the heterosexual community and most of all by the ignorance of his mother. She knew that it was her fault. When she first met the Metropolitan Church

pastor, Larry Whitsell, she said, "I did something wrong...and look what happened to my boy" (Aarons 251).

Even when Bobby was alive and prior to his coming out to her, she secretly knew about Bobby's gayness but she forced herself not to believe it. She remained willingly and consciously ignorant about the homosexuality of her son which led to her rejection which further led to Bobby's suicide.

Mary's epiphany was brought about by her tireless searching for the truth; the place of her son's soul. When she could not find the answer in her church, she turned to the Metropolitan Church, the church for homosexuals. There, with the help of the pastor, Larry Whitsell and the members of the PFLAG she had her "coming out" moment. In the Metropolitan Church Mary felt a quality of camaraderie in the small space, a sense of God that surprised and moved her.

In her quest for the truth Mary is slowly and gradually given the knowledge which eventually set her free from her ignorance. She feels stunned when she is confronted with the alternative views of the Bible. It becomes a major revelation for her and instigated a feeling of anger and betrayal on the traditionist Church. The author thus writes:

> Why then had the existence of such a view not been made known to her and her fellow parishioners? Yes, it was unacceptable to traditionists, but why suppress it? She felt cheated, felt that the church should be called to task for that. What else was out there she didn't know about?...consider this she thought: these prophets, Moses and the rest of them quoted in the Bible, were not God, they were ordinary people who merely lived in a different time and place. (254-255)

As said before, Mary starts to deconstruct whatever she thought she knew about Homosexuality and begin to have a new pair of eyes towards homosexuality and the Bible itself with the new interpretations. The author further adds:

> Nobody takes Deuteronomy 22:18 seriously today. No one in his right mind would condone stoning a rebellious child to death. There were other biblical admonitions honoured totally in the breach these days... So the church no longer recognized many thing as being sinful or worthy of death. Why, then, wouldn't her son's homosexuality be among them? True, the Bible declares the death penalty for "men lying with men." But she could see Moses instituting such a law in the name of procreation- to get the Jewish nation to grow. If one were to examine the Bible in the context of the period in which it was written, as a document authored by human interpreting God's will, that left room for error. How much did Moses really know about human sexuality? (255-256)

Mary's ignorance has been lifted and she gradually found answers to the many questions she used to ask God. She had a dream one night, "The dream was saying that Bobby was born with the seed of his sexuality. He was different. Not sinful or evil or sick, just different. If that was indeed the case, she had, at last, an answer to her question of why God had not healed Bobby. He had not healed Bobby because there was nothing wrong with him" (268-269). After that she became an activist trying to save the parents and friends of gay people from their ignorant state so that they will not lose their child, brother and friend like she did. She became a mother figure for all the homosexuals and in her they place their gratitude for all the

things she has done. She touches millions of hearts with her stories and saved many parents ignorant about the homosexuality of their sons and daughters. The speech which she gave at the city Council Meeting is touching and boosted her reputation as a gay activist.

In short, it can be said that the innovative speech made by Mary sums up the whole issue which has been dealt upon. She spoke for the queer all over the world and tried to educate the people especially the Church on the problems faced by these people they considered 'abnormal' and 'mistakes.' She did this so that the others would not fall into the same ignorant situation she once fell into.

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Incest and Gender Bias in the Tripuri Folktale "Chethuang"

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It is hard to say whether incest avoidance in the folktale under discussion is structured around the idea of a cosmic tree or the idea of such a tree is built about a sad tale such as "Chethuang"[1]. It occupies a special place among the Kokborok speaking communities of Tripura for a number of reasons. It, firstly, venerates the tree *chethuang*, which is also the title of the tale, and gives us the cosmic tree motif which is abundantly found in many tales. Secondly, the tale deals with a taboo subject which is hard to come by in this part of the world.

Tripura is home to a myriad of tongues and traditions. There are nineteen major social groups/tribes (again divided into various sub-clans/tribes) in the state and they are the Debbarmas, Tripuras, Jamatias, Reangs, Murashings, Noatias, Kolois, Rupinis, Uchois, Darlongs, Kukis, Mogs, Chakmas, Lushais, Halams, etc. Folktales, among other things, are rich sources of learning and understanding the pre Christian/Hindu cultures of the tribes inhabiting in the state. The proclivity to tell stories is well established for there are tales of every sort which abound the hills of Tripura. Tripuri[2] folktales depict man's intimate relationship with nature/forest. Some reflect social values as well as socio-economic conditions. Many of them are about the relationship between human beings and

animals. Motifs as diverse as shape-shifting, supernatural, incest, etc. are found in Tripuri folktales. There are tales which reveal the traditional belief systems of the tribes of the state. And most of these tales are egalitarian in nature and are narrated in simple narrative styles.

"Chethuang" is very popular among the Kokborok speaking tribes of Tripura. There is evidence that these tribes worshipped *chethuang (*Alstonia scholaris*)* for their well being as well as its medicinal properties. The story is about a family in a village at a foothill. The family was blessed with a son and a daughter. The siblings grew up together and entered into marriageable age. One day, as the parents were busy elsewhere, they went together to work at their *jhum* field. They needed to cross a small and shallow stream to get to the field. While crossing the knee deep stream the sister lifted her *rignai*[3]. The brother happened to walk behind her so he saw her thighs. He just did not move and stared at his sister. After crossing it, she turned back but found her brother standing on the other side of the stream. She enquired, "Why are you standing there? Come fast, it's going to be late." That day the brother did not go for work and returned home. He always thought about what he saw that day. He could not attend to any work. Neither could he concentrate. He became very gloomy. His sudden change got his parents worried.

The parents demanded to know the reason for his gloominess. No one could extract anything from him. The hapless parents were quite dejected but continued to try every means possible to make their dear son speak. As all hopes of making him reveal got lost, the grandmother devised a way of finding the truth. When there was no one at home she asked her grandson, "What's the matter with you? You aren't taking

food properly. You aren't working also. Tell me if the reason is about a girl ... tell me if you want to get married." To this the boy replied, "Yes! I want to get married." The grandmother was happy to learn that and wanted to know the girl on his mind. She took the names of all the unmarried girls in the village but he showed no interest. The old woman got annoyed and shouted at him, "I have given you enough names but you aren't interested in any of them. The only girl left is your sister. Don't tell me it is your sister." To her surprise, the grandson replied, "Yes, it is my sister. I will marry her."

All of a sudden, there was a tinge of bitterness in her mouth. She tried to reason with him. She said, "It can't happen. It's just unthinkable. Besides, we don't have such a practice. What will the village elders say? You will put everyone in trouble. Choose any girl but your sister."

"I will commit suicide if I don't marry my sister," the boy replied.

The old lady told her son about the decision of her grandson. The father was furious. Nevertheless, the elders of the family asked the boy to change his decision. When the boy could not be persuaded they decided to marry their daughter to her brother. But the affair was to be kept a secret and no was to come to know about it including the daughter. The family secretly began the arrangements for the wedding. A new house was constructed for the new couple. The daughter was still in the dark but knew that preparations are being made for a marriage ceremony.

One day, all of them went to the field leaving the old woman alone. The daughter took permission from her parents and came back home. The old lady was sitting at the courtyard

looking after the rice being dried in the sun. The girl took out her hair pin and hit a bamboo repeatedly. The old woman thought that some birds were eating the rice. She yelled 'chhui...i...i' to shoo way the birds. And, she said to herself, "The rice is for the marriage of my grandson and granddaughter. Why are you eating them you naughty birds? Go away."

The girl was exasperated. She shouted at her grandmother, "What did you say regarding the marriage? Am I to marry my own brother? Why didn't anyone tell me about it?" The old lady kept quite as she realized the mistake of disclosing the secret.

The girl was greatly distressed. That night she had a dream. An old man came in her dream and told her, "You poor girl, find a sapling of a *chethuang* tree and plant it. Water it and worship it. Only then your miseries will go away."

Next day she went to work along with other villagers. The thought of marrying her own brother kept disturbing her mind. She looked for a sapling of *chethuang* tree at a nearby field. She found a sapling and, as told in the dream, planted it at one corner of the field. She watered it and started praying. It was time for the villagers to call it a day and go back home. Yet, she kept on praying. She sang a song:

Dada bai ano kainani hinwo
Log chethuang log

(O *chethuang* tree, they want me to marry my brother
You grow more and more)

The tree grew taller and taller as she sang the song. The other villagers were really surprised to see what was happening. They immediately went back to the village and narrated the whole story. Villagers including the girl's parents came running to the field. They asked the girl to come down but she did not pay heed to their plea. The villagers try to fell down the tree but the girl kept on singing:

Phungchha tang khaino phungba baridi
Log chethuang log.
Dada-bai ano kainani hinwo
Log chethuang log

(O *chethuang* tree! Grow five times more every time they cut you
They want me to marry my brother
You grow more and more.)

To the amazement of the villagers the tree grew even taller every time they cut it. Having failed to fell down the tree, the father told his daughter to come down. For she will not marry her brother. But, the girl replied through her song:

Angba chhiyade angba chhugyade
Chhwila kochhom tan

(I know that you have killed the black dog
And brought his blood)

Then, she went on singing:

Dakhin gwlani nobor chhib faidi,
Babuno khulum nani;
Utur gwlani nobor chhib faidi,

Ma-no khulum nani.

(You South wind, blow on
I pray to my father;
You North wind, blow on
I pray to my mother.)

The tree grew as tall as the sky. Suddenly there was a heavy gush of wind. The girl bid farewell to her parents and disappeared in the clouds.

Since that day the top of *chethuang* tree became flat and never pointed again. There is a belief among the people of Tripura that in the rainy season when lightning flashes across the sky and from the colliding clouds the rambling of thunder can be heard, it is actually the roar of the elder brother startled at the sight of his younger sister's thighs flashing for a moment.

There is a lot going on in this folktale. Notwithstanding the obvious marginalisation of and bias against the female subject, the tale also speaks volumes about her resilience and grit. At the same time, the story can be read as one of human being's eternal hope, refuge and dependence on nature. One may find various rituals, customs, songs, etc. which are dedicated to hills, trees, stones, rivers, and natural phenomena in this region. That's because people of this region understand the values of their ancestral environment, its nurturing qualities as well destructive attributes. Therefore, it is no surprise that "Chethuang" does venerate the tree by way of attributing human and divine qualities to it.

That said, this story also involves a fatal attraction of a brother for his own sister which is forbidden by the aspect of the incest taboo. The taboo on incest is universal whatever the

degree of that incestuous relationship is. It is a taboo one would find in many folktales, plays, novels, TV sitcoms, films, etc. While there are specific customs dealing with incest in different cultures, people normally don't discuss them openly. However, this Tripuri folktale avoids subtlety and nuanced rhetoric to drive home the point. The tale, rather, jumps right into the issue and confronts it making its intentions clear to the young minds that such an act should be avoided at any cost. The structurally similar Santal folktale of "Kora and His Sister", however, does not pay much importance to the tree, but in *Chethuang* the tree is at the centre of the story. In the Santal story, the blood oozing out from the dead siblings would not mix. Both the stories avoid the transgression of the laws of blood relationship and also commit the crime of the immorality of incest. By using interrelated metaphors "Chethuang" establishes the fact that incest and tragedy are linked. The tale proves that incest is forbidden and s/he who destroys the sanctity of blood relationship and kinship norms by incestuous union with someone from the family or family bloodline is punished ultimately. In this case the brave girl becomes a sacrificial goat due to her brother's moment of a *heimlich* and the sustenance of it throughout the tale.

The story of "Chethuang" involves brother-sister incest and not the archetypical mother-son variety as one would find in the Oedipus and Jocasta story. The tale reiterates the fact that women had been at the receiving end as 'gifts' in exchange for trade and prosperity in exogamous societies or as trophies in war. Women were distributed, in primitive societies, among the male members of the family. It was one of the primary means of forging a cordial relationship between men in both endogamous as well as exogamous societies. Nancy L Fischer

in "Oedipus Wrecked? The Moral Boundaries of Incest" opines that the formation of rules regarding 'with whom one could and could not forge sexual relations marked a move away from the chaos of nature and toward the order of culture'. Cultures have evolved, so do societies. This means that the idea of family and kinship have been framed and reframed. However, the subversive issues like incest still haunt cultures. Incest is avoided and tabooed cross culturally.

What the brother in the story wants is beyond the norms of the Tripuri society. Generally, four types of marriages are permitted in a Tripuri society:

1. Marriage by Negotiation/Arranged marriage
2. Marriage by service
3. Marriage by payment/Bride-price
4. Marriage by elopement (Akhanda 5)

As the siblings grow up, the boy learns about his place in the family as the future master and the sister as an entity without any identifiable position within the same structure. The sister is positioned as a woman (then as an object) of the 'male gaze' of a very fatal nature. The boy exploits, thus, the notions of society, and the self sanctioned power as a male member of the family in his favour and advantage. His masculine sexuality becomes a key issue in the story so much so that his masculinity is empowered and the sister's femininity is disempowered as an object of her brother's gaze. This folktale reaffirms the act of a male subject living out his fantasies and obsessions. These fantasies and obsessions come from the control handed over to him by patriarchy - 'law of the father'. This sadistic familial gaze is constructed according to the structures of control. It is voyeuristic and fetishistic in that he looked at his sister as a source of pleasure.

Sociologists and anthropologists have traditionally regarded incest as disruptive of the family and as therefore disruptive of social order. By contrast, feminism has suggested that, "paradoxical as it may seem, incest is actually produced and maintained by social order: the order of a male-dominated society" (Bell 57). The elders in the story try every means possible to persuade the young boy. The very thought of consummating with one's own sister/brother is reprehensible. This is one of those 'don't do it else you will face the consequences' folktales. Because, in Tripuri society marriage between close relatives is not socially sanctioned and close cousin marriages are forbidden. The grandmother in the story warns the boy about the sin he is going to commit if he marries his own sister. But, all the elders succumb to the threat of the boy and they are ready to face the consequences for the sake of the boy. It amounts to the abuse of the female body as female abuse permeates, in one form or another, in all of our histories. The tale, in a way, demystifies the general myth people hold that the girls in traditional societies in the region enjoy greater freedom. It also highlights the reality that human beings are essentially abusive and have been abused as children or adults, as siblings or friends. The daughter becomes a constructed 'female body' in the patriarchal culture which is bound to be abused by one male or the other. It now does not matter who consumes her. That is her fate. The story is an appropriate example of the traditional representation of the gendered body which sees her 'self' as an object a male member must possess.

The sister in the tale is forced to take a gendered position as a female within the symbolic order of a society. Her gendered position as a female is going to be transformed from the role of a sister to that of a wife. In this way, the subject's position

is already fully determined. She cannot challenge this decision because of her gendered position. All that she can do is either succumb to the pressure or free herself by available means. She considers her brother's desires as anti-social and this union, if at all it happens, will not be acceptable in her society. Besides, she is kept in the dark as she does not have any say in her life. To her the whole affair becomes a matter of life and death, of dignity and courage. She does not blindly stay witnessed to the social process of dividing her and her brother along the lines of sexed identities. She is well aware of the hierarchies created between the siblings and how that hierarchy is acting out. In this case, she is devalued and her brother is privileged. What she does is to honour the blood relationship/kinship. The brother fails to honour the blood relationship as he is blinded and driven by noxious desire. She manages to control this taboo from happening because she understands that a family is a biological unit and incest offends the boundaries of that unit and the ideals of kinship. Gwen Bergner also argues that, "all kinship systems are organized around the incest taboo, which necessitates exogamy and establishes affiliation between and among families... ." (Introduction xxiv). Incest is not an acceptable norm for procreation. It is sick and pathological.

The incestuous motive of the brother leaves her with no option but to take refuge in nature. The old man who comes in her dream to give her a way out could be considered as the supreme ancestral deity who watches over his offspring. Her honour is saved by the *chethuang* tree. The tale gives us a good moral lesson that incest avoidance is inherently rooted in close knit traditional societies as much as it is biology. The incestuous motive of the brother is not representative of the ideas and ideals of the Tripuri culture. What this culture

propounds is the avoidance of it and as a lesson for the younger generations of the grave consequences of such pathological and sadistic desires. It is a young lady who showed her real character and avoided incest from happening. On the other hand, the tale can also be read as a story which reminds us of men's nature of delegating women the burden of safeguarding the given community's cultures and traditions. It is needless to say that incest lies inside each of us as a fantasy whether directly or indirectly. So, 'the taboo is highly significant, in the sense that it becomes a fundamental regulatory force in human existence, even though the reason for so much horror or for such frequent transgression of the prohibition may not always be understood" (Alizade 101). The flat top of *chethuang* tree is the consequential inversion of the phallus which symbolises the defeat of the male domination. Ultimately, a woman triumphs in the tale by establishing the importance of kinship ties upon which the unity of the family and the community is built.

Notes

1. As one of the most popular folktales of Tripura, "Chethuang" has been variously narrated and translated into English many times by different translators. The tale referred to in this essay is taken and rewritten from various oral as well as written sources. For written sources, see, Tyagi, D. K. *Tribal Folk Tales of Tripura.* Tripura State Tribal Cultural Research Institute, 1997, and Murasingh, Chandrakant, editor. Tales and Tunes of Tripura Hills. Sahitya Akademi, 2007.

2. The term used here is to denote the Scheduled Tribes living in the present Indian state of Tripura

3. *Rignai* is a wrap-around dress worn by women in Tripura. The upper garment is called Risa.

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Intersections between Space and Identity: Negotiating Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*

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This paper invokes to figure out the inflating fluidity and mobility of nationally, socially and ethically bounded space that is forming a de-territorialized nation, marginalized entity and hybrid identities in Kamila Shamsie's novel, *Kartography*. The novel manifests how the permeability of nation state geographical boundaries of Karachi has become more volatile and hostile after the Partition of East and West Pakistan in 1972. This porosity of fluid space of Karachi ruptures the identity of Karim, a hybrid of a Pakistani and a Mujahir (Bangladeshi) parentage, and of Raheen, who simultaneously identifies herself with Karim. Karim's aim of becoming a cartographer and his iconoclastic hand-drawn map of Karachi not only pose a challenge to the national boundary of Pakistan but also desires to get a place in society and nation. His map goes beyond the bounded space of Karachi and forms a completely new migratory perspective of Karim thereby endorsing fluidity of geographical space and heterogeneity of identity.

Diasporic and geographical space have evolved as an all-pervasive element for the comprehensive understanding of the complexity of social relation and cultural differences with problematic identity of marginalized Mujahir

communities residing in the margins of Karachi. Karachi, as a city space, is constitutive of heterogeneous population of both native Muslims and Bangladeshi Mujahirs. This heterogeneity, represented by Karim and Raheen, is contradictory to the policy of homogeneity of Pakistani government. Karachi is an enigma for these two characters where they symptomatically declare that boundary lies in mind, not in topographies of nation or relations of human. Therefore, the text portrays a potent clashing ground of both past and present, homogeneity and heterogeneity, psychological boundary and geographical unity where space as a whole and identity of an individual are disrupted and disregarded.

Borders or Boundaries are markers of territory of a specific nation state, which creates a difference from other nation state boundary. Border—geographical, spatial, cultural, political, social—implies both inclusion and exclusion. The spread of colonialism and its aftermath consequently lead to the formation of notion of border, a marker of separation which is porous. Étienne Balibar has pointed out that borders are at the core of nation and without discussing border we cannot form our ideas about a nation. Even within the boundary of a nation, that determines the security of it, there are internal borders at the core of nation, the borders that dissociates people of a single nation.

Gloria Anzaldua's groundbreaking book, *Borderlands: La Frontiere,* described the concept of border as a metaphor where two or more cultures contact and amalgamate asymmetrically. In every point of mixing one of the cultures dominate over the other. She says that:

> Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality. Thus, people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes. (37)

Border is a contact zone where people are bound to follow the survival tactic of switch between two cultures—the mother culture and the dominating culture.

Language is also a bar and a way of marginalizing the people who are living on the verge of borders. Suppressing the ethnic language by the language used by the so called polished people, whose culture dominates, is termed by Anzaldua as "Linguistic Terrorism." She emphatically declares:

> Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other. (58)

She further declares:

> So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity-I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. (59)

Language always provides an individual with identity which he/she uses to express and claim his/her rights and places in socio political ambit. Accepting and tolerating identity of ourselves and others can facilitate one to live an uncomplicated life without problems and distinctions. Every language and identity is legitimate in a particular time and space.

Borders are primarily created out of multifarious tensions and imposed violence. But psychological borders have to be flexible enough to avoid fussy anxiety and accept multiple identities of any individual whatsoever. She says that:

> The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the, enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from .convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode-nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (79)

Adapting multiplicity is the only way to live in the problematic areas like borderlands.

In Avtar Brah's ground breaking book, *Cartographies of Diaspora,* Chapter number eight "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities," she has pointed out that within the concept of diaspora the notion of 'border' is underlined. Border

is a political and social construct and in the context of a proliferation of new border crossings the language of 'borders' and of 'diaspora' started acquiring new currency. Displacement or movement depend on a few trajectory of question that is when, how, and under what circumstances any individual or group is moving? And what socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions mark the journey? All diasporic journeys are composite of various lived and re-lived experiences and multiple modalities of gender, 'race', class, religion, language and generation. Diasporic space is heterogeneous contested space, even in the implicated in the construction of a common 'we'. It is important, therefore, to be assiduous to the nature and type of processes in and through which the collective 'we' is constituted.

Diaspora space is the inter-sectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location of people and it is a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes. It is where multifarious subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where both the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. Diaspora space is the point or boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'other' where they meet and contest. Diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited', not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. She defines:

> . . . the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'.

> The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native. (205)

Therefore, in a diaspora space both indigenous and diasporans are equally minor and trying to survive and adapt in the space.

Further this relation of identity and marginalization with consecutive violence is conceptualized by Amartya Sen in his groundbreaking book, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. "One's sense of identity," as Sen argues, "can be a source not merely of pride, and joy, but also of strength and confidence" (1). Identity of an individual contributes to the strength of warmth among members of one community, and excludes many people from their multiple affiliations. But war and violence not only disintegrates Nation, but also decentralizes inner selves and identities of both an individual, and a community. The very sense of identity instigates violence by "… the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people, championed by proficient artisans of terror" (Sen 2). The retrieval of memory and history simultaneously foster crisis of identity in one's life, who is suffering from the trauma of loss, marginalization and displacement. Sen also points out that a person has multiple affiliations, and plural associations. One's identity is required for getting recognition in society or community. But particularizing and prioritizing one identity of an individual over the other, either through the choice of his particular community, or his own, is inescapably conducive of violence. "Plural affiliations" are inflicted upon with the baggage of one single identity thereby dispensing all the other in the backdrop of varied events of tumult. Sen critiques these very act of universalizing of one identity effacing the others of an individual, or a group that consequently produces existential crisis.

The title of the novel "Kartography," explicating the motif of drawing map, is symbolic of physical and geographical territory and boundary but the "k" instead of "c" seems to provide a deviant idea of national and geographical boundary. The story weaves around the lived experiences of Karim and Raheen, located and borne in Pakistan where the migratory perspective of Karim is the cardinal point of intervention. Karim's map is a traveler's perspective, an open route map, where one enters and leaves in a particular space and time. Karim's subjective perspective of the city of Karachi, though puzzling, challenges the governmental idea and notion of border and space.

The novel weaves the story of two generations—Yasmin, Zafar, Maheen and Ali, the parents of Karim and Raheen—and of Karim and Raheen. The relation swap of their parents is intrinsically connected with the event of Pakistan-Bangladesh partition. Zafar was initially engaged to Maheen and Ali to Yasmin. This swapping had a lot to do with the Bengali roots of Maheen. She was considered a Muhajir and hence hated by many. The swapping had happened because of one particular statement Zafar had made to Shafiq. Shafiq's brother had died in the violence that had happened in East Pakistan as a part of the Civil War, and he came into Zafar's house in anger and grief who was engaged to Maheen at that point. Zafar said, "How can I marry one of them? How can I let one of them bear my children? Think of it as a civic duty. I'll be diluting her Bengali bloodline" (Shamsie 232).

Two parallel themes of national violence and ethnic riots run simultaneously in the novel in two different timelines linked through generations. One is of 1970–1971 and other of 1986– 1994. Shamsie relates violence to partition, migration,

succession of East Pakistan, feudalism and ethnic divide and the incessant ethnic riots. Shamsie communicates the displacement caused by the civil war of 1971and power politics of the government that has both marginalized and ousted the Mujahirs and made people uneasy while living at their own place. Communication of the experiences of the displaced people lies at the heart of Shamsie's discourse of displacement.

The people who migrated from the state of Bangladesh to Pakistan are treated as refugees and were forced to live in ghettos. These partition riots and its aftershocks problematize the present lives of the characters. Karim's mother is a Bangladeshi and his father is a Pakistani which simultaneously problematizes the identity of Karim. Karim, having a mixed identity, stands as an unwanted iconoclastic fragment of nation. These mixed fragments are not taken as the building block during the formation of nation. Karim's de-territorialized outlook about Karachi is an outlook of a marginalized fractured person.

Throughout, the novel is blurring and dissolving the boundary between the public and the private, geographical and the personal wherein geopolitical events are lived on an international scale and relived at the level of family and friends with drastic consequences. Kirby, in a discussion of Rich and Chandra Mohanty, makes the distinction between place and space in political terms:

> *Place* seems to assume set boundaries that one fills to achieve a solid identity. […] It perpetuates the fixed parameters of ontological categories, making them coherent containers of essence, in relation to which one must be "inside" or "outside," "native" or "foreign," in

> the same way that one can, in the Euclidean universe at least, be in only one place at one time. (19)

Map represents two things – connections between different places and the boundaries that exist between these places. Karim is fascinated by maps and says that the world is "like a giant jigsaw" where all the places are connecting.

Another significant symbolic association with the map in *Kartography* is that maps here also play a role in illustrating stories. Perhaps, Shamsie is trying to portray the dual existence of the map in locating a place, and also positioning its impact on our imagination. Since maps are representations of the actual geographical or physical landscape, it is through maps that we arrive to an idea of the place before reaching the place itself. As Raheen explained, "So maps weren't about going from point A to point B; they were about helping someone hear the heartbeat of a place" (180).

However, quite ironically maps also figure as imagery for appropriating differences and validating margins. Shamsie points at the internal differences of psychological boundaries of the mind dissociating one person as an immigrant and other as a native. It refers to the politics that create and destroy borders thereby modifying the maps. Through the art of drawing a map, the map-maker in Karim tries to unravel the unspoken suppressed fact that defines the boundaries of different nations. The poignant truth about one of such formation of new borders which ultimately led to redrawing of maps and marginalization is highlighted by Uncle Asif, who says, "In 1947, East and West Pakistan were created, providing a pair of testicles for the phallus of India" (Shamsie 22)

Although maps keep changing consistently with inconsistent socio-political conditions, it is through them that Raheen and Karim once again come closer to each other. The process of deciphering maps led to the discovery of their own rootedness towards each other in a new diasporic space and also towards the country, the place which has excluded them, that is, Karachi. Maps in Shamsie's *Kartography* function as an underlying theme that runs through the narrative as an alternative point in history.

The violence of Partition continues when Indians became Pakistanis, and the violence of the civil war festers when certain Pakistanis became Bangladeshis, which is worse as an open wound cutting across the parents' generation as well as their children's, making Raheen and Karim different "in some way that seemed to matter terribly to people old enough to understand where significance lay" (Shamsie 43). Any nation which includes an act of foundational violence in their myth of creation, on a day-to-day basis, the line between ordinary politics and outright civil war seems very thin indeed. The civil war becomes the before-and-after dividing line in *Kartography*, the halfway point between then and now, the traumatic experience which is everyone's psychological benchmark:

> Between our birth in 1947 and 1995, dead bang between our beginning and our present, is 1971, of which I know next to nothing except that there was a war and East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and what terrible things we must have done then to remain so silent about it. Is it shame at losing the war, or guilt about what we did to try to win that mutes us? (Shamsie 270)

Though Karachi poses a threat against the lives of marginalized Mujahirs like Karim, who out of compulsion moved to London, it is a space of his comfort, a place conceived not only physically in his life but also in his psyche, especially through the eyes of Raheen. He tries to map his own world, a new space, through his zeal to become a "Kartographer" so that he can gain some control over his fate which is frequently judged by his mixed identity relegating him in society. Their relations including the country Pakistan is continuously devoured by prejudice and factionalism.

Finally, Raheen and Karim successfully create their own space by redeeming their love for each other. Karachi epitomizes turmoil and borderlessness, and the psychological Karachi is equally haunted by the memory of pain and suffering. Through Karim and Raheen, Shamsie has touched the devastating unpleasant truths of 1972 of Yasmin, Zafar, Maheen and Ali, their parents, and unearths the fluidity of the space of Karachi which is changing across history. Sigularized identities of their families failed to survive the ethnic violence in the aftermath of partition and thereby simultaneously losing the vibrant Karachi which Karim searches and yearns for in his diasporic existence.

Identity of an individual is always constructed, in varying degrees, on a process of exclusion and inclusion. Raheen is uncomfortable with her swinging realization about her identity; her sense of "we" – meaning "Karachiites" – has been weakened through abstraction and violence. Unity, Raheen is beginning to understand, is not a given, even within a single city, but is generally a question of compulsory association, often a myth exploited as a political resource, fundamentally a fiction. It is also at this point that Karim, a lifelong Karachiite,

identifies himself as Bengali, shocking both Zia and Raheen; they'd never before understood that it might be important to him and to his own sense of identity. People who ask such self-reflexive questions—"who am I?," "where do I belong?"—are actually expressing doubts about their cultural identification, especially within a binary framework of belonging, symptomatic of a culture which is fragile or failed in the wake of revolution, war or mass uprooting.

Thus, though the statement of Karim "I'm a Muhajir, Zia" (Shamsie 178), can unnerve many but it ultimately gives the strength to form an acceptable space of his own where he is not marginalized for his multiple mixed identity but is accepted with it.

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Representation of Women in Mizo Folktales: A Study of the Patriarchal Demarcation of Gendered Roles in Traditional Mizo Society

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This paper aims to study the representation of women in Mizo folktales and the patriarchal demarcation of gendered roles within the traditional Mizo society. It seeks to explore how the male-centered point of view contributed towards gender stereotyping and the subjugation of women. This has resulted in limiting the subjectivity of women and their potential for self-realization. Folklore serves as the mirror of a culture and a medium through which cultural knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation. Folktales, which come under the category of folklore, are didactic and instructive in nature. They are the means by which societal ethos and values are inculcated in a society. They caution readers about the consequences of certain actions and attitudes while the characters are usually simple characters.

Alan Dundes is of the opinion that folklore provides a way for children and adults to deal with crucial problems in their lives. He also notes how folklore in all cultures deal with critical junctures in the life of individuals like birth, initiation, marriage and death and those in the life of the community like sowing, harvesting, etc. He has observed thus, "In fact, if one collects the folklore of a people and then does a content analysis of that folklore, one is very likely to be able to delineate the

principal topics of crisis and anxiety among that people" (Bronner 64). The traditional Mizo society was a patriarchal construct in which there was a clear-cut demarcation of gendered roles which was a marked feature of the society. Men were taught and encouraged from a young age to become *pasalmha*[1] (warriors) protecting the village and exhibiting prowess in hunting wild animals and in warfare. Given that masculinity and bravery were considered as the ideal, they went out of their way to avoid being perceived as cowardly and effeminate and even refrained from showing affection to their wives. Being a *thaibawih* or a hen-pecked husband was a source of shame (Vanlaltlani 26).

The gendered division of labour for men and women in the traditional Mizo society marked the men out for pursuits such as hunting and warfare since they were considered as the stronger sex while the women were marked out for domesticity. This began with the process of enculturation of young boys at the *zawlbuk*[3] (boys' dormitory) from an early age. The objective was to turn them into consummate *pasalmha* who embodied the values of bravery and *tlawmngaihna*[4], which was the principal moral and ethical code by which the Mizos conducted their lives and which helped shape their cultural ethos and worldview. N. Chatterji has described the Zawlbuk as, "…the crucible wherein the Mizo youth, the marginal man was shaped into the responsible adult member of their society" (61). The traditional Mizo society being one where the subordination and subjugation of women could be clearly observed, the manner in which this is manifested can be seen in the representation of women in Mizo folktales about women in particular. Major A. G. McCall, a British political officer has written in *Lushai Chrysalis* that,

> "There is little in the Lushai background to disclose the sense of any great chivalry towards women. Without any ambiguity Lushai has been, and still is, a country for men before it is one for women, or even children…. But the attitude of old Lushai (sic) is betrayed by an old saying on a par with our own sentiment of old—"A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they be." Old Lushai says, "Crab's meat is not counted as meat as women's word is not counted as word, bad wife and bad fence can be changed. But unthreatened wife and unthreatened grass of the fields are both unbearable." (26)[2]

Historically, women too have been complicit in propagating the patriarchal ideology that delimits female subjectivity and self-realization just as much as men. Feminism as an ideological category promotes gender equality and advocates for the freedom of women from paternalistic dominance or patriarchy. The relations of power as depicted in the patriarchal creation of narratives or stories, have become normalized and ingrained in women, because of which they have taken part in the story-telling process. Feminism has risen up to challenge such accepted norms of patriarchy. Regarding the historical development of patriarchy, Gerda Lerner has noted that, "Traditionalists accept the phenomenon of "sexual asymmetry," the assignment of different tasks and roles to men and women, which has been observed in all known human societies, as proof of their position and as evidence of its "naturalness"" (16). They view motherhood as the chief goal of women in life, in accordance with the biological deterministic view. Even today, this sexual division of labour is based on the idea that the natural superiority of men is a

given and this has had a powerful effect on contemporary ideas of male supremacy even though such biological claims have been disproven (17).

It is crucial for feminist politics to dispel the notion of biological determinism because it has legitimized women's oppression over the centuries and has instead, credited child rearing practices as establishing differences between the sexes (Menon 61). Meanwhile, young girls were raised to excel in the domestic sphere by being industrious so to ensure that they were able to get good prospects when it comes to marriage. Young women were raised to be quietly submissive, passive, voiceless and obedient to male authority or the patriarchal family. When men succeeded in hunting and warfare, much honour was conferred on them. In matters concerning marriage, the final authority rested with the parents (Vanlaltlani 23). It is a young woman's parents or the agency of the suitor or that of his parents by which consent is given for marriage. The pinnacle of achievement for a man was to attain the *thangchhuah*[5] status which guaranteed honour and respect in life and a place in *pialral*[6] (the Mizo version of Paradise) in the afterlife. The ability to attain this status was the sole preserve of men and a woman could secure the coveted place in *pialral* only if her husband achieved it. Therefore, it may be noted that only men possessed the agency to transcend their status in life and in the afterlife.

In fact, the role that was expected of the Mizo women delimited their self-realization within the confines of domesticity which was where merit was to be found through industriousness. Besides, such work was considered as their duty and hardly any merit was achieved by women for excelling at it. According to Bell Hooks' view of feminism as

a struggle to end sexist oppression, she describes the state of oppression experienced by women under patriarchy as such, "Being oppressed means the *absence of choices*. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor" (5). In the folktale *Chawngtinleri* the *Lasi*[9] (benevolent spirits of the forest) take Chawngtinleri away to become the wife of their chief. This happened because her brother Lianchea had consented to giving her away in marriage to their chief in his dream, after being tempted with abundant harvests and prowess in the hunt and war. Since such gifts would easily have aided him in achieving the *thangchhuah* status, the offer would have been a thoroughly tempting one for him and as for Chawngtinleri, she had no say in the matter of her marriage.

In the traditional Mizo society, women were viewed as something of a commodity in that, the bride price she could fetch was a source of wealth for her father. All in all, female subjectivity was suppressed. In the folktale *Kungawrhi*, we see how the male protagonist Phawthira is the consummate *pasalmha* (warrior) who responds to the challenge posed by Kungawrhi's father to rescue his daughter. This was because the young man she had married was actually a *keimi*[7] (tiger-man). In contrast, Phawthira's brother Hrangchala was the embodiment of cowardice and threatened to thwart the plan of rescue with his cowardice and inaction.

Even though Kungawrhi was terrified of her husband's *keimi* nature, the fact that it took a man (Phawthira) to save her, shows that women are weak and helpless and need to be saved by men. She is portrayed as passive and without a voice. When her father, the village chief, declared that he would give her hand in marriage to any man who could help heal her

sickness, she had no say in the matter and simply obeyed him. Later on, when her husband transformed into a tiger to cross the river on their way to his village, his true nature was revealed and she was terrified, yet she had no choice but to follow him. In the course of this folktale, when Hrangchala cut off the thick woody creeper leading out of the village of the spirits out of jealousy and let Phawthira, the true killer of the tiger remain behind, he cunningly claimed the reward and married Kungawrhi. She did not want to marry him but she has no voice and is silent and passive. This reveals the female subordination under patriarchy by which women do not have a voice.

In the folktale *Rimenhawihi*, we see how a Raja from the plains, comes to learn about the existence of Rimenhawihi when his servants find a strand of her hair inside a fish they had found. This happened when she disobeyed her husband's request to remain indoors and went out to take a bath at the river. Eventually, it was her husband who rescued her. In this manner, we see how men are portrayed as being the rescuers of women who are helpless and weak and how women are portrayed as getting into trouble when they transgresses male authority. Within the folktales, women had the agency to rise above their situations in life only in situations that involved supernatural beings like the *vanchung nula* (young woman from heaven/ heavenly being) or when supernatural beings or entities help them out, thus distancing such unfettered women from real women.

Subversion or challenge to patriarchal authority with help from supernatural beings is seen in the folktale *Kelchawngi*, where Kelchawngi calls upon *Pu Vana*[10] to take her up to heaven since her parents had left her on the roof of their house

as punishment for cooking her sister, when in fact, she had done it by mistake since she was mistakenly under the impression that her mother had asked her to do it. In the folktale *Sichangneii*, a man had captured a beautiful supernatural being and taken her for his wife. Here, Sichangneii is portrayed as the object of male desire. He had brought her under his control by hiding her wings to prevent her escape. They had several sons till one day, she escaped after persuading her youngest son to reveal where their father had hidden her wings. The older brothers had refused to divulge their knowledge of its whereabouts since their father had warned them that they would lose their mother if they did so. Therefore, the actions of Tlumtea the youngest can perhaps be understood in the light of the fact that, being the youngest, he would not have been indoctrinated into the patriarchal ideology as yet. Moreover, Sichangneii sought escape from her husband and could do so because she was a supernatural being. Lerner describes patriarchy as capable of functioning only with the cooperation and consent of women. She described the ways in which this comes about:

> This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination on access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women. For nearly four thousand years women gave shaped their lives and acted under the umbrella of patriarchy, specifically a form of patriarchy best described as paternalistic dominance." (217)

The representation of Mizo women in the Mizo folktales reveals the gender stereotyping at play. This has been represented in these folktales through the patriarchal notion of the binary of good women set in stark contrast against bad or evil women. Good women are portrayed as being silent, passive and obedient to the figures of patriarchal authority in their lives. To take up an example, in the folktale *Thailungi*, Thailungi cooks her sister for supper after having misheard her mother who had in fact, asked her to cook pumpkins. She is shown as being obedient to a fault. Inversely, the figure of the bad or evil woman is usually embodied by the figure of the step-mother who is portrayed as evil, cruel and cunning and who ill-treats her husband's children while she favours her own. It appears that the characters usually embody the qualities that are valued in the society or which embody the opposing qualities frowned upon by the society. This binary portrayal results in the creation of the ideal image of women as represented in Mizo folktales. This ideal image included that of beauty as an attribute that was objectified and by the patriarchal male gaze since a beautiful young woman could fetch a large dowry and add to the wealth of her father's family.

The character of Mauruangi in the folktale of the same name, appears to be the embodiment of the ideal type of Mizo young woman. She is hard-working, obedient and is passive and silent. Even when her stepmother ill-treats her, she does not appear to complain and when she becomes the wife of a *Vai Lalpa*, (literal translation: the chief of a non-Mizo community), she still obeys her step-mother who entreated her to return to pay them a visit only to kill her, but she was revived by a *saza* (a wild goat). In contrast to Mauruangi, her stepmother is portrayed as cruel, evil and cunning while her

stepsister Bingtaii was portrayed as ugly and lazy. Contemporary feminism has employed deconstructive strategies to destabilize the binary model present in the masculine/feminine dyad and instead, they try to locate the gendered and sexual subject in new frameworks. They seek to destabilize the binary structure which always privileges one binary over another such as the male over the female, as put forth by the Derridean model. Instead of merely reversing such a binary, they seek to destabilize its foundational structures (Phoca 55).

In Mizo folktales, there are underlying possibilities of subverting, challenging or destabilizing the gender stereotype through the figure of the old woman and of supernatural beings. In this connection, old women have been portrayed as wise and possessing traditional wisdom. However, this is somewhat undermined by their portrayal as somewhat strange characters possessing the uncanny ability of having knowledge of things which others are not privy to. In the folktale *Chawngchilhi*, it is an old woman who pointed out the whereabouts of the snake that was Chawngchilhi's lover to the villagers in exchange for the promise of choice cuts of meat after they kill it. Similarly, in the folktale *Ngaitei*, it is Ngaitei's grandmother who advises her to refrain from uttering a cry of shock as she goes to drink water at the deep pool that lay at the bottom of the jhoom. Upon ignoring her advice, Ngaitei is taken into captivity by the spirit of her father who had drowned there.

Since men were regarded as the protectors of the village, any act of defiance of male authority was portrayed as liability that led to the endangerment of the village community. In the folktale *Ngaitei*, when Ngaitei defied the male authority of her father and refused to return to him in the deep pool where

he now lived after drowning, she compromised on the safety of the village. Her father sent a flood that threatened to submerge the entire village. The villagers tried to appease his anger by dropping items belonging to Ngaitei into the water but to no avail. It was only after the villagers reluctantly dropped her in the water and obeyed the male authority that the waters receded. In a similar manner, Chawngchilhi in the folktale of the same name, exposes the village to danger when she bears children which are snakes from her illicit affair with a snake. Her father had killed them all except for one which survived and soon enough, began feeding on the livestock and children within the village. This has resulted from her defiance of parental authority. Likewise, women that defied patriarchal authority and were assertive were seen as endangering their lives and those of the people of their village.

A study of the Mizo folktales reveals that the traditional Mizo society was a patriarchal construct in which their indigenous belief system, their cultural value system and ethos were structured so as to provide incentive and motivation for the men to value the protection of their community above all else, coupled with the negation of the subjectivity of Mizo women. Such a way of life drew to close with British colonization in 1890 and the introduction of the Mizos to education and modernization as well as the near-complete Christianization that it brought about. In post-colonial era, Mizo women have made advancements and now have the opportunity to take up careers of their choice. Although their representation in Church leadership and political leadership at the top level is still lacking for many reasons, this can in part, be attributed to the prevailing paternalistic patriarchal mindset of the modern society. With the enactment of the Mizo

Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014, women in Mizoram today, enjoy the right of inheritance and succession, where before, this was the preserve of male members of the family and women were by and large excluded from matters of inheritance.

Notes

[1] *The Dictionary of the Lushai Language* describes the word *pasalmha* as, "a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter." (Lorrain 352)

[2] In this quotation we see Major A. G. McCall referring to the Mizos as Lushais and this is because it was the name by which the British colonial administrators first recognized the Mizos.

[3] *The Dictionary of the Lushai Language* describes the word *zawlbuk* as, "n. the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night." (Lorrain 562)

[4] *The Concise Learner's Dictionary of Mizo* describes *tlawmngaihna* as, "n. a term for the Mizo code of ethics meaning selfless service for the others. A compelling moral force which finds expression in self-sacrifice for the service of others; helpfulness, self-denial, altruism, unselfishness, sociability, bountifulness." (Vanlalngheta 441)

[5] *The Dictionary of the Lushai Language* describes the word *thangchhuah* as, "n. the title given to a man who

has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear the **thangchhuah puan** which see. The possession of this title is regarded by the Lushais as a passport to **Pialrâl** or Paradise." (Lorrain 447)

6 *The Concise Learner's Dictionary of Mizo* describes *pialral* as, "n. the paradise, heaven (of a pre-Christian vision)." (Vanlalngheta 322) In the traditional Mizo society, those who could not attain a place in Pialral went to mitthi khua or the village of the dead which was believed to be a duller and gloomier version of life on earth.

7 *The Dictionary of the Lushai Language* describes the word *keimi* as, "n. a mythical tiger-man, a person possessing the magic power of changing himself or herself at will into a tiger, and back again into a human being." (Lorrain 242)

8 *The Dictionary of the Lushai Language* describes the word *khuavâng* as, "n. the name of a guardian spirit." (Lorrain 267)

9 *The Dictionary of the Lushai Language* describes the word *Lasi* as, "n. 1. the fabled creator of animals. 2. the spirit which presides over hunting." (Lorrain 286)

10 *The Concise Learner's Dictionary of Mizo* describes *Pu Vana* as, "n. the heavenly god; overlord of the Mizos." (Vanlalngheta 329)

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Culture, Identity and Oral Tradition in *Lai Haraoba* of the Marginalised Meitei Community

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Introduction:

To end the vague idea about the origin and identity of a community and also the knowledge of the ancient culture and tradition in the contemporary society, one needs to rethink and explain one's identity by going back to the roots. The study of folklore has become important in the contemporary society as it not only raises awareness of one's origin and identity but also helps in understanding their ancient culture and tradition. Therefore it has become necessary to explore the elements of *Lai Haraoba*, which forms an important part of Manipuri folklore, in order to understand the rich culture, ancient beliefs, customs and rituals of the Meiteis.

Meitei is one of the most important communities in Manipur. Out of the many festivals celebrated by Meiteis, *Lai Haraoba* festival is the most indigenous festival which still preserves the earliest traditions of the Meiteis. The different form of dances had enriched the performing arts of Manipur. According to Ch. Manihar, "*Lai Haraoba*, a religious and social festival besides being the repository of different facets of Manipuri culture, is the veritable source of a variety of song" (12). According to him the origin of Meitei dance is associated with *Lai Haraoba*. The richness of Meitei culture can be seen

in its folk songs, dances, dresses, arts and crafts, food habits and the religious beliefs and philosophies of the people (13).

Earlier the Meiteis practice their traditional indigenous religion *Sanamahism* only. But it was in 1724 A.D that Vaishnavism came in Manipur during the reign of King Pamheiba (Garib Niwaz). With the advent of this new religion many traditional local deities (*lais*) were destroyed and many books on ancient literature were also burnt. That incident is still remembered today as *Puya Mei Thaba*. Subsequently Garib Niwaz took a number of measures to spread Vaishnavism in Manipur and ordered the discontinuance of all the ceremonies and rituals of the old Meitei faith substituting them with that of Hinduism (Khelchandra Singh 33). But *Lai Haraoba* still survives as a principal indigenous festival of Meiteis without the influence of Vaishnavism after its emergence in the state. The rituals in *Lai Haraoba* still holds the ancient traditions and beliefs of the Meiteis which existed earlier before the coming of the new religion. Through the rituals and tradition of this religious festival we can explore and understand our culture and origin in order to know the vague idea of our identity.

Lai Haraoba:

Lai is the term used for deities, both male and female in Manipuri. It is believed that *Lai Haraoba* was first performed by the Meitei Gods at *Koubru* hill celebrating their success for the creation of universe and other living beings including human. The functions of human being were shown in the form of ceremonial rites in *Lai Haraoba.* Later the human beings imitated this festival of the Gods and celebrated it every year in order to please and honour the deities for their creation and

gain favour from them to bring social unity and welfare of the society. According to another myth of origin of *Lai Haraoba*, *Lord Sorarel* took the form of *yarou saji* (deer) and appeared before the villagers of Leimaram. As the villagers saw the *saji* they ran after it for a long distance to hunt but it disappeared. Sound of drums, singing and merry making were heard nearby and they went towards that direction. To their surprise the villagers saw the merry making of the *lais* and forgot about the *saji* and came back. After some days the Lord revealed himself before the villagers and told everything about his plan and also his wish for the villagers to worship him. Thus the villagers of Leimaram started celebrating *Lai Haraoba* in honour of him (Laishram 170). Earlier there were no temples of *Umang Lais* (forest deities) but in due course of time temples were constructed in almost all the localities. According to Saroj Parratt and John Parratt,

> The *Lai Haraoba* which may be translated as 'the pleasing of Gods', is probably the greatest single key to Meitei history and culture. Despite two and half centuries of Hindu dominance, the *maibis* and *maibas*, largely through the rituals among which the *Lai Haraoba* stands supreme, have successfully preserved the essence of Meitei civilization and world view (xiv).

Lai Haraoba is usually performed at the onset of summer, usually in the months of February-March or May- June annually with some exceptions. E. Nilakanta Singh asserts that "the *Lai Haraoba* mirrors the entire culture of Manipuri people. It reveals its strengths and weaknesses, the beliefs and superstitions, and perhaps also the charm and happiness of the Manipuri people. It reflects the people at their intensest"(17). This festival is the most authentic religious

rituals of Meiteis which closely preserves the ancient culture. It is a festival consisting of oral literature, rituals, dance and music. It is mainly a form of worship and an important religious festival of Meitei society to please the Gods. The text of *Lai Haraoba* was never preserved in written form but was passed down through oral tradition from generation to generation by the *maibis* (priestesses), *maibas* (priests) and *pena khongbas* (players of *pena* instruments). Because of worshipping different deities in different localities there are some differences in the text of *Lai Haraoba*. But the basic structure of the text remained the same in all the *Haraobas*. *Lai Haraoba* starts with *Lai Ikouba* rituals (calling up of the deities from water) on the first day and ends with *Lai Nongaba* (returning of the deities) on the last day of the festival. It is celebrated for many days and during these days many rituals and ceremonies are performed strictly with music and dance by the *maibis, maibas* and *pena khongbas* along with the devotees of that respective locality where the festival is being held. The day starts with *Yakaiba* ritual, where the *pena khongba* awakens and greets the deities by singing with a *pena* and ends with *Naosum*, a lullaby where the deities are sung to sleep by the *pena khongba.*

This festival is also considered as the myth of creation where rituals in the form of performances are clearly shown from birth until death. The necessary daily activities, which are important for human beings, are illustrated in the form of dance movements. The most essential part of *Lai Haraoba* is the enactment of the creation of the cosmos (universe, earth, heaven and human beings). "The *Lai Haraoba* rituals depict creation of universe and life and the gradual development of society as conceived by the Meiteis" (Laishram 170). It is believed that the songs, dances and rituals of *Lai Haraoba* are

the offerings to the deities for a healthy, prosperous and peaceful society. It reflects the lifestyle, manners, arts and various philosophies of the Meiteis thus reflecting their entire culture.

The theme of this festival is the celebration of life, its origin, fulfillment of the purpose of living and the continued endurance through generation. The different forms of dance had enriched the performing arts of early Manipur and *Lai Haraoba* is one of them. *Lai Haraoba* dance is an essential ingredient of the cultural and religious life of the Meiteis. It is a kind of reliving the life of the past which also helps in identifying the tradition of Meitei community in a better way. The increasing trend of *Lai Haraoba* indicates the growing awareness of the pre-Hindu identity of the Meiteis. *Lai Haraoba* can be broadly classified into four types namely *Kanglei Haraoba, Chakpa Haraoba*, *Moirang Haraoba and Kakching Haraoba*. The basic structure and the essential ideas are the same in all the *Haraobas* but there are slight variations in the modes of performance of praying and offering with the variation of the deities in different localities.

Kanglei Haraoba:

It is performed in many parts of the valley of Manipur except *Moirang, Kakching* and those areas where *Chakpa Haraoba* are performed. It is practiced imitating the *Lai Haraoba* which was performed in the Royal Palace, *Kangla*. The *Pandit Loishang* (college of priest) decides the auspicious day to start the festival according to the lunar calendar (the *Thaban* system) of the Meiteis. *Lai Kanglei Thokpa* which literally means coming out of the *Lai* from the shrine to visit in order to search a wife, which is also known as *Lai Nupi*

Thiba is an exclusive feature of this kind of Haraoba. This ritual is generally believed to have been originated from the myth of *Lai Khoriphaba* coming down from heaven in search of a wife. The *maibi* enacts the ritual of Lai Nupi Thiba on the 5th, 7th, 9th and 11th day of the festival (Laishram 177).

***Chakpa Haraoba**:*

It is celebrated at Andro, Phayeng, Sekmai, Koutruk, Khurkhul, Leimaram and Tairenpokpi. It is considered that *Chakpa Haraoba* sustains the primeval form of Lai Haraoba. Earlier sacrificial practices are still maintained in this type of *Lai Haraoba*. *Andro Chakpa Haraoba* is said to be most detailed and extensive of all the other *Chakpa Haraobas*. *Panam Ningthou* is worshipped by the people of Andro. People who do not belong to Andro village are not permitted to attend (participate or watch) the festival as it is confined only to the villagers of Andro. In Andro *Chakpa Haraoba* the *Lai Ikouba* ritual is done from a hill and not from a river unlike other *Haraobas* (Laishram184).

The *Leimaram Chakpa Haraoba* is celebrated every alternate year but some rituals like *Lai Chaklon Katpa* (offering food to the lai), *Lamta Thangja Saroi Khangba* (keeping off evil spirits on Saturdays of *Lamta* i.e. February-march) etc. are carried out every year. The people of Leimaram worshipped *Loyarakpa* and *Nungthil Leima* in this Haraoba. A temporary hut is constructed for the *Lais* to stay during the *Haraoba* and a fire is lighted in a corner of this hut. The fire cannot be extinguished until the end of the *Haraoba* as *Emoinu Ahongbi*, the goddess of fire is also revered on this occasion. Foods cooked in this fire, cooked pig and chicken are offered to the

deities. During this *Haraoba* marriage alliance cannot take place and the shrine is closed if there is any death in the locality (Laishram 179).

The *Chakpa Phayeng Haraoba* takes place thrice in a year. *Koubru, Loyarakpa* and *Sorarel* are worshipped by the people of Phayeng. The participation of a *Phamnaiba* (a person honoured with a title by King) is compulsory in this *Haraoba.* Every locality of *Chakpa* should have a *Phamnaiba*. Language used in this *Haraoba* in the offering songs and prayers from the *Lai Ikouba* ritual till the *Lai Nongaba* of the last day is *Chakparol*. Some differences can be seen in the language used, the dance steps and number of the participants bearing the sacred objects of the *Lais* in this *Haraoba*. Therefore this *Haraoba* can also be said to be a completely different type of *Lai Haraoba*. A day before the *Lai Ikouba* ritual, the married elder women of the locality wash the clothes at the shrine which are to be dressed on the deities during the festival. Unlike other *Haraobas* the sacred objects of the deities are carried only by men. Pig, cooked or raw is offered before dawn to *Lord Sorarel* who is considered to be the Ultimate Ancestor. Vegetable dishes cannot be offered to this deity. *Lai Keithel Kaba* (*Lais* attending the divine market) ritual and men dancing naked before the *Lais* worshipped are the unique features of *Phayeng Lai Haraoba*. Females are prohibited to attend on this occasion (Laishram 178-180).

***Moirang Haraoba**:*

As the name itself signifies this type of *Haraoba* is performed only in Moirang. "The *Moirang Lai Haraoba* enacts the beautiful legend of *Khamba* and *Thoibi*, the star-crossed lovers of Meitei folklore"(Saroj Parratt and John Parratt 18).

In this *Haraoba* Lord *Thangjing* is being worshipped by the people of Moirang. So this type of *Haraoba* is also known as *Moirang Thangjing Haraoba*. Along with *Thangjing* nine other male deities (*Laibungthou*s) and seven female deities (*Lainuras*) are also worshipped in this festival. Every *Lai* is associated with a locality of Moirang.

Rena Laishram in her book *Early Meitei History: Religion Society and the Manipur Puyas* mentions that *Khongchingba, Lam Thokpa* and *Yum Phamba* are the three varieties of Moirang *Thangjing Haraoba*. Out of these three varieties only one is performed annually. In *Khongchingba* ritual the ropes which is tied on the legs of the palanquins of the deities is kept in a straight line. The *maiba* sings the *Ougri* and the palanquins are moved around the Shrine three or five times. In *Lam Thokpa* the deities are carried outside the shrine in palanquins but no ropes are tied to its legs. In *Yum Phamba* the deities are not carried outside and remain seated inside the shrine (Laishram 183).

Kakching Haraoba:

It is performed only in Kakching. Seven *Umanglais* are worshipped in *Kakching Haraoba* namely *Khullen Khamlangba, Wairi Khamlangba, Eroom Ningthou, Sekmai Ningthou, Naohal* and *Yengkhom Pakhangba.* There are some variations in the mode of worship and offering of these *lais* because of their differences. *Khullen Khamlangba* and *Wairi Khamlangba* are the village *lais* and are worshipped by the whole village in the month of April-May. The remaining five are the *sagei lai* (clan God) and are worshipped by the particular *sageis* of that particular *Lais* during August-September and January-February. *Lai Haraoba* of the *five sagei*

lais cannot commence before the *Lai Haraoba* of *Khullen Khamlangba* and *Wairi Khamlangba*. Therefore the *Haraoba* of these two *Khamlangbas* are mainly known as *Kakching Haraoba*. The *maibas, maibis*, village chiefs and village elders of the locality decide together the auspicious day for starting the *Haraoba*. In *Kakching Haraoba*, unlike in other *Haraobas*, offering of *nungarei* flower to the lais is compulsory. So the flower has to be kept ready a day before the *Lai Haraoba* starts. A person along with an attendant goes to *Heipung* hill at *Purum* village to collect this flower. Another difference in this type of *Haraoba* is the dipping of the *maibis* in the river during the *Lai Ikouba* ritual. *Ngaprum Tanba*, finding of a special type of fish, is also another distinctive feature of *Kakching Haraoba* (Laishram181).

Rituals in *Lai Haraoba*:

Day one:
Lai Ikouba or Lai Themgatpa (Calling or bringing up of the deities from the water)

At the Shrine
Lai Phisetpa (Dressing the idol representations of the *lais*)
Laihou Jagoi (Dance to begin the rituals)
Jagoi Okpa (Dance to welcome)

At the water
Khayom Lakpa (the offering of *khayom,* a packet containing food of God, in water)
Laihourol (Creation Song)
Laipao (oracle)
Leiyom Happa (placing the *leiyom* in the pots)

Lai Higaba Cycle (bringing the gods to the shrine)

Jagoi Okpa (welcome dance)
Mei Okpa (cleansing through fire)
Khoiju lamok (cleansing through smoke)
Thawaimi happpa (putting souls in the gods)

Offerings:
Luk thaba (offering of foods- fruits, flowers, vegetables, rice etc)
Anamathou (cleansing)
Naosum (singing of lullaby by the *pena khongb*a)

Day two and subsequent days:

The morning rituals:
Yakaiba (awakening of the *lais* by the *pena khongba*)
Lai Luk Katpa (offerings of fruits, vegetables and flowers)
Laipao Chenba (oracle giving by the *maibi*)

The afternoon rituals:
Jagoi Okpa (welcome dance)
Lei Langba (presentation of flowers)
Laiboula thaba (placing of the plantain leaves)
Lai happa (putting on the *lai*)
Kuruk lei jagoi (dance with *langthrei* buds between the fingers)
Laiching jagoi (symbolizes drawing out the *lais* from the shrine)
Laihou jagoi (a dance to begin)
Nongdai jagoi (dance symbolizing joining of heaven with earth)
Nappa jagoi (dance symbolizing creation of the four directions)
Phibun jagoi (symbolizes the creation of sexuality)
Khutcha jagoi (dance symbolizing as the offering of the creation to the *lais*)

Hoi laoba (a series of folk riddles having erotic meanings)

Laibou cycle (the birth cycle)

i. *Anoirol* (the creation dance)

ii. *Hakchang saba* (the building of the body)

iii. *Yumsaba* (the building of house)

The *Panthoibi* cycle (rituals focus upon *Panthoibi*)

i. Panthoibi isei (*Panthoibi* song)

ii. Paosha (love songs)

iii. Pam *yanba* (cultivation)

iv. Longkhonba (the gathering of souls)

The *phijang* (canopy) cycle

i. Phibul ahabi (dance with cloth balls symbolizing the presence of the *lais,* especially male and female sexual potency)

ii. Chungkhong yetpa (dance representing the foundation of universe at creation)

iii. Chungkhong litpa (dance underneath the *chungkhong*)

iv. Lairen mathek (dance showing like the curve of *python*)

Wakon (the last word, the final lyrics before the *lais* are put to rest)

Final day:

Lai Lam Thokpa or *Lai Nupi Thiba* (seeking a wife for the *lai)*

Thang Jagoi (sword dance, ritual of protection)

Loutaba (cultivation)

Ougri (ingathering cycle)

i. Thabal chongba (dancing by moonlight)

ii. Ningthourol sheisak (plea for the well being of the village)

iii. Thawaimi konba (the gathering in of the souls and the shadow)

iv. Sharit litpa (going beneath the hands)

Khencho (rejoicing)

The *Lai Nongaba* Cycle (the return of the *lais* to heaven)

Lai tethaba (dismantling of the *lais)*

Saroi khangba (appeasing the spirits)

The above series of rituals show that the rites and ceremonies in *Lai Haraoba* are very elaborate and performed with intense care by the *maibis, maibas* and the *pena khongbas* in order to please the deities. One traditional and indigenous instrument '*Pena'* a one string fiddle is played by the *pena khongba* in most of the rituals especially *Yakaiba* and *Naosum* at the beginning and the end of the day. *Pena* is one of the most original and characteristic musical instruments of Manipur. It is only in this festival that *Pena* is used very significantly and elaborately. Care is taken to avoid any mistakes, which the people believed to be a kind of sin against the deities, during these rituals so that the deities are pleased and the locality gains the blessing of god for a prosperous society.

Sacred objects used in *Lai Haraoba:*

Khudeisel kaosel: a brass container with a lid

Personal items: mirrors, combs, fans, betel nut, sword of distinctive shape, umbrella etc.

Ishaifu: small earthen pot

Hiri: hand woven thread of pure cotton

Leiyom: packets containing three layers of banana leaves and buds of *langthre*i plant

Khayom: packet of seven layers of banana leaves and contains rice, a fertilized egg and three *langthrei*

Ishaifu: a large earthen pot

Naheifu: earthen pot in which water is collected for cleansing and calming the possessed *maibis*

Some of the objects being used in the *Lai Haraoba* rituals are still considered sacred as well as important in the present time also and are used in rare occasions specifically at some particular ceremonies. There is a deep connection of these sacred objects with the myth of *Lai Haraoba* where these objects are being related with the Meitei deities. These objects have their specific significance in this festival and they cannot be replaced by other objects.

The Oral Text of *Lai Haraoba*:

The text of *Lai Haraoba* is passed down through oral transmission by the *maibis, maibas* and the *pena khongbas* from one generation to another and was never preserved in written form. Therefore the maibis, maibas and the *pena khongbas* play a significant role in preserving the text of *Lai Haraoba*. Being the preservers of this oral tradition it is their responsibility to commit to memory and reiterate accurately the sacred oral text in the rituals of *Lai Haraoba*. From this we come to know that the origin of the tradition of *Lai Haraoba* can be traced back to the pre-literary Meitei society and existed earlier than the oldest archaic Manipuri written works. The *maibas* and *maibis* therefore play a three-fold role, as priests and priestess, givers of oracles and preservers of oral tradition. With the difference of deities according to the variations of localities or villages, there are some differences in the text of

Lai Haraoba. Some of the language used in *Lai Haraoba* is so archaic that sometimes it becomes difficult for the audience and common people to understand the meaning of some words. These are some of the difficulties or problems of preserving the text of *Lai Haraoba* in written form. The singing and chanting of the sacred lyrics of *Lai Haraoba* are accompanied by the music of *Pena*, a one string fiddle and one of the most important and traditional musical instruments of Meiteis (Saroj Parratt and John Parratt 19-20).

Conclusion:

It is high time for everyone to know and understand the importance and relevance of *Lai Haraoba* in the contemporary society. It is through this festival that the identity and rich culture and tradition of Meitei community are showcased. It is generally believed that folklore of a society becomes one of the most important elements in understanding the culture of that society. Therefore by exploring *Lai Haraoba* which is an important component of folklore, one can understand the origin, identity, custom, rituals and tradition of Meitei society. The *Lai Haraoba* makes certain of the persistence of culture and helps preserve the distinct Meitei identity against the growing impact of cultural hybridisation caused by globalisation and economic liberalisation.

Lai Haraoba is also a proof of the existence of original religion of the Meiteis before the arrival of Hinduism. The religion of the Meiteis today is a complex one in which the indigenous religion with ancestral worship and different aspects of Hindu religion are merged together to form a particular belief system. The Meiteis have a firm conviction that rituals which are associated with *Lai Haraoba* are not

only symbolic, but also aims at meeting some ends in the forms of welfare of the people of the locality where it is being held and also in terms of fertility aspect (both production and reproduction). So this festival is celebrated in many parts of Manipur before the starting of agricultural activities seeking the blessings of the deities for a good production. It also serves in raising identity and cultural awareness among the Meiteis who are being marginalised in the wake of globalisation. The different forms of dance had enriched the performing arts of Manipur and *Lai Haraoba* is one of them. *Lai Haraoba* dance is an essential ingredient of the cultural and religious life of the Meiteis and helps to reflect the tradition, culture and identity in a better way. Thus *Lai Haraoba* plays an important role in the expression of the culture and identity of the marginalised Meitei community.

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Marginalisation of Human Values and the New National Narrative in Khushwant Singh's Works.

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The British colonial regime in India ended with an unfortunate break-up of the country into two nations in1947 leaving behind a trail of sad events and bitter memories. This paper is an attempt to examine the life on the margins of society, which receives points of poignancy in the absorbing narratives of Khushwant Singh. To critically examine the human values in the emerging Indian national narrative, the novels *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and *Delhi: A Novel* (1990) are selected.

Khushwant Singh is considered as a "humorous writer and incorrigible believer in human goodness with a devil-may-care attitude and a courageous mind."[1]Singh was an Indian-English writer, lawyer, diplomat, journalist and parliamentarian, and he remained in public consciousness for many controversies during his life. One of the major Indian English writers of our times, he is very keen to explore and critique the social realities of India. His sensitive understanding of contemporary Indian society is incisively critical and reveals an intimate knowledge of rural and urban life and their inherent problems. His *Train to Pakistan* (1956) captures many aspects of the social life as well as the national trauma which are usually once shadowed by mainstream preoccupations in an emerging nation negotiating colonial aftermaths. This article

will attempt to re-examine the perspectives of protest and power which degrade and dehumanise life as evident in theselected texts of Khushwant Singh.

Singh's writings by and large project a protest voice. He in his works targets the society of stereotypes and masks of evilthrough his use of irony, satireand untraditional criticism. His literary critique expresses a sense of protest against the prevailing norms of dominant social groups or an exploiting system of values.Protest literature endorses 'empathy, shock value, and symbolic action,' in which empathy encourages, shock value inspires emotions and desires, and symbolic action.[2]In other words, the author works witha specific aimto bring changes in the society or individuals.John Stauffer has defined protest literature broadly to mean the uses of language to transform the self and bring changes to the society. It not only critiques society, but also suggests, either directly or indirectly, a solution to society's ills. (Foreword. xii)

The novel *Train to Pakistan* shows the politics and power game of British Empire to divide the country, while *Delhi: A Novel* testifies to the power of destructive human psyche moulded by the socio-political context as the novel depicts the sectarian riots in Delhi. It appears that Singh has an uncanny perception of the role of power in conceiving social relations and human dealings. The mode and function of power are not necessarily ennobling or positively empowering, but the political, social and religious structures in India get exposed in their unholy nexus with each other. In the novel *Train to Pakistan* the two prime characters of Juggut Singh and Nooran, are found interested in their secret relationship centred on sexuality. They bring their relationship to such an extent that, though undesired,Nooran becomes pregnant. The novel refers

to the troublesome affair between Juggut Singh, a Sikh young man and Nooran, a Muslim girl. Each forgets the strict premises of religion and wider social conventions, and both continue their affair secretly to live their life's contentment. The novel brings out the sad turn of events in the wake of India-Pakistan division, how lovers are separated, and their love's paradise is shattered. Even the novel cryptically reveals how religion comes as a stumbling block on their way.The writer does not hesitate to describe the young lovers' passion by physical imagery and corporeal movements(Singh. *Train*14).The lovers' act of love, as described in the pages of the novel, will testify to the fact that Khushwant Singh celebrates the joy of life in every occasion.The unlimited delight of life surpasses all other considerations for the young lovers. In this context,Peter Morey has sensitively observed that Khushwant Singh "appears to valorise" the spirit of "transgression" against "rampant communal nationalism" (174).Here the novelist's critical sensibility of protest against the religious restrictions is made visible.

The novelist exposes the acts of injustice, power game and politics while satirising many social modes. In the novel *Train to Pakistan* the role of the police cops and the way people believe them are emphasised by irony and innuendo. For example, Iqbal is taken into custody on the false accusation of the murder of Ram Lal; when the policemen take him,his outbursts express cynicism and scepticism about the Indian police. He says to Meet Singh, "I would rather trust you than the police in this free country of ours" (Singh.*Train* 57).The policemen who arrest Iqbal can read his innocent anger and apprehend that 'arresting the social worker was a blunder and a likely source of trouble' (Singh. *Train* 62).Here, Khushwant

Singh points ironically to the usual sordid police practice how to file fake cases. In self-defence "some sort of case would have to be made up against him. That was always a tricky thing to do to educated people" (Singh. *Train* 62-63). Singh has also tried to expose the illicit nexus both rules and manipulations of law at every step. The law in force follows its underhand deals by discriminating between the educated and uneducated victims by throwing the principle of equality and neutrality into the wind. It is to disclose how Punjabi policemen were so adamant and hypocritical of their class who would neveradmit making mistakes. The misuse of the institutional position and power to fabricate charges against innocent victims shows that "they would trump up some sort of charge: vagrancy, obstructing officers in doing their duty, or some such thing. He would fight them tooth and nail"(Singh. *Train* 63). In an independent country like India, it becomes clear that themodes of corruption continue unabatedsince colonial times as the old institutions are not overhauled.Corridors of powerecho the same old shuffling, though new power brokers are seen walking high. Their actions do not subvert conduits of power, which Khushwant Singh takes to scrutiny.

Julie Bywater and Rhiannon Jones have discussed Michel Foucault's idea of power and stated that 'power' is active in all levels of social communication in all social institutions involving all people. The crucial aspect of power is felt through the discourse which plays the most significant role. For Foucault, power and knowledge are closely related and support each other. Besides, these concepts construct what is and what is not acceptable even in relation to life of people.(5-6)

Further, in the *Train to Pakistan*, Singh exposes the role of discourse involving the character of Juggut's mother in her talk with Nooran. But Juggut's mother handles the sensitive situation wittily. The novelist has used the power of discourse to convince the unwilling person to yield. He has tried to draw attention also to the love and its power of human bond between two distinct religious communities, which, however unfortunately, are subjected to ruin under changing political upheavals. Significantly, Khushwant Singh draws attention to the marginalised premise of love-life which the Indian women come to encounter first and brace up to handle with feminine skill.

The political divide of an unfolding history and practical exigencies prompted Imam Baksh, father of Nooran, to migrate to Pakistan, before the situation turns worse. The novelist is sensitive to the human situations and problems that ordinarily affect life. Baksh, unaware of love's noose asks his daughter Nooran to pack before the communal violence turns worse. He asks his daughter not to become silly dragging her feet and do as he says. In the novel *Train to Pakistan*, it is common to smell an ominous warning that those who stay behind will be killed helplessly (Singh. *Train*136). In this case, we find the impact of political situation is un-ignorable on the life of the general people of the country. It may be imagined how hopelessly the political turmoil may throw out a man out of his native land overnight and drive him helplessly to save his life, the last dregs of property and dignity.

While commenting on the novel *Train to Pakistan,* S. K. Dubey says that through the sacrifice of Juggut Singh the novelist wishes to tell the readers that the propensity towards for violence in men can be fought with the power of love. In fact, it is the power of love which drives the hero of the novel

Juggut Singh to prevent the mass killing by laying down his life. It is in love that an illicit lover like Juggut finds his actual identity as a human being and cultivates his inner strength of morality to take risk of his life for his love Nooran, as Nooran too was one of the passengers of the train. His love for Nooran exceeds from personal to universal as evident in this process and thus he could prevent a massive genocide. it is found that the novelist tries to convey the message that love in men is as severely rooted as the urge for fierceness. But it is the love, which produces strength and courage to face violence with fortitude (34-35).If we talk about protest voice here, according to Stauffer, protest literature not only talks of violent reactions, but it also endorses compassionate values (Foreword. Xiii).

Delhi: A Novel relates the instinctual power of sexuality secretly lurking towards its opposite gender in the characters of both the narrator and Bhagmati, a eunuch. In the story,it is found that the narrator's kind-heartedness for the helpless one gradually turns into his sensual inquisitiveness which brings in his mind the thought to explore the unique physical feature of Bhagmati who is actually a eunuch. In this context, it is to note that the moving power of sensuality which may shift from one state to the other very fast, thus impacts human behaviour (*Singh Delhi.* 35).Khushwant Singh has brought to notice the problems and understated ironies in the marginalised eunuch's existence.

The novel shows how the power-driven machineries and the grand institutions are susceptible to manipulation and corruption. The narrator is conscious about social and moral restrictions. As he has admitted through the narration that he is accustomed to bring unknown ladies to his apartment. But to keep himself hidden from the public gaze and thus to retain

a façade of his social dignity intact he regularly pays monthly tips to the watchman Budh Singh(Singh. *Delhi*. 39).Khushwant Singh does not feel tired of satirising the nexus between sexuality and human weakness. *Delhi: A Novel* is a political narrative which vividly describes the unfortunate and immediate repercussions following Indira Gandhi's assassination. The consequent Delhi anti-Sikh riot exposes the utter terror of mindless destruction of life with communal hatred, breakdown of state law, machinery and the socio-political divide.

> The mob is composed of about fifty young boys armed with iron rods. Some have canisters of petrol in their hands. They surround the gurdwara and storm in. They drag out the Bhai and beat him up with their fists and rods.(Singh *Delhi* 388)

In an atmosphere of utter chaos and lawlessness, Indira Gandhi's political supporters were out to take revenge of the murder of their leader. But her assassin was one Sikh only. However, the vengeful supporters undertook to kill the innocent Sikhs and ransacked their properties. The author has demonstrated his voice of protest and disgust over the scene of horror and mindless genocide that occurred in the aftermath of a leader's death thus:

> They are killing every Sikh they see on the road, burning their taxis, trucks, scooters. Connaught Place is on fire. They are looting every Sikh shop, office, hotel.(Singh *Delhi* 387)

In this book Khushwant Singh, a Sikh himself has brought both the powerful aspects of human kindness as well as human weakness showing the contradictory pulls of the human mind.It

gives insight to the fact of the power of a mob violently toppling down the power of a balanced individual. In the *Delhi: A Novel*, another motif is to satirise and bring out the flashes of history about the fanatic Muslim rulers out of who got to demolish the Hindu and Jain temples in the city. Singh in this episode highlights the various social evil practices of those bygone days suchas early marriages, racial discrimination, atrocities of the various Muslim rulers, superstitions, religious intolerance, etc. And Delhi attracting alien rulers symbolises ironicallyas a city of many such tragedies. By portraying the characters of the ulemas(Singh *Delhi* 57), Singh satirically brings out the fact that there are people who like the ulemaleaders, depend on and blindly follow the religious books without understanding of truth and make unholy fights in the name of religion. His satire becomes a mode of 'defamiliarisation' of suppressed values.[3]It is through this satire relating to all religions that Khushwant Singh conveys his criticism and disapproval and uncovers the blind religious faith and practices.

Singh makes a biting attack on the educational institutions managed by the Maulvis and their communal agenda during the Muslim period. At one Madrasa, the Maulvi Sahib gives a Hindu boy Musaddi Lal a Muslim name, Abdul, in order to protect him from being bullied by other Turkish as well as Hindu converts. They call him Abdullah though he is not declared a convert. Many of the Muslim boys try to convert him into the Muslim faith for brighter prospects. Unlike most others Khushwant Singh calling a spade a spade exposes these suppressed facts of bigotry:

> My Muslim friends suggested that if I accepted conversion to Islam my prospects would be brighter; I could even

> aspire to become *Kotwal*of Mehrauli. And I would have no trouble in finding a wife from amongst the new converts. If I was lucky I might even get a widow or a divorce of pure Turkish, Persian or Afgan stock. 'If you are Muslim,' said one fellow who was full of witticisms, 'you can have any woman you like. If you are up to it, you can have four at a time.'(Singh.*Delhi* 51)

This passage may give insight into the hidden agenda of lure and conversion.Singh's protesting critique here discloses the abuse of power and passion associated with means of money, religion and women. The Muslim bait for conversion and the implicit polygamous patterns of the Islamic society are satirically presented. One may imagine in another sense, how the patriarchal Islamic society treats women abjectly as property. In spite of these temptations, Musaddi doesn't get converted. He wants to bring back his wife Ram Dulari, but Ram Dulari's parents refuse to allow their daughter to return , because there has been a rumour that their son-in-law's parents had adopted the ways of the Muslim 'maleecha'(Singh. *Delhi* 52). Singh has his observant eyes revealing the shortcomings that afflict all social groups whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh.

Sudhendu Shekhar remarks that for Khushwant Singh, man is rooted in his instinct of power, which is realised through passion and ends with pain. "Power and passion are the co-ordinates of history that characterise human evolution across the centuries in Singh's novels. Simultaneously they also betoken how history is amenable to the fallibility of man through his impulsive self" (119).The novelist has depicted the Delhi's rulers having urges for greed, desire, and lust which testify an intricate system of dishonesty, disloyalty, infidelity, ferocity, animosity and corruption. "The values of tolerance,

co-existence, faith, non-violence, sacrifice, co-operation and fellow-feeling which have a convincing sway over the people at large … are relegated to the background" (136).Delhi's rulers could not learn, as the novelist sees, from Auliya's equability, Teg Bahadur's martyrdom and Gandhiji's sacrifice.

Sexuality and power corridors are having shady links in most of Khushwant Singh's books. On the other hand, in a conservative socio-religious system, the natural love between the Sikh Juggut and the Muslim girl Nooranis not permitted to satisfy in the novel *Train to Pakistan*.What is to be appreciated in Khushwant Singh's novels is his inescapable knack for fun and humour. His characteristic turns to humour relieve the dark and cynical environment of sordid and immoral relations.He raises his accusing fingers at the spurious religious tricks, power politics, deception and the social constraints predominant in the Indian society, which are projected with a sense of humour. It is justifiable to say that Khushwant Singh has employed satire as a tool of exposure and a weapon of moral authority without being didactic. Human values like love, compassion, coexistence, sacrifice and sympathy are made fragile and marginalised in the new national drives for power, political stability and reorganisation of society. And more, he is not tired of exposing the socio-political nexus of power relations and subverting sexual-religious tangles in the emergent national life.

Notes

[1] "The South Asian Literary Recording Project." www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/ salrp/ khushwant singh.html.Web. 24th Feb 2018.

[2] Yi, Steven.'Portfolio: "All About Protest"'. https://bu.digication.com/syiport/What_Is_Protest_Literature. Web. 2nd August 2018.

[3] Gunn, Daniel P. "Making Art Strange: A Commentary on Defamiliarization." *The Georgia Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 25-33 (p.25) Jstor. org.web. 2nd August 2018.

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Confluence of Myth and Reality in *Son of the Thunder Cloud*

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Easterin Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* has been awarded Bal Sahitya Puraskar by Sahitya Akademy in 2018. However, judging by the standard of what she has written, the accolade conferred to her is much less than what she actually deserves because the book is no less significant than Golding's *Lord of the Flies* or for that matter than Hemmingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. The significance of this novella is immense because it makes an interesting allegorical reading that combines myth, religion, history and eco-critical concerns of the pre-sent days: the novelist has blended it all to voice her concern about the degrading affects of human activities on nature. The novella has multiple layers which the novelist has subtly in-terwoven, and through her narrative technique made a very pressing and realistic concern ap-pear an appeal from the world of storytellers.

It is a strange coincidence that Easterin Kire's *Son of the Thundercloud* and Amitabh Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* have been published simultaneously in the year 2016. Ghosh's concern in his book is the climatic change that has been triggered by unrestrained damage caused to nature by human activities which in turn, in every possibility, is about to unleash a catastrophe proportionate to human anomie. Ghosh attributes

this cause to unde-terred destruction of nature incited by mundane activities, industrialisation and rise in carbon economy. Ghosh concludes his book by stating the cumulative effect forced by the great de-rangement:

> The cumulative effect is the extinction of exactly those forms of traditional knowledge, material skills, art and ties of community that might provide succour to vast number of people around the world- and specially to those who are still bound to land- as the im-pacts intensify. The very speed with which the crisis is now unfolding may be the one factor that will preserve some of these resources. (Ghosh 216)

It is in this context Easterine Kire's novella comes as a sure succour, a panacea that may alleviate the condition of mankind and at least catechize humans to respect nature if not to restore nature to its earlier form. Kire is of course not the first novelist from Northeast In-dia to do it; there have been other eminent writers like Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi, Monalisha Chankija, Vanneihtluanga, Arupa Patangia Kalita, and Arup Kumar Dutta who have endeavoured to negotiate between the nature/culture, anthropocentric/ecocentric dichotomy through their respective works. However, Kire's work is a class apart because of her artistic capacity to blend myth and folk-elements with the global concern about the environmental crisis termed as "great derangement" by Amitabh Ghosh.

Kire's novella presents allegorically the relationship between human and nature in a symbiotic equation which is necessary for the present day generation to understand if they are to sustain life on earth. The perpetual traveler in the novella, Pelevotso, the central character, Rhalietuo and his mother

Mesanuo, the sisters of Mesanuo, and the Spirit-Tiger are all alle-gorical figures which function for the purpose of exemplifying the forces of nature amidst mankind's irreverence for her. Apart from the characters, many of the incidents in the novella also have allegorical implications which justify the writer's perception of the mysticism that flanks the world of nature from human understanding. Whereas humans have lived in the lap of nature for millions of years without destroying it, it is only since the 18th century that the mode of production has been altered with the rise of industrialization (Deane). Such changes have eventually led humans to cause irreparable damage to nature. As Dipesh Chakrabarty quotes Oreskes in one of his articles that "humans have become geological agents, changing the most basic physical processes of the earth" (Chakrabarty 206). This claim reverberates in the recent calamity brought about by the flood that has caused havoc in Kerala.

> Environmental scientist Dr VS Vijayan, a member of the expert panel on the Western Ghats, said Kerala was going through a man-made disaster. He said the impact should have been limited if the Gadgil committee report, aimed at protecting ecologically-fragile mountain ranges, was implemented.
>
> He attributed the floods to human incursions and unscientific developmental activities in ecologically-sensitive areas. (Chauhan and Babu)

Such revelations glare at the callousness of the politicians and industrialists who refuse to admit the allegation that the primary cause had been mankind's meddling with the nature. The recent floods in Assam caused by the releasing of

water by NEEPCO has not only dam-aged crops and properties but has also led to human causalities (PTI). The construction of Dams, deforestation and other man made changes have eventually affected mankind. Conse-quently, the fall out of this crisis can be seen in the rage and fury of nature that has been unleashed in the past and the present century. The widening of the ozone hole in the arctic circle prompting in the initiation of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto pro-tocol and the Paris climate agreement only points to the urgency of the situation (Oberthur and Ott). The rise in the global temperature in the post industrial period is now well acknowl-edged and eventually the nations world wide had pledged to adopt measures that would try to lower the average world temperature: "The universal agreement's main aim is to keep a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius and to drive efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels" (Nuttall). Such has been the effect of global warming and natural calamities that it has spilled over the exclusive bowl of political stakeholders. It is no longer limited to the social and en-vironmental scientists alone; the magnanimity of the situation has also led writers from all literary genres to address it to the wider audience in all possible ways. The literature from northeast India has also voiced its concern through the pages of fiction and poetry. Their works raise a concern about how the world of nature is getting bereaved of its pristine beauty and its adverse affect on mankind.

Therefore it is not surprising to identify the sense of urgency that runs throughout Kire's novella: a loss of faith and hope which needs to be restored in order to understand the relationship between man and nature. The novelist employs

mystical events in order to justify the incomprehensible patterns of nature. On the surface it is a simple story, sounds like a mythic one, of a widow whose husband and seven sons had been killed by a tiger. Thereafter a prophesy has been made that the lady will give birth to the son (christ figure) of thundercloud who will not only avenge the death of his family members but will also liberate his kinsmen from the Spirit-tiger. The story has its genesis in "traditional knowledge" which is a repository of ancient wisdom encoded in mythic folklores. As Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi and Binay Kumar Rai have pointed out that the purpose of folklores goes beyond than "simply serving to validate or justify institutions, beliefs and attitudes, some forms of folklores are important as means of applying social pressure and exercising social control" (Vidyarthi and Rai 317).

In *Son of the Thunder Cloud*, the reworking of this mythic lore is occasioned by the regained consciousness of mankind which had so long been suppressed by a false perception and understanding of a anthropocentric world. The substitution of the traditional knowledge with a new knowledge system constructed by Colonial forces throughout the world has not only exploited the nature to its optimum level, but has also changed the route of mankind to-wards individualisation: a life completely divorced from regards towards nature. Easterine Kire's Novella is a bold attempt to reawaken this ancient knowledge system that will restore and redeem man's faith in nature and respect for the spirit of nature.

From the very outset Kire has presented nature as mystic healer and as a living spirit that not only sustains and nourishes human life but as something which is the home for all those who seek refuge in her lap. In the beginning the readers have been informed that after the death of Pelevotso's grand-

father, his grandmother lived at the edge of the forest: "…she had lived alone, collecting jungle herbs to heal sick and wounded animals and men" (Kire 11). Although nature is the healer and saviour of mankind, it has its secrets which is not com-prehensible to human mind. And as such nature- the un-knowable- is to be worshipped, loved and revered. Any irrev-erence and indifference towards her may bring in a deluge of destruction. This fact is made manifest when the narrator re-counts the story of destruction brought about by human igno-rance. The village where Pele lived was one of the best places to live in as it had the abundance of nature. Continuity and tradition have been emphasised here be-cause tradition is the repository of ancient knowledge and continuity ensures the preservation of such knowledge. A slack in any of these two may disintegrate the tribal world beyond re-pair. The older people of the village knew this fact and they too were willing to teach their young ones how to "love the village": "They feared that if the young were not taught to love the village, it would soon be abandoned. They had seen it happen around them" (Kire 12) .

The people in Pele's village talked about the village which was once prosperous and flourishing. The harvest, in that vil-lage, was so abundant that there were no more space in the granaries to store the excess stock and so the excess harvest was left in the field to rot without even caring for the taboo "that said that every village must keep aside some grain after the harvest as seed grain"(Kire 12). Soon the granaries were invaded by swarming field mice sparing not a single grain. The entire food stock had been wiped out resulting in famine and death. It is not that they were not aware of such eventuali-ties in the past, but that they had been momentarily over-

whelmed by their prosperity and became oblivious of ancient wisdom. This is a piece of a priceless wisdom which is to be reckoned in the present day materialistic world where a handful people, who are controlling the world resources, believe in wastage and exploitation of natural resources, thereby leaving millions of needy people deprived and impoverished. Such is the wisdom of ancient cultures which had embedded knowledge in the form of folklore until one day the superior powers came and wiped out this knowledge system by substituting it with the singularity of European "capitalist" wisdom. The novelist narrates another incident of a drunken brawl between two clans that led to a war resulting in bloodshed and abandonment of the villages. What follows is the moral: "they knew that if they had stopped the first killings they would not have left their homes" (Kire 13). Such stories are an integral part of the tribal knowledge system, which are narrated to the younger generations by their parents in order to educate and nourish their intelligence and wisdom. Pele is fed with this knowledge; he is perpetually present from the beginning to the end of the novel and is an allegorical figure representing mankind. His journey through prosperity to deprivation and then to prosperity again is the journey of mankind that exhibits layers of experiences which constitute life.

The novelist has, in fact, interfused history and folk-knowledge to give shape to her point of view. The novella has a strong ecocritical perspective which is encoded in the allegorical characters and incidents. The famine which the novelist alludes to is not fictitious and has actually occurred in the previous centuries. Its effect had been so severely felt in Mizoram that it gave rise to Mizo nationalism resulting in the creation of Mizoram as a separate state (L.K.Pachuau). Simi-

lar incidence had happened in neighbouring states of Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. The incidence of famine is preceded by bamboo flowering resulting in the invasion of mice and other insects which feed on the bamboo flowers. Once they exhaust the bamboo flowers, they take on the granaries resulting in the shortage of food for the villagers. Since such bamboo flowering happens once in every 48 years, the recurrence becomes inevitable. In order to fight such calamity, the villagers had to be cautious and keep a separate stock of seed-grain. Thus a new knowledge is added to the ancient wisdom and passed on from generation to generation through folklores: "Pele grew up in a household that knew the taboos and taught him to respect them" (Kire 13). However, Pele's village had been visited by another famine, not caused by rats this time, but by drought. The famine not only claimed the lives of the villagers and all those who refused to relocate but also the lives of Pele's children, wife and his parents. Soon Pele was forced to leave his village in search of a habitable place. The novelist envisions him as the messenger, the traveler (already anticipated by his grandmother) who would travel to other villages carrying and spreading the ancient wisdom. Pele's journey itself is phenomenal. He witnesses another aspect of nature's fury and scourge. The tribal world is much closer to nature as opposed to the detribalized groups, and hence the significance and credibility of myths in such world is much more plau-sible and meaningful. Further the nature/ culture opposition gets diluted in ancient cultures because culture sprang from reverence to nature. Of course it depended on how the social groups see and interpret nature, but the very existence of totem and taboos establish the fact that nature is to be revered and preserved instead of being conquered. Na-

ture has always been some higher agency whose incomprehensibility has compelled tribal communities to worship it. Therefore, ecocentricism has always been integral to tribal communities in India. Amitav Ghosh has pointed out that "one of the originally impulses of modernity is the projection of 'partitioning', or deepening the imaginary gulf between Nature and Culture: the former comes to be relegated exclusively to the sciences and is regarded as being off limits to the latter" (Ghosh 92). But the Tribal world which is devoid of this effects of modernity does not relegate to the difference, rather it hinges on the culture that arises out of its reverence towards nature. Hence there is no dichotomy, rather there is respect and reverence towards nature.

Likewise Kire wants to bring home the fact that the survival of mankind on earth is reciprocally related to human's reverence towards nature. The destruction of Pele's village is a signal to the misfortune brought about by human actions, and therefore when Pele undertakes his journey through the valleys and forests, he carries with him this message. Moreover, he is also a witness to the possible redemption that mankind may be granted if the 'prophecy is fulfilled'. The prophesy in question is the birth of a prodigal son who will not only avenge the death of his father and brothers by killing the Spirit-Tiger, but will also bring prosperity to the famished and rain-starved village:

> They say that those of us who survived have done so because of the great hope of the ancestors who used to say that our ancient misfortune will end when the Son of the Thundercloud is born. Everything will be transformed then. He will bring rain and mist that softens the soil, and the earth will sprout grain and grass again. There

> will be food and life. This is why we have been kept alive. (Kire 19)

Possibly the Biblical theme of the birth of Christ has been allegorized in order to draw a parallel to the tribal folklore. Pelle's journey along with the two sisters (Kethonuo & Siedze) to the village to witness the birth of the 'son of the thundercloud' reminds one of the journey of the three magi. Of course I am not comparing the magi with these characters, I am just informing about the parallel that shapes the understanding of the writer. In that sense 'son of the thundercloud' is a Christ figure who has come to save mankind from the evil forces (represented by the tiger spirit). Although Rhalietuo (Son of the thundercloud) successfully kills the Tiger, at a later stage we see that he becomes a victim of human conspiracy and jeal-ousy. Rhalietuo has been betrayed by his own kinsman and along with his death the human innocence is drowned in blood. Apart of this, the birth of Rhalietuo also signifies the 'birth of hope'. Hope and faith are two integral elements that bind mankind together. As Kethonuo's sister Siedze said: "'Hope, sir, we have been living on hope. Every morning when we woke up, we eat hope, and so we live to see another day,' the younger woman said" (Kire 28).

Hope and faith must be having a great significance in the tribal world as all kinds of knowledge are orally transmitted from generation to generation. Moreover, the two sisters in the novella appear to be mystical and eerie. They claim to have lived for centuries and to-wards the end we see that they vanish in the thin air. The life of the two sisters had been quite strange as they claimed that they have never seen water in their life. They only lived with one hope: "They didn't mind their ghostly existence, so strong was their desire to see the

Son of the Thundercloud." (Kire 28) The age of the sisters, the birth of the Son of Thundercloud, all have symbolic meaning. They function within the mythic world as strange and distant, but at the same time the strangeness and remoteness about them give them credibility and an indestructible magnanimous position. The more remote and distant it sounds, the higher its ancientness, which keeps such myth beyond the petty queries of doubtful minds. At first Pele doubts the strange things that he sees around himself. He doubts about the moving of the sky and the earth, and the age of the sisters too. "'That is crazy!' He said. 'It's unbelievable! How can anyone live four hundred years upon this earth and not see rain?' (Kire 29). This doubt and inquiry by Pelle is nothing unnatural; rather any inquiring mind will doubt its credibility. However, all details in the myths are not to be taken literally. They have special symbolic functions. They are just literal truths and the real intention is to pass over some important message. Therefore, the length of life is not important in the myth, but that 'hope' and 'faith' which are required to sustain mankind are to be treated as the central message in such myth, other descriptions just exist for its own sake. It is easy to doubt the factuality of such stories from outside, but once you are placed within the world itself, you too become a part of that myth and the distinction between real/unreal diminishes. Pele soon becomes a part of that world in which the two sisters live and starts believing in that world. Pelle experiences the mythic world along with the two sisters. He sees the stars moving, and the earth moving along with it: "He knew, as if he could see it all, that rocks were shifting and river courses were being redirected and the whole mountains were sliding east." (Kire 25). Such change in the natural world is a signal to the

occurrence of that prophecy for which people have been eagerly waiting including Pele. "'Is this some sort of preparation for the coming of the Son of the Thundercloud?' Pele asked even as he scolded himself inwardly: Now you are beginning to sound like them!" (Kire 28). This is how nature manifests herself and the myths and folklores encapsulate it. From being an outsider, Pele becomes a part of the myth and eventually witnesses the birth of the Son of the Thundercloud.

The birth of the son of Thundercloud also happens in strange circumstances which are beyond common comprehensibility. First of all it had been prophesied that the Son of the thun-dercloud will be born and as a child Pele had heard of that prophecy in his village. However, Pele becomes a part of that prophecy because on fulfilling his journey to that mysterious vil-lage, he brings along with him rain. In a way, Pele is also the 'hope and faith' that is nurtured in human heart. His arrival brings rain, and Mesanuo has been mystically impregnated by that raindrop:

> When I was bringing in the herbs that I had put out to dry, I heard the rain coming and before I could reach the house, a drop of rain fell on me…Nothing except for that one drop of rain. I felt the baby grow inside as soon as that drop landed on me.(Kire 36-37)

Mesanuo means 'the pure one' in Angami language, and allegorically she is the manifestation of nature's purity. She represents the mother earth which needs rain to flourish. The incidents in the novella occur in quick succession, diluting the entire concept of time. The day after the rain has occurred, Mesanuo immediately gives birth to Rhalietuo. Although Pele never doubted the authenticity of the prophecy after witness-

ing whatever has occurred, the village headman where Mesanuo lived seemed quite critical of her. The Village headman is the an-tithesis of Pele. If Pele represents faith and hope, the village headman represents doubt and despair. If Mesanuo is the allegorical representation of mother earth, the Village headman is of the kind who destroys nature and believes in the evil forces. After Rhalietuo has been born, and the village received adequate rain, trees and rocks springs up in just one night. This appears queer to the Village headman and so he enquires about the mystery behind this sud-den transformation:

> 'Just one question before I go. Where have those trees and rocks come from.'
>
> 'It's called birthing, headman. The earth has birthed trees, rocks, stones and grains, just a s another births her offspring. The trees and rocks are the sons of the earth. Take care of them and they will take care of you and your children.' (Kire 48)

This short speech encapsulates the sagacity that mankind needs to veer in order to survive and sustain in this planet. The present day crisis which mankind is facing due to global warming needs no rocket-science to be solved, but just this primitive wisdom. The novelist has ar-tistically presented the significance of nature and the need to preserve it through her allegorical representation of nature through Mesanuo. The writer has conflated mother earth with the human mother, both give birth, and both have been neglected by the patriarchal society which not only tries to control both but also tries to diminish both through coercive measures. The Village headman is a typical representative of the patriarchal force which sees and under-

stands everything, but disbelieves because his vision is covered by male ego of supremacy. The novel is written in very simple and fluid language but it is suffused with layers of subtle meanings which has so many hidden messages within it. The writer talks about the murderous instinct of mankind: the fight between good and devil, the fight between hope and despair. Of course she talks about it symbolically. The primitive wisdom which lives in the memories of the communities are carried forth from generation to generation orally in the form of myths and folklores, however these form of knowledge system gets systematically disrupted and destroyed when it comes in contact with so-called superior western knowledge that rebuts the legitimacy of unexplained folk knowledge; and along with that the 'ancient wisdom' eventually gets lost. The novelist terms this a famine of stories and songs: "'No, I am talking about the Famine of stories and songs. They killed all the storytellers who tried to tell them about the Son of the Thundercloud. They killed hope'" (Kire 48).

This supposed 'they' are symbolic of disruptive forces which may be outsiders as well as insiders. The crisis in the modern world may have been caused by the disappearances of the story-tellers who preserved this knowledge. The novelist substitutes the disappearing sto-rytellers and performs their task. Kire subtly embeds prophetic wisdom in the novella not only through the mouth of various characters but also through the voice of the narrator. She establishes the significance of rain and trees for mankind signaling the ultimate message:

> Even the men would have to be very careful, and remember to respect nature the way she expected to be respected.

> 'The river runs!' Shouted the headman when they returned to the village,
>
> 'The river runs. We are saved!' (Kire 53)

The river is the harbinger of prosperity, but at the same time the river is also "treacherous"; similarly prosperity is itself treacherous because when it outgrows itself, it becomes difficult to control. Kire relates the idea of prosperity with river to signify the importance of respecting both these forces.

> The river was once a source of life for the village…there was food in the river, and so the villagers called it 'our mother'. Then the drought came in…the water dried down…'Our mother is dead!she can no longer feed the children. Who shall be our mother when our mother is dead?'…But now the river was alive again…The older people said to each other, 'Our mother has come back to feed us.' (Kire 54-55)

The message is loud and clear. What Sadh Guru, Pope Francis (Ghosh 201) and others have been trying to do of late by creating awareness, the ancient story tellers and so also our novelist have been doing it:

> Bleak though the terrain of climate change may be, there are a few features in it that stand out in relief as sign of hope: a spreading sense of urgency among governments and the public….But the most promising development, in my view, is the growing in-volvement of religious groups and leaders in the politics of climate change. (Ghosh 213)

The rally for rivers is but another effort to save the rivers from extinction, and this would not be possible unless a reciprocal

relationship is established with nature. Nature (River) is addressed a mother because it provides sustenance to human life; and reciprocally we are re-quired to protect this mother from all kinds of harm. This requires respect towards nature. This message has echoed through centuries in the stories and folklores; while some listened others turned deaf ears to it. Kire intertwines this knowledge with the myth so that she can rightly place her characters in the story. Whereas, the three sisters and Pele repose their faith in the prophesy and hope; the likes of the Village headman and his wife are the ones in the society who have forever remained ignorant and doubtful like a cynic. Initially after seeing the transformation of Mesanuo, the village folks started believing in the prophecy. The im-pregnation of Mesanuo by a raindrop is of course a preposterous argument but when the vil-lage folks witnessed it, they could only exclaim in astonishment: "'She is the same woman. Did you see her eyes?' the headman's wife asked. 'They are the same eyes. Only that there is life and hope where we saw grief and wretchedness before. That is the difference. The same woman looks at life differently now'" (Kire 58). What seems unrealistic could be seen as real if we decode the symbolic message in this story. "Life and hope" could regenerate dying faith. If Mesanuo is the mother earth that replenishes depleting resources for mankind, rain restores life and hope to mankind. On the other hand Rhalie, the Christ figure, is the seed-grain which is necessary for every society. Soon after the arrival of Pele (harbinger of rain and hope) faith is restored, that faith impels the impregnation of Mesanuo, and the seed-grain germinates into a boy (Rhalie). This parallel between man and nature is subtly placed by the novelist:"The boy was growing rapidly. He reminded Pelle of the seed grains that had fallen on the newly ploughed soil and began to sprout instantly. Rhalie

had landed on the soil of his mother's womb that had been prepared for centuries" (Kire 61).

Like it is a taboo to eat the seed-grains even during the time of the famine, it is a taboo to kill the son, a prophetic boon birthed to kill the spirit-tiger. However, soon we can see that hope and faith is substituted with jealousy and doubt which eventually leads to the murder of Rhalie. It is the artist's prerogative to use such metaphors that not only beautifies the work of art, but also universalizes the messages he/she wants to convey. In that sense Easterine Kire has beautifully conveyed this ancient wisdom of mankind through her creative genius.

Kire is not only vindicating the story tellers, but was also establishing them as the van-guards of mankind. The story tellers are the ones who carry forward the legacy of ancient knowledge and wisdom. That knowledge which links man to nature in a harmonious and symbiotic relationship. The modern lifestyle which is a threat to the traditional folk life can only be countered and checked by the continuation of such narratives. Stories are full of hopes and it frees the mind of people:

> Because the people sought to be free whenever they heard stories. Free of fear, free of shame and constant desire. Without the stories, people believe that were destined to suffer, and they allowed the dark ones to enslave their minds and fill them with fear and sorrow and despair until they died. (Kire 63)

There are people in the society who thrive on fear and greed. Such evil forces not only try to detach mankind from nature, but also try to exploit both:

> They build fences, they hoard and guard, they want the trees and rivers and the stars to bend to their will…They came after the story tellers, and they let their minds grow dark and began to oppose the storytellers and the work they did. (Kire 64)

Pele is the symbolic everyman who seeks answers about the nature of mankind and its rela-tion to nature. He asks Mesanuo if those dark forces are the ones who brought to the villages. This is perhaps a universal question and the answer given by the latter is also universal:

> No, they are powerful but not that powerful. People control their own destinies. If they choose to believe something dark, they can bring drought upon themselves. So long as the storytellers were alive, there was hope and compassion…..but when the storytellers were killed, one after the other, people slowly forgot what they had been told, or be-lieved they were just myths, and they allowed their minds to accept the darkness. So the draught came as a result of people rejecting the joyful stories and accepting the dark stories.(Kire 64)

Pele witnesses a world which is crippled with greed, narrowness of mind and jealousy; the novelist intends to spread messages pertaining to the ideals of hospitality, dignity of labour and love of nature.

The evil forces that exist in world, the spirit-tiger, the dark world are all part and parcel of the legion of Satan that is posited against mankind. It is Rhalie who is born to liberate man-kind from this evil force by slaying the spirit-tiger. The spirit-tiger is not simply a physical tiger, the spirit-tiger cannot be killed by someone whose heart is filled with pride, nor

by someone who is guided by selfish nature. "'…The boy, on the other hand, had no pride. He was not fighting to earn a name for himself as the others were doing. He wanted to kill the tiger to stop it from hurting any more people. The boy's heart was pure; do you see?'" (Kire 85). Such miraculous power has been exhibited earlier by Moses and Christ; and Rhalie is symbolic of the reoccurrence. Rhalie finally killed the spirit-tiger and liberated his village. However, soon after he falls victim to mankind's jealousy and shortsightedness. People who are in power and wish to control the reins of power are the real perpetrators of social unrest and violence. No wonder it has been the village headman's son who was fed with the vicious thoughts since his childhood by his parents and eventually when he grows up he spews poi-son and mis-leads the group to kill Rhalie:

> Rhalie was standing behind a tree that partially hid him from view. Viphrü shouted, 'There's the deer, strike him down. No point chasing him up…'Go on, hit it while it's down, can't you see it over there?' Viphrü goaded his friends, who threw their spears at the hapless boy on the ground. Some of them believed it was a deer, while the others clearly saw it was a boy, but they thought their eyes have tricked them…. (Kire 135)

Viphrü not only tricks his friends in murdering Rhalie, but also coaxes them in misconstruing a story that they present the murder as an accident. The murder of the 'Son of the Thun-der-cloud' once again bereaves mankind of hope and faith just like the blood of Christ failed to restore faith. The likening of Rhalie to Christ can also be justified by the following state-ment by Mesanuo: "He loved everyone, even those who harboured evil against him" (Kire 144).

After the death of Rhalie, Pelevotso resumes his journey once again; it is the journey of man-kind and the heart of Pele carries the immense secrets and stories that would suffice to nur-ture mankind. Thus Kire fulfils the task of a storyteller who beautifully delineates the history of mankind's possibility of redemption and relation to nature. Kire's use of Biblical images and characters, Naga myth of creation and environmental concern makes her novella a masterpiece among other works which deal with similar theme.

Kire's novel is a befitting response to Ghose's concern about the inability of the nov-elists to delineate an account of climate change through fiction, who otherwise choose non-fiction to write about climate change: "Yet, it is a striking fact that when novelists do choose to write about climate change it is almost always outside of fiction" (Ghosh 10). Ghosh is of the opinion that the failure of the artists to "negotiate the torrents" of climate change is actually an imaginative and cultural failure. He cites the case of Arundhati Roy: "not only is she one of the finest prose stylists of our time, she is passionate and deeply informed about climate change. Yet all her writings on these subjects are in various forms of non-fiction." (Ghosh 11) Amitabh Ghosh is right in his hypothesis about the inability of narration to come into terms with the "torrents" of climate change as "imaginative and cultural failure" but this failure is not self-generated. This failure is brought about by cultural substitution and system-atic destruction of the indigenous knowledge system by colonial forces.

Towards a little north from Ghosh's birthplace is the north-east India wherein we come across a host of writers already mentioned above, who have given an imaginative vent to their concerns about climate, nature and environment in

their respective creative works (Poetry and Fiction). Not only in the written literature have these writers manifested their concerns, but also in their oral literatures constituting the folk tales they have regarded it as "serious fiction". Among all these works, Kire's work stands apart because it blends the contemporary awareness for nature with the mythical world of the folktale in a rare surreal style. From the arguments substantiated above we can surmise that the characters and the situations are allegorical manifestations of the relationship between man and nature; and the under-standing of this relationship is not the outcome of the recent climate change but it is very old as it has percolated from ancient wisdom of the Nagas.

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Women and State: The Story of the *Meira Paibis* (Torch Bearers) of Manipur

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Manipur, one of the seven Northeastern states of India, was an erstwhile independent Southeast Asian kingdom. Since 1964, there has been armed struggle between the Indian Government and the state insurgents on demands of secession. The rise in insurgency led to the imposition of the draconian law, Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 (AFSPA)[1], on the 8th of September, 1980, with the entire Manipur declared as 'disturbed'under the Disturbed Areas Act (DAA).However, apart from the disturbances caused by insurgent groups in the state, the imposed law also did more harm than good. AFSPA allows the armed forces to arrest, shoot and kill without questions asked and with impunity in areas declared as 'disturbed'. This law unleashed a reign of terror-ambushes, midnight house raids, nabbing of 'suspects',which resulted in the general public continuing to live in constant fear and apprehension. Security forces including the military, paramilitary and state police were no longer seen as agents of security, but rather as agents of gratuitous institutional violence(Subramaniam 7).The state government also became highly corrupted.The definition of democracy started to fail when the voices of the people were silenced with fear and threat used as weapons by the state. Despite all this,one voice stood up against the state sponsored terrorism. That is the voice

of women agitators known locally as *meira paibi* or women torch bearers.An incidenton 11th July, 2004 exacerbated the continuing disappointment of the people of Manipur against the state and its maintenance of silence and indifference at the situation, thus breaking the 'culture of silence'. This silence was broken by 12 *meira paibis* who stripped naked outside the headquarters of the 17th Assam Rifles at the Kangla Fort in Imphal on 15thJuly, 2004, to protest the torture and killing of Thangjam Manorama. During the intense protests in the state demanding the implementation of ILP (Inner Line Permit) system[2] in Manipur, the *meira paibis* also took to the streets. The apathy of the state and failure of its machineries in governance provided the biggest disappointment, and gave purpose to the *meira paibis* towards their objectives of integrity, justice and peace in the state. This paper is an investigation on the women-state dynamics perceived through the agitations launched by *meira paibis* in Manipur to upheld democratic values and ideals.

A Brief Look at History: Changing Role of Manipuri Women

From history and literature, we learn that women in Manipur have been playing active roles in the society since the establishment of Manipur as a kingdom in 33 C.E. Lokendra Arambam, in his approach to understanding early Meitei[3] society i.e. the pre-Hinduism era, identified four archetypes of historical women figures or culture heroines in order to study the role of women and their changing behaviour in Medieval Meitei society (Arambam 201).They include:

1. Panthoibi (Pre-Christian era/ 1st century A.D.)
2. Petanga or Likla Louthibi (7th century A.D.)

3. Chingkhei Thanbi (13th century A.D.)
4. Namun Khanbi (12th century A.D.)

Panthoibi is a significant woman figure of Manipur, and an epitome of the modern, sensitised, strong and independent woman.Even after the consummation of her second marriage, she ran off with Nongpok Ningthou with whom she developed an adulterous affair. During that time, adultery and even drinking of alcohol was not frowned upon as much as it is in today's society.

However, the position of women changed around the 7th century A.D. Women were used as diplomatic ploys for harmony between clan principalities. And unlike in Panthoibi's time, adultery came to be strictly punished.

There were significant changes in the inter-clan relationships and the role of women in the court during the 12th and 13th centuries. Arambam points out the political consciousness of the Meitei woman. He writes that "the women showed their extremely dedicated, strong characters, silent, giving, yet in times of honour and seeking for revenge and justice, she would not leave any stone unturned" (Arambam 210).

Not only have women been contributing actively to the agricultural production and economy of the state, but they have also been active in administration since the time of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33 A.D.). There was a women's court headed by the Queen called *Pacha* where women's issues were dealt with. Mention can also be made of heroic women like Maharani Linthoingambi, Maharani Gomti, Maharani Kumudini, Princess Kuranganayani, Princess Jandhabi, Princess Tangja Kombi,etc., all of who made commendable

contributions in the political affairs of the kingdom of their times. However, contact with other cultures and religions, especially the imposition of Hinduism, right from the 15th century changed the men-women and state-women dynamics in the kingdom.Hinduism brought with it new systems of conduct and conventions, which were less favourable for women.Education of girls also remained a taboountil it became socially acceptable only in the first half of the 20th century.

Establishment of Women's Movements in Manipur

According to Radha Kumar's *The History of Doing,* in the pan- Indian scenario, the 19th century was a period when women's issues started getting voiced. The early 20th century saw the formation of women's autonomous organizations, and the construction of a special category of 'women's activism' by the 1930s and 40s. Manipur, with organized women's social movements beginning in the early 20th century, is marked by a continuous history of uprisings against the state. The sense of nationalism took root in the hearts of the people through the women's movements (Thokchom xvi). The first Manipuri women's war locally known as the *Nupilal* was fought in 1904, against the state under British rule. The women fought against its move to revive the *Lallup System,* a form of forced labour which required all males between the age of 17 and 60 to work for the state/king for a certain number of days without any wage.The second Manipuri women's war was fought on 12th December, 1939, against the state still under British administration which sanctioned the exploitation of rice produce by Marwari traders which caused artificial famine for the people. 12th December is commemorated each year, and continues to find poetic expression in many literary works of Manipuri writers and poets.

The *nishabandi* movement in Manipur, an anti-alcohol and anti-drug agitation, began in the 1970s.The rising issue of domestic violence or wife-beating led to the development of the anti-alcohol agitation. Woman agitators locally called *nishabandis*, (who will later come to be known as the *meira paibis*), would patrol the areas at night to keep vigil for drunkards and drug abusers. The *nishabandi* movement in Manipuris comparable to the women's anti-alcohol agitations that began in Northern India, which again were in fact led by the Chipko Movement (mid 1970s) that had begun in the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of India, in which the main players were also women. After widespread agitation by the *nishabandis*, Manipur was declared a "dry state" in 1991, with the passing of the Liquor Prohibition Act, with exemption to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities to uphold their customs and traditions.

The *Meira Paibi* Movement

The motives of the *nishabandis* or *meira paibis* went on to incorporate a larger subject around the 1980s to safeguard the youth against state sponsored terrorism.The *meira paibis*, since then, have been active in fighting for human rights, protesting against violence on women by the armed forces, condemning the state imposed AFSPA, fake encounters, killings, etc.The *meira paibis* would gather in locally constructed sheds called the *meira shang* and organize meetings.The clanking on the lamp post is a calling sign, at which the local women would rush out of their homes and gather. Some of the common forms of protest that have been employed by the *meira paibis* include staging dharnas or sit-in-protests, walking rallies, calling strikes, bandhs and

boycotts,etc. At night, they bear lighted torches made of bamboo called *meira* in their hands, and march out in protest whenever the situation demands the fight for justice and peace. On 28th May, 1980, one Sinam Piyari, a pregnant woman, had lost her life in the procession by a women's organization against army operations in the state. This day has been commemorated as *Meira Paibi* Day. On 29th December, 1980, the *nishabandis* marched out with lit torches to locate and release one Lourembam Ibomcha who had been nabbed by security personnel. Ever since, this day has been commemorated as *Pari Kanbkhiba Numit* by various *meira paibi* organisations.

Meira paibi organisations work through a hierarchical system: The *Leikai* or Community level, the Village level, the District level and the State level. At the State level, the first established *meira paibi* group was the All Manipur Women's Social Reformation and Development Society or the *Nupi Samaj* led by Ima Chaobi. Other *meira paibi* groups include the *Poirei Leimarol*, *Kanglamei*, AMKIL (*Apunba Manipur Kanba Ima Lup*), *Tammi Chingmi*, etc.

Of the countless cases of encounters and killings, another event that had strongly triggered the indignation and discontent of the public was the incident of 4th November, 2000, when 10 civilians were killed by armed personnel of the 8 Assam Rifles at Malom, a village in Imphal (capital of Manipur). To protest this act, Irom Sharmila (popularly known as the Iron Lady of Manipur) took on a hunger strike demanding the repeal of AFSPA in the state. However, her hunger strike that lasted for 16 straight years proved futile as AFSPA continues its rule. During her hunger strike, Irom Sharmila had been receiving the support of the *meira paibis* in her fight against the state. Every year,at her release before the continuance of her trial,

the *meira paibis* gathered outside the JN Hospital where Sharmila had been kept under watch and took her to the temporary shed nearby.However, word on the street is that her love affair with Desmond Coutinho, a non-Manipuri, met strong disapproval and criticism from the *meira paibis* who allegedly claim him to be an agent of the state. They believe that it is the Indian Government supported by the State Government that hindered Irom Sharmila's fight against AFSPA.

Both Irom Sharmila's hunger strike and the Kangla naked protest of 2004 marked a revolution signified by the use of the body as "weapons of resistance" and "sites of struggle" (Rehman xv). It was Ima Khangembam Anandi, then advisor to the Macha Leima, a women's organistion,who came up with the idea of stripping down and staging a naked protest, one that had never been attempted in the history of Manipur. The *meira paibis* used their "own, older bodies" (Rehman xvi) as weapons to challenge the perpetrators. The removal of the *phanek,* a traditional loincloth of the Meitei women, and throwing it to the gates of the Assam Riffles is meant to signify shaming of the security forces. Since ancient times, a Meitei woman's *phanek* has carried powerful symbolism. If a man is thrashed with it, it is meant to signify the worst humiliation of his life. Similarly, in the North Indian context, the offering of bangles to men symbolised their emasculation.Radha Kumar observed that this old tactic of using shame as punishment, however, is no longer an effective means, saying that "the power of shame is weakened by the development of a modern society, which allows anonymity and possibilities of escape from being known"(Kumar 4).Although the demand for the repeal of AFSPA was not met, Kangla, which used to be the

capital of Manipur kingdom, was handed over to the people in 2004 itself with the evacuation of the stationed 17th Assam Rifles. AFSPA was repealed from 7 constituencies within the Imphal municipal area.After the remarkable protest, the cases of violence and rape of women by the security forces in the state also reduced to quite a large extent. However, one question does arise if the naked protest is too heavy a price paid and if it proved futile as the foremost demand of the repeal of AFSPA remained unmet.

The *meira paibi* movement is significant as mothers play the maternal role outside of their own homes to fight against social evils, and for the rights of their husbands and children.The term 'Ima' which literally means mother in Manipuri, is used to address *meira paibis* as a mark of respect. Radha Kumar also observed:

> The first half of the twentieth century saw a symbolic use of the mother as a rallying device, from feminist assertions of women's power as mothers of the nation, to terrorist invocations of the protective and ravening mother goddess, to the Gandhian lauding of the spirit of endurance and suffering embodied in the mother. (Kumar 2)

Teresa Rehman, a journalist who has met with and interviewed the 12 women protestors from the Kangla naked protest of 2004, has also expressed her admiration for the "firmly bonded matriarchy of the meira paibis" (Rehman xv).She also records Ima Jamini, one of the twelve protestors, saying that once theyare together, they forget their own mundane affairs; a community in itself, they cannot be stopped by anyone or their thoughts when it comes to fighting for justice for the land and its people (xx).

EEVFAM (Extra-judicial Execution Victim Families' Association) was established on 11th July, 2009, on the failure of the state to extend support to families of insurgents. Compensation was not for families of victims killed by security forces. (Bhonsle 232)With the rate of crime against women, mainly in the domestic sphere,continuing to rise, many new women's organisations have also been formed, and are taking great initiatives to address the interests of women and help women victims of crime and violence. They have also started publishing routinely journals/magazines like *Nupigi Punshi* (since 2011) and *Woman and Crime in Manipur* (since 2013), to spread awareness to the public on the everyday stories of crime and violence faced by women in the state, and the efforts of the organizations to solve the issues.

Meira paibis and Their Relevance Today

Despite the niche that *meira paibis* have created in the socio-political history of Manipur, their influence seems to be gradually declining. Various factors may contribute to this decline. Firstly, their non-involvement in political decision-making affairs of the state.While Lokendro Arambam is of the opinion that the *meira paibi* movement started solely as a social movement, and is, therefore, still and will remain intricately involved in social struggle, with the least interest for participation in political affairs, Ima Lourembam Nganbi[4] states that cultural factors influence the low percentage of participation of women in electoral politics (Nganbi). She continues that although the strength and determination to sacrifice herself and fight for righteousness is something inherent in every Manipuri woman,it is the age old traditional conventions and norms that have kept women repressed under

the dominance of the male head (father/husband), and the lack of education and awareness that have kept women suppressed today withimmense difficulty to come out of that repression.Ima Nganbi's statement is supported by Thokchom Binarani who, while also pointing out the irony in the under-representation of women considering the role that women's organisations have continued to play in Manipuri society, observed that "the dominant patriarchal philosophy, the archaic traditions of the past, the obsolete middle class morals…still obstruct the path of women's freedom" (Thokchom xvi).The continued stronghold of the patriarchal structure in Manipuri society even explains why almost all of the12 naked protestors of the 2004 Kangla protest admitted to having felt a sense of shame and fear of disapproval from family and society. They are "caught in the twin image of the model woman within the bounds of a patriarchal set-up and the defiant saviour of society" (Murthi 234).

The state also fails in its policy of democracy with unequal representation of women in the decision making process of the state. Even though many laws have been enacted by the central and state government for the protection and empowerment of women, the Women's Reservation Bill, 2008, which proposed to amend the Constitution of India to reserve 33 % seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies also lapsed. As per the 11th Manipur legislative assembly (2017), there are only two women members, namely Kumari Akoijam Mirabai from Patsoi Constiuency, and Mrs. Nemcha Kipgen from Kangpokpi Constiuency. This is anextremely small number considering there are a total of 60 seats in the assembly,which means 96.6% of the elected officials are men.Thus, the strongly rooted system of patriarchy

combined with the forces of the men-dominated state become too strong for the upkeep of women's organisations like the *meira paibi.*

With the state-supported centre's old policy of 'divide and rule' and political bias, reconciliation within the ethnic communities becomes an increasingly difficult agenda. Again, there is the matter of cultural differences between the communities. Thingnam Anjulika Samom observed that antagonism between the Nagas for autonomy and the Meiteis for integrity found expression in women's movements. (Murthi 242) The *meira paibis'* supposedly selectiveagitation or silencewhen it came to issues of violation of rights in communities other the *Meiteis* came with severe criticism. And despite the *meira paibis'*fight for the integrity of Manipur, the larger need for bridging the gap between the valley and the hills of Manipur appear to be ignored.

It is a common opinion of *meira paibis* that a state can never progress until and unless its women are treated with respect. However, some *meira paibi* groups appear to be harsher with women when exercising social verdicts. This is also an influence of the stronghold of the patriarchal legacy of Manipur. Moral policing and mob justice led by *meira paibis* have also become a serious subject of criticism. Restaurant drives and hotel raids led by *meira paibis* to catch men and women involved in 'socially unacceptable' affairs, and the tactic of shaming in order to punish 'uncivilised'youth by intruding into private lives invited a lot ofcriticism.This brings us to the knowledge of the misuse of power by some *meira paibi* groups through unlawful intervention. In a large circle like the *meira paibi* organisation, difference of opinions or conflict of ideologies is bound to occur, just as the fight for

leadership. In such a situation, team work fails and groups fall apart.

In the friction with the state, *meira paibis* are also reported to receive pressures and efforts of persuasion from the state with promises to build *meira shangs* and old age homes, provide basic amenities like cooking gas, rice and food items, and other beneficiaries. These appear as merely strategies to distract the anti-state movements away from their motives in the name of support and development. Scholars continue to question the loyalty of *meira paibi* groups as theybecome politicised with different factions following different political parties. In this situation, Ima Khangembam Anandi pointed out the need for inculcation of awareness to *meira paibis*, in order to instil knowledge about state, national and world affairs, laws and rights (Anandi).Most of the women in civil society movements like the *meira paibis*, at least before girl education was formally introduced, are uneducated.Prioritisation of the education of women and spread of awareness about legal rights becomes crucial to empower womenand encourage them to participate in political decision-making affairs of the state.

As the memory of the heroism showed by the *meira paibis* and the immense power that they held once seem to fade slowly from public memory too, one can thus question if the role and influence of the *meira paibis* is declining even as life under the shadow of AFSPA continues in Manipur.It is to be established if the relevance of *meira paibis* is still intact or not. Yet, one cannot write off the contributions they have made in the socio political affairs of Manipur.

Notes

1. AFSPA was already imposed in the hill areas as early as 1960.
2. Inner Line Permit is an official travel document issued by the Government to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period.
3. The Meiteis are the dominant ethnic community of Manipur.
4. One of the 12 women protestors of the 2004 Kangla Protest.

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Lived Experience of the Mizo Rambuai

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This paper deals with the aftermath of the bombing of Aizawl. It focuses on a story based on the lived experience of a child. Quite a few books about the historical and political aspects of the 20n years conflict in Mizoram have been written.Some creative writings in the form of novels and songs too have emerged. Studies on the psychological impacts of the conflict are gaining recognition. But very few "lived – experience " except in the form of interviews have been documented though there many now who would be willing to narrate their lived experiences about the conflict because after the Peace Accord in 1986 they are no longer gripped by the fear of a bullet.

This is one lived- experience and this is my story : The Yellow Dress.

I remember...the day the jet –fighters attacked Aizawl which reduced the centre of the town to ashes. As soon as the jet-fighters appeared we were asked to run at the bottom of my grandparent's pineapples and oranges orchard to hide . It was decided by the adults in the families that we spent the night there for fear of further attack from the sky. When dusk approached, the gateway to Aizawl at Durtlang could be seen from where we were. All of us both adults and children flashes

of lights coming down to Aizawl. They were so many that they looked as though the lights were stringed together with no gaps in between. The adults knew it was a an army convoy. So the decided that it would not be safe to stay in town though my grandparents' house is at the outskirt of the town. As we were climbing up the hill I remember...there was a heavy down-pour and we were all drenched. Somehow, the up-hill climb and the heavy down-pour was compensated by that night being a full-moon night. When we reached my grandparents' house,we changed and it was decided we all walked to to a village called Sateek the same night for safety. Sateek is about 26 kilometres from Aizawl.

So we walked to Sateek that night. I was in charge of my Aunt's cosmetic tin box ,and empty biscuit tin box. Inside there was one used compact powder,half – used red lipstick ,a very short –blunt black eye-brow and some hair-pins .At Melthum we met a number of volunteers[1] carrying Mizo traditional woven – bags and "chempui'[2]. They all looked very positive and happy with hope of winning the conflict.The fact that the centre of Aizawl had been reduced to ashes during the day and the arrival of the army convoys didn't seem to bother them at all.They were happily sharing with the adults that the next day jet-fighters with a red-nose from China would be coming to destroy the Quarter Gaurd, of the Assam Rifles which was then a symbol of India,which they failed to defeat on the first night of the conflict.With this story tinged with magic realism, we proceded and finally reached our destination.

The Yellow Dress :

I remember ... before the Mizoram conflict, my oldest aunt who was married to a Naga had visited us. The only memory I have is the yellow frock and a matching gold

coloured shoes she brought for me. It was a yello- netted frock lined with yellow taffeta and blue flowers sprinkled all over. I remember I had worn it only once .The memory of that dress with its colour has remained intact till today.

For some days we were in Sateek . Then the news came to inform us that it was safe to return to Aizawl. On the day of our departure from Sateek, my parents asked me to give the yellow dress and the matching shoes to the daughter (who was around my size) of the family who hosted us. I did. There was no hesitation ,no complaint. I was not angry. No childish tantrums.However, it was only after so many years that I realized I have never worn yellow colour till today.

What is a trauma? The dictionary defines it as a "deeply distressing or disturbing experience" And psychologists' definitions have many connotations. If the yellow dress is a source of a trauma how does it surfaces perceivably in a person?The realization that the colour yellow has unconsciously never been a part of my individuality occurred only recently. Its exclusion has never been deliberate and no effort has been taken to avoid it. May be it just doesn't exist for me.

What this article intends to highlight here through "the yellow dress" is besides the 'hurt' inflicted in the form of sexual violence ,forced-migration from one's root ,being imprisoned with false allegations ,physically beaten etc, numerous stories related to the conflict is yet to emerge. One might argue that the lived experience of the "yellow dress" could occur independent of the conflict. However, the sight of the jet-fighters, the sound of the firing from above, the walk to safer place etc could have all contributed to the 'lived experience"

in negative ways. The unconscious avoidance of yellow colour unexplained till today ,in itself is the "silent voice" that pervades the experiences of the Mizo people. The lived-experiences are the only tangible memories that could be retrieved in the contexts of the destruction of family heirlooms and dislocation as a result of forced -migration .

The Mizoram conflict has many dimensions. While history and its political aspects are important,the "hurtful " experiences of the people require attention.Though the phenomenon is not specific to the MIzo people alone in the contexts of war and conflict, however, like many similar cases of war and conflict around the world ,the 20 years conflict could have contributed to problems of social cohesion and mental health of the Mizo people.

Even thought we are now living in what could be called a post-conflict period with the state of Mizoram being proclaimed the most peaceful state in the North-Eastern region of India, a reanalysis of the armed conflict and its impacts on the people perhaps need to be given crucial attention. The North- East as we all know is 71 years behind in development from the rest of the country .As we begin to find our voices in expressing our experiences, the memories of the past and the continuing conflict in this region must not be translated into exclusive regionalism.

The question of "healing" remains to be addressed. Would the inclusion of the yellow colour in one's wardrobe one day denotes the beginning of the healing process?

Note

1. The MNF were called volunteers then
2. Dao

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Folklore

How Creation Came to be

Folklore in translation from the original Mizo by
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In the beginning of time, much before the formation of the world as we know it now, there existed a world that was bereft of human beings. However , there was a powerful deity who was known as *khuazingnu*. *Khuazingnu* was regarded to be the all benevolent deity who created the earth and all that was around it. It was believed that she also created the environment that surrounded all creation. Amongst this was the land that covered all the earth.However, the earth by itself ,was very dry and so arid was the land that the trees and the grass could not survive for long.

Finally, *khuazingnu* found a solution to the problem . She would throw open the windows that grew out of the sky. After this, she would also hurl water from these very windows out from the sky and onto the arid dryness of the earth, all in order to maintain the greenery that was slowly but steadily diminishing. To this day ,very often when the rains fall, some Mizos still exclaim that "the goddess of the heavens is dousing us with water."

Khuazingnu's solution to the dryness of the earth proved to be greatly successful and very soon the land became lush and fertile. Gradually, there grew various kinds of vegetation on earth, and these included fruits and vegetables that were

ready to be eaten. *Khuazingnu* realized that there was a need to create both animals as well as human beings who could consume these. And so she created both human beings as well as other living beings in order to surround and fill the earth, and she also ensured that the various living creatures that she created could communicate with one another. This she did by entrusting each living creature with the power of speech.So in this manner, both man and animal could speak to one another.

Khuazingnu created a world that was harmonious and she also ensured that there were no wicked beings around.In this manner, she had supreme control over the face of the earth and there was no harm done to anyone .There was plenty of food and water to drink and the inhabitants of the earth had no need of anything and so every creature was content and happy. However,with the passage of time, the human beings as well as the animals grew in number and very soon there were differences that arose between them. There was growing enmity between them and gradually , hostility pervaded all over the earth.At length there came a time when they all lived as constant enemies with one another. Eventually, the human beings began to encounter problems between themselves. And thus, there arose the need for a ruler amongst them all, and so they elected someone amongst them to be the chief and to rule over the land.

Now when *khuazingnu* created the earth, it was bereft of any soil.The entire earth abounded with rocks and thus there was no vegetation around. The inhabitants of the earth were confused and perplexed. However, there was a huge expanse of water that covered a larger portion of the earth and it was known as *tuihriam*[1] . It was called so because the waters within this area were always very cold and freezing. And true to its

name the waters of *tuihriam* would be so sharp and piercing that if any creature dipped even a hand in it, there would be a sharp sensation, that was akin to the feeling of a hand being chopped off. And because of this, everyone was afraid to swim in its waters.

Now, on the bank of the *tuihriam* was located a place which was filled with mud and all the creatures of the earth would make an attempt every once in a while, in order to procure some of the mud.In their effort to do so they would all often try , at sometime or the other ,to swim across the *tuihriam* but as its waters were icy and cold they would not even succeed in swimming even half way across its waters.Thus, precious as the mud was ,the inhabitants of the earth could not secure any of it and their attempts to do so failed bitterly and so they continued to live in a state of anxiety.

Eventually, one day a little porcupine made a brave and determined attempt to procure the mud and so he swam across the *tuihriam*.He managed to get a bit of the mud onto his snout and after having done that, he swam back all the way with the bit of mud stuck onto his snout. His friends who were watching him from across the *tuihriam* thought that he would even die in the attempt and so all they could do was to cheer him on valiantly.The porcupine was greatly encouraged by their support and he was able to gather enough strength in order to accomplish his task, and eventually he was able to swim back with the bit of mud. As soon as he reached the bank, all the other animals began to contemplate upon how to multiply the bit of mud which the porcupine had gathered. Even as they were contemplating upon the same, the earthworm said,

> "If you will abide by what I say I shall tell you how to multiply the bit of mud."

All the other animals then gazed at him in awe and said,

" Please do tell us how to multiply this bit of mud."

He then replied,

" All right I shall tell you how to do so. I shall consume this bit of mud and then later it will come out from my body in the form of excreta and we can gather it and place it in various corners of the earth. I shall continue to multiply the mud in this manner and very soon, the earth will be filled with mud."

Now all his other friends had never heard of such a plan before,and even though they were eager to multiply the precious bit of mud,they began to be suspicious about what the earthworm had suggested and so they retorted,

"We do not believe you.You may have made all this up only because you want to taste and eat a bit of the mud."

However, the earthworm replied boldly,

" Your accusations are not true at all. Why don't you give me a chance ? If the idea does not work out, you may even cut me up into three different pieces."

And because he was so brave and confident about the matter, all the other animals wanted to give him a chance and they decided to do as he had suggested.Eventually the earthworm was given a bit of the precious mud to consume and sure enough… he ate the same and after a time, just as he had suggested he multiplied the mud in the form of excreta. Gradually more excreta and mud began to multiply in a similar manner and soon there was a huge mound of mud that was heaped alongside the earthworm.

The inhabitants of the earth were very happy, even as they saw what was taking place.They gathered together in unison and they began to keep themselves busy by scattering the mud in various places across the earth.They also called upon a creature called *chultenu* ,who was called so, because she had the incredible gift of smoothening over uneven surfaces. *Chultenu* was requested to gradually smoothen the creases and the uneven folds over the mud. And in this manner, smooth surfaces of mud filled the earth and the inhabitants of the earth were filled with joy and happiness all over again!!

Note

[1] Water that was considered to be akin to sharp or keen edged instruments.

* The story has been published in *Folklore from Mizoram,* Writers Workshop Kolkata: 2011.

Short Story

Beyond the Edge of Certainty

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I wake up on most days from a strange dream. In it I see a woman rise from a dark lake and walk towards me. I cannot see her face or the features of her attire. Everything is silhouetted by the blinding light of a sun behind her. I know I am not afraid of her. We walk towards each other, taking each purposeful step closer, suddenly a blinding light appears from nowhere and then she vanishes. I cannot explain why this pattern occurs repeatedly when I dream. Perhaps the blood pressure in my body has shot up again. But the recurrence of this dream does make me anxious.

It is at times like these that I miss my dad. Every day when the sun goes down themighty Periyar, I wish I could hear the sound of his car coming in. I have once heard him complaining that diesel engines make one heck of a noise and that our entire gated community could hear of his whereabouts, but honestly, I loved it. I knew it even while I was on my bed to single out and listen to the echoing rumble and feel him coming close. After his car arrived, it would just be a matter of minutes before he locked it, gave the keys to Ammini ammayi and came up to my room. “Kuttappi!!” he would call loudly as he came hustling up the stairs. I would usually be in bed by this time, my back hurting from sitting for long on the wheelchair.

"How was your day?" he would ask keeping his huge bear-like hand on my withered feet. He was the only one who would touch my legs. Amminiamma never has the guts to look at me even while I am changing. I think she fears that she is intruding into my privacy. Or that perhaps I would dislike her for making me a spectacle. But let me ask you this, if you can look at my hands, why not at my disabled legs? Why pretend that I am normal like others when you and I both know I am not?

But dad was different. He would run his hands down my feet, massage them with Vaseline and cover them with the bed sheet.

"Oh I had a hectic day today". He would say munching on a box of store-brought crispies.

"Class of 110. Combination class of History and Economics. And they would start talking the second *you* stop talking.I had to make up for last week's classes too".

He would sound tired.

"But hey, tell me. What did you read?"

Hetugged at the book partly hidden by the layers of bed sheet and smiled.

"Hemmingway eh?I had forgotten we even had this."

"Man can be defeated, but not destroyed".

We almost said that together.

He laughed. I did too.

Dad had that effect on me. He could sweep me to worlds unknown, we would saunter and wade andswim through the labyrinth of lives his books opened us into. And we would laugh.

Dad was an English Professor at U C College,Aluva. I used to believe he had only two loves inhis life- me and his books. He made sure I loved them too. So much so that I remember reading with him Achebe and Steinbeck when I was supposed to do my Board Exams. Dad always called me his *kutti* genius. "My muse and my miracle" He would say. One of the fondest memories I have is of us sitting on the banks of Periyar and reading *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. I would be scooped up on his lap as he read to me the story of a naughty brother and his naughtier sister.A story of how they fought and ran and climbed all summer. They too had lost their mother and had only their dad left in the world. But my hero was always their dad, Mr. Atticus Finch, a man who would stand hell-bent on justice. My dad just happened to come alive in Harper Lee'swords. He was my very own Atticus Finch.

We have been living here in the River DaleVillasfor the last fifteen odd years. Dad wouldn't have been able to generate money for a river front villa, had mom's insurance money not supplemented it.Mom's death in the train accident on her way to work, had shattered our family, already seared by my condition. Mom was pregnant with my sibling at this time and was five months intoher pregnancy when the accident occurred. I was two years then and crying incessantly due to the increased pain in my lower torso. Amminiamma later-on told me of a heart rending story of my dad, crestfallen, defeated, holding a wailing child in his arms, watching the dead body of his beloved wife wreathed in her favourite while lilies, being taken away to be cremated. Promises of a lifetime-to be together through upsand downs, in happiness and in pain- shattered in the sniggering face of death. I don't remember my mom. But I have tried to reconstruct her in dad's words and I feel love

and loss washing overme like the silent water of the Periyareverytime I think of her.

I am sleepy and I feel my head sinking into the pillows that nestle my head. The curtain is billowing in the evening breeze that rises from the river. Dad had made sure that I had the best room in the villa. My room is lined with a wooden shelf on one side stretching from wall to wall, four rows extending horizontally, tailor-made I should say, to suit my wheel chair needs. It proudly houses fiction from all over the world, neatly lined in the order of my preference. The ones I love best and userepeatedly, settles on the bottom racks where it can be pulled out quickly, and the ones I don't read much are stacked up on the upper shelves.

I love seeing the membraned window curtains flurrying in the wind. They have been my companions in my loneliness, their dance at times making me jealous of their agility. I chide them lovingly.

"Tushtush. You make such a racket. Quiet down!"

I know they are helpless and that their movement come from the powerful gust that swift through them. I wish some divine power would lift me up and make me dance too. Ecstatically, at least for a memory of how one's legs are meant to move.

Evenings always make me anxious. Perhaps the settling down of the sun after its work is done, the long evening shadows thrown over the meandering roads, the sounds of cars returning home, the images of happy families filled with people talking together bring in a sinking feeling. It's been raining incessantly the last couple of weeks and the mighty Periyar seems to double

its pace as it runs along hurriedlyto the Arabian Sea. It has a long way to travel, I know, and in my loneliness, I imagine her as a wayward daughter finally running into the lap of waiting parents. Finally home after a rough tryst with fate.

I try not to sleep this early and listen to the distant hum of Amminiamma's routine television soap. The t v in my room gathers dust. I am not interested in the glib world they show, for even in a standard news telecast, every five minutes is peppered by a pretty face selling off a beauty product I would never need or a jewellery shop I would never go to. Dad's books have given me a different perspective and I think men and women who are busy living their lives might not register the need of breathing in life at a slower pace in the way I do.

You might wonder how much a wheel chair bound 'girl' who has seen the world only through the eyes of her dad or his books has the right to judge the living/ breathing/ changing world around her. Yes, my view point might be prejudicial, nevertheless what I see from my window and what I hear from the clutter outside does give me reason to speculate.

The River Dale Villas are a gated community of ten families, most of whom have been living here from the time the villas were built. The security and maintenance is overlooked by the Association members of the community itself and so far I have not heard Amminiamma or dad complaining of the lapses. But once I did see a nerdy young watchman watchSeema lecherously every time she passed the gate. Seema would be closer to me in age than anyone else in the community and once-in-a-while drops a wave if she sees me up in the balcony, that is, if herclasses doesn't tax her sanity. I do watch over her just as I deem it right to watch over each

member of our community. There, now you have it! That's my part time job. To me, they are all extensions of my family.Obviously, Icouldn't let anything happen to Seema. So I made sure I wheeled myself unto the balcony around the time she returned from classes and took close-ups of the cheeky bastard as he grinned at her face and stared at her back as she walked by him. Not just that, he would scratch his crotch every time a girl passed by. I am pretty sure Seema would have been unaware of these developments and would have been irrationally irate if the truth had dawned on her. Besides he salivated after Laura too I am sure. Laura with her skimpy dresses and long stilettoed legs. I myself can't lift my eyes off her beautiful legs every time she strides by. But that's no excuse for a watchman to drool over them!Anyways Dad and Soman uncle, Seema's dad, gave the watchman a good talking to and sent him off as soon as they found a new replacement for him. Seema's mom had come over with a tub full of creamy pal-payasam and told me that I did right. She told me that I was the 'guardian angel of our colony'. I couldn't help blushing. I looked at dad, but he was busy talking over his phone. I wished he could have listened to that too! Guardian angel! Wee!! That was a progression from the crippled/ disabled/sympathy prone look people normally girdle me with.

The curiosity normal people have over a disabled person like me, has always left me wondering. I too have read about the us vs. you divide and I can assure you, most of the days when you talk about the 'victimized other' in crisis, you conveniently forget us, the disabled. It's like we never exist in this rat race you are in. I can roll myself into the wheelchair with an agility that might astound you. I don't need anyone's help in getting into my bed from my chair or vice versa. There

is a rhythm which I follow to do so, and dad used to say my hands are much more powerful than his own. I remember him saying once when I was a child that God would have been too busy shaping my hands to perfection that he would have lost time with the legs while he created me. My hands are my source of survival. And I know I have power beyond mundane humane knowledge resting in the nooks and crannies of my arm. I can swing myself into the toilet seat too, incase you are wondering about how I go about it. Half the time, this is an uncertain question that lingers in the mind of the people who come to see me. Some blurt it out unceremoniously if they are too inebriated by their curiosity.Atleast I prefer that to others who look obnoxiously at the side of the toilet imagining poop to be smeared everywhere.

I can see from my balcony hevery other villa in our cluster, and beyond it, the mighty Periyar. I love watching the sunlight glimmer on the water, the busy flow of vehicles ebbing and cascading on the road in front, the evening strollers walking over the footpath, young couples walking with their hands looped over each arm, I love it all. I guess the intoxication of my gaze is heightened by the fact that none of the others know I am watching them. I havemoneyplants, a common creeper, thriving in my balcony that hides the presence of anyone standing or sitting behind, unless I want to reveal myself to my subject in question. So I watch people going for work, to school, to colleges, daily helpers coming in and going out in clusters, their bags being opened and checked by the security guards near the front gate. These days everyone seems to be in a hurry to save themselves from being drenched.

It is still pouring outside and the night has put on a dark heavy mantle. The July showers in Kerala typically have heavy

downpours accompanied by streaks of lightning, which once people translated as the wrath of God. But this year's rain has been precedential and the local Dailies has an extended editorial on the increasing water levels in the dams in Kerala. Do not speculate on my geographical knowledge thinking I have been confined to this room all my life. I agree I am wheelchair bound, but I too have travelled. Dad had made sure that we went to a new place every annual vacation, and we would spend many an excited hour planning and preparing for the five odd days we would spend away from home. We once went to Mullaperiyar Dam and dad showed me the towering walkway and the indescribable gallons of precious water housed within it. To my innocent query of "Daddy what will happen if the dam erupts?" he had smothered a stray whiff of hair into my pony tail and said. "It wont".

"But dad, what if it does?"

Pat came the reply and he said, "Then its time for a watery grave".

I still remember his words. Let me tell you this, I have wondered how I want to die. Do I have the guts to gulp down a dozen sleeping pills and then end up bursting every cell in my body? No!

Then do I want to set myself on fire and die an extremely painful death? No again.

Do I want to sink into water, be tossed by the water, finally move inspite of my rigid body and like my curtains, billow wistfully towards the ocean into the waiting hands of home. Yes! I think I would choose the watery grave. But I never shared these thoughts with dad. All that I want to remember is that beyond theedge of certainty, there is peace.

"Oh Why didn't you call me *kutta*? You must have been freezing? *Ayyokarthave*!" I wake up listening to Amminiamma's voice running around the room, closing windows and drawing curtains in my room. I should have slept off in between my reverie.

"Its okay Amminiamma. I wasn't cold." Iindulge in a futile attempt to save her from self sympathy. Partly it is also to save my ears from her repeated sorry incantation too. I strained my neck to see the 'damage' as she called it and saw that the slanting rain had indeed stolen in while I slept.

"*Kutta* would have fallen ill if Amminiamma wasn't there." She mumbled again and went down to get the mop to dry the moisture.

Pavamamminiamma. She is like this, senility is stepping in too. I need to give her more rest. I think.

The rain seems to strike down on earth with rage. I am fully awake now and Amminiamma comes in balancing my dinner on a hand and a mop in the other. My routine dinner is *kanji* and *payar*, rice gruel and lentil, with a smack of lime pickle and a *kutti* pappad for a crunch. As I eat, Amminiamma tells me of theRed Alert declared by the government and of the opening of the gates of the Mullaperiyar Dam if the rain continues this way.

"It's already crossed 141 feet *kutta*. The news people were saying three gates will be opened soon. *Ayyokarthave*! What all crisis will follow this? And you know what? There is already flooding in the south. Pampa is flooded and Ranni town has a sudden water level rise. Kochappichayan called an hour back to say that they were asked to shift to a camp nearby.

I don't know what will happen. This horrible rain!!!. I heard her mumble to herself. Her son and daughter-in-law lived in Pathanamthitta and their safety would have been worrying her, I presume.

"Achacha and chechi are ok?"

"Yes..yes.." came a rather quick reply.

"Amminiamma.. Did Achacha call?" I can feel a lie when it is in the air.

"No. I… I guess he must have run out of battery. Or maybe forgot to recharge… He will call tomorrow."

"Yes…That I am sure Amminiamma. He will call tomorrow…Sleep peacefully. Switch off the TV and sleep. The sun will be out tomorrow."

She gave me a tired smile and I watch her climb down the stairs laboriously.

I heard the thundering rain outside and wondered why it would beat down with such fury. It almost trumpeted vengeance. Even to my scant thirty-year-old experience, this torrential rain was unusual. The Red Alert being declared was not a good sign. We never have had flooding here at the River Dale Villa and the gates of the Mullapperiyar being opened occasionally has left us unperturbed all these years.I leaned on to the side of the bed, took the laptop and switched it on. I had been working on a paper which explored the sudden appeal of vampire fiction in 21st century readers after Stephanie Meyer's Twilight series. I had sort of reached a convincing argument that after Bram Stoker's 19th century account of the charismatic count Dracula the lure of the evil had never really

ceased to be with humanity. It arose from the depths of our unconscious and somewhere we resonated it.

The incessant outpouring of rain seemed like a self-inflicting wound by nature. Everything was deafened by the thundering down of water, as if being accidentally caught under a waterfall. I glanced at the clock to see its little hands reach eleven, swung myself unto the wheelchair to empty myself at the toilet, brushed, washed, came back and settled down back on my bed to sleep.

Somewhere in my head a distant rumble begins to register. It accelerates to a pounding, and I wake to muffled human cries. I open my eyes and flick the bed side lamp on. The power has gone. The alternate power supply through the inverter generally gets switched on by its own and in my dream infused state I wonder if I am yet to be awake. But no, it is still dark and iam… wet. My feet cannot register any feeling, but my hands can, and I slowly realise that I am lying in complete water.

"Ammini Amma!! Ammini Amma! *Ba Baa*…hurry!!"

I shout with all the strength I could muster. My thin voice grate feebly through the uproar of the water and I lay there in the darkness sobbing. Ammini Amma could not hear me. She will never be able to reach me. Water would have rushed into the room from all sides, it would have covered the ground floor, reached up to the first floor and was drowning me.I saw my wheelchair float adrift and bang into the side of the table. If I tried swinging onto it, I would only slip and fall into the billowing water. I decided against it. I tried vainly to convince myself not to panic and tried taking a few quick deep breaths like the ones dad used to ask me to do when I went frantic.

Water was rising, steadily, furiously. I saw my books fall one above the other from the shelves into the water. My precious collection of literature from around the world. My dad's memory engulfed in their pages, history of beginnings and endings. One by one they seemed to fall down into the murky water, the intense pressure of the rising tide pushing them down into their death. "No!!" "Not them" "Somebody..please.. help me". I scream, terrified. I see souvenirs rising and falling, my clothes snaking into a hangman's loop weaving a melange of patterns in the murky water. I hear my laptop crash into the water, the table lamp fall down with a thud and I see water gurgle as it found new areas to explore like a gang of thugs ravishing my impeccable room, my safe heaven, me.

I realize I have no escape.

The water has covered the bed and is still rising. Drenched by now, I watch my glasses slip and fall into the arms of the buffeting tide.

I know I will need to follow soon.

I will myself to shed fear, to tell myself that beyond the edge of certainty, there will be peace.

As water lifts me up and tosses me, I wonder if this is how it is to be agile.

Book Review

Dawngi's Art as a Pattern of Paradox

Prof. Sarangadhar Baral
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Book: ***Of Butterflies and Lullabies & Unfinished Conversations,***

Author: Dawngi Chawngthu. Publisher: Writers Workshop, Kolkata, 2015. Price @ Rs 200/-

A volume of fifty poems in the English language appeared in 2015 from Mizoram and was published by the esteemed Writers Workshop, Kolkata. In this part, not many poets write in English and of them a few publish their collected volumes if any; but in most cases their poems are scattered in various anthologies, national and international journals, and social media blogs. It is refreshing to read a volume of Dawngi Chawngthu's lyrics.

Every poem probes a sensitive moment of paradox which underlies life, and which her self-scrutiny delicately uncovers. Generally, these hidden paradoxes run as little ironies of life or unlit oddities of community. A quick, recuperative recovery of the unconscious or of the neglected pulses under superficies does establish an individualist's liberal recognition of the buried facts. Nevertheless, Dawngi does not evince interest concertedly in taking radical positions to expose ills and oddities that have cultural and political implications of the

day. From poem to poem, her art glides but in tune with a paradoxical imperative which defines the core of life perhaps. The poet does not inspire us to probe the deep nature of that paradox; perhaps her own travel is dispersed amid fresh discoveries to be made of as many encounters as possible. It is hoped, more time would lend a deepening to her creative process. For instance, a poem "Am I Robot?" takes on 'a robotic existence/ programmed/ to deliver' the words of kindness, care, or duty with sincere gestures; but its great skill pales before a living, thinking life when put to contrast with 'But hey/ my thoughts / are my own... unprogrammed!'

One can almost always mark a delicate turn in the poet toward her own self in the manner of introspection, self-examination, or self-criticism. In a much-acclaimed poem "Motherhood" we are offered insight into the delicate being of motherliness. It springs some delicate surprises on a familiar theme of the mother's loving efforts and anticipations in a caring family. It moves away from a keenly feminist possibility to an inward awareness of her own frailty as mother. The poem glides wonderfully. While children's dependence is a natural condition, the tradition of mother's support is morally defensible and socially upheld. But a moment of her own 'shout' is an apocalypse of sorts which she is not ready to own. In the process, several radical questions are thrown up: Is mother kept within an aura of power that a culture allows her to celebrate herself? Is she indeed a self-realized individual and a free person? Is love and care for the children a natural claim to identity outside her self-empowerment? Does individuality or social identity come naturally without love, sacrifice, and fortitude? A battle of the unconscious between possession of power and loss of its control is persistent

throughout the poem. To my mind, an unaccustomed 'shout' is a sudden release of the unconscious, an un-motherly selfhood, which dethrones the motherhood from her glorious halo of customary 'silence.' From this perspective, she is now exposed to the ordinary bottom of an individual, devoid of social and moral power, an awareness of which parodies her time-honored, cultivated role play across ages. The poem has sensitively raised a question, if motherhood is a cultivated custom with its moral privileges, which is hard to violate; and yet, is it not painful to acknowledge of its calibrated façades and sweet ironies? The poem subtly raises but does not resolve the moot paradox involving the mother as an ordinary individual vis-a-vis her socially endowed ideal. However, the 'shout' is a self-critical moment unveiling an intrinsically moral being that she is. The way to this discovery again is paradoxically realized. The poem "High Above" apart from being a memory of mother who is now gone off to heaven is again a fresh perspective on motherhood. The lyric brings a mother's view of her mother extended to the image of mother universally, and pitches in for a loved cocoon security in the presence of mother and underlines a girl's premature growth to independent motherhood, which is not assertive of individualism or empowerment. "Voices" brings out the Christian's faith in God whose care is so motherly in love.

Dawngi the poet is awake to her Mizo culture, it seems, at times. The poem, "Lucky ZoLanu" is set from the Mizo mother's viewpoint with 'sweet and loving words of advice' intended to groom the girl and prepare her to settle down with 'a suitable bride groom.' In this long poem apparently as an ethnic lore on the youth's model role, the mother persuades as a conformist of tradition advocating the preservation of the

tribe and the groom's un-flayed position as its 'torchbearer.' The poet persona does not critique the patriarchal aura of the groom. The poem does not complicate, rather shies away from encountering the emergent issues in her society involving woman's rights and her patriarchal customs. One could wonder if the creative vision of Dawngi the poet is not somewhat dwarfed under Dawngi the person herself enjoying social distinction and loving family bonds. It is already pointed out that she is not intent on the social narrative; she turns round to her own self, every moment, to weigh up a point against a creative alternative. This is a poor consolation to know that the poet is characteristically removed from her social ambience, since her earlier dispersed poetic efforts (prior to 2014) are indicative of her cultivated aloofness just like the New Critical structures aim to evolve toward a self-contained aesthetic point.

There is a set of "October" poems unraveling various facets, as it were, of the October Being, which expresses youthfulness including its stresses and strains. These are musings and ruminations on transitional life tied to the time of October. A poem "Untied – October Musings" plays out the state of love to wait till two souls come together by the force of nature, such as Rain and Earth together make a dry spell disappear. Another poem speaks of the young citizen's averred freedom and responsibility in the wake of Mizoram's statehood in October; but yet another opens up a sad face of October as a rehash done on the theme of love between hearts lost in different time and space. In love, the poetic self insists on the deep nature to speak, not a legal contract to compel minds to fall in together.

There is a basic pattern in poems, which is a patterned paradox available at the center of her creative consciousness.

Perspectives change in a moment even as lyrical returns are made to a position in a conversational mode. This inner propensity for the self-turn is essentially to voice a poetic individualism, and the poet does not vitiate this basic position, even when she turns to general motherhood issues and the like. Her discursive thought does not walk far off from the ruling sensibility of contradiction. So, the art does not grow in complication and richness of vision. "Locked Doors," "The Mask," "Paper Boat," and "From the Inside" "Untitled," "Alone" and an entire host would confirm to this norm. One can say Dawngi's talent revels in the moment's revelations; there is no narrative continuity to support her imaginative world. One may also mark how the modernist's style is in work using a single word as a line mapping a thought or a point in poems. An intense moment of awareness vis-a-vis self-introspection, social condition, or other aspects of life is a characteristic artistic tension out of which Dawngi's poem takes its shape. Most of her poems are short lyrics, organized with careful attention given to choice of words to tend a point of distinction by her wakeful and discursive insight. She comes to our view as a modernist poet, and most poems work out her impersonal voice by way of the poetic text minding the point(s) or ideas as yet hidden, unattended and unstoried as if waiting to be unveiled. And the poet gives credible voice to these marginalized states of being.

Well, each lyric looks slender in body (form), but it throbs with a living paradox. The delicate probe with Dawngi's uniquely individualistic poise is, of course, appreciated; but her hiding the gaze behind some moral and social screens may require an unveiling. For the narrative imagination to sustain its manifoldness and plurality, signifying images of a wider

society or a supporting environment, folkloric geographies or philosophical deep states are useful and important. We will wait to see some such investment from this intelligent and insightful poet.

This anthology has included new poems as the date of composition is noted in most cases, and I could mark most of her earlier range of graceful poems are excluded except for "Motherhood" or a couple of them.

Poetry

The Dying Sun

Dr. Anil Boro
Sahitya Akademi Awardee in Bodo and Associate Professor
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At the other end of the sky
Dazzles the dying sun
The dark cloud now encircles
The dying sun
The dazzling brightness
At the crossroads of day and night
At the end of the sky
The sun and the cloud play
Hide and seek
Once hiding and then showing off
The face

The dying sun shines pale as
A piece of art
Drawn on the canvas of
The sky
Nature too is a work of art
Drawn on the canvas of earth and sky
In colours crimson and orange
The cloud blossoms.

(originally written in Bodo and translated into English by the poet)

On the Bank of the Manas River

Dr. Anil Boro
Sahitya Akademi Awardee in Bodo and Associate Professor
Department of Folklore Research
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After a dark slumber
I woke up at the cold touch of the
Manas river,
The dazzling brightness of
The moon couldn't pass through
The dark crescent.

I slept on the bank of the Manas river
And took rest for a while
In a moon lit night
Knowing fully well that
I will not wakeup soon.

To night's moon is not
Bright like the day light
Nor warm like the sun's face
Just a blue moon wearing
The face of the dazzling softness.

You might not know

I set foot on this place
After many years
An ordinary man
Who has his emotions
Fear and sorrow
Hatred and anger
And the strength like
The rising sun in the red sky
Now devoured by the wild lust of man.

I want to go to sleep once more
In the dark crevices and
Want to hide my face
Once more
A man I was never before
Nor do I want to be
In a world unfamiliar to me

Don't wake me up
O time, bridled time
Oh cuckoo , oh gentle breeze
Don't wake me up
I don't want to get up
From this dark slumber

The soft touch of
The cold ancient river
The moon wearing the blue face
Can't wake me up

I want to go to sleep
Once more
And rest in a fullmoon night
Of falgun

On the bank of Manas river.

(originally written in Bodo and translated into English by the poet*)*

The Image

Dr. Bhaskar Roy Barman
Retired School Teacher and Indian author writing poetry and fiction

---

She stayed vivid in my memory, nay, in my mind
for a long time, an image of paramount beauty
after she had parted away from me.
She appeared to me a phantom of delight
sent as if from on high or from some unworldly place,
when I fell asleep, thinking of her I once loved,
and impregnated with the fragrance of flower
the time she stayed with me.
Every time she appeared to me in dream
she said, smiling a sweet smile
that sweetened the flower-fragrant time,
'I still love you and love you in spirit!'
When I met her many, many years ago,
she was five years older than me, but looked younger,
her face was the shape of a betel-leaf
and her hair long and dark as twilight
and done in a bun.
She stared love and a promise, despite the difference
and I responded to the summons of the stare quite
delightedly.

She did not stay true to her promise and parted away
a dead woman from me.
But I could not banish the image of her planted in my mind.
The image manifested itself into the phantom,
the phantom of delight.
Just a few days ago I was invited to a folk-culture festival
held in a place far from the madding crowd's eternal strife
and feasted my eyes and ears on the baul-singers singing
and dancing,
their songs philosophizing on life and love.
I carried back home the refrain of a baul song:
'The body is the temple where love is fulfilled.'
Since then I have not dreamed of the image
appearing to me to say:

'I still love you and love you in spirit!'

The Japanese Doll

Manisha Mishra
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Department of English
Raima Devi Women's University, Orissa

I stared and stared
At her white fingers
That presented a stark contrast
To her red nail paint
The blue dot on her forehead
Emphasised her light skin.

I could not help notice
The delicate golden anklet
On her pretty, white feet
Trinklets and bangles jostled
On her fair arms and wrists
Jolting me out of my senses.

They said any colour would be honoured
To look so beautiful against her porcelain skin
Her neck put her white string of pearls to shame
And her silver waist band shone against her fair waist

But her whole life toiled in the kitchen
Her fair neck sweaty
Her fair face full of flour
Her fair fingers soiled
And her feet wet.

She was a Japanese doll
That sat in one of her shelves
She was not allowed to tan
Outside the premises of the house
She was lucky when a sun ray
Occasionally visited her green balcony.

I am a name in the theatre world
A free spirit, an independent mind
The world does not know her.
But people always say
She was luckier than me
When she was chosen
In response to the ad:
"Fair, tall and slim" !

To a Valley known as Imphal

Robin S Ngangom
Eminent Indian Poet and Associate Professor
Department of English, NEHU, Shillong

Red flaking bricks and mortar of a palace, buried rivers and
Humiliated freedom fighters from the Great War
Bring to mind

A king who tried to evade an ominous prophecy
Only to be bitten by a snake-god and
Two lovers
Hailing from different faiths
Holding each other across the banks
Of a cleaving river
In a small land-locked valley

My departed grandmother
Told stories of
Bomb-hollowed walls and Japanese soldiers
Who vanished in the jungle with your rice-pot and
Negroes from the allied forces
Who tried to molest an aunt.

Whatever happened to all the mislaid years
No one cares

When the bombs rained
My people ran in all directions
Hugging mountain slopes, trampling rice-fields.
Many perished in bewilderment

But the war was not ours and
Perhaps our race did not perish.
We have become civilized
In lieu of a barbaric past.
One cockcrow we found
Ourselves belonging to a civilized nation.

The Dead Shall Mourn the Living

Robin S Ngangom
Eminent Indian Poet and Associate Professor
Department of English, NEHU, Shillong

See the shadow-lips behind lace curtains
watched from the street; the impenetrable windows
and the sorrowing virgins silhouetted
by mute lamps; see the hurried clocks
between adulterous lovers and
the shamefaced debris on walls.

How many times have we seen
fire wilting in crystal brown eyes and
a slow cataract of hate forming?

Look, childhood has died for that urchin.
He now lights his *bidi* in the dark noon and
bears a filial cross on his hunched back.

The end touches us momentarily.
Its voices, its skeletal fingers,
its bone-chilling hoarfrost abandoned
on the hills of yesterdays.
Life filters through our bodies,
its gauze wings eluding our enclosing fingers.

It is no precious stone
we can hold and admire in the sun.

See that tramp from my native land.
He has survived with only the wet streets
beneath his feet bereft of shoes.
He has no pillow to lay his head,
no fire to cook or warm himself and
he just beds down among obsolete machines.

The shade shall mourn the living.
Never knowing who is better-off.
Mutually shaking their heads
in shadow-pity.

Call for Papers

MZU Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies Vol. VI, Issue I, June 2019 (UGC approved journal No.64788), of the Department of English, Mizoram University, shall focus upon 'Mizo Literature'. Papers critically and intellectually analysing on any genre of Mizo literature and culture are invited for publication. Such research papers, book reviews, and translated Mizo poetry may be submitted by April 2019. The papers are to be screened in principle through the double-blind peer review and anti-plagiarism software.

Paper contributors are requested to adhere to the research-oriented standard following the MLA(8th edition) or APA style sheet. Such papers should follow the word limit of 3000 words and maintain without variation the Times New Roman, Font size 12, with margin 1.0 inch and 1.5 inch line spacing.

Sub themes:

Identity	Marginality	Conflict
Trauma	Translation	Culture
Food	Fashion	Ethnicity
Music	Belief system	pop-culture
Politics	Oral literature	Folklore

Authors may also send papers within the parameters of Mizo literature and culture studies. The paper should be accompanied by:

- a declaration that it is an original work and has not been published or sent for publication anywhere else

- an abstract in about 100-200 words
- a brief bio-note of the contributor(s) indicating name, institutional affiliation, brief career history, postal address, mobile number and e-mail, in a single attachment

Contributors are requested to avoid footnotes, if required endnotes may be used.

The paper may be mailed directly to sdbaral.08@gmail.com by April 2019.

Manuscripts should be duly submitted between 3000-5000 words prepared in accordance with the latest MLA Handbook in MSWord format. Articles are to be accompanied by endnotes if any, and a Works Cited list. A brief statement from the author that the article has not been submitted for publication elsewhere will be welcome, along with the author's full address, and institutional affiliation. The above may be mailed to the following address :

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