

Narratives of Mizo Traditional Songs: A Thematic Analysis

Dr Ruth Lalremruati

Assistant Professor, Department of Mizo, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram.

Received: February 07, 2019

Accepted: March 23, 2019

ABSTRACT *The various characteristics of Mizo folk songs show the nature and character as well as highlight the richness of the Mizo folk songs. However, it may be wrong to judge it with an in-depth and critical analysis based on today's written literature, since they are simple literature. That is why it is necessary to understand how we can define its various characteristics and how it is brought to light. And it is for this reason that we will study and acknowledge how the various Mizo folk songs can be identified and emphasized based on the variety of theme. Closely looking into the earlier Mizo songs, we can clearly see that they have a sort of uniform and regular characteristics. One of the richest features of Mizo folklore are the folk songs of various types with their traits of high lyricism, striking opus, unfathomable feeling in various characteristic and wonderful phrase of human feelings.*

Key Words: *Folk, Traditions, Folk Songs, Theme.*

The Mizo folk songs bestow wonderful variety in terms of bliss and contentment, pain as well as anguish, valor in hunting, bravery and spirit in war and expedition as well. The Mizo folk songs are simple and delightful in nature, full of heartfelt sentiments and profound attitude. Many are allied with the theme of love, expedition; hunting, bereavement and dirge, and some have satirical nature, festival themes etc.

The Mizo folk songs with their varied theme were highly vibrant and varied, and the study is essential as it manifested the principles of the Mizo way of living and thinking in the past. Most of these songs were mainly sung in groups at various festivals and ceremonies. There are also some songs which were sung in an unceremonious occasions like *Zu hmun* (a place where men gather to drink rice beer) and *Zawlbuk* (Bachelor's dormitory). Meanwhile, there are some songs which can be sung only by a particular individual at a specific time. The various themes of the Mizo folk songs had been classified keeping in view the characteristics and feature of the songs and also the suitability of a proper study of their background. The magnificence of Mizo folk songs with its variety of themes is most remarkable both in eminence and diversity. The major themes of the Mizo traditional songs can be studied as:

1). Love theme: Love has always been one of the most universal themes in literature. Whether it's poignant or blissful, romantic or tedious, people always seem to be interested in someone else's love life because they are pleased to know that there are people who have loved, lived and suffered just like them or like they wished they had. Love had been treated in various ways in literature. Love is distinctive in that it is a consistent: while it goes on through different decades and different centuries, the elements stay the same.

Likewise, the most fascinating and popular Mizo folk songs are the songs of love with lyrical nature; love was the principal motive of a very large part of Mizo folk songs. And most of the songs of love were found to have high lyrical quality. These songs are pure expressions of one's own feeling; melancholy, happiness and sadness. Love constituted the principal theme of Mizo folk songs like the rest of the world.

The Mizo song with the theme of love can be traced back to *Chawngchen zai* which was regarded among the earliest song of the Mizo. It is believed that *Chawngchen zai* originates during their settlement between *Lentlang* and *Thantlang*. The songs in many ways depicted deep feelings and emotion of the lovers. They reflect the deep longing for the beloved and sadness cause due to love failure.

The Mizo employ their songs as a medium of expressing their relationship. Their love songs were mainly the expression of affectionate love between the lovers and their longings for a lost love. These love songs are not just beautiful love poems; they give a glimpse of Mizo psychology through their imagery. They expose deep feelings in love and unveil social and domestic relations and social values. The languages were seen to be richer and dignified than in everyday verbal communication.

Several striking lyrical love songs appear during the First World War, as a number of Mizo volunteers left their native soil for Europe as Labor Corps under British Force. "They depart from the capital, Aizawl, on the 27th April 1915" (Zatluanga 154). Their departure was a momentous event for the Mizo people. The separation of lovers, families and friends at this time brought about remarkable songs known as *German Run Zai* (Song of War against German). These songs are touching and are full of affection; they truly

revealed the passionate hearts of the young Mizo men and women. The themes were mainly on farewell with a melancholic tone and were mostly in dialogue form.

2). Hunting and War theme:

(i). *Hlado*: The unique nature of the Mizo was their nature of self sacrifice for others and their stance for the welfare of others. But since they were humans, they do demonstrate a bit of personal ego and fame when it comes to achievements and glory; disclosing their accomplishments through *Hlado* and *Bawh hla* when they had taken the head of a foe or an animal. The main motive of performing this practice was to gain dominance and leadership over their killings in the afterlife. Though these two songs are put in one category they are used in different occasion, they are not meant to be sung in groups unlike other songs, but instead, be rhythmically chanted with a specific tune.

A victorious hunter was identified as *Pasaltha* (Knight) and was regarded very highly in the society. When a successful hunter slays a wild animal he rendered a song which is called *Hlado* (Songs of the successful hunter). “*Vaw hla* which is sung out with all personal might is what we call *Hlado* today” (Lalsiamthanga C. Kumza lamtluang 45)

These songs were lyrical in nature and the contexts of the songs were egocentric, which expose the pride and strength of the hunter himself. They were regarded among the earlier songs of the Mizos as most of them are in the *Hmar* and *Pawi* dialect. H.K.R. Lalbiakliana suggested that the earliest *Hlado* was composed in the *Chindwin* valley(85)

“The languages of *Hlado* are not difficult to understand, J Malsawma concluded that the composers are accustomed to the use of *Pawi* dialect for *Hlado*” (Mizo poetry 34). Many people are of the opinion that the *Pawi* tribes were the pioneer in composing *Hlado* as most of them were composed in their dialect and only few of them are in *Lusei* dialect. But it must be noted that the composition in *Pawi* dialect does not mean that they are the sole composer (Lalchungnunga and Hrangthiauva 350-351).

The Mizos in early times hunt wild animals as it has a deep religious purpose in their beliefs. They believed that a man who had killed a barking deer, a bear, a wild gayal, a deer and a boar could be regarded as *Ram lama thangchhuah* and were eligible to enter their ideal place *Pialral* in the second life. Hence, it was the aspiration of every brave man to hunt for such wild animals. Hunting has a significant role as it pave the way for the poor people to win over fame and fortune by killing wild animals. It may be noted that successful hunter killing particular wild animals require for entry to *Pialral* used to climb the nearby hill top and chanted the said *Hlado* with the top of his voice for his success in hunting.

The songs are purely subjective and unlike most of the Mizo folk song they are not meant to be chanted in groups but a single performance. In many of the *Hlado* we see the reflection of man’s superiority over the animals and the inferiors were jeered at by the superior. Likewise, there are songs which highlighted a scornful pity to those men who goes to work in the *jhum* and could not go hunting wild animal since it’s a rather intricate job.

Hlado may vary according to the skill of the composer, a person with more egos and less ego and others who can perform it based on the benefits they incurred on others achievement. Then, there were also others who copy the lines of others; among the *Hlado* what we have known is authentic and only a handful of them.

There are some songs which highlights the Mizo believes in the supernatural being. They believed that when some hunters killed animals in the forest they were helped by a super natural being who rule over animals. *Haldo* was performed by the skilled hunters as a way to show their marksmanship by calling out others to come and share their killings. It is also a sign of informing the villagers who the hunter is and what kind of animal he had killed. The significant factor of this *Hlado* is that, it conveys the feeling of togetherness among the people to share even a small achievement; thus, restraining the room for pride and jealousy among the people.

(ii). *Bawh hla*: The early Mizo frequently fought war against neighboring villages and when a brave warrior killed his enemy he put his foot on the dead body and proclaim his name and chanted a song which was called *Bawh hla* (Songs of the brave warrior). When a warrior chants *Bawh hla* on the outskirts of their village to be notice by the villagers, it signifies that he had killed an enemy. Either the warrior or his selected warrior can recite *Bawh hla* and was not meant for everybody.

It is difficult to know the exact meaning of its name, for the Chiefs of *Lai (Pawi)*, it is called *Vaw hla* and in literal translation the meaning of *Bawh* in *Lai* dialect is ‘Strong’. *Bawh hla* was also known as *Chan hla* or *Mi Chan hla*. If this was the scenario, we can assume that the origin of these songs dated back to when the Mizo were engaged in battles and wars for their survival. One known fact was that, these songs were one of the most historical songs and it even might be the oldest songs according to some of the Mizo historians.

Also, they were mainly in the *Pawi* language or rather a mix of *Pawi* and *Duhlian* language which even more implies that these songs originated from the *Pawi*.

In regard to its characteristics *Bawh hla* were very much similar to *Hlado*, they only differ in their purpose (i.e. *Bawh hla* was chanted by great warrior when they slay an enemy, whereas *Hlado* is chanted by brave hunter when wild animals were killed). The warrior who had killed an enemy was also called as *Pasaltha*. He had accomplished the honor of the villagers and was highly appreciated by the society.

In *Hlado and Bawh hla* we came across many beautiful and exceptional depths in Mizo lyrical words which are often used till these days; and it contributed to the richness of the Mizo poetical words. They were fairly rich in terms of rhyme, internal rhyme, meter, alliteration, pathos etc. *Hlado* and *Bawh hla* are one of the most noteworthy songs when it comes to in-depth study and critical analysis compared to the other types of Mizo folk songs. It is also fascinating to note that, before the Mizo learned how to read and write they have used the letters 'a' and 'e' in correct punctuation forms.

3). Lamentations: Songs were composed based on the event or circumstances which impel the composer to express his feelings in the form a song. Death was one of the most significant factors which touch a person to unveil his true emotions which is communicated through songs. It is hard to explain a person's feelings in words when faced with sorrow, loneliness and dead; his mind was flooded with an ocean of pain. Filled with spontaneous overflow of emotions which was unexplainable in words; a person conveys these feelings in words. The mourning songs of the Mizo are sung with a specific tune. And most of these songs greatly reveal their religious beliefs and practices.

In the olden days while the Mizo settle in the *Than* range they were affected by famine. A number of people starve to death, diseases spread widely and families have to part with tears. Families, friends and close ones sits together to mourn and console each other. At this time, they began to utter with mourning which takes the form of songs later on. As the mourners sits while reciting these mourning songs, it continues to bear the name *Thuthmun zai* (which means songs sung while sitting). They were the songs of lamentation of the dead ones. The origin and composers are not known but are regarded as one of the earliest folk songs. As time went by, more songs about death and loneliness were composed and later on personal names were given to the songs. Many bereavement and lamentation songs largely scattered in the society so they have become a part of tradition.

When the songs about mourning theme evolved, they already have what can be presumed as religion such as practices. The Mizo ancestor belief in the abode of the death called *Pialral* and *Mithi khua* and they assume, after their death, they go to either one of the two places. However, if we closely study the folksongs of the olden days, *Pialral* was seldom mentioned in those songs. It was only after the influence of Christianity that the word *Pialral* is inscribe in some of the Mizo songs. Their lamentation songs lean towards songs about condolence, comfort, loneliness and remembrance of the dead.

The folk songs about mourning and loneliness were remarkable because it evolved from true feelings of deep sympathy. Though they were couplet song, it is a complete song which communicates all the essential elements of being a song about grief and sorrows.

4). Satire: In the early period of the Mizo, we witness a number of satirical natures in their folk songs and these kinds of songs are called *Intuk hla*. The term 'Satire' applied to any work of literature or art whose objective is to ridicule. It is more easily recognized than defined. The distinct feature of the Satirical theme of the Mizo folk songs were not about its melody or tune of the song but rather about its bold nature in communicating its true intend with aggressive words which are sang without fear.

However, there are also some songs which reveal the cheerful side, humorous side and which lifts the spirit to enlighten the atmosphere. Nonetheless, the songs are true to its subject and direct in expressing the right intend of the song. It is interesting to note that we can see a number of Mizo satirical songs from the British period and the advent of Christianity in Mizoram. In the Mizo folk songs, we can see nomadic pieces having satirical nature.

Personal criticism and mockery of individuals is seen in many of the Mizo songs. The most well known among them was between Awithangpa and Diriallova, they were both great composers, and they are both *Lelhchhun* clan of the *Ralte's*. It is seen in the early composition that Awithangpa never composed songs to mock others. It can be assumed that, he later started composing satires after being provoked by Diriallova. They confront each other through a number of songs.

The different Chiefs of the Mizo took chieftainship and reign before the British step foot on this land. During that period, a number of war breakout between these Chiefs and their clans which are conveyed in the satirical nature of the Mizo folk songs. Not only this, the origin of the famous wars during this period, namely, *Chhim leh Hmar Indo* (Northern and Southern War) and *Chhak leh Thlang Indo* (Eastern and Western War) is believed to outbreak because of the Mizo satirical songs. It is an important aspect to be

noted as to how the words of a song plays an important role and highlight its influence in bringing conflicts between the *Sailo* Chiefs which ultimately resulted in massive wars between them. These outcomes truly underline the uniqueness, powerfulness and admiration towards the Mizo Satirical Songs.

5. Nature Theme: Folk songs on nature are one of the most common types of tribal folk songs. The rural folk are dependent on nature for their life and livelihood and spend all their life in close connection with Mother Nature. The folk-mind fostered through calm contact with nature and the incidents experiences nurture by it. Thus they are very much emotionally involved to all the aspect of Nature, such as the trees, the seasons, birds, flowers, animals and the entire gamut. This love and attachment to nature is found reflected in all their folk songs.

In the Mizo folk songs, similes and metaphors are largely drawn from nature, which reveal their natural intimacy to the objects of nature. Since nature play a vital role in the life of the people it also provides emotive inspiration in love-songs, the lovers often used the objects of nature to compare themselves. Many folk songs around the world considered the birds as epitome of fidelity, and are common images in folk songs. They are often engaged as envoy of love, and are sometimes personified. Pigeon is a frequent image in the classical mythologies of India. In the Mizo folk song, the most common images of love are the eagle, the hornbill and the dove. These birds denote the closeness of the poet with nature and employed it as a means to convey their feelings. Especially at times when the lovers come across separations, he calls for these objects of nature to console, enlighten and even act as a messenger.

Conclusion: The thematic studies of the mizo traditional songs shows that love is the most popular theme in Mizo folk songs. The love songs generally render the faithful and true, but often despondent, beseeching of a lover who cares nothing but sacrifice on behalf of his beloved. They are mostly sincere, simple words, in most of these songs the ideal of true love is adhered to with great fidelity, - the ideal of constant truthfulness to one lover. There are a few exceptions to this attitude, which stand out because of their direct opposition to this view. Even though true love was so often saddened because of unfortunate fate, yet the ideal was unchanged. Their lamentation songs highlighted mainly lean towards songs about condolence, comfort, loneliness and remembrance of the dead.

The Mizo attitude towards brave warrior can be seen, when a boy is born, the elders gave their blessings so that he might grow up to be a brave and good hunter. Being brave, strong and hard working was the utmost trait they valued among the men. Boys are trained to be brave, to be skilled hunters and kill their enemies without fear. There was an assumption that the soul of the wild animals and enemies they killed would accompany them to *Pialral* as a servant. *Hlado* and *Bawh hla* reveal the attitude of the brave Mizo warrior, they are purely subjective and unlike most Mizo folk songs not meant to be chanted in groups but an individual performance. One of the characteristics was its restriction to occasions, it was proper to sing or recite certain types of lyrics only on certain occasions and only by certain persons.

Reference

1. Jadav, Kishore. Folklore and its Motifs in Tribal Literature. New Delhi: Manas Publication.2010. Print.
2. Hrangthiauva and Lalchungnunga. Mizo Chanchin Aizawl, Lalrinliana ans Sons, 1978. Print.
3. Lalbiakliana, H.K.R., Mizo Zaite (Vol-I), Aizawl: The Exodus Press, 1995. Print.
4. Lalsiamthanga C. Lalthangfala, Ed. Kumza lamtuang. Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters. 1994.
5. Lalthangliana B. Mizo Hun Hlui Hlate. Aizawl: R.T.M. Press. 1998. Print.
6. --- Mizo Literature. Aizawl: R.T.M Publication. 1993. Print.
7. Ngurliana, Brig. Pi Pute Hla. Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board. 2009. Print.
8. Sailo, Lalsangzuali. Sakhming Chullo. Aizawl: Zorin Compugraphics. 1995. Print.
9. Thanmawia, R.L. Mizo Poetry. Aizawl: Din Din Heaven. 1998. Print.
10. Zatluanga. Mizo Chanchin Aizawl: Zasanga. 1997. Print. (Mizo Zaite Vol.I.1995.p.85)
11. Zawla K. Mizo Pi pute leh an thlahte chanchin. Aizawl: Zomi Book Agency. 1976. Print.