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Humanistic Study of Mizo Folklore, Folktale and Myths

Saroj Laldinpuii

Associate Professor, Govt. Aizawl North College, Aizawl, Mizoram

Abstract-- One of the three fundamental principles of Indian Knowledge System (IKS) named Parampara aims at acknowledging the rich heritage and lineage of India. It aims at upholding and nurturing the wisdom and culture that had been passed down through generations. The history of Mizo reveals its existence originating from China to Mizoram. The tribe is believed to travel from *Chhinlung* located in China to Myanmar and finally to Mizoram. The folklores and folktales narrated orally through generations expose the culture of the tribe. These songs, tales, fables and myths reinforce the unique cultural identity at the same time helping the people to maintain their tradition and a sense of belonging.

Keywords-- Chhinlung, Folk Lore, Chin Hills, Myanmar, Mizo.

I. MIZO

Mizo tribes live in Mizoram, one of the states in northeastern India, Aizawl is the capital and the largest city within the state. It shares international borders with Bangladesh to the west, and Myanmar to the east and south, and domestic borders with the Indian states of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. Out of the two official languages, namely Mizo and English, the most widely spoken tongue is Mizo, it serves as a lingua franca among various ethnic communities who speak a variety of other Tibeto-Burman or Indo-Aryan languages. Mizoram have the highest percentage of scheduled tribes in India, with the Mizo people forming the majority. The name Mizoram is derived from two Mizo words: Mizo and ram. Mizo refers to the native inhabitants of the region, with Mi meaning "human" or "civilian" and Zo can have varied interpretations. Some suggest Zo signifies "highland" or "remote," while others associate it with the feeling of "cool" or "crisp," evoking the climate of the high-altitude region. The term Mizo has evolved into a broad ethnic classification, encompassing various subgroups and clans inhabiting the area as well as clans from surrounding areas, historically known as the Lushai Hills. Many speakers of Central Kuki-Chin languages have also adopted the Mizo identity while others have not. The second component, ram, means "land" or "forest". So, Mizoram can be translated into "land of the Mizos" or simply "Mizo land."

II. ORIGIN OF THE MIZO

Like many ethnic groups in Northeast India, the origins of the Mizo people are covered in mystery and intertwined with threads of oral tradition and linguistic analysis. There cannot be a definitive and conclusive historical narrative except through examination of folklore, linguistic connections, and anthropological studies which gives us a glimpse into the possible pathways of their ancestors.

Integral to Mizo identity lays the legend of Chhinlung, a place often evoked in songs and stories passed down through generations. This mythical homeland is believed to be somewhere in present-day China, possibly near the banks of the Yalung River in Sichuan. Archaeological evidence for Chhinlung still remains to be found, but its significance in Mizo folklore connects with a deep-rooted connection to a distant past and a collective memory of migration. Chhinlung (also spelled Sinlung or Chinlung) is believed to be the legendary ancestral birthplace of the Mizo people and related ethnic groups such as the Hmars, Chins, and Paite. According to Mizo legend, the Mizo ancestors emerged from the earth through a large covering rock or cave called Chhinlung. Folklore describes the ancestors stepping out into the world one by one. Legend says the Ralte clan was so talkative as they emerged that the deity (Pathian or Khuanu) feared the world would become too crowded and noisy. To prevent further emergence, the deity sealed the cave with a massive stone, trapping the remaining people inside. In the Lusei (Mizo) language, chhin means "to cover/seal" and lung means "stone" or "rock," translating literally to "a rock with a seal". While historically debated, many scholars and oral traditions link Chhinlung to specific geographical locations outside of modern-day Mizoram. A prominent theory suggests Chhinlung refers to Sinlung or Chinlingsang (possibly Xinglong) located in the Yunnan province of China, or near the Yalong River in Sichuan.

III. THE ROUTE TO MIZORAM:

Delving deeper into linguistic and anthropological studies the Mizos are placed within the broader Tibeto-Burman family, signifying their ancestors were part of a wave of migration from China that spread across Southeast Asia and Northeast India.

This migration, maybe driven by a combination of factors such as population pressure, environmental changes, and political conflicts, saw the ancestors of the Mizos gradually move southwards, merging with other groups and developing their distinct identity. While the exact route and timeline of their migration remain uncertain, oral traditions and linguistic connections provide some clues. It is believed that the Mizos, after leaving Chhinlung, first settled in the Shan State of present-day Myanmar. From there, they moved to the Kabaw Valley, then to Khampat, and finally to the Chin Hills by the middle of the 16th century. Historians believe the Mizos migrated from southern China or Tibet into Myanmar (Burma) and eventually into the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) over several centuries.

The Mizos moves from China to Burma and then to India under forces of circumstances. They first settled in the Shan State after having overcome the resistance put up by the indigenous people. Then they changed settlements several times, moving from the Shan State to Kabaw Valley to Khampat to Chin Hills in Burma. They finally began to move across the river Tiau to India in the Middle of the 16th Century. The Shans had already been firmly settled in their State when Mizos came there from Chhinlung around 5th Century. The Shans did not welcome the new arrivals, but failed to throw the Mizos out. The Mizos had lived happily in the Shan state for about 300 years before they moved on the Kabaw Valley around the 8th Century. It was in the Kabaw Valley that Mizos got the opportunity to have an unhindered interaction with the local Burmese. The two cultures met and the two tribes influenced each other in the spheres of clothing, customs, music and sports. According to some, the Mizos learnt the art of cultivation from the Burmese at Kabaw. Many of their agricultural implements bore the prefix Kawl which was the name given by the Mizos to the Burmese. Khampat (now in Myanmar) is known to have been the next Mizo settlement. The area claimed by the Mizos as their earliest town, was encircled by an earthen rampart and divided into several parts. The residence of the ruler stood at the central block call Nan Yar (Palace Site). The construction of the town indicates the Mizos had already acquired considerable architecture skills. They are said to have planted a banyan tree at Nan Yar before they left Khampat as a sign that town was made by them.

The Mizos, in the early 14th century, came to settle at Chin Hills on the Indo-Burmese border. They built villages and called them by their clan names such as Seipui, Saihmun and Bochung. The hill and difficult terrain of Chin Hills stood in the way of the building of another central township like Khampat.

The villages were scattered so unsystematically that it was not always possible for the various Mizo clans to keep in touch with one another. Modern Mizos and related tribes refer to themselves as Chhinlung-chhuak meaning those who came out of Chhinlung as a mark of their shared cultural identity. This gradual migration exposed them to various influences, shaping their language, culture, and social organization. The name is used for various modern institutions, such as the Chhinlung Theological College in Aizawl and the Sinlung Hills Council, an administrative body for the Hmar people in northern Mizoram.

IV. FOLKSONGS:

Mizo folk songs are closely connected with their everyday life covering all their movements and mental changes brought out by various activities in their life. It covers themes like war, love, hunting, nature, and daily chores. Many Mizo names derive from musical terms, showing music's deep embedment in identity.

Mizo folk songs (Mizo hla) are a vital part of the cultural identity of the Mizo people, often characterized by soft, gentle tunes that reflect their deep connection to nature, history, and community. Historically, these songs were passed down orally through generations.

Types of Mizo Folk Songs are:

Chawngchen Zai: Considered one of the oldest forms of Mizo verse. Variations are often named after their place of origin, such as Tlangkhawzai, Dawn zai, and Lumtuizai.

Chawngi chhung inah
Zu lovin vuaia ka lam ngai lo
Chawngi chhung inah
Chawn tin tuah chhung chawngnu dam sela
Thlangva lam zir vuaia dam ang a

The song praises the couple who organised Chawng (festival) where they can drink and sing to their hearts content. The couple are a blessing to them especially to the poorer people who get a chance to enjoy themselves.

Tlar Li Zai: One of the most ancient forms, consisting of only four lines. It is traditionally accompanied by a small drum, a Seki (mithun horn), and a phenglawng (flute).

Puma Zai: A popular traditional song form often associated with communal festivities and the Tlanglam dance.

Chheih Hla: The specific song that accompanies the Chheihlam dance. It features impromptu, spontaneous lyrics that recount heroic deeds or praise guests.

AwithangpaTlawh Zai: A folk song style often associated with the legendary Mizo poet Awithangpa.

Malzai: Another traditional folk song style performed by Mizo singers.

Themes: War (Bawh Hla), hunting (Hlado), love (Lengzem Zai), nature, community, and daily life (like farming/jhumming).

Lunglen: A central emotional theme, a complex blend of melancholy, nostalgia, longing, and loneliness, often triggered by scenery or memories.

Mizo used makeshift instruments according to the need for the songs. They are:

Percussion: Khuangpui, Khuangte, Talh Khuang (drum), Dar, Darbu, Bengbung, Darbenthek (gongs).

Wind: Phenglawng, Phaiphuleng, Tumphit (flute), Rawchhem, Kharbeh (bagpiper), Hnahtum (leaf instrument).

Strings: Tingtang (Mizo guitar).

Horn: Seki (animal horn)

Cultural Significance:

Music is integral part of Mizo culture, a festival without music is like "Khuanglova chai ang" (a festival without drums).

V. FOLKTALE AND MYTHS

The oral narratives of the Mizo are rich containing tales from varied stories. Mizo folktales (Mizo Thawnthu) encompass creation myths, trickster tales, and legends of heroic figures, often reflecting the community's deep connection with nature and the supernatural.

The myth representing the primary origin story tells of humans emerging from a cave called Chhinlung. It is said the God Pathian closed the cave with a rock after people became too noisy. Rev Lalremliana asserts that Chhinlung may not be a cave but a village presently occupied by Tibetans who follow Dalai Lama. He writes "Khaw Sinlungah kawt sial ang ka zuang suak a, mi le nel tam e, hriemmi hrai ah" meaning the speaker jumped out of Chhinlung like buffalo to the world full of people.

Mizo literature is rich with folktales touching upon many legendary people.

Chemtatrawta: A popular cumulative tale about a man sharpening a dao (sword), which leads to a chain reaction of mishaps involving animals and plants.

Mauruangi: A Mizo version of the Cinderella story, featuring a mistreated orphan girl and her struggle against a cruel stepmother.

Thailungi: A tale of a woman sold into slavery by her mother for a cucumber, often used to study traditional patriarchal structures in Mizo society.

Zangkhuu: An astronomical myth explaining the origin of the Ursa Major constellation as the spirit of a warrior named Kawlawia.

Folktales of Mizo touch upon the lives of the people in various fields.

Chhura is the most famous figure in Mizo folklore, often accompanied by his brother Nahaia. He is a lovable, dim-witted trickster. Stories often follow his absurd adventures, like trying to "buy a fly" or whistling poorly.

Mizotales also often feature supernatural beings such as - Ramhuai (evil spirits), Khuavang (benevolent spirits), and Lasi (beautiful forest spirits who guard animals). Weretigers (Keimi) are also a common motif.

Romances featuring legendary figures like Zawlpala and Tualvungi or Chawngfianga and Lianchhiari are tragic love stories deeply embedded in Mizo culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

Mizo folklore and myths is a significant component of the cultural identity of Mizoram, it is rich in oral traditions, capturing their worldview, moral ethos, and historical narratives. These stories, passed down through generations, serve as a source of Mizo culture and collective memory, reflecting their intimate relationship with nature, community, and spirituality. The folklore serves multiple functions like entertainment, moral instruction, historical documentation, and spiritual guidance. The oral tradition is deeply entrenched in the socio-religious practices of the community.

The origins of Mizo myths can be traced back to their pre-Christian animistic traditions. These myths were shaped during their migration from the Chhinlung cave, which is considered the mythical origin of the Mizos, and their settlement in the hills of Mizoram. Each story, infused with elements of their struggles and victories, is a reflection of their adaptive strategies and their sense of identity as a tribe. Before the arrival of Christianity, the Mizos practiced animism, and their myths often centered on spirits, deities, and supernatural beings. The folklore often relates to agricultural practices, with myths explaining natural phenomena or the origin of plants and animals. The advent of Christianity in the 19th century influenced the traditional Mizo folklore, with some elements being integrated into Christian themes, while others were sidelined.

Creation myths believe in the mythical origin of humanity from a cave called Chhinlung also address the origins of natural features like rivers, hills, and forests, emphasizing their deep connection with the land.



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Folk tales often celebrate legendary figures like Thangchhuah, a man who attained spiritual and societal supremacy by fulfilling specific rites and feats. Chawngchilhi, a tragic heroine, symbolizes love, sacrifice, and the consequences of defying societal norms. Myths are replete with accounts of supernatural beings like Ramhuai (evil spirits) and Khuavang (benevolent spirits). Tales of interactions with supernatural beings serve as cautionary tales, promoting moral behavior and community solidarity. Proverbs derived from moral and ethical stories are still used in everyday conversation to instill moral virtues.

The Role of Mizo Folklore in Modern Times

Cultural Identity is preserved through Mizo folklore becoming a cornerstone of the community's identity, celebrated through festivals, literature, and art. The stories are enacted in traditional dances like Cheraw (bamboo dance) and songs. Scholars and writers have documented and analyzed these myths to preserve them for future generations. They serve as an important source for understanding the socio-cultural evolution of the Mizos.

Schools in Mizoram include folklore in their curricula to instill cultural pride in younger generations. Traditional festivals like Chapchar Kut and Mim Kut celebrate Mizo heritage and keep the folklore alive.

Hence the study contributes to the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) to a small degree. One of its principles Parampa touches upon the importance of Oral narratives that enriches a culture – here a Mizo culture. The narratives enhance and nurture Mizo lives giving us an insight into its history and helping the people to treasure and continue to nurture it.

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