



THE CONTEXTUAL LINKAGES BETWEEN RECORDED MIZO HISTORY AND LITERATURE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

There was a time when history and literature were regarded as a single field of study in the Mizo society. Mizo history showcased past events based on the actual occurrence of events while Mizo literature highlighted the culture, societal set up and lifestyles of the Mizo people. Mizo literature may not be regarded as a fully reliable source for undertaking a comprehensive, detailed analysis of Mizo history but is still able to offer an extensive insight due to the inclusion of the prevailing societal set up and lifestyle; the incorporation of characters created in accordance with those that may have existed in that particular mode of history; the emphasis on the political system and the turmoil that may have plagued the Mizo society at a particular phase in history. Mizo literature is richly laded with the political, economic and social realities that existed at different phases of Mizo history. This paper aims to partake on a critical analysis of the commonalities or the differences that may be located between the recorded history and the literature created or made available during that same historical period through selected Mizo literature that have time and again been regarded as reflective of Mizo history.

Keywords: *Mizo history, Mizo literature, contextual linkage, Mizo Union, MNF Movement.*

Introduction

K. Kris Hirsat said, “History is the study of the human past as it is described in the written documents left by human beings. The past, with all its decisions completed,

participants dead and its history told, is what the general public perceives as the immutable bedrock on which we historians and archeologist stand. But as a purveyors of the past, we recognized that the bedrock is really quick stand, that bits of the story are

yet untold, and that what has been told comes tainted by the conditions of what we are today.”ⁱHistory is also defined as the events of a particular period, country, or subject; something that has been done or experienced by a particular person or thing repeatedly over a long period (Cambridge Dictionary).ⁱⁱHistory can best be summed up as the record of events that actually happened in the past. It cannot be altered, extended or re-created based on one’s view point. It has to be recorded and written down in the exact manner in which events actually took place in the society.

Novels are tales or fabrications, made up stories or anecdotes about events that took place in the past where the characters’ actions threw light on the past and present journey embarked upon by man. The plots in novels are richly laden with minute details and are highly complex.ⁱⁱⁱ Novels can be described as a source for drawing the amalgamation of facts from fiction where the life experiences of man coupled with his dreams, hopes, aspirations and ideas are encapsulated into one form. Unlike history, which is recorded based on historical facts and findings, novels use the characters as storytellers to depict the intentions and feelings that the author intended to portray. This is one fundamental difference between the two.

For the purpose of this study, it is not possible to undertake an analytical study of all historical novels. Two historical novels which at a glimpse, appear to offer a contextual linkage between the historical events recorded at a particular time frame in Mizo history will be studied. These two

novels are *Thanpuii Thlan*, written by Vanlalrawna where the central point of the study will be based on the Mizo Union.^{iv}The second novel is *Nunna Kawng Thuampuiiah* written by Zikpuii Pa^v where the MNF Movement will be the main point of contention. These two works are in the vernacular language from which relevant quotations were drawn accordingly.^{vi}The Mizo Union was the first political party in Mizoram, established on the 9th of April, 1946. It brought about political awakening among the Mizo people. It successfully campaigned for the abolition of chieftainship. It rigorously fought for the creation of a District Council in Lushai Hills and rejected the Language Bill of 1960, introduced by the government of Assam (Assamese was to be given the status of the official language of the state). The MNF Movement (referred to as *rambuai* in Mizo writings) occurred during the period of 1966-1986 where Lushai Hills witnessed turmoil, instability due to the movement spearheaded by nationalistic goals i.e. attainment of independence and autonomy for the Mizo people. This Movement ultimately concluded with the signing of the Peace Accord on the 30th of June, 1986 which led to the birth of the state of Mizoram. These segments/ areas of study chosen for the paper all form a part of the Mizo political history i.e. are part of the major entities that shaped Mizo political history.

Thanpuii Thlan and the Mizo Union

Thanpuii Thlan written by Anthony Vanlalrawna in 2016 is a novel which follows the love and affection that

blossomed between two people, during the period of formation of the first political party in Mizoram and the subsequent birth of a nationalistic party. His writing traces the emergence and birth of the Mizo Union as a political party along with its profound imprint on the minds of the Mizo people.

In *Thanpuii Thlan*, special mention of Mizo Union (the first political party in Mizoram) was made numerous times. Anthony Vanlalrawna writes “around two months ago, a party called the Mizo Union was born in Aizawl. The leaders of the party distributed themselves and went to all villages, trying to win over the villagers and get their approval”. The mention of the establishment of the Mizo Union in this novel throws light on the initial years of its existence.^{vii}

The opportunity towards generating a societal upliftment within Mizoram and the transpiring of a greater Mizo unity wave awoke the sentiments of the people created a buzz of excitement amongst the people. The writer mentions, “The male heads of all the households willingly paid the membership fee of one rupee. Their wives and children became associate members, and paid fifty paisa.” The swaying of the people’s emotions and feelings coupled with the subsequent lack of support from the associates of the Chiefs led to a situation where the pool of supporters later gave their favor towards the nationalist driven front^{viii} which was established a year after Mizo Union started making waves. Subsequently, two groups i.e. the Mizo Union and the nationalistic driven front were both in the forefront. The desire for a handful of people

to exert power and authority in the society was one of the defining features that promoted the dissent of some people towards Mizo Union, paving way for their alliance with the nationalist front.^{ix}

The very first General Assembly of Mizo Union was held in Sikulpui, where the Mizo Union stated that, “Mizo Union was a party that represents the entire Mizo society. Nothing should transpire in Mizoram, without the wishes and support of the Mizo Union as it is the people’s representative”. This statement was not supported by the Deputy Commissioner (DC). The various undertakings and proceedings of the Mizo Union failed to win over the support and approval of the administrators. When L. L. Peters was the DC, in matters of disagreement he always sided with the nationalist group and always ruled against the Mizo Union. Before giving the Mizo Union a chance to truly represent their side of events, the DC jailed them immediately without any fair trial. Such incidents were elaborated in *Thanpuii Thlan*. The writer writes, “The people no longer wanted to pay taxes to the Chiefs which enraged the chiefs and the chiefs shared their grievances to the DC. The DC in accordance with the grievances shared by the Chiefs, issued an order and started arresting all the people whom the Chiefs had complained against. The accused were transported to Aizawl and were locked up.”^x

These incidents mentioned in *Thanpuii Thlan* are also mentioned in R. Vanlalawma’s writings. R. Vanlalawma, a Mizo historian in his writings mentioned that, “the Mizo Union took steps for the

removal of *Pu Peter*^{xi} and undertook an agitation for his speedy removal from his incumbent post. The agitation was to commence on the 28th of December, 1948. The President of Mizo Union during this period was Thanhkira. Thanhkira and Hrangiaia, on behalf of the Mizo Union went to Shillong to share their discontentment about the DC; *Pu Peter*. The DC's officials were waiting for their return. On the 11th of December 1945, Hrangiaia was caught and kept in jail. Later, Thanhkira on arriving in Aizawl was also caught. An agitation grew in Aizawl due to their arrest. The Mizo Union carried out protests and raised the slogan "Peter go home". The Mizo Union leaders, based on the Maintenance of Public Order Act, 1947 were sentenced to six months in jail commencing from the 29th of December 1948. The agitation spread in the villages as well.^{xii}

Besides the birth of the Mizo Union and the proceeding events leading to the establishment of the nationalist party, their efforts towards attaining liberation from the control of the Chiefs and the desire to grant power in the hands of the people also found due mention in *Thanpuii Thlan*. The writer says, "The chiefs were extremely scared of being dismissed and raised their concerns to the government of India and the government of Assam. Based on the wishes of the Mizo Union, the Assam government passed an order, leading to the abolition of chieftainship in Mizo society. The Mizo Union was exhilarated and full of joy. The frustrations of the people over the tyrannical rule came to an end."^{xiii}

With the new decree made by the Assam government, the institution of Chieftainship came to an end. Each village elected a Village council to undertake governance and administration at the local level. In the elections for the Village Council, majority of the chosen people were all members of the Mizo Union.^{xiv} With the overwhelming details and facts on the Mizo Union and the corresponding backdrop entailed within the novel, one can assume that the writer has channeled all historical facts in his writing. The incorporation of the transcending political historical details within this novel appears to be reflective of the events that had transpired in Mizo society. These details more or less falls in line with the Mizo political history recorded by various historians along with the anecdotes which have been time and again shared by the many remaining survivors of this era (The insight from the survivors have been expressed/made known through various public outlets which are in oral form expressed during various occasions ranging from public speeches, informal and religious gatherings).

Nunna Kawng Thuampuih and Rambuai:

The author of the book, *Nunna Kawng Thuampuih* is KC Lalvunga, who used the pseudonym Zikpuii Pa in his writings. His work, *Nunna Kawng Thuampuih* written in 1989 offers an elaborate backdrop into the hardships and turmoil prevailing in society with the advent of the Mizo National Front (MNF) Movement. The MNF Movement (1966-1986) was the era of grave social and

political turmoil in Mizoram. Many historians termed this period as ‘the era of insurgency’ in Mizoram. The MNF Movement, referred to as *rambuai* by Mizo writers was the phase when the MNF demanded independence for the Mizo people. Large and small scale attacks were undertaken by both the Government of India and the MNF. In the process, many innocent people lost their lives. Entire villages suffered grave losses. There was instability and fear in the minds of many Mizo people. The MNF Movement ended with the signing of the historic Peace Accord in 1986. This novel is believed to have been written by the author based on his personal experiences along with the experiences of those close to him. The sufferings of the people under the hands of the British Indian army men, the administrative set up and undertakings of the government, the true impact of *rambuai*^{xv} on the lives of the people along with the church based, family based and personal perspectives is deeply depicted throughout his writing.

The start or advent of the period of *rambuai (insurgency)* was depicted by Zikpui Pa. “The MNF was on a role. They were able to bring the Aizawl treasury under their domain...the period of insurgency commenced in Mizoram. With the start of the insurgency era, the capital Aizawl and all the surrounding areas became the platform for armed rebellion... the Mizo army and Assam Rifles started firing shots at each other and the Assam Rifles slowly started retreating towards their safe haven.”^{xvi} In chapter 5 of the novel the author mentions, “the capital Aizawl was reclaimed and the central area, Bara Bazar

was left in flames. The land and possession of many rich Mizo businessmen were seized... the army men abused the Mizo women where children, mothers and young girls were not spared...”^{xvii}

Aizawl Treasury was the only place that was clearly specified by Zikpui Pa. Zoramthanga’s recording on the advent of insurgency movement mentions, “the insurgency commenced on the night of 28th February when the Mizo National Army had gathered, were on a line of command but accidentally triggered their grenades, leading to the advent of the insurgency at a time earlier than intended. On 2nd March, the Assam Rifles and police on patrol were ambushed. On the 3rd of March 1966, during night time the firings started in Aizawl city... on the 5th of March 1966; jet fighters started bombing possible areas where the Mizo fighters (the insurgents) may have stationed themselves from 10am onwards.”^{xviii} C. Herman made a continuation of the above extracts, “The declaration of Mizoram’s Independence by the MNF on the night of 1st March 1966 was over the All India Radio, Gauhati Station and the rebellion of the MNF from the government of India saw the entry of security forces. The Indian governments send the central security forces on a mission, a mission to free the civilians of Mizoram from the control of the Mizo rebels.”^{xix}

Recordings on the attack carried out on the army convoy on the 7th of May between Zanolawn and Serkhan can also be found in *Nunna Kawng Thumpuiah*. There is mention of a particular incident. At around 3 pm, when the characters in the

novel were on their journey towards Zanlawn, upon crossing Khankhawn the MNF ambushed their convoy and started firing the British Indian army. The army had better weapons and were abundant in number but the Mizo side were not to be easily intimidated. Close to 30 people were killed in this incident.^{xx} This small incident mentioned in the novel is actually a very crucial historical fact in Mizo history.

The mention of the declaration made by the major General in *Nunna Kawng Thuampuih*, “whosoever rapes or commits a sexual offence against any Mizo women, irrespective of their rank will be brought under the summary court”^{xxi} but the further mention of the lack or sheer absence of any actions taken against the accused by the writer is another eye opener. Also, the writer clearly delimited the contradictory role of the so-called protectors of the civilians, who were in reality the actual culprits who had caused great sufferings on the women. The portrayal of the devious actions of the army to a great extent is reflective of the actual state of affairs that were happening in the Mizo society during this period of time.

In *Rambuai Literature*, one can find recordings where in places of warzone or rebellion one could rarely locate incidents where atrocities have been committed on women or children by the army men as they were always shielded by the superiors and higher authority.^{xxii} This further validated the nature of injustice and sufferings that were faced by the Mizo women and children.

In *Nunna Kawng Thuampuih*, there is a mention of a series of encounters where

women were kept at a certain place and were being attacked by the army men on a nightly basis. Some of these women screamed for help, some tried to fight off the attacks.^{xxiii} Even if majority of such incidents could not be verified, the volume of human emotions and sufferings included in them cannot be disregarded as they appear to be true reflections and glimpses into the happenings that were taking place along with the inhumane injustice that were being committed on Mizo women. The nature of sufferings handed to the Mizo women and the number of suicides committed out of sheer agony may not be recorded statistically but was a dominant part of the society.^{xxiv}

Conclusion:

Based on the comparative analysis of historical writings and novels depicted through the two selected Mizo novels, it is evident that certain parts/ elements of these novels hold the key towards unraveling more details in Mizo history. At the same time, while certain entries appear to be closely related to the truth, they may in actuality be nothing more than elaborated or false fabrications. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau clearly stated that while some details could indeed be made up or fabricated, it was not humanly possible to make up or create certain entities found in these novels based on one’s mere imagination.^{xxv}

The debate on the reliability of novels as a source for making an insight into the events and situations of the Mizo society has found many takers and refuters. Novels, being a part and parcel of literature have indeed opened up a flood gate for new

insights and understandings of historical events and many a times, act as supplementary agents for the existing history. At the same time, validating these works on the grounds of reliability is a daunting task. One should never forget that the creators have full freedom to entwine both real and false events in their writings. The early writers did indeed incorporate major parts of their present experiences and observations in their writings, but questions raised on their validity and reliability are left unanswered. At the same time, based on the similarities with the recorded history along with the societal level occurrences deduced from these two novels, it is evident that many Mizo novels are indeed a source of historical writings which can prove instrumental towards encapsulating a deeper, micro level understanding of the past events that transpired in Mizoram.

End Notes

- ⁱHirst, K. Kris. "What is History? A Collection of Definitions." retrieved on 13th February, 2019 from <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-history-collection-of-definitions-171282>
- ⁱⁱ"History meaning". Cambridge Dictionary. retrieved on 13th February, 2019 from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/history>
- ⁱⁱⁱKhiangte, Lal Luangliana. (2005). *Thuhlaril*. CTBET: Aizawl, p.71

^{iv}The Mizo Union was the first political party in Mizoram which was established on the 6th of April, 1946.

^vMizo writer, KC Lalvunga used the pseudonym, *Zikpui Pa* in many of his writings.

^{vi}All direct quotations in the paper are translated works from the original novels, which were written in the vernacular language by the Mizo writers.

^{vii}Vanlalrawna, A. (2016). *Thanpuii Thlan*. Aizawl: Samaritan Printer, p.130

^{viii}The national front was a group or association that was driven by its aim of attaining independence for Lushai Hills.

^{ix}Vanlalrawna, A, op cit., p.151

^xIbid., p.148

^{xi}L.L.Peters was called "*Pu Peter*" by the Lushai people which when translated in English means "Mr.Peter" or "sir Peter".

^{xii}Vanlawma, R. (1989). *Ka Ram Leh Kei*. Aizawl: MC Lalrinthanga, p.210

^{xiii} Vanlalrawna, A, op cit., p.215

^{xiv}Ibid., p.215

^{xv}*Rambuai* is a Lushai term which refers to the period of armed rebellion or insurgency that occurred in Mizoram from 1966-1986.

^{xvi}Lalvunga, K. (1998). *Nunna Kawng Thuampuih*. Aizawl, p.69

^{xvii}Ibid., p.70

^{xviii}Zoramthanga. (2016). *Mizo Hnam Movement*. Aizawl: Dingdi Press, p.36

^{xix}Hermana, C. (2015). *Zoram Buai lai khan*. Aizawl: Synod Press, p.43

^{xx}Lalvunga, K. op cit., p.82

^{xxi}Ibid., p.106

^{xxii}C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, P. (2014). *Rambuai Literature*. Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, p.448

^{xxiii}Vanlawma, R, op cit., p.84

^{xxiv}C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, P., op cit., p.428

^{xxv}Ibid., p.86

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C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, P. (2014). *Rambuai Literature*. Lengchhawn Press: Aizawl.

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