

Intergenerational Values and Cultural Continuity in Mizo Folktales

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Abstract— This research aims to showcase the significant role of Mizo folktales in the passing down of cultural values and norms across generations. By examining a few Mizo folktales, this paper deliberately explains how themes of morality, justice, authority, and social obligation are embedded within the stories of these oral traditions. This research paper also examines the role of traditional institutions, in particular, the *zawlbuk* (bachelor's dormitory) as organised spaces for cultural learning. The findings indicate that Mizo folktales work as a refined educational tool that has prolonged its cultural identity, ethnicity, and continuation to provide ethical guidance from one generation to another among the Mizo community. The paper concludes by addressing how these traditions have been adapted to the contemporary digital world while retaining their significance in the preservation of Mizo cultural identity, despite the pressures of modernisation and globalisation in all spheres in today's time.

Keywords: Bachelor's dormitory, cultural values, cultural continuity, folktales, Mizo

I. INTRODUCTION

In cultures where a script is not present and writing systems were developed recently, oral storytelling has been historically the primary means of preserving and sharing cultural knowledge. Lalengkimi (2018) mentioned that societies can be studied through the proverbs and folktales created and transmitted within them. The folk stories carried essential information about history, lineages, customs, laws, and a collective wisdom of the society across generations. Pachau (2023) also noted that traditional Mizo society depends on oral tradition to transfer knowledge and culture across generations. According to the Mizo folktale *savun lehkhah* (Thanmawia, 2018), the Mizos once had some form of writing inscribed on animal skin that was lost and carried away by a dog and eaten, a symbolic explanation of how the community relied on an oral tradition until the arrival of the Christian missionaries of Wales. Oral traditions have been especially significant and treasured; as a result, folktales occupy a central place in Mizo ethnic identity, reflecting the community's moral framework, social values, and belief system rather than serving as mere art or amusement. Through the continuous process of practising this oral tradition, the Mizos have safeguarded their collective memory, preserved culture and ultimately passed down indigenous cultural ways of living across generations. Mizo folktales may be broadly classified into different categories. Their themes and motifs are not always similar, but in any case, each story tends to have dominant features that allow categorising it into known similar types of tales (Prajapati & Hrahsel, 2019).

Mizo folktales such as *Liandova* and *Tuaisiala*, *Mauruangi*, and *Nahaia pretended death* have been purposively selected due to their cultural prominence and ethical richness. These stories are also framed within a conventional social institution, like the bachelor's dormitory which is locally called *zawlbuk*, with an aim to learn more about the cultural setting in which storytelling served as a form of moral guidance. The secondary sources assisted in the interpretation of the empirical data. The research is

qualitative rather than a mere generalisation of statistics since it has considered the cultural meaning. This paper will describe and show a subtle comprehension of how Mizo folktales induced the latent transmission of values and culture across generations through social and cultural anthropology approaches.

I.I. DISCUSSION

The discussion begins initially by highlighting the Mizo traditional institution, like *zawlbuk*, that played an important role in the process of cultural transmission. It also identifies the core values like *tlawmngaihna* which is embedded in selected Mizo oral traditions. The paper then considers some of the selected folktales for studies and subsequently analyses the key intergenerational values like selfless service, respect for the aged and social justice. Lastly, it covers the modern way of adaptation of folktales and emphasises the continued relevance of folktales in the formation of the modern Mizo identity.

II. THE ZAWLBUK: AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

The exact date and time marking the origin of the *zawlbuk* institution remain unknown in literature and among the Mizos. However, a historical understanding of its initial development is derived from accounts associated with the settlement of seven thousand household (*sangsarih*) in a city name *Selesih* around 1740-1750 A.D. which people commonly called *Selesih sangsarih* that is located in the eastern part of Mizoram. Seven chiefs are said to have come together to construct seven *zawlbuk*. In its original form, the institution was known as 'zalbuk', a term derived from 'zal', meaning 'sleep' or 'lie down', and 'buk', meaning 'hut'. Over time, the term gradually evolved into "zawlbuk" (Lalthangliana, 2023). In a traditional Mizo society, the process of cultural transmission was officially institutionalised in the *zawlbuk*. Mostly positioned at the centre of the village, often nearby to the chief's residence, the *zawlbuk* occupied a significant place in the social organisation of the community. It not only served as a second home to the single men but also was a shaping area where young Mizo males were inculcated into being disciplined, competent, and responsible members of the said society. Within the *zawlbuk*, the male youths acquired essential survival and generational wisdom and occupational skills such as hunting, agriculture, construction, and a defence mechanism. More prominently, it was in this setting that the village elders transmitted folktales, myths, and historical narratives through oral voices, ensuring the continuity of the cultural knowledge across generations. The institution also served as a central role for spreading traditional moral instruction, emphasising virtues such as honesty, diligence, bravery, boldness, obedience to authority and the chiefs. Also, the *zawlbuk* was a leadership training institution at such a young age for communal decision-making and village security, which strengthened a collective responsibility and social communal harmony. As the colonial administration became involved, and a modern education was introduced, the *zawlbuk* institution became weaker over time, leading to a tremendous change in the old systems of cultural transmission between generations. Its disappearance marked a shift in moral and cultural education from a communal institution to formal structures such as schools, colleges, universities, and churches.

II.I. TLAWMNGAIHNA: THE CENTRAL MORAL PRINCIPLE OF MIZO SOCIETY

Tlawmngaihna represents one of the most distinctive and deeply rooted moral ideologies and values within the Mizo culture. Although it has no precise equivalent in the English language, it is commonly associated with ideas of altruism, service, and self-sacrifice towards others filled with moral courage. This moral value urges a person to prioritise the good of the community over his or her own interest and behave humbly, generously, and courageously and serve others more than serving themselves. Instead of being an abstract ideal in the shape of an ideology and prestige, *tlawmngaihna* displays itself in the form of expressive actions, which ultimately evidences being responsible to the members of the community. The value of *tlawmngaihna* used to be expressed historically by practices like the *zualko* system, where the volunteers made a risky journey to deliver a life-saving message to people, and by collective efforts like helping the ailing person or engaging in communal

work that is present in the society. In the Mizo folktales, characters which reflect these moral values are common and offer a model of ethical behaviour to the audience, particularly to the young generation. The moral imperative requires one to be willing to serve others at the expense of inconvenience, thus constituting the moral foundation of conventional Mizo society.

II.II. REVERENCE FOR ELDERS

Respect for elders, locally known as *aia upa zahna*, constitutes another essential component of the Mizo moral system and value. This value system is commonly regarded as an indicator of civilised behaviour and a particular characteristic of a traditional Mizo society. The elders are considered to be the carriers of the cultural knowledge and moral authority; their respect is taken as one of the primary keys to preserving the social order and peaceful relations among the generations in the long term. This value is always echoed in the Mizo folktales in which the elders are portrayed as the origin of knowledge, wisdom, and the highest moral principles.

II.III. COMMUNAL HARMONY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Collective living in harmony and mutual dependency are prominently reflected in Mizo folklore. The three stories that are selected in this paper showcase the importance of cooperation, shared responsibility, and communal unity. The system of storytelling was in itself a united process that later reinforced the values and belonging to the Mizo community. The Mizo folktales are also a source of moral guidance that instils a sense of justice and responsibility in the traditional Mizo community in addition to fostering harmony. One of the themes that are repeated in the stories is that moral values are always definite; the wrong persons are punished according to the type of punishment they deserve, and the right people are rewarded so that they can be respected in the society. This is a moral structure that is typically characterised by the triumph of righteousness over wickedness and is highly found in Mizo folktales. Through the assistance of these tales, the listeners and the readers are instructed in some fundamental principles of fairness, responsibility, justice, authority and power.

II.IV. CASE STUDIES: INTERPRETING VALUES IN PROMINENT MIZO FOLKTALES

To examine how cultural ideals are translated from abstract principles into lived moral guidance, it is necessary to study their narrative within an individual folktale. Folktales such as *Liandova* and *Tuaisiala*, *Mauruangi*, and the stories of *Nahaia's pretended death* are among the most widely known in Mizo folklore, and they provide valuable examples of how intergenerational values are conveyed through storytelling.

II.V. LIANDOVA AND TUAISIALA: SELF-SACRIFICE, ENDURANCE, AND MORAL TRIUMPH

The story of *Liandova* and *Tuaisiala* exemplifies a classical Mizo narrative of life mystery and transformation from poverty to wealth. It recounts the lives of two orphaned brothers who suffer from severe deprivation and social exclusion. In spite of hunger and hardship, both the brothers consistently demonstrate compassion, generosity, deep mutual understanding and a love for each other. *Liandova*, who is the elder sibling, took up the responsibility of providing food and necessities for his brother. This emotionally compelling tale emphasises perseverance in adversity, the importance of taking up responsibility, sacrificial love, prioritising others, and the belief that sincere goodness is always rewarded by nature. It imparts to a younger audience that ethical character holds greater value than just a mere material prosperity and also moral values must be maintained even in the harshest circumstances. One fine day, a neighbouring chief called *Lersia* disguises himself as a leper and visits their village. Other people in the society do not pay any heed towards a dirty man who is wrapped in rags, but the brothers show hospitality and welcome him in their home. The visitor then revealed himself later and invited the two brothers to his village, where he was a chief. Chief *Lersia* gave them one living mithun from his herd as a reward for their hospitality (Lalthangliana, 2005). Despite their poverty, the brothers show a profound reverence towards the man; they pity him as a fellow human being and as an elder deserving of dignity. Their story, which is based on humility and moral obligation brings achievements in the later stage of their lives. Such a considerate and dignified treatment of the older generation in the Mizo community is not an accident but rather a core cultural value and source of pride, a system of values instilled in the people.

II.VI. MAURUANGI: FEMININE VIRTUE AND THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

Mauruangi could be depicted as Cinderella as she suffers at the hands of her cruel stepmother. She also faces jealousy from her stepsister and endures complete negligence from her father (Pachau, 2014). *Mauruangi's* father killed her biological mother and remarried a neighbour who would mistreat and starve her and bring never-ending suffering to her life. The late mother reincarnated into a catfish and later appeared in a stream, tenderly feeding and comforting her very own daughter despite her new physical form. When the stepmother discovered this, she summoned the villagers to capture the fish. Though *Mauruangi* tried to help her fish-mother escape, the villagers caught and killed her. *Mauruangi* collected her mother's bones and buried her heart in a white anthill from which a semal tree (*phunchawng* tree) grew. The narrative continues with the stepmother's cruelty, subsequently leading to *Mauruangi's* death. She is brought back to life by a serow known locally as *saza*, who appears purely in an animal form, unlike a mythical being. In gratitude, *Mauruangi* cares for the serow's young one. "A serow, an animal, is given human characteristics of love and sympathy whereby the human returns the good deed by taking care of his child" (Ralte, 2023). *Mauruangi* occupies a central place in the Mizo oral tradition as an ideal representation of womanhood and feminism. Despite enduring hunger, excessive labour, and emotional suffering, *Mauruangi* maintains qualities such as humility, diligence, and kindness. Although her virtues eventually lead to marriage with a chief at some point in her life, her trials do not immediately end; justice is achieved only after she overcomes her malicious stepsister and regains her rightful place. The story serves a number of didactic purposes: it reinforces socially desirable feminine qualities, including perseverance, obedience, and domestic efficiency, but demonstrates how women who depend on others suffer and how cruelty is punished and righteousness is rewarded as a moral lesson.

II.VII. NAHAIA PRETENDED DEATH: THE TRICKSTER FIGURE AS A VEHICLE OF MORAL INSTRUCTION

In the Mizo folktale *Nahaia's pretended death*, *Nahaia* was portrayed as a cunning and at times malevolent figure. One well-known tale illustrating *Nahaia's* trickster character recounts how he feigned his own death in order to discover who genuinely cared for him. According to the story, *Nahaia* deliberately lay down on a jhum (shifting cultivation) path, pretending to be a lifeless person. And as individuals who passed by beheld him there and thought him dead, nobody halted but made complaints and refused to offer assistance. *Chhubura*, who is usually referred to as being closely related to *Nahaia* in the oral traditions, arrived at the scene later. He was convinced that *Nahaia* was dead indeed, and he was overwhelmed by grief and sympathy and took the body to his home on his back. After reaching the house, *Nahaia* rose up and disclosed his deception of acting like a dead person. He announced later by saying that *Chhubura* was his one and only true friend (Khangte, 2023). The story highlights the Mizo moral value of *tlawmngaihna*, the unwritten rule of being selfless, compassionate, and willing to assist others without any reciprocation. This cultural ideal is eventually expressed through *Chhubura* in his act of caring. *Chhubura* is one of the most vibrant yet multi-dimensional representations of folk characters and the most outstanding characters of Mizo folktales. Being a trickster, he is a combination of apparently conflicting traits, being stupid and yet demonstrating an intelligence that laymen are unable to grasp at times and being disruptive and yet wise. His stories, filled with continuous humorous, funny episodes and clever deceptions, are entertaining on the surface but also convey a deeper, wiser meaning. This story teaches a lot regarding trust, integrity and loyalty.

Folktales and their significance in fostering cultural awareness, moral knowledge, and social accountability among learners have emerged as an issue of concern among learning institutions. When these tales are taught formally, children and young people learn not only about the rich cultural heritage of the Mizo people but also a moral lesson that is implicit in the tales themselves. It is also practised to reinforce the flow of knowledge across generations in such a way that the principles, values, and worldviews that are transmitted through folktales do not become irrelevant in this fast-changing or evolving society. Implementing digital technology and media communication in the 21st century has been an effective tool for maintaining Mizo folklore and data storage. Digital storytelling may also be viewed as the modern version of the ancient storytelling tradition that is augmented by digital photographs and videos, as well as audio to tell the stories (Colney, 2023). The affordability

presented by online libraries, podcasts, and all the audio-visual documents presently at their disposal is making a classical narrative far more reachable; the world is able to read it through the aid of the internet and artificial intelligence, and the new generations can read the narratives that otherwise may not have survived in any form of transmission. The social media and community websites also extend beyond reaching the local audiences and connecting the Mizos in the communities in the diaspora to their cultural heritage and enabling the global audience to see the richness of Mizo oral heritage.

III. CONCLUSION

Mizo folktales are a foundation to the community's cultural heritage, serving as a primary means of passing down moral values, social principles, and collective memory and identity across generations. In addition to being entertainment, the stories serve as a learning source, instilling some moral message like *tlawmngaihna* (selflessness and sacrifice to others), respect towards the older ones, and social justice. Traditional institutions like the *zawlbuk* played a significant role in enhancing this transmission by connecting the elders and the young through storytelling. Tales such as *Liandova* and *Tuaisiala*, *Mauruangi*, and *Nahaia pretended death* demonstrate the skilful combination of moral teachings into emotionally engaging narratives, fostering both individual character development and a shared cultural memory. Today, urbanisation, industrialisation, and global media have changed traditional oral practices, and communal institutions have declined rapidly. However, preservation continues through written records, educational incorporation, and digital media, ensuring that Mizo folktales remain relevant while nurturing cultural identities at the same time, providing ethical guidance in a modern 21st-century context.

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