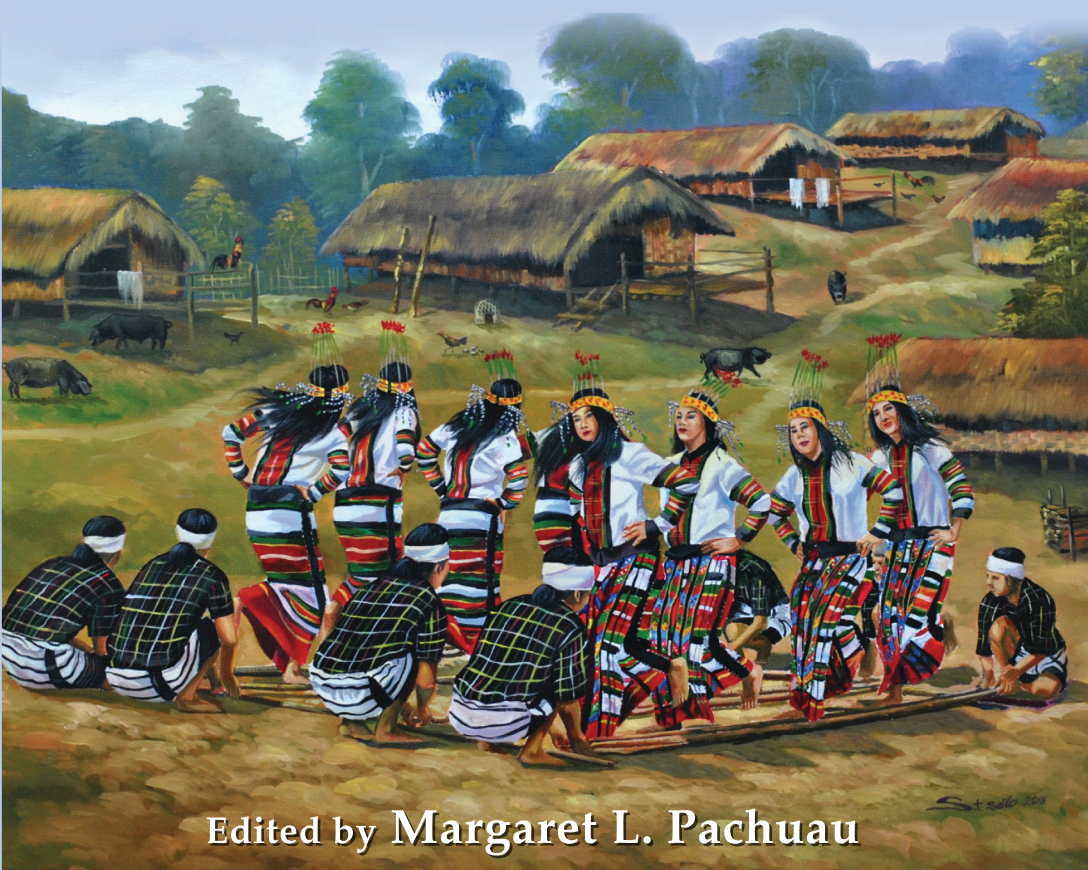


# NEGOTIATING CULTURE

## Writings from Mizoram



Edited by Margaret L. Pachuau

B L O O M S B U R Y

# Negotiating Culture



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*Writings from Mizoram*

Edited by  
Margaret L. Pachuau

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NEW DELHI • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • SYDNEY



BLOOMSBURY INDIA  
Bloomsbury Publishing India Pvt. Ltd  
Second Floor, LSC Building No. 4, DDA Complex, Pocket C – 6 & 7,  
Vasant Kunj, New Delhi, 110070

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First published in India 2023  
This edition published 2023

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ISBN:HB:978-93-56400-17-7;eBook:978-93-56400-19-1;ePdf:978-93-56400-21-4

Typeset in Minion pro by Manipal Technologies Limited

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# Contents

<i>Foreword</i> by G.J.V. Prasad	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction by <i>Margaret L. Pachuau</i>	1
<b>Part I: Boundaries and Narratives</b>	
1. Remembering <i>Rambuai</i> : Trauma, Memory and Narrative by <i>C. Lalrinfeli</i>	15
2. Territoriality: Its Concept and Relevance in the Mizo Worldview by <i>Catherine Laldinpuii Fanai</i>	31
3. Colonial Encounters: Traces of Empire in Mizo Fiction by <i>Hannah Lalhlanpuii</i>	54
<b>Part II: Systems, Ethos and Perspective</b>	
4. Exploring the Tribal Justice System in Mizo Folk Tales by <i>Lalrinsangi Nghinglova</i>	75
5. Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Mizo Society by <i>Z.D. Lalmangaihzauva</i>	92
6. Satire and the Mizo: Narrating the Zephyr Drama Club by <i>Immanuel Lalramenkima</i>	109
7. Performing Madness: Laltheri's Narrative by <i>Lydia Lalduhawmi</i>	129
<b>Part III: Lores and Culture</b>	
8. Narrating Mizo Literature for Children by <i>Z.D. Lalmangaihi</i>	149
9. Mizo Folklore as a Pedagogic Device by <i>Judy Lalpawmawii Khiangte</i>	167

10. Telling Our Stories: Reflecting upon Oral Narratives in Mizo 183  
by *Margaret L. Pachuau*
11. Grotesque Aesthetics in 'Hlawndawhthanga' 204  
by *Hmingsangzuali*

#### **Part IV: Home and Identity**

12. Conceptualising Cultural Identity and Hybridisation in  
Mizo Magazines 225  
by *L. V. Lalrintluangi*
13. Home, Roots and Ethnic Identity: Portrayal of the Natural  
Picturesque in Mizo Poetry 242  
by *Lalthansangi Ralte*
14. Writing the Self: Voices of Young Mizo Women 257  
by *Lalsangliani Ralte*

*About the Editor and Contributors* 275

*Index* 281

## Foreword

This is an important book, one that looks at a specific state of India's Northeast and gives us nuanced readings of its cultural history through readings of its literature, both oral and written. *Negotiating Culture: Writings from Mizoram* is organised in four parts and consists of 14 chapters that take for examination literature written in both Mizo and English.

In the first part of the book, understandably on 'Boundaries and Narratives', we have chapters on the Mizo struggle (1966–1986), the concept of territoriality and the impact of colonialism and Christianity. We know that Mizoram went through very troubled times after Indian Independence, that the Mizo sense of territoriality found new consolidation and also that perhaps it is one of the states that felt the greatest impact of Christianity during the colonial period and is a very Christian state now (and this, in turn, impacts the value systems espoused by the Mizos). The analyses of various narratives give us interesting insights into these issues, including how divergent Mizo literary works are in their representation of colonialism from other parts of the postcolonial world.

In the second part, 'Systems, Ethos and Perspective', the book attempts to explore the tribal world order—its system of justice and patriarchal structure—and the challenges posed to this order by theatre and performance. Again, these include nuanced, clear-eyed and close readings of various texts.

The third part, 'Lores and Culture', examines children's literature (looking at multimedia literature as a new form of orality) to see how a certain worldview is transmitted (and subverted) and shows how folk literature was used to teach Mizo values and impart information in precolonial times and how oral narratives can help reconstruct and offer more complex readings of precolonial history.

This part also shows us how it is in our readings of oral narratives that their significance lies and how new approaches can broaden our understanding of the human and the nonhuman, perhaps even the post-human.

‘Home and Identity’, the fourth part of the book, looks at how identity is constructed. The notion of Mizo Christianity is established through print culture with the advent of magazines, and this hybrid identity is developed over years; this development can be seen in the history of poetry as well, and one can see the change in aesthetics. This part ends with a reading of young women writers and the challenge they pose to traditional practices and understanding.

One must understand the trajectories of different peoples of India—their histories, their struggles, their understanding, their value system, their worldview and their desires and ambitions to even begin to speak of India. It is only if we speak of individual states of the Northeast in a nuanced manner that we can begin to speak of the region, understand it even if partially and see how we can all come together in various spaces and conceptualisations. This book is a significant step in that direction, a book that will help in the understanding not just of the literature of a state but of a people, of a state.

**G.J.V. Prasad**

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## Acknowledgements

As always, I would like to render gratitude to God, whose blessings have helped make this book happen. I convey my heartfelt appreciation to Professor G.J.V. Prasad, who so graciously wrote the foreword. I thank my fellow contributors for their patience, commitment and concerted effort in realising the creation of this book.



# Introduction

Negotiating the aspect of identity has been a challenging yet integral requisite within the discipline of literature from Mizoram, a land that is located in Northeastern India. The term Mizoram has been derived from two words, namely ‘Mizo’, which is the term used to address the native inhabitants, and ‘Ram’, which, in the Mizo language, means land. Thus, Mizoram literally means land of the Mizos. The idea of putting together an anthology of this nature came about largely due to a felt need which has often been echoed at major academic conferences and within the domains of classrooms as well: that despite texts having been published from and about the region, a huge vacuum persists because writings from the domain of literature from academia within the state have yet to be perspicuously compiled. Debates concerning writings about the region have often been raised, especially in terms of the fact that the veritable issue of indigeneity that lay within such realms required a more profound address.

In what could perhaps be deemed as a concrete response to these contestations, this book offers perspective, with insights from literary history, memory studies and cultural studies, and attempts to situate the ethos related to identity and Mizo located within the broad paradigm ranging from orality to writing. Each contributor has reflected upon the effects of and responses to identity and culture studies within the ambit of Mizo literary narratives. The chapters address issues that contextualise the development of subaltern and postcolonial studies and the quest for identity within the Mizo perspective. Mizos first began to settle in present-day Mizoram in the 16th century, migrating in multiple waves from South East Asia, which lasted through the 18th century. Currently, the Mizos are protected under the Indian Constitution as Scheduled Tribe, and their land became part of British India in 1895. Subsequently,



the northern and southern Mizo Hills became the Lushai Hills with Aizawl as their headquarters. In 1971, the Mizo Hills gained the status of a union territory (which became Mizoram in 1972), and following the Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986 between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front (MNF), Mizoram was declared a full-fledged state of India in 1987.

Tracing the concern with identity and interlinking it to popular literature and individualism, the chapters identify what has been deemed as topics that are imperative in terms of being significantly distinct to negotiate both individual and collective identities of the Mizo. Within the ambit of the cultural sensibility, it has also been largely accepted that the need of the hour is to contextualise within a broader framework developments within Mizo intellectual writing to display aspects that relate to the continuing force in the relationship between literature and culture studies. The portrayal of how colonial struggles have continued to contribute to the postcolonial discourse by producing fundamental ideas about the relationship between non-Western and Western cultures has been emphasised, even as there has been a predominant concern for the suppressed cultural and literary history of the Mizos. The chapters have amply underlined key insights and demonstrate how they may be employed to understand contemporary Mizo ethos from those who inhabit what is often still deemed as the 'periphery'.

The volume has been divided into four parts: (i) Boundaries and Narratives (ii) Systems, Ethos and Perspective (iii) Lores and Culture (iv) Home and Identity. Each of the contributors has expressed themselves in distinctive voices while the underlying perspective that runs through the chapters is that the defining perception regarding Mizo identity lies in its complex and dynamic character.

In the first part, entitled 'Boundaries and Narratives', C. Lalrinfeli's 'Remembering *Rambuui*: Trauma, Memory and Narrative' delves into how the trauma of the *rambuui* years in Mizoram forges a collective memory out of its remembrance. In so doing, nonfiction works, such

as *Rambuai Literature* (2014) authored by C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau and Malsawmi Jacob's *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015), have been taken into account. Significantly, *Zorami: A Redemption Song* and *Rambuai Literature* document the devastating and chaotic period of Mizo history while encapsulating the MNF armed rebellion against the Indian Army, which started in 1966 and ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986, against the Indian Army. It has brought out the significance of collective memory and the necessity of articulating a traumatic past, which may eventually bring about a healing process. *Rambuai* has become the definitive Mizo expression to denote those troubled times of Mizoram's history. It began on 1 March 1966 with the MNF's armed struggle for 'Mizo independence' and ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord on 30 June 1986. In 1959, the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) was initiated in response to the famine that resulted from Mautam. The chapter has elaborated upon how the memory of the *rambuai* years has been represented and reproduced in narrative form as it is an integral aspect of dealing with the traumatic past. However, the memory, which is deeply embedded in public conscience, can be placed within an ambivalent framework of remembrance as it is not a steady replication of the same memories but a contested, contrasting and divergent process of selective memories among different groups.

The Mizos' relationship with land was not one of possession but centred on the thoughtful utilisation of the resources that it provided. In 'Territoriality: Its Concept and Relevance in the Mizo Worldview', Catherine Laldinpuii Fanai elucidates the relevance of territoriality in the Mizo worldview. She traces the evolution of the concept of territoriality from precolonial times to the present and the historical factors that have influenced these changes. The chapter establishes the significance of the peripatetic way of life led by the Mizos in precolonial times due to the practice of shifting cultivation, which had resulted in the never-ending search for fertile and virgin lands and necessitated westward migration of the people,

as did the threat from other tribes from the east. Therefore, the Mizo's concept of 'territory' or 'territoriality' was not a permanent one but pertained only to the land that was being utilised at present. Although 'territory' was not a permanent concept, the Mizos were very territorial over the area that they were utilising. This is evident in the claim of right to the land and its resources by the chief and in the great care they took to set up a new village—from the selection of a location to the planning and construction of the village itself and then to the distribution of arable land among the residents of the village. The chapter argues that the sense of territoriality that it stimulated was bound to be more intense, while inspiring a deep love and dedication for the development of the land and a yearning for it when in another land.

The progress and development of Mizo fiction, particularly the representation of English missionaries in fictional works by Mizo writers, are recurring phenomena. In the chapter, 'Colonial Encounters: Traces of Empire in Mizo Fiction', Hannah Lalhlanpuui debates the ever-looming question of colonialism within the Mizo context, which, she asserts, is significantly marked by a strong religious dynamic and informs the Mizo postcolonial discourse to a large extent. The chapter traces the roots of Mizo literature as a genre that is intrinsically connected to Christianity. It looks at the evangelical mission of English missionaries as part of the larger colonial project. The coming of Christianity in Mizoram ushered in developments in almost every aspect of Mizo cultural life. The changes brought about by the evangelical mission were visible not just in the religious sphere but in secular education as well. Hence, the essay argues that education in the Mizo context has its root in the mission work, which further informed the development of Mizo literature. Early Mizo fiction dealing with colonial encounters rarely views colonialism as a haunting past that traumatised the present, which is the common pattern in other postcolonial literature. Within this context, the writer explores how the character of the 'white man'

is being represented in Mizo fictional writings. It further argues that the overriding impact of Christian doctrines and the supremacy of the church largely inform the content and subject matter of Mizo fiction.

In the second part, entitled 'Systems, Ethos and Perspective', Lalrinsangi Nghinglova delves into the topic of Mizo folk tales in the legal context. Her chapter, 'Exploring the Tribal Justice System in Mizo Folk Tales', incorporates the concept of ethnological jurisprudence to come to a better understanding of Mizo customs and their legal connotations as reflected in the tales. Ethnological jurisprudence alludes that our perception of what is right or wrong is influenced by the generation we live in, and in like manner, a tribe's system of justice is inextricably linked to its cultural values. Customary laws, for instance, are an essential part of tribal jurisprudence, and most tribes in India's Northeast, including the Mizos, attach immense importance to them. Customary laws are age-old codes of conduct, which are obligatory and sanctioned by the collective conscience of society. In precolonial Mizo society, each village was self-sufficient, self-governed and well contained within its territories. Before the advent of the British in 1891 and their subsequent interference in the internal administration, the Mizos led a simple life and were accountable to their village chiefs. The chief's position was that of a benevolent ruler who looked after the villagers as his children. Law is said to have its origin in the day-to-day interactions of people and is associated with the 'geist' of the people obeying it. Customs, according to the historical school of law, are the true source of law and are derived from the common consciousness of the people. Before the law courts came into existence, the Mizos were governed by their customs and traditions. Their perception of right and wrong and their notion of crime and punishment were moulded by the common consciousness of the people.

Based on reflections within the realm of literary representations, Z.D. Lalmangaihzaava, in 'Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in

Mizo Society', elucidates aspects that are related to patriarchy and gender inequality in Mizo society. In examining its extent, the chapter considers the advent of Christianity among the Mizos as a pivotal point in Mizo history, one that has brought about a paradigm shift in almost all walks of life. Hence, this chapter attempts a study of select Mizo literature from two eras: those produced before the advent of colonial modernity and Christianity and those produced after. This has been done to probe deeper into the generalised notion of Christianity and colonial modernity as a redemptive force that frees Mizo women from the shackles of patriarchy. He lucidly conveys within the framework of the essay that Christianity did not necessarily bring about an end to gender inequality; rather, it led to the emancipation of women to a certain extent. It essentially attempts to highlight that the gender equation in Mizo society did witness some changes with the advent of Christianity, but it also argues and locates how the paradigm shift brought about by the new religion fails to uproot many aspects of gender inequality inherent within Mizo society.

Mizoram's complex journey from being a largely unrecognised oral-based community prior to the British colonial rule to becoming a modernised Christian community under the British administrative rule and the extensive outreach of the white missionaries in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century have been enigmatic. Immanuel Lalramenkima, in 'Satire and the Mizo: Narrating the Zephyr Drama Club', explores the challenges and issues of Mizo society, which is overwhelmed by rampant corruption, materialism, alcoholism, drugs, HIV and AIDS. These issues have been touted as important signages that reflect the deteriorating conditions of social and moral values by multiple voices in the Mizo intellectual space. In the context of contemporary Mizo society, the Aizawl-based Zephyr Drama Club's figurehead, H. Rotluanga—fondly known by many of his fans as Mapuia—talks about his interest in wanting to change society. He makes a mockery of individuals who

pretend to portray Christian morality and attempts of uphold Mizo values of *tlawmngaihna* through staged performances. The chapter emphasises that the drama club is capable of achieving all this while keeping the audience entertained, sometimes laughing at oneself and on other occasions at the prevalent vices and follies that are deeply embedded in the contemporary life and experiences of the general Mizo populace.

Lydia Lalduhawmi's succinct portrayal of Mizo women denotes that they are often voiceless and faceless in the account of historical Mizo society. Laltheri's voice is piercingly loud in 'Performing Madness: Laltheri's Narrative'. Laltheri, the daughter of a Mizo chief, fell in love with Chalthanga, who did not belong to a clan with a prestigious social standing. He was a commoner but she did not care for such pretentious segregation. Chalthanga was subsequently killed. Considering the times they lived in when Mizo women were not given any deference or outlet to raise their voices and opinions, Laltheri's performance of grief, which was outside the norm of normal Mizo women's behaviour, could be seen as madness. Laltheri's narrative stands as a living testimony of the image of the subversive madwoman against the restraints of patriarchal rule. The madness of Laltheri is a product conceived by the destruction that has been inflicted upon her by society.

In the third part of the book, entitled 'Lores and Culture', Z.D. Lalmangaihi's 'Narrating Mizo Literature for Children' stresses the gravity of locating children's literature in Mizo. One can gather that children's literature in Mizo has coherently aligned with the tradition and culture in which orality has always been dominant. She argues that the development of such literature bears strong ties with the church and has thus drawn significant parallels between childhood and colonialism. By drawing parallel between these two antithetical terms, the chapter subverts the structured understanding of childhood and the dislodged slavish understanding of childhood in the Mizo context. Orality is deeply rooted in the culture of the Mizos, and aside

from this, the chapter elucidates that the print and electronic media productions of children's literature are deemed as a secondary form of orality, thereby opening a new chapter regarding the nature of orality in the contemporary context. A posthumanist stance in the chapter also propels the readers to question the notion of subjectivity, the fluidity of 'being' and, most importantly, the implications of engaging with nonhuman subjects. A broader understanding of human identity has been made visible through the posthumanist reading of Mizo children's literature, which thereby revises the category of the human and the nonhuman, which creates the complexity of categorisation while subverting the perception of such narratives.

The concept of folklore as a means of imparting education to children has been an important cultural tradition of Mizo society. Judy Lalparmaui Khiangte has demonstrated in 'Mizo Folklore as a Pedagogic Device' that precolonial Mizos imparted knowledge to their youth through oral means and practices. While the adults taught the youth through their daily life chores and survival skills, little children were trained in values of social harmony and morals by the older generation through fabulous and varied tales. She contends that Mizo folk narratives are an important pedagogical device in precolonial Mizo society in terms of situating their identity and as a sociocultural phenomenon. While the tales may not always be didactic, the power hierarchy and power struggle that are inherently a part of the framework are the manifestations of early Mizo society. The cultural significance of these tales and the intellectual and emotional role that they exercise in enlightening the individual and the society are significant pedagogical methods that have been skilfully practised by early Mizo society.

Margaret L. Pachau, in 'Telling Our Stories: Reflecting upon Oral Narratives in Mizo', delves into precepts that are related to the concept of orality and the Mizos and also the significance of lores within the ambit of the same. Narratives that existed within precolonial domains were integral in shaping and formulating arenas that were pertinent

to Mizo identity. She explicates the belief that cultural narratives, especially oral, ultimately depend upon their social purpose, which is why in the past the same was handed down by oral tradition and written chronicles. The chapter illustrates that oral history is not necessarily an instrument for change. Nevertheless, orality certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of literature. Several folklores translated from the original Mizo have been narrated to convey and represent the nature of orality in Mizo culture.

Certain social realities that are pertinent in Mizo society in the form of aesthetic expressions have often informed one's perception regarding morality, human psychology and culture. Hmingsangzuali's narrative, 'Grotesque Aesthetics in "Hlawndawhthanga"', emphasises the aesthetics of grotesque theory to offer a more coherent understanding of human nature and the complexities of social functions in Mizo narratives. The select grotesque identities from the tale help to transform perceptions about human vices and limitations, and they serve as a cautionary message about these imperfections, which have been embodied as fearsome creatures disrupting the normative social order. The interpretation of Hlawndawhthanga is an aesthetic appreciation of a treasured Mizo folk tale. Its modern relevance in terms of its metaphorical symbolisms and thematic grotesque—where the creature is depicted as possessing a certain level of humanity as well as intense fear and animosity that surpasses his humanity—is being explored.

In the fourth part, entitled 'Home and Identity', L.V. Lalrintluangi, in 'Conceptualising Cultural Identity and Hybridisation in Mizo Magazines', analyses in select Mizo magazines how the identity of the people has been altered with time and by influences from different cultural spheres. She sheds light on the fact that magazines are part of history while telling the story of a particular time, not only by what is written on the pages but also by the inclusivity of the contributors. It also delves into the history of print in Mizo, while interlinking



it with the cultural, political and religious ethos of the people. The Mizos comprehend their identity as inextricably linked to religion, and the collective consciousness of the Mizos actively propagates a 'Mizo Christianity'. She concludes that it is a part of the historical process to understand the cultural identity of a people and affirms how language is united through print media as evidenced by the development of magazines. It is the recovery of these lesser-known printed documents, largely consumed and contributed by the people themselves, that is essential for the mapping of cultural production.

During these global multicultural times, a Mizo is often faced with the challenge of identifying oneself, and the essay argues how the landscape of beauty has been transformed into a landscape of sorrow. In the chapter 'Home, Roots and Ethnic Identity: Portrayal of the Natural Picturesque in Mizo Poetry', Lalthansangi Ralte narrates the fundamental precepts concerning Mizo poems written in English and some Mizo songs that have been translated into English from Mizo. She has brought to light the synonymous usage of the terms 'song' and 'poetry' by Mizo writers as a result of which the term 'verse' has been used in the title in order to include both the songs and poems written by Mizo writers. The Christian missionaries brought about progress and development in the land, especially after they created the Mizo alphabet. Over time, the Mizos were introduced to other races and cultures as well as people who had entered and taken roots in their land. Early writers like Vankhama, Sangliana and Rokunga, while writing about the beauty of their land, also wrote about the importance of preserving and protecting it from outsiders and from people who had exploited the land for their selfish gains. The traditions of the natives gradually changed, and the once merry and unified people have taken on the habits and characters of the 'better' people.

While at present it is far-fetched to assume that the Mizo woman is liberated from her struggles against dominant ideologies and norms, the act of writing about themselves and their experiences using words that are their own is in itself a form of resistance. Lalsangliani

Ralte, in 'Writing the Self: Voices of Young Mizo Women', offers an insight into the lives of Mizo women of the past as well as their traditions and customs. In traditional Mizo community, which was patriarchal, women played subsidiary roles in family and public life. Mizo customary laws did not do much to empower women and protect their interests as they were male-biased. She asserts that in the contemporary set-up, the contribution of Mizo women in the workforce and public life can no longer be neglected as they are also becoming increasingly vocal about their experiences and views. Highlighting Mizo women who have, in their poems, addressed different challenges, she focuses on authority and patriarchal norms.

The essays are relevant to the notion of culture and they situate critical insights and developments. They are thoughtful and provoking, and it is a hope that our readers will appreciate the myriad dimensions presented across the text while negotiating culture from Mizoram.



**Part I**

**Boundaries and Narratives**



## Remembering *Rambuai*: Trauma, Memory and Narrative

C. Lalrinfeli

This chapter attempts to bring forth how the cultural trauma of the *rambuai* years in Mizoram forges a collective memory out of its remembrance. In so doing, *Rambuai Literature* (2014), authored by C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, and Malsawmi Jacob's *Zorami: A Redemption Song* (2015) will be taken into account. The selected fiction and nonfiction works have documented the devastating and chaotic period of Mizo history while encapsulating the Mizo National Front (MNF) armed rebellion against the Indian Army (the predominant military force). This armed rebellion started in 1966 and ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986. The two texts have been selected for study as they highlight the sufferings of the Mizos at the hands of not only the military force but also the MNF and have depicted that perpetrators of the suffering were not just the military but also their fellow Mizos. This chapter shall bring out the significance of collective memory and the necessity of articulating the cultural trauma, which may eventually bring about the healing process. In analysing the traumatic period of *rambuai*, theories on cultural trauma and narratives of this period have been incorporated, and they have focused upon the rapes and internal conflicts that remain an inherent aspect in the social memory of the Mizos.

## Reflections on *Rambuai* Years

The word *rambuai* means troubled land or disturbed land. *Rambuai* has become the definitive expression of the Mizos to denote the troubled times or the disturbed period of Mizoram's history. It began on 1 March 1966 with the MNF and its armed struggle for 'Mizo independence' and ended with the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord on 30 June 1986. The formation of the MNF is rooted in 1959 when the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) was established in response to the famine that resulted from Mautam<sup>1</sup>. With the flowering of bamboo in the Mizo district, the rat population had exploded, and it was anticipated that the entire district would be affected in the coming year. The Mizo Hills District Council, therefore, requested that the government of Assam provide financial aid as a preventative measure to give relief to the entire district. The government, however, denied the request, dismissing the forecast as 'a tradition of the primitive people' (Zaitinvawra and Kanagaraj 2014, 450). This hurt the sentiments of the Mizos. And so, a voluntary group, the MNFF was organised to respond to the crisis. Subsequently, the MNFF started to accentuate the necessity of having one's independent state. Later, the term 'famine' was dropped from the name and, thus, the Mizo National Front, under the leadership of Laldenga, regulated the Mizo Rambuai Movement in 1961. In the 'Introduction' to *After Decades of Silence: Voices from Mizoram*, Sanjoy Hazarika delineates:

The conflict grew out of Mizo anger at Assam for failing to assist them with famine conditions of 1959, and that anger was used by the MNF. (Zama and Vanchiau 2016, 9)

Subsequently, the MNF instigated an ethnic political consciousness by emphasising the significance of securing 'Mizo independence'. Many patriotic youths supported the MNF movement to fight for the cause of independence. The insurgency and counterinsurgency measures brought about devastating pain and suffering. It caused

deep psychological and emotional turmoil among the Mizos. During the uprising, the deployment of the air force, sexual violence, pointing (identifying supporters of the Mizo underground army) and village groupings made the period one of the darkest periods in Mizo history. In ‘The Social Memory of the Mizo *Buai*: Some Comparisons with the Kachin Conflict’, Pachuau and Sadan astutely opine: ‘When Mizo people refer to this period of exactly twenty years as *buai* or the “Troubles”, it is used as an apt name for the suffering that they had to undergo at the hands of both the MNF as well as the Indian government’ (Pachuau and Sadan 2016, 444).

## Trauma, Memory and Narrative

Memory plays a pivotal role in reconstructing the past as it helps in establishing collective memory, which subsequently results in the formation of cultural identity—and the reconstruction of narrative. While employing cultural trauma as its structure, the chapter also examines the aspect of trauma and collective memory of the *rambui* period and how it has been reconstructed in narrative form. Ron Eyerman, an American author and sociologist, observes that cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people who have achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in the community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant ‘cause’, its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted through memory, a process which requires time as well as mediation and representation through narrative (Eyerman 2016). The ‘trauma of loss and violation’ in the social collective memory and the issue of sexual violence remain largely agonising in Mizo public memory. Thus, the traumatic past needs to be revisited through memory and narrative to establish its meaning so that healing can take place. Arthur Neal, an American author and sociologist, defines a ‘national



trauma' according to its 'enduring effects' and as relating to events 'which cannot be easily dismissed, which will be played over again and again in individual consciousness', becoming 'ingrained in collective memory' (Neal cited in Eyerman 2016). In this account, the traumatic past of the *rambuai* years must be understood, explained and made coherent through public reflection and discourse.

## Collective Memory and the Trauma of the Mizo Community

Eyerman and his fellow American sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander have asserted the difference between trauma as experienced by an individual and trauma as a cultural process. Alexander states that cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, making their memories forever and changing their future identities in fundamental and irrevocable ways (Alexander et al. 2004, 1). Significantly, *rambuai* and its memory continue to be a lived reality to the point where it has become a metaphor for violence, fear, dominance, difference and the unsatisfactory resolution of the problems of the Mizos. Sexual violence, air attacks, village groupings and curfews are still fresh in the minds of people, especially those who have suffered the atrocities. Rohmingmawii Pachuau, who authored multiple *rambuai*-related research articles, delineates that this period has resulted in deep psychological scars—scars that will take decades to heal. The memory of incidents of sexual violence remains largely in the public; there is a profound emotional pain and stigma attached to it. It still hurts and leaves a living scar (*ser nung*) in public memory (R. Pachuau 2019, 69).

Nevertheless, as a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and is linked to the reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory (Eyerman 2016).

The Mizo public experience of violence during *rambui* came to the fore almost a decade after the outbreak of the movement with the formation of the Human Rights Committee<sup>2</sup> in 1974 by Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo. Even though the Human Rights Committee was established to advocate for ‘justice and decency to be restored’ and though it reported at least 36 cases of army atrocities ‘ranging from rape and torture to execution’ (Nag 2002, 249) and documented ‘concrete cases giving specific dates, time of occurrence, the names of the culprits, the names of the victims and their addresses’ (Lalchungnunga 1994, 160), there was no response from the government. Sailo’s report, however, ‘created a furore in the Indian Parliament’ (Nag 2002, 250). To many Mizos, this painful period is best forgotten, because ‘to revive memories in the first place is to open up wounds, to bring out injustice and experiences of hurt against each other’ (Pachau and Sadan 2016, 456). However, revisiting the painful memory of *rambui* is necessary to unfold the truth and provide an unbiased historical fact for future generations. Subsequently, over the past few years, studies of this period have increased immensely where scholarly articles are published and historical records are being examined and memories revisited.

Various works have been published that reflect the turbulent *rambui* period. However, narratives of this time differ according to the perspectives of the writers. For instance, the writings of those who belong to the MNF emphasise the valour and heroism of the underground army. Among the varied narratives of the period, in *Untold Atrocity* (2014), C. Zama<sup>3</sup> denotes the turmoil while focusing on the tragic air strike, village groupings and killings of the innocent. He believes that justice has not been done and that the real historical facts need to be told and should be part of recorded history. In *Ram Buailai Leh Kei* (2010 and 2016), the Mizoram Upa Pawl, which comprises an association of the elderly, compiled personal experiences of the period in two volumes. Their statements depict the sufferings that the Mizos had to undergo during *rambui* and delineate how they had to face the