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Poetry in English by Mizo Writers: Toward a Literary Tradition between the Gong and the Guitar

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Abstract

In the present paper, gong and guitar are used as tropes to signify their metaphoric and metonymic orders to meet across the imagined wall that divides them into two separate worlds. Any living culture, thus Mizo culture, is not to be seen as limited by its dominant hierarchy of the holier over the secular structures and meanings. The English language poetry of Mizo writers, with its marginalized status, would not claim equal status with the dominant cultural dispensations, not by its nascent history alone, but for its shaping ideologies also. A growing, living culture, more than its fixed religious domain, will have to include those marginalities, voiceless and deviants who rightfully belong here and contribute/d to the culture's unsure beginnings, diversity, richness, and to its awesome living paradoxes, to its life-world, to its worldviews. The same is so true of its literature. Our civilized cultural logic would not stop at our civilized doorsill apparently or religiously slammed on our wilderness ancestors and their profitless wonderments. Therefore, the English language poetry is uniquely situated with unimagined possibilities; and it will not lose a world in creatively recovering the oral world. In the process, it will define its identity as genuine part of the Mizo literary tradition.

Key words: Gong, Guitar, Hierarchy, Alterity, Zorami, Monologic, Imaginary.

In Mizoram, poetry in English appears in print only recently, around the early years of 2000 AD, after more than a hundred years of enabling education imparted in English. Therefore, the corpus of English language poetry compared to poetry in vernacular Mizo is meager, hence invisible, at the state as well as national level. Nevertheless, the cultural geography of this emerging poetry is wider and more varied than the more sizable Mizo literature is. The English language poetry of Mizoram can be characterized as time-sensitive and individualistic, wide-eyed and radical, which the dominant society mostly ignores as non-essential or non-event, for its obvious nature of being discordant with the settled mainstream notions.

There are constraints in imagining the Mizo literary tradition as unified. As I see, this literary culture is grown

predominantly under the Christian worldview, while the oral ethnic tradition is treated as a unique fossil and accommodated in the appendices to the central preoccupations of a stable community. In the present paper, gong and guitar are used as tropes to signify their metaphoric and metonymic orders to meet across the imagined wall that divides them into two separate worlds. The English language poetry, for that matter, the English language literature, as a whole, with its marginalized status, would not claim equal status with the dominant cultural dispensations, not by its nascent history (a century later by considering introduction of the guitar to the Mizos) alone, but for its shaping ideologies also. However, its unique situation is enabling with all unimagined possibilities; and it will not lose a world in learning from the oral tradition, since it has yet to know its voice properly determined and identified. An oral world, a missing link, would empower, while awaiting imaginative sympathies to work a bridge. In the possibility of its alignment with the high and dominant voice, the English language poetry will allow itself only to play a mere second fiddle. So far, it has not done so. However, to the buried music of the gong now, no shadow appears as a steady listener in the Mizo literary horizon. The gong is deprived of its Mizo *tawng* (voice) for more than a century; it can wield its buried harmonies into a more homely heart for a beginning, a weird journey perhaps, -into a heart that is, simultaneously, indigenous Mizo, part distant and strange, and part wide-world, by which the English language poetry is qualified in its historically late arrival. Its voice is already so adult, one would wonder. But it is not yet mature as the growing, ageing and reflective process endows this maturity. By its apparently distanced relationships, unlike the dominant sociolinguistic codes, it has stayed away from a highbrow dismissal of the folksong as simplistic, childish, sometimes ridiculous or unintelligent babble. It intermittently listens and minds that intimate throb of nativity. For example, Mafaa Hauhnar's poem "The Lost Parchments" turns between elegy and panegyric on the ancient Mizo valor.[1] What is significant is a veiled irony vis-a-vis the dominant faith:

> How can we survive
> in an ark that seems
> sinking?

In this critical self-awakening more than nostalgic reminiscing, the poetry in English occasionally scripts a new lore. It already knows an academic episteme of 'difference', which would readily intervene in many creative ways in order to retrieve the lost threads and lost lore. One will cherish this wonderful moment for an unfolding, for a poetry finds its rendezvous, and a tradition is restored deservedly to Mizo literature.

Most emerging poets in English are aware of an intellectually uninspiring climate in Mizoram. They would consciously like to croon in private and not risk the public gaze. And in this, a kind

of first infatuation in poetry for the foreign and universal above the local and familiar is more apparent. However, a poetry produced in a living cultural climate cannot remain hermetically isolated or always anchored on the universalist ideas far removed from the local affects and forces. This attitude of artistic detachment or pretended aloofness is ungainly, since it does dwarf the growth of the poetic mind and saps the culture's artistic possibilities.

The poets in English mostly write in free verse mode with little or no classic rhyme schemes or English stanza patterns to objectify. However, the sense of lyric fluidity in prose poetry is generally dominant. In her edited *Oxford* volume (2011), Tilottoma Mishra has a few sensitive observations to make on the literary culture of the North East. Her appreciative remark of this region's new poets seems a little flamboyant in the face of displaced cultures.

These poets have effectively combined the music, the rhythm, and patterns of their own languages and cultures with the forceful communicative power of the English language.

('Introduction': xiv)

My appreciation, specifically as of the English language poetry in Mizoram, is however slightly conservative, for, under scrutiny, her remark fails to appeal in real particularities. The literary 'Mizo poetry' is predominantly Christian at the moment; since its new incarnation it has absorbed the Western rhythms and Christian patterns. However, the new poetry in English is not steadily Mizo in nature, not principally Christian, nor even reminiscent of the gong booms of a pre-literary culture.

There came a turning point in the history and culture of the Mizos when they had to choose to accept and follow a different system of faith other than their ancestor's. This new faith has set off a series of dramatic transformation in their attitude and identity formation. Historically, Christianity arrived in Mizoram in1894; and a Mizo translation of the Holy Bible as *Mizo Zir Tir* was early produced in1898-9. This publication and its attendant merits are recounted as a landmark in the history and culture of the Mizo. However, while burying the myth and lore of the pagan past, Mizo intellectuals have yet to seriously think of any critically observant reviews of their wild lineage, now forgotten, to be ever necessary in the life-world of culture. In socio-political terms, however, the Mizo has measured his culture's advancements in the light of this cultural shift engineered by Christian education. A Christian literature followed by a conflict literature enmeshed with Mizo nationalist ideology of the 1960s-80s continues to rule the social monologic till date. Most of this impersonal monologic is available basically in vernacular Mizo with a handful of politically safe illustrations being translated recently in English, such as the attempts made by Laltluangliana Khiangte's volume called *Mizo Songs and Folk Tales* (2002) and R. L. Thanmawia's *Mizo Poetry* (1998), or other eminent

Penguin (2009) and Oxford (2011) publications of poetry from the North-East. It is to be noted, however, that under the globalized economy daily encountered at the doorstep, the Mizo's early-secured conviction in a written Christian order is showing the dwindling sign of the time.

During the insurgency period, Mizo literature predominantly turned to be responsive to an atmosphere of repression, trauma, and patriotism for an independent Mizoram, as prominently visible in the poetry of Rokunga, Laltanpuia, James Dokhuma, and many 'Rambuai' (conflict-nationalist) narratives by others. This impassioned period is significantly bolstered by a strong faith in God. Dokhuma an esteemed Mizo poet, once an underground insurgent, in his *post-conflict* mood in a poem "Oh! Delhi" would express love of peace intermingled with praise of heaven with no mark of self-penitence.

> A city untouched by restless waves,
>
> A heaven of rest for all your sons,
>
> With unflagging zeal they sing your praise;
>
> And heavenly God bless you forever. (p 65)

A strain of resistance still registers an appeal in vernacular creative modes about the erstwhile troubled times (1966-1986) and unjust oppressions thrust on the Mizos. This mental dialogic of conflict and trauma, steadied and assuaged by faith, continuing to shape the dominant locale of Mizo literature, ought to have ideally nurtured any newly evolving mode of creativity, for instance, the contemporary English language poetry. However, the emerging poetry in English seems either oblivious of this troubled past, or mindful more of the contemporary social and individual dissonances set in life.

In his poem "Then I Rest with Nature", Laldinkima Sailo's genuine love for nature and God is visible. One will not miss his criticism of the present generation and degraded human relationship; but his attitude to the 'gong order' is attuned to the dominant religious ethics: the same trivializing sensibility.

> All I ask for is a land
>
> Filled with spirited hearts
>
> Where holiness finds serenity to Paradise
>
> Of much more than just gongs of hollow words. (p 38)

Back with the new poetry in English, one would mark that this poetry under all its indirect ploys, in some cases intellectualized and elegantly modern, turns difficult for the educated besides the common Mizo. An example among others is Mona Zote's poem beginning with the following lines:

> The reality of music is a problem
>
> Waiting to be solved by the black guitar,
>
> Not the girl, nor the jug of blue hibiscus

> The pigeons are insane with grief because you left them
>
> The clouds will be noble and distant as always… (p 72).

Nonetheless, the closing lines of the poem throw some intelligible light on the state of an implanted culture now 'fading' with departure of the masters or maestros 'noble and distant as always' but letting the guitar music remain dear yet problematic, since it somewhat killed the 'gong' of an ethnicity. As to the English language poetry, its access has naturally limited the readership in Mizoram, and is pegged hence to the global appreciation.

Thus, an expressly written tradition of poetry in English here in Mizoram, as elsewhere with a newly proselytized culture in the North-East, is historically coincidental with Christian religious education by introduction of the Romanized Mizo script. As to the idea of Mizo folklore and folksong forming an earlier tradition of oral literature, it is imaginable that the primary 'civilizing' project of literacy had understandably no prospect for such an underground challenge to nurture for the future. None of Christianized cultures, for example, in Nagaland, Meghalaya or Mizoram, had its own *ethnic tradition* transcribed especially into the scriptable domains as the first work of the *wonder* script at its very germinal and formative stages. No fine lore or song of their own ethnicity, no traditional heroic tales, no lovely love stories of their old, enabling tradition to translate; on the contrary, the Christian hymns and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* were some of the first translations zealously introduced into the vernacular for the anxious freshmen to read and write. Therefore, to the postcolonial reader of this scenario, this written literature was planted to serve as the *only* historical evidence of a literature of an oral race to cite, refer to, and sing, by renewable energy of recovery, in all futures. Elleke Bohmer has thrown a candid light on similar scenes in a larger colonial context:

> To present-day readers, the worlds represented in colonialist fiction may seem strangely empty of indigenous characters. Although set in Borneo or Patagonia, the ventures and adventures of the colonizers, of white men, make up most of the important action. The available drama is *their* drama. Almost without exception there is no narrative interest without European involvement or intervention. (p 62)

To be politically correct, the Missionaries were not political agents of the British imperialism, though these different establishments were not sore enemies either. Nevertheless, here, an old tradition without translation is lost without war cries in the process. The written record, i.e., translation of a superior culture, was made to transmit superior knowledge to the subaltern who was stereotyped as an innocent receptor. With this process set rolling, an entire living discourse with its conceptual realm of the oral tradition was locked in a constructed casket of fossils.

Writing records, which is a pre-eminent European tradition, got formally and informally sanctified in place of orality and memory, which is now displayed as materially unavailable and absent and logically absurd for references. By normal political logic, it is improvident of the Mission to introduce a primary people of orality to the strange charms of the scriptable word, which would talk and celebrate their own ethnic ways in permanent print forms. Moreover, this could be counter-productive in many unpredictable ways to any power structure, which aspires to maintain its newly-championed status as the *noble giver* of gifts. This in reality happened, though privately to trouble many belated minds like Mona Zote, here, as elsewhere such as Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, Esther Syiem, Desmond L. Kharmawphlang, or Temsula Ao. Their nostalgic poetries, though with no wistful gravitation, open a dialogic window to our critiques. However, majority of the mainstream writers in their states appear untroubled, writing happily their monologic numbers.[2]

This is also fact that the new poetry in English is inspired by Eurocentric modernist paradigms that the poets have learnt professionally in academic corridors. Normally, it has no connection with the native oral tradition of Mizo culture, even though much of the oral oeuvre remains in cocoon yet to be translated and disseminated. Further, Mizo poetry of the modern progressive period has no ethnic linkage with the old oral culture. This fact is evident in the good "survey of Mizo poetry" by an esteemed Mizo academic R.L. Thanmawia who reflects on the absence of "allusion" and admits:

> The value of their (Mizos') literature, whose main purpose was to propagate the Christian faith, would greatly be deprecated if allusion is to be applied in their poetry. As such, a few applications of allusion found in Mizo poetry are allusions to biblical passages. (p161)

For this absence of allusion, the evolution of a written Mizo literature is held reasonably young, not even 'a century old', as Thanmawia understands self-apologetically. It is revealing that there has been little or no attempt made by creative Mizo minds, during a hundred years, to allude to their own cultural roots in olden folklore and oral traditions. On the other hand, a lurking dread of deprecation is sensed in the event of such possibilities and under the gaze of a powerful Christian establishment, which is certainly a sufficient cause to truncate or suppress the imaginative stirrings of nativity in literary expressions. In a community under the sway of a new religion and the traumatic interventions of insurgency till the 1980s, what emerges is that no critically observant literature was possible, nor for creative and intelligent minds to engage with issues of identity, individual and cultural. Therefore, an aura of amnesia about the old way and traditions is consequential for a nascent poetry in

English, yet differently registered in the mainstream Mizo literature. To be solely assimilated into a world literature, it is a good dream for a nascent poetry; but this journey has its stern prices. I will particularly refer to Malsawmi Jacob's first novel *Zorami (A Redemption Song)* which is a good bold, though belated, attempt at blending the folk world, the Mizo Christian and the English literary orders, without apprehensions of the social stigma for such ventures.

From socio-political perspectives, however, a democratic polity in Mizoram in tandem with the dominant religious establishment has cherished the total transformation of a culture from its aboriginal nativity to Western modernity. However, the overture about an oral race receiving everything as God's gift for proselytes is somewhat irrational. Jenkins the Welsh scholar candidly writes, "The Khasis were weaving stories long before the Bible-thumping, hymn-crazy Welsh arrived on the scene" (10). Therefore, the idea that Mizo literature to be the Mizo's cultural text or identity marker, so long understood as a primary gift of the Evangelist institutions, appears problematic, which needs more debate. In this context, one may think of Mona Zote's early poem "Home Going" (2008) as a sharp turn away from this settled opinion. The poem, a sophisticated structure of love images is significant in that that the images of Knossos (Crete/ Greek) and Ma'rib (Yemen/Sheba) set natural love in prehistoric times using pre-Christian imagery, yet non-Mizo, which may be her constructed alternative to the dominant Christian tradition choking the creative breaths of her time. 'Home Going' is suggestive of going back home, to ethnic traditions. The poem's title recalls the famous poem "Church Going" of the agnostic Philip Larkin. Interestingly, both poems are more critically worked with non-conformist attitudes. In its contemporary social extension, this poetic voice seems to be a radical challenge to the dominant structure of patriarchal power in the Mizo society. This was the early phase of her radicality not exposed to the public gaze.

The Mizo Christian literature is projected as the cultural capital of the Mizo. One registers only an absence of the other pre-Christian folk tradition in this framework. In such literatures historically beginning under Western interventions, some troubling thought lingers - how to de-mutate the dominant culture of the present (written) and make a living space for an older tradition (oral) to find. There is a point in Temsula Ao's argument that the people of North East India have grown "mature" in accepting their "differences as only uniqueness of … culture rather than as denominators of any deficiency or inferiority." (2011: xvi). If one may ask to know of this 'difference', an improvised answer will be that it is formed in hybridity rather than essentiality. Is this 'mature' response (a little postcolonial-cum- political) an adequate explanation of the intrinsic crisis in cultural identity or in the life of a literary tradition? In Mizoram, the English

studies, even Mizo literature, intellectually Western in outlook, fights shy of such deep-inherited dilemmas; their fundamentally different worldviews are not honestly addressed toward synthesis. To take a sample on Naga ethnicity by Temsula Ao who wistfully but in the modern Williams-like style writes: "the stone-people /were born /out of the womb / of the earth." (2009: 1-4). The Mizos have a similar creation story. Are these creation stories to be respected equally with the Christian belief, or one is to be subsumed under a powerful another? Contextually, the old world of Chhura in Mizo folklore and the civilized locale of grand Christian narratives are poles apart. With reasons, the Missionaries' prejudicial denigration of a pre-literate culture paved the way only for displacement of the old order. An entire epistemic discourse of the old world is silenced. To attempt to give voice to the muted now is a creative challenge, and should not be again construed within the master's monologic. Ao's position does not recover the old as a good technology to meet the self's challenges beyond life's hybridity or enchanted amnesia. In my observation, the English language poetry of Mizoram is fastened mainly to the secularist Western pole and its modernist paradigms. It has yet to know its subject position from where to take on the other. Its intellectual response to the layered crises at home needs to unfasten; and to the contemporary social realities, it is only a sign of muted understanding, just another passive day of self-neglect.

I will not believe that any living culture begins from a particular day of its historical invasion or cultural assimilation. Moreover, it is too ridiculous to believe, except for the mentally colonized to believe, that the ancestors of an old world were devoid of 'modern' intelligence, lived their preposterous ways in merely producing certain pagan generations as to be redeemed by a future modern code. I am of the view that the poet or critic in English, here, has to go beyond attempts networking collected orature on the lost ethnicities, now mostly appended as a secular tradition. A civilized modern literature, particularly its poetry in Mizoram, cannot continue to tune with the Eurocentric modernity's bizarre lures for all times. To be called a fully-awakened artistic enterprise, it will have to strive for cultural renewal by closely attending to beats of the *cheraw* and sensuous *chheihlam* dances, to colorful patterns as on the *puan*. To the booms of the gong at solemn ceremonies, to the ethnic peals of laughter and traumas of the tear, and no less, to many unwritten landslides along the walk of life. For these unattended spaces are the sediments under the ethnic blood stream.[3] After all, the English language poetry aspires to be Mizo culturally and in expressive ethnic domains.

Let us look at a few samples of poetry in English, especially the early ones, emerging from some skillful and confident hands in Mizoram, to show how sensitive hearts negotiate the repressive order at home. For reasons of space, I will

selectively treat a few poets who are coincidentally females. Dawngi (Chawngthu)'s short poems, each attracting our attention to its inner thought encased as if in a well-knit, reified wallet. Technically, she is a remarkable craftsperson, artistically mindful of raising an idea or feeling to a structured image, which in the modern New Critical phrase would be close to 'autotelic artifact' by paradoxical epistemology. For example, in the poem "Alone" (p 259), the crucial problem is language in an entire landscape of stones. In a range of poems, "Untied" along with "Black and White", "The Mask" and "Locked Doors," it is the self that stands differently located from others; sometimes it is paradoxically a self "safe and sound" being locked "on the inside" as against locked from outside. Why, is the external world untrustworthy? Is this world to be her immediate society? Poems do not expressly work such questions beyond the iconic cells of their self-containedness. To her, the "unsung song", the "untold story" or even the "unexplored thought" needs "a storyteller." (p 242) One still asks to know which untold story she tells of her own clan, of her own gender, of her own society and customs. The conscious artist in her has already removed all socially signifying garbs off the poetic object. And this is where I find the excellent poet as handicapped from the socio-linguistic perspective. Her poems are not part of the Mizo mainstream monologic, nor part of the lost ancestral symbolic. Crucially, its poetic register is images of the self-enchanted modern or postmodern detachment. The "stones" in Dawngi's poem "Alone" would get more subversive in meaning only when put beside the more manifested image "stars" in Mona Zote's "What Poetry Means to Ernestina in Peril" (2005). Stones and stars are interestingly loaded images in these poets, whose radicality would appear vibrant against the sedative of dominant social monologic.

Similarly, a fine fresh voice in English as Cherrie (Cherrie L. Chhangte) works its way in "Plea" (p 75) not through recognizable Mizo images, though she is not removed from her immediate social affects ("What Does an Indian Look Like?"). We do not hear the common terror lore from her love-stirred strings. However, the image of an unyielding Juliet to be pursued by a passionate Romeo is no claim to belong to the Mizo cultural landscape of love. Overall, one could suspect a rather survivalist deployment of muted indirection in Dawngi by large, but in Cherrie and Mona Zote in their early poetry only. After all, their individual self's early aloofness throws discursive light on the glaring social conditioning and an environment hostile to free creative growth. Mona too has a couple of poems to display her early knack for alien images distanced from home.

Her early poem "Home Going" (Poonte blog: 2008), cited above, suggests that the human body is a "paper boat", too frail to contain the whirl of love. The poem unfolds that in the process of love act, the person is 'seen', known, and not from his 'reputed wisdom' as of the

Minotaur's austere world (part-animal and part- human). With this knowledge gained, the woman gets ready to go home- 'home going' is a growing maturity of life with an insightful, perhaps alarming, knowledge. This poem opens up a feminist face of the woman persona being cynically, yet silently, watchful of the masculinist control of the other gender without empathy in love as it is in knowledge. It signifies the woman's fall into reality as well as man's fall off the age-old self-complacency. In another early poem "The Idiot Goes to Hell" (2008)[4] Mona works a few delicate surprises that complicate the Christian meaning of the Cross for a death. A Christian selecting to hang himself from the Cross, in the burial ground, is a radical sensibility to note. Our traditional Christian perspectives seem meaningless to involved persons in the poem, almost suggestive of the absurdist Samuel Beckett's existentialist tramps. But an implication that any deed perfectly done is its own sufficient meaning for no religion to certify is not lost, which has its Christian overtones too. Mona has the capacity to complicate and stay critically observant.

These two poems, as I see, lack the adequately signifying markers by which they would claim the status of 'Mizo poetry' in English. The first poem will be readily claimed by a Greek to be his/her. The second poem will be fairly claimed by any atheistic or anarchic Christian, to be repudiated as anti-Christian and hence anti-Mizo by ruling codes of the mainstream Mizo morality. Reflexively, if the poems are situated in the Mizo contexts, one will be surprised at the suppressed meanings getting suddenly resonant. It is however refreshing to know that Mona and Cherrie are not for long aloof from the Mizo's cultural contemporaneity. It is to be emphasized that Mona occasionally spins herself up to connect with the "sad subterranean" past of her culture, the tremble of the silenced "gong", and the buried legends like Pi Hmuaki (p73), or even the ever-inventive sensibility of Chhura, the gritty hero in the Mizo's legendary geographies. Even while the ancient Biblical landscape has no space left for the Mizo hills or streams to dwell, it is not too absurd to desire that the gong finds a creative space in the literary imaginary of the Mizo in contemporary times. To take cognizance of it is not as simple as it sounds; to encounter the past from the present locatedness is a many-sided challenge. Homi Bhabha draws attention to this crucially sensitive question:

> How does one encounter the past as an interiority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity within the present? How does one then narrate the present as a form of contemporaneity that is always belated? (p 308)

Two important and subversively significant views emerge out of our critique here; one, in the modern Mizo society, the voices of marginality, of dissent, and of religious disorientation is artistically being expressed. Secondly, by wandering within universal spaces, the

poet- traveler in English in Mizoram slowly sees the point to come down to the immediate, dear and familiar landscape, to the hill homes as creative geographies, for characteristic Mizo imageries.

To me, a poem is a cultural artifact, without ever denying its potential for universality. One may argue, in love poetry usually, poets work out images that are culture-free, as Mona's poem here appears. But to be called a Mizo poem, "Home Going" will have to evolve through images and symbols that are ethnically and expressively Mizo. As I have come across a slowly burgeoning tuft of poetry in English written by Mizo men and women, I find no self-convinced confidence in using Mizo symbols or locales. The fact is that the immediate material culture has impacted on the creative minds but toward deliberate indirections. I feel, the poet's exercise may better unfold the self-alienation, self-exile or the social neglect by means of the culture's images. This is nevertheless to acknowledge the indubitable fact that other poems of Mona and Cherrie are characteristically and subversively Mizo in nature.

We recognize the basic concept of a Minotaur or a Romeo as an artifact to have originated from the genius defined by its culture and ethos before being acceptable as the standard universal of love or otherwise of non-love. The Mizo ethos is equally endowed with love narratives which give us lovers such as Chawngvungi and Sawmkhara, Lianchhiari and Chawngfiana, Tualvungi and Zawlpala, who unfortunately have fallen in the wastelands of the Mizo's cultural memory except for a corner in the folklore world academically collected as stuffs other than the folklorist Dundes's 'cultural mirror' (pp 53-60). Every culture has its dream horizon; an old dream may realize its dream wing (s) in a different age. Some Mizo folks even, it is said, dreamed of the strange saviors to come from alien lands. Should we accept and adore the savior's gifts as our own and abandon the dreamers as hopelessly banal? A living culture cannot afford to dream only with its dominant denizens with holier abilities. A growing, living culture, more than its structurally fixed religious domain, will have to include those marginalities, traumatized and deviants who rightfully belong here and contribute/d to the culture's unsure beginnings, diversity, richness, and to its awesome living paradoxes, to its life-world, its worldviews. The same is true of its literature. Our civilized cultural logic would not stop at our civilized doorstep slammed apparently or religiously on our wild/erness ancestors for having profitless wonderments.

Let us not forget Edward Said's radical postcolonial critique of 'Orientalism' (pp 49-70) emphasizing how the Occidental defines itself by the signs of the Orient essentialized and denigrated through a binary episteme. We could see this fine radical critique being applied by intellectuals to their own literary traditions to redefine their locations. For instance, Hughes says of a French literary study:

> *Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature* explores how cultural centres require the peripheral, the outlawed, and the deviant in order to define and bolster themselves. (2003: *Foreword*)

Thus, the so-called civilized is not fully segregated from the so-called savage who quietly lends the latter an intellectual and material space for identity formation and different growths. Literature is such an imaginative, wonderful domain to blend within its symbolic extensions the heretical and the holy and weave their inter-creative intimacies; the old savage and the modern dissembler by the same warmth of clasp. Literature of a people, a culture, save a police society, does not privilege a written history over an unwritten story; it accepts imaginatively the social as well as individual dissonances, consonances, and ambivalences without partisan discriminations.

Contextually, I am not delighted watching the ancestral Mizo heritage being consistently sidelined by Mizo intellectuals, and more pained to see the old-ways thought and lore pasted as a sapless adjunct to the mainstream mythologies of Mizo literature. This is where the Mizo writers will have to attend more seriously and reinvent their narratives more sensitively rather than borrowing alien grand models and symbols being systemically appropriated through modern and global studies, which are normally incognizant of the local ethos, our little narratives, yet intimately close to our bloodstream. Can the English language poets of Mizoram study, beside classic Shakespeares and Eliots and Arthur Millers, their own Mizo folk-narratives, or Vankhamas and Rokungas for a romance of love strains still possible in native language? Or by way of creatively recovering threads of connection with a loving lineage lost to Mizo academic history? Which litterateur of the world will do it for us, and to what credible extent? None but the Mizo genius will. This would entail honest intellectual engagements with the contemporary or bygone culture in all its tensions and pretensions, complexities and ironies, and its poets to reinvent the technology of symbols, allusions and accents by which its literature would claim, with its own narrative interest, a distinctive category among other fine categories around. Mizo temples are witness to the intrusive presence of the drum and swinging bodies to stay in rather too sacred an arena. More to nativize the Christian aura calls for imaginative capacities and with a tenacity to de-mutate for which the Mizo is traditionally known. One will have to look beyond easy delights offered in ideas of the self-comforting togetherness, in similar political affiliations, similar modern mythologies or similar historical encounters, which but stylistically and thematically produce a limited literature. I will end by recalling a line from the poem "Rez" of Mona Zote:

"The things you have to say, no one can say them for you."

Notes

[1] Mafaa Hauhnar is a distinguished name working across many genres in Mizo. For this poem, see Zualteii Poonte's literary Blog: *Mizo Writing in English.com* since 2007.

[2]Dialogic is Mikhail Baktin's neologism, a sociolinguistic idea for all interpenetrating energies of different voices on play in a living culture; monologic is its contrary position with the *officially* dictated norms.

[3]*Puan* is the Mizo lady's spun cloth worn on traditional occasions; *cheraw* is the most impressive and famous bamboo dance, while *chheihlam is* a dance form with two dancers (male and female) stepping out sensuously to the singing of 'Puma Zai.' This latter one has the potential for further sophistication by its winged grace of birds on love, its flights for a sky, its ethnic steps close to nature's rhythms.

[4]These two poems especially of Mona Zote are found in the Blog of Zualteii Poonte : *Mizo Writing in English.com* since 2007.

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A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan next week.

George S. Patton
War As I Know It

We must beat the iron while it is hot, but we may polish it at leisure.

John Dryden
Aeneis