

Sampling an Old Mizo Play Song and Lullaby in Translation

Translated from Mizo by Kristina Z. Zama*

Abstract

Play songs and lullabies for young children are an integral component of the oral traditions of any human culture, containing narratives seemingly innocent yet often subversive, sometimes even dark. It is possible that they may convey the worries and angst of an adult world but of which the child may be blissfully unaware of because it is cloaked in the playful and innocent language of childhood. Play songs and lullabies are also the first conveyers of storytelling sung to a young child by a mother, grandmother or caregiver. Such songs transmit to a child a harmonious tone that may be culture specific and which establishes the memories and roots of days gone by. A soft lullaby sung while a child is rocked to sleep in its mother's bosom or the back, provides a sense of comfort and security in the child. Likewise, play songs too reflect, although culture specific in terms of subject matter, communication that encourages language development, social skills, cohesion and belongingness. The Mizo oral tradition is a rich repository of such play songs and lullabies which continue to be a part of the Mizo way of life but now requiring a conscious effort to preserve this oral heritage for future generations.

Key words: oral tradition, culture, children, song, repository, memories

Tho hmasa hla

*Lungte a tho hmasa ber a,
Lungte in hnantawm a delh a.
Hnantawmin uihli a delh a,
Uihli in vawkpui a seh a.
Vawkpui banah a innawt ri,
Arin a hria a, an khuang a.
Mihringin an hria a,
Tlaiberh a tho hnuhnung ber a!
Tlaiberh a tho hnuhnung ber a!
Tlaiberh a kuaikinlut chhungin,
Ni chu tlangsang tak a lo ni!*

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*Tlaiberh a tho hnukung ber a,
Mikhual vai dawr buan ka cho.
Phaitual bawngthi ri rel rel...
Awi ka nu! Thangchina vanram fang chhuak!
Tuilian khangbung sepin an sep;
A tawpah erawh chuan, thingpui sen kan in a!*

(translation) The Early Riser

The pebble is first to rise!
The pebble weighs down on trimmings of bamboo
Whose trimmings weigh on the flea!
The flea nibbles the mother pig!
Its itchy itch scratched against a pole...
The noisy noise caused the cock to crow!
Awakening thus, the human world!
The bulbul last to stir
The bulbul last to stir!
And when it stretches,
The sun is mountain high!
The bulbul last to stir
Challenge me a *vai*¹ to wrestle!
Cowbells ring in distant plains
Oh mother! Thangchina travels entire heavens,
While floods toss the tendrilled tree
And in the end, we drink red tea!

¹*Vai*- a non-mizo, usually referred to people from the plains.

Nau Awih Hla

*Ka nu, ka pa, lo haw thuai thuai
Tlangah ruahpui a sur e
Sakhi lampeng rawn zawh la
Lo zangphar der der ang che.
Chhingmiti a tap e
Rolenga a tap e
Ka mumang mang chu ni sela
Ka zuk au na ral ral tur a ni.*

(translation) A Lullaby

*Ka nu, ka pa*² Hasten home to me!
Rainstorm over mountains I see
Hasten home to me!.
Follow the path of the barking deer
...its hoofs guide you home to me!
Wave! Wave your arms so I can see!
Hasten home to me...
Tearful Rolenga and Chhingmiti!
If wishful dreams were granted me
I'd call aloud... ...my echoes guide you home to me!

² *Ka nu, ka pa* - mother, father

Source

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