

Mizo Folk Songstresses



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Mizo folk songs may be regarded as one of the most popular forms of their folk orature. The folk songs are lyrical in nature, short in length, musical, and easily understood. It reflects the social heritage, milieu and culture of the Mizo of a particular period. The entire Mizo culture, as it were, can be said to be reflected in them.

Several folk songs have been named after the women composers themselves. Some of them, though composed by others, continued to be named after them. The Mizo folk songstresses were endowed with a remarkable variety of expressions which reflected in their compositions. Some of the notable Mizo folk songstresses are described below.

Pi Hmuaki is claimed to be the first known songstress of the Mizo. Her name can be traced back to 1600-1650 AD when the tribe settled between the Run and Tiau rivers. Some of her songs disclose her profound love of her village Ngente, a few miles away from Tiau River:

*Kan Ngente Khua khaw nun nuama kha
Thla ka fam hma'n ka nghilh rua lo ve*
(Our Ngente village a place of joy,
I will not forget thee till I die)

*Kan Ngente khaw chhuahtlang dai rawnah,
Lungrual taka tuan lai ngai iang e*
(I yearn for our contented lives together,
in the happy valley of our Ngente village)

Her songs are spontaneous and they contain no rigid themes for she is versatile, and flexible. It is said that she was a born songstress as she could compose musical verses at any moment without restraint. Her verses contain two lines; they are simple, natural and musical.

Darpawngi is another noteworthy composer of folk songs. Her songs can be categorized according to their tunes and themes into three groups: *Thlek zai* (songs of head turn), *Lusun zai* (songs of mourning), and *Thinrim zai* (songs of anger). Most of her songs are lamentations for the death of her son, and her rebellion against the repressive village chief. Her songs are arranged in a three-lined verse form except for *thinrim zai*. *Thinrim zai* has four lines in each verse and the second line is an echo of the first line. She courageously protested against the injustice of authority through her songs.

Laltheri is another folk songstress who through her songs, contributed significantly to the social protest against the growing class discrimination facilitated by the repressive village chief. She brought about a change in the social status of the Mizo women through her songs. She was the daughter of a powerful chief, Lalsavunga but broke tradition by falling in love with Chalthanga, a commoner, who was beheaded at the behest of her angry brothers. Laltheri protested against the murder by refusing to wear clothes and abstaining from food. When asked to wear clothes, she replied in a song:

*Ka nemte puan ka chawi lovang ka nu,
Ka di thandang zalna mah, chhimhlei tualdaihah.*
(Oh mother, I will not have my clothes on,
even my beloved lies in the cold grave)

Her songs clearly declare the depth of her feelings. Her powerful grieving finally touched the hearts of her proud Sailo brothers. And the chief Vanhnuailiana, her brother, agreed that such cruel incidents would not take place in future.

Lianchhiari is another noteworthy Mizo folk songstress. As the daughter of a chief, the first part of her composition reflects her pride in the prominence of her family:

*Ka tawng a uang em ni !
Tlangin lo ngai rawh u,
Zova siahthing ril khi;
A din chung keimahn*

(Think not of me boasting too much, our courtyard is fully decorated with the skull of wild animals. Our family will be conspicuous so long as these decorations stand firm)

Love is the main theme of the majority of her songs. Her songs are four-lined verses while other songstresses mainly composed in two or three-lined verse form. She weeps for her lover Chawngfianga, who is a commoner, and tells of their tragic love story through song narrative. Her songs are marked by sentimental and emotional tones.

In the later part of the 19th century, the Mizo were blessed with a gifted songstress named **Saikuti**. Unlike some of the previous songstresses, she did not compose songs solely for personal reasons. Her songs were composed in a two-lined form except for

her songs in Awithangpa's tune which contained three lines. Her versatility with any theme and the use of simple language made her songs immensely popular with the people. We can see her closeness to nature from her use of imagery and metaphors drawn freely from it. In her song, the eagle, the horn bill and the dove are often used to symbolize a lonely lover:

Muvanlain van zawlah di a au,

Keipawh ka di mual a liam e ralah ka au ve.

(The lonely eagle up on high calls for its mate, likewise, I too call for my love that has gone afar)

Among the variety of themes, her songs of great warriors are worth mentioning. She not only sings on the subject of their brave deeds but also challenges and encourages the young men to be courageous.

To sum up, the contribution of Mizo folk songstresses on the development and evolution of the genre of Mizo songs up to the present day has been powerful and meaningful.

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Reiek Tlang and its Lores

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Reiek Tlang, or Reiek Hill is situated ten miles west of Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, and in between them flows the State's longest river known as Tlawng Lui. Reiek Tlang itself is just a little more than 4000 ft. in height. When viewed from the east it appears to stretch out into a wide expanse while towards the south-west it is banded by high rocky ledges and steep precipices. Towards the north of the peak of Reiek Tlang the village of Reiek is situated. Some distance below it, sits the village of Ailawng.

Just below the peak of Reiek Tlang is a vast open track of grassland, but the peak and the rest of the ledges are all exposed layered rocks. An old famous Mizo myth called *Van Indona* or War of the Heavens is believed to have taken place here on this very hill, and the chief participants belonged to this place as well.

The queen of the demon spirits of Reiek Tlang was Khawluahlali and she had a beautiful daughter named Ngaiteii. She ruled well and all the demon spirits of the hill were happy and lived in harmony until trouble finally arrived in the form of the demon spirit of the Tlawng river who decided to flow southwards through the passage between the two hills of Reiek and Lungdar. However, the demon queen Khawluahlali

would not hear of it. The very idea of the river dashing along the banks of her territory where her subjects lived was something she could not tolerate. Because the demons of the hills were considered superior to the river demons, the Tlawng river demon had to concede defeat. Disgruntled and greatly offended, he decided to show his anger by taking a circular turn and coursing back. This spot is still known as 'Tlawng nuar' or 'Tlawng in a temper' and lies right beneath the great height of the protruding rock that juts out of the peak of Reiek Tlang.

This victory was considered a great achievement by the demon spirits of Reiek Tlang and they were confident that this was the end of their troubles. While they were happily preoccupied dancing and celebrating, the *Chawngchen*,¹ the demon spirits of the famous Chhawrpial Tlang, lying towards the west of Reiek Tlang, arrived to raid and make war with them. Busy with their celebrations, the Reiek demons were unaware of the great threat posed to them. Seeing this, the demons of Chhawrpial planned to kill them all by crushing them from a great height with the weight of the great protruding rock of Reiek Tlang. With the aid of great wedges, they started to hammer at this great projection and caused cracks to appear. Realizing the