

Revisiting The Mizo Traditional Hunting And War Chants

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Abstract :

The paper narrates the Mizo traditional songs focusing on the war and hunting Chants. The Mizo are one of the tribal living in the Northeast corner of India, they have a rich cultural tradition, especially with regards to their folksongs. The war and hunting chants have reflected many pictures of the Mizo traditional society, some of which are revealed in this paper. War and hunting have been the dominant practices of the early Mizo culture as their livelihood depends on these skills and occupations.

Introduction

The early Mizo life in the preliterate time was an invariable struggle for endurance. Life was not easy for them and they had to struggle persistently against the forces of nature. Their social and cultural structure was greatly influenced by their daily occupation, agriculture, and hunting expeditions. They earned their livelihood by practicing shifting cultivation. So, they had to strive constantly for a selection of an inhabitable place for shelter and fruitful land for agriculture.

The lust for power among the Chiefs of different villages leads to war even within the same clans; there are times the innocent women and children suffer the impact of these wars. Raids were often carried out in their enemy's villages. Strong walls were built and tower guards were kept to keep watch over the villages. When a man slays his enemy, the head should be brought home as a trophy to prove his bravery. "In case the place of the killing is too far to bring home the head, he must bring home a large part of the skin from the head" (Zawla 95). Their victory in war was celebrated by displaying the heads of the defeated foes; the young boys were asked to knock at the heads of the foes to prove their bravery.

These killings took place not for the sake of head hunting alone, but mainly to protect their village and to assert their bravery. On the other hand, Mc Call stated that "the

reason for headhunting is to propitiate evil spirits, to accomplish access to Pialral (abode of the brave and well-to-do people after death) after death, to prove prowess over enemies and to gain the respect of a prospective bride" (38).

Though war and killing were significant among the Mizo, one notable trait to be noted is that murder was greatly condemned in their society. Not only murder but quarrels and fights among them were condemned by the people.

(i). Hlado:

Hlado is a war chant that was chanted by the brave hunters when they came home successfully from their hunting expeditions. The unique nature of the Mizo was their nature of self-sacrifice for others and their attitude toward the welfare of others. One ethical conventional practice inculcated in the Mizo society was Tlawmngaihna. Thanmawia quoted that "according to K.C. Lalvunga Tlawmngaihna is an ideal of life in which man could not be outdone in doing good to others. When a man is Tlawmngai, one cannot defeat him in doing good to others, and that self-sacrifice sometimes demands life itself" (Mizo Values 15). It is an ethical code primarily arising from a sense of duty and responsibility whereby one's significance is concealed and regarded as less important in the face of the needs of others.

Even though tlawmngaihna was placed very highly by them, they do demonstrate a trait of their ego and fame when it comes to achievements and glory; disclosing their accomplishments through Hlado and Bawh hla when they had taken the head of a foe or an animal. The main motive for performing this practice was to gain supremacy and superiority over their killings in the afterlife. Though these two songs are put in one category they are used in different occasions, they are not meant to be sung in groups unlike other folk songs, but instead are rhythmically chanted with a specific tone.

A victorious hunter was identified as Pasaltha and was regarded very highly in society. When a successful hunter slays a wild animal he renders a song which is called Hlado (Chant of the successful hunter). These songs were lyrical and the contexts of the songs were egocentric, which exposed the pride and strength of the brave hunter himself.

These songs were regarded among the earlier songs of the Mizos and most of them are in the Hmar and Pawi dialect. H.K.R. Lalbiakliana stated that the earliest Hlado was composed in the Chindwin Valley and the song goes like this:

Vi li liu, vi li liu

Haw haw haw, ku ku kui (85)

(Being the first of its kind, the words have no clear meaning but indicate the new achievement with particular high-sounding words to reflect the success and joy of hunting.)

“The languages of Hlado are not difficult to understand, J Malsawma concluded that the composers are accustomed to the use of Pawi dialect for Hlado” (Mizo poetry 34). Many people think that the Pawi tribes were the pioneers in composing Hlado as most of them were composed in the Pawi dialect and only a few of them are in the Lusei dialect. But it must be noted that the composition in the Pawi dialect does not mean that they are the sole composer (Lalchungnunga and Hrangthiauva 350-351).

The Mizo in early times hunted wild animals as it had a intense religious implication in their beliefs. They believed that a man who had killed a barking deer, a bear, a wild gayal, a deer, and a boar could be regarded as Ram lama thangchhuah and were eligible to enter their ideal abode Pialral in the afterlife. Hence, every brave man aspired to hunt for such wild animals. Hunting has a significant role as it paves the way for the poor hunter to win over fame and fortune by killing wild animals. A successful hunter killing specific wild animals which are entailed for entry to Pialral used to climb the nearby hilltop and chant the said Hlado at the top of his voice to proclaim his success in hunting.

The songs are purely subjective and unlike most of the other Mizo folk songs, they are not meant to be chanted in groups but chanted by a lone hunter. In many of the Hlado, we see the image of man's dominance over the animals, and the inferiors are jeered at by the superior. These chants reveal the superiority of the hunter over the wild animals, and their sense of pride and honor is embedded.

There are also some Hlado who highlighted a scornful pity to those men who goes to do agriculture work in the jhum and could not go hunting wild animal since it's a rather intricate job. These songs reveal that they gave high esteem to the brave hunters and the hunting profession itself. Hlado may vary with the skillfulness of the composer, and the extent of their self-esteem.

Some Hlado highlighted the Mizo belief in the supernatural being. They believed that when hunters killed

animals in the forest they were helped by a supernatural being who ruled over wild animals. In the following Hlado, a hunter calls upon Khuanu (Mother Nature) to grant equivalent blessings to all the hunters instead of showing support to a few only:

Khuanu e, mangmawl aw chi,
Thang ngai than tui tuk hlah law;
Kipten e, i phawt ulaw,
Valin e, pahrang kan duh chian e.

(Meaning: Oh Mother Nature; don't be irrational when dispensing your favor and blessings to the hunters; and bestow your favor and blessings equally to all, as all the young men want to achieve triumph and eminence.)

Haldo was performed by the accomplished hunters as a way to show their victory by calling out to others to gather and share their accomplishments. It is also a sign of informing the villagers who the hunter is and what kind of animal he has killed. The significant aspect of the Hlado is that, it conveys the feeling of togetherness among the people to share their achievements; thus, restraining the room for pride and jealousy among the people. There are different types of Hlado, namely, Hlado tluang (which is chanted without specifically mentioning the animal they kill), Sai hlado, Sakhi hlado, Sazuk hlado, Savawm hlado, Tumpang hlado, Sanghal hlado and Satel hlado were the famous ones. Apart from these, there might also be some other type of Hlado which were chanted based on the animals they slay.

(ii). Bawh hla: The early Mizo frequently fought a war against neighboring villages and when a brave warrior killed his enemy he put his foot on the dead body and proclaimed his name and chanted a song which was called Bawh hla (Songs of the brave warrior). When a warrior chants Bawh hla on the outskirts of their village to be noticed by the villagers, it signifies that he has killed an enemy. Either the warrior who slays the enemy or the selected warrior can recite Bawh hla and was not meant for everybody.

It is difficult to know the exact meaning of its name, for the Chiefs of Lai (Pawi), it is called Vaw hla and in literal translation, the meaning of Bawh in the Lai dialect is 'Strong'. Bawh hla was also known as Chan hla or Mi Chan hla. We can assume that the origin of these songs dates back to when the Mizo were engaged in battles and wars for their survival. One known fact was that these songs were one of the most historical songs and they even might be the oldest songs

according to some of the Mizo historians. Also, they were mainly in the Pawi language or rather a combination of Pawi and Duhlian language which even more implies that these songs originated from the Pawi.

Regarding its characteristics Bawh hla is very similar to Hlado, they only differ in their purpose (i.e. Bawhhla is chanted by great warriors when they slay an enemy, whereas Hlado is chanted by brave hunters when wild animals are killed). The warrior who had killed an enemy was also called Pasaltha. He had accomplished the honor of the villagers and was highly appreciated by the society.

In the following Bawh hla, the warrior celebrated himself and his strength:

Keichu e, kan sentel e,
Sa leh doral ka pianpui e;
Ka do ve, rimnam pa e,
Thangchem e, aikim i ti ulaw.

(Meaning: From nativity, I was born to be brave, to kill wild beasts, and foes; and so it happens that I am attaining exceptional achievements killing and conquering wild beasts and foes.)

In Hlado and Bawh hla, we came across many remarkable Mizo lyrical words that are used to this day ; and it contributed to the richness of the Mizo poetry. They were fairly rich in terms of rhyme, internal rhyme, meter, alliteration, pathos, etc.

The Mizo hunting and war chants revealed the Mizo attitude towards brave warriors and hunters. When a boy was born, the elders gave their blessings so that he might grow up to be a brave warrior and good hunter. Being brave, strong, and hardworking was the ultimate trait they valued among the menfolk. Boys were trained to be brave, to be skilled hunters, and to kill their enemies without fear. There was an assumption that the souls of the wild animals and enemies they killed would accompany them to Pialral in the afterlife as a servant. Hlado and Bawh hla reveal the attitude of the brave Mizo warrior, they are purely subjective and unlike most Mizo folk songs they are not meant to be chanted in groups but an individual performance. One of the characteristics was its restriction to occasions, it was proper to sing or recite certain types of lyrics only on certain occasions and only by certain persons.

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