



LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

Reading the Lushais (Mizos) through their Folktales from the Point of View of an Outsider

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Abstract

There have been a number of articles and books that deal specifically with the Lushais or the Mizos but two articles and a book that had been published in the twentieth century which deal with the people of the Lushai Hills may be considered for further study. *Lushai Chrysalis* (1949), "The Kuki-Lushai Clans" (1909) and "Folk-Tales of the Lushais and Their Neighbours" (1909) have been chosen specifically because they consist of folktales that had been collected by the British administrators and they could be seen as anthropological and ethnographical efforts.

When one reads these works of the British administrators, there appears to be the presence of the "noble savage". In the narratives of the book and the articles, the writers appear to be sympathetic to the Lushais and their ways of life. In collecting and documenting the folktales, the writers often share their view that the people they were writing about had their own belief system and

practices which might have seemed “backward” to a European; but these might not mean that they are “uncivilised”. However, the writers, who were also administrators in the region, did not hesitate to add that the people needed the presence of the administrators in order for them to make progress in the future. This may be seen as an ambivalent attitude on the part of the administrators. The present paper analyses the Lushais’ folktales from the point of view of an outsider.

Keywords

Lushais; Mizos; Folklore; Folk Tale; Outsider’s Point of View.

Folklore has a wide range and it includes the folktales of the people. Alan Dundes explains: “Folklore includes myths, folktales, legends, proverbs, riddles, folk beliefs, costume, folk medicine, traditional foods, folk speech, charms, curses, games, folk music, folk dances, etc.” (Dundes 9). M. H. Abrams defines “folklore” as “the collective name applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or primarily, by word of mouth and example rather than in written form” (Abrams 100). There have been a number of articles and books that deal specifically with the Lushais or the Mizos but two articles and a book that had been published in the twentieth century which deal with the people of the Lushai Hills may be considered for further study. *Lushai Chrysalis* (1949), “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” (1909) and “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and Their Neighbours” (1909) have been chosen specifically because they consist of folktales that had been collected by the British administrators and they could be seen as anthropological and ethnographical efforts.

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view that the people they were writing about had their own belief system and practices which might have seemed “backward” to a European; but these might not mean that they are “uncivilised”. However, the writers, who were also administrators in the region, did not hesitate to add that the people needed the presence of the administrators in order for them to make progress in the future. This may be seen as an ambivalent attitude on the part of the administrators.

The book to be studied here is called *Lushai Chrysalis*¹ and was written by Major A.G. McCall. This book is in the form of a guide book for future travellers or administrators who were preparing to travel to the Lushai Hills. On the one hand, the book may be considered a history book that records the early life of the Lushais and their ways of life, culture and social practices. On the other hand, it could be considered an anthropological work that studies the life style of a particular tribe of people called the “Lushais”. The two articles – “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” (1909) and “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” (1909) – are from journals in the United Kingdom that deal with the stories of the people of the Lushai Hills. The first article was written by J. Shakespear and the second was by J. Shakespear and T. C. Hodson. This book and the articles are one of the earliest written records of the Mizo folktales, and it is no wonder that they have been written by “outsiders” (the British administrators). Since there was no script for the Mizo language, the written records had to be prepared by the Britishers to “preserve” the history and culture of the people. J. Shakespear and T. C. Hodson were anthropologists as well as administrators who worked under the British Government carrying out extensive work on different tribes of the North-Eastern region of India.

The articles “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” and “Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” were both published in 1909 in *The Journal of the Royal*

¹ The first edition of the book was published by the Royal Asiatic Society in 1949. According to the Preface, McCall began writing this work in 1939 when Lushai Hills was under the colonial rule. Therefore I have used this text as an illustration of a text by a British administrator.

Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and *Folklore*, respectively. The writers of these articles had been administrators in the Lushai Hills and had written about their experiences and the people they had met in the course of their duty. In the “General Theme” that is found in the first few pages of the book, Major A. G. McCall states the following: “Anthropological terminology has been omitted by me to widen the field of readers, though the principles of anthropology have been strictly applied” (McCall 7). This gives one an idea that the author’s target audience seems to be of a wide range which would include academicians as well as non-academicians. In order to ensure that his book may be accessible to a variety of readers, he has clearly made an effort in his style of writing as well as the jargon he uses. When one reads the book, it appears to be a narration of a person’s journey into an unknown land. There are personal stories that are intertwined with the facts and history of the Lushais. Therefore, this book may also be considered as a travelogue in some sense.

When one reads “The Kuki-Lushai Clans” by J. Shakespear for the first time, the most prominent feature that one finds is the anthropological nature of the article. It appears as though the writer has made a case study of the Lushais. Shakespear traces the link between different tribes by finding out the similarities in their religious practices, their customs, social ways of life, naming system and origin myths, among other things. He tries to ascertain the fact that these tribes might have originated from the same ancestor. The overt nature of the article cannot be denied because the journal it had been published in is an anthropological journal. In this article, there is just one folktale which is narrated – “The Tale of Grand-Daddy Bear and the Monkey”; however, there are passing references to the various tales that have been passed on from generation to generation of the Lushais and the important role these tales play in their lives. The article has a number of “urban legends” that involve the spirits and gods that the Lushais worshipped. For instance, the

story of Dailova, who forgot to perform his annual sacrifice to the spirit (*ramhuai*) and who had to be violently reminded of this fact is narrated in this article. The reasons behind certain sacrifices offered to different spirits, the origin of magic among the Lushais and the origin myths are also narrated here.

There are several interesting facts that may be gathered from this article regarding the earlier lifestyle of the Lushais. The Lushais believed that there was a dual nature within every person: “[E]very person is supposed to have two souls, a wise and a foolish soul, and the struggles between these two account for the unreliability of men” (Shakespear 379). The position of women in the earlier Lushai community did not appear to be very important because even in their belief about the afterlife, women do not seem to be spared hardships. The Lushais believed that on the path to the “Mitthi Khua” (the land of the dead), there is a certain junction where Pu Pawla sits waiting for the souls of dead people. He always shoots all the dead souls with a large pellet; the only exceptions are infants and the men who have performed a certain ceremony in their lifetime. However, Shakespear states that: “[W]omen, whoever they may be, he always shoots at” (379); which means that according to the belief of the Lushais, women had no way of escaping the painful shot of Pu Pawla. Another interesting fact that can be found from this article is that at the time this was written, there were literates among the Lushais who could write because when Shakespear describes the “Ai” ceremony of a man called Thangbanga, he mentions that “[t]he following description was written for me by a Lushai” (380). This article contains valuable information about the Lushais, their historical background and customs and practices as well as provides the reader with a glimpse into the belief system and superstitions of the Lushais. The audience/reader that the writer anticipated when writing this article could have been academicians in his homeland who were interested in learning about a race of people that they had never been exposed to before. This could have been one way of making use of their power to widen their “knowledge” of other

racess of people in the countries they ruled over. In a way, the folktales provided these readers in the motherland a kind of “education” of the “Orient”. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines “Orientalism” as “[a] term pertaining to the Orient as discovered, recorded, described, defined, imagined, produced and, in a sense, ‘invented’ by Europe and the West”. The exercise of collecting these Lushai folktales and their publication in journals and in books may be seen as a way of constructing an identity through available materials. According to Edward Said, “Orientalism” is “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience” (Said 1); he further states: “Orientalism lives on academically through its doctrines and theses about the Orient and the Oriental” (2) and “[i]t is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work, that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength” (7).

“Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” was also written by J. Shakespear with notes by T. C. Hodson. As the title suggests, the folktales that have been recorded here are not confined to the Lushais alone. There are several tales that have similarities in their narration of certain events and occurrences and Shakespear has pointed these out. The tales may be similar but the tales have different names for the protagonists. There are primarily nine different folktales that have been included in this article and in some cases the varying versions have been included. The first folktale is a very popular one among the Lushais, that of Chemtatrawta, but in this article, Shakespear gives the version of the Aimol, which appears to be a censored version of the Lushai tale. All the events that follow are quite similar but the main reason for the cause of the confusion differs. In the Aimol version, the prawn bites the protagonist in the leg, however, in the Lushai version, the prawn bites the protagonist in his private part. Could this have been the

reason why the writer chose the Aimol version? The origin myth² of the Lushai, the Anal and the Thado all appear to be very similar – they all have a tale which suggests that they came out of the earth. The origin myths are depicted here probably for the collectors to establish the fact that even though there are tribes in places which are far off, they seem to have a link between themselves. The natural occurrences such as eclipses, earthquakes and thunder are all explained through folktales by different tribes. The remaining folktales that have been recorded are all from the Lushais.

There are two tales with Chhura as the protagonist; there is the story of Mualzavata, a Lushai legend; the tragic story of Chawngchilhi who fell in love with a snake; the story of Tlumtea, who courted a woman from heaven; the story of a father who abandoned his sons in the forest; the story of the bear and the monkey; and the monkey and the quail. It is interesting to observe that in all these tales, Shakespear has not made any attempt to state the morals behind the folktales. He does not mention that a particular folktale might mean something or the other to the listeners or that the events described in the tales could have a meaning which could throw some light on the lives of the Lushais. It is possible that Shakespear knew about the morals behind the folktales but did not want to state them in his writing. It could have been that he wanted the readers to find out these things by themselves, leaving space for the audience to interpret the tales in their own ways. However, there is the possibility that the minds of the readers may have been influenced by the title or the distinctions that Shakespear made of the folktales he collected. There is one tale which Shakespear has included in this article which he claims is “a tale without an object” (Shakespear and Hodson 401). This particular tale is about a man called Thlang-pa-saisira and an evil spirit (woman) called Nu-hlu-pi, who captures him. He manages to escape, disguising himself as an old man and works for a family. When the father of the house comes to know that the

² The Lushai version of the origin myth is that their ancestors came out of “a cave in the earth” (“close to Vanhuilen’s village”) and were led by a great Chief called “Tlandrok-Pa”.

old man is actually a handsome young man in disguise, he makes his youngest daughter marry him. The daughter is reluctant at first but obeys her father. Unfortunately, Thlang-pa-saisira dies at the hands of a water spirit (Tui Huai). Although Shakespear claims that this tale has no object, there are certain important things that can be found in this tale. The father, when learning of the true identity of Thlang-pa-saisira, offers to make a sacrifice to appease the spirit that has enslaved him. This reminds the reader that the Lushais were very staunch in their beliefs and they were ready to help out one another to purge the spirits. Another thing that is found in this tale is the obedience that the daughter has for the father. That she should marry an old man employed by her father is an example of the subservient nature of the Lushai woman. The advantage of obeying one's parents could also be one of the morals that is found in this tale. Hence, it may be said that no folktale is without an objective. Folktales may have been used to explain the events in nature, as already mentioned before, such as eclipses, earthquakes etc., as well as the appearance of certain animals. Although Shakespear made no overt attempts to state the morals behind the folktales and seem to leave the interpretation to the reader, it is quite possible that his comments on the folktales may have affected the reading of the folktales in some sense.

As in the case of the first article, in this article "Folktales of the Lushais and their Neighbours" too, Shakespear repeatedly mentions that the similarities between the tales of the Lushais and the other tribes suggest that they could have come from the same ancestors. In the notes that T. C. Hodson gives at the end of this article, his conclusion is that the Lushais have a deep, understated connection with the Nagas (420). In the two articles, there are repeated attempts to construct a connection between the Lushais and the other tribes surrounding them. It is not clear for what purpose this was done but it could have been an effort to overlook the distinctive features of each tribe and try to club them together so that the British administration could run

smoothly. Alan Dundes is of the opinion that “one of the most important links between folklore and identity has to do with stereotypes” (22). By giving several versions of a tale that appears to have a similar origin, Shakespear and Hodson might be trying to show that all the tribes of the North-Eastern region of India have a common ancestor. Thus, he in a way constructs a tribal identity through the folktales and formulates a cultural affinity among several tribes. This cultural affinity which Hodson proposes might be problematic for the people that he has studied, even though he might find it appropriate to make such assumptions. The “unified” tribal identity which he proposes might not be acceptable to the people he wrote about.

Lushai Chrysalis was written by Major Anthony Gilchrist McCall, who had spent some time in the Lushai Hills as an administrator. The main purpose of this book appears to have been an attempt to study a “backward” people and the ways they could be administered (7). The writer is aware that this exercise will be helpful for his countrymen who will have an opportunity to travel to the land about which he was going to write. Therefore, Major McCall has done an extensive study of the lifestyle, practices, customs and beliefs of the Lushais. In this book, under the second chapter called “Spirit Glimmerings”, there is a section titled “Folk-Lore” which consists of thirteen folktales of diverse topics such as the belief in death and afterlife, love stories and animal tales. Although there is a certain section that is kept aside for the folktales, there are legends and tales that are intertwined within the narration of the book. For instance, in chapter one, the story behind the name of a particular village, Chhuhlawh, is given (23). In chapter two, the origin of the Lushai clan is traced through the story of Zahmuaka, whose great-grandson, Sailova, became one of the most powerful and greatest chiefs among the Lushais. The writer seems to be making an attempt to try to understand the people of the land he writes about: “In seeking then to penetrate the heart of the Lushai we must bear in mind that at least, traditionally, he is an animist at

heart and in his approach to all problems and impacts” (68). McCall also writes: “On the basis of this association with the Supernatural, the Lushai would claim to be a highly cultured man rather than a savage” (68). These two comments of the writer suggest that on the one hand, he is open in accepting the possibility of the Lushais not being as “backward” as they (the British) perceive them to be. On the other hand, there appears to be a prejudice against the Lushais that they are indeed “savage”.

When Major A. G. McCall introduces the folktales of the Lushais, he gives a list of reasons as to why these tales were so popular. The tales could have been a means of escape from the daily hard work of the people, a way to “indulge their imagination” and a way to teaching and learning about one’s culture and tradition. All the tales included in the book have a few lines at the end titled “Remembrance for Posterity”. There are thirteen Lushai folktales included in this book. These tales range from popular figures like Chhura and Chemtatrawta to the tragic love stories of Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana to the animal tales. There is also a tale where the village of death is described with the figure of Pawla who shoots at the dead souls with pellets. On the whole, this book has been useful for Mizos in later years as well as for non-Mizos for different reasons. For a person (an “outsider”), possibly from the West, preparing to travel to the Lushai Hills, this book would have been quite useful for a journey to an unexplored part of India. There is a personal angle to the book where Major McCall describes his arrival and his departure from the Lushai Hills. This brings up the question as to whether the “objectivity” of an anthropologist could have been maintained while writing this book.

In one of her articles called “An Axis Jump: British Colonialism in the Oral Folk Narratives of Nineteenth-Century India Author(s)”, Sandhana Naithani writes: “British collectors of Indian folklore were also administrators, and their narrators were their colonial subjects; their folklore collections had intentional, incidental and potential administrative implications” (Naithani

184). This is true of the Lushais and the British who collected their folktales. In all the three sources mentioned above, the writers were British administrators who had been in the land for many years. Their purpose in writing these works could have been to share their experiences, to publish their findings to their contemporaries, or to keep a record of their administration in writing for future use. There are certain folktales and legends that have been included by both Shakespear and McCall in their writings. The stories about Chhura, Chawngchilhi, Chemtatrawta and the monkey and the bear are found in the work of both the writers. In “The Kuki-Lushai Clans”, there were hardly any folktales but it did include legends like the good spirit called “Lasi”, the belief in a life after death with Pawla in the path of the dead souls, and the folktale of the monkey and the bear, which are all found in *Lushai Chrysalis*. In all these tales which are common to the three works, there are elements embedded in the tales and legends which could have given an idea about the lives of the Lushais to the reader. For instance, the story of Chemtatrawta has a number of animals included in it which could give a survey of the animals that could be found in the Lushai Hills. The love story of Chawngchilhi and the snake might give an idea of the fear that people have of snakes and the tragic end that a woman will meet if she disobeys her parents. The legends and tales about Pawla and his pellet reveal that the Lushais had a very clear cut notion of a belief in life after death and in their actions in the present life having an impact on their afterlife. Thus, there seems to be a pattern where the writers have chosen particular tales or legends which could create a vague identity of the Lushais, based on their views.

Major A. G. McCall describes the “General Theme” of his work, *Lushai Chrysalis*, and writes:

The main purpose of the book is to show the following points through the subject taken, viz., Lushai:

- (a) What happens when a backward people are exposed, undirected, to stronger culture impacts.
- (b) The necessity for fostering development along healthy and appropriate lines in cases where the backwardness of a people is such as to preclude them from fostering their own ordered development.
- (c) The necessity for a closer link of understanding of the difficulties of such people with those in the Homelands, without which the flow of suitable officers prepared to labour, suffer, and endure must become progressively less.
- (d) The projection through appendices and photographs of proof that the treatment accorded to the Lushais resulted in their support in times of trouble.
- (e) The Book contains authoritative matter compiled by me, the author, over a period of nearly twenty years' close study under conditions of much isolation and hard living.

Anthropological terminology has been omitted by me to widen the field of readers, though the principles of anthropology have been strictly applied. (McCall 7)

It is clear from these points that the British needed to know more about the people they were going to rule. They found it necessary to create a source which could be accessed by the present as well as the future administrators of the Mizo country. Therefore, it was necessary for the administrators to formulate a way of understanding the people they were going to conquer. The words used to describe the Lushais seem to make a hierarchy between them and the British administrators. For instance, according to McCall, the Lushais are “a backward people” who need outside help to make “development along appropriate lines.” The British who are posted in the Lushai Hills seem to be depicted in this General Theme as men who have made sacrifices for a better

cause as they have to “labour, suffer and endure” while they are in this region. The author himself had to live through “much isolation and hard living” while writing *Lushai Chrysalis*. Hence, from the first few pages of the book, a gap has already been established, where the Lushais are placed at a much lower level than the Britishers. Folklore is one aspect through which a certain community may be better understood. Barre Toelken writes: “Folklore functions in part as an informal system for learning the daily logic and worldview of the people around us” (Toelken 27). Thus, for the British who had entered a foreign land, it was necessary to find a way to learn about the people they were going to rule over. One of the aspects of folktales is that there is an underlying moral or teaching embedded in them. Such subtle messages are an important clue to learn more about the customs and practices of the people whose folktales one is studying.

In *Lushai Chrysalis*, it is pertinent to note that Major A. G. McCall has included “Folk-lore” as a section in a chapter titled “Spirit Glimmerings”. Does it imply that for Major McCall, the tales are part of the ancient beliefs of the Mizos which cannot be separated from their religious practices? In the brief introduction to the thirteen tales that Major McCall has collected, he writes of the important place that the folktales occupy in the minds of the people. It appears that in order to prove his point, he has affixed “Remembrance for Posterity” to each tale. Stating out the morals or the teachings of the folktales at the end might seem appropriate but one could beg to differ that it takes away the joy of discovering the underlying morals.

If a person who did not know anything about Mizo life and custom were to read these thirteen folktales, it would not be difficult for that person to form an idea about the beliefs and lives of the Mizos of that time. The belief about afterlife is found in “Pawla and Sanui”; love in the time of the terrible inter-village wars and rivalries is found in “Chawngmawii and Hrangchhuana”; the value given to bravery and honour among men is found in many of the tales;

the reason why certain stars shine brighter, why a lobster becomes red when it is heated (ways of nature) are found in the folktales. There might be questions about why a Christian would want to depict the afterlife in his collection of folktales. One explanation could be that since the writer is an anthropologist, he is applying “anthropological objectivity” and writing the tales as they are told. On the other hand, the depiction of afterlife that the people believed in could have drawn a comparison with the belief in life after death that is taught by the Christian missionaries, thus paving the way for the spread of Christianity.

According to Major McCall, folktales can be a means of escape for people who live a hard life. The stories may be used for amusement or for entertainment: “In folk-lore a people can indulge their imagination, can seek to rise above the plane of life’s incessant hardship” (McCall 75). McCall does not seem to dwell on the educative aspect of the tales and is more interested in the social picture that can be drawn through a reading of the tales. *Lushai Chrysalis* was first published in 1949 and was primarily meant as a book to give information about a region which was then known as the “Lushai Hills”. Therefore, the main readers would have been people who did not have any information about that region and who were preparing to rule over the land. Thus, in a way this book may be considered a text book through which the British got to learn about an almost unknown territory and the thirteen folktales could have been a source of getting to know about the people and their customs through their popular stories.

The main purpose of these British writers seems to be that of assisting the administrative work of the British government. By collecting these folktales, these administrators paved the way for the Britishers to understand the people of the region and helped them to rule over these people. As Vladimir Propp asserts: “Folklore is an ideological discipline. Its methods and aims are determined by and reflect the outlook of the age” (3). Therefore, it was crucial

for the British government to learn about the people they were going to conquer through the knowledge of their folktales.

Folktales and customs are often thought to be reflections on the life of the people. For example, Shakespear's observation that "the casual way" in which a character is introduced in a story is a reflection of the proceedings of court cases he had tried among the Lushais. Quarrels come up which turn out to be about something which is unrelated to the case at hand. In the article "The Kuki-Lushai Clans", Shakespear writes: "The only cure I know for a bewitched person is to eat the liver of the person who has bewitched him" (384). This statement is corroborated by Mrs. Shakespear when she discusses the various plates that accompany the article "Folk-Tales of the Lushais and their Neighbours". When discussing Plate XXIII which shows Darbilli, Mrs. Shakespear writes about how Darbilli fell ill and how the illness was attributed to a wizard. For her treatment, "the wizard was killed, and his liver procured" (Shakespear and Hodson 415) but Darbilli died before she could eat the liver. It is clear that the Lushais believed in this practice but there is no proof whether this belief actually worked or not. These observations seem to suggest that the life of the people is reflected in their stories and folktales. However, according to William Bascom, there are "striking divergences between folklore and actual conduct" (Bascom 33). There may be instances where connections could be made with real life, but one should realise that not everything that is done in the folktales and stories are to be seen as something which will be actually done and accepted. Alan Dundes mentions that "[i]t could even be seriously maintained that folklore provides one of the principal sources for the articulation and communication of stereotypes" (23). This could explain why the British administrators were so keen on collecting the Mizo folktales. There was a way of formulating an identity of a stereotypical "tribal image" of the people they were going to conquer.

There are many Mizo folktales that have not been included in either of the articles or in the book mentioned in this chapter. One of the reasons for this could be that there was a constraint in space and availability of the folktales. In the article “Folktales of the Lushais and their Neighbours” by Shakespear and Hodson, there is a mention of the origin myths of different tribes; however, this was included to look at the similarities with the other tribes. In McCall’s *Lushai Chrysalis* the origin myth of the Mizos is not mentioned. Considering the fact that origin myths have an important place in the folklore of any community, it is surprising that it has not been included in the book. It will not be possible to mention all the popular and well-known folktales that have not been mentioned by these writers. However, one of the most striking absence is that of the story of Liandova and his brother that is found in a collection of Mizo folktales in the Mizo language (Lalthangliana 460). This folktale tells the story of a young man called Liandova who is blessed with riches and fame after he entertains a rich village Chief (who is in disguise). This is one of the most well-known folktales among the Mizos which teaches people to be hospitable to strangers. It also mentions the wealth that the Mizo Chiefs possessed. Yet this tale is not found in any of the three sources mentioned in this chapter.

Folktales are often considered sources of knowledge and learning; therefore the British administrators seem to have made use of folktales by collecting them and studying them so as to form a certain identity of the people. Thus, in a way, they helped the British rulers to “educate” themselves about the land that they were to occupy. The presence of the British in several parts of India had a dual objective of ruling over the country as well as adding to their knowledge. The exercise of collecting the history and folktales of the Lushais served both these objectives. The publication of the articles in journals in Great Britain and the book by the Royal Asiatic Society (first edition) shows that the anthropologists/writers wanted to present the “exotic” to their people

back home and give them a glimpse of the “Orient” which they had never got before. The three sources that have been discussed in this chapter are very important in the history of the Lushais because they are among the first written records of folktales and legends as well as the lifestyle of the people. There will be certain points on which the readers of the twenty-first century may not agree but one cannot deny the fact that these were important milestones in history. It is problematic that “outsiders” should have been the ones to keep a record for the Lushais but one needs to find a way to see the positive aspect of the efforts of the early administrators. It is up to the present and future generations of Lushais/Mizos to make use of the available sources of history and use them to their advantage.

It might be appropriate to make a brief mention of a handwritten newspaper that was in circulation in 1898. In an unpublished article by P. Thirumal and C. Lalrozami, titled “On the Discursive and Material Context of the First Handwritten Lushai Newspaper ‘Mizo Chanchin Laishuih’, 1898”, there is an analysis of one of the issues of the newspaper that is still available at the State Archives in Aizawl, Mizoram. The news items included orders that had been announced by Shakespear, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills at that time; reports of hunting expeditions and the animals that were killed; provisions for taking care of babies whose mothers had died while giving birth; facts about how the earth is round and not flat; and a short tale about the mother frog who tried to make herself as big as a mithun and died in the process. The presence of this handwritten newspaper shows that the Mizos had taken an initiative to promote the written Mizo script. The article mentions the following:

Three prominent names appear in the text. They are BorSap (Shakespeare or the White Prince of the Hills), the most powerful colonial administrator of the Lushai Hills; Khamliana, a Sailo Chief on the decline who later rose to become the first literate and the most

effective spokesman for the Lushais; Sauka, a commoner from the less visible Chawngthu Vanchiau clan, remarkably enterprising and a person who held several positions in the colonial bureaucracy, and taught the Mizo language to Lorrain, the missionary responsible for producing the script for the Lushai language. It appears that these three men participated in the writing of MCL.

Although this newspaper is very significant in the history of writing in Mizo script and there were Mizos who had a hand in the publication of this newspaper, it appears from the items that the superiority of the British is still being established through the written form.

The folktales that have been collected by the British administrators are not the only ones that were kept in the written form. The Welsh missionaries had also made attempts to record and preserve the folktales. The approach might have been different for the administrators and the missionaries but both their aims seem to be education. For the administrators, the exercise of collecting the folktales could have been to “educate” themselves and their successors about an unknown people and their culture; whereas for the missionaries, the folktales contained a knowledge system that could be used to “educate” the people as well as spread the gospel in a way. Therefore, the history of the establishment of the “modern” education system in Lushai Hills and the efforts made by the missionaries cannot be ignored.

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MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Laldinpuii. “Reading the Lushais (Mizos) through their Folktales from the Point of View of an Outsider.” *Literary Quest* 1.10 (2015): 64-82. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.