

# *Literary Horizon*

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## A Social Critique of James Dokhuma's *Khawhar In*

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**Abstract:** *As man is a social being, we adjust and adapt to the society with principles that we admire in the concept of how to live with it. How to amend social errors, way of life, to the point where it influences our logic and thinking capability. With these principles we cultivate, we develop a competition in ideology and we are reluctant to subdue these ideologies to the point where we risk even our lives.*

*Even from the story "Khawhar In" we are highlighted to what the Mizo society admires. So, we put an effort in order to gain that admiration. In order to take favour Vantlangmuana relocate to village as guided by his grandfather's dream. Since Vantlangmuana lived a higher status from the commoners. According to Mizo community, he achieved the title Thangchhuah in both the positive and negative aspect.*

*Looking from Mizo's social context, we can speculate that Vantlangmuana, during his time, he can be considered to have an elite status. Favoured by faith, acknowledged by his community he was able to attend his desire, even when the Mizo's concept of admiration drifted differently, he still managed to attain his wealth and admiration.*

**Keywords:** *Mizo fiction, history, social values*

### Introduction

The story "*Khawhar In*" (1970) written by James Dokhuma addresses what the Mizo community find admirable in the past and the present. It also addresses about what other culture finds admirable about our way of culture. With development and progression, the concept of admiration differs and develops as well. Our likes, opinions, our principles on



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attaining a healthy life evolve and adapt with cultural progression, thus it is not always valid to stick to the old traditions on the concept of what is admirable.

## Strong Man (MiChak)

In the Mizo society, the community admires and look up to strong and courage men in their community. Even in our folk tales and stories, this archetype is considered as the key feature of the story and they are present in most of our Mizo story. So even in the story "*Khawhar In*" the protagonist, Vantlangmuana possess the quality and is acknowledged by the society. Even during his childhood days, he was an active child with good physique, so he stands out in sports. He was exceptionally talented in hockey and sprinting in his school so he was favoured by his teachers. But his seniors are jealous of his reputations which can be seen in the story.

Also, Vantlangmuana is exceptionally good in traditional wrestling (inbuan) due to his physical structure and strength. In olden times, when villagers have guest in their village, the male youth would test the strength of their guests before courting women by having a friendly wrestling match in '*Zawlbuk*'. So even in the story, Vantlangmuana was wrestled by the youth of Lungpho village. While they were digging a grave plot, there were young maidens who were distributing tea around, and these maidens are also fascinated by the males wrestling match so they decided to watch them. They could not pin down Vantlangmuana who was determined by his will power where he motivates himself by saying "*I must not yield in this wrestling match for the maidens are watching,*" (*Khawhar In*, 73). Thus, from this quotation, we can conclude that even the maiden's folk admire strong man.

## Hero (Sa Kap Thei)

The Mizo ancestors have high regards for hunters who have the most animal kill count. Also, the hunters are ashamed to return empty handed when they venture out for hunting. In order for them to have a good kill, they would perform rituals of offering to the forest spirit. Our ancestors believe that all the animals are ruled and protected by the forest spirit called '*Lasi*'. Also, according to the Mizo culture, every newborn sons are pre-determined to become a good hunter, in which a hunter with good kills develop a positive



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reputation even to the women folk and every hunter aim to achieve the title called 'Thangchhuah', so he set his mark on animals to kill in order to achieve that title.

The ancestors of Vantlangmuana were also blessed by the deity, and guided them in their dreams through a prophet. So, they followed the guidance of the deity and shifted their village. After doing so he was visited by the deity's prophet again to reward and bless them. "I am the one whom you've encounter before. Your actions have pleased the deities and the gods, so I am sent here to shower you and your descents with blessings and good fortune. They will be blessed with the ability of marksmanship and some of them will be blessed with desirability. They will be admired and respected by all. And you will be blessed with long life, and will not die before you see the face of your grandson." (20)

Vantlangmuana was blessed by a deity called 'Khawzing Pathian' so in order for him to attain the title 'Thangchhuah', the only animal that was left for him to hunt down was the *Tumpangchal* (a wildbull) which was the only animal that he could think of. And after he hunts down the bull, he attains a sense of completion and satisfaction in attaining the title. Like how deity told him in his grandfather's dream, Vantlangmuana was able to enter a special place in the spirit world call *Pialral* with all the animals that he hunted down. According to our ancestors, hunter with marksman ability are highly praised and admired by all. Even when he slayed the tiger a ceremony was held in his village for his victory, he gratifyingly exclaimed while performing a ceremony called Sakei Lu Lam "As I gaze towards the villagers from the ceremonial ground it was pleasing to see maidens staring at me appealingly" (60). It was due to his achievement that he attains the love of his life Biakliani and the praise from the elders as well which can be seen when the elders ordered the children of Lungpho to call for him to narrate the story of his duel with the tiger by the male elders. In the Mizo society, what the male elders praise and approve is approved by the whole community

## Courting (Nula Rim)

By living in a confined society, we intuitively analyse our surrounding as well as our opposite gender. Sometimes social practices and customs may contradict each other, and



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these contradictory practices cannot always be amended or refined and sometimes continue to exist in our social practices even with development and progression. The Mizo society has a long practice of courting women and the male youth favoured the maiden with good nature, beauty and cordial nature. Even the parents also like to take the maiden of such quality for their bride. Also, if the maiden or the family members do not commemorate her suitor, the community, disowns her and her family, which is an embarrassment for their family. Even in this story we see the characters of Chalkhumi, a maiden with beauty but lacks cordial nature. If she has the nature, she would have worked much more in times of her marriage. In the story we see Vantlangmuana courting her, who stayed a bit longer than the others, was scolded by her mother, and when this was acknowledged by the community, they were disowned. Also, her mother acted snobbish, where Chalkhumi courted by a young man who was from the Assam Regiment. However, a person with government profession was look up with high regard.

The Mizo culture believes that a man who has managed to have an intercourse with several maiden, was believed that when he died, in his afterlife he would be pardoned by Paula. This belief was deeply engraved in their belief system. Thus, a man tried to have intercourse with as much maiden possible during his youth. This belief system was very much accepted by Vantlangmuana as well “...like how my grandfather have foreseen in his dreams, even I have managed to attain the title *thangchhuah* in both positive and negative aspects”. (113)

## Gayal (Sial)

The Mizos hold a culture that domesticates animals. Among those animals, the Gayal is considered to be the most prominent animal. The Gayal also plays an important role even in marriage ceremony. Also, in Mizo ceremonial customs, the people who can perform most ‘*Sechhun*’ are put in a high pedestal in the society and attain the title ‘*Thangchhuah*’, so for this reason, a Gayal is necessary. The Gayal is also used as a sacrificial item in order to please the deities as well. Even in the story “*Khawhar In*” the Gayal is used as an offering in marriage; in addition, the characters travel all the way to Lungpho village in search for a





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Gayal. In the story, when Vantlangmuana and his friend Laia venture out for trading their sights of a Gayal, on the outskirts of Lungpho village gives them a sense of accomplishment.

*Muana look there, if they could just use this Gayal as an offering in the marriage ceremony and if we could use the other Gayal to turn down their offering, then they will not belong to anyone. And it will be a dream if the field is filled with pots of Gayal meat for the marriage feast, it would be a relaxing and pleasant dream don't you think so. (65)*

Thus, through their conversation we can acknowledge the importance and value of a Gayal in the Mizo society.

## Community Feast (Khawtlang Hrai)

According to Mizo customs and belief, the ticket to the afterlife (*pialral*) requires one to organise a community feast for the whole community. Even during the 'Khuangchuar' festival, it becomes a customary practice that it is always followed by a community feast. Thus, it has taken an important root to our custom practices. Thus, even in the marriage of Muana and Rovi, Rovi's passing of her matric exam, all this celebration involves feast. Even during the marriage of Biakliani it is practiced as well.

Self-sustainability plays an important part in Mizo customs. So, every family thrive to attain what is necessary for their household and to be independent in terms of wealth, land and household, food and resources. Vantlangmuana and his friends even travel all the way to Burma and Manipur in order to attain financial sustainability. Also, Rovi's family, although her father has been an army pension, they still cultivated vegetation for commercial as well as for self-sustenance. Even Biakliani's family use animal rearing to support themselves.

Thus, the Mizo society highly promotes self-independence and self-sustainability which is an important custom guideline to be a blessing for others as well and which is highly admired by other cultures as well.

So, from James Dokhuma's story "Khawhar In", we can also see how Christianity changes our old customs and traditional practices. From these fictional stories, there is an image of the new way of living and new thinking brought about by Christianity. Therefore, change has taken place in different levels like social relationships, ideas about women's right, religion, etc. First of all, Christianity replaced the traditional beliefs, practices and





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superstitions. Another element seen in the post-Christianity literature has been the rise of education. Before the advent of Christianity, lives of the children were closed under the four walls of their home. They were meant to help the family. With the arousal in education, parents sent their children to school with a view that they could work a more prestigious job. Therefore, it must be mentioned that the school began to produce teachers as well as scholars and the foundations of the present primary school system had begun to laid; and it is because of this education that they have their now literary and fictional works which enriched our literature. Education has now become one of their identity.

However, we can still undoubtedly hold on to some of our old traditional customs that signifies our identity as well. Last but not the least, the status of women have undergone a major change. Christianity brought about the essence of humanity and women empowerment. Initially, besides all household chores and domestic works had been directed to women, she had no personal privileges or rights. However, Christianity brought freedom to the men as well as women. One of the most marked changes Christianity had brought about is the change in the status of women, freedom and equality in the Mizo society.

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