

guns and helicopters and computers money can buy” (Ghosh, *Circle* 261). These then are the new “tools of empire”. Ghosh sums up the entire episode saying, “This was no feud: no tyrants died; there was no fratricide, no regicide, no love, no hate. It was just practice for the princes of the future and their computers – an exercise in good husbandry. (Ghosh, *Circle* 262). Science is the ‘tool’ to subjugate in the first section; applied science and technology is used as the ‘tool’ for the ‘civilizing mission’ in this section. The Oilmen decide to build a shopping mall, named Star. The site they choose for it is symbolic; the Star is being built where the date palms once stood. Being built against a historical background of exploitation and neocolonialism it is the new-age “civilizing mission” of the neo-colonial era that Ghosh brings to our notice. But it collapses when underconstruction which can be read as a symbol of the potential collapse of neocolonialism itself (Chambers 44). Alu had fled to al-Ghazira to escape the police and he is an illegal immigrant working in the under-construction Star. When he lies buried underneath the Star, Ghosh juxtaposes the centuries old trading culture with the modern oil economy that threatens to subsume it. When rescuers go looking for him they hear a ‘voice’ which is actually a transistor radio accidentally switched on during the collapse of the building and which echoes through the ruins. Robert Dixon feels this ‘voice’ evokes the aesthetics of postmodernism: the loss of affect, the decentering of the bourgeois subject, the loss of interiority and the relentless commodification of culture. Alu is trapped inside postmodernity and when he is reached, he is found saved by two sewing machines (Dixon 17). Ghosh uses this incident as an allegory about the cultural logic of global capitalism destroying the ancient trading cultures of the Middle East. The Star was to replace the Souq, the traditional market place, after all. In this novel, Ghosh depicts the modern world of globalization and international migration that neglects their ‘have-nots.’ The novel focuses on the misery and displacement of the refugees as a result of the Bangladesh War and on the plight of migrant workers in the Gulf States. Zindi’s house in al-Ghazira shelters a desperate group of migrants, who go to great lengths to survive the hostile environment of the oil economy. Alu is one of them. The Iran-Iraq war was in full swing when Ghosh was writing this novel. This probably provided him with material for his dark depiction of the state murders of unarmed civilians at the end of the “Rajas” section and the shadowy Oilmen surreptitiously manipulating al-Ghazira’s political order.

Carbolic acid, an embodiment of science in the novel, becomes virtually a cleansing agent in the social sense too, meant for purging the society of its evil practices. Lying buried under the debris of the Star, Alu has a hallucinatory revelation. He realizes that money is the ultimate dirt in the society. To remove that evil he introduces a moneyless community and for physical purification he comes on his uncle’s mission of cleanliness, and introduces carbolic acid in al-Ghazira. Even here, they are chased for their gospel of physical and psychological purity. The state cannot survive without capital gains and hence must squash all methods that undermine this. It uses violence against the migrants, killing many and dispersing the rest. When carbolic acid is used as “ganga jal” in the third

section of the novel it marks the turning point in India's social history indicating the movement from superstition to science. Alu learns the importance of being human first, over and above his rational faculties. This awareness is the moment of final redemptive mystery in the novel. This awareness is immediately rewarded when his atrophied thumb is restored to him and his potato-shaped head too becomes normal. Alu is exorcised of the ghost of Reason, he is a new man. *The Circle of Reason* (1986) has the social, economic, political and metaphysical all woven together. It shows the struggle between capitalism and socialism, and also the struggle between reason and humane qualities. Science, trade and war are the 'tools' that colonial powers used to rule; they remain the same in the hands of neocolonial powers. Gayatri Spivak asks the question 'Can the subaltern speak?' Ghosh's writings have been directed at wanting to answer this question, and in the affirmative. The many journeys that the characters in Ghosh's novel undertake usually results in an exercise in retrieval of stories that intend to subvert mainstream history, and make the subaltern 'speak'. He does all this while recognizing that the recuperation of the voice of an indigenous culture which is assumed to have existed in parallel with colonial discourse is fraught with difficulties. This is because the very acknowledgement of the existence of such a culture would presuppose that such a domain had an autonomous, uncontaminated existence. John Thieme adds that all the evidence – linguistic, archaeological, theological, etc. – suggests that cross-pollination and syncretism always occur when cultures come in contact. It would also be a problem because colonial and other forms of elite historiography have successfully occluded subaltern narratives from the scribal records of societies (130). Ghosh employs two strategies to counter these difficulties. The first is imaginative reinventions based on a bedrock of historical fact. The second is a recurrent emphasis on the interactions occurring within both 'Western' and 'Eastern' cultures during the last millennium.

References :

- Chambers, Claire.(2003) "Historicizing Scientific Reason in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*." *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Tabish Khair. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 36-55. Print.
- Dasan, A.S. (2007) "Questing for Truth: History-Fiction Interface in the recent Indian English Fiction." *Littcrit*. 33.2-64 (Dec 2007): 5-24. Print.
- Dixon, Robert. (2003) "'Travelling in the West': The Writing of Amitav Ghosh." *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Tabish Khair. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 9-35. Print
- Ghosh, Amitav. (1986) *The Circle of Reason*. New Delhi: Dayal, Print
- Hawley, John C. (2005) "The Writer, his Contexts and his Themes." *Amitav Ghosh: An Introduction*. New Delhi: Foundation, 1-17. Print.
- Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. (2003) "The Road from Mandalay: Reflections on Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*." *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Tabish Khair. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 162-74. Print.
- Thieme, John. (2003) "The Discoverer Discovered: Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*." *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Tabish Khair. New Delhi: Permanent Black. 128-41. Print.
- Weisbord, Merrily.(1997) "Amitav Ghosh." *College English Review* 1.4 (July-August 1997): 4-5. Print.



Translating Mizo Folklore: The Power Dynamics

- Margaret L. Pachuau

Abstract: This paper shall attempt to situate the significance of religion and power and its centrality in the process of translating Mizo folklore. It shall determine an exploration of the translation of Mizo folklore -from the Mizo to English- and trace the underlying aspects that are located in the process of translation of the same. As indicated in the title, it shall explore the cultural dynamics that are inherent in a society, where translation does not take place for its own sake alone but rather in terms of a paradigm where it exists in a dynamics where a semblance of 'censorship' is a prerequisite. This aspect of 'censorship' has been seen significantly as a product of religion. In the process it has created a cultural complexity towards situating folklore within the Mizo paradigm.

Keywords: religion, power, translation, Mizo, folklore.

Post colonial writing including the oft quoted question posed by Spivak 'can the subaltern speak?' have stressed upon the notion of speaking not merely about a post colonial ethic but also in the aspects concerning post colonial 'creativity' in the ambit of literature and identity. As with most cultures, translation has had myriad functions to play in this context, as almost all literature, both oral as well as written, for the Mizos have been 'inherited' in translation from the Welsh missionaries. Thus, it is in this perspective that translation plays a key role. Colonisation brought about the advent of the Welsh missionaries in what was then predominantly referred to as the Lushai Hills, and the advent of Christian missionaries have been central to the Mizo ethos, predominantly as the receiving culture was decidedly tribal, and bereft of literacy. Within the ambit of this domain, the dynamics of a recreation and a reordering, of what was ostensibly a culture with little or no established mores, became the mainstay prerogative of the Welsh mission. However, what must be taken into consideration here is that, it would be decidedly wrong to perceive of the Mizos as a tribal community that was either savage or alien to the concept of both administration and religion. As in most cultures, where orality has had a marked significance, Mizos too had their own precepts of religion and forms of administration. The Welsh missionaries were keen on the transformation of a the Mizo ethos from orality to writing, and this aspect was achieved only through the nuances of translation. Translation was foremost in priority and it has been instrumental in creating a semblance of identity formulation amongst the community. Having translated folklore from the Mizo to English, I realise that there are certain aspects where the dynamics between the folk and the lore are predominantly 'censored' due to the power that religion has over the Mizo mindset. The translated narratives have sought to locate the Foucauldian argument, where

Foucault stresses that 'power is everywhere because it comes from everywhere'. In deliberating upon the same, concentrated effort has been made to dwell upon the censorship that is prevalent in the translation and interpretation of folklore, where translation has not been rendered 'for its own sake'. In the translation of Mizo folklore; translation by itself is a power seeking action that transcends literary boundaries, and religion becomes the determining power in translation, and this aspect has gradually been enhanced in everyday ethos. (Pachau, 7) In this context Foucault's essay 'What is an Author?' must be taken into consideration. This paper also assumes the premise that every act of writing is already a translation or a translation of a translation. In this context Spivak's has raised the notion of how the 'third world' subject is represented in Western discourse including in translation. In her seminal 1988 essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' she posits the question of whether or not it is possible for the subalterns to speak for themselves especially in the light of the colonisation that they have undergone. This question is applicable to the subaltern context of the Mizos too who have increasingly rendered identity in translation. The image of the hill dweller as projected through translation has in turn been translated with varying cultural contexts in the folk narratives, in terms of an identity formation. Spivak's position is well situated in the Mizo paradigm especially where she denotes that in order for the 'subaltern mute to speak', it is necessary 'to unlearn and to mark our position' before being able to learn again. The demands that are made upon the translator as mediator are correspondingly high because 'the translator must be familiar with the history of the language, the history of the author's moment, the history of the language-in-translation', all of which have been little researched upon by the translators in the colonial past and this ethos has been maintained even in the post colonial era.

Translation dynamics across cultures and particularly for the Mizo sensibility demands a critique as well as a coherent comprehension of the religious ethos pertaining to the same. Foucault's concept of the belief that 'relations of power are not in themselves forms of repression... But what happens is that, in society, in most societies, organizations are created to freeze the relations of power, hold those relations in a state of asymmetry, so that a certain number of persons get an advantage, socially, economically, politically, institutionally' are central in the application of the Church as a religious instrument that determines the levels of translation. Canonical law, the Christian pastoral and civil law contribute to aspects of repression. Foucault attributes a fundamental role to censorship and taboos regarding speaking and thinking and this has been central to the Mizo ethos as well. In terms of the individualisation of ideas pertaining to ideas such as, 'What is an author?' where Foucault questions the notions of the authorial status, he further elaborates:

What is a work? Of what elements is it composed? Is it not what an author has written? What is an author's name and how does it function?" For each poetic or fictional text, we ask questions-from where does it

come, who wrote it ,when ,under what circumstances, beginning or design? (Rabinow,3)

This paradigm may also be applicable to Mizo folklore in translation. In the Mizo dynamics of translation too the earlier Welsh mission translators as well as the Mizo translators of the post missionary era, have been translators in more than the literal sense, and thus the term translator cannot be confined to just the translation of a mere text or body of writing. Translators have thus been ' authors and translators' of something much more than a text. They have set the pace for subsequent theories and traditions and disciplines in which other books or authors in Mizo literature will find their place. Religion and the significance that it has in terms of translation, then is akin to the concept of surveillance which Foucault denotes from time to time in his works. The aspect of self-identity in relation to the problem of 'individualizing power' is a strategic case for consideration. Foucault also uses the term 'pastoral modality of power'.(Foucault,84) Perhaps this aspect could be referred to, to further explain as to why Christianity which was the decided colonial legacy, for the Mizos (and which has much of its origins from the Hebrew tradition), was so intense in its development of the pastoral theme .The concept of Christian thought and institutions, of God alone as the Shepherd and the people as their flock are central. Clearly in such an instance, the association of “pastoral technology” in the management of men has been a part of the perhaps disruptive discourses of society. (Foucault ,34)In this regard, a semblance of political domination has occurred in Mizo translation dynamics too because, the Church has largely censored the translation and subsequent rendering of Mizo folk narratives. However, the prose tradition was less censored as compared to the song tradition because it was considered to be less of a threat in comparison to the song tradition and in fact the missionaries themselves helped in the translation and documentation of the prose narratives. Mrs. E M Chapman, popularly known as Pi Zirtiri alongwith a lady called Pi Nuchhungi in fact, helped in the compilation of folk narratives in prose entitled 'Serkawn Graded Reader' which was prescribed for the primary schools(and is in fact studied till the present time of writing). Even then, the prose narratives were 'censored' and many aspects that were related to the cultural artifacts were often harshly left untranslated. Varying narratives that had been handed down from the Mizo folk tradition have been censored because the terms and the themes used, have been regarded to be detrimental to the precepts of Christianity. The narratives that were related to the song tradition were vastly censored in translation from the original Mizo, because folk songs were regarded to be more emotionally overpowering, as compared to the folktales. In this regard, religion has played a central predominance because, there is a distinct personal bond where the tie with the shepherd is an individual one and in the process, leads to a constitutive part of Christian self-identity, as earlier elucidated in terms of Foucault's model. In the affirmation of identity and translation within a post colonialist perspective, the white man has decidedly played a significant role in the

poetics of translation. Religion has been consistently the central power within this aspect because, the colonizers chose to translate only select aspects that were located from both song and prose folk narratives, this ostensibly because the mainstay was to promote and enhance their own agendas rather than anything else. It is evident that the missionaries recognized that music and song folk narrative, was central to the Mizo sensibility. Edwin Rowlands a Welsh missionary who came to the Lushai hills in the early nineteenth century, after the Arthington mission had left the Lushai Hills records thus:

the Lushais seem to have a great love for singing, It is said that during one of the military expeditions, when the British soldiers were encamped at certain places ...the Lushais, who were shooting at the camp, stopped when the song began but fired again when the singing had ceased. (Vanlalchhuanawma,4)

The politics of translation has further been problematised in this regard. It has been denoted by Mizo cultural historians too that Mizos would perhaps be a people who possessed the widest range in song narrative .This was much before the script was created for them. While disseminating Christian ideology, thus, music became one of the more significant tools of the missionaries. There was a growing awareness of the Western tunes of the English hymns that were rendered in translation. Song and the Christian ethos were thus significant, and it was a decided marker of a new social identity and this shift in the musical direction was a signifying aspect of power. The Mizos made little or no attempt to indigenize the aspect of Christianity and it ensured too that there was little or no attempt made to write back to the empire with little or no attempt made to fight against the missionaries. The Mizo concept of the song tradition was one that advocated for hope amidst turbulent beliefs. Song reinforced a sense of community identity. What remains significant in this regard is that while other cultures have aimed at a sense of emancipation from colonialism, Mizos themselves have not been too vehement in this regard. It appeared from the very outset that the pioneer missionaries recognised the Mizo instinct for music and singing. There had been an immense amount of material that had been already gathered in terms of the folk narratives of the Mizos that were rendered in the song tradition as well as an immense amount of growth and development in terms of the Mizo composers and their songs even before the arrival of the Christian mission. To further elucidate that the Mizos in fact had an immense amount of songs and music, K. Zawla has denoted thus:

it must be said that we ,the Mizos, are the people who have the most extensive range of song in the whole wide world even before having the alphabet. (Vanlalchhuanawma,56)

Lorrain and Savidge the two missionaries referred to earlier as the first to have entered the Lushai hills, have however been credited in terms of rendering the first Western hymns in translation to the Mizos. The both of them had composed a song which was based upon the life of Jesus, and it depicted instances relating to the incarnation up till the ascension and it was set to the tune of J.J. Rousseau's "Come ye sinners poor and

needy". The smooth flow of the song made it easy to sing and it first placed in the Mizo hymn book which contained a dozen hymns. Some of those hymns were familiar hymns that had been sung in many places even before the missionaries themselves had set foot in those places. The hymns and songs were very important instruments in removing Mizo apprehension about the 'alien religion' and played a unique role in the later revival movement when new Mizo hymns based upon traditional tunes emerged. The Welsh mission immediately developed the ministry of music by adding six more hymns to the already existing twelve hymns that had been contributed by the Arthington mission and subsequently they also printed a new hymnbook in 1899. The surprising aspect was that as soon as the mission inaugurated an evangelistic outreach in the villages, there was no rejection towards the same, rather the villagers began to sing Christian hymns in the zawlbuk (bachelor's dormitory) and this itself was a significant indicator that the hymns as well as the missionaries themselves were well accepted within the local domains. Songs became inherently central for the people even as there was a continued acceptance of Christianity and this has been indicated especially in terms of the revival movement, when the missionaries were making headway in the various villages amidst opposition and indifference. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 45) Even as there arose significant pandering towards the Christian hymns, there arose a cultural movement that was centred around an obscure song called 'puma zai' and this movement flared up during the year 1907. The said songs that stirred the controversy were songs that were composed around a double lined refrain of any number of verses and it had the appellation of 'puma' at the end of the line. The musical roadmap, in translation, for the Mizos has assumed a very similar observation since the time of the Christian missionaries whose one principal ministry resource was the power and the influence of the songs that they gave the Mizos. While disseminating the Christian ideology, music became one of the more significant tools of the early missionaries. The old order gave way to the new quickly in terms of attracting a majority of the populace, even as there was still the pre colonial song tradition, there was the growing awareness of the Western tunes of the English hymns that were rendered in translation and these tunes quickly attracted the local community. Initially, these songs were not too many in number but at the same time the native Mizos were faced with a sense of attraction especially because they were drawn towards the 'attractiveness' of the new religion of Christianity as well as its comforting promises of salvation. This led many to be convinced about the religion of Christianity within a short span of time. So overwhelming was the force of the new Christian music that was imported from abroad that until the first spiritual revival broke out in the year 1913, neither the Mizos nor the Western Missionaries had to think of any other music genre to supplant or to complement what had been slowly built up as a model for Christian songs. When a new Christian culture was administered into the life of the Mizos by the missionaries, the resulting

impact on the society was immense. In the wake of these arguments, Felix Muchimba states that in terms of the African context, “Christians need to be on guard against reverting to ancestral worship in the name of maintaining their culture and spiritual identity.” (Muchimba, 45) There are references to the Old Testament where the Hebrews sang to God with joy and danced before Him. There has been a significant recognition of song and music in the Old Testament books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah to name but a few where there has been a demonstration of the role that song and music has played. The dynamism of social culture ensured that the function of music changed from the times of the Old Testament to the New. There is also the recognition that when missionaries enter a particular domain, they do not enter a cultural vacuum but that they enter ongoing societies and cultures with unique belief systems and social constructs. In as far as the publication of hymnbooks are concerned the Mizo were enthusiastic overtly in this matter and Strom observes that :

Mizos are a singing people. This is perhaps their most outstanding characteristic. Taught by the musical Welsh, Mizos quickly began to compose songs-so many that they wanted to publish a new hymnbook every year.

The Mizo hymnbook which is known as the *Kristian Hlabu* is probably one of the hymnbooks that has undergone the greatest number of revisions as well as reprints. Subsequently the second decade of the twentieth century has often been regarded to be the decade of the Mizo Christian hymns. The concept of the colonizer reacting sharply to the colonized sensibility came about when the missionary began to make statements that stated that the songs that had been sung by the pre Christian Mizo were but 'corrupt ballads': God's hymns as they call them have become very popular ...they have to some extent supplemented their corrupt ballads and are sung in the zawlbuks.” This denotes that there was a deep love for music by the native people and that they were responsive towards differing genres of music. It also depicted that hybridity was quickly being an acceptable point of view with them. In this regard there must be significant mention of the reaction to the colonial missionary and his hymns. This came in the form of the 'puma zai'. It arose in the light of the various revival movements that occurred in the villages of Mizoram. And this was regarded to be a cultural movement more than anything else and it occurred in the year 1907. This song was composed of a double lined refrain of any number of verses and there was an appellation of 'puma' at the end of the first line of every refrain thereby the term 'puma zai'. Interestingly though there have been a number of theories with regards to the origin of 'puma zai'. The Biate term 'puma' means God and thus in terms of the Mizo connotation it may be rendered as a song of God. At the time when the persecution of the Christian revivalists was being curbed by the government Lalzika the chief of Zawngin went to Ratu with a young man named Liangkhaia who learnt the song and introduced it in his village, in order to celebrate the