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The Perception of Home: A Study of the Mizo Diaspora in Zorock's "Zoram ngaih hla"

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The term diaspora was used initially for the dispersal of Jews when they were forced into exile to Babylonia. Today, Diaspora implies a "dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and relocation in one or more nation-states, territories, or countries" (Briziel and Mannur 1) as such it is now used to refer to any transnational community which has a particular ethnic identity and in turn share common bonding as well. In the context of the Indian diaspora, in earlier times, the formation of the Indian diaspora was often as a result of induced emigration or bond but in more recent decades it usually occurs due to free choice and often for economic, artistic or social advantage.

The Mizo diaspora mostly comprises of the late capital or postmodern dispersal of new migrants of all classes from their original location to other lands. These exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss and some urge to reclaim and rebuild their identities. In *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie has rightly asserted that

the position of “the exile or immigrant is one of profound uncertainties” (Rushdie, 35)

Living in diaspora means living in forced or voluntary exile. The diasporic person is at home neither in his native land nor in his adopted country and can, therefore, be regarded as almost homeless. Thus the concept and interpretation of home becomes vital for them which in turn gets expressed in the form of diasporic writings. “ZoramNgaih Hla”, composed in 2005 by Rosangliana (Zorock) is a song, born out of longings and nostalgia for home, a home not shaped out of a particular house, but one that emanates out of Mizoram in its entirety. The song won the Lelte Best Song Award in 2008 and continues to resonate across the Mizo community all over the world.

The singer and songwriter, Zorock, is an expatriate who has first-hand experience of living in the diaspora. Born in 1956, he emigrated from Khawkawn (in northeast Mizoram) to Khampat in Myanmar at a young age of 7, along with his family and since then, has relocated a number of times, from Khampat to Rangoon in Myanmar, back to India where his work placed him in places like Nagaland and Meghalaya. He, thus, experienced what Aijaz Ahmad asserted “exile itself becomes a condition of the soul” for the diasporic person.

The song “ZoramNgaih Hla”, speaks about the composer’s longing for home as a Mizo expatriate. In

crossing borders and boundaries, he has imagined and re-imagined his homes and has bonded with those who are in similar situation. In an interview, Zorock asserts that the song speaks the voice of all Mizos living in diaspora because there is a shared memory.

*U.S. unau te ka ngai, Zampui tlang dung aw, Manipur;
Rangoon pawh zali kan chuang e...*

Here he invokes all fellow Mizo living outside Mizoram, from the US, to Tripura, Manipur, Rangoon and Shillong.

*Zanin Shillong tlang
Chhawrthlapui eng hnuai ah,
Pianna Zoram hmangaihberte
lenna Kolasib ngaih a zual;
Lenrual lungduh zawngte kan
ram ngei ah hlimin an leng,
Len ve hun aw ka nghakhlel*

Zorock, having moved away from one culture to another, expresses the sentiment that he is often caught between two cultures and he is mostly engaged either in a process of self-recovery through the resort to history and memory or in a process of self-preservation through an act of transformation. He exerts in the song that he often grapple with the problem of defining his identity and as such he depicts a confused, insecure self as the statement below rightly affirms:

My contention is that the expatriate writer remains in what may be called a state of animated suspension, insecure in his new environment, uncertain of his affiliations and his roots. (Mandal, 9)

Memories are the glue that holds the past and present together. They give shape and texture to identities that are fragmented by immigration, displacement, and diasporic living.

*Zanin chu ka lunglen min hnem turin,
Rual hlui zawngte autograph address ka han thlir a;
Hmana rual hlui fam tate ka ngai,
Hranghlui zai mi fam tate ka dawn changin,
Luai thlipui ka nul leh thin.*

Commenting on this, the composer asserts that his existence away from Mizoram, “gave me the distance I needed to look back on my culture with objectivity, to pick out what I valued and realize what I did not attain in a foreign land.” This feeling of connectedness to the Mizo group or community gives him a sense of belonging. He emphasizes that his memory of the Mizo community in Mizoram gives him the sense that he is a part of something. He feels attached, close and thoroughly accepted by his own people and hence, the longing to permanently settle among them in Mizoram. But at the same time, he often denotes that belonging is more than just being part of a group.

Belonging is, additionally, therefore, that feeling of connectedness to a group or community through language, race, ethnicity and practices. Zorock has also claimed that the desire for homeland has to do with this desire to belong with the larger Mizo community in Mizoram. He said, “In Mizoram, we all share a common sense of social and cultural identity, we can lean in, use our strengths and be authentically who we are”. He also claims that when we share a sense of social identity with a group, we can lean in, use our strengths and be authentically who we are. “Being surrounded by other human beings doesn’t guarantee a sense of belonging. Belonging actually has to do with identification as a member of a group and the higher quality interactions which come from that. It’s the interactions over time which are supportive of us as full, authentic human beings.” One striking example is an YouTube channel by the name US Mizo news that feature Mizos living across the US and their interviews depict different livelihood and lifestyle, but one common thread that binds them is the Mizoness, whether in whole or fragmented, that they all still possess and exhibit.

This song, however, do not seem to endure the sense of rootlessness and despair that usually result from this nomadic life. It stands for unity in spite of geographical difference, for the Mizo diaspora community, that continues to adapt to the host cultures while upholding at the same time the tradition of the old world. A such, the song is an attempt

to bring together Mizo diaspora through a shared memory of Mizoram, to strengthen their ties with this original home and to gather onto a common space of a collective Mizo identity who are otherwise separated by geo-political boundaries . it concerns people who are “scattered” away from their original homes to “gather” in some other time and other place in a foreign country, forming new communities. In all cases, the *diaspora* carries a sense of displacement; that is, separated from its national territory, and usually its people have a hope, or at least a desire, to return to their homeland at some point, if the homeland still exists in any meaningful sense.

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