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Sibling Rivalry in Select Mizo Folktales

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Abstract:
The concept of "sibling rivalry" covers many emotions and factors that contribute to them. This article will explore sibling rivalry's psychological and cultural implications in folktales. When folklorists like Alan Dundes have noted that animosity, competition, and venomous jealousy between siblings are very much present in folklore, the emotions and complications surrounding the subject of sibling rivalry are often dismissed, sidelined, and overlooked. Folktales amongst the Mizos are mainly regarded as stories for children, and there are good references to genuine bonds between siblings in stories such as 'Liandovateunau' and 'Thailungi'.There are instances where the siblings do not get along or even turn out to be each other's biggest follies. This paper attempts to analyze the rivalry between siblings in folktales such as 'Mauruangi,' 'Kelchawngi,' 'Kungawrhi,' 'Chawngchilhi,' 'Chhura, and Nahaia.' Betrayal, violence, and even deaths depicted in these stories took place in the hands of siblings who share the same blood or household. The article shall also denote that sibling rivalry will be interpreted as a universal human experience through comparative and folkloristic research.

Keywords: Mizo folktales, sibling rivalry, psychological, cultural, comparative, folkloristic.

Introduction

Mizo folktales have several recurring themes and ideas that span from creation, the afterlife, poverty, class conflict, ethical principles, mythological beings, and animal fables to everyday realities. A less symbolic yet frequent theme found in many of these folktales is the depiction of sibling relationships that vacillates between harmony and rivalry. In his seminal essay "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture,"Alan Dundes pointed out that the enmity, competition, and bitter jealousy between siblings are reflected in

folklore, even in nursery rhymes or jump rhymes which are considered to be innocent. At one point, he even argues that this inter-sibling hostility is "an integral part of the children's worldview" (479).

The universal truth that all siblings do not get along, or may end up becoming each other's worst follies, is present throughout Mizo folktales, which are primarily thought of as children's fables or bedtime stories. To emphasize this sibling rivalry, several folktales, including "Chhura and Nahaia," "Kelchawngi," "Kungawrhi," "Chawngchilhi," and "Mauruangi," will be examined. In his Introduction to *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*(1976), Bruno Bettelheim claims that, with very few exceptions, nothing in the entire body of "children's literature" can be as educational and pleasurable for both children and adults as the folk and fairy tales. It is true that fairy tales, which were written long before modern mass society existed, do not explicitly teach anything about the particulars of life in this society. However, compared to any other story that falls within a child's comprehension, they offer more insight into the deeper issues that people face and the best ways to address those issues in any given culture (15).

In a chapter titled "Introduction: The Analytics of Alan Dundes," the editor Simon Bonner emphasizes how folklore has 'psychological and cultural' relevance because it uses symbols in intricate stories and rituals to capture and enhance an experience that offers a distraction from reality. It also serves as a temporary and socially acceptable avenue for expression. However, he also adds upon how "Folkloric evidence is different from historical documentation because it often constitutes fantasy, but that does not detract from its truthfulness or significance" (3).

Every culture has some form of lore and tales that are similar. It is impossible to compare and compete for originality or authenticity in folktales.On the other hand; everyone can agree and acknowledge that these stories represent universal aspects of the human experience. Dundeshas spoken about the plausible "noncognate folkloristic parallels which seem to depend upon universal or quasi-universal human experience"(472). Comparative and folkloristic research has revealed these parallels, which will be addressed to establish folklore as a reflection and representative study of hostility between families with a particular emphasis on sibling relationships.

Theorising 'Sibling Rivalry'

According to Juliet Mitchell's argument in *Siblings: Sex and Violence*, a sibling is "par excellence" (someone who threatens the subject's uniqueness). As a result, the sibling relationship gives many people their first and most potent experience resolving differences and learning to coexist with others (10). In this sense, developing alternative interpretations of sibling relationships in

folktales or early modern history might even be a "politically useful move." The sibling's task of working through feelings of rivalry and hatred toward a more positive evaluation of the other is unquestionably at some level a foundation for all other social relationships. However, this view contradicts the modern and Western ideas that a sibling relationship will develop and mature through time.

Sibling ties are frequently the longest partnerships in life now, just as they were in the past, as Davidoff points out in his book *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and their Relations*. Of course, a sibling resembles you the most while still being unique from you; as Stefani Engelstein observes, "the sibling is a mirror in which one becomes conscious of oneself through becoming conscious of another"(48). No matter where we fall in the family hierarchy, sibling rivalry will occasionally affect us in one way or another throughout our lives. Even an only child believes that other kids have many advantages over him, which makes him quite envious. In addition, he might be worried that his parents would favor the other child over him if he had a sibling.

The feeling of being unworthy to be loved by his parents at a time when his desire for their love is solid leads to the fear of rejection, even when, in reality, there is none. This rejection fear compounds the anxiety that others are preferred and also maybe preferable —the root of sibling rivalry.

(Bettelheim 330)

When it comes to children's feelings for their parents, Sigmund Freudpreferred to interpret them as a displacement of the deadly competition between siblings and the incestuous desire he witnessed in such relationships. Nevertheless, he had a wrong opinion of sibling relationships and saw them as the source of fierce competition even when there was no proof of incest. He contended, "a small child does not necessarily love his brothers and sisters: often he does not. There is no doubt that he hates them as his competitors, and it is a familiar fact that this attitude often persists for long years, till maturity is reached or even later, without interruption" (204).

Juxtaposing Good and Bad Relatives in Folktales

… tales of faithful servants and relatives nearly always imply their opponents' presence and sometimes active machinations. In a considerable number of folktales, the deeds of the wicked are far more than incidental; they constitute the central interest in the story. We have already seen a dozen such tales in which the hero's adversary is supernatural. However, even his relatives may have their hands against him.Mothers plot against sons, sisters against sisters, and even wives against husbands.

(Stith Thompson 113)

Jack Zipes noted in his book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* thatMax Lüthi claims that the family

plays a major role in the magic folktale ("Zaubermärchen"). Considered to be the proponent of formalist research on folk tales, Lüthi observes thatcontrary to popular belief, the little or nuclear family ("Kleinfamilie") is what is important in the fairy tales instead of the extended family ("Grossfamilie"). Lüthi claims that the focus on the little family creates a clear and understandable framework for the story, "Within this structure, it is not harmony that characterizes familial relations but rather tension, argument, and conflict" (147).

In Mizo folktales, there are good references to familial and sibling relationships, such as 'Liandova and Tuaisiala,' the orphaned brothers who never left each other in the face of misery and would even share a single grain of maize. Other examples include 'Thailungi,' whose younger brother traveled far and wide, overcoming obstacles and challenges to free his sister from captivity, and 'Nuchhimi,' who carried out a complex and merciless vengeance on Hmuichukchuriduninu who had devoured her younger brother. On the otherhand, numerous tales depict estranged relationships between families. The most frequent trope found in Mizo folktales is, unsurprisingly, the wicked stepmother who made the children suffer. However, since the objective of this paper is to trace the animosity between siblings, stories that depicted these themes have further been elaboratedupon.

'Chhura and Nahaia'

Most Mizo folklorists believe that Chhura and Nahaia were siblings. Nahaia was viewed as being extremely lazy. It was claimed that Chhura and Nahaia shared a home, but following their marriage, Chhura moved out with his wife and family to live independently. Nahaia did not build a home for himself because he needed to be more active, and the house frequently needed its roof repaired. Because he was crafty and clever, Nahaia would devise various ruses and traps to steal precious items from his brother, who would submit to him. In like manner, the two brothers exchanged many things, all at Nahaia's behest. Sometimes it was the jhum (plots of shifting cultivation), house, wild yams, *Mithun* ("domesticated cattle"), and even *sekibuhchhuak* ("the horn of plenty") all in favor of the lazier brother. Margaret L Pachuau, in her introduction to *Folktales from Mizoram*, opines that "As Chhura was greatly respectful of Nahaia, who was his older brother, he was reluctant to cross swords with him, even though Nahaia was proved wrong on many occasions. Some even attributed Nahaia to be the reason why Chhura was " projected as the fool" even though he was "actually very clever and an unsung hero in many dimensions." (Pachuau 36).L.B.Thanga the writer of *The Mizos* also pointed out that, "According to one view, he (Chhura) was the cleverest of all the wise man and all his actions and behaviors by which he was called foolish were in fact all due to his abiding love and affection for his brother Nahaia"

(49).By passively allowing his brother to carry on with his antics, their relationship becomes an endless loop of tricking and fooling each other.

'Kelchawngi'

The story of Kelchawngi, who cooked her younger sibling, features a gruesome murder. She was given the order to prepare some *mai* (pumpkin) for dinner one day as her parents prepared to leave for the jhoom. It seems that Kelchawngi confused the words "*Mai*" and "*nau*," which is why she asked, "Cook my sister for dinner?" However, her mother thought she was only fooling around, so she went to the jhoom without bothering to clarify with Kelchawngi. So she 'obediently' killed her younger sister while her parents were at the jhoom and cooked her for the evening meal (Pachuau 33). Later that night, when the parents came home, she was too terrified to answer honestly when they asked about her sister because they had been wondering where she was all day. She lied and made many excuses. When she eventually serves the prepared 'pumpkin,'

she began doling out her sister's head and arms.Her parents were aghast, "Is this not your sister's head? Moreover, are these not your sister's limbs?" Moreover, they began chiding her. However, she retorted, "Of course, it is not..these are remnants of the head of the animal slain by my grandfather... remnants of the limbs of the meat slain by my grandfather.

After a while, her parents realized Kelchawngi had cooked her sister and were enraged.

(Pachuau34)

In different versions of the story,Kelchawngi does not show much remorse for her horrendous actions. Her parents decided to discipline her by refusing to remove her from the roof. "Mother take me down... father take me down," cried Kelchawngi. However, they refused to bring her down and said, "This is your punishment for cooking your sister" (34).

The story still needs to finish with Kelchawngi receiving the just penalty, despite what may be assumed. In desperation, Kelchawngi cried to the sky, "Pu Van, please lower your string of ropes so that I may climb atop the heavens." When PuVana[1] Immediately lowering his ropes, Kelchawngi grabbed them and ascended to the heavens. Even better, he dressed her in the most exquisite attire and accessories. Kelchawngi once more ascended her home's roof while dressed in them. As she lowered herself upon the roof her armlets and trinkets made a great sound. Her parents called out, "Who is that atop the roof?"

Moreover, she replied, "It is I, Kelchawngi, the daughter you have rejected" (34). It is observed that there is a lack of guilt and remorse in Kelchawngi's story, which even ends on a note of triumph over the parent's rejection. Theorists have attempted to explain that these folktales are used as

[1]*PuVana*- a heavenly deity, the name 'van' translates to a person from the sky.

justification for their behavior by children harboring seeds of resentment towards their siblings and feeling rejection from their parents.

Folklore provides socially sanctioned forms of behavior in which a person may do what cannot be done in real life…The folkloristic frame not only permits but requires the taboo action, thereby relieving the individual from assuming responsibility (and guilt) for his actions.(Dundes 476)

'Kungawrhi'

In the story of Kungawrhi, who was especially born from the festering wounds of her father's thumb, two brothers, Phawthira and Hrangchala, volunteered to rescue her from the Keimi village so that they could win her hand in marriage. The valiant and gallant*pasta*[2]Phawthira led almost all the rescue efforts and even killed the weretiger. However, on the way back, while they were fleeing the guardian spirit's home, the younger brother, the cowardly and greedy Hrangchala, chopped off the vines as his elder brother was climbing it so that he might claim himself as the sole rescuer and get to marry their rescued damsel with no competition. Later, it was revealed that Phawthira planned his retaliation by patiently planting the creeper and eventually returned to attack his brother, who was already wed to Kungawrhi.

'Chawngchilhi'

This is a folktale about two sisters who turn against each other and commit a telltale act of betrayal. The usual perception is that having siblings is like having someone to protect our secrets, even from our parents. However, Chawngchilhi's younger sister could not maintain her sister's secret for very long, resulting in the family's murder. Before judging the younger sister, since she is a victim, it is crucial to understand her background. She was old enough to go to the forest with her sister to get firewood. Chawngchilhi and her sister regularly visited the jhum, and their father provided them with rice and dry meat. During this time, Chawngchilhi and the snake that lived close to their jhum fell in love. They would frequently get together, and Chawngchilhi would send her sister to call the snake. It was stated that her sister was terrified of the snake and would not even go near the jhum hut when the snake was inside. She consequently rarely even had lunch. The younger sister quickly became thin with stress as a result of not eating the meal and her elder sister's relationship with a snake. Chawngchilhi swore her sister to secrecy and frequently threatened her to keep her alliance with the snake a secret from their father. She would threaten her with words like, "If you even tell my father about the snake, I shall order the snake to swallow you whole" (Pachuau 64). Ultimately, their father sensed something was wrong, so he prodded the younger daughter to tell him everything. Out of wrath, he killed his older daughter

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[2]*Pasalṭha* - a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter. (*DLL* 352)

and her snake lover after learning what had happened. The betrayal or loss of confidence between the siblings in this instance was truly warranted by Chawngchilhi, who was revealed to be the evil sister who had committed immoral acts.

'Mauruangi and Bingtaii'

Muaruangiwas a Mizo folklore heroine who endured suffering at the hands of her evil stepmother and stepsister. Initially, during the marriage, Mauruangi was treated exceptionally well by their stepmother. However, as time went on, she became harsher against her and only showed favor to Bingtaii, who was her own daughter. She offered mashed bran to Mauruangi and would not give her any nutritious food to eat. However, Bingtaii had a very different lifestyle. She did as she pleased because she had nothing to worry about. Mauruangi grew weak and pale in the interim.

She obtains supernatural assistance from a catfish,a reincarnation of her deceased mother, and the catfish provides her with nourishing food. However, Bingtaii observed their meetings and told her mother, who instructed her husband to plan a catfish hunt. Mauruangi gathered the bones of the catfish after the hunt and placed them in a fresh earthen pot. On the third day, she discovered they had transformed into a lovely necklace when she peeked inside. Then she strung it up and put it on. Once more, she was robbed of it by her stepmother and stepsister, who were jealous. The necklace shriveled away into a pile of charcoal when Bingtaii wore it.Mauruangicame across her mother's heart (which had been buried), which eventually transformed into a *punching.*[3] Tree from which she could sip the nectar. However, this was cut down after Bingtaii spied on her and revealed her secret.

As they grew older, they competed in every sphere of their lives. One was constantly given an advantage, while the other prevailed due to her perseverance, good nature, persistence, and kind attitude. One day, *Vai*[4]Chief's servants stumbled across Mauruangi's crops as she was toiling diligently in her field, sowing and cultivating a profusion of crops despite being given worm-eaten seeds and little fertile lands. They encouraged their chief to marry her because of her warmth and hospitality. It was revealed that the stepmother planned to switch the girls' positions because she wanted the proposal for her daughter, Bingtaii. However, the inept stepsister is quickly sent back. Seething with jealousy over Mauruangi's good fortune, Mauruangi was killed but was revived. Eventually, their story ends with The 'Vai' chief who got the siblings to engage in a duel while robbing Mauruangi with a thick, robust blanket for protection and a sharp weapon. Then, after wrapping Bingatii in a thin cloth, he gave her a dull dagger. Ultimately, Mauruangi was able

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[3]*Phunchawng*-a tall flowering tree that provides sweet nectar.

[4]*Vai*- a non-Mizo, a foreigner but primarily referred to the plain people of India.

to attain her 'happily ever after' by slaying her 'foe' right there and then.

The story of Mauruangi is "experienced as a story about the agonies and hopes which form the essential content of sibling rivalry, and about the degraded heroine winning out over her siblings who abused her" (Bettelheim330). A symbol of being inferior to one's siblings, regardless of sex, "having to live among the ashes," was used even before Perrault gave "Cinderella" the form in which it is now well known. Bettelheim traced that stories about an ash-boy who eventually becomes king, similar to Cinderella's destiny, existed in Germany, for instance. He also points out how "Aschenputtel," the title of the Brothers Grimm's version of the tale, initially designated a lowly, dirty kitchenmaid who must tend to the fireplace ashes. There are numerous examples in the German language of how being compelled to live among the ashes served as a metaphor for both degrading oneself and sibling rivalry and the sibling who ultimately exceeds the sibling or siblings who had debased them.

Overtly the story helps the child to accept sibling rivalry as a relatively common fact of life and promises that he need not fear being destroyed by it; on the contrary, if these siblings were not so nasty to him, he could never triumph over the same degree at the end. Further, it tells the child that if he was once considered dirty and uncouth, this was a temporary stage with no adverse consequences for the future (Bettelheim 337).

Conclusion

The opinions expressed by Bruno Bettelheim in his book *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* are frequently cited and used as sources in this article. However, it is felt that it is equally necessary to draw attention to and address the arguments made against him and the falsehoods he has been accused of, such as authoritarianism and a lack of scientific rigor in his attempt to force meaning on children's development through the therapeutic use of fairy tales.

Jack Zipes dedicated a chapter in his book, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, to discuss the intent of Bettelheim and revealed that the latter was impelled to write his book out of dissatisfaction "with much of the literature intended to develop the child's mind and personality because it fails to stimulate and nurture those resources he needs most in order to cope with his difficult inner problems."Due to this, Bettelheim researched the enormous potential of fairy tales as literary role models for children since "more can be learned from them about the inner problems of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society, than from any other type of story within a child's comprehension" (5). Nevertheless, he felt that Bettelheim's book propagates mistaken ideas about the original goal of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and the

literary quality of fairy tales, leaving the reader in a state of mystification despite his good intentions and moral concern for the welfare of children.

This is to consider Bettelheim's book in its totality. Since folk and fairy tales have played, and continue to play, a significant role in the socialization process, a thorough study of Bettelheim's position is crucial for grasping whether the tales can be used more effectively in helping children (and adults) come into their own. A critical examination of his theory may ultimately lead to a fresh look at contemporary psychoanalytic views on internalization and new insights into the production and usage of folk and fairy tales. (Zipes 208)

In conclusion, a more nuanced discussion of the less prominent and less discussed narrative roles in folklore is made possible due to the analytical tools propounded by theorists like Bettelheim. However, it is also noted that the structural, sociohistorical, psychoanalytic, and pedagogical views are only a few used to research folk and fairy tales. They each reveal different aspects of both tales, such as the complexities of human relationships and particular ones like familial bonds. It is intended that these allusions and implications will be able to showcase the intricacy and universality of Mizo folktales.

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