CHAPTER 2:

DYNAMICS OF DARKNESS AND FEAR
Darkness and fear have both assumed metaphorical significances in literature. “Darkness” signifies negativity, the presence of shadows, evil and foreboding, the unknown, hidden meanings and unexplored zones while “fear” is often generated by these very causes because the feeling of revulsion usually occurs after something frightening is seen, heard, or otherwise experienced. It is the feeling one gets after coming to an awful realization or experiencing a deeply unpleasant occurrence. Sigmund Freud has given a clear definition of fear:

> It is a reaction to the perception of external danger, viz., harm that is expected and foreseen. It is related to the flight reflex and may be regarded as an expression of the instinct of self-preservation. And so the occasions, viz., the objects and situations which arouse fear, will depend largely on our knowledge of and our feeling of power over the outer world. (Freud, 231)

Fear is characterized by obscurity or indeterminacy in its treatment of potentially horrible events; it is this indeterminacy which leads to the sublime. According to Ann Radcliffe, fear "expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life" (Radcliffe, 142). As such, the experience of fear induced by going through darkness enables one to identify the morals and values of life better as well as appreciate the positive aspects in life. Darkness stands in apparent contrast to open surfaces, as a hidden nugget of meaning deep within the surface rather than the aura of the visible appearance on the exterior. Darkness has been interpreted as “mental or
spiritual blindness; lack of knowledge or enlightenment, especially in religion and morality: as
heathen darkness…obscurity of meaning; lack of clearness or intelligibility” (Wordnik, 1) A
study of darkness necessitates unearthing the hierarchy of meaning, layer after layer, to the deep
message or hidden truth. This observation demonstrates that penetrating to the interior of an idea
or a person is possible and must be interpreted in order to meet the actual implications, especially
in terms of the realm of folk and fairy tales.

Often shadowed by their undisruptive exterior, folk and fairy tales’ darkness behind the
shadows are often overlooked or not realized because of the predominance of entertaining and
appealingly fantastic elements. They provide more amusement and delight rather than instill fear.
Therefore, the intrinsic values they carry beneath their seemingly innocent layers tend to be
treated as perhaps implausible. However, an important function of folk and fairy tale is to
preserve and promote cultural and personal values, to impart both placid as well as violent
societal aspects, but they are done so entertainingly so that they would endure. “Like the sugar
coating on a bitter pill, the fictitious plot of a moral story guarantees its delivery.” (Ashliman, 4)
This chapter shall examine the dynamics of the moral, the values exposed through darkness and
fear, and the representation of violence through a study of the various Grimms’ fairy tales as well
as Mizo tales. Lisa Hunt opines that the dark settings in folk and fairy tales are the very essence
of moral instructions:
Fairy tales often employ these settings as metaphors of the shadow. They are the wild, untamed symbols of our own landscapes, where creative thinking and intrinsic energies reside and beg to be released. It is here where we meet frog princes, wise old men, a golden goose, a ravenous wolf, imposing giants, spirit messengers and all manner of creatures that help us shed the constraints of a rational mind. It is here where we let go and become self-aware. It is under the dappling light that we recognize our full potentials and find our way through the tangle of brush. Through the darkness of paths unknown, we have the possibility of seeing the light. (Hunt, 1)

Folk and fairy tales exist, especially for children, to hold attention and they must, therefore, entertain and arouse curiosity. In the process, they also spur the readers’ imagination, help children in particular to develop their intellect and to clarify their emotions. They help to regulate anxieties and aspirations, help to recognize difficulties and in turn, provide solutions to the problems that might approach. It provides avenues to understanding complex personalities, in exercising the various mechanisms of resistance and espousal necessary for facing life. This is so because, man is inevitably exposed to society and undeniably must learn to cope with its conditions. Folk and fairy tales, in that context, endow possibilities. As Bruno Bettelheim opines:
By dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which occupy the child’s mind, these stories speak to his budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious development. (Bettelheim, 271)

Thus, folk and fairy tales, when viewed with their shadows, reveal a powerful social vision and in turn convey moral teachings as a means to understanding the self. Bruno Bettelheim again asserts:

For a story truly to hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity. But to enrich his life, it must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him. In short, it must at one and the same time relate to all aspects of his personality—and this without ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicaments, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future. (Bettelheim, 5)

They also accentuate the imperfections found in a culture such as hatred, grief, hunger, abuse, selfishness and wretchedness. Every tale which has been selected for the research serves as a
vehicle for social protest and allows counter-hegemonic thoughts and actions and unconscious anxieties to be expressed.

As products of social life, these tales denote didactic stories, thus having moral instruction as an ulterior motive. Whether appended or not, the moral of a story is usually not difficult to ascertain. In these tales, the moral of the tales typically centers around the preservation of both personal and cultural values. A personal value is absolute or relative and ethical value, the assumption of which can be the basis for ethical action. Rokeach opines:

Personal values provide an internal reference for what is good, beneficial, important, useful, beautiful, desirable, constructive, etc. Values generate behaviour. (Rokeach, 45)

Personal values exist in relation to cultural values, either in agreement with or divergence from prevailing norms. A culture is a social system that shares a set of common values, in which such values permit social expectations and collective understandings of the good, beautiful and constructive. Without normative personal values, there would be no cultural reference against which to measure the virtue of individual values and so cultural identity would disintegrate. Rokeach again asserts:
Values relate to the norms of a culture...cultural values identify what should be judged as good or evil...they are abstract concepts of what is important and worthwhile for society (Rokeach, 75)

Many of the values that can be found in the tales are the very threads that bind families and communities together in a hostile world. These are “diligence, honesty, generosity, dependability, perseverance, courage and a unique balance of self-reliance and selflessness.” (Ashliman, 4) These, however, are often shown to battle with evil issues and in the end, are shown to come out victorious. Thus, these tales reflect both personal and cultural values. Various conflicting values are occurring everyday, the constructive values must essentially persevere in order to maintain a subdued life and folk and fairy tales mirror these very aspects of life. There are also many other values that are reflected and which are explicit or gruesome to the extent of discomforting sensitive modern readers. Sexism, racism, anti-semitism, persecution of people deemed to be witches and a drive towards retribution are some of the ideals unapologetically advanced by traditional tales that modern readers find offensive.

It must be taken into account that the moral values imbibed in folk and fairy tales not only direct themselves towards children but also towards adults as well. In fact, these tales were originally related to meet adults’ yearnings and this very fact is the reason for the excessive inclusion of exhibitionism, rape and voyeurism. Sheldon Cashdan denotes:
Fairy tales were never meant for children. Originally conceived of as an adult entertainment, fairy tales were told at social gatherings, in spinning rooms, in the fields, and in other settings where adults congregated—not in the nursery.

(Cashdan, 2)

Folk and fairy tales capture the meaning of morality through vivid depictions of the struggles between good and evil where characters must make difficult choices between right and wrong, or where heroes and villains contest the very fate of imaginary worlds. These stories supply the imagination with important symbolic information about the world and appropriate responses to its inhabitants. Alasdair Maclntyre sums this up comprehensively:

It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance..., that children learn or mislearn what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.

(Maclntyre, 4)
Another common function of folk and fairy tales is to offer storytellers and their audiences a
socially acceptable platform for the expression of otherwise unspeakable fears and taboos. Tales
often warn any would-be tempter that he or she may not escape the wrath of an intended victim
and his or her protectors. By offering make-believe solutions to real-life problems, it functions in
a time honoured fairy tale tradition.

We find in them rules or behavior on how to cope with these things. Very often it
is not a sharp ethical issue but a question of finding a way of natural wisdom.

(Franz, 192)

Folk and fairy tales denote that these struggles against difficulties in life are unavoidable and are
intrinsic part of human existence, but they also denote that if one firmly and strongly holds
oneself against all these, including all unjust hardships, one can master these adversities and
emerge victorious.

The cautionary tale makes an example of its protagonist, the very figure with
which children identify, rather than of its adult villain, and thus becomes a true
horror story. (Tatar, 8).

This is probably the reason why there are blatant depictions of violence in both the Grimms’
tales as well as the Mizo tales selected for the study. Violence is exerted predominantly in the
form of dark human treachery that strikes against virtuous characters. It impales them and instills
deep terror that often renders them to be helpless. The Grimms’ tales, in particular, have often met sharp criticism. The Grimms, however, discerned that characters in fairy tales, if subjected to violence, have the immediate sympathy of the listener or reader. So, often they turn their hero and heroine into tragic martyrs. The most popular collection of tales by the Grimms, *Children’s and Household Tales*, even after Wilhelm Grimm had extensively reworked to make the stories more appropriate for children, have been harshly criticized for the cruelties they depict. The brothers, however, defended themselves, claiming the need to accurately record tradition, and they correctly argued that the cruel elements are an important aspect of folklore. In order to understand the reason behind the depiction of violence in the tales, “placing these tales in cultural and historical context and questioning their psychological penetration is often necessary”. (Zipes, *The Great Fairy*, 56-67) The very reason that led the Grimm brothers to collect German folk and fairy tales was mainly due to the spirit of nationalism revived in the nineteenth century. They wanted to impart the ideals and values of the great German past and they felt that folk and fairy tales are important facilitators of all these. Through these stories imbibed with rich cultural meanings as well as values, the brothers presented moral teachings that would enable readers to reflect upon themselves and reconstruct their lives. As such, the popularity of the Grimms' collected folk tales endured well beyond their lifetimes. (Grimm, iv-vi)
It took Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm fifteen years to collect and edit the stories from storytellers around the German countryside, primarily in Hessia, the county that included the town of Gottingen where they taught at the University. In 1812, the brothers Grimm published the first volume of what was innocently entitled *Kinder und Hausmarchen* (Fairytales for Children and Use Around the Home). Wilhelm and Jacob were impressed with the straightforward honesty and naturalness of the tales. They instilled in the tales, both personal values as well as the cultural values of the Germans.¹ In the foreword to their second volume of the fairy tales, the brothers Grimm regretted that the custom of storytelling was on the wane. They bemoaned that with the demise of the story telling ritual, a tradition which nurtured the collective cultural spirit, was doomed:

They specifically remarked on a powerful yet humble sense of grace that permeated these stories—a connection to ground and a deeper source of spiritual nourishment which further cultivated a sense of meaning on moralistic arguments.

(Bernheimer, 12-13)

For many years, readers and scholars deplored the Grimms' collection for its raw, uncivilized content. They felt that these folk and fairy tales mirror all too loyally the entire medieval worldview and culture with all its stark prejudice, its crudeness and barbarities. The Grimms, however, defended themselves claiming that they were crucial for understanding the facet of life. Therefore, they refused to oblige to offended adults who objected to the gruesome
punishments inflicted upon the villains. In “Snow White” (Grimm 53) the evil stepmother is forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes until she falls down dead. This tale features such elements as the magic mirror, the poisoned apple, the glass coffin, and the characters of the evil queen and the seven dwarfs. Envy and pride, like ill weeds, grow taller in the heart of the queen every day, until she has no peace day or night. Eventually, the queen orders a huntsman to take Snow White into the deepest woods to be killed. As proof that Snow White is dead, the queen demands that he returns with her lungs and liver, so that, like a true brute, she could feast on it.

Finally she called her huntsman and said, “Take the child out into the forest, I never want to lay eyes on her again. You are to kill her and to bring me back her lungs and liver as proof of your deed. (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 182).

Such brutality and cannibalistic tendency is punished in the end and the moral denotes that pious, subservient and innocent girls like Snow White are rewarded with fortunes and a royal husband in the end. Despite being poisoned with a comb, a lace and an apple that render her unconscious consecutively, she still triumphs in the end because she is not treacherous and evil like her stepmother.

The evil queen was so petrified with fright that she could not budge. Iron slippers had already been heated over a fire, and they were brought over to her with tongs.
Finally, she had to put on the red-hot slippers and dance until she fell down dead.


This is a story in which a child has been victimized by an adult. Adult anxieties and jealousies cause the adults in the tales to act against the children- the children being the objects of the adult's jealousy.

In "The Goose Girl"(Grimm 89) a treacherous servant is stripped, thrown into a barrel speckled with sharp nails, and dragged through the streets. A young princess is stripped of her title by a servant who takes advantage of the princess when they are travelling alone. The princess, though sad, is good at heart and exchanges her clothes with her. This imposter marries the prince while the princess has to tend to the geese. In the end, the truth is revealed and the princess refuses to spare the imposter because in fairy tales, justice is usually served.

“She deserves nothing better,” said the false bride, “than to be stripped completely naked and put inside a barrel studded with sharp nails. Then two white horses should be harnessed to the barrel and made to drag her through the streets until she’s dead.” “You’re the woman,” said the king, “and you’ve pronounced your own sentence. All this shall happen to you.” (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 301).
Some readers and listeners might possibly shy away from the Grimms’ tales because of their reputation for violence. Like all the great fairy tales, the Grimms’ tales invite a closer drawing of analogies between the imaginary world and the real world. It supplies the imagination with information that the self also uses to distinguish what is true from what is not. They awaken and nurture the moral imagination through the depiction of crude, raw, realistic violence in various forms. These may be in the form of parent-child conflict, incest, cannibalism, kings subjugating subjects or orphans condemned by society. These instances introduce moral principles and virtues as practical instruments for achieving success. These tales also seemingly advocate the assumptions that standards of social utility and material success are the measurements of the value of moral principles and virtues and that this pedagogy would transform the minds or convert the hearts of young people. They starkly project societal realities and its negative elements such as the despair of the weak, the darkened envy of the poor, the greed of the rich, and the aggression of the strong with the effects that these tales become sites of struggle between morality and immorality. Only a pedagogy that awakens and enlivens the moral imagination will persuade one that courage is the ultimate test of good character, that honesty is essential for trust and harmony among persons, and that humility and a magnanimous spirit are greater than the prizes that are won by selfishness, pride, or the misuse of power. This is the very essence of folk and fairy tales that can be found when one scratches the apparent surface of fun and frivolity.
Moral imagination is, in essence, the very process by which the self makes metaphors out of images given by experience and then employs these metaphors to find and suppose moral correspondences in experience. Moral imagination, therefore, impels the need to actively visualize and inquire. The richness of the moral imagination depends upon experience. Lack of experiences would not cultivate active moral imagination whereas rich experiences would equip a person to face the stern realities of life. Children, especially, are open to this crucial formation through experiences provided and therefore, folk and fairy tales become extremely vital as instruments of moral shaping.

Tales that provide events to nurture and build the moral imagination generate thinking for children and even adults as well. Often it is regarded that the impoverishment of the moral imagination in children is their inability to recognize, make, or use metaphors. They may lack an awareness of morality and they might be confused or perplexed about its basis or personal ownership. When provided with a story, it raises their ability to question and thus, they are able to find the inner connections of character, action, and narrative provided by the author's own figurative imagination. In this aspect, folk and fairy tales function as medium because they encompass a world of darkness and light. Darkness feature in the forms of sinister preys, wicked witch and wizards, ogres and curses and induce fear and terror to characters and readers alike. But, in the end, this darkness is defeated by light in the form of the inherent good in man. Folk
and fairy tales transport the reader into “other worlds” that are fresh with wonder, surprise, and danger. They challenge the reader to make sense out of those “other worlds”, to navigate his or her way through them, and to imagine himself or herself in the place of the heroes and heroines who populate those worlds. The safety and assurance of these imaginative adventures is that risks can be taken without having to endure all of the consequences of failure; the joy is in discovering how these risky adventures might eventuate in satisfactory and happy outcomes. Yet the concept of self is also transformed. The images and metaphors in these stories stay with the reader even after he has returned to the "real" world.

Though the tales of the Grimm brothers encompass crude, coarse and even grotesque elements and despite a number of filtering and polishing these tales by repeated editions, the brothers could not or would not, remove many of these elements, defending that they are an integral part of life itself. And through the portrayal of these elements as well as virtues, the tales offer moral teachings to readers. The Brothers Grimm’s version of “Cinderella” (Grimm 21) reveals a powerful inclination towards victory for the benevolent. The tale opens with the dying mother insisting that the girl be good and pious.

…she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, “Dear child, be good and pious. Then the dear Lord shall always assist you, and I shall look down from
In this statement, the apparent intention of the Grimms to draw readers towards Christian piety cannot be missed. The dying mother firmly insist that her daughter should be virtuous in order to win the assistance of the Lord. The moral of the tale has been transformed into a parable of Christian piety, even as it retains the savage episode requiring the violent mutilation of the feet of the stepdaughters and pecking out the eyes of the stepmother by the birds. In this tale, Cinderella's father does not die but seems to be oblivious to Cinderella's hardship and the stepmother and stepdaughter's cruelty. Cinderella is rightly compensated for all the denials against her joy meted out to her by her cruel stepmother and stepsisters. Her father brings her a branch that she asks for and she plants it on her mother's grave where it turns into a beautiful tree. This works in her favour. On the tree are two birds who give Cinderella anything that she asks for. On two occasions, they help her pick a bowlful of lentils that has been thrown into a pile of ash by Cinderella’s cruel stepmother in order to prevent her from going to a ball the king has arranged.

Cinderella then runs to the tree where she asks the birds for a gold gown and gold and jeweled slippers which they give her. This helps her win the love of a prince at the ball and he comes searching for her so that he could give her back one of the shoes that she has forgotten at
the ball when she fled. Thestepsisters mutilated their feet in order to fit it into the shoe and twice, the prince rides away with each of them in turn but on both occasions, it is the birds who reveal the deception. As they pass Cinderella's tree the birds tell the prince about the blood in the shoe and how his real bride still waits.

“Looky, look, look at the shoe that she took

There’s blood all over, and the shoe’s too small.

She’s not the bride you met at the ball” (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 83).

The prince insists on seeing her and as is natural, the shoe fits her. At Cinderella's wedding the two birds peck out her stepsisters eyes so that they would be blinded as long as they live for their falseness and wickedness. The ending, along with the details of the mutilation of their feet can be regarded as evidence of the brutal, violent turn taken by the Grimms’ tales. However, they seem indispensable in order to bring evil to justice. When the sisters find out that she is the one that fits the glass slipper, “They threw themselves at her feet begging her pardon for the harsh treatment they had made her endure” (Zipes, *Radical Theory* 453). They do this in order to redeem themselves of their mistreatment of Cinderella earlier in the story. This appeals to readers who believe deeply in repentance for sins. Thus, the plot moves in favour of the virtuous and humble while the wicked suffer at the end.
Many tales are actually aimed specifically towards instructing young girls how to behave in a proper manner. In each story, the “good” girl is rewarded with prizes such as jewels, royal status or beauty. She is rewarded these gifts because when given a choice of gifts, she chooses the humblest gift. Cinderella, for instance, is not greedy or selfish like her "evil" sisters or stepmother who are punished by curses and extreme punishment. Thus, these tales instruct young girls to avert from selfishness and vanity. Even though this overt violence seems to contradict with the readers’ ethos and thus seeming to repel that audience, reading a fairy tale lets the reader escape from the social constraints placed on them. As William Bascom writes,

Some of the contradictions between folklore and culture are thus explained as wish fulfillment or escape from sexual taboos on a fantasy level by mechanisms comparable to those found in dreams or daydreams…Folklore reveals man's frustrations and attempts to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed upon him by society (Bascom, 340-343)

The Grimms’ fairy tales are, thus, particularly gory. Maria Tatar writes, "More often, the Grimms made a point of adding or intensifying violent episodes" (Tatar, The Hard Facts, 365). Violence is projected often as punishment for a transgression. This not only satiates the reader’s desire for retribution, but also seems to be a manifestation of what the reader wants to happen to the antagonists of these stories. There is a level of satisfaction in the thought that unspeakably
violent things will happen to those that transgress. For instance, in the version of "Cinderella" (Grimm 21) written by the Grimm Brothers, the step-sisters who had mistreated Cinderella earlier in the story each have their eyes pecked out by doves in the end. The reader may believe that they deserve such punishment for their transgressions. In a way, one attains a sense of satisfaction out of this bloody act. A reader may grimace at the detail, but comes to understand that these things are meant to happen to “bad” people. The same instance is seen in "Snow White"(Grimm 53). The "evil" stepmother attends Snow White's wedding reception at the end of the story and is forced to wear hot iron shoes. She then is compelled to dance in the iron shoes until she dies of severe exhaustion.

In “The Juniper Tree”(Grimm 46), the stepmother eventually gets a millstone dropped on her head because she kills the little boy in the story. It is the little boy that drops this millstone, crushing the stepmother and exacting justice on his assailant. Sometimes in folk and fairy tales there seems to be an act of violence that is entirely unwarranted. In "The Juniper Tree," (Grimm 46) when the stepmother slays her son, chops him up into bits, and serves him to her husband in a stew because she hates him for the sole fact that he will inherit a part of her husband's fortune when he dies. This act seemingly has no redeeming qualities. It repulses the reader without offering any kind of redeeming quality. However, these cruel acts impose moral imagination upon readers and rouse judgment which condemns these cruel acts. They can be regarded as
cautions for adults: those who threaten and abuse children become themselves targets of brute violence. The millstone is an instrument of revenge that punishes adults for injuring the young and innocent. Thus, the moral intent of the tale remains an integral aspect of the tale.

Another example of this is in the Grimms’ "Fitcher’s Bird" (Grimm 47). In this tale, the antagonist, the sorcerer, threatens to kill the main character for her simple transgression of curiosity. Though she has done nothing to threaten the sorceror's well-being, he attempts to kill her because she has found his secret room where he hides the corpses of his previous wives. In "The Maiden Without Hands", (Grimm 31) the main character's hands are cut off because her father, a miller, makes a deal with the devil. She is an innocent bystander made victim by the evil forces in the story. The miller is offered wealth by the devil if the miller gives him what stands behind the mill. Thinking that it is an apple tree, the miller agrees, but it is his daughter. When three years has passed, the devil appears, but the girl has kept herself sinless and her hands clean, and the devil is unable to take her. The devil threatens to take the father if he does not chop off the girl's hands, and she lets him do so, but she weeps on her arms' stumps, and they are so clean that the devil could not take her, so he has to give her up. This denotes the theme of docility and obedience towards parents.

He went to his daughter and said, “My child, if I don’t chop off both your hands, the devil will take me away, and in my fear I promised I’d do it. Please help me
out of my dilemma and forgive me for the injury I’m causing you. “Dear Father,” she answered, “do what you want with me. I’m your child.” Then she extended both her hands and let him chop them off. (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 110)

These children rarely do anything to deserve to be the target of such an act. Also, as children, they tend to be seen as the most innocent characters in a story. Thus, the repulsion of this act is immense and makes the reader cringe. The purpose of these seemingly senseless acts of violence is to vilify those that commit them. In this way, the second act of violence which has brought about the antagonist's demise seems all the more warranted. Violence begets violence. The violence committed by the main characters of these tales is justified in almost the same way in which killing someone in self-defense is acceptable.

Themes of deviant sexuality also exist in many of the folk and fairy tales selected for the study. Usually, this takes the form of an incestuous act that drives the child away. In tales such as "All Fur"(Grimm 65) the sexual advances of the father drive the daughters to assume a disguise.

Suddenly he fell passionately in love with her and said to his councilors, “I’m going to marry my daughter, for she is the living image of my dead wife”(Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 239)
Horrified by her father’s evil intentions, she demands an impossible favour from him in the hope that it would dissuade him. She requests a cloak made of a thousand fur and three dresses as golden as the sun, silvery as the moon and as bright as the sun. But her father persisted and meets these demands and therefore, she is regrettably both driven away and emotionally injured. She has to escape and serve as a servant in another kingdom, stripped of her sense of worth, her title as princess and compelled to tolerate subjugation. Such an act is deplored and a counter hegemonic thought is often expressed within the tale itself. In this tale, it is the king’s councilors who are horrified by their king’s decision and who utter that it is a sin:

When the councilors heard that, they were horrified and said, “God has forbidden a father to marry his daughter. Nothing good can come from such a sin, and the kingdom will be brought to ruin”. (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 239)

Themes of family are also prevalent in folk and fairy tales and the value in the portrayal of family is that no matter how evil a person may be, he or she usually has close ties with other blood relatives. As Maria Tatar writes, "The nuclear family furnishes the fairy tale's main cast of characters just as the family constitutes its most common subject" (Tatar, 369). Familial bonds are strong in the fairy tale. The ultimate conclusion of many of the tales is marriage to a prince that can end financial woes and loneliness. Marriage is the "happily ever after". Otherwise, happiness does not happen in fairy tales. There is no doubt that the familial unit is of great
importance. Families are expected to act as a cohesive unit, with the parents being responsible for their children's actions and families expected to live together under one roof. This sometimes goes to the extreme revulsion of resorting to violence in order to advance the family's present status. For instance, in the version of "Cinderella" (Grimm 21) by the brothers Grimm, Cinderella's stepmother urges her own children to cut off the toe and heels of their feet to trick the prince into marrying them.

So her mother handed her a knife and said, “Cut your toe off. Once you become queen, you won’t have to walk anymore.”....So her mother handed her a knife and said, “Cut off a piece of your heel. Once you become queen, you won’t have to walk anymore.” The maiden cut off a piece of her heel, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went to the prince”. (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 83)

The stepmother expects her children to go to great lengths to obtain success. This is a reflection of her expectations that her children will become more successful than her. Also, such brutal force is exerted upon the daughters in an attempt to vicariously enjoy royal lavishness.

For every act of violence that befalls heroes and heroines of fairy tales, it is easy enough to establish a cause by pointing to behavioral flaws. The aggression of the witch in “Hansel and Gretel” (Grimm 15) for example is often traced to the gluttony of the children."Ngaiteii"
3 is a Mizo story that cautions one to be obedient and patient. The tale depicts the story of a young girl who is abducted by her father’s spirit because she does not heed the warnings of her grandmother. The story denotes that Ngaiteii lives alone with her grandmother and one day, while looking for yams in the jungle, she grows thirsty. Her grandmother goes down to a gorge several times to fetch water for her. Finally, when she grows tired she asks her to go on her own with a warning that she must not say “E Khai” when she sees the gorge. But as Ngaiteii looks down into the gorge, she forgets the caution and exclaims “E Khai”. It so happened that in this very gorge resides her dead father’s spirit and immediately, on hearing Ngaiteii’s voice, seizes her. This illustrates the consequences of disregarding caution when one faces adversity. Often, parents and grandparents are depicted to be full of wisdom. They signify awareness accrued with better experiences to detect and avert dangers. When the grandmother learns of the misfortune, she begs the spirit to return her and he did, with the condition that he would come back for her in a few days. When both grandmother and daughter resists, Ngaiteii’s father counteracts by flooding their villages. In the end, Ngaiteii has to be sacrificed much to the grief of the villagers.

The Grimms’ “Little Red Cap”(Grimm 26) conveys the dangers of talking to strangers but simultaneously addresses differing issues. Embedded in the narrative is also an instruction on
manners. Little Red Cap’s mother advises her daughter to be well mannered as she hands her cakes and wine for grandmother.

When you’re out in the woods, walk properly and don’t stray from the path. Otherwise you’ll fall and break the glass, and then there’ll be nothing for Grandmother. And when you enter her room, don’t forget to say good morning and don’t go peeping into all the corners of the room. (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 93)

The story emphasizes the importance of listening and being obedient to one’s parents. It also warns girls of the danger of conversing with deceitful men who may mislead such young maidens into partaking in improper acts of violence. As Little Red Cap leaves home for her grandmother’s, she promises to “do everything right” to her mother but fails to heed the advice by wandering off the path and subsequently is trapped in the belly of a wolf. This wicked wolf lures her into the deep forest, tempting her with the beautiful flowers that beg to be plucked while he himself scampers off to eat the grandmother. When he has gobbled up the grandmother, he dresses himself in her clothes and awaits for Little Red Cap to arrive. He also gobbles up Red Cap and sleeps, satiated. Fortunately, a huntsman, sensing the unusual, discovers the crime and snips the wolf’s belly open with a pair of scissors and rescues them. At the end of the story, on being saved, Little Red Cap tells herself: “Never again will you stray from the path and go into
the woods, when your mother has forbidden it” (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 95) The
Brothers Grimm are thus, intent on sending a moral message and they did so by making the
heroine responsible for the violence to which she is subjected. Folk and fairy tales have
traditionally been a narrative genre that sought less to entertain than to enlighten. It also strives
to stimulate self-discipline in the face of the more mysterious and unwholesome aspects of
maturity. The cold metallic core of fairy tales is their sharp-edged examination of the eternal
conflict between children who must inevitably grow up and establish their independence and
their parental caretakers who often appear to lack the capacity for recognizing the line between
giving their children too much independence and not giving them enough. In many folk and fairy
tales, the dark woods feature as symbolic representation of the frightening world of adulthood
and the big bad wolves or rather, vicious men out there ready to exploit and pounce upon the
innocence of children.

“Little Red Cap” (Grimm 26) is taken primarily as a metaphor to warn children about
deception. The plot device that has Red Cap taking off on her journey to grandmother's house
should be viewed in terms of a metaphoric journey toward maturity. The woods in fairy tales are
not only dark and mysterious, but more importantly they are teeming with temptation. This
temptation is represented by a wolf who is closer to pure evil incarnate. Her repetitive use of the
parental imperative that her mother told her what to do and what to beware proves that all the
lessons on maturity have been appropriately wedged inside her consciousness, but Little Red Cap has not taken the opportunity to engage critically with these life lessons. It is only when Little Red Cap ultimately learns the most important life lesson—that no real protection can be afforded by a mere cape and hood—that she comes to fully appreciate that the warnings and prohibitions.

“Cinderella” (Grimm 21) is the ultimate tale of the struggle between good and evil and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. As the tale unfolds, there are important insights that can be noted. Misfortunes and complicated circumstances can befall upon good-natured people, in spite of their unquestioning virtue as is seen in the case of Cinderella’s plight. Cinderella is an orphan and her stepfamily is unloving. Instead of becoming despondent, Cinderella looks elsewhere for friendship. The story teaches man that comfort and friendship can be found if one chooses to look for them. Cinderella is treated unfairly and unkindly. Instead of returning evil for evil, Cinderella chooses to remain kind and thoughtful. The tale depicts Cinderella as being industrious and uncomplaining. Her work ethics teaches one that tasks, while unpleasant, can be approached in a constructive manner. Cinderella is forced to live in poverty while those around her enjoy creature comforts. At this juncture, the tale teaches about enjoying simple pleasures, about endurance, and about the importance of maintaining an optimistic attitude and holding onto hope. When Cinderalla is not allowed to attend the three day festival and put to impossible chores, two pigeons arrive to ease her sufferings. Aided by magic, they clothe her in fine gold
and silver and send her off to the festival. The birds thus, inspire Cinderella to define her goal and develop a plan to achieve it. It shows that though it would not be easy, sometimes one can make the impossible possible.

Cinderella is a fairy tale embodying the element of unjust oppression as well as triumphant reward. It delivers the basic theme of the persecuted heroine who emerges victorious, regardless of the circumstances. The story focuses upon a girl whose attributes are unrecognized and she unexpectedly achieves recognition or success after a period of obscurity and neglect. Tater rightly claims that in the tale of Cinderella, “One is more fascinated by her trials and tribulations at the hearth than by her social elevation.” (Tatar, The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales, xvi) Walter Benjamin applauds the feisty determination of fairy tales heroes and heroines and states:

The wisest thing—so the fairy taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and with high spirits. (Benjamin, 67)

Mizo tales also appealingly depict character and virtue while also depicting the wits and craftiness of the characters as they fight for their very own assertion. In these tales, virtue glimmers even as wickedness and deception are exposed. These stories enable readers to face the undistorted truth about themselves while compelling them to consider what kind of people they
yearm to be. In the same manner, the collectors’ deliberate moral insertion into these tales points to an attempt to promote these tales as paths to valuable lessons. Nuchhungi, claims, in a preface to her collection *Serkawn Graded Reader* that this book has served to mould better men in the Mizo society:

> Kum kha leh chen kha Mizoram naupangten zirlaibu pakhatah an lo hmaŋ tawh a, kha lehkhabu lo zir ve tawhte tan kan rama mi pawimawh te leh kohhrana mi pawimawh chherchhuahna hmanraw te tak te a lo ni ve reng a ni. (Nuchhungi, iii)

> (For many years, children in Mizoram have used this as a textbook in the curriculum; for them, this book has served to mould great agents as well as church leaders in the society)

Thus, these Mizo folktales function as cautionary tales which make an example of their protagonists, the very figures with which children identify, rather than of their adult villains, and thus they become true horror stories that teach values.\(^5\)

“Kawrdumbela” (Maragaret Pachuau)\(^6\) is another folktale that depicts the outcome of covetousness, conceit and greed. Kawrdumbela is a hideous man who is resented by all in his village. When he secures the chief’s daughter as his wife with the help of a witch, Vazunteii, his new bride detests him outright. However, fortune smiles on him as he catches a magical fish that
tells him the secret to becoming handsome if he frees it. The fish suggests that he should scrub himself with the smoothest stone in the river and as he does, he becomes a fair, attractive and handsome figure much to the delight of his wife. When the chief learns of this news, he immediately is filled with a sense of envy. He decides that he would also do the same in order to be better than Kawrdumbela. He goes down to the river, catches the fish and demands that he be given the same secret. The fish, however, is a different magical fish that offers secrets to becoming ugly rather than handsome. It advises him to choose the roughest stone from the river banks and to bathe and scrub using this stone. When he does as directed, he turns utterly loathsome.

After a while the fish said, “Go and bathe and scrub yourself with a rough stone. After he had done as he was instructed, he realized that his body was bruised and battered. He rushed home in great consternation and everyone who saw him fled in fear. (Pachuau, 20)

Everyone who comes across him scampers away in fright and abhorrence. This story reveals the ultimate truth, that misfortunes can also befall upon those who are consumed by greed in all forms, including, jealousy over the beauty of others.

“Mauruangi” (Margaret L. Pachuau) is yet another striking Mizo tale that denotes a further struggle between good and evil and the inherent virtuous character one can possess. Some
readers and listeners might regard such tales as gruesome because there is blatant depiction of cruelty meted out to orphans. However, such a depiction is apt since it essentializes a closer drawing of the correlation between the imaginary world and the real world. The moral imagination is roused through a depiction of violence in the form of parent-child conflict, murder, abuse both in physical and verbal as well condemnation and disregard by society. Mauruangi is perhaps, the epitome of an ideal individual. Despite being constantly mistreated by a heartless father and a wicked stepmother, she still grows up into a woman who possesses virtue and a sense of intrinsic worth. Mauruangi’s adulterous father pushes her mother into a river and kills her and then, marries another woman. Her stepmother assigns her to a number of heavy chore while her very own daughter, Bingtaii, rests and sleeps and eats as she pleases.

Her stepmother admonished Mauruangi and beat her up severely. However, Mauruangi made no response and would tend to the jhum meticulously every day. (Pachuau, 74)

Mauruangi silently suffers these abuses and has to oblige for she has no other alternatives. She must somehow learn to fit in and adjust in a world that viciously mistreats her:

Fairy tales begin with conflict because we all begin our lives with conflict. We are all misfit for the world, and somehow we must fit in, fit in with other people, and
thus we must invent or find the means through communication to satisfy as well as resolve conflicting desires and instincts. (Zipes, *The Irresistible*, 2)

The extreme despair that Mauruangi endures drives her to seek solace. This solace can be found only in the river that has drowned her mother. It is not the river itself that draws her towards it but the remnants of her memories, both pleasant and tragic, of her mother that desolately haunt her; pleasant because this river, which has stolen her mother away from her, is perhaps a reminder of those comfortable times when her mother was alive (this is where she last saw her alive) and tragic, because this very river is also a grim reminder that her mother has been engulfed in the water never to return. However, folk and fairy tales subvert the normal execution of life by turning the impossible to possible. Extraordinarily, animals talk and inanimate objects are rendered alive. Help comes in the most atypical ways and yet these are never conveyed as far-fetched. They are the very means that suggest that providence appears to the reticent and subjugated.

A journey through the dark of the woods is a motif common to fairy tales: young heroes set off through the perilous forest in order to reach their destiny, or they find themselves abandoned there, cast off and left for dead. The road is long and treacherous, prowled by wolves, ghosts, and wizards — but helpers also appear along the way, good fairies and animal guides, often cloaked in unlikely
disguises. The hero's task is to tell friend from foe, and to keep walking steadily onward. (Windling, 1)

Mauruangi too, must leave home and go to the river that flows in the forest to find her support. When Mauruangi goes to the river that drowns her mother to grieve, her mother who has turned into a giant catfish comes up to her and asks her about her condition. On hearing her plight, her mother feeds her with rice and meat and tells her to return whenever she is hungry.

Mauruangi’s journey is not a literal journey through the dark woods as travelled by Little Red Cap. Rather, it commences from the point of her abandonment by her family to the successive abuse and denials and eventually to her propitious marriage in the end. Thus, hers is a metaphoric journey of life that initially does not seem to treat her right but ultimately mends the path that leads her to a happy ending. Though ill treated and starved, Mauruangi defies all odds and grows up alongside Bingtaii. She works diligently as ordered by her stepmother, while Bingtaii sits idle all day. When her labour in the jhum impresses vai lalpa, a king or a Rajah from a foreign land, both the stepmother and Bingtaii thwarts her impending happiness. The chief decides to marry Mauruangi but Bingtaii, with the help of her mother, takes her place. Mauruangi is left once again dejected and alone even as the chief takes off with Bingtaii to his land. In the end, Mauruangi must struggle for her rightful place and her very own survival when she has to fight with Bingtaii in a duel. The theme of a lovely, sweet natured, virtuous girl
harassed by a wicked step mother seems to be of universal interest. Bingtaii and the wicked stepmother embody brutality but despite their eagerness to disrupt Mauruangi’s life, their attempts prove futile. By putting her to endless tasks and replacing her as a bride to the king, they expect to foil her fortune but justice prevails and their ultimate downfall in the end reveals the fact that good triumphs over evil. Mauruangi may be seen as representing her western counterparts, the fairy tale heroines like Cinderella and Snow White. Like them, she also finds escape from her harsh life in marriage to a “prince” because this elevates her status and rescue her from the clutches of her cruel family. These instances introduce moral principles and virtues as instruments to achieving victory in life.

In “Rairahte”(Nuchhungi, IV.2), episodes of violent trials and tribulations occur which, from the moral grounds, again elucidate the triumph of good over evil. Abused by his archetypal stepmother, Rairahtea suffers immensely. After a series of alternating misfortunes and fortunes, he emerges victorious in the end. From the very start of the story, Rairahtea has been mistreated. He has a stepmother who assigns him endless chores and finally, sells him off to sailors.

Hmanlai hian fahra pakhat hi a awm a, a hming chu Rairahtea a ni. Nuhrawn a hrawn a, a rethei em em mai a; hna hrehawm tak tak hi a thawk thin a….Rairahtea chu a nuhrawn chuan tangka khotea khatin a hralh ta a. (Nuchhungi, 80)
(Once there was an orphan named Rairahtea. He had a cruel stepmother, was very poor and was made to do colossal chores….Rairahtea was sold off by his stepmother for a potful of coins.)

Within folk and fairy tales, magical items can function to move the plot forward, providing both power for the hero of the story and power for those who oppose him or her. The use of magic is often transformative of the character, if not the world.

For Rairahtea, transformation comes in the guise of his Bahhnukte, a magical item, that he acquires from a giant magical snake. With this, he aids the helpless sailors and frees their vessels stuck on the shoreline. Consequently, he wins the trust and kindness of the leader and secures a stable position on the vessel. This piece of magical item serves as a powerful tool to elevate him from his initial, degenerated state.

The belief in objects and substances endowed with supernatural powers touches all human cultures. Talismans, sacred relics, and good-luck tokens are found everywhere….to true believers, they can serve as material links to superhuman powers and thus be worth any cost to acquire and hold. The wondrous events common to fairy tales everywhere often rely on physical artifacts. (Haase, 598)
It is continuously his *Bahhnukte*, mutually merging with his innate benevolent temperament that promotes his status. His acts of kindness and goodwill wins the heart of their leader to the extent of facing a number of fatality to secure a wife for Rairahtea:

A tukah chuan khua a lo var a, lawngpu chu Reng lal fanu dil turin a kal ta a. Reng lal in chu zuk thlen chuan in chu sipai thuah sarihin an lo veng khup mai a. Sipai thuah khat pawl chuan an lo bia a, “Engnge I lo tih dawn?” an ti a. Lawngpu chuan, “In lal fanu hi…. a ti hman chauh va, a lai takah an sat chum a an inthlanga tui hmar luang chu an lentir ta daih a.

(When morning came, the captain went to seek the hands of the daughter of the *Reng* chief for Rairahtea. The chief’s house happened to be guarded by seven lines of sentries. The first line asked. “What have you come here for?” But no sooner had the Captain replied, “This princess of yours….”, he was lacerated in the middle and thrown into the river that flowed to the north. )

Rairahtea’s concern for those close to him constantly yields great endeavors. He goes in search of his leader and brings him back to life.

Chutichuan a bahhnukte kha a keng a, “Ka pu Rulpuia thu, thutak te ka bahhnukte khua leh tui ka chanpui dawn meuh chuan, ka pu thi hnu kha lo nung leh rawh se,” a han ti a. Chu veleh a pu thi tawh hnu chu a kiangah a lo ding ta reng a. A
puchuan mak a ti hle mai a. “E! hetiang a nih chuan ka kal leh bawk ang,” a ti a, a kal leh ta a. (Nuchhungi, 94)

(Then he took hi bahhnukte and chanted, “Great snake, mighty one, if I am to build a kingdom with my bahhnukte, revive my master from the deaths.” Immediately the captain, his master, arose and stood next to him. The captain himself was astonished. “If this be the provision, then I shall make another attempt,” said he, and off he went.)

The leader becomes deeply grateful to Rairahtea for saving his life and therefore, he in turn seeks a wife for Rairahtea in spite of fatal obstacles. Maria Tatar comments:

Heroes and heroines alike must sever ties with their family, but through the helpers and donors they encounter en route to a second home, they enter an intricate weave of relationships that envelops and protects them. The fairy tale world is a world in which compassion counts - the good deeds of the heroes and heroines single them out from their siblings and mark them as the beneficiaries of helpers and donors. (Tatar, 79)

The leader is immediately slain to death by the guards of the Reng Lai, whose daughter he has decided to request to be the wife of Rairahtea. However, when Rairahte brings him back to life,
the leader feels deeply indebted and decides to face the same threat. This denotes the fact that the
compassion of Rairahtea has won the support of the leader.

The significance of the Bahhnukte as a distinctive marker for Rairahtea is indicated when
Rairahtea’s evil wife steals it away. The once powerful and wealthy Rairahtea, is reduced to a
nobody with no wealth. Like the story of Cinderella, however, the item is recovered and the wife
is duly punished. In the end, one witnesses the resolution of a conflict and the subsequent victory
of virtue over vice. This tale starkly project societal realities and its negative elements such as
the despair of the weak, the darkened envy of the poor, the greed of the rich, and the aggression
of the strong with the effects that these tales become sites of struggle between morality and
immorality.

This story also reveals the Mizo values such as Tlawmngaihna (altruism), honesty and
concern for orphans. Rairahtea is given all the attention because of his acts of kindness and
because he is a good-hearted orphan, people treat him kindly. A common incident in every
culture has always been that there have been, are and will always be orphans in society and folk
and fairy tales imbibe heavily from society. They reveal the injustices often meted out to orphans
and also the good fortunes that befall these orphans if they behave well. It also serves as a
vehicle that relays the fact that violence eventually is exerted upon evil characters and often, they
die or are punished in the most horrific manner. Rairahtea avenges himself by forcing his
adulterous wife and her partner to fall from heaven with his magic. They fall with such heavy force that they die immediately.

Often these folk and fairy tales convey morals that teach one to be responsible and subservient. “Chepahakhata” (Nuchhungi, III.6) is a tale that depicts an irresponsible husband who suffers due to his laxity. Chepahakhata has always been a very ugly man who has, for this very reason, also failed to find a wife. When he has finally given up his endless quest after a long search, he happens to meet a witch. This kind witch takes pity on him and marries him. His wife showers him with riches and grants him a kingdom and makes him the king. When he pays a visit to his subjects, he is garnished in splendor and treated with a grand feast, and in the midst of these delights, he forgets his family altogether. When his daughter pleads with him to return, he makes no efforts:


(She said to her father, “Father, you must really come home this time. If you do not, we are going away.” Chepahakhata replied, “Yes, I shall definitely come home.” But he did not have any inclination to return home.)
His wife grows impatient and when their daughter fails several times to bring him back home, she flies into rage. She turns the entire kingdom into a plantain field and with their daughter, goes up to *Pu Vana*.¹²

Chepahakhata is reduced to the man he had been before, someone who is detestful, poor, hungry and homeless. He manages to survive only because his daughter from heaven takes pity on him and sends him the magical pot that refills with food on its own. He becomes a scavenger who roams the earth with no place to stay and several times, he has to rely on his wits alone in order to defeat enemies. Thus, morals and values represent a large part of the lives of people in folk and fairy tales as well as real life. They are a way for people to justify their action or lack of action. They can also dictate the ways in which people react to those around them. Stories work with people, for people and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible and as worth doing or best avoided. More than mere curiosity is at stake in this question, because human life depends on the stories they tell; the sense of self that those stories impart, the relationships constructed around shared stories, and the sense of purpose that stories both propose and foreclose.

Extraordinary heroes, as has been discussed, are the embodiments of their culture, they are larger than typical figures in ordinary life because they are exemplars of their society’s aspirations and sociopolitical conflicts. When a hero dies, he illustrates not just his own personal
weaknessness but the failings of a society at large. As a result, these heroes serve as social
guidelines for behavior and are regarded as having a certain historical and cultural truth
embodied in them. The protagonists also remind readers and listeners of themselves, and the
quests and questions of these protagonists are on the same personal level as them. As a result,
folk and fairy tales can be regarded as personal entertainment, as engaging fictions reflecting
one’s ability to laugh at oneself as well as to overcome one’s deepest dreams and fears. The use
of fantasy, magic, both good and evil, the confronting of a problem, the successful resolution of
that problem, the use of a sympathetic protagonist and his or her triumphs, all contribute to
making these folk and fairy tales vehicles of moral teachings in a society that is constantly
strived with conflicts and issues. Adam Gidwitz remarks:

> Every child has cut himself. Every child has been bruised and bled. And so, evry
> child knows that the blood stops eventually, the wound scabs over, the bruise
> yellows and heals. Fairy tale violence teaches a child that every emotional wound
> heals. That salty tears dry. That no matter the pain, victory is possible. (Gidwitz,
> 78)

In both the oral and the written form, folk fairy tales have always assumed the status of
didactic tales. According to Zipes, “Fairy tales were first told by gifted storytellers and were
based on rituals intended to endow meaning to the daily lives of members of a tribe” (Zipes,
Fairy Tale as Myth, 10). Such tales assisted the community in developing explanations for natural occurrences, such as changes in the seasons or weather, and served as ways to structure the meanings of communal events such as harvesting, hunting and marriage.

In the transition from the oral tradition to the literary tradition of folk tales, fairy tales evolved into literary tales that “addressed the concerns, tastes, and functions of court society” (Zipes, Fairy Tale as Myth, 11). Interestingly, the institutionalization of the fairy tale as a literary genre was originally intended for educated adult audiences and only later for children. Prior to the sixteenth century, there were no literary fairy tales for children (Zipes, Fairy Tale as Myth, 22). The question now arises as to why folk and fairy tales assume the status of children’s tales from the sixteenth century. Following Zipes’ thought, the literary fairy tale for children emerged with “the rise of a ‘state of childhood’” by the end of the sixteenth century due to the “rise of a greater discrepancy between adult and child as the civilizing process became geared more instrumentally to dominate nature” (Zipes, Fairy Tale as Myth, 22). At this time, the fairy tale began to be used as a tool to socialize the child by cultivating “feelings of shame” and by arousing anxiety in children “when they did not conform to more inhibiting ways of social conduct” (Zipes, Fairy Tale as Myth, 22). In examining the changes in society from the Renaissance to the present time, it can be suggested that society becomes too complex, too specialized and, as a result, too alien to the world of the child. Prior to the sixteenth century,
children lived and are depicted in art and literature as little adults. For example, children wore the same clothes as adults. The world of child and adult was one world, and virtually the same expectations were held for adult and child alike. Children worked with adults, and they also played with adults. (Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth*, 30) This implies that the child participates in the world of the adult. Hence, one can understand the moral implications and the heavy inclination towards violence in spite of them being tales for children because children mirror adults and learn from the stark and realistic circumstances reflected in the tales.

Thus, folk and fairy tales enable man to learn about themselves and the world they inhabit. They were written and told to mark an occasion, set an example, warn about danger, procure food or explain what seem inexplicable. These tales are told to communicate knowledge and experience in social contexts. Folk and fairy tales are informed by a human disposition to action- to transform the world and make it more adaptable to man’s needs, while man would also try to change and make himself fit for the world. Therefore, the focus of folk and fairy tales, whether oral or written, has always been on finding magical instruments, or powerful people and animals, or circumstances, that will enable protagonists to assert themselves within a harsh environment, and in turn echoes moral teachings.

While the critic Bettelheim emphasized the value of “struggle” and “mastery” and saw in fairy tales an “experience in moral education”, Benjamin asserts that the sense of morality that
has been endorsed in fairy tale is not without complications and complexities. As is seen in the tales studied, the plots move in favour of the goodhearted who confront and resist malice exerted upon them. While it can be agreed that promoting toughness against difficulties through these good characters may be a good manner for the child, it may not necessarily concur that cunning is a quality one wishes to encourage by displaying its advantages. It can be detected that the moral economy of the fairy tale does not necessarily concur with the didactic agendas set by parents. Instead, folk and fairy tale characters may be seen to be lying, cheating, or stealing their way to good fortune.

But despite this issue, a very worthy outcome is the fact that moral imagination is bound to have been stimulated and sharpened. These stories depict the core darkness of humanity stripped of all pretensions and in doing so, mirror the unappealing aspect of life itself. In the process, they also denote how these spiteful elements often induce fear and insecurities upon humanity itself. In the end, what these folk and fairy tales offer are powerful images of good and evil and to show how to love through the examples of the admirable characters. This will spur the imagination to translate these experiences and images into the constitutive elements of self identity and into metaphors one will use to interpret one’s own world. One will, thus, grow increasingly capable of moving about in that world with moral intent. When the moral imagination is wakeful, the virtues come to life, filled with personal and existential, as well as
social, significance. The virtues that the tales instruct can take on a life that attracts and awakens the desire to own them for oneself. They adopt forms of moral pedagogy to make persons into mature and whole human beings, able to stand face to face with the truth about themselves and others, and desiring to correct their faults and to emulate goodness and truth wherever it is found. Values reflected in the tales also carry the full burden of concerns over the decline of morality. Through these tales, teaching value, whether family values, democratic values, or religious values, is touted as the remedy for our moral confusion.
NOTES

1A long time ago, when listeners crowded close to solid tiled stoves that warmed an entire thatch-roofed old farm house in Germany, these drastic stories spoke of ancient truths, warming the intent listeners—who usually were adults rather than children—with the assurance that evil would not go unpunished, that good would win out and that there was order and justice in the world. This was the very essence which made up the entire collection of the Grimm brothers.

2The insertion within the inclusion marks indicates the collector and the serialized number assigned for the tale in the collection of Grimms’ fairy tales, Zipes, Jack. *The Complete Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*. New York: bantam Books, 1987 and henceforth, this manner shall be employed to indicate the source of a tale.

3The insertion within the inclusion marks indicates the collector and the serialized number assigned for the tale in the collection, Nuchhungi & Pi Zirtiri. *Serkawn Graded Readers: Mizo Thawnthu*, 3rd ed. Aizawl: Mualchin, 2010. Print. and henceforth, this manner shall be employed to indicate the source of a tale.

4“E Khai” is a Mizo term for exclaiming a surprise. It is roughly equivalent to “Oh” or “Wow” used to express wonder or astonishment.
Folktales in Mizoram began to reach print just at a point when education was established in the state by the Christian missionaries in the early 1900s and it was immediately incorporated into the school curriculum. Further, this inclusion into the school curriculum happened at a very crucial point in time when Christianity was firmly established and as such, they were easily harnessed into service as stories for children with a few key changes made—changes that divested the tales of their violent twists and vulgar turns of events to make room for moral instruction and spiritual guidance. Those who produced the anthologies of folktales usually had an ever watchful eye on the models generated by the Church.

The insertion within the inclusion marks indicates the collector and translator of the tale in the collection, Pachuau, Margaret. *Handpicked Tales from Mizoram*. Kolkata: Writers’ Workshop, 2008. Print, and henceforth, this manner shall be employed to indicate the source of a tale.

The insertion within the inclusion marks indicates the collector and translator of the tale in the collection, Pachuau, Margaret L. *Folklore from Mizoram*. Kolkata: Writers’ Workshop, 2013. Print. and henceforth, this manner shall be employed to indicate the source of a tale.

*vai lalpa*, a king from beyond the boundaries of the Mizo community. Usually referred to as a Rajah, a person who rules in the plain areas.

*Bahnmukte*, similar to the Greek’s Cornucopia, is a magical item that can draw forth anything that the owner desires.
10 *Reng Lal*, a chief in Tripura.

11 *Tlawmngaihna*. Altruism, selflessness, sacrifice and all constructive values. This is a very admirable trait of the Mizos in general and encompasses all virtue. It continues to be practiced within a very close knit community like such as the Mizo society and is responsible for instilling a sense of solidarity and unity within the society.

12 *Pu Vana*, regarded as a celestial being by the Mizos. He is believed to dwell in an abode in the sky.