CHAPTER 4:

NEGOTIATING POWER DYNAMICS

WITHIN THE DARK ENCLAVE
Folk and fairy tales reflect a culture that provides a site of negotiation between two binaries or oppositional forces. Cultural studies reveal culture as a site of struggle between the resistance of subordinate groups in society, and the forces of incorporation operating in the interest of the dominant groups in society. Thus, power dynamics assume a predominantly significant place in the evaluation of cultural evidences in a text. Hall is of the opinion that “culture is the site at which everyday struggles between dominant and subordinate groups are fought, won and lost”. (Procter, 11) The study of culture tries to define this constant struggle in terms of social, economic and political order. There cannot exist a culture without the interplay of power, therefore, cultural studies try to negotiate and try not to put one thing over the other, as in high and elite, or low and mass culture. As Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan have stated:

Culture is both a means of domination, of assuring the rule of one class or group over another and a means of resistance to such domination, a way of articulating oppositional points of view to those in dominance. (Rivkin and Ryan, 1025)

A study of folk and fairy tales, thus, reveal culture - the functioning of the social, economic, and political forces and power structures that produce all forms of cultural phenomena and endow them with their social “meanings”, their “truth”, the modes of discourse in which they are discussed, and their relative value and status. According to Hall,
The study of culture involves exposing the relations of power that exist within society at any given moment in order to consider how marginal, or subordinate groups might secure or win, however temporarily, cultural space from the dominant group. (Procter, 2)

Accordingly, within the realm of folk and fairy tales, there lies the relations of power that exist within a society. This in turn may reveal the means by which subordinate sections of the society can win a cultural space for themselves against the hegemonic group. Society, as denoted in these tales, recreates it’s “others”. This construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society. The postcolonialist critic, Edward Said argues that all these “actualities” are difficult to accept as most people “resist the underlying notion: that human identity is not natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally even invented outright”. He further claims that “human history is made by human beings”, that history includes the “struggle for control over territory” and so is “the struggle over historical and social meaning”. (Said, 332) Postcolonial critics claim that the development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another different and completing alter-ego, since identity is a construction which involves establishing opposites and “Others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from the “us”’. Consequently, folk and fairy tales also become sites of unguaranteed political struggle between dominant and subordinate groups. They represent voices for the voiceless, of the marginalized
other fighting back against the center because these tales champion the feats of children against cruel parents, of helpless women against ruthless males and the subjugated lower members of the society against the dominants.

Power, then, becomes a very significant case in point in folk and fairy tales, especially in terms of the projection of social division. “Power” has been interpreted as a phenomenon that is ever present and can both produce and constrain the truth. It emanates from everywhere, from all levels of the society. According to Michel Foucault, power is a relation that has been institutionalised in a way that can produce the illusion that power is a fixed essence that some people have and others do not and the underprivileged cannot move beyond destroying those who have this power. Foucault suggests that every person, no matter how low down in the hierarchy, has the capacity to disrupt and change relations of power and have a destabilising impact on the system even if at a miniscule level. He opines:

Relations of power are not in themselves forms of repression. But what happens is that, in society, in most societies, organizations are created to freeze the relations of power, hold those relations in a state of asymmetry, so that a certain number of persons get an advantage, socially, economically, politically, institutionally, etc. And this totally freezes the situation. That’s what one calls power in the strict sense of the term: it’s a specific type of power relation that has been
institutionalized, frozen, immobilized, to the profit of some and to the detriment of others. (Foucault, *Power*, 1)

This system of power relationship has been clearly reflected in the Grimms’ and Mizo folk and fairy tales. An analysis of the tales exposes the power relationships between parents and children, adults and children in general as well as between men and women and the have-nots. Folk and fairy tales more often engross readers and listeners with the wonderful magic spells that lie apparent on the surface. This often obliterates their real historical and social basis and abandon one to a wondrous realm where class conflict does not exist and where harmony reigns supreme. Yet, behind its exterior, lurks a shadow that encompasses all sorts of power struggles over kingdoms, rightful rule, money, women, children and land. Their real enchantment emanates from these dramatic conflicts. This chapter specifically examines the fluidity of the power that characters exercise: domination, collusion, resistance, and agency. It also examines how power is exercised by identifying the power of domination through agency. Through this detection, there is an expose of which characters benefit from the power exercised, and how they benefit as well as others who are disadvantaged from power and how.

In essence, the meaning of the fairy tales can only be fully grasped if the magic spell is broken and if the politics and utopian impulse of the narratives are related to the socio-historical forces. As Zipes opines:
These enchanting, loveable tales are filled with all sorts of power struggles over kingdoms, rightful rule, money, women, children, and land, that their real “enchantment” emanates from these dramatic conflicts whose resolutions allow us to glean the possibility of making the world, that is, shaping the world in accord with our needs and desires. (Zipes, Breaking, 23)

Power is the ability to influence the behaviour of people. The term authority is often used for power which is perceived as legitimate by the social structure. Power can be seen as evil or unjust, but the exercise of power is accepted as endemic to humans as social beings. In a community, power is often expressed as upward or downward.

With downward power, a community's superior influences subordinates. When a community exerts upward power, it is the subordinates who influence the decisions of the leader. (Greiner and Schein, 89)

The Grimms’ and Mizo tales echo communities that divide themselves into hierarchies, between royalty and subjects and even within the micro level of family as well. Very often in the tales, one witnesses power exertion moving from subordinates to leaders which ultimately leads to differing outcomes in the end, often in favour of the subordinates. There are times too, however, when the subordinates are disempowered and meet distressing fates in the end. Thus, the tales denote that power circulates throughout society and in spite of the palpable hierarchical system
that can be detected in the tales, the power distribution pattern does not follow a top-down phenomenon. This pattern, instead, may render the weak as dominants in certain events while at other times, the same pattern may render them as entirely helpless, thus, leading to their tragic ends. Much of the recent sociological debate on power revolves around the issue of the enabling nature of power. Power can be seen as various forms of constraint on human action, but also as that which makes action possible. Michel Foucault defines power as “a complex strategic situation in a given social setting” (Foucault, 127). Being deeply structural, his concept involves both constraint and enablement. It is possible to examine regimes of power through the historicised deconstruction of systems or regimes of meaning-making constructed in and as discourse, that is to see, how and why some categories of thinking and lines of argument have come to be generally taken as truths while other ways of thinking/being/doing are marginalised. According to Zipes, folk and fairy tales “awaken our regard for the miraculous condition of life and to evoke profound feelings of awe and respect for life as a miraculous process, which can be altered and changed to compensate for the lack of power, wealth, and pleasure that most people experience” (Zipes, Why Fairy Tales, 848-9)

Folk and fairy tales often focus on the meaning, production and reception of a tale within its historical, social and cultural context. As products of sociohistorical circumstances, they reflect conditions, values, religious beliefs, social concerns, politics and ideologies, informing
the lives of a certain people at a specific time. Although tale types and motifs may be spread widely across geographical and cultural borders suggesting a certain universality each version of a tale depends on the context in which it was produced, received and interpreted. Therefore, each version communicates a different message tailored to its audience, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes subverting or questioning social values pertaining to the time and place in which it was conceived.

The stories of class struggle and gender conflict blend sadism with slapstick to produce a form of festive violence that targets either the top dog or the underdog as victim, and that observes neither temporal nor spatial limits to its reach. (Tatar, 168)

Lutz Rohrich suggests that folktales are “a reflection of the reality in which they were produced, the characters and the settings being based upon real people and their surrounding culture. In that sense, folk tales mirror the stages of socialization of one specific group of people, and each version is representative of its own cultural context”. (Rohrich, 199) Characters that dominate usually belong to the higher rank in the social structure. Marvin Harries comments:

A society's structure is comprised of its domestic economy (social organization, kinship, division of labor) and its political economy (political institutions, social hierarchies), while its superstructure consists of the ideological and symbolic
sectors of culture; the religious, symbolic, intellectual and artistic endeavors.

(Harris, 658)

The term "sociocultural system" embraces three concepts: society, culture, and system. A society is a number of interdependent organisms of the same species. A culture is the learned behaviour that is shared by the members of a society, together with the material products of such behaviour. Hierarchy in a society is, according to Max Weber, divided into three components, class, status and power. Class refers to a person's economic position in a society. Status is a person's prestige, social honor, or popularity in a society. Weber noted that political power was not rooted in capital value solely, but also in one's individual status. Finally, power denotes person's ability to get their way despite the resistance of others.(Weber, 92) Weber implies that by power, it means the chance of a man, or a number of men "to realize their own will in communal action, even against the resistance of others."(Weber, 121) He denotes that the base from which such power can be exercised may vary considerably according to the social context, that is, historical and structural circumstance.

These three components feature endlessly in all folk and fairy tales. Social structure comprises of kings and queens who often through economic means and status, assume power and dominate other characters. There are also sparodic mingling of merchants, wealthy nobles, farmers, hunters, servants, housewives, slaves. They range from those belonging to the highest to
the lowest in the social hierarchy. Usually, the protagonists belong to the lower end of the spectrum. According to D.L. Ashliman:

Fairy tale protagonists typically come from the lowest group, the proletariat, and as the tale progresses they nearly always engage in a conflict with the rich and the powerful, ultimately gaining victory through cunning and magic. (Ashliman, 147)

Folk and fairy tales follow rigid social structures and therefore, the agents of violence and subordination usually rest on the higher classes: kings fare well, queens can get rid of unwanted threats, wealthy noblemen can have wives of their choices from any classes and in the micro level of family, the parents reign supreme and children often suffer at their hands. Zipes has rightly stated, thus:

The most striking characteristic of the traditional tale lies in the fact that the social institutions and concepts which we discover in it reflect the age of feudalism. Thus the question of the origin of the folktale coincides with that of the origin of literature in general. (Zipes, *Fairy Tales*, 30)

Clearly the folk tales that were collected in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries preserved aesthetic patterns derived from pre-capitalist societies. They did so because these patterns, in the form of transformed elements and motifs, continued to reflect and speak to the conditions of the people and the dominant ideology of the times to a great degree.
The characters in the Grimms' and Mizo folk and fairy tales come from two extreme ends of the social structure. At the bottom are woodcutters, tailors, cobblers, peasants, swineherds, goose girls, kitchen maids, cottagers, crofters and discharged soldiers. At the top are princes, princesses, kings and queens or chiefs and their family. However, heroes and heroines usually belong to the lower strata of the society and if they are princes and princesses, they are such in name only and are typically quite powerless at the tale’s beginning, as witnessed in the “The Frog King” (Grimm 1) in which the prince is a simple, ugly toad who has been cursed to live helplessly in a well in the dark forest. There is “The Twelve Brothers” (Grimm 9) in which the twelve princes are turned into ravens from the very start of the tale, not because they have committed a crime, but because their father misinterpreted their behavior. “Snow White” (Grimm 53) relates the tale of a young princess who must fight for her survival against her evil stepmother. She is denied a royal life of luxury in the palace and instead, has to keep house for her friends, the seven little dwarfs who receive her into their house in the forest. It can be noted that folk and fairy tale derived its perspective from the socio-political concerns of the respective authors. Jack Zipes claims that the Grimms collection of tales also originated from the common people who were struggling against the aristocrats during the eighteenth century when the tales were documented.

As pre-capitalist art from, the folk tale presents, in its partiality, for everything metallic and mineral, a set and solid, imperishable world…. particularly in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Germany….the main characters and concerns of a monarchical and feudal society are presented, and the focus is on class struggle and competition for power among the aristocrats themselves and between the peasantry and aristocracy, and among the peasants. ..this is why the people were carriers of the tales: the Marchen catered to their aspirations…. (Zipes, *Breaking*, 35)

As such the hero is not only a subjugated prince or peasant, but a bourgeois protagonist, generally speaking an artist, the creative individual, who has numerous adventures and encounters with the supernatural in pursuit of a "new world" where he will be able to develop and enjoy his talents. Eugen Weber comments:

A number of stories begin with the son or sons leaving home, very young, either to earn money or to escape the misery they knew. This is absolutely true to life well into the nineteenth century. The eight Yearold Coignet guarding his sheep in the forest, the eleven-year old boy from the Pyrenees arrested in Paris in 1828 for selling engravings without a permit, and the twelve-year old boy a policeman noted among the rebels of 1832, all confirm stories like that of the three brothers who have nothing left to eat…(Weber, 98)
The quest is no longer for wealth and social status (though class struggle is involved) but for a change in social relations. “Hansel and Gretel” (Grimm 15), for instance, depicts two children who are taken into the woods and abandoned by parents who cannot or will not care for them. When a great famine settles over the land, the woodcutter's second, abusive wife decides to take the children into the woods and leave them there to be by themselves, so that she and her husband will not starve to death, because the children also needs to be fed and therefore, they have to eat away a certain portion of the family’s daily meal. The stepmother, who holds the reins in the house, has the ultimate power to decide the fate of the children. She is the villain who makes no effort to disguise her hatred of the two children who dare not counter her. She denotes her hatred for the children when she claims that, once abandoned in the woods, the children will never find their way back home:

“I’ll tell you what,” answered the wife. “Early tomorrow morning we’ll take the children out into the forest where its most dense. We’ll build a fire and give them each a piece of bread. Then we’ll go about our work and leave them alone. They won’t find their way back home, and we’ll be rid of them.” (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 53)

When her husband protests, she calls him a fool and warns him that all four of them will die of starvation. In this tale, the power rests on the parents and they misuse it; it is selfishness pure and simple that motivates the stepmother’s plot to lead the children deep into the forest. The father’s
empathy with Hansel and Gretel lacks the passion necessary to resist the strength of his wife’s resolve:

“No, wife,” the man said. “I won’t do this. I don’t have the heart to leave my children in the forest. The wild beats would soon come and tear them apart.” (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 53)

It is not long before he falls in with her plan and collaborates in the project of abandonment. In this tale, it is the subordinates who must be sacrificed both out of murderous resentment exerted by the dominants and to ensure the survival of these very people who are in power.

Even when a tale exonerates one or both parents of malice by implying that abandoning children is the lesser of two evils (between suffering due to hunger and brutish self interest), the children are left to fend for themselves because parents have been too incapacitated to provide. One way or another, the parents who are in power are to blame and begin to emerge at the least as monsters of negligence. “A Tale About the Boy who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was” (Grimm 4) also tells the story of a boy who is disowned by his father and sent into the world to find his own way. In the tale the father disowns his son because his son innocently breaks the leg of a Sexton who attempts to frighten him and as such is simply defending himself. His horrified father turns him out of the house, so the boy sets out to learn how to shudder and
assert himself into a world that misunderstands and mistreats him. His father’s parting words are spiteful and agonizing:

“Learn what you want,” the father said. “It’s all the same to me. Here’s the fifty talers. Take them and go out into the wide world, but don’t tell anyone where you come from or who your father is because I’m ashamed of you.” (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 13).

The mutilated heroine of “The Maiden without Hands” (Grimm 31), although apparently safe from further abuse, also walks away from her father’s house and into the woods. In the tale, a 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 turns out to be 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. But, the girl, now handicapped, decides to set out into the world, despite her father's wealth:

Now the miller said to his daughter, “I’ve become so wealthy because of you that I shall see to it you’ll live in splendour for the rest of your life.”
But she answered, “No, I cannot stay here. I’m going away and shall depend on the kindness of people to provide me with whatever I need. (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 110).

The youthful hero of “Iron Hans” (Grimm 136) fearing a beating from his father, runs away into the woods. This young prince is playing with a ball in the courtyard. He accidentally rolls it into the cage where a wild iron-skinned man picks it up and will only return it if he is set free. He states further that the only key to the cage is hidden beneath the Queen's pillow. Though the prince hesitates at first, he eventually builds up the courage to sneak into his mother's room and steal the key. He releases the wild iron-skinned man who reveals his name to be Iron Hans. The prince fears he will be killed for setting Iron John free, so Iron John agrees to take the prince with him into the forest. As it turns out, Iron Hans is a powerful being and has many treasures that he guards. He sets the prince to watch over his well, but warns him not to let anything touch it or fall in because it will turn instantly to gold. The prince obeys at first, but begins to play in the well, eventually turning all his hair into gold. Disappointed in the boy’s failure, Iron Hans sends him away to experience poverty and struggle:

“You’ve failed the test and can no longer stay here. Go out into the world, and you’ll learn what it means to be poor...my power is great, greater than you think…” (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 445).
The heroine of “All Fur” (Grimm 65) flees into the woods to escape her father’s incestuous advances. A king promises his dying wife that he would not marry unless to a woman as beautiful as she is, and when he looks for a new wife, he realizes that the only woman that would not break the promise is his own daughter. The daughter tries to make the wedding impossible by asking for three dresses, one as golden as the sun, one as silver as moon, and one as dazzling as the stars, and a mantle made from the fur of every kind of bird and animal in the kingdom. When her father provides them, she takes them, with a gold ring, a gold spindle, and a gold reel, and runs from the castle the night before the wedding. She sleeps in a forest of a neighbouring land where the local prince hunts and his dogs finds her. She asks them to have pity on her and receives a place in the kitchen, where she works, and because she gives no name she is called "All Fur." From the status of a princess, this young woman has been forced to flee from the luxurious life of royalty and has been reduced to the level of a servant because of the inappropriate treatment meted out to her by her father.

When the king’s daughter saw that there was no hope whatsoever of changing her father’s inclinations, she decided to run away. That night, while everyone was asleep, she got up and took three of her precious possessions; a golden ring, a tiny golden spinning wheel, and a little golden reel. She packed the dresses of the sun, the moon, and the stars into a nutshell, put on the cloak of all kinds of fur, and
blackened her face and hands with soot. The she commended herself to God and departed. (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 240).

Unlike Cinderella, who endure humiliation at home and becomes the beneficiary of lavish gifts, this princess is mobile, active and resourceful. She begins with a strong assertion of will, resistant to the paternal desires that would claim her. Fleeing the household, she moves into an alien world that requires her to be inventive, energetic and enterprising if she is to reestablish herself to reclaim her royal rank. “The Brave Little Tailor” (Grimm 20) has a young tailor, who, finding his workplace too restraining, abandons his trade and sets forth to seek a better life. A tailor is preparing to eat some jam, but when flies settle on it, he kills seven of them with one blow. He makes a belt describing the deed, "Seven at one blow". Inspired, he sets out into the world to seek his fortune.

The tailor tied the belt around his waist, and since he now thought that his bravery was too great for his workshop, he decided to go out into the world. (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 74).

With that, the king marries him to his daughter. His wife hears him talking in his sleep and realizes that he is merely a tailor. The king promises to have him carried off. By cunning and sheer will, he defeats a giant and then captures a unicorn as requested by a king. With this feat done, the king rewards him with his daughter and his prosperity enfolds.
Thus, in all these tales, one finds abused children fighting for their survival by fleeing from the confines that mistreat them. This asserts that even the most rigid institution and arrangement of power relations is inherently unstable, and concerted and subdued non-cooperation by those involved can lead to change. This does not indicate however, that the cost to individuals for such resistance might not be high, but it does bring action within the realm of possibility in the folk and fairy tale world rather than it being a matter of waiting for the grand moment of violent revolutionary overthrow. At the same time, this also means that everyone becomes responsible – not just a few. Seemingly insignificant acts of compromise all contribute to the ongoing disruption of unjust and oppressive systems just as an accumulation of seemingly insignificant resistances can ultimately lead to their breakdown. As such what is to be noted in all these tales is the fact that the protagonists are all children or youths and are subjugated by authority, usually the parents. They must search their new way by themselves, independent of traditional social structures. Neither family nor government offers aid but in folk and fairy tales, these subordinates are not alone. Magic pervades the tales, and through its help, they prevail. Power is invested solely in adults, who use their superior strength and intelligence to teach children a lesson. These stories, with their single-minded focus on the transgression/punishment pattern, their unique power relationships, their explicit morals, their implicit call for conformity are the most relevant in the Grimms’ collection as well as in many Mizo tales.
Child abandonment, incest, famine, rape, identity theft, spousal abuse, madness, and plague: These are but some of the themes that nourish the tales, told through abstraction, depthlessness, everyday magic, and intuitive logic. (Bernheimer, 2)

Parent-child conflicts usually take a number of forms, the most common being the proverbial cruel stepmother’s mistreatment of her husband’s children. There are many cultural and psychological reasons as to why villains in folk and fairy tales are often depicted as stepmothers. Perhaps the most relevant and greatest issue is the restoration of justice. Many elements fit into this framework - a child may be denied his or her rightful position in a family or a young adult may be denied personal choice in the selection of a mate. In most of the tales, what is to be noted is the strong presence of the wicked stepmother. She is perhaps the most ubiquitous powerful female character in folk and fairy tales. The open hostility which she displays toward her stepchildren is a stark feature in all the narratives. She exemplifies the “bad” mother who allows the fantasy of the “good” mother to remain; she is cruel, greedy, malicious and jealous. The stepmother is one of the most common villainous characters, and she is closely aligned with other hostile female characters, including witches, ogresses, enchantresses. She may overwork, starve, kill or eat the children. These acts of villainy are perpetrated against both male and female protagonists and this, in turn, portray her as a monstrous beast whether she actually takes the form of an actual beast or simply appear in a human form. If a tale includes the
stepmother’s natural children, she almost always works toward their promotion while abusing her stepchildren.

It must be remembered that women died young due to frequent child-bearing and unsanitary conditions. Thus, step-mothers were common in households, and this often led to difficulties with the children from former wives. In this respect, the tale reflects the strained relations but sees them more as a result of social forces. (James, 126).

The Mizo tale “Thailungi” (Margaret Pachuau) portrays a cruel stepmother who barters Thailungi with a bale of iron. This story is a corroboration of the fact that the dominants often exert and exploit their power over their subordinates for the sole benefits of the hegemonic groups and the disadvantage of the victims. In this tale, the stepmother represent that power under whose regime, the young and helpless Thailungi suffers. For status and capital, the stepmother abuses her power and the abused girl gains nothing. She conspires with the trader to send Thailungi off to fetch water from the stream and to take her while she is at the task. Thailungi overhears the plan but is too frightened to protest. This tale depicts the strong, dominating presence of the stepmother who is consistently featured as evil, cruel and cunning. Thailungi reluctantly has to obey her vicious stepmother and as she goes out, she shudders at the
fate that awaits her, and as has been arranged, the trader captures her and take her away as price
for the bale of iron.

Thailungi could overhear the entire conversation and she was deeply
disheartened. She could not even run away for fear of wild animals….And so very
reluctantly the little girl went her way. The Pawihte travelers captured her quickly
and took her to their land. (Pachuau, 15)

In “Rahtea” (Tribal Research Institute, 25) , a young boy is compelled to flee from home because
his stepmother proposes to have him killed. She refuses to feed him, clothe him and assigns him
to heavy chores. Ultimately, when she demands that he be sacrificed to cure her supposed illness,
Rahte has to no choice but to escape the wrath of his stepmother.

(Rahtea was an orphan who had a stepmother. His stepmother treated him
brutally; he had no proper clothes, his clothes were torn and for food, she served
him rice husks and he grew thinner and thinner. )
“Rairahte” (Tribal Research Institute, 26) is another Mizo tale in which a cruel stepmother sells her stepson to traders. When she learns that a group of sailors are in search of human sacrifice to release their ships that could not sail due to spells, she unhesitantly sells him to them for a pot of gold.

Chu lawng tang thawi nana mihring an han zawn chuan tangka khote khatin a hralh ta a, Rairahte chu Kawrpawlho hnenah chuan a awm ta a. (Tribal Research Institute, 133)

(She sold him off for a pot of gold when they wanted a human to sacrifice so that their ships could be released, Rairahte now belonged to the sailors.)

The most daunting stepmother presence in all Mizo tales is perhaps Mauruangi’s stepmother who, like Cinderella’s stepmother, goes to the extent of not only disrupting Mauruangis existence but also thwarting her only hope of happiness through a marriage:

Suddenly her stepmother took a pail of boiling hot water and poured it over her and Maurangi died. Her body was thrown in the forest below the village, but a wild goat found it, and brought it back to life, and he kept her as a nursemaid. (Pachuau, 76)
Another such instance is in “The Juniper Tree” (Grimm 47) in which the stepmother offers her stepson an apple and decapitates him with the lid of the chest “and his head flew off, falling among the red apples” (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 159). The evil stepmother chops his body and cooks stew out of him and serves them at dinner. His father also eats the stew when he comes home. The bones of the boy turn into a bird that sings about the events. Then the bird throws the millstone on his stepmother’s head and kills her, after which this very bird turns back into the boy again. The stepmother’s actions are horrific, and though justice finds her, it presents a twisted image of reality in which acts of cannibalism and brute forces would be frowned upon.

These tales also convey the sense that power somehow resides in the institutions rather than in the individuals that make the institutions function. As such, for the characters, rather than attack the instigators of abuses upon them, they prefer to venture into the world and face the larger system itself (that make the individual abusers function) in an attempt to create changes. This would improve their conditions as individuals and also bring improvement in the society itself. Thus, these inferior characters in the tales must undergo conflict and resolution process through which they can assert themselves. For the male protagonists, this must include strength, valor, and fortitude. In “The Story of the Boy who Went Forth to Learn What Fear Was” (Grimm 4), his challenge is to spend nights in a haunted castle. The first night, as the boy sits in his room, two voices from the corner of the room moans into the night, complaining about the cold. The
boy, unafraid, claims that the owners of the voices are silly not to warm themselves with the fire. Suddenly, two black cats jump out of the corner and, seeing the calm boy, propose a card game. The boy tricks the cats and traps them with the cutting board and knife. Black cats and dogs emerge from every patch of darkness in the room, and the boy fights and kills each of them with his knife. Then, from the darkness, a bed appears. He lies down on it, preparing for sleep, but it begins walking all over the castle. Still unafraid, the boy urges it to go faster. The bed turns upside down, but the boy, unfazed, just tosses the bed aside and sleeps next to the fire until morning. Thus, series of actions that determines the boy’s ferocity are witnessed. The boy, on facing these challenges, has no choice but to face them because he has been rejected by his father and he must struggle to survive on his own.

As the boy settles in for his second night in the castle, half of a man’s body falls down the chimney. The boy, again unafraid, shouts up the chimney that the other half is needed. The other half, hearing the boy, falls from the chimney and reunites with the rest. More men follow with human skulls and dead men's legs with which to play nine-pins. The amused boy sharpens the skulls into better balls with his lathe and joins the men until midnight, when they vanish into thin air. On his third and final night in the castle, the boy hears a strange noise. Six men enter his room, carrying a coffin. The boy, unafraid but distraught, believes the body to be his own dead cousin. As he tries to warm the body, it reanimates, and, confused, threatens to strangle him. The
boy, angry at his ingratitude, closes the coffin on top of the man again. An old man hears the noise and comes to see the boy. While showing the boy his ability to push an anvil into the ground, the boy splits the anvil and traps the old man's beard in it, and then proceeds to beat the man with an iron rod. The man, desperate for mercy, shows the boy all of the treasures in the castle. Thus, this boy earns wealth and riches and for surviving three nights in the castle, he is awarded a beautiful princess as a price by the king.

Another challenge a male protagonist may face is killing a dragon, as in “The Two Brothers” (Grimm 60). Two brothers who are twins, born of a poor broommaker, are compelled to leave their family because of a scheme planned by their uncle, a rich goldsmith. They are adopted by a huntsman and even they become great hunters. They move out and seek adventures and part their ways. One of the brothers rescue a princess by slaying a six headed dragon and would have married her had his head not been chopped off by an envious marshall of the king.

Shortly after, with a great roar the seven headed dragon descended on the spot. When he caught sight of the huntsman, he was astounded, and he said, “Wat do you think you’re doing on this mountain?” “I’ve come to fight you,” replied the huntsman. (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 217)

He is revived by a faithful hare, then roams the world for a year till he meets up with his brother and together, they seek out the princess and reveal the truth.
Rescuing a princess from monsters or ogres is a common element that can be found in many of the Grimms’ tales. A very significant tale would be “Strong Hans” (Grimm 166) in which a very strong young man named Hans seeks out adventures and on one occasion, comes across a princess who has been captured by an ogre. He rescues the princess by beating the ogre with his club and flees while hiding her in a basket and carrying her across valleys to the land of her parents who offer the princess as prize for his deeds.

The protagonists usually have the least favored position in the social setup, including the family and they are usually the youngest son, youngest daughter or stepchild. Often they are openly unwanted by their parents. Many are chided for being too small, and “Little” can even be a part of their names such as Little Red Cap. Demeaning names such as Cinderella, Ash Lad, Donkey-Skin and Hans My Hedgehog are awarded to them. Frequently the male protagonist is a simpleton, although they do fare rather well in the second phase of the stories. Only with the aid of magic, are they able to establish a place for themselves in the society rather than having extraordinary skills, training or resources. In “The Worn Out Dancing Shoes” (Grimm 133), a king with twelve daughters offers the hand of one of them in marriage to the man who can discover how they escape from their locked room every night and dance their shoes to pieces. Many princes attempt to learn the secret, but all fail, forfeiting their lives. A recently dismissed soldier, too severely wounded to continue his military service, is confronted by an old woman
who, for no apparent reason, gives him a cloak that will render him invisible, then tells him how to use it to discover the princesses’ secret.

Then she gave him a little cloak and said, “When you put this cloak on, you’ll be invisible, and you’ll be able to follow all twelve of them.” (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 53)

He follows the old woman’s counsel and succeeds where many before him have failed. His wounds mentioned earlier play no role as the story progresses, but then neither does he rely on any special abilities. He succeeds because he has the magic cloak, a cloak that anyone could have acquired, and he has been in the right place at the right time. Thus, in the realm of folk and fairy tales, where fantasy mingle with reality and where anything is possible, magic becomes the source of power that signifies one’s assertion in the social structure.

Thus, through the main characters in these tales, the concerns of a monarchistic and feudal society are presented, and the focus is on class struggle and competition for power among the aristocrats themselves and between the peasantry and aristocracy. Hence the central theme of most folk and fairy tales remains “might makes right.” He who has power can exercise his will, right wrongs, become ennobled, amass money and land, win women as prizes. This is one of the reasons as to why the common people were the carriers of the tales: the tales catered to their aspirations and allowed them to believe that anyone could become a knight in shining armor or a
lovely princess, and they also presented the stark realities of power politics without disguising the violence and brutality of everyday life. These tales are realms without morals, where class and power determine social relations. Hence, the magic and miraculous serve to rupture the feudal confines and represent metaphorically the conscious and unconscious desires of the lower classes.

A world inverted, an exemplary world, fairyland is a criticism of ossified reality. It does not remain side by side with the latter; it reacts upon it; it suggests that we transform it, that we reinstate what is out of place." Whatever the outcomes of the tales are-and for the most part, they are happy ends and "exemplary" in that they affirm a more just feudal order with democratizing elements-the impulse and critique of the "magic" is rooted in a historically explicable desire to overcome oppression and change society. (Fisher, Jerilyn and Ellen S. Silber, 126).

Magic is used as a weapon against injustice to level the playing field for the peasant in their class struggle against the aristocracy. Bourgeoisie who seized power and came to replace the aristocracy at the top tier edited the tales, highlighting magic to make them appear ridiculous and to relegate them to the children's realm. Power is then everywhere, in every relationship in the Grimms' and Mizo folk and fairy tales. Within this enclave, the populace is constantly subjecting it and being objects of it. It encompasses the relationships between parents and children, between
lovers, between kings and subjects, between men and women. This stands in accordance with Foucault’s argument for many struggles by “women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals against the particularised power, the constraints and controls, that are exerted over them...these movements are linked to the revolutionary movement of the proletariat to the extent that they fight against the controls and constraints which serve the same system of power”. (Guimarães, 1) Female subjugation is a very palpable aspect of power relationships in many of the tales. The start of the nineteenth century, the very period during which the Grimms’ *Nursery and Household Tales* was collected and published, was traditional in the sense that women were no more than subordinate domestic possessions. In, “”The Female Tradition”, Elaine Showalter presents that:

> The middle-class ideology of the proper sphere of womanhood, which developed in post-industrial England and America, prescribed a woman who would be a Perfect Lady, an Angel in the House, contentedly submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity … queen in her own realm of the Home. (Showalter, 1108)

This holds true for most societies, including the German society. However, after being suppressed to this ideology for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the beginning of the Edwardian period was the time when women began speaking out about various social injustices that were forced upon them for centuries. This was widely known as the suffragist
movement. Women sought to create a constitutional change, whereby they would be privileged to basic rights. Many women believed that because the “role of a woman” was in the home, she should not be denied a say in legislation that directly or indirectly influences laws, which impact the home. Women did not approach this social change with any violence, or force. This is unlike men, who have a history of using violent measures as a means to obtain peace or equality. (Barrie, 49) This was the politics behind the production of the Grimms’ tales and as such, the political turmoil pertaining to women are reflected across the tales:

The Madonna/whore construct is created for women through fairy tales and the man is emasculated. The treatment of women in the fairy tales is a reflection of and a response to the socio-historical events of the time in which they are composed. While the modern retellings of the tales still retain the powerful and demoniacal female antagonist, the protagonist usually gets what she wants through her own intelligence and resourcefulness (Marshall, 410).

Subjugation, passivity, voiceless existence as well as attempt at self-assertion by some are all aspects that find expression in the female characters. Especially in realm of gender, power is understood within the frameworks of class and social order; and the heroine's innocence and persecution are ideologically constructed. Consenting to heterosexuality and motherhood is portrayed as natural for women. Women are usually faced with daunting domestic tasks: to spin
straw into gold as in “Rumpelstiltskin”(Grimm 55), to separate peas and lentils from ashes as in “Cinderella”(Grimm 21), to strip a large quantity of feathers from their quills as in “The True Bride”(Grimm 186) Alternatively, a fairy-tale heroine, now an emerging woman, may spend her time passively isolated: locked in a tower as in “Rapunzel”(Grimm 12), maintain a vow of silence as in “The Twelve Brothers”(Grimm 9), comatose in a glass tome as in “Snow White”(Grimm 53) or asleep barricaded behind an impenetrable hedge of thorns as in “Brier Rose”(Grimm 50).

The Grimms’ comprehension of women is misogynistic at best. Their idea of a woman’s place in society becomes clear. Their approach to femininity is bipolar, a question of “good” and “bad”. A woman is “good” if she is passive, submissive and pious while a “bad” woman is assertive, demanding and constantly attempting to empower herself, even if it means involving wicked means. Much is revealed about these intended gender roles by examining characterization in “Cinderella” and “King Thrushbeard”. Cinderella is the paradigm of “pious and good”, while her stepsisters and stepmother are characterized as “treacherous and wicked at heart.” While this explanation seems simple, and is usually taken at face value, one has to consider the Grimms’ explanation of Cinderella’s goodness. Cinderella is apparently “good” only because she is pious and passive. She never does anything aside from looking beautiful to
warrant such praise. In fact, nearly all heroines in Grimms’ fairy tales are beautiful -- from Cinderella to Brier Rose to Rapunzel to Little Red Cap - and therefore “good.”

Specifically, Cinderella is good because she is beautiful, passive, innocent, and beguiled. She is victimized by her “wicked” stepmother and stepsisters, who are “beautiful and fair in the face, but treacherous and wicked at heart.”(Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 181) They force her to wear rags and act as a servant in order to break her spirit and undermine her beauty status. Zipes denotes:

In making Cinderella a metaphorical slave, these women are another tool of the Grimms’ to serve the mechanism of patriarchy. Whenever a woman in a fairy tale possesses or acts with power, they act in favor of the patriarchy (Zipes, Fairy Tales, 148).

In the tale, the stepmother realizes that the only way to gain social status and succeed on the system’s terms is to marry her daughters into wealth. She knows that the power of a woman directly correlates the beauty of a woman. Thus, her stepdaughter is a threat who must be removed and therefore, is justified. Cinderella, in her own limited ways, also asserts herself but in a manner that is entirely different from the rest of her family. She seeks help, defies orders and marries the forbidden prince but does all these in a secretive, docile, humble manner in such a way that she does not cause disorder in the entire social setup. Jack Zipes comments:
Cinderella does not turn her cheek but rebels and struggles to offset her disadvantages. In doing so she actively seeks help and uses her wits to attain her goal which is not marriage but recognition. The recovery of her lost slipper and marriage with the prince is symbolically an affirmation of her strong independent character. (Zipes, *Fairy Tales*, 30)

She uses her wits to gain a place for herself in a society that does not treat her right and also, by being “pious and gentle”, she earns sympathy from her kind friends. Her animal friends pity her situation and help her to escape her dreadful condition. Cinderella demonstrates her “goodness” through housework and submission, no doubt a way to reinforce that a “good” woman is always rewarded with an affluent marriage and unending happiness. Thus, beauty is more often associated with goodness and ugliness with evil and laziness and age. Beauty is rewarded and ugliness is punished. In “The White Bride and the Black Bride” (Grimm 135), the mother and daughter are "cursed" with blackness and ugliness. A woman, her daughter, and her stepdaughter are cutting fodder when the Lord comes up to them and asks the way to the village. The woman and the daughter refuse, and the stepdaughter offers to show him. So the woman and daughter becomes as black and ugly as sin, but the stepdaughter is offered three wishes. She chooses to be beautiful, to have an ever-full purse of gold, and to go to heaven when she dies. Such a tale connotes goodness with diligence and beauty, and characters are "rewarded" for their
hard work. In this way, beauty becomes associated not only with goodness but also with “whiteness” and “economic privilege”.

Although beauty is often rewarded in Grimms’ tales, it is also a source of danger. Beauty is, thus, commodified in a number of such tales. The princess in “King Thrushbeard” (Grimm 52) is the Grimms’ representation of a “bad” woman. She, like Cinderella, is beautiful, which apparently gives her potential for “goodness.” She is even described as “so proud and haughty that no suitor was good enough for her.” (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 177). She even makes fun of her suitors. There are two possible trajectories with regards to women in the tales: one passive, docile and compliant with patriarchal norm and the other nomadic, creative and socially subversive. It is clear that the princess fits into the latter qualities. It might be assumed that the princess is simply arrogant, never considering that she is obviously and unwillingly forced to marry. Her father, the King, gets angry that she will not accept a proposal from a parade of men that she does not know and does not like and marries her off to a beggar. He believes he needs to teach her a lesson to make her “good.”

The princess is “bad” because she is proud, because she has standards, and because she probably aspires more than to be a mere wife for a king. She is berated by her beggar husband for not knowing how to cook or clean. Instead of having a sympathetic (or even kind) view of the princess, the Grimms assume a position of misogyny. She is not depicted as a woman forced into
a compromised setting, but rather as a materialistic, egotistical princess. In Woman Hating, Andrea Dworkin writes, “[Female characters] have one scenario of passage. They are moved, as if inert, from the house of the father to the house of the prince. First they are objects of malice, then they are objects of romantic adoration. They do nothing to warrant either.” (Dworkin, 42) In almost all folk and fairy tales featuring women, marriage is the ultimate goal for both male and female protagonists. The princes actively pursue a bride while the beautiful maidens wait to be chosen. The princess tries to break from this cycle, but is instead humiliated and “broken” by both her father and husband, a notion implying that women need to be tamed like animals or disciplined like children. After the true identity of her husband is exposed, despite ridicule, humiliation, lies and belittling, the princess’ “true happiness began.” This is a clear indication that often the politics behind these tales need to be unearthed and extensively studied.

The Grimms’ version of “Cinderella” (Grimm 21) conveys a depiction of the desperation of the stepsisters to marry and the scenarios that ensue project gory insights. The first stepsister cuts her heel off with a knife in order to fit the slipper, the second stepsister severs her big toe to fit the slipper. The prince is duped both times, only to discover on the way to his castle that the slipper is overflowing with blood. The stepsisters, desperate to gain status through marriage, symbolize the feminist point of view of how women sacrifice their bodies, intellects, and
aspirations in hope of finding a man. One could then determine that the “wicked” stepsisters are perhaps promiscuous in thought or deed, and therefore “bad”.

The Grimms’ characterization of man is simple. He is aggressive, handsome, wealthy, powerful, and therefore “good.” He matters, acts, and succeeds. The man’s goodness comes from every trait that women do not possess. “The male as savior is dominant and protects the virtues of the humble female.” (Zipes, *Fairy Tale*, 149) It seems that the “worse” she is, the better he is for assuming her as a liability, like the deceptive King Thrushbeard and his victimized bride.

Cinderella’s father, a rich man, never tries to regulate the discourse between his new family and his old one. Presumably, Cinderella would have special treatment, she being his very own daughter from the first marriage. Interestingly, Cinderella’s father is mentioned only once -- to clarify that he is rich. He never appears to influence his daughter’s fate. To the Grimms, he is only rich, therefore powerful, therefore “good”.

In “King Thrushbeard” (Grimm 52), the princess’ father appears briefly at the beginning of the tale only to force his daughter to marry for the sake of status. When his plan fails, he forces her to marry a beggar and promptly kicks his “proud and haughty” daughter out of her home. The basis for the king’s justice is the frivolous use of power to determine and execute what is best for his daughter. He, too, is the “good” father, keeping with the Grimms’ Christian notion of family values. Cinderella’s father marries an evil woman who supposedly tortures his
only child from his first marriage and does nothing to stop it. The princess’ father in “King Thrushbeard” (Grimm 52), also abandons his daughter with a strange man. In the Grimms’ world, these men are patriarchs, beyond moral law and codes of decency and women are a commodity whose wealth are based on degrees of silence and beauty.

Even though Cinderella and the princess are on either end of the Grimms’ spectrum, they do hold one major trait in common: both women are victimized. In fact, most women in the Grimms tales are victims. Cinderella is a victim of her stepmother. The princess is a victim of her own pride. None of these women use their cunning wit to save themselves. They remain passive. They never think, act, initiate, confront, or question, but are always saved in the nick of time by the handsome prince. Brier Rose and Rapunzel are again victims of a wicked witch and parents’ selfish decisions. In folk and fairy tales, women are often projected into two very different spectrum, “good” and “bad”. Passive, subservient women like Brier Rose and Rapunzel are “good” because they are repressed, submissive and willing to be dominated by authority. Whereas, the evil stepmothers and witches are branded as “bad” because they are willing to assert themselves, evil as their schemes may be, and they seem to be unwilling to conform to the societal norms that patriarchy demands of a woman, that is, to be humble, docile, selfless and domesticated. “Brier Rose” (Grimm 50) is helpless in the hands of people superior to her. To her father, there is nothing in the world which is more cherishable to him than his daughter. And, as
she is his only legacy into the future, he feels it his patriarchal duty to protect her from the harsh realities of the life that he has already experienced. Though he cannot keep her young forever, he will do everything in his power to prolong the process. While his acts of protection are out of love, his parental barricades may end up harming his child more than helping her. Brier Rose ends up being cursed by an old woman when she is not invited for a feast to celebrate her birth. She is cursed to die on her fifteenth and despite her father’s wariness, she pricks her finger with a spindle and sleeps for a hundred years. She is trapped within the confines of the palace and the helpless princess, for no fault of hers, is imprisoned within the brier hedge that engulfs the palace.

Soon a brier hedge began to grow all around the castle, and it grew higher each year. Eventually, it surrounded and covered the entire castle....The princess became known by the name Beautiful Sleeping Brier Rose, and a tale about her began circulating throughout the country. (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 173)

She is silenced for a hundred years and only when a prince revives her by kissing her, is she able to reassume her place in the palace. And immediately she is ushered off to be married to him because the prince wants her.

“Rapunzel” (Grimm 12) is a victim of the adults in her life. She is traded off to a witch for a rapunzel lettuce by her father even before she is born.
When his wife had the baby, the sorceress appeared at once. She gave the child the name Rapunzel and took her away...But when she was twelve years old, the sorceress locked her in a tower that was in a forest. It had neither door, nor stairs, only a little window high above. (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 42)

The tower signifies a suppression, an incarceration that stifles the life and soul of a young, naive and beautiful Rapunzel who is not aware of a life otherwise until a prince comes to meet her. She has been obediently serving the sorceress before the prince arrives, lifting her up with her hair whenever she demands. Whenever the sorceress wanted to get in, she would stand below and call out:

“Rapunzel, Rapunzel,

Let down your hair for me.”

Rapunzel’s hair was long and radiant, as fine as spun gold. Every time she heard the voice of the sorceress, she unpinned her braids and wound them around a hook on the window. Then she let her hair drop twenty yards, and the sorceress would climb up on it. (Zipes, *The Complete Fairy Tales*, 43)

But this also leads to her misfortune because the sorceress catches them and the prince is blinded and forced to wander off while she must bear his twins and look after them on her own.
In her fury she seized Rapunzel’s hair, wrapped it around her left hand several times, grabbed a pair of scissors with her right hand, and snip snip the hair was cut off, and the beautiful braids lay on the ground. Then the cruel sorceress took rapunzel to a desolate land where she had to live in misery and grief. (Zipes, The Complete Fairy Tales, 44)

In the Grimm's version of “Snow White” (Grimm 53), the mirror is a magical instrument which is owned by the evil queen that symbolizes the absent king's voice and opinions. The queen, after a few years of marriage, can predict the King's thoughts and actions. She has versions of his feelings in her mind which is represented by her magical mirror: "... The woman has internalized the King's rule: his voice resides now in her own mirror, her own mind" (Bettelheim, 293). The mirror provides a patriarchal voice for the queen and her stepdaughter. It also illustrates the queen's anxieties about Snow White and her jealousy about Snow White's looks. Bettelheim concludes that "the story of Snow White warns of the evil consequences of narcissism for both parent and child" (Bettelheim, 203). The narcissism of the queen is clearly seen in her obsession with the answers of her magic mirror. In the Grimm's version, the father's voice is pivotal in the stepmother- daughter relationship. "His, surely, is the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgment that rules the queen's- and every other woman's- self-evaluation" (Bettelheim, 293). The Grimm brothers changed the tale of Snow White, from the earlier versions they had
printed, in 1819 to make Snow White's stepmother, not her actual mother, but the evil stepmother (Warner 211). The evil stepmother is found to be more believable than an evil mother and more acceptable by children.

The roles accessible to women and men, thus, have been clearly expressed in the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm. The tales indicate that powerful, aggressive women are bad, and that good women are paralyzed. Also, men are dictated as always good, no matter what they do or do not do. The tales also denote that the realistic modes of femininity and masculinity are radically polarized until the ideal woman is portrayed as a mere toy and the ideal man is portrayed as a heroic dragonslayer:

The root of folk fairy tales are instructions, mandates meant to lead us down the Grimms’ idealistically proper way of life. These stories are much more than children’s fiction. They give analytical adults the opportunity to discern and dissect the traditional roles of women in history, and the misogyny that assigned women to generations of subservient territory. (Tatar, 45)

The Mizo tale, “Mauruangi” (Margaret L.Pachuau ) depicts a similar “Cinderella” story in which Mauruangi is a helpless victim under a wicked stepmother, a jealous stepsister and a neglectful father. Mauruangi receives help from her mother who take the forms of a catfish and a tree to aid her daughter. When she is wooed by a Raja, her stepsister Bingtaii intervenes and
takes her place while Mauruangi is left to the task of looking after a serow’s child. However, in
the end, when the Raja realizes he has been deceived, he decides to put the two women to a duel
and whoever wins, he shall choose for a wife. In the end, Mauruangi defeats her stepsister and
assumes her rightful place as the Raja’s wife.

Mizo women, especially in the pre-colonial era, were subjected to a hardworking regime
whereby they were obliged to sacrifice themselves to the rigidly established patriarchal system.
They had to get up at dawn, fetch water from streams, work hard at the jhums all day, entertain
young men at night while spinning yarns.

Mizo women were recognized for their hard work or dutifulness particularly in
their household responsibilities. (Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii, 42)

Any woman who displayed such qualities were considered the embodiment of a “good” woman
while women who indulged in otherwise unruly manners were considered “bad”. As
Vanlachhuanawma asserts:

In the case of moral misbehaviour between young men and women, the male
partner was said to earn honouring the world of spirit whereas the female partner
was doomed to perdition. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 46-47)
In the tale, Mauruangi is projected as a humble, subservient, hospitable, kind, and skilled in spinning, farming and weaving, who is in direct contrast to her step-sister Bingtaii. Bingtaii, by contrast, is portrayed as lazy, manipulative, wicked and shallow. She is a representative of the very epitome of a “bad” woman because, in the eyes of the patriarchal setup, she is worthless in all aspects.

Mauruangi...would tend to the jhum meticulously every day. Bingtaii, on the other hand, would not tend to her part of the jhum and soon it wore an unkempt look. So even though Mauruangi had the less fertile patch of land, she tended it with care and had a good harvest of corn.(Pachuau, 74)

Parent-children conflict episodes, as with other folk and fairy tales, dominate this tale and here, it is not only the evil stepmother but also the father who is responsible for the trauma that Mauruangi experiences. It is not only Mauruangi, but also her mother, who suffers at the hands of the dominants. She is drowned by her husband and when she turns into a magical fish and tree to feed her daughter, it is her husband who sends an entourage of men to hunt her down and dispose of her. While such actions seem to condemn the two evil characters in the story, their behaviour is indicative of the status of wives and of orphans in Mizo society and as such, serves to highlight the strong masculine aura as well the heavy presence of the “bad” female behind
these men in Mizo society. The cruel treatment meted out to orphans and neglected children in the society is represented through the pathetic condition of Mauruangi.

With the passage of time she (Mauruangi’s stepmother) meted out harsh treatment to her and only favoured her own daughter Bingtaii. She refused to give Mauruangi any good food to eat and gave her only mashed bran. Mauruangi was unable to partake of the same and she went hungry very often. (Pachuau, 70-71)

Mauruangi’s story, therefore, though it might seem entirely fictional, is actually reflective of past Mizo society and its social customs and beliefs, especially pertaining to women’s social roles.

“Rimenhawihi” (Margaret Pachuau) tells the tragic story of the Mizo version of the Grimms’ “Rapunzel” in that Rimenhawii, like her counterpart, has a beautiful, long, shiny hair and while her husband is away on a journey, like Rapunzel, she is locked up in a house made of iron. When a chief from a faraway land happens to find a strand of her hair from a fish’s bowel, he firmly orders his men to capture her for his wife, whether she is willing or not.

The chief commanded, “Ah...now that would be the name I have been seeking. Now, you must all go back there once more and you bring her here to me. I do not care whether she is married or not.” (Pachuau, 41)
She is a representation of the voiceless, submissive wife who has no power to undermine men’s decisions, even at the cost of her own welfare. She is dragged away from her home, and carried off to foreign lands and is completely uprooted from the safe confines of her home which though detaining, is still a comfort because it is familiar.

Another similar tale, “Tualvungi and Zawlpala”(Zama) is also indicative of a subjugated, passive, submissive wife who is sold off to a stranger from another land by her very own husband. Tualvungi is a beautiful maiden who is the pride of her husband Zawlpala. Despite his seemingly profound love for her, Zawlpala never acknowledges nor consults his wife even in matters that affects her own fate. His honour means more to him and when Phuntiha, a wily chief from a far off land seeks her hands in marriage, he plays the court on his own completely leaving his wife out of the resolution.

Distressed greatly, she turned to her husband and pleaded with him thus:

I can see them yonder
Herding in countless mithans
And carrying great numbers of puans
Tell them Tualvungi is with child
O my love Zawlpala
But her desperation was matched by Zawlpala’s loss for words at the turn of
events and he was unable to offer her any consolation. So the now hated Phuntiha arrived and proceeded to fulfill his obligations with great gusto. (Zama)

He finally has to oblige when Phuntiha could meet the dowry demands that Zawlpala thinks would be impossible to achieve and therefore, has put forth in jest. Tualvungi has to part with her true love and remain estranged for the remainder of her life. And in the end, ironically, this submissive, selfless female still sacrifices her life for the very person whose pride stands before his love for her. When she learns that Zawlpala has died, she requests an old woman to kill her and is eventually depicted as being in the grave with him.

Thus, both the Grimms’ and Mizo tales contain explicit and implicit messages about dominant power structures in society, especially those concerning gender. They reflect seemingly appropriate gendered values and attitudes and contain symbolic imagery that legitimates existing race, class and gender systems. Young women characters are more often described as “beautiful” than are older women, while male characters of any age could be described as handsome. Furthermore, beauty is often associated with being white, economically privileged and virtuous. Feminine beauty is necessitated in tales by not only making “beauties” prominent in the stories but also in demonstrating how beauty gets its reward. The fact that women’s beauty is particularly salient in the tales, denotes glorification of feminine beauty and represent a means by which gender inequality is reproduced. Both the Grimms’ and Mizo tales
also suggest that both helpless children and women are consistently manipulated by the dominating social structure in the tales. Also, the economically disadvantaged, among others, are subject to structural violence. The persecuted heroes and heroines usually belong to the lower strata and they are orphans, servants, lowly labourers and traders, helpless women and children or else are passive princes and princesses. This structural violence usually has the effect of denying people important rights, such as economic well-being; social, political and sexual equality; a sense of personal fulfilment and self worth and only by retaliation, are they given the sense of significance in the society.
NOTES

1The Grimms’ tales reflect pre-modern era in Germany which espouse social hierarchy that climbs from servants and common folks at the bottom to kings and their royal families at the top. They also reflect the eighteenth and nineteenth century German predicament where there was class struggle and competition for power among the aristocrats and against the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, and also among the peasants.

2In pre-colonial Mizo society, that is, before the nineteenth century, social stratification of the Mizos was organized in which the Chief (Lal) was at the top of the chain. Then came the Chief’s council followed by the priests. The traditional Mizo social organization centered around the village ruled by a chief and in each village, there was a wide gap between the privileged and non-privileged. Widows, orphans and those deemed to be at the lowest because they belonged to a lower clan by birth, did not enjoy status and were often discriminated.

3The 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. Print and henceforth, this manner shall be employed to indicate the source of a tale.
4 The insertion within the inclusion marks indicates the collector and translator of the tale in the collection, Pachuau, Margaret. *Folklore from Mizoram*. Kolkata: Writers’ Workshop, 2008. Print and henceforth, this manner shall be employed to indicate the source of a tale.

5 The Grimms were resolute on delivering Christian ethics into the tales they collected. As such, they revised and filtered numerous tales that they documented from the oral because they felt that the production and reception of their tales was closely bound to the needs of the commodity market wherein Christian values were being promoted. This corroborates the enormity of Christian themes and values into the plot of the tales.

6 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.

7 *Raja*, a king from the neighbouring kingdom. They belong to the main Indian culture, to an entirely different ethnic group and have no similarity with the Mizos in terms of culture or race.

8 The insertion within the inclusion marks indicates the translator of the tale, Zama, Margaret Ch. “Tualvungi and Zawlpala.” *MizowritinginEnglish*. 9 Feb 2009 Web 12 April 2013.