CHAPTER III

WEALTH
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In the modern society, it is not possible to think of a life without money. In this chapter, I propose to examine the way Mizo playwrights employ this theme in their dramatic exposition of life. The desire for being rich or acquiring riches is, most probably, innate in all human beings. In some, it finds violent expression in the form of being totally unscrupulous as to how one attains riches. The lure of being rich is indeed so great, that, very few would be able to resist the temptation when it faces them. Money is a great mystery and it is present in every sphere of human life in the present day to day living. It is a shore to which every human craft is anchored. In fact, money gives the social atmosphere to give men food, shelter, comfort and amenities of life and even privacy. So, it is safe to say that our society is built with money and we are tied to money. Money is a means to acquire more riches or wealth, for wealth commonly refers to money in abundance or valuables accumulated in possession.

The Dictionary of Economics by Ahuja defines wealth in the following manner:

The wealth of an individual can be defined as his stock of tangible or intangible assets which have a market value. This implies that they must be capable of being exchanged for money or other goods; in other words, the ownership must then be capable of being transferred. It also implies that it should not only include physical possessions such as a house, stocks and shares, bank accounts, but also his business and professional connections, together with the value of particular skills which he may possess.

One of the Oxford Dictionaries define 'wealth' as "possession of a great amount of property, money etc. riches." And any thesaurus will categorise wealth with riches, which may be treated as synonymous with other words like affluence, opulence or opulency, prosperity, mammon, possessions, assets, fortunes, treasures and so on.

Mammon, defined by the New Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, is an Aramaic word for riches or wealth. The word in Syriac also bears the same meaning. It is often used in the Bible, as in Matthew 6:24 and St. Luke 16:9-13 and

taken by medieval writers as the proper name of the devil of covetousness. Having many possessions or acquiring riches simply does not oppose the religious principles. In the Old Testament, possession of wealth was regarded as an evidence to God's favour. Even the New Testament does not condemn the possession of wealth but because of the great tendency to covetousness it is regarded as dangerous. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Amongst the religious prophets, Jesus Christ has dealt more comprehensively than any other, with the problem of wealth, examining all its aspects and its effects. Jesus teaches, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money." In another context he also preaches, "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches." He also says, "I tell you, use worldly wealth ... to gain friends for your-

5. Holy Bible, Psalm 1:3, also Job.
selves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." In this way Jesus has changed altogether the values which men attached to human existence and human happiness and acquisition and possession of wealth. To Christ, real happiness derived from being at peace with one's fellowmen through perfect love and fellowship, and selfless service and sacrifice.

Wealth, in term of money, has become the criterion for judging man and his activity. One by one the state, the legal system, churches and other social organizations have submitted to the power of money. Money plays a vital role in the administrative set-up of the society. As a matter of fact everyone has begun to think that money, the source of power and evil must get priority over everything else. This belief is well supported on the one hand, by a general loss of spiritual sensitivity (if not of faith itself) and on the other, by the incredible growth of technology in the modern society.

Money, which allows us to obtain everything material progress offers (in truth, everything our fallen nature

9. Ibid.
desires), is no longer merely an economic value. It has become a moral value and ethical standard.\textsuperscript{12}

In the light of the above observation, I shall now examine how the Mizo playwrights have touched the various manifestations of money in their plays. Wealth, in this sense, shall include all those possessions of man, movable and immovable properties, valuables acceptable as a means of exchange and settling debts and including cultural treasures and heritage of the society.

To some Mizo playwrights, wealth has been perceived as a strong power or an instrument which paves its own way for some ends. Some other depicted it as an instrument to achieve certain goals in life. Man is searching for earthly happiness and wealth up to the extent of worshipping the devil for thinking that "money is the answer for everething."\textsuperscript{13} The power of riches can be seen in one way or the other as handled by different playwrights.

Sailo's \textit{Liandova te unau} (1969) presents a vivid account of marrying wealth. His characters Liandova and Tuaisiala were once looked down upon by the villagers because they were poor in all respects. They were given a stick

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} The Bible, Ecclesiastes 10:19.
stained with animal blood instead of a piece of meat, a basket of husk in place of paddy as their wage when they worked in the farm of Thangmanga (Act II, Sc. v). They were given entrails or stomach to wash instead of a piece of the meat of a python when they joined the other villagers in hunting and of a deer when they killed it in the farm (Act II, Sc. i). However, they were blessed with a large number of gongs and beads which were once regarded as symbol of wealth in the Mizo society. To increase their treasure, the king Lersia blessed them by giving his best full grown domesticated cow-gayal (mithun) along with a good amount of paddy on a community harvesting day, that is the last harvesting day in a particular farm. Only Pi Fangi, their neighbour and constant adviser knew the material possession of the two brothers. With her advice and help, the Princess Tuaichawngi decided to marry Liandova; but did she love him? That is a question. Tuaichawngi, in fact, married the wealth of Liandova. The unbelieving father, thereafter fixed the high price of Tuaichawngi, so that Liandova will not be able to pay in time. However, such a great number of beads and mithuns were paid easily in one instalment. And the remaining beads and mithuns were still big enough for the family. Here in this play, wealth brings marriage and happiness for the new couple and their family and wealth serves as meaningful power to attain what is dreamt of by the characters.
The Sangi Inleng (1963) by Lalthangfala Sailo projects another concept of wealth. In a typical Mizo society, wealthy persons exercise great influence in their village. To have a wealthy friend or relatives means an honour, which is rather a very rare one. When the mediators of Zahranga contact the parents of Sangi, the angle character of the play, Sangi's mother excitedly responds to the proposal. She, therefore, puts a strong pressure on her husband to agree for thinking that they will be able to treat Hranga as a puppet and share in his wealth. "They are rich, a lone son Hranga, after they have married we will treat him as we like it," (Scene - I). The mother never consulted her daughter for her view but forced her to marry Hranga for his wealth. But Sangi, who had confided her love to Muana was not tempted by the riches of others. For her the power of love is stronger than the power of wealth, a good name is to be chosen rather than riches (Proverbs 22:1). She says, "I can live without sharing his riches." (Scene - I). Her mother focussed her eyes to Hranga's wealth but Sangi overcomes the temptation of riches and fixes her eyes on someone whom she really loves.

Sailo does not portray the mere bad effects of wealth. For him, wealth is a useful means to attain status in the society. The two brothers Liandova and Tuaisiala, in Lian-
dova te unau had been granted social status only after the princess Tuaichawngl had disclosed the secret riches of the two brothers. It can be assumed that the two brothers had developed confidence, of course which is concealed, only after they had discovered treasures from the entrails of the python. Again, to strengthen their position, Lersia had awarded their humble-mindedness with countable wealth. It is a bare fact that the two brothers acquired their place in the society with their riches. Once they have enough money or wealth, security follows. The proverb goes "a rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall protecting him." The Holy Bible, Proverbs 18:11. There is a kind of security that wealth can bring. For Liandova, wealth is a means to become the son-in-law of his village chief, who had been quite rude to him before. Liandova married the princess happily and achieved high status with his wealth. The playwright did not discuss the evil effect of money or a sign of deterioration in their character. So, for Sailo, wealth or money is a useful instrument with which man achieves status, confidence and happiness.

In Khawkungi's Zawipa Thian Tlangah (1981) the error of judgement is committed by the uncle of Remi because of the love of wealth. The uncle Ruala tries to force Remi

to marry Lalmuana, son of a wealthy village man in order to earn Lalmuana's double-barelled breech-loading gun as one item of Remi's price. Such over-fondness of gun resulted in the error of judgement, without thinking of the fate of his children. On the other hand, Remi will never surrender her chastity to a drunkard howsoever wealthy he is; whereas Lalmuana believes that he can win her with money and constant flirting. The charm of wealth has no appeal to Remi who runs away from the village. The evil effect of covetousness reappears when Ruala forces his own daughter to marry Lalmuana never agrees to pay that gun as part of the price of the bride.

While in a disturbed mind, Remi recollected in her soliloquy, the fate of Tualvungi. Tualvungi, the beautiful wife of Zawlpala was forced to marry the rich and powerful king Phuntiha. While investigating the marital status of Tualvungi, Liandova who, out of love and over-fondness of her beauty tells Phuntiha that she was his sister. The rich Phuntiha instantly inquires for her price. Zawlpala casually demands a very high price so that even Phuntiha would never be able to pay and so that the loving couple will live freely. But Phuntiha did not seem worried over the high price demanded by Zawlpala. The tremendous wealth to render for favour of Tualvungi had been produced by
Phuntiha after sometime. The unfortunate husband has nothing to say, for wealth purchased his wife. The disillusioned wife has been carried off by the power of those riches, which heavily tormented the loving couple. Money can buy anything and it is a means to achieve something.

The playwright, Padma Shri Khawlkungi\(^{15}\) (b. 1927- ) had depicted the result of covetousness and its subsequent effect on man. She knew quite well that the pull of envy is strong and hard to resist. And all the more, she understood that wealthy person could exercise their power over the poor. In doing so, her heroine Vanlalremi also had faced insult against proud people. To marry riches, for Remi was absurd and it was against her principle. Besides, the last words and the messages of the father binds Remi not to marry anyone who used to indulge in wine and luxuries. Keeping her father's message in mind, for Vanlalremi wealth is no substitute for character and goodness. She know that a good name is to be chosen than money or wealth, in order to keep up self respect and dignity. And the heroine of the play is an embodiment of the playwright's philosophy of life.

\(^{15}\) Mrs Khawlkhungi was the recipient of Padma Shri for literature in 1987. The award was given by the President, Government of India.
"Love of Money", said Democritus, "is the metropolis of all evils." Seneca speaks of, "the desire for that which does not belong to us, from which every evil of the mind springs." "The love of Money", said Phocylides, "is the mother of all evils." Philo spoke of "love of money which is the starting place of the greatest transgressions of the Law." Athenacus quotes a saying: "The belly's pleasure is the beginning and root of all evil." Money in itself is neither good nor bad; it is simply dangerous in that the love of it may become bad. With money a man can selfishly serve his own desires and buy his way to forbidden things and facilitate the path of wrong doing. Nevertheless, with money a man can generously answer to the cry of the needy. So, money in itself is not an evil, but it is a great responsibility. Money brings power, and power is always a double-edged thing, for it is powerful to good and powerful to evil. 16

Pauline assertion of money as a root of all kinds of evils 17 has been nicely portrayed by the Mizo playwrights. In Lalhuauaka's play Lo Kir Leh Mai Rawh (1965) the younger brother Liana of Chawngawih village had been hopelessly indulged in the enjoyment of money. After collecting his

17. 1. Timothy, 6:10 (The Bible)
share from the family treasury, he plunges himself into the dark pool of unconsciousness. The temptation of over love of money in Liana drives him to the extent of worshipping money as deity and not being afraid of tormenting another being for the sake of money.

The desire for money tends to be a thirst which is insatiable. There was a Roman proverb which say that wealth is like sea-water; so far from quenching a man's thirst, the more a man drinks of sea-water the more he wants to drink. The strange thing about wealth is that there never seems to come a time when a man can say: 'Enough!' He is always driven by the desire for a little more. 18

Money is the real force that is destructive to Liana's life. The power of money had been actively tempting the son to flee from his loving father. The riches, which would be in his hand, be-dimmed the clear sight of the son towards his father. As a result, his passion ruins and makes his age a weariness instead of the avowed pleasure.

Of course the temptation to wealth exists and to be lost in riches is to follow our own heart. But the

situation goes beyond human nature, for this temptation involves possession by a spirit different from the spirit of God. Money is only the material sign of inner possession. It is the channel and means, but its force would not be so formidable if it were not accompanied by this spirit and used by this power which seeks to seduce us, to possess us, to make us live apart from God, and ultimately to win our love. 19

Wealth gives a man popularity as it happens in the case of Liana. When Liana was rich, he has got many friends, who shared his money, enjoying luxurious food and drinks. He was however, deserted by his friends and neighbours when he became poor. Those people loved money but not the man. The playwright has shown the great amenities and luxuries that money can give and the wretched state of man who worships money.

The evil effect of wealth had been clearly depicted by Lalsiama in his two short plays. When we examine the character of Thatvunga and Chalchani of Pa awk hrawl and Sumparlawma of Ukil hlawthing, the desire for money or wealth tends to make a man more selfish. When they are driven by the desire for wealth it is nothing to them that

someone has to remain poor or possess less share in order that they may amass more, or that someone has to lose in order that they may gain. As the playwright arranged in his play, *Pa awk hrawl*, Thatvunga, the hero, collected all those riches from his dead elder brother's properties. He had sold out every valuable material and tangible property. According to the will, Thatvunga is entrusted to look after the two children Laltawia, aged 6 and Riangkungi, aged 4, till they become physically mature. Then, he will offer Rs. 3000/- (three thousand) to Laltawia when he attains the majority age - and to reserve Rs. 1000/- (one thousand) and two domesticated cow-gayal as her property (or dowry) to Riangkungi, a young girl, in time of marriage. Besides these, Thatvunga had accumulated a large treasures from the richest village man named Neihkunga, the elder brother who suffered a serious illness, and ultimately died.

At Pherzawl village, Chalchani, the wife of Thatvunga received her husband with extreme joy at the sight of the newly acquired riches. Her joy is however, enveloped by covetousness and envy of others. When she realised the exact agreement made between her husband and his elder brother, their terms and condition laid down for the future of the two children enraged her all the more. She, therefore, devised out the best way for the removal of Laltawia and
Riangkungi out of their path and to enjoy those riches all by themselves. The desire for wealth fixes the wife's thought upon herself and she considers the two children as merely means or obstacles in the path to her own enrichment. The husband agrees with his wife readily. It is clear that the love of money easily leads them into a wrong way which may end in pain, regret and remorse. The brother and sister were deserted in the thickest jungle, so that they can no longer share in the wealth of their father. However, the selfish couples no longer enjoy the wealth of the dying father. The tiger killed all their animals one by one. And they themselves met a tragic death not long after the two children of Neihkunga had been removed out of jealousy and selfishness. Their desire for more wealth is founded on the desire for the longest comfort and for pure luxury at the sight of their neighbours. But money or wealth cannot buy security. It cannot protect from them sorrow and from death. As in the case of Thatvunga and Chalchani, the security which is founded on material wealth is foredoomed to failure and to collapse.

Lalsiama, the playwright knows very well that money or riches blooms for a very short time. He remembers Jesus teaching of 'use wealth to gain friends', and he believes that money is for temporary use. Accumulation of wealth
is of no value to a dead man. A man can be so entangled with this world that he forgets that there is any other world. The playwright, therefore, feels that a fortune in money is a poor substitute for a man's soul.

Money has no material force except as people attribute force to it. Money as an object is not the master of states, of armies, of the masses or of the mind except by humanity's consent to its authority. Materially speaking, money would be nothing without human consent. But money brings strong temptation. Money is a force that is destructive to life and the first limitation on the role of money in human life. To follow our fallen desire means to be lost in riches and luxurious living.

In this connection, the case of Ramthanga, the protagonist of Lahmuaka's Ramthanga te chhung (1965) may be taken up. Being a father he has to look after his family with his wages as clerk in one particular office. But it always happen that most of his money had been spent in his drinks alone. On a certain month, he gave to his wife for family expense only Rs. 50/- (fifty) out of his Rs. 450/- (four hundred and fifty rupees) of his pay. In fact, fifty rupees is not enough to look after his wife and

children. When his wife resorts to mismanagement of the family, the father using his manly power, scolded her or threatens to discipline her with a stick. Ramthanga who is depicted as a drunkard and lazy staff was not entertained in the office for long. His misconduct attracts termination of his services. The untold suffering and anxiety have been brought into the house as a result of the love of money. Money turns Ramthanga to a drunkard. For the temptation of money can arise from any corner. Money or wine or both stirs up the dormant desire for luxurious life in Ramthanga, which found its expression in his behaviour and habits.

In his two plays, *Lo Kir leh mai rawh* (1965) and *Ramthanga te chhung* (1981), Lalhmuaka had depicted the endless desires of men, which finds its expression with money. The playwright believes that money is a means to achieve something. However, he tries to convince his readers that money can bring temporary joys and pleasures, but not the end of everything. Using his two protagonists Liana (*Lo kir leh mai rawh*) and Ramthanga (*Ramthanga te chhung*) Lalhmuaka has shown to us that how money can spoil one's life and also one's family. There was a time when money gives contentment, but it will soon fly away. Love of money can be a real temptation for Christian. For this reason,
he wants every Christian to be aware of the attractiveness of money or riches.

Love of money, as depicted by Lalzuithanga, in his novel Thlahrang (1977) and his drama, The Black Corner of Aijal in 1989, which was stayed in 1940, (unpublished manuscript), once again convinced us that it was a root of evil. Lalzuithanga (1916-1950), in his novel and drama skillfully reveals how the love of money ruins one's life. It is clear that a useful servant of a master may ruin the other master.

In Thlahrang, the villain Kawla 45 years old bachelor who used to sell medicines was seen as a sociable, kind and friendly man in Aijal town. One Burmese medical man tempted Kawla to kidnap a beautiful girl Parmawii, the daughter of Suakliana of Tripura and bring her to him. This medical man offered Kawla Rs. 3000/- (three thousand) and spelt out the condition under which he wanted to take revenge on Suakliana. When Kawla was offered Rs. 1000/- as advance, the temptation was all the more great:

Tangka sang khat te chu mang lam pawha ka la hmuh ngai loh a nih avangin chu thlemma chu dang zo rual niin ka inhre lo a, ka pawta a.21

(I have never seen such a big sum of rupees thousand, even in my dream and to resist such a strong temptation, I felt, was not possible and I accepted it.)

It was a hard decision, but the love of money in him had overpowered Kawla's conscience and money followed him to the grave.

To kidnap Miss Parmawii was not easy. He, therefore managed to hire an abductor. The story goes on and it is found that a series of murder must have been undertaken. In doing so, Kawla had to kill his hireling, who had demanded Rs. 1000/- in fact, Rs. 500/- more than the agreement, for them of kidnapping the target girl. The hireling and Kawla himself were greedy enough. To settle the matter and to get more money, Kawla had decided to close the hireling's mouth. He then killed his hireling with a sharp knife.

Greed had driven Kawla to being an instrument of another man. But when things turn out in the most unexpected way, Kawla hanged himself after keeping a note of his treacherous actions. In his letter, he condemned himself to be the real culprit, who was solely responsible for the kidnapping of Parmawii, who subsequently murdered his partner in the conspiracy out of love of money. With such a treacherous act of conspiracy, bribery and killings, the
writer wants to show that love of money is the real root of evils. The evil in man, aroused by money spoils human relationship and even ruins human lives.

Lalzuithanga, in his drama, composed, directed and even acted by himself in the first drama competition of Mizoram, The Black Corner of Aijal in 1989 (for photo of the actors - see Appendix), again depicted the strong temptation of money as it was found in the society. A man called Ranga was one of the regular customer of one Hotel-cum-Bar, which was situated in a hidden street of Aijal (now Aizawl). He used to enjoy drinks as well as gambling with other customers and he was well acquainted with those lady waitresses. Being a gambler and drunkard, he can guess the heavy income of the Hotel manager and he even knew where the money-chest was kept. As a last man to go home from the hotel, one night, he could see that the manager did not lock his chest properly. About midnight, Ranga could not sleep but imagine how much he can rob from that hotel. He was bankrupt at the same time. He rose up again and robbed the hotel with a revolver in his hand. On his

23. 2nd Prize Winner in Zosiami Cup Drama Competition at Aijal in 1940, organized by one Missionary, Rev. Samuel Davis.
way to the main door, he used charmer to make the guard
sleep soundly. While closing the money-safe he made one
mistake to make a big noise. The owner rang up the Police
instantly. But when the search party arrived on the spot,
Ranga could hardly escape from them. However, the Police
intelligence later found out that, Ranga was the real rogue,
who has stolen all the money. The judgement which fell
upon him was hanging till dead. It was inevitable. Ranga
was punished for his theft and was hung before a large
crowd.

So was the result of the love of money. Lalzuithanga
knew quite well that money leads man astray to the extent
that out of such love, man meets his sad end. The temptation
of money or wealth can arise from any side or anywhere,
and if man follows that glitter with all his will, the
sparkling gold will lead him to the darkest night.

The strange thing is that the desire for wealth
is based on the desire for security, but it ends in nothing
but worry and anxiety. The more a man has to keep the more
he has to lose. And if he has great possessions, the ten-
dency is for him to be haunted by the risk of losing them.
There is a fable about a peasant who rendered a great service

to a king. The king rewarded him with a large sum of money. For a time the man was thrilled, but the day came when he went to the king and besought him to take the gift back, for into his life there had entered the hitherto unknown worry that he might lose what he had. But most men are not like this peasant.

The love of money usually leads a man to wrong ways. That is true even physically. The love of money is to be condemned. It is thus extremely important that we never try to justify, however little, an attachment to money or the importance we attribute to it. That our attachment to money pushes us with it headlong into nothingness.  

The Mizo dramatists and playwrights had touched the problem of riches and its consequences in a number of ways. Each playwright has, in one way or the other, presented this theme in the play as we have discussed in this chapter. After a systematic study, I have found that two broad division can be drawn out of it.

In the first case, wealth, mostly in the form of money, is seen as a valuable possession, which can be used effectively. The effectiveness or the power of money can be best seen in this passage:

A feast is made for laughter,
And wine makes life merry,
But money is the answer for everything.26

The answer of money can be in a good way or a wrong way. Few playwrights among the Mizos, have depicted money as a spring-board to happiness. Money is used as a helpful instrument for doing something. If one is not overpowered by excessive love, money can be used properly to do important works and to bring out good and useful things. This has been effectively depicted by fewer playwrights. In Hausakna nun dik tak, a joint venture of Chawngzika and Samuel Davis, acted in 1938 at Sikulpui,27 it was meaning­fully portrayed that a wealthy man can live righteously. One should not think that money and righteousness could not go together. Earlier dramatists had tried to show the righteous life of a rich man to the people. Their aim would be to inculcate righteousness in a noble man's life. The same example has been set by the modern playwrights in some of their plays.

The second category is that, majority of the Mizo playwrights wanted to show the evil effect of money. The

27. Sikulpui is the Boys' Middle English School, Mission Veng, Aizawl, where dramatical performances were held in earlier time.
desire for riches can blind a man to the higher thing. And the pursuit of money takes the place of the worship of God. And even Jesus Christ had mentioned that, "You cannot serve God and Mammon." A man's god is that to which he gives himself, his time, his energy, his thought, his life, that which dominates and pervades his life. And if a man's one concern is with wealth, then wealth is his god.29

Knowing the strong temptation of Mammon, the Mizo playwrights had exemplified the evils of money or riches in their characters. They have shown that desire is deeply rooted in human nature and if that desire is not controlled, the result can be really horrible. Riches may beget arrogance in their possessor and subservient snobbery in those who came into contact with him. In that case, riches or prosperity can be the cruelest curse ever obtain by men.

Therefore, the Mizo playwrights have seen that to evaluate everything in terms of money, to make the love of money or riches the driving force of life, cannot ever be anything else than the most perilous of sins.