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Poignant Love Story of Mizo – Lianchhiari

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Mizoram is a picturesque mountainous state in northeastern India, Aizawl is its capital and largest city in the state. The state is bordered by Assam, Manipur, and Tripura domestically, and shares 722 km of international borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Over 84% of the state is covered in dense forests and rolling green hills. The area sprawls across 21,081 square kilometers with a population of about 1.26 million. Most of the inhabitants are Mizo decending from Chin Hills.

The story of Lianchhiari is one of the most famous and heartbreaking romantic folktales from Mizo culture, immortalized at the landmark known as Lianchhiari Lunglen Tlang (Lianchhiari's Hill of Longing) in Dungtlang village near Champhai, Mizoram. Lianchhiari was the beautiful daughter of Vanhnuaithanga, a powerful and respected chief of Dungtlang village. She fell deeply in love with Chawngfianga (sometimes referred to in variations as Chalthianga), a young man from a humble, common background. In the olden days a Chief's offspring may not court anyone from a lower clan. Despite social barriers and differences in status, their affection for each other grew strong and became the talk of the village. Chawngfianga, however, could not reciprocate her love for him because he was a simple commoner. Lianchhiari was an attractive and beautiful girl, but eligible young men of their village did not have the courage to woo her because she was the daughter of the village chief; so she did not have many young men paying court to her.

LOVE STORY:

In the jhum of Lianchhiari's family, there was a wide spreading banyan tree, whose branches had grown rather wild. Her father found this to be a great obstacle in his jhum and so one fine day he declared, "How I wish there was a young man to cut this wild tree for me. If there were such a volunteer, I would be ready to even give him Lianchhiari's hand in marriage."

At this, Lianchhiari responded eagerly, "Father, please search for someone to cut the branches of the tree for you and if you do find a person aptly suited for the task, I shall even assist him." After saying thus, she ensued to warn the young men of her village by saying, "When my father arrives to announce that he is in search of someone to trim the branches of a tree for him, all of you must refuse and declare that none but Chawngfianga will be able to do so."

When Lianchhiari's father arrived to convey what he needed to the youth, all the other young men of the village did as Lianchhiari had told them to, and they conveyed their inability to do as he requested. While doing so, they also told him that only Chawngfianga was competent enough for the task. Thus, Lianchhiari got ready to help him in the chore and her father then went back to his jhum, accompanied by both Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga.

Chawngfianga was indeed very deft while cutting the tree that had grown awry, and the branches fell, just like a bird in a flight, he pursued the job. Lianchhiari's father was very pleased with Chawngfianga, and he declared, "I have not come across anybody quite as skillful as this young man. I am truly satisfied, and I shall now make my way home. As for the both of you, do what you wish to make yourselves comfortable." He immediately left the place.

Chawngfianga worked arduously at the task of cutting the branches of the tree. At length he finished his work. Realizing that he was ready to climb down the tree, Lianchhiari conveniently positioned herself strategically below. At this, Chawngfianga requested, "Please step aside, I am about to leap." Yet she stubbornly refused to relent. In utter despair, and especially because his limbs were aching, by and by, Chawngfianga proceeded to jump off a little further away from where she stood. While doing this, the front portion of his garment brushed Lianchhiari's face slightly and she fainted in pretense from the supposed impact. At this Chawngfianga queried in great consternation, "Are you hurt? It was an accident." And saying thus, he helped her to her feet. Now, this was exactly what she had wanted in the first place. Coyly, leaning upon Chawngfianga, she replied, "Oh no! It was my fault, and I am not hurt at all."

Later both of them ate their lunch. After they had eaten, Lianchhiari feigned a stomachache because she wanted Chawngfianga to carry her on his back. Chawngfianga obviously had no choice but gave her a piggy ride. After a time, Lianchhiari requested that he bear her in front, across his body in a more seductive manner. Even as Chawngfianga complied, she further implored, "Hold me much lower down." Yet, as alluring as this suggestion was, Chawngfianga

staunchly bore in mind that she was the daughter of a chief and so he did not dare to seduce her. In this manner, the both of them reached their village.

Time passed and Lianchhiari's father wanted to hold a feast. Various young men and women of the village gathered together in their house and romp round while at the chawng chen (festival) and partook of zu (rice beer) and all the while, they were in a gay and boisterous mood. Later that very night, Lianchhiari and Chawngfianga succumbed to the throes of love. The young lovers were lying in the enclosure where the goats were kept, by the wall alongside the verandah. Lianchhiari's mother had gone to gather wood from the wood pile that was placed there and, in the darkness, she caught a glimpse of Lianchhiari's fair thigh and she was startled. At first, she thought that it was a goat that had strayed from the herd; so she cried out and kicked at what she thought was an animal. Later she realized that it was only her daughter, nestled in the warm embrace of her lover Chawngfianga. Stunned at the sight, she could only utter, "Oh, it is only the both of you!" and quickly started for home.

Following traditional Mizo customs, Chawngfianga's family sent a mediator (go-between) to negotiate the marriage formalities with Lianchhiari's family. Unluckily, the chosen mediator harbored deep jealousy toward Chawngfianga—whom the chief actually looked upon favorably. Through deceit, manipulation, and false demands, the envious mediator sabotaged the negotiations, creating severe misunderstandings and pressure that humiliated Chawngfianga's family. Lianchhiari's father cordially accept the proposal for marriage and ready to accept whatever bride's money they could procure. But the mediator related that Lianchhiari's father intended to kill Chawngfianga.

Lianchhiari's parents warmly stated, "Since our daughter is so besotted by Chawngfianga, we will accept whatever is demanded by them." Thura (messager) then realized much to his surprise, that the chief was very amenable to the alliance. So, he was unable to overcome his jealousy! As soon as it dawned on him that Chawngfianga was most likely to get married to the beauteous Lianchhiari, he began to seek every possible manner in which to thwart the alliance. So, he went back to Chawngfianga's family and narrated the event in a manner that was totally contrary and exaggerated by declaring, "Lianchhiari's family has requested you to bring them a cat with horns." So skillful was he at playing the part of the sympathetic emissary that he even made an attempt to console Chawngfianga, "Lianchhiari and her kind are too big for the likes of us, why! Her father is greedy in matters concerning money, and in fact I am afraid you might die of the pressure one day."

And even as he narrated these false statements to Chawngfianga's family, Thura also cunningly managed to convey everything in a conflicting manner to Lianchhiari's family. Lianchhiari's father was most astonished over the turn of events and queried, "What on earth could have gone wrong, especially when we are ready to accept all their demands unconditionally. Why is it that both our families cannot come to a consensus? Could it be that we have been misconstrued?" At length he suggested, "Let Chawngfianga himself come here, and I myself shall deliberate over the matter with him." The evil emissary Thura then conveyed the message in a manner that was totally contrary to the original intention, and he told Chawngfianga, "My worst fears have come true; Lianchhiari's family have decided to take your lives. So flee as fast as you can in order to save yourselves."

THE ESCAPE:

Fearing the chief's anger and overwhelmed by the social fallout, Chawngfianga and his family hastily gathered their belonging and fearing for their lives fled the village of Dungtlang in great terror in the cover of the darkness. Chawngfianga and his family quietly migrated away to Chhingzawl village, located to the east. Their sudden departure shattered Lianchhiari. As soon as Lianchhiari realized that Chawngfianga and his family had departed from the village, she was deeply disheartened. Disenchanted, she visited the abandoned dwelling of Chawngfianga and came across the feathers of the chicken that they had used as a sacrificial offering. The feathers were strewn awry upon the floor, and in her grief and utter haplessness she cried, and would writhe in agony upon the bare floor. Refusing to accept the separation, she would regularly climb out onto a dangerous, projecting rocky ledge on a steep cliff overlooking the landscape toward Chhingzawl.

There, for days and weeks, she would sit refusing proper sustenance, gazing into the distance and pouring out her grief in sorrowful love songs—embodying lunglen, the Mizo concept of deep, soul-stirring longing. While doing so she would see the villagers at the a game in their courtyard and this would make her grieve all the more. She would also see the flutter of the garments that believing it to belong to Chawngfianga, and her yearning for him endured all the more, and she would be all the more engulfed in grief.

And legend denotes that even as Lianchhiari sung, her body and her spirit were wracked in grief, and the tall birch trees would bow over in sympathy. The arch formed by the trees would create the much-needed space for her to catch a better glimpse of Chawngfianga even as he ventured out in the streets of Chhingzawl. The sight of his countenance would make her lament once more in anguish. And in this manner she passed the time, engulfed in woe. Chawngfianga too mourned over the fact that he could not marry Lianchhiari and in his grief relised the evilness of their emissary. Thura, the envious emissary decided to retaliate in self-defense declaring that it was their poverty that bring out their misfortune. With the passage of time, Lianchhiari continued to remain engulfed in sorrow. She remained a loner and so profuse was her yearning for Chawngfianga that she remained unmarried, and sought not the companionship of any other men.

MARRIAGE:

According to traditional accounts and regional retellings, Lianchhiari later faced pressure and married another man named Pawngsena, reportedly under the condition that she was allowed to speak of or honor her love for Chawngfianga. With the passage of time, Lianchhiari continued to remain engulfed in sorrow. She remained a loner and so abundant was her yearning for Chawngfianga that she remained unmarried, and sought not the companionship of any other men. However, after a time, Pawngsena, a young man of the village, expressed his desire to marry her. When the proposal was brought forth to her Lianchhiari stated, “I will marry him on the condition that he will not dislike even the mere mention of Chawngfianga’s name at any time.” Pawngsena had no choice but to comply to this demand, for he was totally awed by her ethereal beauty. And so he proclaimed, “Ah! I shall bolster myself to tolerate her obsession.” In a short while, they were married. After a time Lianchhiari bore him children and in the meantime, Chawngfianga too eventually got married and had children of his own.

Despite all this, both Chawngfianga and Lianchhiari continued to kindle the sentiments that they cherished for each other. Eventually, there arrived a day when Chawngfianga’s children had to visit Lianchhiari’s village. They were to buy rice from her village, and they had brought an axe with them in order to exchange it for the rice. Upon catching sight of them, Lianchhiari realized that they were Chawngfianga’s children, and so she eagerly told them, “I shall buy your axe.” Saying thus, she even arranged for their food and lodging in her own house. Later in the evening, she arranged for her son Vanpuia to wrestle with Chawngfianga’s son. When her son’s feet began to slip and give way, and when it was evident that he would soon lose his hold she would raise a rallying cry in support of his opponent, “Take heart…o son of Chawngdanga.” And she ensured that Chawngfianga’s son won the wrestling bout. She was extremely partial towards him, and showered him with affection than was far greater than the one she displayed towards her own son. When morning broke, she measured the rice that they were to take home with them and while doing so she ensured that she buried the axe amidst the rice. And thus, totally unaware of what had occurred, the children actually took back their axe.

UNION AFTER MARRIAGE:

After a while, Chawngfianga himself came to Lianchhiari’s village to sell utensils. It was the time when they were in the midst of a family feast. Lianchhiari’s husband, Pawngsena could perceive Chawngfianga from a distance and upon recognizing him, he remarked with disdain, “Hey! Who could that man be?” As soon as she heard the sardonic comment, Lianchhiari peered down from where she was seated and from afar, she urged the approaching figure of Chawngfianga to take heart, “Why don’t you declare with confidence that it is I Chawngdanga?”

She then went out and she asked him, “What brings you to our village?” Chawngfianga replied, “A severe famine has befallen us, and I have come to sell utensils in order to acquire some rice.”

Lianchhiari then answered, “Ah…you have come at the time of feasting, so why don’t you partake of some zu?”

And she proceeded to take him by the hand and invited him into the house. They both drink zu and they were delirious with ecstasy. Dusk was about to set soon, and their guests started for home. Caring not for anyone else the couple continued to drink the zu and as it was sucked through a bamboo tube from the same beer pot, very soon their faces were almost entwined as they would brush closer together with every sip.

Chawngfianga did not bother to search for a place to stay for the night. He was extremely contented to be where he was, by Lianchiari’s side, in her house. Eventually, all the guests left but both of them continued to delight and revel in each other’s company, as they drank zu, sometimes flicking the zu on each other’s faces playfully in wild abandon. Lianchhiari’s husband, Pawngsena watched all of this helplessly and after some time in deep dejection and utterly

disgusted by the sight, he covered himself with his huge quilt. From time to time, he would peer from beneath the quilt to perceive the pair of lovers who naturally were totally oblivious of his presence. Unable to contain himself he finally asked Chawngfianga, "Were you and my wife ever lovers in youth?" In response all that Chawngfianga said was, "Of course not, your wife was the daughter of a chief, I was but a lowly commoner. How could I have stood a chance?" At that Lianchhiari retorted, "Hey…what are you afraid of? Why don't you proclaim that I was but at your mercy, responding to your every whim and fancy?"

And enraptured by each other's company they both stayed up the entire night. Of course, Pawngsena realized that sleep was impossible for him, and thus he stayed up the entire night wrapped in the folds of his quilt. Chawngfianga had not intended to stay for the entire day, yet because he was so enamored by Lianchhiari's company. Lianchhiari implored him to stay on the next day as well. Pawngsena was greatly angered but there was little that he could do because he was reminded of the fact that he had promised Lianchhiari that he would not be jealous over the matter of Chawngfianga, much before they were married. In dismay all he could do was to plead to Chawngfianga, "Friend, whatever you do, please do not sleep with my wife." In this manner, he had to staunchly endure the overwhelming display of affection between his wife and her former lover. Pawngsena passed away with the passage of time. After his death Lianchhiari discovered that her full grown mithun had gone missing, and after much search it still could not be found. She moan about the loss and cried in anguish but upon hearing this her son Vanpuia declared, "More terrible than the loss of our gayal, is the fact that Chawngfianga and you were lovers in youth." Immediately Lianchhiari replied indifferently, "Ah…to think you would say thus, don't you realize that many were the times I wished you were the son I bore with Chawngfianga!!"Years later, Chawngfianga returned to visit, briefly reviving their connection before life and tragedy ran their course.

Today, the cliff edge where she sat—Lianchhiari Lunglen Tlang—stands as a timeless monument in Mizo folklore and literature, symbolizing enduring, unfulfilled devotion. You can explore more about local heritage spots through the Mizoram Tourism guide.

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