

Hrawva Khiangte as a Confessional Poet

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Abstract:

*Hrawva Khiangte (1893–1956), born Rolala in Baichi near Lunglei, was among the first Mizo graduates, earning a Bachelor of Arts from Calcutta University. Though he composed few poems, his works are deeply introspective and confessional, drawing directly from his experiences as an orphan. Losing his parents early, Hrawva was raised by his elder brother with support from British missionaries, a childhood marked by deprivation and mistreatment, including abuse from his stepmother. His poetry, including *Khuanu Leng Chawi* and *Rairahtea Hla*, reflects his longing for parental love, his resilience in adversity, and his perception of human dignity. Hrawva also emphasizes moral integrity, the value of a righteous heart over wealth, and reliance on divine providence. Composed largely during his studies in Calcutta (1920–1924), his poems blend personal grief with social realism, portraying early Mizo society and the universal human need for love, care, and spiritual faith, establishing him as a seminal figure in modern Mizo literature.*

Hrawva Khiangte was born in 1893 at Baichi, which was located to the east of Lunglei. His real name was Rolala. His parents were Thanthulha and Dolaii. Among the Mizos, he was one of the two graduates. The other one was his friend Lianhnuna. Both of them completed Bachelor of Arts at Calcutta University (Mizo Hla leh Chham Hlate, 53).

Though he composed very little poetry, but he really was truly a person of principle. Poetry serves as a mirror to men. He expresses his sufferings as an orphan through his poems. He shows up the miserable life of the orphan especially in the early Mizo society. He never received the tender love from his parents as they have died so soon. He was raised up by his elder brother Makthanga with the help of the British missionaries.

Hrawva Khiangte's poems are really introspective. He composed poetry from his inner life and exposed them to the external world. Hrawva Khiangte's poetry brought many a time close similarity to living personalities. Art is one of the means by which man wrestles with and assimilates reality. His poetry shows the verisimilitude of the social life and society of the modern life.

Going through most of Hrawva Khiangte's poetry, he can be called as a confessional poet. As confessional is used to refer to poetry that drew from and described the poet's own experiences, and refers to the content of the poems rather than the techniques. Confessional poetry is characterized by deeply personal and revealing poems in which the poet examines their own feelings and experiences from a first-person perspective. In several of his works, he openly

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shared details about his life and personal experiences. Some of his poems are a confession of his life and experiences. Taking some lines from his *Khuanu Leng Chawi*,

Ngai teh thiana, ka dawn lungruk riang ngei hi,
 Chun chawi lohvin val ka tlei lian;
 Khuanu lengin min awi e (54).
 (Behold my friend, my destitute thought at heart,
 Maturing without the raising of a mother;
 Soothed by the loving nature).

In these lines, Hrawva confesses that he was an orphan who never receives the loves and cares from his mother. He said that he was soothed by the nature, (referring to God in Mizo context) and raised him up until he became matured. This is his real life. He used this poem as a confession of his real life that he was an orphan. His poem reveals that parents are the most valuable gift for their child.

Chan ka nuam e, chungleng murva te-ah e,
 Riangte'n lungduh tlang tin thlirin
 Chun leh zua ka tawng mahna (54).
 (Wishing that I could become a martin,
 Piteously onlooking the loved ones
 Wish that I might have met my parents).

He was longing for the love of his parents and that he could search everywhere to find them if possible. It is true that life without parents and being an orphan is the worst thing that happens in human life.

He felt that he was nothing without mother's love and was longing for that kind of true love from his mother. In his *Khuanu Leng Chawi*,

A mi chunnu'n lungduh hraileng an awi e,
 Kei ka chunnu Khuanu lengin;
 Awmhar riang te min awi e (54).
 (Someone mom's rocking their young ones,
 Nature, my only darling mom,
 Soothe me, the forlorn one).

From these lines it is true that he was badly longing for the mother's love. In reality, this is the same feelings for all human beings. The mother's love is the best love that one can receive from birth till death. From these lines it can be seen that mothers are very important and needed in a child's life. Hrawva too needs his mother to take care of him when he is in need, to help him up when he is down. One of his poems *Rairahtea Hla* is also about the expression of his life as an orphan. In this very poem, he also expressed the love of the mother for a child.

A paw mang e, kan biaklai khua nuar angin,
 Chunnu chawiin rairah riangte;
 A len khua a rei love (Ngirtling, 68).
 (Feels regretful, as if our god turns displeased,
 Destitute baby in the hands of his mommy;

T'was too short walking with her).

These lines from Rairahtea Hla show that his mother had left him so soon. As a young child he wants his mother to raise him up, to take care of him in everything that he does.

He even wrote about the father's love in his Khuanuleng Chawi,

Thinlai na e, kip te'n ka dawn ngam lo ve,

A mi zuapa'n an hraileng chawi;

Lungduh tinkim an hlan e (Mizo Hla leh Chhamhlate, 54).

(T'was hurting, can't figure it out,

Someone's dad rearing their babies;

Giving them the best that they could give).

In reality, no one wants to live their life without their father. This reveals the importance of father in every human life. Every human being, from their birth depends on the fathers for their living, they completely depend on their father in every step that they are taking. Fathers are central to the emotional well-being of their children; they are capable caretakers and disciplinary. It is true from the poem that the child's primary relationship with their father can affect all of their child's relationships from birth to death.

One can see from Hrawva's poems that parents are the greatest gifts from God. Without them human life can never be completed. He was living the life of a dreadful orphanage since childhood as his parents had left him so soon. He can never imagine life without his parents, but he has to go through it. He has to bear all the hardships as an orphan during his lifetime. In early Mizo society, the life as an orphan was the worst thing to choose; they are contemptible, detestable, and distasteful. Hrawva's Rairahtea Hla is a subjective poem expressing his poverty and destitution as an orphan, how he is getting lost in life and that his brother Makthanga is his only possession in life.

In the early Mizo society, the orphans were ill-treated, ridiculed, looked down, scorn upon, laughed at and disrespected and this was even reflected in the Mizo folktales and folklores. The step-mother was one of the greatest archenemies of the orphan. Hrawva wrote about the ill-treatment from his step-mother in his Rairahtea Hla (Ngirtling, 74). She was scornful to Hrawva. He was so much abused, ill-treated and persecuted by his step-mother. Because of her oppressing behaviour towards him, Hrawva called her 'tiger' in his poem Rairahtea Hla. He wrote,

Cho-ui lengkel mah pawn in hliaptiang zarah,

Rairah riang te runin hnuaiah;

Vawk leng chun ang a bel e (Ngirtling, 74).

(Even stray dogs and goats are sheltered at the balcony,

But that abandoned child beneath the house

Was himself sheltering to the pigs).

This verse from Rairahtea Hla clearly stated that his step-mother Uiliani used to beat and insulted him. He was only a small child and there was no one to care for him from that insultation. His poem states that whenever he was down, he ran under the house and took shelter and stayed with the pigs. He was staying with his step-mother for only a period of three years. But he ran away three times during this period for shelter to his brother who was staying at

Lunglei. But his step-father (who was his uncle) drags him back two times. He was not dragged back for the third time and finally he could stay there with his brother to have a peace of mind. His brother let him attend the school with the help of the British Missionaries who was staying at Lunglei.

As mentioned earlier, he had gone through many difficulties; he knew how to deal with the real life and people. Whenever he wrote poems, he uses his deepest thoughts and from that imagination he wrote out his experiences as a poem. Moreover, he was not trying to hold the attention of the readers to pity him; he just wrote it the way he dealt life. His emotion was his greatest inspiration. He had so many experiences in human life, one of his poems Pianna Thu Lam Ka Chhui Lo, he wrote about the condition of human life and human being itself.

Pianna thu lam ka chhui lo,
 Hming pawh hriat a ngai chuang lo;
 Thinlung lam a dik phawt chuan,
 Mi ropuah ka ngai thin (Mizo Hla leh Chhamhlate, 55).
 (No inquiries about birth are needed,
 Nor the names are needed to know
 If one is righteous in heart
 I consider it as a great man)

This introductory verse shows that he was a man of dignity and that if anyone was right at heart, he considers them as a trustworthy, dependable and a man with good qualities. No matter where they came from or what they name signifies if one is loyal he can become a good person anywhere or anytime. This is true from his real life; he never gave up on what he is going through, though it may be tough sometimes but he believed that one day he will survive. It is true in human life that most of it undergoes sad life and troubles once in their lifetime. He continues in the second verse,

Hausakna ka ngaithla lo,
 Rethei te pawh ni mahse,
 Mihring thinlung dik tak chu,
 A neih chuan a tawk a ni (55).
 (Doesn't matter wealth,
 Even if he's unwealthy,
 If one possesses a good heart of man,
 T'was alright with it).

From these lines he shows that he was well-perceiving the human nature it does not matter whether he is rich or poor; honesty and loyalty is all that matter. This poem shows the real nature of human being.

Hrawva composed poetry nostalgically. He is reminiscent of his younger years inspired him to composed a good reality poem. It was mentioned earlier that he had gone out of state for more knowledge and higher education. Most of his poems are composed while he stayed in Calcutta during 1920 to 1924 (Mizo Hun Hlui Hlate, 210). His poetry reveals that he was a man of determined and strong-willed. He wrote in his poem Khuanu Leng Chawi,

Sappui nun chan lungkhamin min sel lo u;

Rairah nghilhna a awm maw tiin,
 Lenrual lungduh ka pel e (54).
 (Condemn me not for my living;
 For there might be a way to forget destitution,
 I'm outstripping the good friends).

He really wants to forget his life as an orphan and what he had been through. He continues his education in other states in order to forget his miserable life. He does not want to be condemned for what he is doing where he is going. He was searching just to find a way to forget his destitute life and outstripping his good friends and families to get honoured in life. But still he was empty and feels lonely without his families, especially his parents who had passed away when he was a kid. He misses them so much that he wished he could fly like a bird so that he might find a way to meet them and told them his progression in life. Without his parents he never feels satisfied and cannot get rid of the feelings of destituteness. He wants them to come back to life wished that he could call them back.

Lo tho leh r'u ka chun leh zua fam tawh hnu;
 In chawi hrinhniang rual zawng laiah,
 Ka riang thlang Kawrvaiah (54)
 (Come back my perished parents;
 Me your beloved son,
 Is lost here amongst the foreigners).

This poetry shows the importance and necessity of parents in human lives. Life becomes incomplete without them. But on the other hand, one cannot choose or opts for whatever we wish to have in life. But in fact, if one was strong and determined he could become successful in life. These experiences could be revealed from his poetry. He composed poetry for others too; as his poems are mostly introspection even if he writes for others, one can imagine and attached the character to him.

Hrawva composed poetry out of his inner life experiences and merely shows his life through his poems; and this was an important characteristic of his poetry. His poems are personal poems and clearly reveal his life. He devoted himself to God who never betrays him even when he was down. And he believed that one day he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. In his song Isuan Ro A Rel e, he wrote

Ropuiin chhandamte,
 A sirah an inkhawm,
 Nakinah chuan kan tel ve ang a (Kristian Hlabu, 264).
 (The redeems marvellously,
 Gathering besides the Redeemer,
 We'll join them someday).

Whenever he faced difficulties, he looked upon his Redeemer and believed that he is strong enough to cope with his problems. So, he was longing for the love of God and eagerly waiting for the time he will be with Him.

Hrawva's poetry are real. It was composed out of experiences in life and so they are really heart-touching. His poems are the ones that go through the poet deep thoughts and penetra-

tion. In his poetry none of the other character was seen. It was all about himself and his life. This is why his poetry are really introspective. He composed poems from his life situation and used himself as an example of the rough and tough times in life.

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