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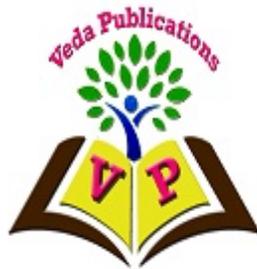
**ECHOES OF THE SPIRIT WORLD: SUPERNATURAL HORROR IN MIZO FICTION WITH REFERENCE TO DARHLIRA'S *KHAWKIL BUNGHUAI***R. Ramdinmawii ^{1*} , Dr. Lalrammuana Sailo²^{1*}(Research Scholar, Mizoram University)²(Asst. Professor, Pachhunga University College, Mizoram)Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2025.12305>**ABSTRACT**

Darhlira's *Khawkil Bunghuai* is a seminal work of Mizo supernatural horror that intricately blends folklore, ritual, and cosmology into a narrative of fear and cultural reflection. This study examines how the novel constructs its supernatural world, particularly through scenes such as the huai of the banyan tree, responsible for mysterious occurrences including the disappearance of a child. These episodes portray spirits as active agents influencing human behavior, moral order, and communal memory. By situating supernatural events within familiar village landscapes and liminal spaces, Darhlira immerses readers in a universe where life and death, the human and the otherworldly, coexist in uneasy tension.

The article analyzes the literary techniques used to evoke horror, including manipulation of atmosphere, light and darkness, temporal perception, and narrative ambiguity. The study demonstrates that horror in *Khawkil Bunghuai* emerges not only from supernatural phenomena but also from their integration into cultural, moral, and social systems.

Ultimately, the novel exemplifies how indigenous horror traditions can articulate local anxieties while engaging broader literary discourses, offering insight into the cultural mediation of fear and the narrative possibilities of the supernatural.

Keywords: *Mizo Literature, Supernatural Horror, Huai, Folklore, Liminality, Cultural Cosmology.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Horror fiction has long been a site where human anxieties are projected onto imagined spaces, unsettling presences, and otherworldly beings. As Noël Carroll observes, the genre's distinctiveness lies in its "art-horror," where fear and fascination are evoked simultaneously by entities that transgress cultural categories of the natural and the rational (Carroll 28). Within global traditions, horror fiction often divides into two overlapping but distinct modes: psychological horror, which destabilizes through the human psyche, and supernatural horror, which unsettles through the intrusion of forces that defy natural laws (Clasen 113). Darhlira's *Khawkil Bunghuai*, one of the earliest and most significant Mizo horror novels, locates itself squarely in the second category, presenting the supernatural not as peripheral ornamentation but as a narrative and cultural core.

In studying Mizo horror fiction, one must first acknowledge its deep entanglement with folklore and cultural cosmology. Folklore, as Linda Dégh reminds us, is not merely an aesthetic resource but a "socially embedded mode of meaning-making" that reflects and reaffirms a community's worldview (Dégh 54). For the Mizo community, belief in spirits, omens, and the supernatural is embedded in oral narratives, ritual practices, and collective imagination. Darhlira's novel translates this folkloric imagination into literary form, situating its characters in a universe where the natural and the supernatural coexist in fragile balance. The novel's title itself, *Khawkil Bunghuai*—suggesting a haunted or disordered village—signals that the story will operate

within a liminal space where the uncanny is not distant but intimate, residing in the everyday lives of its characters.

What makes *Khawkil Bunghuai* particularly compelling is the way it dramatizes the permeability between the living and the spirit world. Drawing on traditional Mizo cosmology, the novel portrays the supernatural not as an external intrusion but as an extension of cultural reality. Spirits, apparitions, and otherworldly presences reflect the Mizo conception of life and death as coexisting realms rather than discrete categories. Anthropological perspectives, such as E. B. Tylor's notion of animism—the belief in souls or spiritual beings inhabiting the world (Tylor 260)—offer a useful lens for understanding the novel's supernatural framework. Similarly, Victor Turner's theory of liminality underscores how the text situates its characters in threshold states where ordinary boundaries collapse and fear emerges from the uncertainty of passage (Turner 95).

The supernatural in *Khawkil Bunghuai* is therefore not a mere embellishment to produce fear, but a cultural articulation of metaphysical and existential concerns. The novel stages encounter with the uncanny that embody communal fears: of untimely death, of the violation of social norms, of unseen forces that can both protect and harm. In this sense, the supernatural functions as a metaphorical language through which Darhlira articulates collective anxieties. As Julia Kristeva suggests in her discussion of the abject, horror often arises when boundaries are destabilized—between life and death, self and other, purity and pollution (Kristeva 4). *Khawkil Bunghuai* consistently operates in this space



of blurred boundaries, where the uncanny presence of spirits destabilizes not only the characters' sense of safety but also the reader's sense of narrative certainty.

This paper argues that Darhlira's *Khawkil Bunghuai* offers a distinctive articulation of supernatural horror that is both culturally specific and resonant with global horror traditions. By foregrounding supernatural elements, the novel demonstrates how folk belief systems and cosmological frameworks remain active agents in shaping modern literary expression. At the same time, it resonates with broader discourses of horror theory, including Todorov's concept of the fantastic, where the hesitation between natural explanation and supernatural possibility generates narrative tension (Todorov 25). The study will explore how *Khawkil Bunghuai* constructs the supernatural world, the literary techniques through which it produces horror, and the cultural significance of these representations in Mizo society.

By situating the novel within both Mizo cultural contexts and global horror scholarship, this article aims to demonstrate the importance of recognizing regional literatures as active contributors to theoretical debates about horror. Just as scholars like David Punter and Fred Botting have traced the Gothic's evolution across time and geography, it is equally necessary to examine how local traditions such as Mizo supernatural horror create new expressions of the eerie, uncanny, and terrifying (Punter 7; Botting 2). *Khawkil Bunghuai* exemplifies how supernatural horror is not simply an imported genre but an indigenous mode of storytelling that

transforms folklore into literary art. The supernatural here is both terrifying and culturally legible, reminding us that horror is always grounded in the cultural landscapes from which it emerges

2. THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD IN *KHAWKIL BUNGHUAI*

Darhlira's *Khawkil Bunghuai* immerses its readers in a universe where the supernatural is not a distant abstraction but a palpable and ever-present reality. Unlike Western gothic fiction, where supernatural elements are often shrouded in doubt or explained away as psychological projection, Darhlira treats the spirit world as ontologically certain, reflecting the cosmological assumptions of Mizo society. The novel thus invites its audience to perceive the supernatural as an extension of the natural world, aligning with Edward Tylor's anthropological conception of animism, where "spiritual beings are everywhere assumed to exist and to act upon man and nature" (Tylor 260).

The narrative of *Khawkil Bunghuai* unfolds in a setting where encounters with spirits, apparitions, and omens are both expected and feared. The supernatural forces depicted in the novel are not uniformly malevolent; rather, they embody a spectrum of qualities, from guardianship to menace. This duality reflects a distinctly Mizo worldview, where spirits could act as protectors, intermediaries, or avengers depending on the circumstances of their interaction with humans. Darhlira's text dramatizes this ambivalence, showing how characters respond with reverence, caution, and terror to presences that hover at the boundaries of visibility.



The supernatural world in the novel is also marked by its liminality. Spirits and apparitions are most often encountered in transitional spaces: at dusk, in the forest, or in isolated village paths where boundaries between the human world and the spirit realm weaken. Victor Turner's notion of liminality—states of transition where structures collapse and ambiguity prevail—provides a useful interpretive lens here. *Khawkil Bunghuai* situates fear not only in what is seen but in what might emerge from these threshold spaces, amplifying the uncertainty of human existence in a world permeated by the supernatural (Turner 95).

An especially striking feature of Darhlira's construction of the supernatural is its close relation to death and the afterlife. Mizo cosmology traditionally conceives of the soul's journey after death as one that is perilous, requiring passage through otherworldly terrains and encounters with spirits. *Khawkil Bunghuai* integrates this belief into its narrative framework, portraying the village as a site where the living and the dead coexist uneasily. Death in the novel is not final separation but a shift in presence; the dead may return as apparitions, reminding the living of their fragility and unfinished obligations. In this sense, Darhlira engages with what Julia Kristeva identifies as the abject—that which disturbs identity, system, and order by collapsing the boundary between life and death (Kristeva 4). The novel's spirits embody precisely this disturbance, unsettling both characters and readers by refusing to remain confined to the realm of the dead.

Equally important is the role of omens and uncanny signs, which serve as narrative

foreshadowing devices. These manifestations operate within the logic of Mizo folklore, where dreams, natural phenomena, or sudden silences in the forest are often read as portents of impending danger. Darhlira incorporates these beliefs seamlessly, allowing the supernatural to function not only as episodic intrusion but also as structural principle. The narrative rhythm of *Khawkil Bunghuai* often mirrors the experience of living in a world where every sign carries possible supernatural significance, intensifying the atmosphere of dread and uncertainty.

By embedding the supernatural into everyday life, Darhlira ensures that his characters cannot escape its presence. Unlike the Western horror tradition where characters may confront or "defeat" supernatural antagonists, the villagers in *Khawkil Bunghuai* live with the constant reality of spirits and apparitions as part of their cosmological inheritance. This continuous presence makes fear diffuse and enduring rather than climactic. It aligns the novel with folk horror traditions, which, as Adam Scovell observes, often emphasize "the inescapability of ancient belief systems and landscapes" that exert a terrifying hold on the present (Scovell 31). In Darhlira's work, the supernatural is precisely such an inescapable force—rooted in cultural memory, sustained by folklore, and embodied in narrative form.

Thus, the supernatural world of *Khawkil Bunghuai* functions on multiple levels: as a literal representation of spirits consistent with Mizo cosmology, as a metaphor for collective fears surrounding death and transgression, and as a narrative engine driving the novel's horror. In



bringing these elements together, Darhlira demonstrates that the supernatural is not an imported literary trope but an indigenous mode of articulating dread, grounded in cultural belief yet resonant with broader traditions of supernatural horror.

3. TECHNIQUES OF SUPERNATURAL HORROR

Darhlira's *Khawkil Bunghuai* demonstrates a sophisticated use of literary techniques to construct an immersive supernatural world that is culturally grounded and psychologically compelling. Central to this construction is the interplay between the supernatural and everyday life, particularly through the depiction of the *huai*—spirits tied to specific landscapes and objects, such as the banyan tree near the village of Khawkil. In this scene, the unexplained disappearance of a child, whose cries are heard but whose presence cannot be located, immediately establishes the forested environment as a liminal space where natural and supernatural realities intersect. This initial encounter sets the tone for the narrative, signaling to readers that supernatural forces are both present and consequential within the moral and spatial order of the village.

One key technique is the manipulation of atmosphere. Darhlira uses descriptions of natural elements—rustling leaves, sudden gusts of wind, shifting shadows—to generate tension. For example, when villagers search for the missing child, the forest is depicted as simultaneously familiar and alien: the ordinary soundscape of the village edges is interrupted by silence or eerie noises, producing the “uncanny” effect Freud describes, where the familiar

becomes frightening. These atmospheric details heighten the sense of dread while remaining culturally coherent, as the forest is traditionally considered spiritually potent in Mizo folklore.

The author also carefully manipulates light and darkness to reinforce suspense. Nightfall, moonlit glades, and shadowed pathways not only delineate the physical space but also act symbolically to mark the threshold between the living and the supernatural. In the child disappearance episode, fleeting moonlight illuminate portions of the forest, leaving gaps that suggest unseen presences. This interplay between visibility and concealment mirrors the villagers' uncertainty and engages the reader's imagination, aligning narrative form with emotional response.

Temporal manipulation is another technique that amplifies tension. Darhlira slows the pacing during moments of supernatural encounter, elongating the search for the child and emphasizing the villagers' anxiety, then accelerates time when sudden, inexplicable phenomena occur. This rhythm mirrors psychological responses to fear and uncertainty, drawing readers into the characters' subjective experience of the supernatural.

Ambiguity is central to the novel's horror. Villagers—and by extension, the readers—are uncertain whether supernatural events have human origins or are caused by *huai*. This hesitation sustains the narrative's fantastic quality, as defined by Todorov: the story teeters between rational explanation and supernatural reality. The *huai*, therefore, function as culturally familiar yet



unpredictably powerful agents, their actions reinforcing both fear and moral instruction.

Additionally, Darhlira incorporates ritualistic interactions as narrative devices to emphasize the relationship between humans and spirits. Villagers offer prayers and perform traditional rites to appease the *huai*, revealing that the supernatural is morally and socially regulated. These rituals are not ornamental; they underscore the integration of horror with cultural belief systems, illustrating that fear is both existential and socially mediated.

Finally, the novel employs psychological horror, wherein suspense arises from anticipation and uncertainty as much as from the supernatural event itself. The auditory hallucinations of the child's cries, the unpredictable movement of shadows, and the villagers' internal fears converge to produce tension, showing that Darhlira's horror operates on both literal and psychological planes. This multifaceted approach demonstrates that the supernatural in *Khawkil Bunghuai* is intricately tied to literary technique, cultural knowledge, and reader perception.

Through these strategies, Darhlira constructs a supernatural world that is immersive, morally significant, and emotionally resonant. The *huai* and other spirits are not only narrative catalysts but also reflections of cultural anxieties, communal ethics, and the human encounter with the unknown, solidifying *Khawkil Bunghuai* as a masterful example of indigenous supernatural horror.

4. CULTURAL CONTEXT AND FOLKLORE

To understand the supernatural in *Khawkil Bunghuai*, one must recognize the cultural and folkloric foundations upon which the narrative rests. For the Mizo community, the supernatural is not merely a fictional device but an extension of cosmological and ritualistic traditions that structure everyday life. Darhlira's novel reflects and reanimates these traditions, positioning the supernatural as a living presence that mediates between belief, fear, and storytelling.

At the heart of Mizo supernatural imagination lies the belief in *huai* (spirits) and the coexistence of the living with an active spirit world. Traditional cosmology conceives of the afterlife as a place where the souls of the dead journey across dangerous terrains, facing both benevolent and malevolent entities. The porous boundary between life and death means that the departed can reappear as apparitions, omens, or forces that intervene in the lives of the living. Darhlira draws upon this worldview by populating *Khawkil Bunghuai* with presences that blur the line between the visible and the invisible, showing how the everyday world is constantly shadowed by echoes from the spirit realm.

This cultural framework is further reinforced by ritual practices. In Mizo tradition, rites performed at funerals and memorials were intended not only to honor the dead but also to protect the living from their lingering influence. Failure to observe these practices was believed to leave the living vulnerable to spiritual harm. The fears dramatized in Darhlira's novel thus mirror communal anxieties about ritual neglect and spiritual vulnerability. In portraying spirits that return to haunt the living, *Khawkil*



Bunghuai situates its narrative horror within the larger cultural discourse of proper ritual and communal responsibility.

The significance of folklore in shaping the supernatural is particularly visible in the novel's use of omens and uncanny signs. Folkloric imagination in Mizoram often interprets natural phenomena—such as sudden storms, the cry of birds at night, or inexplicable silences in the forest—as portents of danger. Darhlira transforms these cultural signs into narrative devices, allowing the supernatural to manifest indirectly through nature. By doing so, he blurs the distinction between environment and spirit, reflecting what anthropologist Nurit Bird-David identifies as the “relational epistemology” of animist cultures, where natural phenomena are not inert objects but participants in a communicative network of meaning (Bird-David 68).

Another crucial element in the novel is its depiction of transgression and supernatural punishment. Folklore across cultures often frames the supernatural as a means of enforcing moral or social codes, punishing those who break communal rules. In *Khawkil Bunghuai*, characters who violate norms—whether through betrayal, greed, or disrespect for the dead—often encounter supernatural retribution. This alignment of horror with morality situates the novel within the folk horror tradition, which, as Scovell notes, often stages “the intrusion of the old ways, beliefs, and rituals into the modern or rationalist present” (Scovell 45). For Darhlira, the supernatural is not arbitrary but deeply tied to questions of social order and cultural continuity.

Death, in particular, occupies a central place in both folklore and the novel's supernatural framework. The narrative repeatedly underscores the fragility of human life, showing how sudden death destabilizes not only families but the community as a whole. In Mizo belief, untimely or violent death was often associated with restless spirits who returned to haunt the living. Darhlira integrates this belief directly into his narrative, where the presence of such spirits serves as a constant reminder of mortality and unfinished obligations. Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject—the horror produced when boundaries between life and death collapse—resonates here, as the novel forces characters and readers alike to confront the unassimilable presence of death within life (Kristeva 4).

Importantly, *Khawkil Bunghuai* does not treat folklore as static or archaic. Instead, it demonstrates how folkloric imagination adapts itself to new literary forms. By embedding rituals, omens, and supernatural beings into the novel's narrative structure, Darhlira preserves cultural memory while also transforming it into a modern mode of horror fiction. This process reflects what Homi Bhabha describes as the “reinscription of tradition in modernity,” where cultural narratives are not lost but rearticulated in response to contemporary needs (Bhabha 212). The novel's supernatural elements thus function as both preservation and reinvention, ensuring that folklore remains a living resource for literary creativity.

Ultimately, the cultural and folkloric foundation of *Khawkil Bunghuai* ensures that its supernatural horror is never alien to its readers. Instead, it draws



upon shared cultural knowledge, tapping into fears that resonate not because they are exotic but because they are familiar. The haunted village of the novel is not an abstract Gothic castle or distant haunted landscape; it is the recognizable Mizo village, transformed by folklore into a space where the supernatural and the ordinary coexist. This fusion of folklore and fiction is what grants Darhlira's novel its enduring power as a work of supernatural horror.

5. GLOBAL PARALLELS AND COMPARATIVE DIMENSIONS

Darhlira's *Khawkil Bunghuai* occupies a distinctive place in Mizo literary culture, yet its supernatural elements invite fruitful comparison with broader global horror traditions. The novel's reliance on folklore, ritual, and the supernatural situates it within a transnational discourse of horror fiction, where different cultures employ similar narrative strategies to confront death, fear, and the unknown. Examining these parallels highlights how *Khawkil Bunghuai* simultaneously reflects local cultural identity and participates in a global literary conversation.

5.1. FOLK HORROR AND THE SUPERNATURAL

The most immediate global parallel is with the tradition of folk horror. As Adam Scovell explains, folk horror narratives typically arise from "isolation, landscape, skewed belief systems, and morality, with the supernatural intruding as a force tied to the old ways" (Scovell 43). *Khawkil Bunghuai* embodies these principles almost entirely. The novel is set within a village community that is simultaneously ordinary and haunted, and its supernatural presences are intimately tied to ritual practices, folklore, and the

social fabric of Mizo life. Much like British folk horror films such as *The Wicker Man* (1973) or *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), Darhlira's narrative uses the supernatural as a means of reasserting the continuity of tradition in the face of change.

However, unlike its Western counterparts, which often frame folklore as sinister or regressive, *Khawkil Bunghuai* presents it as both terrifying and culturally essential. The supernatural punishes transgression but also preserves the moral order of the community. This duality makes the novel less about the "otherness" of folklore and more about its intimate, internal authority, highlighting a key divergence between Mizo folk horror and Western iterations of the genre.

5.2. GOTHIC HORROR AND THE HAUNTED PAST

The novel also invites comparison with Gothic horror, which traditionally situates terror in spaces marked by history and trauma, such as castles, ruins, or haunted mansions. Gothic fiction thrives on the return of the repressed—the intrusion of the past into the present. In Darhlira's novel, the haunted village functions as a localized Gothic space: familiar, yet transformed by the presence of death and spirits. Like the Gothic, *Khawkil Bunghuai* insists that the past is never truly dead but lingers, returning to disturb the living.

Freud's concept of the "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) provides a useful theoretical frame here. For Freud, the uncanny arises when the familiar becomes strange, when what should remain hidden is revealed (Freud 241). The Mizo village in *Khawkil Bunghuai* epitomizes this effect: it is simultaneously the home



of the community and the site of supernatural intrusion, where ordinary rituals and landscapes reveal their terrifying underside. This structural resemblance to the Gothic suggests that while the novel is grounded in Mizo culture, it resonates with the broader Gothic tradition of haunted spaces and lingering trauma.

5.3. JAPANESE K Aidan AND THE PERSISTENCE OF SPIRITS

A further comparison can be drawn with Japanese *kaidan* (ghost tales), which emphasize the continuity of spirits within the social and natural world. In works such as Lafcadio Hearn's *Kwaidan* (1904), the supernatural is rarely an abstract monster but often a lingering presence of the dead, whose unresolved emotions or unfulfilled duties bind them to the world of the living. Similarly, *Khawkil Bunghuai* presents spirits not as external threats but as extensions of the community's own failures, rituals, and transgressions.

The Japanese belief in *onryō* (vengeful spirits) resonates with the Mizo notion of restless souls who haunt the living when denied proper burial or ritual. Both traditions reveal how the supernatural becomes a cultural mechanism for addressing unresolved social tensions, whether rooted in betrayal, neglect, or violence. By paralleling *kaidan*, Darhlira's novel illustrates how indigenous ghost traditions, though culturally specific, share structural affinities across the globe.

5.4. INDIAN HORROR AND CULTURAL BELIEF SYSTEMS

The Indian horror tradition also provides illuminating parallels. In Indian folklore and literature,

supernatural beings such as *churel*, *bhoot*, or *preta* emerge from improper death rituals or unfulfilled desires, mirroring the Mizo concept of restless spirits. Indian horror cinema of the 1980s and 1990s often emphasized haunted houses, curses, and revenants tied to cultural anxieties about modernity versus tradition. *Khawkil Bunghuai* operates in a similar register, where the supernatural embodies both fear and the persistence of traditional belief systems in a rapidly changing society.

Like Indian horror, the novel situates supernatural terror within familiar spaces—the home, the village, the environment—rather than distant Gothic castles or abstract landscapes. In doing so, it reflects the same pattern seen in other non-Western traditions: horror is not externalized but woven into the rhythms of everyday cultural life.

5.5. THE UNIVERSAL AND THE PARTICULAR

What these global parallels demonstrate is that *Khawkil Bunghuai* functions on two levels simultaneously. On one hand, it is deeply particular, rooted in Mizo folklore, ritual, and community life. On the other, it participates in universal patterns of horror: the return of the dead, the collapse of boundaries between life and death, the role of ritual in protecting the living, and the use of supernatural beings as enforcers of morality.

By connecting Darhlira's narrative to Gothic, folk horror, *kaidan*, and Indian horror, one can see how the novel exemplifies what Noël Carroll describes as "the paradox of horror"—that audiences are drawn to works that elicit fear because they are anchored in culturally meaningful frameworks (Carroll 27). In



Khawkil Bunghuai, fear is meaningful precisely because it emerges from familiar cultural knowledge, while also resonating with global tropes that make it legible to a broader comparative framework.

Thus, Darhlira's work contributes not only to Mizo literature but to the global canon of supernatural horror. It shows how local folklore, when articulated in literary form, can dialogue with traditions across the world, producing horror that is both culturally intimate and universally recognizable.

6. CULTURAL RESONANCES AND THEMATIC IMPLICATIONS

While *Khawkil Bunghuai* can be read as a work of supernatural horror, it is equally important to understand how Darhlira's text resonates with the cultural, social, and religious fabric of Mizo society. The novel is not simply a narrative of fear but a cultural document that encodes values, anxieties, and worldviews specific to its context. Its engagement with the supernatural is deeply tied to the community's relationship with belief, tradition, and collective memory.

At its core, the novel underscores the inseparability of folklore and social order. By situating spirits, omens, and supernatural encounters within village life, Darhlira illustrates how traditional cosmology regulates behavior, instills caution, and reinforces communal boundaries. The supernatural here functions not only as an object of fear but also as a system of moral instruction. Characters who disrespect cultural taboos or fail to heed communal warnings often encounter misfortune, reinforcing the idea that the spirit world serves as a guardian of

cultural continuity. This recalls what Mircea Eliade describes as the "sacred canopy" of traditional societies, in which myths and supernatural beliefs provide existential meaning and regulate conduct (Eliade 34).

The novel also dramatizes collective anxieties about liminality and transformation, particularly in relation to death and the unknown. The recurrence of spirits and apparitions embodies a cultural unease with unfinished business, improper burials, or unresolved tensions between the living and the dead. Such fears highlight the fragile boundary between order and chaos, human and nonhuman, natural and supernatural. In Mizo cosmology, these anxieties are not abstract but part of daily existence, and Darhlira's narrative foregrounds this by showing how the villagers constantly negotiate their lives in the shadow of otherworldly forces.

Another key resonance lies in the connection between landscape and the supernatural. The forests, hills, and village outskirts are not merely backdrops but active agents in the production of fear. By anchoring supernatural occurrences in the natural environment, Darhlira reflects a worldview in which the land itself is imbued with spiritual potency. Adam Scovell's discussion of folk horror's emphasis on "landscape as repository of ancient terror" (Scovell 42) is particularly useful here, as *Khawkil Bunghuai* situates its dread within terrains familiar yet uncanny to its readers. This reinforces the sense that horror emerges not from foreign intrusion but from the very soil of Mizo culture and geography.



Thematically, the novel interrogates the fragility of human existence in a universe governed by forces beyond human comprehension. The villagers' interactions with spirits underscore their vulnerability and remind them of their dependence on rituals, communal solidarity, and traditional wisdom for survival. At the same time, the supernatural provides a way of articulating social tensions. Fear of spirits often parallels fear of social disruption—betrayal, greed, or the breakdown of kinship obligations. In this sense, Darhlira's horror is never divorced from the human condition; it reveals how supernatural terror can be a metaphor for cultural instability and the dangers of transgression.

Finally, *Khawkil Bunghuai* contributes to the broader discourse on indigenous horror traditions. By grounding his supernatural narrative in Mizo belief systems, Darhlira challenges the dominance of Western horror frameworks and asserts the legitimacy of local modes of storytelling. The novel demonstrates that horror is not a universalized genre imported from Euro-American contexts but a form that can be reshaped and revitalized within regional cultures. Its significance lies not only in its literary craft but also in its capacity to preserve and transmit cultural memory, offering a uniquely Mizo articulation of the supernatural that participates in global horror traditions while maintaining local distinctiveness.

7. CONCLUSION

Darhlira's *Khawkil Bunghuai* stands as a landmark in Mizo supernatural literature, demonstrating how folklore, ritual, and cosmology can be integrated into

a narrative of fear that is both culturally specific and universally resonant. The novel's supernatural world, exemplified by scenes such as the hui of the banyan tree and the mysterious disappearance of the child, illustrates the tangible presence of spirits in the lives of humans, showing how Mizo beliefs about the afterlife, restless souls, and moral retribution structure communal understanding of life and death. These supernatural elements are not mere literary devices but culturally embedded agents of narrative tension, moral reflection, and social cohesion.

The narrative techniques Darhlira employs—manipulation of atmosphere, the interplay of light and darkness, pacing, and temporal ambiguity—enhance the psychological impact of horror, creating a sense of suspense that is deeply grounded in familiar cultural spaces. Liminal zones, such as forest edges, village outskirts, and twilight settings, act as thresholds between the human and supernatural worlds, reinforcing Victor Turner's notion of liminality as a space of uncertainty and potential transformation. The novel's horror is thus inseparable from its geography and cultural context, underscoring that fear in Mizo folklore is both existential and socially meaningful.

Moreover, the novel's supernatural occurrences often serve a didactic function, punishing transgressions, rewarding respect for tradition, and enforcing communal norms. In doing so, Darhlira aligns the narrative with global folk horror traditions while maintaining its distinctive local voice. Comparative parallels with Western Gothic literature, Japanese *kaidan*, and Indian folklore-based horror reveal that while supernatural horror often follows



similar structural patterns—such as the return of the dead, haunting of familiar spaces, and moralized fear—*Khawkil Bunghuai* uniquely synthesizes these strategies with the ethos of Mizo belief systems.

The text also exemplifies the psychological dimensions of horror, highlighting the vulnerability of human perception when confronted with the unknown. The villagers' encounters with the huai, unexplained sounds, and omens produce both fear and reflection, illustrating how horror functions as a medium for negotiating uncertainty, mortality, and moral responsibility. As Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject suggests, the intrusion of the supernatural into familiar spaces confronts characters and readers alike with the collapse of boundaries between life and death, self and other.

Ultimately, Darhlira's work is not only a literary achievement but also a vital record of Mizo cultural imagination. *Khawkil Bunghuai* demonstrates that supernatural fiction in indigenous contexts serves multiple purposes: it preserves and transmits folklore, negotiates social and moral concerns, and engages readers in the universal human experience of fear. By anchoring horror in culturally specific knowledge, Darhlira creates a text that resonates locally while contributing meaningfully to the comparative study of supernatural literature globally. The novel affirms that indigenous horror traditions are dynamic, sophisticated, and capable of engaging both local and international audiences, offering insights into how cultural beliefs shape narrative form, thematic depth, and the enduring power of the supernatural in literature.

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