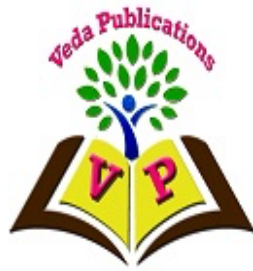




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**BETWEEN WORLDS: LIMINAL SETTINGS AND NARRATIVE TRANSFORMATION IN MIZO FANTASY FICTION**Lalremruati Ngente^{1*}, Dr. Lalnunpuia Renthlei²¹Research Scholar, Department of Mizo, Mizoram University²Supervisor/Assistant Professor, Pachhunga University CollegeEmail: aremruatingente23@gmail.com ; nununa123@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2026.13206>**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the role of liminal settings in shaping narrative transformation in selected works of Mizo fantasy fiction. Drawing on texts such as Kawlkil Piah Lamtluang, Omnus, Tihna Hneh Lalnu, Rauthlaleng, and Hun Awm Loh Hunah, the study explores how transitional spaces function as sites of movement between different states of existence, perception, and identity. Liminal settings are analyzed not merely as physical thresholds but as experiential and psychological zones that influence character development and narrative progression. In contrast to global fantasy traditions, in which liminal spaces often appear as clearly defined portals, the selected Mizo texts present fluid, internally experienced forms of transition. The paper argues that liminal settings in Mizo fantasy fiction are central to narrative transformation, emphasizing process, perception, and cultural continuity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fantasy fiction has long been associated with the exploration of alternative realities, where the boundaries between the known and the unknown are constantly negotiated. Within this narrative framework, setting plays a crucial role, not merely as a background but as a dynamic and active force that shapes character development and narrative progression. In particular, liminal settings occupy a significant position, as they function as transitional spaces where characters encounter unfamiliar realities and undergo transformation.

The concept of liminality, as developed by Victor Turner, refers to a condition of being "betwixt and between," where individuals exist outside established structures and are open to change (Turner 95). In literary narratives, such spaces frequently represent thresholds between different worlds or states of existence. These spaces create conditions in which transformation becomes possible, as characters are removed from familiar environments and placed in situations that challenge their understanding of reality.

In many global fantasy traditions, liminal spaces are represented through clearly defined portals or boundaries. These transitions are often sudden and visible, marking a clear shift between ordinary and extraordinary worlds. However, liminality is not limited to physical movement; it also encompasses psychological and experiential dimensions through which transformation unfolds gradually.

Mizo fantasy fiction presents a distinctive approach to liminality. The selected texts *Kawkil Piah Lamtluang* written by C.Lalnunchanga, *Omnus*

written by C. Laizawna, *Thihna Hneh Lalnu* written by Laltanpuia Chhangte, *Rauthlaleng* written by R. Zuala, and *Hun Awm Loh Hunah* written by Sangzuala, demonstrate that liminal spaces are often fluid, subtle, and deeply connected to cultural and emotional experience. Rather than functioning as clearly marked thresholds, these spaces emerge through interaction, memory, and perception, shaping both character and narrative in complex ways.

This paper examines how liminal settings operate within these texts to influence narrative transformation. By situating Mizo fantasy fiction within a broader comparative context, this article argues that liminality in these narratives is not merely structural but also experiential, emphasizing process, continuity, and introspection.

2. LIMINALITY AND FANTASY NARRATIVE

Liminality occupies a central position in fantasy narratives as the space in which transformation becomes possible. According to Victor Turner, liminal states are characterized by ambiguity, openness, and the suspension of conventional structures (Turner 95). In literature, such spaces enable narratives to move beyond fixed realities and explore alternative possibilities of existence.

In global fantasy traditions, liminal spaces are often represented through clearly identifiable transitions. These boundaries typically take the form of physical portals that separate different narrative domains, reinforcing a structured progression from one state to another. The clarity of these transitions emphasizes the distinction between reality and fantasy.



However, liminality also operates at a symbolic and psychological level. Literary spaces often represent states of human experience rather than purely physical locations. This suggests that liminal settings can be understood as processes of perception in which transformation occurs through interaction with unfamiliar environments.

Beyond its structural function, liminality can also be understood as a disruption of stable meaning. Characters placed in liminal environments must reinterpret their surroundings, as familiar frameworks no longer apply. This process of reinterpretation becomes central to narrative development, creating tension between recognition and disorientation. The unfamiliarity of the liminal space challenges characters to construct new meanings, thereby leading to deeper engagement with the narrative.

In Mizo fantasy fiction, liminality often takes this broader form. Transitions are not always clearly marked but unfold gradually through experience. This approach shifts the emphasis from structural transition to experiential engagement, allowing liminal spaces to function as sustained environments of transformation rather than momentary thresholds.

Liminality can also be interpreted as a disruption of fixed systems of knowledge. When characters enter liminal spaces, they are placed in conditions where previously accepted meanings no longer hold stable significance. This destabilization compels them to reconstruct their understanding of reality actively. As a result, liminal settings become spaces of cognitive and emotional negotiation, where meaning is not given but continuously formed through experience.

Furthermore, liminal spaces are characterized by their resistance to clear categorization. They often exist between binaries such as reality and imagination, past and present, or self and other. This in-betweenness allows narratives to explore complex forms of identity that cannot be confined within rigid definitions. The character, positioned within such a space, becomes both an observer and participant in the process of transformation.

Another important dimension of liminality is its temporal fluidity. Time within liminal spaces does not always follow linear progression. Instead, it may appear fragmented, circular, or suspended. This disruption of temporal structure reinforces the sense of uncertainty and enhances the transformative potential of the narrative. Characters are therefore not only displaced spatially but also temporally, which further complicates their experience.

In addition to its spatial and psychological dimensions, liminality can also be understood as a state of interpretive openness. Within liminal spaces, meaning is not fixed but remains provisional, allowing multiple interpretations to coexist. This openness is crucial for fantasy narratives, as it enables the exploration of ideas that cannot be confined within rigid structures. The character, positioned within such a space, must engage in a continuous process of interpretation, negotiating between different possibilities of meaning.

Furthermore, liminal spaces often function as zones of instability where established hierarchies and distinctions are temporarily suspended. This suspension creates opportunities for transformation, as characters are freed from the constraints of their previous identities. In this context, liminality



becomes a site of potentiality, where new forms of identity and understanding can emerge.

Another significant aspect of liminality is its relationship to the unknown. Liminal spaces are frequently associated with mystery and uncertainty, representing areas that lie beyond the limits of human knowledge. This association enhances their narrative function by introducing elements of tension and anticipation. The character's journey through such spaces becomes a process of discovery, in which each new experience deepens understanding of both the self and the world.

3. LIMINAL SETTINGS IN SELECTED MIZO TEXTS

The selected Mizo texts demonstrate that liminal settings are not merely transitional devices but central elements that shape the narrative structure and the development of characters. These settings function as environments in which characters encounter unfamiliar realities, leading to shifts in perception, identity, and understanding.

In *Kawlkil Piah Lamtluang*, the movement into the world of Ahfrit represents a significant liminal transition (*Kawlkil Piah Lamtluang*, 47). However, this transition is not presented as a sudden or clearly demarcated shift. Instead, it unfolds progressively through the protagonist's experiences. The unfamiliar environment is revealed gradually, allowing both the character and the reader to adapt to its logic and structure over time. This gradual immersion emphasizes that liminality is not confined to a single moment of crossing but extends across the narrative as an ongoing condition of transformation.

The narrative strategy of gradual revelation is particularly significant. Rather than providing a fully

constructed world from the outset, the text introduces unfamiliar elements through fragmented encounters. These moments of partial understanding create a sense of uncertainty that drives the narrative forward. The liminal setting thus becomes a space of negotiation, where meaning is continuously constructed through interaction.

A similar approach can be observed in *Tihna Hneh Lalnu*, where the boundaries between different states of existence are closely linked to memory, ancestry, and spiritual continuity (*Tihna Hneh Lalnu*, 53). The liminal space is not represented by a physical threshold but by a shift in perception that connects the present to the past. This creates a layered sense of reality in which different temporal and existential dimensions coexist.

In *Omnus*, the liminal setting is shaped by speculative and scientific elements that challenge conventional understandings of reality. The environment interacts with human cognition, creating a space where perception itself becomes unstable (*Omnus*, 54). This introduces a form of liminality that is both external and internal, as the transformation of the setting is mirrored by changes in the character's consciousness.

Rauthlaleng illustrates the diversity of liminal representation in Mizo fantasy fiction through its subtle, continuous transitions between different states of existence (*Rauthlaleng* 3). The movement between worlds is not abrupt but fluid. Allowing characters to inhabit spaces that are neither fully real nor entirely imaginary. This creates a sense of uncertainty that propels the narrative forward while also deepening the reader's engagement with the text. The liminal spaces in the narrative function not



merely as transitional zones but as dynamic environments that shape character development and thematic exploration.

In *Hun Awm Loh Hunah*, liminality is further developed through a nuanced portrayal of perception and experience. The boundaries between worlds remain fluid, but greater emphasis is placed on how the environment is mediated through the characters' subjective experience (*Hun Awm Loh Hunah*, 145). The setting is not presented as fixed or objective; instead, it shifts according to emotional and psychological states. This allows the narrative to explore multiple layers of meaning, as the same space may be interpreted differently at different moments. As a result, liminal space becomes a site of interpretive complexity, enriching both the narrative structure and its thematic depth.

Across these texts, it becomes evident that liminal settings are deeply integrated into the narrative structure. They do not simply mark the passage from one world to another but function as dynamic environments that influence character development and thematic exploration.

The liminal settings in the selected texts also highlight the role of perception in shaping narrative reality. The environment is not presented as an objective or fixed entity but is mediated through the character's experience. This subjective engagement with space allows the narrative to explore multiple layers of meaning, as the same setting may be interpreted differently at different moments.

In addition, the gradual unfolding of these settings reflects a deliberate narrative technique that prioritizes immersion over explanation. Rather than

providing a complete description of the world, the texts allow the setting to emerge through interaction and discovery. This method not only mirrors the character's journey but also engages the reader more deeply, as they must actively participate in constructing the narrative world.

The presence of ambiguity within these settings further enhances their narrative function. The lack of clear boundaries creates a sense of instability that drives the plot forward. Characters are compelled to question their surroundings and their own identities, leading to continuous transformation. This process of questioning becomes central to the narrative, opening new possibilities for interpretation.

Moreover, the interconnectedness of different spaces within the narrative suggests that liminality is not confined to isolated locations but extends across the entire story. The boundaries between settings remain permeable, enabling continuous movement and interaction. This interconnected structure reinforces the idea that transformation is not limited to specific moments but occurs throughout the narrative.

4. NARRATIVE TRANSFORMATION AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

The presence of liminal settings in the selected texts plays a crucial role in shaping narrative transformation, particularly in relation to character development. These spaces create conditions of uncertainty and instability that compel characters to confront unfamiliar realities, thereby initiating processes of change and self-discovery.

In *Kawlkil Piah Lamtluang*, the protagonist's journey through the liminal world leads to a gradual



reconfiguration of identity. Initially motivated by personal desire, the character's engagement with the unfamiliar environment forces him to reassess his understanding of reality. The transformation that occurs is not defined by a single moment of resolution but unfolds progressively.

Similarly, in Thihna Hneh Lalnu, character development is closely linked to memory and perception. The liminal space connects different layers of existence, allowing the character to engage with past experiences and inherited identities. This process results in a form of transformation that is both personal and cultural.

In *Omnus*, narrative transformation is shaped by the interaction between the character and a speculative environment. The instability of the setting creates a corresponding instability in the character's perception, leading to a redefinition of identity. This suggests that transformation is not solely the result of external challenges but also emerges from shifts in consciousness.

Across the selected texts, transformation is characterized by its open-ended nature. Unlike many global fantasy narratives, which often culminate in clear resolution, these texts emphasize process over closure. The liminal setting sustains a state of transition that allows for continuous reinterpretation of identity and meaning.

Transformation in liminal spaces is not merely a change in circumstance but a deeper process that involves the reconfiguration of identity. Characters must confront unfamiliar experiences that challenge their existing beliefs and assumptions. This confrontation often leads to moments of reflection,

during which the character reassesses their position in the world.

The uncertainty inherent in liminal spaces plays a crucial role in this process. Without stable points of reference, characters are forced to rely on their own interpretation and judgment. This autonomy allows for the development of new perspectives, as characters begin to understand themselves and their environment in different ways.

Additionally, the absence of clear resolution in these narratives suggests that transformation is ongoing rather than final. Characters do not reach a definitive endpoint but continue to evolve throughout the story. This open-ended approach reflects a broader understanding of identity as fluid and dynamic.

The emotional dimension of transformation is also significant. Liminal spaces often evoke feelings of confusion, anxiety, and curiosity, thereby deepening the narrative. These emotional responses are not merely reactions but integral components of the transformative process, shaping the character's journey and influencing their development.

The transformative potential of liminal spaces is closely linked to their capacity to disrupt established patterns of thought. Characters entering these spaces often encounter situations that challenge their assumptions and force them to reconsider their understanding of reality. This process of questioning is essential for transformation, as it creates the conditions necessary for change.

Moreover, transformation in liminal spaces often involves a reconfiguration of relationships. Characters may develop new connections or



reinterpret existing ones, leading to shifts in their social and emotional dynamics. These changes contribute to the narrative's overall development, shaping both individual and collective experiences.

The role of uncertainty in this process cannot be overstated. Liminal spaces are characterized by their unpredictability, which requires characters to adapt continuously. This adaptability becomes a key aspect of transformation, enabling characters to navigate complex, changing environments.

In addition, the interplay between external events and internal responses further deepens the transformative process. Characters must not only respond to environmental challenges but also reflect on their own reactions. This dual engagement deepens the narrative, enabling a more nuanced exploration of identity.

5. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

When examined within a broader global context, the representation of liminal settings in Mizo fantasy fiction reveals both similarities and differences. In many global fantasy traditions, liminal spaces are depicted as clearly defined thresholds separating distinct worlds. These boundaries often appear as physical portals that mark an immediate transition.

By contrast, the selected Mizo texts present a more fluid form of liminality. The transition between worlds is often gradual and embedded within the character's experience rather than marked by a single boundary. This results in a narrative structure that is less rigid and more experiential.

Another key difference lies in transformation. In global fantasy, transformation often leads to resolution and closure. In contrast, Mizo fantasy

emphasizes ongoing transformation, where identity remains fluid and open-ended.

Furthermore, Mizo fantasy fiction challenges the conventional view of fantasy as escapism. Instead, it presents fantasy as a mode of introspection, allowing characters and readers to explore deeper questions of identity, perception, and reality.

The contrast between Mizo fantasy fiction and global traditions can also be understood in terms of narrative emphasis. While many global fantasy narratives prioritize the construction of elaborate and detailed worlds, Mizo fantasy often focuses on the experiential aspects of setting. This shift in emphasis leads to a different approach to world-building, where the meaning of the setting arises from interaction rather than description.

Furthermore, the representation of liminality in Mizo texts challenges conventional narrative structures. The absence of clearly defined boundaries allows for a more flexible, dynamic narrative form, with transitions that are gradual and interconnected. This flexibility enables a more nuanced exploration of identity and perception.

Another significant difference lies in the treatment of knowledge. In many global fantasy narratives, the world is ultimately explained and understood, providing closure for both the character and the reader. In contrast, Mizo fantasy often maintains a degree of ambiguity, allowing multiple interpretations to coexist. This openness encourages active engagement from the reader, who must participate in constructing meaning.

The comparative perspective also highlights the cultural specificity of narrative forms. The distinctive



features of Mizo fantasy fiction reflect a particular way of understanding the relationship between reality and imagination. By situating these texts within a global context, it becomes possible to appreciate both their uniqueness and their contribution to the broader field of fantasy literature.

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that liminal settings in Mizo fantasy fiction function as dynamic spaces that shape narrative transformation through perception, experience, and cultural context. Unlike global traditions that emphasize structure and closure, these texts present liminality as fluid and continuous.

By emphasizing process over resolution, Mizo fantasy fiction offers a distinctive contribution to the study of fantasy literature. It expands the understanding of how narrative worlds are constructed and how transformation is experienced.

The study also suggests that liminal settings can be understood as spaces of possibility, where conventional boundaries are challenged, and new forms of understanding emerge. By emphasizing uncertainty and transformation, these narratives invite readers to reconsider their own perceptions of reality.

In this sense, Mizo fantasy fiction contributes to a broader rethinking of the genre, demonstrating that fantasy is not merely escapism but a means of engaging with complex questions of identity, culture, and existence. The exploration of liminal spaces thus becomes a powerful narrative tool, enabling both characters and readers to navigate the unknown.

The comparison between Mizo and global fantasy traditions also reveals differences in narrative pacing.

Global fantasy narratives often emphasize structured progression, where events unfold according to a clear sequence leading to resolution. In contrast, Mizo fantasy fiction frequently adopts a more fluid pacing, allowing events to develop gradually and organically.

This difference in pacing reflects broader variations in narrative style. While global traditions may prioritize clarity and coherence, Mizo fantasy emphasizes complexity and openness. This openness allows for a more flexible interpretation of events, as the narrative does not impose a single, definitive meaning.

Another important distinction lies in the treatment of space as a narrative element. In many global fantasy texts, space is carefully mapped and defined, providing a detailed framework for the story. In contrast, Mizo fantasy often presents space as experiential and evolving, focusing on how it is perceived rather than how it is structured.

The comparative perspective thus highlights the diversity of approaches within fantasy literature. By examining these differences, we can understand how cultural contexts influence narrative forms and thematic concerns.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that liminal settings play a vital role in shaping the narrative and thematic complexity of fantasy fiction. By functioning as spaces of transition and transformation, they enable the exploration of ideas that extend beyond the boundaries of ordinary experience.

The distinctive approach of Mizo fantasy fiction, with its emphasis on fluidity and experiential engagement, offers valuable insights into the genre's possibilities. It challenges conventional assumptions



and expands the scope of fantasy literature, highlighting its potential as a medium for both creative expression and critical reflection.

Through its exploration of liminal spaces, Mizo fantasy fiction not only contributes to the development of narrative theory but also offers a deeper understanding of the relationships among culture, identity, and storytelling.

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