www.myveritasjournal.com

# VERITAS:

## A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

ISSN: 3107-748X

Vol. I, Issue 04

June 2026

Editor: Lt. Dr. B. Ajantha Parthasarathi

Veritas: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

# Sacred Anchors: The Divine Feminine, Ecology, and Social Ethics in Bodo and Mizo Indigenous Worldviews

*Banani Das[1] (First Author & Corresponding author)*
*Laltluangpuii Renthlei[2]*
*[1](Asst. Prof., Department of English, The Assam Royal Global University, India)*
*[2](Student (MA English), Dept. of English, The Assam Royal Global University, India)*

**Abstract**

Indigenous religious landscapes in Northeast India are frequently analysed through patriarchal structures, often obscuring the central role of the divine feminine. This paper through a Myth–Ritual Continuum Analysis presents a comparative theological study of Mainao, the Bodo goddess of rice and prosperity, and Khuanu, along with the nature spirit Lasi, the Mizo matriarch of the cosmos. Adopting a comparative framework, the research examines how distinct ecological niches—the agrarian plains of the Bodos and the rugged hills of the Mizos—shaped divergent constructions of female divinity.

Through a critical analysis of the Mainao and Mizo oral folklore, the study argues that Mainao represents the domesticated power of production essential for settled agriculture, functioning as the kinetic energy of the household. In contrast, the Mizo figures of Khuanu and Lasi embody the untamed power of provision, reflecting the negotiation with wilderness inherent in a hunter-gatherer and Jhum (shifting cultivation) society. The present study expands previous research by offering a detailed comparative analysis of these feminine deities and their place within global goddess traditions. By drawing parallels with Greek, Roman, Sumerian, Celtic, Japanese, and Egyptian mythologies, this paper situates the Bodo and Mizo divine feminine within a broader sacred landscape. In doing so, it contributes to ecofeminist scholarship, indigenous theology, and comparative religion.

Keywords: Eco-feminity, orality, indigeneity, symbolism.

## I. Introduction

Across the world, cultures have turned toward the divine feminine to articulate ideas of creation, fertility, protection, ecological balance, and communal identity. Whether manifested as the Greek *Demeter*, the Roman *Ceres*, the Sumerian *Inanna*, the Japanese *Amaterasu*, or the Celtic *Danu*, goddesses have embodied the generative forces of life and the rhythms of nature. For many indigenous communities, the feminine divine is embedded not only in myth but also in daily life, agricultural practices, and ecological relationships.

The tribal societies of Northeast India are often studied through a patriarchal lens, yet the spiritual landscape is deeply rooted in feminine power. In Northeast India, the Bodo and Mizo peoples preserve distinct yet interconnected visions of feminine sacred power. The Bodo people, a major plain tribe of Assam, practice Bathouism, a faith centered on the worship of the invisible, supreme deity, Bathoubwrai (often symbolized by the Sijou tree, *Euphorbia Splendons*). There are no written theological texts and history about Bathouism except oral literature and mythological tales (Basumatary 37).

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

> As recounted in one of the myths, the origin of Goddess *Mainao* is attributed to the metamorphosed self of Lord *Bathou Bwrai* (*Sibrai*), who from his own immaculate self created her. (Narzary 216)

For the Bodos, Mainao is the benevolent protector of rice, the source of household prosperity, and a symbol of domestic guardianship. Rooted deeply in the Bathou religion, Mainao weaves together cosmology, ecology, and gender roles. Scholars emphasize her etymology as 'the Mother of Rice,' asserting her position at the center of the Bodo agrarian cycle. While Bathoubwrai is the ultimate creator and ancestor, the functional needs of the community are often addressed through a pantheon of lesser deities. The Bodo community is an agrarian society practicing *Bathouism*, where the domestic and agricultural spheres are governed by female deities. Among these, Mainao holds paramount importance. Her presence transforms the field from a mere patch of land into a sacred space subject to her authority and favour.

On the other hand, Mizoram is a hill society (historically practicing *Sakhua*/Animism) where female spirits governed nature, hunting, and creation before the mass conversion to Christianity. The Mizo pantheon, on the other hand, features complex feminine figures such as Khuanu, a primordial benefactor and nurturer of humanity, and Lasi, the queen of animals and forests, whose intimate relationship with hunters articulates an ethical relationship between humans and nature. These deities, though no longer ritually worshipped after the region's rapid Christianization, survive in folklore as carriers of ecological knowledge and moral imagination.

**II. Objectives of the Study**

1. To provide an understanding of the divine feminine in Bodo and Mizo indigenous worldviews.
2. To analyze the symbolic functions of Mainao, Khuanu, and Lasi in relation to ecology, subsistence, and social ethics.

## III. Literature Review

The first section of the literature review establishes the theoretical framework by linking gender oppression with environmental destruction, primarily through the lens of literary analysis. Ghosh (2004), Agarwal (2017), and Chakraborty (2010) exploring Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*, establishes how the Sundarbans ecosystem is anthropomorphized and gendered. Their work analyzes the representation of the forest deity Bonbibi, highlighting her role in managing the human-nature conflict and offering protection, thereby examining the gendered portrayal of nature and divinity in the face of ecological threat. Mies and Shiva (1993) provides the foundational theoretical bedrock of the study. Their ecofeminist theory fundamentally argues that the domination of nature and the oppression of women are intrinsically linked and stem from the same patriarchal and capitalist mindset. Their work is essential for defining the conceptual parameters of ecofeminism used in the analysis of regional myths. Singh (2005) while focussing on textual criticism, offers a visual and ethnographic documentation of the enduring and active cultural relevance of the *Bonbibi* myth among the people of the Sundarbans, emphasizing its non-literary, lived context.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Narzary (2018) provides a critical analysis of Bodo creation myths, focusing on their underlying monotheistic principles found within Bathouism. This helps contextualize the philosophical depth of the Bodo religious system, moving beyond simplistic tribal labels. Further Boro (2010) and Brahma (1998) interpretation of Bodo folklore, symbolism, and ritual practices helps reader understand the detailed structures like the Sijou altar (representing the cosmos) and the symbolism of other religious objects. In particular, Hajowary (2014) draws attention to Mainao, the Bodo deity connected to paddy and agriculture; she establishes her spiritual significance as a life-giving force and stresses the agricultural basis of Bodo culture. Choudhury's (2017) work highlights the considerable religious authority of the female spirit medium, the Doudini, thereby contesting prevailing notions of gender-based hierarchy. This study illustrates the institutionalized spiritual influence wielded by women within Bodo religious practices. Analysing the modern usage of Bodo myth by poets Ramchiary's (2025) scholarly work helps to understand the active modernisation of traditional narratives and their function as instruments for cultural identity preservation amidst the pressures of globalization.

Hmar (2017), Haukhanlian (2005), and Zirsangliani (2004) explore major religious and social shifts in Mizo society, emphasizing changes that occurred after the arrival of colonialism and Christianity. Chhangte (2013), Lalruanga (1984), and Lalsangpuii (2023) provide the historical and sociological framework for the decline of indigenous religious practices. These sources are essential in assessing the cultural memory and identity of the Mizo people, maintained mainly through their oral traditions. They pay attention to the narratives that predated recorded history, and the influence of Christianity. Research by Hmingthanzuali and Pande (2009) addresses gender head on through the lens of women's traditional environmental knowledge and its marginalization as a result of modernization and religious practices. This connects specifically with the ecofeminist aspect of the study. Ralte (2023) adopts a contemporary theoretical lens by looking at female characters, i.e. the goddess Khuazingnu, in a posthumanist context. This lets us see such myths not so much as an antiquity of time, but as works relevant to contemporary philosophical concerns of human and non-human interaction.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

This part expands the study's focus, enabling the examination of regional deities (Bonbibi, Mainao, Mizo goddesses) to be placed within a broader global or Indian framework. Devi (2002) contextualizes Bonbibi by locating her within a broader, pan-Indian tradition of forest deities present in Bengal and other regions of India. This stops the analysis from becoming overly isolated by illustrating the ancestry of the forest guardian archetype. Hounkpè and Ibrahim (2024) provide a cross-cultural viewpoint outside of India, examining the strengths and constraints of female characters in Greco-Roman religion. This analysis assists in recognizing common trends regarding how patriarchal structures exploit or restrict feminine divine authority. Zote (2015) and Singhal (2023) examine additional important female Mizo mythical characters, including the fish/water goddess Chawngtinleri, the highest female deity Khuanu, and the woodland spirit Lasi. This guarantees a thorough grasp of the Mizo pantheon, extending beyond merely the creation stories.
This concluding part of the literature review presents the practical and institutional difficulties encountered by the communities, linking the theoretical cultural analysis to concrete socio-political concerns. Singh (2025) offers a modern assessment of gender disparities in Mizo inheritance practices. This provides a tangible, real-life illustration of how patriarchal systems are upheld in institutions, highlighting the contrasting potential authority of female deities in mythology. De (2021) advocates for the essential protection of traditional knowledge by creating indigenous legal systems specifically designed for communities in Northeast India. This links the safeguarding of culture, as represented in the myths, to the necessity for legal acknowledgment and defence against outside exploitation.

## IV.Methodology

This study adopts a Myth–Ritual Continuum Analysis as its integrated research methodology and theoretical framework to examine the divine feminine in Bodo and Mizo indigenous religions. Rather than treating myth as a fixed narrative corpus or ritual as a secondary enactment, this approach understands both as part of a single, dynamic continuum through which religious meaning is produced, sustained, and transmitted. In indigenous traditions where written scriptures are absent or marginal, mythology survives primarily through ritual performance, seasonal observance, ecological practice, and oral transmission. Consequently, the divine feminine is approached not as a symbolic abstraction or archetypal figure but as a functional presence whose significance becomes visible through recurring ritual action. Drawing upon functionalist anthropology, particularly the insights of Bronislaw Malinowski, the study assumes that myths serve as social charters that authorize ritual behavior, moral norms, and gendered responsibilities within the community. Methodologically, the analysis proceeds by first identifying the principal feminine divine figures—Mainao within Bodo Bathouism and Khuanu and Lasi within Mizo indigenous belief—through ethnographic accounts, oral traditions, and descriptions of ritual practice. These figures are then examined in relation to the concrete social and ecological functions they perform, such as ensuring agricultural fertility, safeguarding forest resources, protecting domestic space, and maintaining communal harmony. The focus thus shifts from what the goddess represents in narrative form to what she *does* within lived religious life. A central component of the analysis is the mapping of gendered ritual participation, with particular attention to women's

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

roles as custodians of household rituals, transmitters of oral mythic knowledge, and participants in fertility- and ecology-centered rites. This enables the study to foreground women's ritual agency and religious authority, which are often underrepresented in text-centric approaches to religion. Comparative analysis is undertaken not by aligning myths thematically or tracing speculative historical connections, but by examining parallel ritual functions and outcomes across the two cultures, such as the regulation of agricultural cycles, mediation between human and non-human realms, and reinforcement of collective ethical values.

**V. Discussion :**

**V.i. Bodo *Mainao***

Bodos, a Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnolinguistic group, is the largest sub branch community of the Kachari Group and is a dominant as well as indigenous tribal group of the northern valleys of the mighty river Brahmaputra in the state of Assam. (Narzary and Longkumer 55) In the Bathouism tradition of the Bodo people, the agricultural perspective is closely linked to the goddess Mainao, revered as the protector of rice and prosperity. Goddess *Mainao* as a chief divinity stands as an emblem of family wealth, fertility, and therefore the goddess of prosperity. She is grace, beauty, and charm incarnate.

> According to Endle (1911:37), she is in short to the Bodo peasant very much what Ceres was to the old heathen Roman cultivator. In other words, she is the source of all life and order. Those who understand and remain faithful to her are protected from misery, desolation, and poverty because all things come from her and all things return to her. (Narzary and Basumatary 216)

Bodo tradition highlights the supremacy of Goddess Mainao through the title *kangnaini-bima-kha*, meaning the 'mother who brought up the world.' Mythology tells of a universe destroyed by evil but reborn through the union of the primary deities Bathou Bwrai and Bathou Bwri. This revival, led by the resulting goddess of life, establishes Mainao as a vital figure in the Bodo pantheon. Regional narratives indicate that Bodo farmers ceremonially cut a small handful of rice during the harvest and offer it as 'Mainao,' honouring the initial grains as a vibrant goddess of plenty. In a society that relies on wet-rice farming, the unpredictability of nature must be controlled. The ritual functions as a means of regulation—an effort to formalize the divine feminine within a consistent rhythm of sowing and reaping (Narzary and Basumatary 218). This approach demonstrates an ecofeminist perspective, the grain (nature's gift) is defined in a feminine shape, symbolizing the nurturing earth. According to Vandana Shiva's analysis, Bodo women — who carry out these harvest rituals — exist at the intersection of nature and culture. By celebrating Mainao, they embody a type of understanding that connects women's work (rice cultivation and preservation) to environmental sustainability (Shiva). According to Narzary, 'the sacred marriage was a religious practice prevalent since ancient times,' where the male spirit symbolizes the sky and the female symbolizes the earth.

> …it is through the concerted effort of the gods that the fertility of the world is assured. In analogy to the classical myths, the God *Bathou Bwrai* here inherently signifies the sky god, and the Goddess *Mainao* represents the earth goddess. (Narzary 218)

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

In the Bodo tradition, the family structure is often mirrored in the divine structure. Bathou Bwrai (*Sibrai*) represents the eternal, formless, and foundational principle, akin to the sky or the primordial void. Mainao, the daughter, often symbolizes the manifested world—the earth, fertility, and life. The daughter figure in this context represents the continuation and actualization of the divine lineage into the material realm. This relationship elevates the female figure not merely to a consort, but to an heir and an executor of the divine will. Bodo women have always found a central place in all rituals, specially the Kherai puja. In Kherai, a female priest called *Doudini* plays central role.

> Doudini performs most of the essential rites during the Kherai worship with the help of oza and gidal. Bodos perform four kinds of Kherai. These are (1) Darshan Kherai (held on in the month of September and October to propitiate Mainao, goddess of wealth), (2) Umrao Kherai (held on in the month of June-July for the welfare of villagers as well as of summer season crops), (3) Phalo Kherai (held on in month of January and February during bhogali bihu), (4) Nowaoni Kherai (occasionally held on in a family for the well being of the family) But in the absence of doudini (female priest) none of these Kherai can be performed. (Boro 24)

Women hold a central position in Bodo spiritual life, particularly regarding agricultural rites. Female heads of the household lead several essential ceremonies tied to the farming cycle, including the lighting festival (Gasa Saonai), the ritual inspection of crops (Mai Naihwinai), and the formal welcoming of the goddess of wealth (Mainao Borainai) (Boro 25).

> The main target of goal of such festival is to propitiate 'Mainao' Goddess of wealth and collect successful crops. When it is done, it is believed that Mainao (Lakshmi), Goddess of wealth gets satisfied and blesses the family in harvesting successful crops. (25)

Apart from that, another deity known as 'Bwiswmuti' the Goddess of Land is also worshiped immensely among every Bodo people. As the Goddess of Land is a female, thus in the Bodo community woman of all ages plays a very significant role in their own way. (Narzary and Longkumer 56)

The ritual framework of Bathouism embodies a clearly tribal egalitarian spirit. The Bathou altar (Bathou Bindo) is collective and rooted in nature, it features a *Sijou* tree surrounded by bamboo—symbolizing the cosmos—and accompanied by *Tulsi*, which signifies the goddess Mainao (Barooah 112–13). There is no priestly class or human-like idol acting as a mediator between devotees and the divine; rather, the elements of nature serve as sacred representations. The *Dourie* (priest) recites verses requesting Mainao to occupy her place. According to Endle, the prayers frequently depict Mainao not as an aloof sovereign, but as a mother needing persuasion to remain: 'Oh Mother Mainao, don't depart for the west or the east... stay here on this golden stool.' (Endle 42). In this symbolic economy, the goddess is a concrete presence integrated into daily life—especially in the rice granary and kitchen, where ritual items like *Sijou* branches, Tulsi plants, and white threads are preserved (Barooah 115)

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

The ceremony typically takes place near the *Sijou* tree (symbolizing the supreme god *Bathou Bwrai*) but moves inward toward the *Ishing* (the sacred kitchen/inner sanctum) and the granary.

> But her foremost earthly realm is inside the *nomano*, located in the *ishing*, where she is symbolized by a lump of earth, alongside her consort *Songraja* (manifestation of *Bathou Bwrai*). It is to be noted that the Goddess *Mainao* has to be ritually retrieved time and again to gain her compassion and benevolence. (Narzary and Basumatary 217)

This spatial movement signifies the transition of the goddess from the wild/external world into the safety of the home. This embodied sacredness resonates with Luce Irigaray's insistence on concrete, bodily symbols of the feminine rather than abstract metaphysical representations. Mainao's embodiment in rice and *Tulsi* articulates a symbolic language that honours women's labour and corporeality—fertility, cooking, and the management of household wealth—within the sacred order.

Likewise, Bathou theology emphasizes communal wholeness rather than private devotion. The Bodo people do not worship *Mainao* individually but integrate her presence into collective family and village festivals such as *Magw Domasi* and *Wngkang Gwrtwi Janai*, both of which are thanksgiving rituals associated with the harvest of new rice (Bordoloi 78–80). These festivals foreground collective gratitude to the earth and reaffirm social interdependence. In the Mainao Tissonai ritual Goddess Mainao is appeased with the spell

> *Aaywi Song Bwri, Bima Moathansi,*
> *Lokhi Mainao, Sali Mainao, Ashu Mainao, Basmuti Mainao,*
> *Nimahahwdw.*
> *Ishing singao thapoi phindw,*
> *Kulumwaaywi nwngkou.*

Translation:

> Mother *Song Bwri*, mother *Maothansi*, *Lokhi Mainao, Sali Mainao, Ashu Mainao, Basmuti Mainao,*
> Forgive us of our sins and faults.
> Come back, and stay in the innermost apartment of our main house (*ishing*),
> We pray to you our mother (Narzi 1966:245-249)

Goddess rituals, especially Mainao worship, are important in the Bodo situation because they reinforce societal norms that are linked to ecological linkages. They strengthen social cohesiveness, encourage reverence for the natural world, and highlight the role of women in community life and food security. Misfortunes or illness are seen as indicators that Goddess Mainao has been disrespected. Like major Mother-goddesses in many cultures, the goddess' dual character as a source of illness and a provider of good fortune reflects her larger role as a creator and destroyer.

**V.ii. Mizo Khuanu and Lasi**

The Mizos, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman ethnic group, primarily living in the northeastern region of India, were once worshippers of forest spirits and animals.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

> In the beginning there was no earth, nor man or any other animal. There was however the god called Khuazingnu, who created the earth. (Origin Myth of the Mizo) (Zama para 2)

To comprehend the significance of the divine feminine in Mizo culture, it is essential to first explore the distinct theological and literary environment of the Mizo world before Christianity. Before Welsh missionaries arrived in 1894, the Mizos followed an oral culture with no written language. So Mizo theology emerged in an oral tradition, including Thawnthu (folktales), Hla (folksongs) and proverbs (Zama 46).

> The outbreak of Mizo revival movements from the 1960s onwards, however, played a crucial role in encouraging Mizo Christians to abandon their traditional religious sacrifices. Initially, this caused concern among their non-Christian Mizo counterparts, who supposed that forsaking these sacrificial practices would result in tragedies, sickness and diseases. However, when no such misfortunes befell the Mizo Christians, they confidently declared, 'Surely Jesus has triumphed over the evil spirits. (Zorinthara 3)

Zorinthara quoting Welse missionary Jones mentions that the choice for the word Pathian "was influenced by the presence of another benevolent spirit known as *Lasi* in Mizo traditional belief. The existence of these two benevolent spirits, *Khuavang* and *Lasi*, added to the complexity of the decision, ultimately leading to the selection of the name *Pathian*, who was considered distant from humans." (para 3)

> Accounts from an earlier Mizo pastor and a British officer stationed in Mizoram during the British occupation also indicate that the Mizo worship practice, known as *Sakhua*, was primarily directed towards the Guardian Spirit (*Khuavang*). (Zorinthara para 15)

In this patrilineal society dominated by men's authority over the Zawlbuk (bachelors' dormitory) and the Village Council, the spirit world was a contradiction, although the social hierarchy was male-dominated, the forces shaping fate (Khuanu) and the richness of the forest (Lasi) were female. The feminine spirits of the natural world are also venerated within the traditional Mizo (Sakhua) faith. Thus, in this oral and animistic framework, the divine feminine is delineated into two distinct aspects: the heavenly kindness of Khuanu (Mother of Nature) and the earthly allure of the Lasi (Nature Spirits). Unlike the Bodos iconographic style, the Mizo conception of the divine feminine was aniconic — acknowledged not through idols, but through relationships to the environment.

> For Ralte, the representation of God as a feminine figure served multiple purposes. Firstly, it offered a balance to the patriarchal representation of God (*Pathian*), allowing feminist theologians to relate more closely to God and Mother Earth. This inclusive image of God created a space for a deeper connection with the natural world. Secondly, the retrieval of the *Khuanu* concept was not seen as a departure from Christianity, but rather as an incorporation of the female divine within the Christian framework. (Zorinthara para 12)

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Mizo women did not hold a respectable position in the Sakua as it was believed that Mizo 'women did not have any Sakhua as they had to follow whichever Sakhua their husbands followed'(Ralte 79). Women were generally considered feeble and evil depicted through the characters of Hmuichukchuriduninu, and Phung. On the contrary there were benevolent character like the Khauzingnu that existed before the formation of the world and was considered a benevolent deity who created the earth and all that was around it (Ralte 80).

Before the arrival of the Missionaries, the Mizo's beliefs centred around a spirit called 'Khuanu' meaning the one who give blessing. (Guite 365). Khuanu, which translates to 'mother of nature', is depicted as a benevolent creator and guardian—often viewed as the companion of the supreme deity Pathian—whose blessings ensure fertility, tranquility, and ecological balance (Chatterjee 62–63). As Lalsangkima Pachuau observes, this theological structure was spatial, so that spirits were linked to locations — for example, caves, trees, and mountains, and that form of geography was infused with spirituality (Pachuau 23). Lasi are deities of the forest, or guardians of hunting, being venerated for making successful hunting feasible and for protecting the forest's health (Lalthangliana 118–20). This belief is an offshoot of the ecological contexts of upland Mizo life, which has historically relied on shifting agriculture, livestock farming, and forest resources. Khuanu, the most important, yet often vague, feminine figure. From etymologically representing nature / village / cosmos (Khua) and mother (Nu), she personifies the nurturing side of the universe. While the male god Pathian was often thought of as a distant creator requiring little appeasement, Khuanu was the fundamental sustainer of life. This is further complicated by the Mizo theologian T. Vanlaltlani, who argues that according to traditional Mizo spirituality, 'Khuanu blesses and protects and is in particular connected with protecting the vulnerable, such as orphans and widows, a mechanism standing in contrast to the harshness of tribal life' (Vanlaltlani 45). She was 'the creator of fate.' In Mizo oral traditions a long life or a fortunate escape was often ascribed to Khuanu samsuih (the knot made by Khuanu), suggesting that she dictated the threads of human fate. She represented the village's internal order — feeding and life and safety.

If *Khuanu* represented cosmic safety, the Lasi stood for the allure and danger of the wild. The Lasi are described in folklore as female spirits of exceptional beauty who inhabited the rocks, caves, and deep forests—territories crucial to a hunting-gathering society. The most famous of these figures is *Chawngtinleri*, the Queen of the Lasi, who is believed to have controlled the movement of wild animals. The Lasi presided over the *Ramsial* (wild mithuns) and other game. In Mizo folklore, a hunter's success was not merely a matter of proficiency; it was also about spiritual seduction, as he had to please the Lasi to be granted a catch.

> … a hunter can only succeed in his hunting endeavors when this spirit enters his heart (Chatterjee, 1979). The phenomena of male hunters being possessed by female spirits creates a compelling paradox in this patriarchal setting where hunting prowess was traditionally linked with masculinity. This leads to deeper investigation of the intricate interplay of genders and their cultural and spiritual ramifications. (Sarkar 218).

The Pasaltha (hero/hunter) would enter a trance-like state to commune with her, a relationship often described in romantic or even erotic terms.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

> The story of Thasiama and the Lasis, while entertaining, carries several implications, particularly regarding the portrayal of the Lasis. The spirits are depicted as beautiful and powerful, capable of influencing hunting success. (Sarkar 219)

Margaret Zama argues that this relationship is illustrative of a different worldview where 'the feminine was the gatekeeper of the forest's resources, needing negotiation and respect rather than domination' (52). The Lasi therefore represent the untamed feminine—independent, capricious, and essential for the supply of meat and sustenance in the unforgiving hill landscape. The presence of a female spirit next to the male hunter also represents the necessity of harmony and balance in the hunting process bringing in a respectful and harmonious interplay between masculine and feminine energy (Sarkar 219).

> The presence of a female in the hunting scene kind of contradicts 'Man the Hunter' (Lee and Devore, 1968) and 'Women the Gatherer' (Dahlberg, 1983) model put forth in social anthropology, archaeology, biology, and students of human evolution. (219)

Khuanu and the Lasi produce a theology in which the feminine figures as the compassionate mother of the village, at the same time as the wild mistress of the forest, reflecting the entire Mizo existence before the arrival of Christianity. As ecofeminist theorists such as Vandana Shiva and Rosemary Radford Ruether would anticipate, women—normally major caretakers and small-scale farmers—incorporate ecological wisdom and survival strategies in feminine sacred imagery (Shiva 41; Ruether 97). In practice, Mizos traditionally made prayers and sacrifices, including female animals like piglets, to Lasi to ensure abundance and successful hunting (Lalthangliana 121). Although the ritual particulars may vary among clans and regions, the underlying symbolic logic is the same: Khuanu and Lasi are maternal representations of the land that connect human survival and environmental sustainability.

In symbolic terms, Khuanu and Lasi resemble and complement feminist theological perspectives. The earth-mother role of Khuanu exemplifies the fundamental idea that the divine feminine embodies creation itself, rather than being external to it (Ruether 91; Luce Irigaray 26). The phrase 'mother of nature' pushes against monotheistic ideas of transcendence by rooting divinity in the organic process rather than placing it outside. As guardians of the forest ecosystem, Lasi represent the autonomy and wisdom of the natural world, echoed in Sallie McFague's 'body of God' metaphor where each entity represents a manifestation of the divine (McFague 75). Even in modern-day Mizoram, where Sakhua traditions have been sidelined, the persisting veneration for these deities speaks to tribal theology that sees women and nature as interdependent sources of sustenance. A comprehensive comparative study of indigenous female deities situates Bodo Mainao in the context of world goddess beliefs alongside Mizo Khuanu and Lasi. Upon examination, these goddess figures, alongside figures of various mythology from Greek, Roman, Sumerian, Celtic, Japanese, and Egyptian myth, reveal similar symbolic commonalities that have links between femininity, fertility, and ecological agency (Eisler 77–80; Gadon 25–28). Goddesses, in the various traditions, often represent the divine forces generating the earth as well as the fruits of agriculture and ethical constraints to human interaction with nature; their roles in

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

myth can be seen in figures like Demeter and Ceres in Greco-Roman mythology, Inanna/Ishtar in Mesopotamia, Brigid in Celtic mythology, Amaterasu in Japan, and Isis in Egypt (Gimbutas 112–15; Gadon 41–44).

Within this comparative frame, *Mainao's* association with rice, household wealth, and communal festivals aligns her with agrarian mother-goddesses who sacralize food production and women's labour, while *Khuanu's* identity as 'mother of nature' reflects a cosmology in which divinity is immanent in land and life rather than transcendent and abstract (Ruether 91–97). *Lasi*, as guardians of forests and hunting success, parallel global goddess figures who govern wilderness and non-human life, reinforcing the idea that ecological balance depends on respectful reciprocity rather than domination (McFague 75–84).

By drawing these parallels, the study demonstrates that Bodo and Mizo feminine deities are not isolated or 'local' curiosities but participate in a trans-cultural sacred grammar that integrates gender, ecology, and community. Such a perspective contributes to ecofeminist scholarship by affirming that women's ritual practices and environmental ethics are central to religious meaning-making (Shiva xiv–xv, 41). It also advances indigenous theology by recognising tribal cosmologies as sophisticated systems of ecological knowledge, while enriching comparative religion through the inclusion of South Asian indigenous traditions within global goddess discourse.

## VI. CONCLUSION

A comparative perspective reveals that Bodo Mainao and Mizo Khuanu and Lasi are far more than ethnographic curiosities; they are colourful symbols connecting indigenous theology and ecofeminist thought. Centering women's ritual activities, collective values, and ecological ethics within cosmology, these traditions illustrate gendered perspectives where the sacred feminine is bound up with land, labor, and community (Endle 55; Chatterjee 64). Bodo and Mizo, ecofeminist and symbolic feminist theories reflect based on why these goddesses hold enduring cultural influence. In this regard, the divine feminine is not a passive object of love, but rather life itself — rice, water, forest — respected and preserved as a gift to be paid for in the voices, bodies and rituals of women. Tribal feminist theology argues that such views are highly contextual and result from distinct subsistence and social types. Anthropology also reveals their social function: the worship of goddesses in agricultural societies encourages sustainability, reciprocity and ecological moderation. Mainao, Khuanu, and Lasi as sacred figures represent and articulate ecological insights and feminine autonomy, grounding theoretical constructs of feminism in real life experiences of indigenous lifetimes. In sharp contrast to the household Mainao, the Mizo Lasi becomes the untamed feminine strength of the lofty hills. Lasi are not gods to be laid to rest on an altar; the Lasi are spirits of stone, cave and beings to be met, revered and cherished. The engagement with the Lasi happens when one hunts individual members of the deep forest — not through the mediation of a priest (Puithiam) in a village ritual. The story of Chawngtinleri, the

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Queen of Lasi, evokes a transaction in which the spirit pays the hunter his reward for his attempts (Zama 50), as well as whether he earns loyalty through success or love. Bodo involvement with the divine feminine is liturgical (prayers/choruses) while Mizo involvement is narrative (stories/dreams). A hunter does not "pray" to a Lasi; rather he achieves a dreaming or trance state, in which the Lasi manifests itself as a mysterious maiden. The Lasi appears beyond the Daipawn (the enclosure of the village). She inhabits the Ramhuai (feral spirits) domain. Introducing a Lasi to the village causes trouble, and bringing Mainao into the Bodo village ensures that they are in harmony. Because agriculture continues to be a central aspect of the Bodo identity, Mainao thrives today. The ritual easily assimilates into modern Hinduism (sanskritization), meaning Mainao is synonymous with Lakshmi. Khuanu and Lasi have decayed as a result; the lifestyle she led — hunting and animistic negotiation with the wild — has been eliminated largely, through modernization and a stricter Christian monotheism that demonized nature spirits. (Pachuau 112).

> Just as the Mizos acknowledged the lines on the soles of their feet, palms of their hands, joints and fingers as intricately crafted by the Spirit known as *Khuavang zai*, meaning 'cut by the *khuavang* Spirit, they also believed that the Earth's surface, as well as 'ravines, streams, hill ranges, gullies, valleys, and mountain ranges', were natural demarcations and boundaries prepared by *Khuavang*. With great reverence, they respected these natural delineations and regarded them as sacred markers. These natural demarcations also served a practical purpose, as they were used as lines of demarcation for the jurisdiction of the village chief. (Zorinthara para 23)

In stark contrast to the fast-paced urbanization and consumerist culture that often views land as a mere commodity, the Bodos and the Mizo ancestors drew their environmental ethics from their deep-rooted pneumatological cosmology.

Attributes associated with female deities—such as autonomy, fertility, domestic authority, benevolence, and destructive power—are mapped against the historically attested social roles of women in Bodo and Mizo societies. This analytical move draws on feminist anthropology and gender studies, which emphasize myth as a symbolic site where social power relations are encoded, reinforced, or contested (Ortner 72; Ruether 45). The contrast between Bodo social arrangements, often described as relatively egalitarian with matrilocal tendencies, and Mizo society's patriarchal and warrior-centric orientation provides a critical axis for comparison. The theoretical framework integrates myth–ritual theory, functionalist anthropology, and feminist ritual theory, allowing the divine feminine to be understood as an active, relational force embedded within everyday social practice rather than a distant theological construct. By emphasizing practice over doctrine and function over form, this combined methodology respects indigenous epistemologies and avoids imposing external classificatory models derived from classical or textual religious traditions. Ultimately, the Myth–Ritual Continuum Analysis enables the study to demonstrate that the divine feminine in Bodo and Mizo religions operates as a living principle that sustains ecological balance, social reproduction, and gendered cultural knowledge, thereby offering a practice-centered and culturally grounded framework for comparative study.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

**Works Cited**

Agarwal, Smita (2017). 'Ecocriticism and the Hungry Tide: Understanding Gendered Spaces in Amitav Ghosh's Novel', *The Atlantic Literary Review*,18:1.

Bandyopadhyay, Pradip Kumar (1983), *Leadership Pattern in Mizo Society: A Study of Four Mizo Villages,* Gauhati University:Assam.

Boro, Anil (2010), *Folk Literature of Bodos:Myths, Tales, and Ballads*, N.L. Publications, Assam.

Boro, Arun (2018), 'Women in Bodo Society.' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)* 7:3, pp. 23-26.

Brahma, Kameswar (1998), *A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Boros*. Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes.

Barooah, Jeuti (2004), *The Religion and Culture of the Bodos*. Spectrum Publications, India.

Bordoloi, Nabin Chandra (1991), *Bodo Samaj aru Sanskriti* [*Bodo Society and Culture*]. Bina Library.

Chakraborty, Paromita (2010), 'Bonbibi and the Gendered Space of the Sunderbans: An Ecocritical Reading of Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide', *Journal of South Asian Literature* 45:1.

Chhangte, Lallianzuali (2003), *Mizo Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Content and Meaning*. North-Eastern Hill University: India.

Choudhury, Prem(2017), 'The Role of the Doudini in Kherai: Gender and Spirit Possession in Bodo Ritual', *Indian Journal of Cultural Studies* 18:3, pp. 60–75.

Devi, Mahasweta (2002), *The Book of the Hunter*, Seagull Books.

Endle, Sidney (1911), *The Kacharis*. Macmillan and Co.: Germany.

Ghosh, Amitav (2004), *The Hungry Tide*. Harper Collins:India.

Goyary, Jibon (2021), 'The Emergence of Modern Bodo Literature: Themes, Identity, and the Influence of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha', *Literary Dynamics of Northeast India*, edited by A. C. Das, Spectrum Publications : India, pp. 110–25.

Hmar, Lalrinnunga (2017), 'Migration and Social Formation of the Mizo', Ph.D. Thesis, North-Eastern Hill University.

Hmingthanzuali, and Rekha Pande (2009), 'Women's Indigenous Knowledge and Relationship with Forests in Mizoram', *Asian Agri-History* 13:2.

Hounkpè, Armande, and Yekini Ibrahim (2024), 'Female Authority and Religious Symbolism in Ancient Rome and Greece', *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research*, 11:11.

Maisuangdibou, M. (2023), 'Methodological Issues in Tribal Theology', *The Tribal Bilateral Study*.

Irigaray, Luce (1985), *This Sex Which Is Not One,* trans. by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, Cornell University Press.

Kristeva, Julia (1982), *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* trans,. by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Lalmuana Guite (2020), 'National and Religious Identity of the Mizo with Special Reference to Mizoram Insurgency', *Humanities and Social Sciences 11:4, pp.355-60.*

Lalruanga (1984), 'A Study of Mizo Folk Literature', Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati University.

Lalsangpuii, R. (2023), 'Mizo Migration as Historical Imagination: Between Myth and Evidence', *Senhri Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 8:1, pp.10-22.

Lotha, Eyingbeni. (2024), 'A Tribal Feminist Reading of the Bible: An Ethical Perspective on Justice and Righteousness', *Ecumenical Review* 76:1, pp. 127-34.

McFague, Sallie (2018), 'Creation Is the Body of God', *Center for Action and Contemplation*, 19 February at https://cac.org/daily-meditations/creation-is-the-body-of-god-2018-02-19/.

Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva (1993), *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books.

Narzary, Biren (2018), 'The Cosmogonic Myths of the Bodo: A Study in Creation and the Divine Self', *Journal of Northeast Indian Cultures* 12:1, pp. 22–38.

Narzary, Hargouri, and Mahima Basumatary (2024), 'Mother Mainao: The Goddess of Wealth' *International Journal of Novel Research and Development* 9:12, pp. 216-20.

Ralte, Lalthansangi (2023), 'Mizo Myths and Folklore: A Posthumanist Study', *Literary Oracle* 7:2, pp.77-86.

Ramchiary, P. S.(2025), 'Exploration of Folkloric Elements, Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Bodo Poetry', *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences* 10:5, pp. 450–62.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford (1992), *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. Harper Collins: San Francisco.

Pachuau, Lalsangkima (2020), *Ethnic Identity and Christianity: A Socio-Historical and Missiological Study of Christianity in Northeast India*. Peter Lang.

Sarkar, Amrita (2025), 'Her Story in Stone: Women's Voices from the Landmark & Megalithic Culture of Mizoram, India', *Ancient Asia* 16: 1, pp. 217-25.

Saikia, Udoy S., et al. (2001), 'Culture, Religion and Reproductive Behaviour in Two Indigenous Communities of Northeastern India', *IUSSP General Population Conference,* pp.1-18.

Shiva, Vandana (1989), *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. Zed Books, Internet Archive at https://ia800301.us.archive.org/7/items/StayingAlive-English-VandanaShiva/Vandana-shiva-stayingAlive.pdf.

Singh, Jyoti (2025), 'A Critical Analysis of Inheritance Rights of Tribal Women with Special Reference to Khasi and Mizo Tribes of North East India', Ph.D. Thesis. Christ University.

Singhal, Neeti (2023), 'Myths & Legends from Northeast India', *Bikat Adventures*, 27 June 2023, at https://www.bikatadventures.com/home/blog/myths-and-legends-from-northeast-india.

ISSN: 3107-748X (Online)

Ruether, Rosemary Radford (1992), *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*. Harper SanFrancisco, at ttps://archive.org/details/gaiagodecofemini0000ruet_p5q2/page/n5/mode/2up

Zama, Margaret Ch. (2015), 'Mizo Folk Tales: A Study of the Oral Tradition', *Journal of Mizo Studies*, 4:2, pp. 45-58.

Zirsangliani, Grace (2004), 'Mizo Concept of God and Conversion', Ph.D. thesis, North-Eastern Hill University.

Zorinthara, Billy J.(2024), 'Spirit in Creation: Mizo Primal Cosmology and Its Implications for Anthropogenic Climate Change Concern', *Studies in World Christianity* 30:1, pp. 115–32.

Zote, Jacqueline (2015), 'Mythical Creatures from Mizo Legends' *Jacqueline Zote's Blog* at https://jacquelinezote.blogspot.com/2015/08/mythical-creatures-from-mizo-legends.html.