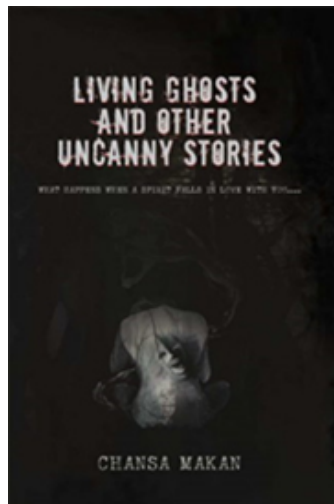


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Chetan

“Living Ghosts and Other Uncanny Stories” Chetan



***Living Ghosts and Other Uncanny Stories: What Happens When a Spirit Falls
 in Love with You |***
Collection of Short Stories | Chansa Makan |
Blue Rose Publishers, Delhi (2020) | ISBN: 978-93-90034-84-0 | pp 137 | ₹
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Haunted Tales from the Northeast

After listening to the interviews and lectures of Prof Richard Dawkins, I was skeptical about the existence of good angels and evil spirits. But my perception and staunch faith in science dwindled after reading *Living Ghosts and Other Uncanny Stories* (2020) – a collection of six short stories written by Chansa Makan, who has attempted to present the horrifying oral narratives passed on from one generation to another of the Tangkhul Naga community. As the author has mentioned in the introduction of the book, these are not just fictional stories but rather myths and legends of Tangkhul culture “well known to – and believed by many – in our society,” (Makan, 1) one can conjoin them with the tribe’s history and attempt to draw their parallel with Greek myths. ^

The book is unique in its compositional structure since each story could be broadly divided into two sections. The first section deals with a myth that functions as the foundation for the second one. In the first section, the author acquaints the readers with the myth itself by explaining its history and how it has become the source of truth and belief in the Tangkhul community. In the second section, the author shows the materialization of the myth; how people have fallen victim to goddesses and evil spirits in recent times; the experiences of victims, of their family members and of friends; and how the myth turns into reality with the victims dying or losing control of themselves.

The first story, "Kazeiram Kazang: Journey to Sheol," is a narrative in which a shaman undertakes a journey to the underworld to fetch the soul of Yarteo – the beloved son of the headman of Lungsang village. The author has minutely described the rites performed at the time of shaman's visit to the underworld, especially the family members who patiently anticipate the return of Yarteo.

The second story Zingtai Mansingla weaves around the life of Mansingla – a girl born to Khalengshang and Masowon after the blessing of the fairy Rong Ngayi. Mansingla falls in love with Vahei, and both of them are married. As Vahei begins his journey home with Mansingla, a storm engulfs the couple in which Mansingla is missed. Vahei searches for his wife, and after facing a plethora of troubles, he succeeds in his endeavors.

"Kashong Philava" is the third story narrated in a series that starts with the tale of two brothers and their love for the same woman and ends with the tale of Ayo whose life is saved from the goddess Philava. Makan has extensively described how the goddess of Kashong Philava who, after the death of her lover, looks for lovers among mortals. Ayo – a young man in Ukhrul – falls in love with Philava disguised as a beautiful woman. Gradually, Ayo's health deteriorates, and modern medicines have no impact on him. Oja Masophy, faithful to the god, saves Ayo from the trap of Philava.

The fourth story "Mi Khangayei" narrates the tale of how humans metamorphose into wild creatures after drinking water from a certain well and their encounter with people. The fifth tale deals with those people who are engaged in black magic known in the local language as *rai kazang* – some kinds of special powers that allow people of *rai* bloodline to send their unclean spirit into those people whom they love or detest. The author has given the nomenclature of living ghosts to such people. The last story talks about the blessings and curses of the goddess Meewo on people living in two villages separated from each other. The goddess Meewo blesses the villagers by giving a stone called *Shanglung*, and her curse is fallen on those who get another kind of stone called *Palung*.

The book features the accurate description of hills, towns, streets and other famous landmarks of the Ukhrul district in the state of Manipur and adjacent territories, enabling the readers, especially from the Tangkhul community, to remember their childhood when elders scared them with terrifying stories of goddesses and evil spirits. The extensive topographical details blur the gap between fiction and reality. Many readers must have walked on the described streets, climbed up the haunted hills and experienced the beauty of magical forests and smelled the hallucinating fragrances. Besides, Makan has added authenticity to the stories by supplementing them with the real names of victims and their family members along with their photographs. To facilitate the readers to internalize these stories, the author has incorporated paintings, artworks (depicting ceremonies and rituals) and photographs of hills, caves and forests.

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Although the stories fall within the genre of gothic fiction, they are the cultural

source of the Tangkhul community in which the readers get the glimpses of community's religious practices and rituals along with its past. In the stories, Makan has scattered the snippets of the Tangkhul community's history, particularly the British colonial period in India when the tribes proselytized into Christianity. The author has hinted at the division of the community into people following traditional practices, and the one converted into Christianity. Many believe that the conversion would infuriate tribal gods whose rage would have a catastrophic effect on the community.

The combination of fiction and facts in *Living Ghosts and Other Uncanny Stories* neither places it in the basket of fiction nor in factual records. It can only be categorized as an amalgamation of anecdotes and personal experiences of people from the Tangkhul community. The stories have unclear disjunctures acting as hurdles for the readers to distinguish between myths and their manifestation in the material world. Although the book encapsulates a glossary of terms for the readers to understand the local words, the readers will be baffled by the names of people and places primarily due to cultural alienation.

♣♣♣END♣♣♣



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