

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Representations of Class and Human Equality in K. Hminga's "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*": A Marxist Reading

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines K. Hminga's song "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" through the lens of Marxist literary criticism. The study explores how the song represents class distinctions, social inequality, and power relations within Mizo society. Drawing upon key Marxist concepts such as class struggle, ideology, false consciousness, and social hierarchy, the paper analyses the song's lyrics to demonstrate how they challenge discrimination based on wealth, social status, education, and institutional power. The study argues that the song advocates human dignity and equality while critiquing the tendency of privileged individuals to misuse their social position. Furthermore, the paper highlights how the song exposes the ideological structures that normalise inequality and encourage social division. By foregrounding the experiences of marginalised individuals and questioning hierarchical social relations, "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" functions as a form of social criticism that resonates with Marxist concerns regarding justice and equality. The paper concludes that the song serves not only as a cultural expression but also as a powerful medium for raising social awareness and encouraging critical reflection on contemporary Mizo society.

**Keywords:** Marxist criticism, class consciousness, ideology, social inequality, Mizo society, K. Hminga, Mizo song

## FULL RESEARCH PAPER

**Introduction**

Songs often serve as important cultural texts that reflect the social realities, values, and concerns of the communities from which they emerge. In Mizo society, contemporary songs frequently engage with issues of identity, morality, social relationships, and communal life. Among such songs, K. Hminga's "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" occupies a distinctive position due to its reflection on social hierarchy, human dignity, and the unequal treatment of individuals based on wealth, status, appearance, and social influence.

In several interviews, K. Hminga has explained that the song emerged from a combination of personal experiences, observations of society, and reflections accumulated throughout his life. He describes the creative process as an unexpected moment of inspiration through which broader social concerns found expression in the form of song. The songwriter further acknowledges that his reflections on inequality, privilege, and human relationships were shaped by his experiences and by his engagement with ideas concerning justice and equality. (Hminga, *Weekend Horn Interview* 2:45–4:53).

A significant source of inspiration for the song was the realisation that, despite the many differences among human beings, death ultimately reduces all distinctions in wealth, status, beauty, education, and social standing. K. Hminga recounts how the sight of two similar graves prompted him to reflect upon the temporary nature of social divisions and the futility of human attempts to elevate themselves above others. This realisation became central to the thematic foundation of "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*"

The song challenges attitudes of superiority and social discrimination that persist within society. It questions the tendency of individuals in positions of privilege to misuse their authority and to regard themselves as inherently superior to others. At the same time, it calls for mutual respect and recognition of shared humanity regardless of social or economic differences. Through its critique of social hierarchy and its affirmation of human equality, the song presents concerns that resonate strongly with Marxist literary criticism.

This paper therefore employs Marxist literary criticism as its theoretical framework to examine how "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" represents class relations, social inequality, ideology, and power structures within contemporary Mizo society. By analysing the song's lyrics and themes, the study seeks to demonstrate how it serves

as a form of social criticism, encouraging reflection on class consciousness, discrimination, and human dignity.

### **Theoretical Framework: Marxist Literary Criticism**

Marxist literary criticism is a critical approach derived from the philosophical, political, and economic ideas of Karl Marx. It examines literary texts in relation to social class, power structures, ideology, and economic conditions. Rather than focusing primarily on aesthetic value or artistic beauty, Marxist criticism seeks to understand how literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges the social realities of its time (Laldinmawia 283–84).

According to H. Laldinmawia, Marxist critics are particularly concerned with how literature represents human behaviour, social relations, and ideological formations. The approach seeks to reveal how literary texts reflect the values, conflicts, and material conditions of the societies in which they are produced (286). Consequently, literature is not viewed merely as an artistic creation but also as a cultural product shaped by historical and social forces.

A central concern of Marxist criticism is the concept of class. Karl Marx argues that society is divided into different social groups whose relationships are determined by economic power. In capitalist societies, the dominant class possesses wealth, resources, and institutional authority, while the working class provides labour but often lacks access to the benefits generated by its own work (Datta 268). This unequal distribution of power gives rise to social tension and class conflict, which Marx identifies as one of the driving forces of history.

Another important concept in Marxist theory is ideology. Ideology refers to the beliefs, values, and assumptions that shape people's understanding of society. According to Marxist thinkers, dominant social groups often use institutions such as religion, education, politics, and culture to present existing inequalities as natural and inevitable. As a result, subordinate groups may accept their disadvantaged position without recognising the structures that contribute to their oppression. Marx describes this condition as false consciousness, a situation in which individuals fail to perceive the actual causes of their social and economic circumstances (Dustin 171).

Marxist theory also distinguishes between the concepts of base and superstructure. The economic base consists of the material conditions of society, including labour and production, while the superstructure includes political institutions, religious beliefs, legal systems, and cultural practices. Marx argues that the economic base shapes the superstructure while also maintaining existing power

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relations (Dustin 162–63). This relationship provides an important framework for understanding how social inequalities are reproduced through cultural and ideological mechanisms.

Marxist criticism seeks to expose systems of domination and inequality while advocating a more equitable social order. Its emphasis on class consciousness, ideology, and power relations makes it a useful framework for analysing literary texts that address social injustice and discrimination. Since K. Hminga's *"Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?"* reflects on social hierarchy, privilege, and the unequal treatment of individuals, Marxist literary criticism offers an appropriate theoretical lens for examining the song's representation of contemporary Mizo society.

### Research Objectives

1. The present study seeks to examine K. Hminga's *"Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?"* through the lens of Marxist literary criticism. The specific objectives of the study are:
2. To analyse the representation of class hierarchy and social inequality in *"Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?"*.
3. To examine how the song reflects Marxist concepts such as class struggle, ideology, false consciousness, and power relations.
4. To investigate how the song critiques discrimination based on wealth, social status, education, and institutional authority.
6. To explore how the song promotes human dignity, equality, and social consciousness within contemporary Mizo society.
6. To evaluate the significance of popular music as a medium for social criticism and cultural reflection.

### **"Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?" from a Marxist Perspective: Class Hierarchy and Social Status**

One of the central concerns of K. Hminga's *"Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?"* is the issue of social hierarchy and the tendency of individuals to evaluate others based on wealth, education, occupation, social standing, and physical appearance. Through its lyrics, the song challenges the assumption that social status determines human worth and questions the legitimacy of discriminatory attitudes that arise from such distinctions.

The opening section of the song emphasises the unstable nature of social positions. It suggests that individuals' circumstances may change over time and that

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no one occupies a permanent position of superiority or inferiority. As Ruataroyte observes, the song reminds listeners that no individual is too insignificant to rise in status and no individual is too powerful to experience decline (Ruataroyte04). This perspective challenges hierarchical social structures by emphasising the shared vulnerability of all human beings.

From a Marxist perspective, such observations can be understood as a critique of rigid class distinctions. Marxist criticism seeks to expose the artificial divisions that separate individuals into categories of superiority and inferiority. Rather than accepting social inequality as natural, Marxist theory encourages critical reflection on the structures that produce and maintain such divisions (Laldinmawia 286). K. Hminga's song similarly questions the legitimacy of social hierarchies and promotes a vision of human equality that transcends economic and social differences.

The song is particularly critical of individuals who use education, social influence, religious authority, or economic privilege as instruments of domination. K. Hminga portrays those who conceal their own shortcomings while magnifying the faults of others. Such individuals use their social status to assert superiority over those perceived as socially inferior. Within a Marxist framework, these privileged groups may be compared to the bourgeoisie, who occupy positions of influence and authority. At the same time, those subjected to discrimination resemble the proletariat, whose voices are often marginalised within dominant social structures.

The song further suggests that unequal access to opportunities contributes to social division. Individuals possessing influence and institutional power are often able to secure advantages that remain inaccessible to others. Such disparities generate resentment, frustration, and conflict, thereby reinforcing class divisions within society. Marxist criticism identifies this phenomenon as a manifestation of class struggle, a condition arising from unequal distributions of power and resources.

By exposing the misuse of privilege and criticising attitudes of superiority, "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" challenges listeners to reconsider the values upon which social status is constructed. The song ultimately argues that human worth cannot be measured by wealth, education, occupation, or social position. Instead, it emphasises the fundamental equality shared by all individuals regardless of their location within society's hierarchical structures.

### **Ideology and False Consciousness**

A significant Marxist dimension of "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" lies in its critique of social attitudes that normalise inequality and encourage unquestioning acceptance of

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hierarchical structures. Marxist critics describe such attitudes as manifestations of ideology, a system of beliefs and values that shapes how individuals understand themselves and the society in which they live. According to Marxist theory, ideology often functions to conceal social inequalities and legitimise the dominance of privileged groups (Dustin 171).

The song suggests that individuals in positions of authority often command respect not for their moral integrity but for their social status, educational achievements, economic resources, or institutional influence. As a result, society often measures human worth by external markers of success rather than by personal character. This tendency is reflected in the lyrics: *"Inthiamna hriam khan mi a hliam / In vanneih a siam in rawnkai in chang leh si"* (lines 10–11).

These lines criticise those who use education, privilege, or professional success as instruments of social domination. Rather than employing their knowledge for the collective good, such individuals may use their advantages to elevate themselves above others. The song therefore exposes the unequal power relations that operate beneath seemingly respectable social institutions.

Marxist theory argues that dominant groups maintain their authority by persuading subordinate groups to accept existing social arrangements as natural and inevitable. Marx refers to this condition as false consciousness, a situation in which individuals fail to recognise the structural causes of their oppression (Dustin 171). The song reflects a similar concern by questioning why people continue to admire and obey those who misuse their positions of authority. It challenges listeners to examine the assumptions that lead them to equate social status with moral superiority.

The song's relevance becomes particularly apparent when considered in relation to political, educational, and religious institutions. Individuals who occupy influential positions within these institutions often enjoy a degree of public trust and respect. However, the song warns that such authority can be misused when power becomes a means of exclusion, discrimination, or self-promotion. Through this critique, K. Hminga draws attention to the ideological mechanisms through which inequality is reproduced and sustained within society.

The song suggests that social divisions are not maintained solely by those in positions of power. They are also reinforced when ordinary individuals internalise discriminatory values and participate in practices that privilege some groups while marginalising others. In this sense, *"Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?"* functions as a call for critical self-reflection. It encourages listeners to question inherited assumptions about status,

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prestige, and social worth, thereby promoting a greater awareness of the ideological forces that shape everyday social relations. Viewed through a Marxist lens, the song can therefore be interpreted as an attempt to challenge false consciousness and foster class consciousness. By exposing the contradictions embedded within social hierarchies, K. Hminga invites listeners to recognise the shared humanity that transcends distinctions of wealth, education, occupation, and social position.

### **Equality, Human Dignity, and the Symbolism of Death**

One of the most significant themes in "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" is that all human beings ultimately share the same fate, regardless of their social position. Throughout the song, K. Hminga challenges the distinctions that society creates based on wealth, education, beauty, occupation, and social status. These differences, though influential during one's lifetime, are presented as temporary and ultimately insignificant in the face of mortality.

The inspiration for this idea can be traced to K. Hminga's observation of two similar graves. In an interview, he recalls seeing two tombs that appeared identical despite belonging to individuals of different social backgrounds and statuses. This experience led him to reflect upon the reality that death erases many of the distinctions that people use to separate themselves from one another (Hminga 7:55–8:16). This realisation forms the philosophical foundation of the song. It is reflected in its title, "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" ("Who Can Differentiate?").

The lyrics repeatedly question the legitimacy of social discrimination and human arrogance. Particularly significant are the lines: "Thihna hmaah ang khata kun za t̃heuh tur hi, Tu nge inthlei thei?" (lines 26–27). These lines emphasise that all human beings are destined for the same end. From a Marxist perspective, such an idea challenges hierarchical structures that privilege certain classes over others. Marxist criticism rejects the notion that wealth, social status, or institutional authority inherently make one individual superior to another. Instead, it advocates recognising the shared humanity that unites all members of society.

The song further develops this idea through its portrayal of individuals who are often marginalised because of poverty, limited education, or social disadvantage. Rather than depicting such individuals as inferior, K. Hminga emphasises their intrinsic worth and dignity. The lyrics suggest that human value cannot be determined by material possessions or social prestige but must instead be understood in relation to one's humanity. This perspective aligns closely with Marxist concerns regarding social equality and the dignity of ordinary people.

Interestingly, the song also incorporates a moral and spiritual dimension. The lyrics imply that every individual possesses value because all human beings are created equal. While this perspective emerges from a Christian worldview, it does not contradict the song's broader critique of social inequality. Instead, it reinforces the argument that discrimination based on external differences lacks moral justification.

By invoking the image of death as the ultimate equaliser, "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" undermines the foundations upon which social superiority is often constructed. Wealth, status, beauty, and influence are revealed to be temporary conditions rather than permanent markers of human value. Consequently, the song encourages listeners to reject discriminatory attitudes and to embrace a more inclusive understanding of human dignity and equality.

Through its reflection on mortality, social hierarchy, and human worth, the song advances a powerful critique of inequality. The symbolism of death serves not merely as a reminder of human finitude but also as an argument for recognising the fundamental equality among all people, regardless of class or status.

## **Conclusion**

This study has examined K. Hminga's "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" through the lens of Marxist literary criticism to explore the song's representation of class relations, social inequality, and human dignity in contemporary Mizo society. The analysis demonstrates that the song functions as more than a musical composition; it serves as a form of social commentary that challenges discriminatory attitudes based on wealth, education, social status, physical appearance, and institutional authority.

Through its critique of privilege and its concern for marginalised individuals, the song exposes the unequal power relations that continue to shape social life. The analysis reveals that the lyrics engage with key Marxist concepts, including class hierarchy, class struggle, ideology, false consciousness, and the relationship between power and social inequality. By drawing attention to how authority and privilege can be misused, K. Hminga encourages listeners to question the social structures that normalise discrimination and exclusion.

A particularly significant aspect of the song is its emphasis on the shared humanity of all individuals. The recurring reminder that all human beings ultimately face the same fate serves as a powerful challenge to social arrogance and class-based prejudice. The symbolism of death functions as an equalising force that undermines artificial distinctions of status and privilege. In doing so, the song promotes values of humility, mutual respect, and social equality.

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The study further demonstrates that literary and musical texts can serve as important sites of social criticism. Although "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" emerges from a specific Mizo cultural context, its concerns regarding inequality, dignity, and justice possess broader social relevance. The song's critique of discrimination and its affirmation of human worth resonate with Marxist concerns about creating a more equitable society. K. Hminga's "*Tu Nge Inthlei Thei?*" may be understood as a culturally significant text that challenges hierarchical social structures and advocates a more inclusive understanding of human value. Through its engagement with questions of class, power, and equality, the song demonstrates how popular music can become an effective medium for social reflection and critical awareness.

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