

**ETHNICITY AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN  
MANIPUR: THE CASE OF ZO TRIBES IN  
CHURACHANDPUR DISTRICT**

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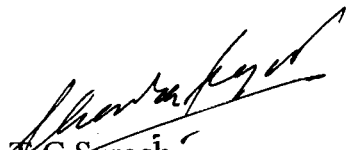
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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Ethnicity and Political Mobilization in Manipur: The Case of ZO Tribes in Churachandpur District**” submitted by **H N Muanlal** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is his own work. The dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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*To My Parents*

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*List of Abbreviations:*

ADCs	-Autonomous District Councils
ALZOSA	-All Zomi Students' Association
AMSU	-All Manipur Students' Union
ANSAM	-All Naga Students' Association Manipur
ATSUM	-All Tribal Students Union Manipur
CYMA	-Central Young Mizo Association
ECC	-Evangelical Convention Church
GNO	-Guite National Organization
GPC	-Gangte People Council
GTU	-Gangte Tribes' Union
HNU	-Hmar National Union
KIM	-Kuki Innpì Manipur
KNA	-Kuki National Assembly
KNF	-Kuki National Front
KNO	-Kuki National Organization
KNU	-Khulmi National Union
KSO	-Kuki Students' Organization
MC	-Mizo Convention
MCC	-Manipur Christian Convention
MDC	-Municipal Development Council
MHU	-Manipur Hills Union
MLA	-Members of Legislative Assembly
MLR&LR	-Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act
MPP	-Manipur Peoples' Party
MSCP	-Manipur State Congress Party
NEIGM	-North East India General Mission
NNP	-Naga National Party
NGOs	-Non Governmental Organizations
NMHM	-Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha

NMM	-Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha
NSCN (IM)	-National Socialist Council of Nagaland ( Isac-Muivah)
PMYL	-Pan Manipuri Youth League
PNC	-Paite National Council
SNC	-Simte National Council
TCU	-Tiddim-Chin Union
TNL	-Tangkhul Naga Long
TKPM	-Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission
UJO	-United Jou Organization
UNC	-United Naga Council
UNHRC	-United Nations Human Rights Commission
VNO	-Vaiphei National Organization
YMA	-Young Mizo Association
ZNC	-Zomi National Congress
ZORO	-Zo Re-unification Organization
ZRO	-Zomi Re-unification Organization
ZRA	-Zomi Revolutionary Army
ZSF	-Zomi Students' Federation
ZU	-Zeliangrong Union



## Chapter I

### **Introduction**

Manipur was declared an independent country under the Treaty of Yandaboo which was concluded on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1826. However, Manipur lost her independence and sovereign existence after the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891. The hill tribes of Manipur were, nevertheless, excluded from the general administration of the state. It was only in the post-independence period that the hill men and the plainsman came under the common administration but with safeguards provided under the Manipur State Hill People (Administration) Regulation, 1947.

The state of Manipur lies in the extreme North East corner of India. It has two distinct geographical regions: hill and valley. The Hill Areas, inhabited by the tribal, cover five of the nine districts contributing barely 41.16% of the state population (2001 census) and accounts for 89.98% of the total geographical areas whereas the Plain Areas, occupied by the Meitei, is only 11% of the state's area but accounts for 59% of the people. The 33 (thirty- three) recognized tribes of the state have closer anthropological and cultural links with their cognate tribes living across the intra and inter state boundaries than the people of the valley. In spite of the small size of the population, the hill areas of Manipur have geopolitical significance because, geographically, it encircles the plain areas and politically, it has Autonomous District Councils (ADCs).

It is true that the modern institution such as schools, market, Co-operative society, District Council, political parties have come to be slowly established in the tribal areas. However the degrees in which these institutions have been integrated into the village social structure vary from place to place. The assumption is that leaders who are recipient of the new ideas will also bring rest of the people into its fold. It is important to examine the pattern of interaction between the traditional socio-political setting and modern political structures in the tribal areas.

In fact there is a growing trend in the tribal areas towards modification of the traditional structure by the modern one and the nature of their responses naturally vary from place to place. So it is important to look into how tribal view democratic/competitive politics in general and their attitude towards election in general or District Council and others socio-economic and political institutions in particular. It is also important to examine various arenas of politics in which the tribal participate.

The general impression is that there is a considerable impact of political unification of the tribal areas on the political culture and value system of the people. The idea here is that unless and until tribal leaders do not mobilize their community towards the new institutions and processes all efforts of the administration will remain skin-deep. In this context the point is to analyze the relationship between the tribes and the democratic politics in our country.

The difference introduced in the tribal systems during the pre-independence era and consolidation of the same in the post-independence India, has sharpened the forms, the bases and the structure of the tribes movement. It becomes sharp when the discontentment is high and the political systems do not encourage the legitimate mobilization to ventilate the grievances of the masses.

The structure of unequal/under-development in the countryside, in the colonial as well as in the post colonial period, was an important context of the tribal movement. After independence, the Government of India has introduced democratic political set up with ideals of the "welfare economy" with a special affirmative policies for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and, the Backward Classes.<sup>1</sup> But the special policy has helped the tribes and backward communities very little. The majority still suffer from economic deprivation and social oppression. Both in the colonial and post colonial period, the genesis of various tribal movements seems to have occurred under the condition of relative deprivation and social oppression. The mobilization was founded either on primordial sentiments like ethnicity, religion, language on the proletarian

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<sup>1</sup> Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in India*, 1974. pp.6-25.

ideals.<sup>2</sup> In North East India, however, those groups which evoke tribal movements and conflicts may not necessarily be of primordial sentiments, although it can be one of the many factors that play a part in it.

#### RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES:

Churachandpur is a predominantly tribal district like any other hill district in Manipur. According to 1991 census, the tribal population, as already mentioned above, constitutes 41.16 percent of the total population of Manipur. It is economically backward with almost no industry worth its name and no irrigation which is typical of this part of the plain areas of Manipur. Naturally most of its inhabitants are poor. But their condition has not been so deplorable as to cause its name to be bracketed with those which has synonymous to starvation and drought in the popular perception. Nor had anything happened in Churachandpur to generate much media attention flattering or otherwise until about a few years ago (1997, June). It was around that time a placid and obscure place became the scene of violent confrontation between two communities, occupying the lower strata in the traditional social hierarchy.

Violence among the different tribes groups in Churachandpur district of Manipur stands unparalleled in the history of contemporary Manipur. For an instance, when the state was going through ethnic feuds like the Kuki-Naga conflicts (1992) which affect most of the districts and the neighbouring states, Churachandpur district remained calm although its population consists of all the ethnic groups. The 1997 Conflict (Kuki-Zomi) was one of the rarest incidences of internal contradiction between these oppressed tribal group hitherto noted for the combined struggle to achieve just future against the dominating socio-political structure (For example, the Kuki Rebellion 1917-19 which is also locally called as Zo Gal). The present case becomes all the more significant in the sense that in this region the relation between the people under the name Kukis and Zomis was historically peaceful and good. It has to be noted that they both belong to the Chin-

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<sup>2</sup> K N Sharma, Jharkhand Movement in Bihar in *EPW*, 10Jan1976. pp.36-45

Kuki-Lushai (ZO) group of family. But the (1997, ethnic conflict) events, has threatened to shatter the tranquility of the region.

The issue of conflict between these two ethnic groups is of great importance because until recently these two groups of the social matrix have been treated as a single block by both their traditional elite as well as political parties. This has been amply manifested in the Hills versus the Plain dichotomy. There is a fact that these tribes have many other reasons to consider other than the common grounds of cultural, social and linguistic bases in determining their ethnic affiliations. It has to be noted that within this distinct groups, there is question of identity difference. This group is referred to as *Kuki*, *Chin* and *Lushai*. The same term Kuki was applied to the tribes found in the present Mizoram and the Chin state of Burma (Myanmar). The term was also applied to some tribes of Manipur. Some authors intend to say that the tribes of Manipur other than the Nagas are generally referred to as Kuki. They are further classified as New Kuki and Old Kuki in the Indian context. In Burma, in the Chin Hills, they were known as Chin. Presently, as a matter of convention, the Thadou speakers continue to accept Kuki as their name. The other groups, such as Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Zou, Simte etc., who were supposedly outwardly to accept the term Kuki disown themselves from the term. This new type of relationship is not conducive to forge unity among themselves as deep-rooted fear and mistrust appears to persist between them. As such the problem of “ethnic divides” is not between the traditional lines of the Meitei versus Hillmen or Meitei versus Naga or Meitei versus Kukis. Rather the emergent trend is between the one-time “Kuki” groups of tribes.<sup>3</sup> However the conflict between the two sub-groups is emerging as a significant reality and the proposed study intends to focus and explain it.

There has been a problem or failure to distinguish between types of ethnic relationships. There has been a sort of assumptions that the ethnic feuds among different Zo ethnic groups are necessarily the relations between subordinates and dominant groups. This concept is viable when it comes to a relationship between the majority ethnic groups

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<sup>3</sup> as in R.K. Ranjit Singh, *Ethnic Movements of the Small Tribes of Manipur: A Preliminary Survey* in Joshua C Thomas.,R. Gopalakrishnan, ,R.K. Ranjan Singh, (ed.) *Constraints in Development of Manipur*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2001. p.3

living in the plains and the tribes in the hill areas of Manipur. But the relations of the many Zo ethnic groups cannot be termed or described specifically as relationships between superior-subordinate.

There is also an assumption that because of scarce resources in every field, different Zo ethnic or tribal groups are compelled to assert themselves as distinct ethnic or tribal groups. These do not, however, explain why they are led to perceive and organize themselves along ethnic lines, rather than on other lines, such as social class.

There also comes the questions that a common religion or a common language are the major factors that binds people together and that its absence is what pulls people apart. However, as far as all the Zo ethnic groups are concerned in this context, the diversity or differences are few or nil.

## OBJECTIVES

A study conducted prior to the conflict clearly showed the palpable tensions between the ethnic group based on Zomis and Kukis. This raises few very important questions, what was the cause of tension between the Kukis and Zomis? What are the socio-economic contexts of the conflict? What was the pattern of mobilization during this period? How can this conflict be interpreted? This study will make a modest attempt to answer some of these questions.

### *Brief survey of literature:*

Ethnic conflicts and violence in Northeast India have been explained using both primordial and instrumental lenses. Sections of scholars have pointed to fundamental cultural differences between people in the region and those from 'mainland India'. This incompatibility has motivated them to question the 'unequal' and 'forced' integration of

the Northeast region into the Indian 'mainstream'.<sup>4</sup> Historians like Sanajaoba trace the problem to the forced integration of Manipur into India and the subsequent development of master-subject relationship between the two, reinforced by a colonial pattern of political, economic and cultural dominance.<sup>5</sup> They argue that this seriously undermined the integrity of the state and led to frustrations that fed into ethnic conflicts. Others have tended to see things from an instrumental perspective. They have pointed to rapid modernization as the explanation for the region's instability.<sup>6</sup> Some writers point to the unequal power structure and intra-community competition over resources to account for the region's many conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Others have emphasized the class bases of these conflicts, pointing to the clash between the 'new class' and the traditional elite.<sup>8</sup> Baruah explains in North East's "durable disorder" that much of the pathology in the region is the outcome of the central state's weakness to monopolize security, its disembeddedness from society and its reliance on militarist tactics to respond to challenges posed by militias in the region. The central state's counter-insurgency policy in the region is accompanied by a tolerance for suspension of the rule of law, authoritarianism and large-scale leakages of development funds. This creates opportunities for insurgent dividends. Baruah claims that public policies promoting self-governance for particular communities contribute to the disorder. They encourage competitive mobilization by other groups not so privileged, resulting to sustained conflicts.<sup>9</sup>

Jackson makes terminological distinction between *ethnic category*, *ethnic group* and *ethno-nation*. *Ethnic category* signifies persons of the same social and cultural characteristics that identify them as members of a recognizable social category. Characteristics may include race, religion, colour, customs, language, and geographical origin. Thus, the emphasis is on primordial characteristics. *Ethnic groups* indicate an

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<sup>4</sup> P.S. Dutta, 'Roots of Insurgency', *Seminar* 366, Northeast Special Number February 1990.

<sup>5</sup> N. Sanajaoba, *Manipur Past and Present*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1998. see also Lokendra Arambam, 'Language, Identities and Crises in Manipur's Civilisation', *Imphal Free Press*, Special Edition: Selected Writing on Issues of Identity, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> See B.P. Singh, *The Problem of Change: A Study of North East India*, New Delhi: OUP, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> U.A. Shimray, "Socio-Political Unrest in the Region Called Northeast India", *EPW*, 16 October 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Fernandez, 'Conflicts in NE India: A Historical Perspective', *EPW*, 18 December 1999, pp.3579-3582; A. Bimol Akoijam, 'How History Repeats Itself', *EPW*, 28 July 2001. pp.2807-2812.

<sup>9</sup> Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, New Delhi: OUP, 2005. pp.3-27.

ethnic category that has acquired additional characteristics of identity and organization. Identity means to value one's membership in an ethnic category. Ethno nation arises when an ethnic group aspires an interest in public authority which may be constitutional status of special rights, provincial autonomy, and not outright sovereignty. The process by which ethnic category may be awakened and transformed into ethnic group or ethno nation is called by Jackson as 'ethnic mobilization'.<sup>10</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethnicity plays a significant role in directing the course of North East Indian politics with ethnic mobilization assuming various forms including division along linguistic traditional, tribal and religious lines. An ethnic group can be defined as a historically formed aggregate of people having real or imaginary association with specific territory, a shared cluster of belief and value connotes its distinctiveness in relation to similar groups and recognized as such by others.<sup>11</sup>

According to De Vos, Ethnicity is a sense of ethnic identity consisting of the 'subjective, symbolic and emblematic use' by 'a group of people...of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups'.<sup>12</sup>

Development of ethnicity based assertions has their origin in the inequalities in distribution of available resources, social benefits and opportunities between distinct ethnic groups. Ethnic feeling is provoked by a sense of being deprived and excluded. It involves the articulation of social, economic and political rights for the members of the groups or for the groups as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Brass further points out that ethnic consciousness

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<sup>10</sup> R.H. Jackson, Ethnicity, in Giovanni Sartori (ed.) *Social Science Concepts*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Urmila Phadnis, *Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, p.14.

<sup>12</sup> De Vos' quotation cited in Paul Brass's *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 1991. p.19.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, pp.30-35.

take the form of political consciousness only when the ethnic leaders mediate between the state and the ethnic group.

Ethnicity is basically a device for the pursuit of collective shared objectives. Ethnic mobilization in this context is best understood as a form of collective action, using emotional affinity to strengthen their claims on the developmental resource of the areas.<sup>14</sup>

Ethnic competition thus emerges where there exist a certain degree of economic and political development. Dominant groups use ethnic mobilization to consolidate their positions and to counter threats from opposing groups while emerging communities appeal to ethnic sentiment to compete for a greater access to economic resources and political power. Such competition will assume the shape of conflict where structural inequalities exist and where weaker or minority ethnic groups are economically exploited.

It is however important to note that ethnic conflict can also arise as a result of deliberate manipulation of ethnic differences by the dominant community from outside to effect division within forces threatening its status quo.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, leadership can deliberately provoke ethnic conflict by emphasizing ethnic differences and cleavages so as to mobilize the particular community against potential rivals. This tactic is often resorted to in competitive democracy, where ethnic politicization is used as a method of attaining electoral support.<sup>16</sup>

The kind of consciousness of ethnicity which gives rise to ethnic conflict can depend entirely on the context in which people form their consciousness and, particularly, on the other ethnic groups which they recognize as existing in that context.<sup>17</sup> It does not

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<sup>14</sup> Ahmed Shamina, *The Politics of Ethnicity in India*, in *Regional Study, Autumn*, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p.24.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.24.

<sup>17</sup> Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan, *Concise Dictionary of Politics*, Indian Edition, OUP, 2003.



matter whether shared origins or traditions can be said to have objective fact or whether they are 'invented' or 'selected'.<sup>18</sup>

## THE CONCEPT OF TRIBE IN THE PRESENT STUDY

There are basically two broad approaches to the idea of the term tribe. According to one point of view, tribes are different from other communities in the sense that they remain outside the Jati system and the social organization based on Varna. This view considers the so called tribes of India as indigenous, autochthonous people of the land.

For the second perspective, various groups labeled by the government as tribes are not isolated from the Hindu castes of plains in distribution, language, economy and religious traditions, nor are they necessarily the autochthonous people living in various areas of the country.

It is well recognized that the term tribe as a concept is very problematic. From the census report of 1901 and 1911 by Resley and Gait respectively, the term 'so-called animists' has been added under the table of Caste and Others. Marten, in 1922, changed the term 'animism' to 'tribal religion'. However, there is no such concrete demarcation to differentiate the tribal religion from the practices adopted by the subordinate caste community. They therefore, are inclined to regard the officially labeled tribal groups as backward Hindus, that is, groups imperfectly integrated with the caste system.<sup>19</sup>

Some sociologists and anthropologists are of the opinion that the conceptual boundary between tribals and non-tribals is too thin and flexible. Bailey faced and tackled the problem of specifying the criteria for deciding at what point on the continuum of tribe and caste of a particular society is to be placed. He states that the larger is the proportion of a given society which has a direct access to the land, the closer is the society to the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> G S Ghurye, *The Scheduled Tribe*, *Popular Prakashan*, 1963. pp.1-24.

tribal end of the continuum. Conversely, the larger is the proportion of people whose right to land is achieved through a dependent relationship nearer the society comes to caste pole.<sup>20</sup>

Xaxa, makes a point that tribe and caste represent two different forms of social organizations – castes being regulated by the hereditary division of labour, hierarchy, the principle of purity and pollution, civic and religious disabilities, etc, and tribes being characterized by the absence of the caste attributes.

The two types of social organizations are seen as being governed by different principles. It is said that kinship bonds govern tribal society. Each individual is hence considered equal to the others. The lineage and clan tend to be the chief unit of ownership as well as of production and consumption. In contrast, inequality, dependency and subordination are integral features of caste society. It is also said that tribes do not differentiate as sharply as caste groups do between the utilitarian and non-utilitarian function of religion. Caste groups tend to maintain different forms, practices and behaviour patterns for each of these two aspects of the religion. Tribes in contrast maintain similar forms, practices and behaviour patterns for both functions.<sup>21</sup>

According to Andre Beteille, there are two ways of setting about in search of a definition of the term tribe. The first is to examine the existing definitions which have been worked out on general considerations. The second is to analyse the specific conditions in India and to find out the attributes which are distinctive of groups conventionally regarded as tribes.<sup>22</sup>

“The tribe is a society having a clear linguistic boundary and generally a well-defined political boundary. It is within the latter that ‘regular determinate ways of acting’ are imposed as its members. The tribe also has a cultural boundary, much less defined, and this is the general frame for the mores, the folkways, the formal and the informal

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<sup>20</sup> F G Bailey, *Tribe, Caste and Nation*, London, OUP, 1960. pp.13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Virginius Xaxa, Transformation of Tribes in India, *EPW*, 12 June, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Andre Beteille, *The Definition of Tribe in Tribe, Caste and Religion*, ed. Romesh Thakur, Meerut, 1977. pp.7-14.

interactions of these members”.<sup>23</sup> This definition conforms fairly well to the usual text-book definition of a tribe.

Beteille seems to have given less importance to cultural boundary because according to him, field-workers throughout the world have realized that no iron wall exists where one culture begins and another ends. Commonness of culture is very much a question of degree. Clearly, then, the position of a ‘Common Culture’ can hardly be considered as a primary criterion in a democracy the boundary of a tribe, or of any society for that matter.<sup>24</sup> Another characteristic of a tribe is its perceived primitiveness. The author dismisses this by saying, “this also is somewhat misleading, since none of this attributes is universal among tribal societies or, for that matter exclusive to them. The same may be said of the ecological characterization of tribe”.<sup>25</sup> They do not necessarily live in isolated hills and forests. Tribal societies have been known to flourish under all kinds of ecological conditions.

Beteille proposes an ideal-typical definition of tribe “as a society with a political linguistic, and a somewhat vaguely – defined cultural boundary, further as a society based upon kinship, where society stratification is absent”<sup>26</sup>

According to the author, therefore, in today’s India tribes which answer to the anthropologist’s conception of the ideal type are rarely to be found. Even the territorial, political, linguistic and cultural boundaries are being broken gradually. There is nothing exclusively tribal in these spheres. The process of ‘give and take’ has been continuously true in the case of the Indian tribes. The tribes are entering into the industrial productive system of economy. Distinctions on the basis of wealth have begun to appear in the tribals societies which were unstratified at one time. The tribes are finding a new identity in changing conditions. The process by which tribes have been transformed is a historical

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid* p.10.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid* p.10.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid* p.11.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid* p.13.

one. And only by going into the antecedents of a group can one say whether or not it should be considered as a tribe.

The Constitution order of 1950 declared 212 tribes located in fourteen states as "Scheduled Tribes". It is pertinent to point out that no single criterion has been hitherto adopted to distinguish the tribal population from the non-tribal population. However, if we have to look for common features in the purest of tribal groups, which have been resisting acculturation or absorption, we find the following:-

1. They live a way from the civilized world in the most inaccessible parts of both forests and hills;
2. They belong to either one of the three stocks- Negritos, Austroloids and Mongoloids;
3. They speak the same tribal dialect;
4. They profess a primitive religion known as 'Animism' in which worship of ghosts and spirits is the most important element;
5. They follow primitive occupations such as gleaning, hunting and gathering of forest produce;
6. They are largely carnivores or flesh or meat eaters;
7. They are either naked or semi-naked, using the tree barks and leaves for clothing; and
8. They have nomadic and a love for drinks and dance.<sup>27</sup>

Verrier Elwin divides the tribes into four classes.<sup>28</sup> The Anthropologists and workers who met at the Tribal Welfare Committee, at Calcutta suggested the following classification of the existing tribes:

1. Tribal communities are those who are still confined to the original forest habitats and they follow the old pattern of life :

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<sup>27</sup> C B Mamoria, *Tribal Demography in India*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1958. pp.21-22 quoted in *Tribe in Transition* by A R Desai, in *Tribe, Caste and Religion*, op.cit. p.18.

<sup>28</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, p.19.

2. Semi-tribal communities or those who have more or less settled down in rural areas and have taken to agriculture and allied occupations:
3. Acculturated tribals communities or those who have migrated to urban or semi-urban areas and are engaged in modern industries and vocation and have adopted modern cultural traits:
4. Totally assimilated tribals in the Indian population.<sup>29</sup>

These attempts to classify the tribal societies are the obvious evidence to prove that there would not be one single definition, so comprehensive as to encompass all the existing tribes. Secondly, the tribals themselves are passing through the stages of cultural developments. The Zo and Naga more or less came in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> classes according to Elwin's list. While on the one hand many tribals have shifted to urban centres and industries, the greater majority still stay in the villages as settled agriculturists.

In the Indian context, Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field identify the term "tribe" as "non-Hindu, indigenous (that is, in historic terms they precede the Aryan invasions); they speak non-Indo-Aryan languages, are territorially more cohesive than castes, partake of no all-India reference categories (as Hindu castes do in relation to Varnas), are not stratified in contrast with the hierarchical structure of caste Hindu society, and relate to non-tribes or castes in ways substantially different from the ways in which Hindu castes relates to one another (that is, they are not part of the ritual hierarchy)."<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, they distinguished tribes into two aspects. Firstly, there are section of communities who they themselves and also by others as "tribes". And secondly, there are section of communities who are classified by the Government of India as "scheduled tribes" with specific legal rights and protections not given to other community. India's tribes in this study have "social, cultural, and legal identity."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, pp.22-23.

<sup>30</sup> Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field, *Electoral Politics in the Indian States: Three Disadvantaged Sectors*, Manohar Book Service, 1975, p.78.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

To sum up, a particular tribe is an indigenous unit speaking common language, claiming a common descent, locally observing social and political customs based on kinship.

The study focuses on the ethnic communities (based on Zomi and kuki identity) in context of social conflict and electoral politics in the district (Churachandpur). Numerically, the Zomi ethnic group is the largest ethnic group in the district.<sup>32</sup> They are found almost in every village and have close relationship with the Kukis. In their homeland, they have adopted tribal language and same cultural traits.

#### AREA OF INTEREST

The scope of my research in the Conflicts among the Zo ethnic groups would as far as possible be based in Churachandpur District of Manipur. It must be noted, however, that the majority of the Zo ethnic groups are outside the state of Manipur. Therefore, their relationship and influence among themselves cannot be ignored. It has to be noted that the relationships among the different Zo ethnic groups do not stand in a hierarchical basis, the study will be on the basis of parallel conflicting groups, divided by a vertical cleavage. This excludes the relations between the Zo ethnic groups and the majority group in the plain areas of Manipur, where conflicts revolve around the system of ethnic stratification.

The characteristics of relationships why we will differentiate between the majority plain peoples and hill areas and between the differently 'recognized' hill peoples will be on the basis of hierarchy and parallel system flow from their differing origins. Generally speaking, hierarchical systems are produced by conquest or capture of power. The ensuing domination lends itself to the establishment of inferiority upper and lower hierarchical clientage relations, and the ideology of inferiority for the subordinate groups.

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<sup>32</sup>It will be discuss in the third chapter.

On the other hand, parallel system has nothing to do with invasion or conquest but may be either intermixed or regionally discrete.

Despite certain limitation and fuzziness, although not ignoring the fact that they are somehow or possibly related, the focus will be on the political relations of different groups that do not stand in a hierarchical relation to each other but exist side by side as a separate sub societies, whether regionally or geographical intermixed or discrete.

In the Zo society, where parallel ethnic groups coexist, the question of group superiority is far from irrelevant, although it is not settled. These different ethnic groups are definitely not hierarchical in relation to each other. Also in the fields of social, economic, political, and for that matter, utilization of resources, position of a group varies from one area to another. Accordingly, interactions and exchanges often occur across group identity without any sense or anything to do with superiority or hierarchy as such. It is not the question of subordination that concerns them, though they are well aware of the threats of ethnic subordination, but the politics of inclusion and exclusion. When conflicts or violence occur, this Zo ethnic groups and for the matter, a parallel ethnic group usually aim not at social transformation, but at something related to exclusion of another groups from a share of power.

## THE ZOMIS OF CHURACHANDPUR

The study will examine the role and political participation of both the Kuki and Zomi ethnic groups in Churachandpur district of Manipur.<sup>33</sup> Since the Zomi ethnic group constitutes numerically the majority in the district, the study will focus more on them. They are exposed to the forces and the process of modernizing changes. They have been influenced by the Christian religion, culture and festivals. All this has brought about many changes in the traditional way of life of the people in this area. Nevertheless they

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<sup>33</sup> It has to be noted that in this study, Zo signifies both the Kuki and Zomi ethnic groups. The very basis of the study will view Zo as a primordial concept and Kuki and Zomi ethnic groups from an instrumentalist lenses.

have been able to retain their distinct socio-political system. They have their own customs and regulation also. Thus the tribes under study have been able to maintain their distinct socio-cultural traits, in spite of the forces of change.

The characterization of tribe by Redfield can be applied to Zo communities, especially their distinctiveness, smallness, homogeneity and all pervasiveness.<sup>34</sup> It is still to be inquired whether with the introduction of Autonomous District Councils and emergence of new elite in its wake, the tribal political system and social structure have been undergoing changes. Socially and economically the process of class formation has been also seen in Zo tribes. Despite of developments and social changes that are undergoing in the tribal society, they have still retained some of their basic social characteristic which account for its distinctiveness as a cultural entity.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology of research is primarily analytical. The research is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are 1) the data collected from Field surveys 2) official records such as districts statistical handbook 1991, election commission documents, district gazetteer, and materials on Zo tribes 3) secondary sources are mainly media reports, books, articles and journals.

During the field study, interviews were conducted with a number of persons from variety of backgrounds. They include the leaders of both communities, politicians, academicians, government officials and active participants in local political processes.

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Redfield, *The Little Community*, University of Chicago Press, 1965. pp.1-19.



## HYPOTHESIS

1. Various Tribes of Manipur are trying to assert their own community – ethnic identity and thus have their own share in the durable conflicts in the state.
2. A counter-hegemonic force led by the majority group to “integrate” the hill areas by claiming to represent many a small tribes in the state is emerging against the policy of the central government towards the tribal areas.

## CHAPTERISATION

The study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter (Introduction) introduces the research problem, and then goes on to present the basic objectives of the study. Finally it also lays down the theoretical framework that is sought to be used in the study.

The second chapter is an overview of the Churachandpur district focusing on the geography, history, culture, socio-economic and political life of the people. It will also discuss the coming of Christianity in the district and its impact on the social relations of the people.

The third chapter deals with the specific conflict between the ethnic groups in 1997. It focuses on the causes of the conflict, its background, changing relationship of the Kukis and Zomis, their solidarity and conflict. It also tries to analyze how the conflict manifested itself politically leading to the formation of Zomi Re-unification Organisation(ZRO), an independent political organization. It also highlights the role and responses of various other social forces (to the conflict).

The fourth chapter deals with the electoral politics of the Manipur. The first section deals with the state-making processes and deals mainly with the State’s political party formations, policies and its functioning in the process of emerging ethnic identity assertion in the state. The second section mainly focuses on the Zo political participations. It focuses on the key issues such as social conflict and political choices,

the mobilization pattern, the style and functioning of the members of different political parties and the contested issues on the eve of assembly election. Here an attempt is to analyze the dynamic and changing interaction between local and state level politics.

Lastly, the major findings of the study are presented in the conclusion. It will also put forward certain suggestions which might be useful in studying the social and political dynamics of the concerned communities.

## Chapter II

### **Churachandpur District: An Overview**

#### *The Process of Sociological Crystallization*

With the establishment of a full flag State in 1972, Manipur was divided into five districts; Central, East, West, North and South Districts. Geo-physically Manipur was divided into two distinct geographical features, the hills and the valley. The Central District is the only district located in the valley, comprised of the whole of the Imphal Valley and Jiribam Sub-Division.

Presently, the Central District is divided into four valley districts namely Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishenpur and Thoubal. The other four districts, East, West, North and South are situated on the hills and presently known by the name Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Senapati and Churachandpur respectively. The fifth hill district, Chandel, was carved out from the erstwhile East and South Districts (Churachandpur).

#### **A Profile of Churachandpur District:**

The South District was renamed Churachandpur after 1981.<sup>35</sup> It is inhabited by the Chin-Kuki-Mizo groups of people. South western district (Churachandpur) of Manipur, was created and constituted on the 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1969 with five Revenue Sub-Divisions viz Churachandpur, Henglep (Churachandpur North), Parbung (Tipaimukh), Singngat and Thanlon. There are six Tribal Development Blocks. The Revenue Sub-Divisions are contiguous with the Tribal Development Blocks except for Churachandpur Sub-Division where there are two Blocks namely Churachandpur and Samulamlan. The Sub-Divisional Officer also functions as the Block Development Officer. The District head-quarter is situated at Churachandpur (Lamka).<sup>36</sup> It is the second largest town in the state located 62 kms away south west from Imphal, the capital of Manipur. It is a hilly district with a small percentage of the plain area. The Deputy

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<sup>35</sup> Census of India 2001, Series 14, Manipur,(Provisional). p.66.

<sup>36</sup> The South District, as already mentioned, is named Churachandpur only after 1981. It is locally known as LAMKA. Thus, we will be using the name interchangeably whenever it is needed.

Commissioner is the Chief administrative head of the District, who is appointed by the Government of the state. The geographical area of the District is about 4,570.0 sq. km. The Sub-Divisions of the District is shown below:

Table I: Sub-Division wise population of Churachandpur District.

Sl.no.	Name of Sub-Division	No. of Villages	Population
1	Churachandpur	243	93,882
2	Henglep	107	20,455
3	Tipaimukh	42	23,995
4	Singngat	65	18,643
5	Thanlon	47	19,209
	Total	504	1,76,184

\*Source: Census of India 1991, Series-15, Manipur, Part 11-A, General population table

According to the provisional data of 2001 census, the recorded total population of the district is 2,23,866. The literacy rate in the district is quite high, the percentage being 64.38 (72.6% in male and 56.4% in female). Unlike other part of the state and country, the sex ratio is in favour of the female gender: 1034 per 1000 male.

#### Topographical Facts: Location and the People

Churachandpur District is located in the south western corner of Manipur. It lies between 93.15 degree E and 94.0 degree E and between 24.0 degree N and 24.3 degree N Longitude and Latitude respectively. The District Headquarter lies at an altitude of 920 metres above mean sea level.<sup>37</sup> According to 1981 census there are altogether 428 inhabited villages in the district. The total population of the District according to 1981 census was 1, 34,776, comprising 9.48 percent of the total population of the state, which has subsequently increased to 9.64 percent in 1991 (1991 census).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Luachin Neihzial. *This is Lamka*, Lamka, 1996. p.17.

<sup>38</sup> *Census of India 2001*, Manipur, Directorate of Census Operations, Manipur. P.66.

The Churachandpur district is composed of about 14 different indigenous tribal communities. They include Thadou, Hmar, Paite, Vaiphei, Zou, Mizo(Lushei), Simte, Gange, Sukte(Tedim Chin), Kom, Kabui, Chothe, Anal and Chiru, each tribe speaking their own native dialects. "Churachandpur, the Headquarters of the South District is the biggest cauldron of social assimilation."<sup>39</sup>

#### Political History:

Since time immemorial, the Hills Areas of Manipur were politically administered differently from that of the valley. Even, during the British colonial period the hills areas of Manipur were protected by certain special acts and laws such as the Inner Line Regulation of 1873; Assam Frontier Regulation of 1880; the Chin Hills Regulation Act of 1896; Excluded and Partially Excluded Area Act, 1919 in due recognition of their unique social, cultural and religious practices of the people of the region. As a result, the state of Manipur in general and the Hill Regions in particular have till recent times remained comparatively little affected by events and developments that is taking place in other part of the Country. The hills people of Manipur as far as the non-meitei are concerned; they are categorized as Scheduled Tribe by the Constitution of India. When the Constitution of India was adopted, certain provisions were enacted in the Constitution to facilitate the economically backward people. Thus, various ethnic minority communities of Manipur sought separate recognition of their unique identity. At present, almost all the different clan or linguistic communities of Zo people were recognized by the government.<sup>40</sup> All the Zo communities speak the same language with minor variations in different localities.

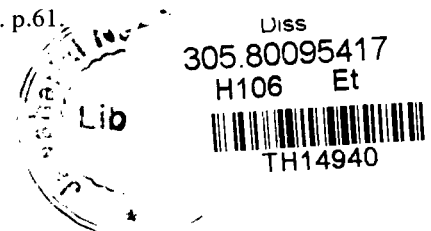
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Though, as many as 14 different tribes/communities live in the district, there are no communication problem as everyone understands each other dialect. That is why many are of the views that Lamka could be called 'The Pentecostal Town'.<sup>41</sup> For example, when one attend any town committee meeting, students' Union meeting or

<sup>39</sup> Cited in L.Jeyaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur*, Scholar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, p.81.

<sup>40</sup> Thangkhangin, a seminar paper submitted to Indian Social Institute under the title Zomi Identity and Alienation in Colonial Set-up: a case study on Identity, Alienation and Conflict Solution in North East India, 28<sup>th</sup> September 2001 (Unpublished)

<sup>41</sup> In T S Hatzaw , *Christianity in Manipur*, New Lamka (G), 2003. p.61.



participate in condolence service, one will find an amazing peculiar character of the people of the district. The amazing character is that though individual belonging to different tribe speaks in their own dialect, they all speak in one's turn in one's own dialect. The *lingua franca* is each one's own dialect.

Articles 342 of the Indian Constitution provides/stated that "The President...after consultation with the Governor...specify the tribe or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes in relation to the State...".<sup>42</sup> Different tribal and non-tribal groups in the hill and the plain areas could have join hands together and develop socially, economically and politically. But on the contrary, it has contributed to highlight differences and enhance the awareness of self-identities among the hill peoples. Further, Constitutionally-guaranteed educational, political, economic and other advantages have contributed significantly in widening the socio-political differences universally of the once isolated or nearly isolated tribal communities. A clear manifestation of such outcome is that the Zo community have been negates not by differences in origin or culture but by political institutions. What I mean to say here is that, although the Zo are inseparable because of their socio, economic and cultural affinity and similarity, they are deeply divided when it comes to the question of identity primarily based on dialectical-clanist issue(s). Politically, almost all the communities have their own local parties and associations based on their tribe. In Lamka for instance, each and every tribal community avidly wants to preserve their own ethnic identity so much so that almost all tribal organization used the term 'national.'<sup>43</sup> Further, the tendency to divide the minorities of the state on the basis of region by the majority groups and the adoption of superiority attitude towards the hill people has further complicated the deteriorating tension between them. This is particularly true for many tribes of Manipur that they were generally not accorded any recognition in the form of treaties in the colonial and post-colonial era.

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<sup>42</sup> P.M.Bakshi, *The Constitution of India*, Universal Law Publishing Co.Pvt.Ltd.,Delhi,1997.

<sup>43</sup> Op.cit., p.61.

### **Socio-economic and Cultural Milieu:**

In the context of Manipur, it is important to understand the social formations of the Zo(Chin-kuki-Mizo) to come to grapple the issues of tribalness and the rise of conflicts among the different groups of the Zo communities as well as non-tribal communities. As is well known, consolidations of identities along the lines of 'recognized' tribe and community have become increasingly manifested in the recent years in this region. Therefore, in order to understand the nature of contemporary social formations among the Zo communities, the focus of analysis will be on the different stages of social processes in the traditional society by studying the economic aspect of each of the social systems. In the course of our analysis, we will see how the economic relationships were linked with the institutions in the society, social relationships and religion. It is not possible to study a particular period of history without studying the preceding one. Therefore, to understand the conflicts among the Zo communities, it is imperative to examine the development of the Zo social formation in the pre-colonial period.

In order to analyse the social and economic formations in the traditional Zo society, identification of the different modes of production historically is necessary. Over all, for practical purposes, the Zo history could be divided into two parts: before and after the chieftaincy. It is important to study the periods of Chieftaincy because it is the main factors which led the formations of political processes among the Zo society. Our main objective and interest in analyzing the traditional social and economic formations was to find out the different elements of the society prevailing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before the arrival of the British.

### **Owner of Means and Social Structure:**

Zo society is an agrarian society. The family is the basic unit of the society and is headed by the father. There are clan leaders too. But the father as a clan leader does not have authority over other families or clans internal business. Each father is the head of his

own family. They might have clan *elder* within the clan, but there was no political organization to run the village administration.

The family is the unit of production. Production is confined to goods required for the unit's consumption. Each family produced maximum quantity of crop that is required for their own consumption. It can be thus refer also to as subsistence production. The objective was to meet family needs with the minimum self- utilization. Surplus production was not extensive. It was only in the latter stage and during the Chieftaincy era where competition among or between the family/families begin to rise due to gradual expansion of the family, that surplus production increased. The traditional Zo economy was a self sufficient one. There was a balanced growth of every sector of the economy according to the requirements of the family even if it did not produce a substantial surplus.

Products of daily necessity were bartered amongst people. There were not surplus as such but excess products were exchanged for other scarce products. Barter system was carried out mostly among the local. In this rudimentary marketing network the sellers themselves were the producers and buyers. It shows that production was based on use-value and was not market-oriented. This production and exchange network made the Zo villages self-sufficient.

The Pre-Chieftaincy mode of production corresponded to a particular stage in Zo society. According to Zo historical traditions and folk-songs, the clan-wise settlement was found in the early Zo history, when they first settled in the hill in course of their migration. The village was composed of members of the clan. The village organization was based on kinship relations, the productive forces, the objects of labour and the means of labour were the common property of the clan community.



## Source of Livelihood:

Let us examine the nature of mode of production by analyzing the different sorts of economic activities. The economic activities may be considered in relation to agriculture (slash and burn agriculture); hunting; domestication of animals; handicrafts; cutting firewood and drawing water; fishing; and gardening; etc.

Agriculture was the main occupation among the different social activities of the Zo people. The land belongs to the community. Both husband and wife join together in the production of food for themselves as well as for their children. The father organized the social labour. The method of cultivation was slash and burn or shifting cultivation. It required the cooperation of both sexes. Each agricultural cycle included several stages such as clearing the jungle (*louvai*), burning the field (*louhal*), gathering the logs left over by fire (*mangtom*), sowing (*buhtuh*), weeding (*loukhok*), harvesting (*buh-at*), etc. the clearing and burning part were done by the males<sup>44</sup>, the rest was done by both sexes.

In the social level there was another form of social activities called *lawmpi* (sometimes *lawmzui*). *Lawmpi* was a simple social activity carried out by boys and girls of the village, in when the unmarried boys and girls work together in the field, this was called *lawmpi*. The *lawmpi* would work from one field to another on consecutive days till all the fields were completed, they would start from the beginning, to the last field till the agricultural cycle ended. The post-harvest was usually followed by festivity in which the whole village community participates. In short, they were working for each of their family on the basis of the principle of mutual assistance and cooperation. The leader of the *lawmpi* called *lawm-upa* (*elder of the lawm*) coordinates and supervise the work. Sometimes, married persons could also join the *lawmpi*. There was no strict regulation. Widow, orphan etc., who did not have anyone to look after them could join the *lawmpi*. In this way the widow (*meithai/meigong*), orphan (*tagah*), and others who were lagging

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<sup>44</sup> See ZZ Lien, *The U-Now People: the Ethnological survey of the People viz., Mizo, Zomi, Kuki, Chin and the Allied Tribes of North East India and Burma*, Churachandpur, Manipur, 1981. P.67.

behind were assisted by the working-team so that they would not be wanting. This form of cooperation however slowly died down with the advent of the British.

Hunting was regarded as the greatest expedition next to war.<sup>45</sup> Hunting was carried out by male members only. There was individual as well as collective hunting. Guns came into use for hunting around the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> Spear was used for hunting prior to the introduction of gun. Hunting with spear was practiced both individually and collectively. Collective hunting required complex cooperation between all men from a village. (Even to these days collective hunting with gun is still practiced in remote villages). After taking or setting apart portions of the kill for *Inndongta*<sup>47</sup>, all the meat would be distributed equally among the hunters and the skull of the killed animal would be preserved by the hunter as a prized possession. *Sa-aih*<sup>48</sup> was usually performed after a successful expedition.

Extensive gardening was not practiced. Domestic gardening and small garden over the graves of their dear ones were mentioned in the traditions. They planted different kinds of flowers (Khupching and Ngambom story). In course of time, the practice of vegetables gardening came into being. They also planted sacrificial and medicinal herbs like spice (*ai-eng*). Fruits like guava, mango, banana, species of lemon, etc., were also cultivated. Guava was taken from the Burmese and the Zo people called it *Kawl*<sup>49</sup>-sing (Burmese fruit).

Of course, we would not be able to discuss each and every issue of the village socio-economic activities. However, the activities that we have discussed earlier did give us some picture of the very basis of how social relationship has taken place among the Zo people. The idea of family property was manifested in the process of the production. In

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,p.71.

<sup>46</sup> See F.K. Lehman, *The structure of Chin Society*, The University of Illionois Press, Urbana, 1963. pp. 24-25.

<sup>47</sup> Inndongta is the household council; it will be discussed in detail later.

<sup>48</sup> *Sa-aih* is a kind of ceremony performed after a killing of a rare animals like elephant, tiger, bear etc. which is considered to be of high value. The more an individual can perform *Sa-aih*, the higher he grows in the social ladder. See Shaw, William *Notes on the Thadou Kuki*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati. Reprint 1997, pp. 77-78.

<sup>49</sup> *Kawl* is a name use by the Zo people to refer to the Burmese people. It is use even today in their dialect to refer to them.

the collective hunting, if there were more than one member from a family, that family would receive more share than the other family. Competition between families to produce more arose in other activities also. In the process, one family would rise above the other. As a result social status differentiation emerged in the Zo society, and this led to lineage segmentation within the clan.

Inter-clan and inter-village wars were important events for securing the human means of production. By raiding other village and capturing women and children<sup>50</sup>, the victors increased his prestige which played an important role in the Zo community. In order to win prestige and power one village or one clan fought with another village or clan. Besides man livestock and other property were captured and taken as booty. War thus became part of an economic activity in the Zo community social formation. It further helped to integrate different villages into one community. One village settlement came to contain more than one clan. Consequently, a different form of kinship relations, not based on blood relationship, which would include the whole community, irrespective of various clans which formed a village community emerged. This refers to *Inndongta*, the household council, which was important for the lineage-based mode of production, and which has continued through the different stages of social change in the Zo socio-economic formations up to the present days with, of course, slight modification here and there.

#### Inndongta Institution:

Inndongta institution was the main fabric of kinship relation of the Zo society. It was a kind of household council. It consisted of agnatic, cognatic, and affinal kinsmen. A household without Inndongta could not function in the society. Indongta institution is defined by Kamkhenthang as "...structural relationship of household of agnates, affines, enates and other selected non-clan member of the village in a corporate manner. This corporate relationship of survival households is designed to meet the partial need of a

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<sup>50</sup> Mostly, during the time of head hunting or war between villages, the Zo people were regarded to place most value on their enemies child's and their women's head. See William Shaw, *Notes on the Thadou Kuki*. Guwahati, Reprint 1997. pp. 79-80. Side by side, however, they also practiced the system of *Suak leh Sal* i.e slave.

household of a man with that of his agnates, affines, enates, and friends form an institutional organization called 'Inndongta'".<sup>51</sup> The whole society was interlinked, some way or the other by it. The clan member and non-clan members were related through the functioning of Inndongta. In a village of one hundred households, there must be one hundred Inndongta. The whole village communities were knitted together by this institution. It linked the whole society and served as the agent of cooperation among the families in the village community in all forms of activities. A man had to have a (separate) house of his own in order to form an Inndongta apart from his father's house. As long as he lived in his father's house, having grown up children, he can not form a separate Inndongta.

*The Making of Indongta Institution:*

It has to be noted that *Inndongta* composition are similar in every Zo society. However, there can be slide variations from clan to clan and also in different locations. Broadly, the composition can be discussed as follows:

1. Inntek: The father of the house
2. Thallouh: The eldest brother of the *Inntek* is the Thallouh. In case the *Inntek* is the eldest of the family, he can appoint his Uncle (his father's brother) as the Thallouh.
3. Thallouh Mang/Thallouh Thusa: It can be one of *Inntek*'s brother or a person closest to him among his clan members.
4. Thusapi/Vengthusa: It can be someone close to *Inntek* but not from his clan members.
5. Beh Thusa: Anyone from his clan members.
6. Tanupi: It can be *Inntek*'s sister or his eldest daughter.
7. Tanu Nihna: It can be *Inntek*'s sister or his *Ni* (his father's sister) or his second eldest daughter.
8. Tanu Thumna: It can be *Inntek*'s sister or a female member from his clan or his third daughter.

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<sup>51</sup> Kamkhenthang, *The Paite: A Transborder Tribe of India and Burma*, Delhi, 1998. p. 15.

9. Pu Pi: This is given to *Inntek*'s father or mother and also to his brothers.

10. Zawl: A person closest to him and who happens to be not from his clan members is given this title.

Generally, the decision taken by the *Inndongta* members is respected by the *Inntek*. However, the father of the house need not necessarily always comply with the decision taken by the *Inndongta*. But at time there is a rare case of not respecting the decision of the *Inndongta*.

In the Pre-Chieftaincy society, the principal relationships were between households, and every member of a household had his or her relationships with the same group of households. Anything produced collectively was distributed in terms of *Inndongta* relationships. In agriculture, a family had the right to retain its subsistence needs but if it produced more than subsistence, the surplus would be consumed by the whole community in ceremonial feasts, which required *Inndongta* participation, and meat and drinks would be distributed according to *Inndongta* relations. Feasts and ceremonies were another form of distribution and circulation of the products, especially the surplus products. If a man perform feast and ceremonies frequently, his status would rise and he would be respected in the society. Traditional Zo economy thus produces well above the subsistence level. During merit feasts (*Tawn*, *Khuangchawi*, *Sialsut*), as part of the ceremony, the paddy grain would be thrown away from agriculture field to a village by boys and girls; this showed that the performer of the merit feast fed not only human beings but also the birds and animals. Clearly such feasts presupposed control over a substantial surplus. The merit feast contributes to the emergence of Chieftaincy.

Emergence of Chieftaincy in Zo society:

Before discussing the nature of Chieftaincy mode of production, I would like to discuss in brief the circumstances and factors which led to the emergence of Chieftaincy in the Zo society. We have noted that the *Inndongta* was the only village level organization, and it did not function beyond the village. Yet a supra-village institution

was necessary when inter-village or inter-clan wars were frequent. For example, when livestock of one village intrudes another village, conflict would arise between the two. There would be many such situations. During the fighting, the leader received temporary authority over his captives. If wars occurred frequently and led to victory under him, his authority was maintained. In course of time, he became the political head of the community.

Besides the war, clan division and lineage segmentations also contributed to the emergence of Chieftaincy. It would be best to discuss how lineage segmentations within the clan were formed and then proceed to their contributions for the emergence of Chieftaincy in Zo society. New clan or lineage segments were founded by individuals who gained prominence e.g. the Zo fathers such as Chongthu (songthu) and Thlanrawkpa performed the great feasts of *Tawn* and *Khungchoi* respectively.<sup>52</sup> By performing these feasts of merit one could gain high social status. Individuals and their clans attaining prominence thus became dominant in the society.

Prominence and social status were maintained by graded marriage alliance (hypogamy) and frequent performance of the feasts of merit. Secondly, also resulted in rivalries among the sons of different wives on inheritance and consequently the non-inheritance sons founded new lineage segments.

Before and after the emergence of Chieftaincy, the Zo social developments were characterized by lineage segmentations. For example, the Lushei clans were divided into twenty seven sub-clans and more than two hundred lineage segments.<sup>53</sup> When different clans lived together, people living in the village of a different but powerful clan tended to identity themselves as belonging to the latter. Thus there would be Ngaihte clan among the Simte, Paite; Guite clan among the Kuki, Paite, Vaiphei and so on.

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<sup>52</sup> William Shaw, *Notes on the Thadou Kukis*, Government Publications, 1929. pp. 22-29.

<sup>53</sup> Rev. Liangkhai, *Mizo Chanchin* (History of Mizo), published by the Mizo Academy of Letters, Aizawl, 1938. pp. 2-12.

### Institution of Chieftaincy:

The Chief is the owner of the Village including the Land. He is the supreme ruler of whoever settled in his territory. As Stevenson put it, “the chief is the Lord of the Soil.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, all that is in the village belong to the chief. The office of the chief is inherited by the youngest or the eldest son among the Zo people. The institution differs from clan to clan and from location to location. The Zo society is strictly patriarchy, therefore, it is “next to impossible for a daughter to inherit the office of the father.”<sup>55</sup>

Chinkholian Guite explained the role of the Chief as the guardian of the customary laws of the people. Secondly, he explains the chief as the judge within the chiefdom. He emphasized the function of the Chief in terms of executive power. Here, the chief act as the guardian and administrator of the village. He also has the power to appoint the village priest, the village council members mostly consist of village elders (*Upa*) etc. Secondly, the Chief have a legislative power. The chief play the most important role in making the rules and regulations. In matters concerning festivals, village games and sports, deaths, allocation of lands for jhum cultivation etc., the chief have the power to frame the rules based upon the customs and traditions of the community. Thirdly, he also has the power to interpret the customary laws of the people.<sup>56</sup>

In the past, Zo community had well established system of traditional political organizations all under the Chief such as village elders (*Upas*), the village Crier (*Tangko*), the village priest (*siampu*) etc.<sup>57</sup> The traditional political organization of Zomis contain features such as effective group control(*Haam*)<sup>58</sup>, welfare of the people (*Lawmpi/tlawmngaihna*), and system of extra-group relations (*Inndongta* institution).

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<sup>54</sup> H N C Stevenson, *The Hill People of Burma*, Burma Pamphlets No.6, London, 1944 as cited in Vumson, *Zo History*, Aizawl, (Undated). p.8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p-9

<sup>56</sup> For more details, see Chinkholian Guite, *Politico-Economic Development of the Tribals of Manipur*, Anmol Pubs.Pvt.Ltd. New Delhi, 1999, pp. 35-58.

<sup>57</sup> For details see Chinkholian Guite, pp. 35-58

<sup>58</sup> Haam=Dormitory system. It is a place where young male members used to sleep. It is also an important place for educational, political and social aspect. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55

Villages, whether small or large, had been governed by the village chief. The system of chieftainship was prevalent in almost all the hill tribes of Manipur. Among the Zomi-Kuki groups, chiefs are powerful. The institution of chieftainship was so strongly embedded in the early history that it was an unenviable one. He was the guardian of his people, leader and defender in times of attack by the enemy and provider of food in times of scarcity. In battle, he would lead his warriors. Disputes within a family or between persons were settled by him.<sup>59</sup>

The chief is the land owner. He distributed the land of his village to the people for cultivation and other purposes. In return, the villagers are required to contribute a kind of taxes such as *Tangseu*, *buhsun salieng* etc.

Now there is a crisis so far as continuance of traditional leadership is concerned. The traditional leadership is withering away due to the rise of elite groups with the introduction of modern education and statutory institutions.

#### Chieftaincy Social Formation:

With the rise of Chieftaincy, probably towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the system of production underwent gradual changes. First, land was distributed annually to specific families by the chief. However, they could not sell or exchange the land for other commodities. The Chief's right over the land increased and evidently, he claimed complete right over the land. "Traditionally, all lands in a Kuki (Zo) village belong to the village Chief who has the sole right to use and even sell the land (though within the village)"<sup>60</sup>.

At the end of the agriculture cycle, each family gave the Chief three to six baskets of paddy or whatever the main crop was. This kind of tax was called *tangseu* in the

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<sup>59</sup> L B Thanga, *The Mizo*, Gauhati, 1978. pp. 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Government of Manipur, Report of the Chief Ministers Social Policy Advisor Committee of Manipur 1995-97. p.39.



beginning. It meant millet tax. The term *buhsun salieng*, meaning taxes of paddy and animals legs, came into use later.

Other forms of cooperation like *Lawmpi*, the young working team, continued as before and the chief encouraged them. The relations of production centered on the chief, the political head of the community. Whatever the villagers produced be it in agriculture, hunting, fishing, trapping, trading, etc, it yielded tax for the chief. The main reason for giving such kind of tax was that the Chief being the political head of the village was preoccupied with the village affairs that sometimes, he had no time for economic activities. He was thus compensated for his services rendered to the villagers.<sup>61</sup>

If the family would like to migrate to another village, the chief of the based village would take all its property except clothing and ornaments. The migrating family had to forfeit its property including live-stocks.

The Zo people code of morals, *Tlawmngaihna*, was a stabilizing and motivating force in the Zo ethnic and moral code of conduct. In times of emergency, the chief would call for duty to the people and his calls would be responded on the principle of *Tlawmngaihna*. *Tlawmngaihna* was the principle of hard work and self sacrifice, and it was the Zo ideology based on individual and social relationship outside the family kinship relation. The ideological concept of *Tlawmngaihna*, the spirit to serve others with hard work, bravery, endurance, generosity, kindness, selflessness, etc actively influence everyone in their activities. Samuelson pointed out that –

*Tlawmngaihna* implies the capacity for hardwork, bravery, endurance, generosity, kindness, and selflessness. The forefathers emphasized this value of action to their progeny. In days of both happiness and misfortune, the concept of *Tlawmngaihna* was a stabilizing force.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> As in Chinkholian Guite, op.cit.,

<sup>62</sup> Samuelson S. Lalramchani, The Mizo Independence Movement, MA Thesis(Unpublished), Humbolt State University, 1767 cited in Vumson, op.cit. p. 10.

It is an obligatory on every Zo community to be willing to help others even at considerable inconvenience to oneself. This spirit of *Tlawmngaihna*, in the Zo society, is becoming a dead ideology now-a-days.

The technique of manufacturing gun powder was known to the Zo people in the early eighteenth century.<sup>63</sup> Previously, guns were exchanged for slaves from the Burmese. Three slaves were exchanged for one gun. Our main objective of mentioning guns and gun powder was to point out their contributions to the rise of chieftaincy. In those days, those who got more guns would become paramount chieftains. Many local chiefs submitted to the paramount chiefs, and they and their villagers paid tribute to the paramount chiefs.

#### *The system of Bawi, Suak-leh-Sal*<sup>64</sup>

The paramount and local chief practiced a distinct kind of slavery system called *Bawi*. J. Shakespear has observed that slavery existed among the Zo people and stated, 'Among the Thadous and the Chin real slavery used to exist, and men and women were sold like cattle. Among the Lushais this has never been the case, but there is a class known as *Boi* (*Bawi*) who have been miscalled slaves by this ignorant of their real condition'<sup>65</sup>. In 1913 the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society appealed 'to Mr. Montague to take immediate action to procure the freedom of the slaves, the masters receiving compensations'<sup>66</sup>. When the missionary and the social workers came to Zo inhabited areas, they tried their best to discourage the *Bawi* system.

There were different kinds of slaves in Zo society. Broadly, the slaves could be divided into two categories, viz; the captive slaves, and the accepted slaves. The captive slaves were originally people captured during the war. They could be sold. They were

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<sup>63</sup> Vumkhohau, *A profile of a Burma frontier man*, Bandung, Kalat, Madju, Press1972. pp. 300-306.

<sup>64</sup> It has to be noted that these term like *Bawi, Suak-leh-Sal* is a kind of slave system that began to be practiced with the rise of Chieftaincy. But in most cases in the Zo society, these systems are quite different from our contemporary understanding of the Slave system that was practiced in the western world. It is more of a voluntary except in cases like *Suak-leh-Sal* system.

<sup>65</sup> J.Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki clans*, part-I, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram. Reprint, 1975. p. 45.

<sup>66</sup> A G Mc Call, *Lushai Chrysalis*, T.R. Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram. Reprint, 1977. p. 123.

called *Suak leh sal* or *Sila*. The second category the accepted slaves were those who entered the chiefs house at their own will to become slaves of the chief. They were called *Bawi*. They could be divided into three classes: *Inpuichhung Bawi* (those who live in chief's house); *Chesen* (Red Dao) *Bawi*; and *Tuklut* (enter by promise) *Bawi*. The *Inpuichhung Bawi* consisted of all those who could not support themselves, or had none to support them such as widows and orphans, who had been driven to take refuge in chief's house. The *Chesen Bawi* were those who took refuge in the chief's house to escape vengeance and so became slaves of the chief. The *Tuklut Bawi* were those who deserted the losing side in war and joined the victors by promising to become a slave with all their descendants on the condition that they will be given their freedom after sometime, such slave usually adopt the name of the master's clan.

In the process of social formation, the Zo society underwent changes. In the early period of settlements in hill areas there were divisions of clans and lineage segmentation in the society as a result of their economic activities and their natural habitat. The *Inndongta* institution which functioned within and outside the client (blood group) in a village became an important institution in the society.

Religious concepts:

It is very important to note that in the Zo traditional society, we cannot separate the religious practices and their culture; the social processes, everything comes under it. Therefore, in Zo traditional society, there can and never was a clash of culture or tradition and religion. The reason is that most of the tradition only reflects their religious belief. Dr. G. Hatlang has rightly pointed out that "Planting of crops, birth and death, slashing and burning, festivals, successful harvests, victory over the enemies, in games and sports and in hunting, all these are connected to religion or worship."<sup>67</sup> Moreover, individual and social life is greatly influenced by religion. Thus, it will not be out of place to discuss in details, the religious concept and practices, to come to grips with the social and political processes of the Zo people.

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<sup>67</sup> Rev. and Dr. Gouzakap Hatlang, Who are the Paite People, *Siamsinpawlp* Golden Jubilee Issue, Lamka 1996. p. 5

The traditional Zo religious concepts were built around the economic activities. Man, objects (animated and unanimated), and nature were considered to have soul. The concept of life after death was the miniature of this earthly life. After a man die, he would go to *misikhua* or *mithikhua* (dead man's village). The ideas of going to *misikhua* might be the manifestation of their longing to go back to their ancestor's route of their migrations. When a child die, he or she would be given an egg which he or she would roll down on the way to *misikhua*. Whenever a dead body was buried, his or her head would be made to point to the east, the direction where the spirit of the death would go. He would pass all the old settlements before reaching *misikhua*. *Misikhua* was the place where the ordinary one who did not perform great feasts or who did not kill many game animals during his life time. The purpose in this earthly life was how to reach and live happily in the *misikhua* after this life was over. For that reason a man tried to work hard, to become a good hunter, and to become wealthy. Whatever animals and enemies he killed during his lifetime would accompany and serve him in the *misikhua*.

Every clan had different religious practices and worship, sacrifice, and ceremonies. But the concept of religion, life after death, heaven, soul, etc. were the same. They worshipped various objects and spirits. The objects were stones, trees, rivers, fountains, house, etc. in which various spirits were suppose to dwell. The spirits were regarded to be the causes of illness, death, misfortunes etc. There was one Supreme Being, called *Pathian* or *Pathien*<sup>68</sup>, who was only asked in birth for blessing and in marriage for reproduction. Sacrifices would be made only to the spirits in order to pacify them. In sickness and illness they would perform sacrifices to the evil spirits. This spirits which they worshipped could be divided broadly into three categories: the village spirits (*Sakhua*); the Jhum spirits (*Lou*); and the jungle spirit (*Gam* or *Ram*). The village spirits (*Sakhua*) were regarded friendly and kind. Whoever died in the village was said to be lucky and a good dead. His soul could go to *misikhua*. The *Khua* spirits were regarded as one's spirit or the ancestor's spirits. *Khua* signified the inner persons of a man, the soul. When the Zo people worshipped their *Sakhua*<sup>69</sup>, they worship their creator, maker, and

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<sup>68</sup> see L. Jeyaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur*, Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., New Delhi 1996. pp. 38-39.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

the ancestor. The ancestor would appear in different forms, might be in tiger or anything, in their dreams. If those things happened in their dreams they would immediately worship their *Pusa*<sup>70</sup>. This *Pusa* worship was called as *Sakhua*. If one of the members showed the sign, the *Pusa* would be worshipped. Every clan or family worships its own *Pusa* (*Sakhua*), the ancestor worship. The family would sacrifice animals when the *Sakhua* was being worshipped. *Lou* (Jhum or agricultural field) spirits were the middle spirit, moderate spirit, between *Khua* and *Gam* (Ram). They also caused illness. In order to produce more, they would offer sacrifice in the fields. If someone became ill while agricultural works were in full swing or while he was living in the field for days during agricultural work, he would be regarded as *Lou mat* (caught by the field). *Gam* (*Ram*) spirits were connected with hunting, fishing, and other academic activities in the jungle. It was regarded that the wild animals were the cattle of the spirits. Whenever they were about to clear the jungle for jhumming or cultivation, they would first examine to see whether there were any objects or fountain in which the spirits could dwell. *Gam* or *Ram* was regarded as cruel, unkind. When a man died in a jungle in accident, the dead would not be taken inside the village but buried outside the village. His soul could not go to *misikhua* (dead man's village), but hover around the village and jungle.

In order to make sacrifices, a priest was required to do the job. In the early period, in the familial society, the head of the family was the priest. When a society evolved to lineage society, the elder of the lineage (the clan founder's eldest son's eldest descendents) would be the priest who was called as *Tulpi* or *Siampu*. In sacrifice ceremonies, etc. the *Tulpi* (eldest brother) was necessary, and without him nothing could be done. When chieftaincy emerged, the chief acted as the religious and political head combining both offices in him in the early stage of chieftaincy. In the later stages, the chief would ordain or select, a man who knew the art of sacrifices, ceremonies etc. to be the village priest who will perform sacrifices and be loyal to him. He was paid by the villagers whom he served; this system was known as *Phaidam Loh Dim*.<sup>71</sup> When the

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<sup>70</sup> *Pusa* (Pu- grandfather, Sa- maker) was the root word for *Sakhua* in Zo language.

<sup>71</sup> It literally means Basketful of Paddy.

priest performed a sacrificial meat, he is entitled to get a portion of the meat called *A Ngum*.<sup>72</sup>

It is also mentioned that the priest made a tremendous contributions in instigating the practices of head-hunting by making the people to 'believe that the spirit or vitality of man lies in his head and by its possession the hunter's village is not only strengthened by that spirit but also the fertility of its soil is increased, yielding more harvests..'<sup>73</sup>

It is important to note that centuries ago before the advent of the British in the region, there was a high degree of fluidity in the socio-cultural arena, so that intermingling of various streams of people, including biological admixture, produced diverse social alignments and group identities. The boundaries of the groups were never very rigid. It is this flexibility, characteristic of a frontier tract experiencing considerable population movement from different directions, which provided scope for shifting alliance and identities. Pre-colonial social setting in the region was more flexible than during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

We have seen the pre-colonial social formations of the Zo community, where the social and economic activities centered on the modes of production and how it slowly changes in the Chieftaincy era. Although the Chieftaincy system still exist, their powers and functions are gradually on the wane and this process is accentuated with the introduction of the modern institutions and the recognitions of the various Zo ethnic groups into 'recognised' political block.

## II

### **Christianization of Social Relations:**

This section will evaluate the role of the traditional institution and their importance in the development process. Further it will trace out, how the modern

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<sup>72</sup> A Ngum= The spine from the sacrificial meat.

<sup>73</sup> As in Lien, p. 45.

institutions like the church organizations has replace the old one and the relationships between traditional institution and modern leaders thrown up by modern institutions.

#### Impact of Christianity and Modern Education:

Education was no doubt considered as one of the binding forces to maintain political stability; in fact, it was with this objective in mind which impelled the British officials to introduce formal education in the hills areas of the North East India. Of course the spread of modern education in North East India was not solely the work of the government. The Christian missionaries sponsored by the government or independently have played an important part in educating the people of the North East India.<sup>74</sup> Pudaite however distinguish the policy of education made by the Christian Missionaries from the government. He stated that the objectives of the government is to-1) recruit the educated natives to serve the state in the subordinate posts e.g. clerks, peons, etc. 2) expand the market for British manufactured goods in India. 3) reconcile the natives to the British rule.<sup>75</sup> However, the Christian Missionaries has a different objective. W. Pettigrew<sup>76</sup> once said, "giving education to the tribesmen was to propagate Christianity".<sup>77</sup> In order to communicate the gospel, the missionaries felt the necessity of giving them education.

According to Hluna, the spread of Christianity and modern education rapidly affected the life of the tribal people and brought a complete change in the society. The tribes who believed in supernatural beings and spirits to whom they offered sacrifice in order to propitiate them were now converted to Christianity by doing away with the ancient beliefs. In fact, Christianity and education removed blind faith, superstitions, sacrifices and replaced them by better exercises of reasoning power, understanding the fact and using will power.<sup>78</sup> The practice of head-hunting which was once regarded the

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<sup>74</sup> Bipin Chandra, *Modern India ( NCERT )*, Reprint 1986, New Delhi, p-119 in Dr. Rosiem Pudaite, *Indian National Struggle for Freedom and Its Impact in the Mizo Movement (1935-1953 A.D.)*, Churachandpur, 2002. p. 75.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.75.

<sup>76</sup> William Pettigrew was the first known missionary in established a school in the hill area of Manipur. He established a school at Ukhrul in 1896.

<sup>77</sup> Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism*, Shillong 1988.p.161.

<sup>78</sup> J.V. Hluna, *Role of Missionaries in Mizoram Education*, NEIHA (Pasheghat) 1968. p.284.

highest heroic deed was now given up. The tribal found the moral and spiritual instructions laid in the Bible was very much appealing to their heart and embraced the new faith. Further, the introduction of western education rapidly transformed the society. For the tribal who had been toiling day and night to make both ends meet, it was a boon to get modern education since everyone was made responsible for his/her own welfare, fate and living standard. The creation of living salaried posts created a new awareness towards life and all that life and the world can give to one.<sup>79</sup>

The development or change has occurred because Missionary movements are often based on a zeal that is very much philanthropic. The Christian missionaries offered extensive humanitarian services to the tribal people by opening dispensaries, schools and service in the difficult and remote hills for the welfare and upliftment of the tribals, the missionaries earned their goodwill and win their hearts. This can be seen from the fact that Walkin R. Roberts, who brought Christianity to the present Churachandpur District area, had no intention initially to be a missionary but to act as dispenser and private helper to Dr. P. Fraser at the Welsh mission medical clinic in Aizawl.<sup>80</sup>

When the Christian Missionary normally approaches the native people to evangelize, a definite interaction of each other's culture takes place. Whatever be the package one may offer, people do get interested when they come to be convinced that what is offered is good enough to enrich their life. Louis J Luzbetak asserts that there is no other way of introducing new Christian beliefs and practices or new socio-economic ideas than by effectively persuading individuals to deviate from their traditional ways. Lal Dena points out:

The Colonial Policy throughout the period under study has been to consistently legitimize and uphold the authority of the traditional chiefs, where as the missionary work, basing

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<sup>79</sup> Z. Z. Lien, op.cit. pp.118-119.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Fraser's letter to R J Williams, Secretary, WCMFMS, Liverpool, dated 14<sup>th</sup> September 1908 quoted in Dr Lal Dena, *Christianity Missions and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in North East India with Particular Reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills 1894-1947*, Vendrame Institute, Shillong, 1988, p. 49.



on the theory of cultural selectivity, contributed to the disruption of order in the traditional society.<sup>81</sup>

Dena further explains that while the 'traditional elites' stood behind the officials, the 'modern elites' rallied behind the missionaries. This resulted in loosening of bond between the new elite and the traditional authority which later became the source of contention.<sup>82</sup> In fact the individual who dare to part from their traditional way are the bridge between the Missionary educator, technical advisor, doctor, catechist, counselor, confessor and preachers. The innovators are the bridge between the Church and the non-Christian society.

This could be one of the main reasons which resulted in certain changes in the structure of the Zo society because prior to Christianity, as we have discussed earlier, the Village Headmen functioned as the religious guide of the village. But after the advent of Christianity, the authority of the Church assumed higher important in the religious matters and the Village Headmen had to limit his authority to the administrative matters only.

Before the introduction of Christianity and modern education, the chief and the council of elders formed the first elite group in the tribal society. But with the spread of education the chief and the council of elders were replaced by the educated tribals who formed the newly emerged middle class among the tribal society. "It initiated an unprecedented fast process of change in all attributes of the social and political aspects in these regions. It expeditiously graduated the people from their primary status".<sup>83</sup> The educated tribals were more conscious about their political rights and they could no longer see the faulty administration of the chiefs and hoped for better administration. They see the chief as a symbol of 'exploitation' and 'oppression'.<sup>84</sup> For example, the desire for better administration was culminated in the formation of Mizo Union Party in the Lushei Hills District which ultimately brought to an end to the Chieftainship by the Government

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> S C Sharma, *Insurgency or Ethnic Conflict (With special reference to Manipur)*, Magnum Business Associates, New Delhi, 2003. p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> f a' Dena, *op.cit.* p. 110

of Assam Act 1954. By virtue of being the first educated people they were easily absorbed in the government services as clerks, teachers, interpreters, etc. Since they were employed on a regular basis, they were provided with financial security. Since then educated middle class began to play a dominant role in the tribal society, they become very active against the traditional chiefs.

N.B. Bose points out; Christianity has undoubtedly brought the message of the richer life. It gives a wider companionship and a new sense of dignity to converts. But it is interesting to note that the Christian religion has always been attended by the beliefs of modern civilization. And this was particularly so during the British rule when the converts felt closer to the British rulers than their benighted countrymen. It is only after independence that allegiance to one's native culture is being encouraged. It is now gaining acceptance that their can be a Christian religion which does not necessarily draw men and women away from their own culture and civilization. Yet up to now, the principal agent of westernization (often regarded as Modernisation), among the tribal folks has been the Christian Missionary enterprise.<sup>85</sup>

Tarun Goswami claims that Christianity has not alienated Kukis (or Zomis) from their traditional and cultural milieus. It has not disturbed the in-built frame work of their ancient culture, lore and lifestyles. Rather it is Christianity that has been suitably modified, may not thought be in its basic tenets, but definitely in its outward forms and practices, under the strong and perpetual impact of a human culture handed down the ages. As such their ancients are still remembered, revered and obeyed.<sup>86</sup>

Arrival of Christianity in South District (Churachandpur):

Lal Dena has made an in depth research in the advent of Christianity in Churachandpur district under the title "The Beginning of Missionary Occupation, 1894-1919."<sup>87</sup> In the South District, the beginning of the Mission enterprises is very much related to the Revival in Welsh, England. The Revival was led by Evan. Walkin R.

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<sup>85</sup> L Jeyaseelan, op.cit.p. 127.

<sup>86</sup> Tarun Goswami, *Kuki Life and Lore*, Haflong, 1985. p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> see Lal Dena Dr., op.cit. pp. 49-53.

Roberts around 1904-1906. The turning point came when the Gospel of St. John, which he used to distributed in the Lushei hills and the surrounding areas reach to one Khamkholun, the Chief of Senvon. With the latter invitation asking him to visit the village, Robert decided to visit the village.<sup>88</sup> He was accompanied by two students from Manipur, Lungpau and Thangkhai started from Aizawl on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1910, and reach Senvon on 5<sup>th</sup> February.<sup>89</sup> This was how the Gospel first reaches the Churachandpur District.

It is the initiative of Rev. W. Roberts in 1912, accompanied by R. Dala went to the United States with the hope to raise funds and sponsorships. When they returned R. Dala was to station himself at Senvon. Gradually their missionary enterprise was christened as 'Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission'. There are many interpretations to the reason why it was named as TKPM. First it was to give a clear idea that this mission had nothing to do with Indo-Burma Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission. Secondly, the early Missionaries who had no clear idea about the land and the people in South District thought that all were Thadou-Kukis. Thirdly, W.Robert began to refer to the work as Thadou-Kuki Mission, because the Mission was initiated by the Thadou-Kuki Chief of Senvon village, Khamkholun Singson.<sup>90</sup>

#### Processes and the Beginning of Linguistic Based Division:

In 1917 a great revival came to Senvon and it spread to the surrounding villages. As a result, many were converted and some went on to preach the Gospel to Vuite area and Gangte area, etc.<sup>91</sup> To expand the scope of the Mission they renamed the Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission (TKPM) into North East India General Mission (NEIGM).<sup>92</sup>

It is known from the beginning i.e., 1910-1947 that the missions was run under one administration and organization under NEIGM. And the number of Christians, with

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 49.

<sup>89</sup> L. Jeyaseelan, op.cit. p. 85.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p.86.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.88.

<sup>92</sup> Kaineng, Tangthupha Gen Mite Kalsuan, *Jubilee Thusuah*, ECI, 1974.

the expansion of the missionary movement, increased in each tribe. Thus it is quite obvious that the problem of language would crop up under a single administration. Since different tribes spoke different dialect, the medium of Church service become debatable. Hence the ideas of separate association came up for discussion.<sup>93</sup> For instance, in 1949 there was supposed to be a General Assembly at Saikot. The Simsak Bial pr sbytery, one among the five divisions under NEIGM, decided at an emergency meeting on the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1948 at Sialbu (near Singngat) that they would not attend the Assembly Meeting. Simsak Bial Presbytery had an exclusive conference in 1949 at Kaihlam. It was the first Paite Christian Conference. In 1950, there was another Conference at Songtal. Simsak Bial Presbytery was changed into Manipur Christian Convention (MCC) was later changed into Evangelical Convention Church (ECC).<sup>94</sup> Thus, an independent Church, created solely on dialectic based was formed.

Later on, Bible translation has been taken up which further increase the tendency of linguistic identity, reinforcing the dialectical and denominational divisions that have and continue to take place among the different communities living in Churachandpur.

It was around 1924 that the Maharaja of Manipur accepted the request of H.H.Coleman to occupy the Old Churachandpur area. Thus, the Missions Headquarter from Silchar was shifted to the place and named Mission Compound. Here, the occupants of the Mission Compound, although located in the hills area, were neither under a Chief nor any village authority. Further, the occupants were exempted from Hill House Tax which, at that time, every household was supposed to pay.<sup>95</sup>

No doubt, the Christian mission headquarters at Churachandpur have definitely contributed towards the growth of urban life. The Headquarters which are based at Churachandpur(Lamka) town have become a life line of all types of activities; religious, social, political and economic.

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<sup>93</sup> D. Khaizalian, *Tangthupha Tunma leh Tunning Thu*, New Lamka, 1986. pp. 70-71

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.* p. 84-85

<sup>95</sup> See L. Jeyaseelan., *op.cit.*, pp. 80-82.

It is also important to note that though due to modernizing project such as Schools, White collar jobs etc. and urbanization many more tribals are flooding the towns, there is a structural detribalization but the ethos of tribalism persisted even in the new situation. Here, Sharma comment on Manipur is quite relevant where he stated that “The societies had developed in this region in a self-contained environment. It had nurtured on the foundation of ethnicity for ages which firmly bounded the people in closed pockets. Their priorities, allegiance and consideration were guided by singular ethnic fundamentals. The territorial boundaries of the State which have been changing from time to time on political consideration in this region have not really moved them, emotionally, not even politically”.<sup>96</sup> This ethos of tribalism or ethnicity is manifest in the fact that people of the same tribe or ethnic groups prefer to live, congregate together and make clubs, associations. The Kukis, Zomis and Mizos, who live either in cities like Delhi, Calcutta or Bombay, have often been seen to behave in the certain pattern and, most of the time, group together for various purposes or occasions. Hence, though outwardly such factors like urbanization, migration, industrialization seemingly cause a breakdown of the cognitive structural phenomena of a tribe the ethos of tribalism persists.

The sense of ethnicity becomes more acute in a new changed situation, because here the fact of ethnicity becomes the platform for power,<sup>97</sup> status and security. In a new situation, members become a more compact ethnic group. Once rooted from the rural areas, the same group of people begins to reunite into a solidary ethnic group.

The change of religion by the people did not emanate any drastic mutation in the ethnic equations among the people except marginal social effervescence. The tribesmen treated religion as a sacred aspect of life but it was never considered above there ethnic interests of the tribe. Therefore adoption of a common new religion brought no change in the intensity of the hostility between different rival groups.<sup>98</sup> This can be summed up with a critical view given by Lal Dena on the Naga-Kuki conflict. He stated:

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<sup>96</sup> Sharma S C, op.cit. p. 10.

<sup>97</sup> K S Singh, Tribal Transformation:(II)- Tribal Movements, Eight Devraj Chanana Memorial Lecture 1981.

<sup>98</sup> ibid.p. 96.

It appears that a Kuki is first Kuki and then a Christian; and the Naga becomes a Naga first and then a Christian. In other words, their loyalty to Christ is subordinated to their loyalty to their ethnic community.<sup>99</sup>

This process has been termed as “Retribalisation” by Cohen which he defines as “a process by which a group from one ethnic category, whose members are involved in a struggle for power and privileges, with the members of a group from another ethnic category, within the framework of the formal political system, manipulates some customs, values, myths, symbols and ceremonials, from their cultural traditions in order to articulate an informal political organization which is used as a weapon in that struggle”.<sup>100</sup>

Hence, the study of how the modern institutions (Christian institutions) replace the old ones and the relationships between traditional institution and modern leaders thrown up by modern institutions from both the view points of the observer and the actors has not been probed into. The present study shows only the unidimensional, one side consideration. The mind of the actor, either in using or ignoring the attributes, has been neglected in this field.

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<sup>99</sup> Dena Lal, The Role of Churches in Containing the Ethnic Conflicts in Manipur in Joshua C Thomas., R Gopalakrishnan , R K Ranjan Singh, op.cit. p. 80.

<sup>100</sup> quoted in Mitchell J C, Perception of *Ethnicity and Ethnic Behaviour: An Empirical Exploration in Urban Ethnicity*, (ed) Abner Cohen, pp. 16-17.

### Chapter III

## Identity Mobilizations, Ethnic Conflicts and Demographic Changes

During the Naga-Kuki conflict<sup>101</sup>, some other groups like the Paite, Zou, Vaiphei, Simte, Hmar, etc. who were mainly concentrated in Churachandpur (Lamka) district and have linguistic and cultural affinity with the 'Kuki' tried to distance themselves from the latter. One main reason was that they preferred Zomi as an identity to Kuki. This enraged the displaced Kukis and some Kuki militants particularly the Kuki National Front (KNF) which also viewed Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) as being the supporter and sympathizer of the Naga militant group. Another factor was that the demand for 'Kuki homeland' by KNF includes Churachandpur district which is the stronghold of ZRA, an armed organization of the Zomi group. There was an underlying tension between the Kukis and Zomis.

According to official report, in Churachandpur, tension spilled out because of the incident of mass killing of innocent villagers at Saikul village, located around three kms from Churachandpur (Lamka) town, by the Kuki national Front (KNF) militants in the evening of the 24rd June 1997.<sup>102</sup> This was accepted by the Kuki Innpi, Churachandpur (an apex body of the Kuki ethnic group) and the Zomi Council as the real and immediate cause of the conflict. This ignited the Zomi ethnic groups and in retaliation the next morning, Kuki houses were burnt and civilians were killed within the Churachandpur town.<sup>103</sup>

While the Kuki-Naga conflict concentrated mainly in four districts, namely, Senapati, Tamenglong, Chandel and Ukhrul, the 1997-98 Kuki-Zomi conflict was mainly concentrated in Churachandpur district. By the end of August, although no precise figure could be ascertained the official figure has crossed 90 dead. The number of injured persons was put somewhere around 80. Over 300 houses, granaries and cow sheds had

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<sup>101</sup> Will be discuss later in the chapter.

<sup>102</sup>H. Nengsong, *Project Report for Rehabilitations of Displaced Persons in Churachandpur District*, Manipur 1998. p.3

<sup>103</sup> Misson for Peace, Zomi Council, Manipur, August 5, 1998. p.11

been burnt down rendering over 10,500 persons homeless.<sup>104</sup> According to the “Project Report for Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons and Victims of the Ethnic Clash between the KNF and ZRA in Churachandpur District,” the ethnic clash of 1997-1998 resulted in 450 lives lost and 6000 houses burnt or destroyed, with the value of lost properties estimated at INR50 crore (1 crore = 10 million; INR 50 crore = USD11.1 million [@USD1 = INR45]).<sup>105</sup>

Here, it is important to present briefly the ethnic composition to comprehend the complexity of the changing relationship among and between the various communities and tribes in Churachandpur. The immediate outbreak of violence between the Zomi and Kuki groups in Churachandpur may be over the question of dominance and supremacy at a particular geographical region, as one may guess. Another factor may be claims and counter claims made by the different groups over identity based on language issue and the like.

The population of the area could be broadly categorized as Scheduled Tribes and Others. The Scheduled Tribes constituted 86.26% and the Others includes Meitei, Meitei-Pangal, Nepali, Bengali, Sikh, Bihari, etc. They constituted 13.74% of the district population.<sup>106</sup>

The Kuki(Thadou) population is concentrated in the rural areas. They constitute 12.76% of the total population in the district.<sup>107</sup> The Zomi<sup>108</sup> however constitute about 76.38% of the total population.

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<sup>104</sup> *Eastern Panorama*, September, 1997.

<sup>105</sup> Inter-Church Peace Committee, Manipur, 1997-98, pp4-15 as in Aphun Kamei, *Sustainable Development: The solution to Ethnic Conflict in Manipur*, The Sylff Newsletter, No.14 January 2006.p.3

<sup>106</sup> Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 1999- Government of Manipur.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Here, the tribes included in the Zomi list are Paite, Gangte, Hmar, Simte, Zou, Tidim-Chin and Vaiphei. These seven tribes adopted the name ZOMI in June 26, 1993 at Pearsonmun, Churachandpur. See Ngulkhanpau J M, *When the World of Zomi Changed*, An unpublished thesis submitted to the Faculty of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon. August 30, 1995. p.11



Among the Kuki ethnic group, the numerically dominant Thadou is the second largest tribal community in the state. As per 1981 census, they account for 3.97 percent of the total population of the state<sup>109</sup> and are found in every district of Manipur and have close relationship with every ethnic group in the State. On the other hand, the Zomi ethnic groups live in more compact areas. In terms of population, they constitute 7.13 percent of the state of which Paite tribe (a single largest sub-group among the Zomi ethnic group) account for 2.17 percent. Nearly twenty years ago, it was observed that the Thadou were minority as compared to Paite in Churachandpur region. This study will mostly focus on these two communities.

However, significant changes have occurred during this century in the status of the Kukis. They have increased their power vis-à-vis the Zomis and the metaphor of the Kuki as an identity captures this changing power relationship between the two communities in the Churachandpur district. This linkage paid off well and made the Kukis indispensable part of the local hierarchy and also helped them to get a settled economic life side by side with the other community.

## I

### **Demographic change and Its Impact:**

An overview

One of the most serious ethnic violence occurred in northern Manipur during the 1990s between the Nagas and Kukis. There are many theories about the root cause of the conflict. However the events of the 1990s (conflict) had their roots in the claims of the NSCN(IM) to annex what it calls 'Naga inhabited areas of Manipur', namely the four hill districts of Ukhul, Tamenglong, Senapati and Chandel. There are no parts in Manipur which are properly mono-ethnic. The Kuki National Front (KNF), for example, has the aim of bringing all the Kuki dominated areas within one administrative unit called 'Kukiland'. This claim also includes some parts of the area in the four districts mentioned

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<sup>109</sup> Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 1999- Government of Manipur.

above. Thus, this claim and counter-claim of 'Nagalim' or 'Kukiland' is one of the main factors that ignited one of the most horrendous inter-ethnic violence ever known in Manipur's contemporary history.

The NSCN, after its formation regularly collected 'tax' from each house, originally set at Rs. 10. According to a government intelligence report this was increased ten fold in 1992, and an additional charge of Rs. 1000 was levied on each village per annum for the creation of 'Southern Nagaland'.<sup>110</sup> The Kuki villages naturally resented this imposition. The flash point proved to be the border town of Moreh in Chandel district. Moreh is an important commercial centre which is situated at about 120 kms south-east of Imphal. The murder of a Kuki youth by the NSCN(IM) in 1992 sparked retaliation and further killings.<sup>111</sup> In October of the same year the United Naga Council (UNC), a body drawn from Nagas in Manipur, unilaterally declared that only Kukis who had settled in 'Naga areas' before 1972 would be allowed to remain, and then only in the condition that they public recognized 'the sole ownership and sovereignty of the Nagas over the land'. Those who fail to do so would be required to vacate their land or 'will face dire consequences at their own risk'.<sup>112</sup> It is not one sided. In the year 1992 itself, the KNF had also served 'vacation notice' to villagers of the Chatrik village in Ukhrul district.<sup>113</sup>

The Naga-Kuki ethnic conflict, which erupted in 1992, has claimed hundred of lives and displaced thousands (see table II).

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<sup>110</sup> Phanjoubam Tarabot, *Bleeding Manipur*, New Delhi, 2003. p.209.

<sup>111</sup> For detail accounts of Naga-Kuki conflict, see *ibid.*, pp.192-220.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p.211.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.210.

Table II: Kuki-Naga Ethnic Violence during 1992-1997.<sup>114</sup>

Year	Tribe	Killed	Injured	No. of Houses Burned
1992	Kuki	11	22	11
	Naga	2	26	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>11</b>
1993	Kuki	261	69	2144
	Naga	60	72	1365
	<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>3509</b>
1994	Kuki	95	49	262
	Naga	67	28	425
	<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>687</b>
1995	Kuki	65	39	404
	Naga	44	43	653
	<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>1057</b>
1996	Kuki	32	18	61
	Naga	21	15	127
	<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>188</b>
1997	Kuki	9	13	27
	Naga	14	13	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>33</b>

*Source:* Imphal Secretariat Archives, 1997.

It is problematic to discuss who constitute the Nagas and Kukis. There can be little doubt that these groups who constitute the Naga and Kuki and for that matter the Zomi groups, have common ethnic roots in migration from southern China. The nomenclature is also problematic. Naga is a relatively new term applied to the hill people by others. The earliest records of the British officers normally use the proper clan names,

<sup>114</sup> See The Impact of Arm Violence in Northeast India, Turner and Nepram, CICS, November 2004.

such as Tangkhul, Angami and so on, and do not generally use Naga as an all inclusive term. The present-day meaning of Naga, in the sense of a group of clans which are believed to have a common history, culture and polity derives from the desire to posit a unified political identity. The situation regarding the Kuki is even more complex. The term was used by the British to replace the earlier 'Lushai' to cover the present Kuki, Chin, Mizo and Zomi clans. These groups have a greater cultural and linguistic affinity than the Naga clans. Gangumei notes some clans are in culture midway between the Nagas and Kukis, in that though they speak Kuki-Chin languages they share some cultural traits with Nagas.<sup>115</sup> Gangumei further comments:

As the Naga movement was more powerful (i.e. than the pan-Kuki movement) and deeper, the tribes who are Kuki-Chin speakers, but having strong cultural affinity and geographical proximity and homogeneity, are completely confirmed with the Naga constellation. The Naga-ising process is still a continuing phenomenon.<sup>116</sup>

We can however see the root cause of this development in the colonial identification of various communities which was responsible for the shifting of identity among some "bridge buffer" communities in the hills of Manipur.<sup>117</sup> Kamei stated that:

...ethnicity was employed both by the colonial administrators and tribal elite for different purposes, one for administrative convenience and the other to build up an expanded identity formation...<sup>118</sup>

Thus, the use of the term Naga and Kuki within Manipur is problematic from the historical point of view. However, for the present study, we cannot avoid using it although these are terms that are now so much part of the current debate.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Gangumei Kabui, *Ethnicity and Social Change: An Anthology of Essays*, Imphal, 2002. p.29.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp.29-30.

<sup>117</sup> Gangumei Kamei, *Ethnicity and Social Change: An Anthology of Essay*, Imphal, 2002. p.58.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> However, for the general identification of who constitute the Naga and Kuki groups, see Zehol, Dr.Lucy, *Ethnicity in Manipur: Experiences, Issues and Perspectives*, Regency, 1998. pp.36-39.

The Naga-Kuki conflict led to a spin off conflict between the Thadou and the Zomi especially the Paite speaking groups. According to Zomi sources, misunderstanding over issue of nomenclature was the cause of the conflict.<sup>120</sup> The Kukis on the other hand, states that during the height of Kuki-Naga conflict, the Zomis instead of supporting them, maintain closer relations with the Nagas both at the underground and over ground levels.

It also appears to be the apprehensions of the Zomi group that the displaced Kukis as result of the Kuki-Naga conflict would dominate and subjugates them in various ways. The signing of Peace Accord in 1998 brought peace and understanding between the two warring groups. The state high level committee headed by W. Nipamacha Singh, the then Chief Minister of Manipur initiated the peace process. As instructed by the state government and also authorized by the conflicting parties the Zomi Council and the Kuki Innpi, apex bodies of both the conflicting groups, pledged to forgive and forget the past mistakes committed against each other. The parties agreed that “the nomenclatures Kuki and Zomi shall be mutually respected by all Zomis and Kukis. Every individual or group of persons shall be at liberty to call himself or themselves by any name, and the nomenclature KUKI and ZOMI shall not in any way be imposed upon any person or group against his/ their will at any point of time.”<sup>121</sup>

District wise distribution of two dominating ethnic groups, Zomi and Kuki, are shown in the table below:

Table III: District-wise distribution of Paite and Thadou (1981 census)

Tribe	Senapati	Tamenglong	Churachandpur	Chandel	Imphal East & West	Ukhrul	Total
Paite	202	17	29155	431	1045	109	30959
Thadou	23060	4359	17196	5232	1502	5116	56465

Source: Statistical Handbook of Manipur, 1999-Government of Manipur

<sup>120</sup> Crime Against Humanity, The Zomi Students' Federation, Churachandpur, 1997.

<sup>121</sup> Final Peace Accord Between Zomis and Kukis for Restoration of Peace and Normalcy in Churachandpur District, Churachandpur, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1998.

The Kuki-Naga conflict in the hills of Manipur has led to the displacement of about 11000 Kukis and Nagas since 1992. Although no precise figures could be obtained, in 1993 alone 261 Kukis and 81 Nagas were murdered, and by the end of 1999 nearly a thousand lives had been lost and nearly 6000 houses destroyed. The casualties on both sides have been severe, though the Kuki casualties have been greater. More than 10,000 houses belonging to the Kukis and the Nagas have been torched in arson. More than 600 villages have been uprooted. Some 37,000 Kuki civilians sought sanctuary in camps in the valley (Imphal) and in southern Manipur.<sup>122</sup>

The Kukis demanded government intervention at the very initial stage when the United Naga Council served Quit notice on them on October 22, 1922 and the apathy of the governments towards the plight of the people led to more internal displacement of both the Kukis and the Nagas. The government report at the time described the situation as 'desperate and hopeless' and interestingly, blamed the police and security forces for failing to give adequate protection to isolated communities.<sup>123</sup>

Internal Displacement:

*The Definition*

There is no single structure or instrument to define the term Internal Displacement. The United Nations Organization defined internally displaced persons as "person or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border". According to the Article I of the Conventions of Refugees (1951) combined with Article I of the 1967 protocol of UNHRC a refugee is defined as a person who: "Owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality,

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<sup>122</sup> In John Paratt, *Wounded Land-Politics and Identity in Modern Manipur*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2005. p.178 .

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.* p.178.

membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of this nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it".

Internally displaced people (henceforth IDP) are those people who are forced to abandon their homes by similar circumstances. Yet, they are not accorded the status a refugee enjoys. It means like IDP does not belong to any category. The only difference between an IDP and a refugee is that the IDP does not cross any international boundary or seek refuge to a foreign country. Yet, they bear the same burden; suffer as much as a refugee suffers.

According to UN sources, the total number of IDP runs as high as 30 million with Asia's own share of 7 million (1995 report). The plight of the internally displaced people are similar to those circumstances that created refugees. Yet lack of access to these people by the international agencies such as Red Cross, Human Rights Commission, UNHRC etc. make the situation grimmer. We can certainly point this problem due to the lack of co-ordination between the agencies and the state functionaries.

Ethnic clash, natural calamities, religious confrontation, armed conflict, poverty etc. form the core issue. This problem prevails in almost all the societies and states. As all of the affected people are civilians they continue to suffer both politically and economically with adverse effects on their society and culture. Ethnic clashes between Kukis and Nagas, the Kukis and the Zomis in Manipur could be cited as nearest examples.

In this study, the displacement within the state of Manipur is considered, but not the displacement from outside the state and those who are from outside the Indian Union.

Internal Displacement and its Impacts:

Conflict and internal displacement not only disrupts the parties concerned, it also affects the lives of other neighbouring communities and environments. Conflict and internal displacement also spill over into neighbouring villages and regions. The Kuki-Naga conflict originally confine to Moreh in Chandel district of Manipur spread to Ukhrl district and finally to other districts in Manipur and even Nagaland. The conflict in Churachandpur is a good example of how conflict and internal displacement in one region influence the situations in other regions and led to large-scale displacement. We can also illustrate this from the writing of John Parratt where he traces the conflict (between the Kuki and Zomi in 1997) from the Naga-Kuki conflict. As mentioned above, Kuki civilians began to seek safety in the Valley and the Southern District. According to Parratt, “as *refugees* from the north sought sanctuary in Churachandpur district antagonism arose between different clan groups. The Kuki National Front (KNF), which claimed Churachandpur as part of a separate Kukiland, accused the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) of paying taxes to the NSCN (IM) and aiding their activities. The Paite especially were accused of indifference to the Naga atrocities, and the KNF attacked several of their villages.”<sup>124</sup> Joshua Thomas states that “Having been driven out from the Naga inhabited areas of Nagaland and Manipur, the Kuki refugee enter Churachandpur district. In order to accommodate them they look at the hands of the Paites. They also knew that if the Paites were subdued, the whole district would be under their hands.”<sup>125</sup> To what extend this finding is true will be hard to ascertained, but it would not be wrong to comment that there is a competition for supremacy between these two groups. It has become a political, economic and strategic problem affecting broad geographical areas.

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<sup>124</sup> Parratt, op.cit. p.178.

<sup>125</sup> Joshua C. Thomas, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Manipur in (ed.) Girin Phukon, *Political Dynamics of North East India*, South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, 2000. p.212.



Table IV: Kukis uprooted in the Kuki-Naga conflict (in terms of villages)

State	No. of Kuki Villages Burnt/uprooted
Manipur	325
a) Ukhrul	82
b) Chandel	69
c) Churachandpur	18
d) Senapati	64
e) Tamenglong	92
Assam (North Cachar Hills)	92
Nagaland (Kohima district)	16

Source: Memorandum to the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, by the Kuki Innpi, Imphal, 1996

The demographic pressures resulting from internally displaced persons in-flow leading to ethno-demographic imbalances and subsequent pressure on the local resources both natural and infrastructural have often created a tense atmosphere in these areas.

Again since their geographical destinations are determined mostly by cultural and linguistic affinity, ethnically mixed villages and towns, once common in the hills of Manipur especially in the Churachandpur district, have virtually ceased to exist. Various relief camps set up by the government immediately after the displacement could not provide even the basic necessities. The displaced persons prefer to move about in the hills or areas where their groups of people have already lived.

Here we may take into account the census figures from 1961 to 2001 to make the picture clear.

Table V: District-wise Population of Manipur (in Lakhs)\*

District	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	Net % Increase (1961-2001)
Senapati	0.72	1.04	1.55	2.08	2.84	526
Tamenglong	0.37	0.45	0.62	0.86	1.11	302
Churachandpur	0.62	0.98	1.35	1.76	2.29	369
Chandel	0.28	0.39	0.56	0.71	1.23	439
Ukhrul	0.49	0.62	0.83	1.09	1.41	287
Imphal	3.19	4.34	5.56	7.11	8.33	261
Bishnupur	0.79	1.08	1.41	1.81	2.06	260
Thoubal	1.35	1.82	2.32	2.94	3.66	271
<b>Total (State)</b>	<b>7.81</b>	<b>10.72</b>	<b>14.20</b>	<b>18.36</b>	<b>22.93</b>	<b>305</b>

\*As in Aribam Brajakumar Sharma, *Influx of Migrants into Manipur*, United Committee Manipur (UCM), November, 2005. p.49.

If we see Table V, it shows the increase in population in the district of Senapati, Churachandpur and Chandel is more than the State average.<sup>126</sup> Further, to be more precise, if we study comparatively the year between 1991 and 2001 in Churachandpur district, it shows a sharp increase in population compared to the other previous years. In the Report, it is mentioned that the main reason behind this 'abnormal increase could have been due to suspected influx from adjoining country of Myanmar and Indian state of Mizoram.'<sup>127</sup> However, this report is counter factual to the prevailing variable in explaining the influx of immigrants in Manipur such as 'Politico-Socio-Economic conditions in the neighbouring countries/states'<sup>128</sup>, the influx of Bangladeshi and Nepali given in the Report are mostly concentrated in the Valley and Senapati District

<sup>126</sup> The study of ranking of district by population size in 1991 and 2001 shows that while Churachandpur, Senapati and Chandel rank Sixth, Fourth and Ninth position respectively in 1991 census, Churachandpur district rose to Fifth, Senapati to Third and Chandel to Eighth position. See Census of India 2001, Series 14, Manipur, PROVISIONAL POPULATION TOTALS, Paper 1 of 2001, Directorate of Census Operation, Manipur.

<sup>127</sup> Aribam Braakumar Sharma, opcit. P.50.

<sup>128</sup> ibid (3.2.4), p.27.

respectively.<sup>129</sup> Further, it has to be noted that the neighbouring states especially Mizoram is doing much better than the Manipur hill districts in the socio-economic sphere and also politically. There were no notable incidences that would amount to mass influx to Manipur State during the said period.

Secondly, the Report itself has limited itself to the fact that it studies 'the *migrants* from outside the State and those who are from outside the Indian Union' and not 'within the state of Manipur'.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, it is obvious that it did not consider the events happening within the state during that time. Thus, the reasons (for population growth) given in reports could not be taken as final. As Phanjoubam puts it, "The influx of displaced Kukis to Churachandpur during the feud with Nagas had also resulted in a demographic imbalance in the district... This has caused enmity between the Kukis and Zomis from whom the former had expected some 'fraternal gesture' which, some Kuki militants viewed, was not forthcoming during the Naga-Kuki conflict."<sup>131</sup>

This interdependence expecting the majority and minority of both the dominant groups of the Zomi and Kuki group had offered the system some sort of stability in the region. However, the majority-minority relationship of the earlier time came under considerable strain as both the communities now found themselves locked in competition over scarce resources especially after the ethnic conflict between the Nagas and Kukis in 1992. Most of the Kukis living in different districts were internally displaced. The local population felt the pressure both in terms of socio-economic and political standing.

Significant changes have taken place within the two communities as well as in their relationship. There is an increase in tribal consciousness as a result of work done by various NGOs and government sponsored relief programmes. Though there is some development as a result of government efforts, the *old settlers* hardly got benefited in a big way who were also indirectly affected by the mass displacement. However, the Kuki

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<sup>129</sup> *ibid.* pp.26-29.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.* p.23.

<sup>131</sup> Phanjoubam Tarapot, *Bleeding Manipur*, New Delhi, 2003. p.217.

has done relatively well and this has advanced their social standing both in economic and social terms.

In such circumstances, the emerging tensions between the Zomis and the Kukis are not difficult to understand. The conflict between these two groups is largely concerned with wealth and power especially drawn from the state.

From this it is clear that the emerging tension and conflict is mainly because of the competition for wealth and power between the displaced persons and the *locals*. For examples, the Kukis have acquired large areas of land through mass settlements. The Zomis also blame the Kukis of violating the peaceful economic norms and demanding extortion money from local businessmen and households. In the past years the Zomis have revolted against such exploitation but in a peaceful manner. Hence, it becomes necessary to answer why a non-violent protest become violent in the later years.

Generally, it points to an incident where tension was witnessed between the Zomis and the Kukis on the issues of killing of innocent villagers at Saikul village, which incidentally also reflects the politics of domination. But to the surprise of Kukis this time the dominant status was challenged by the Zomis. It reflects that new scenario has emerged where no particular community has exclusive hegemony.

The Kukis, however, hold that the nature of the present politics and the role of the NSCN (IM) is responsible for the existing condition in the region. The upward mobility of the Kukis also changed the Zomi's perception of the role of politics in society. While earlier politicization of social matters was resented by the latter, now they saw politics as a tool to catch up with the Kukis.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> There are distinctive regional patterns in the electoral behaviour of tribal constituencies, reflecting not only differences between the regions in which the tribes are located, but also reflecting important differences among the tribes themselves- their demographic distribution, levels of modernization, intensity of self-awareness, and their relationship with state and central authority. As stated in Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field., op.cit. p.118.

If we go behind the surface reality, we are able to discern that this conflict between the concerned communities was an outcome of fractional fighting between the armed organizations of both the ethnic group i.e. the Kuki National Front (KNF) and Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA). We can here quote Ved Marwah, the then governor of Manipur in 2002 where he stated:

...It is ethnic difference or rather a misconceived perception of ethnic difference- which has been the major source of conflict, and has been ruthlessly exploited by some of the insurgency movements.<sup>133</sup>

Secondly, the rift further increased when the two marginalized groups found themselves battling over the scarce resources. In a newspaper interview, the Kuki National Army (which mostly operated around the Moreh town) openly stated that “it had come to the district (Churachandpur) to bring about an amiable settlement between the KNF and ZRA. But then the KNA first wanted that the Paites admit publicly that they are also Kukis.” Further, the ZRO in return responded that “history has established that the Paites are of Zomi group and not of Kuki...”<sup>134</sup> Here it brings us deeper into the roots of the conflict which we will discuss in terms of dialectical-clan based identity in the next section.

## II

### **Dialect-Clan Based Identity Mobilization:**

#### **Background**

The ethnic identity of the Zo people in Manipur is subsumed under different identity designations. The Constitution of India referred to them as Scheduled Tribe. Among them some are designated as ‘Kuki’ while some others like to be called “Chin”. Thus, they were known by different names in contemporary times. The term CHIN or KHYAN were mainly used by the Burmese to refer the Zo people. When some section of

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<sup>133</sup> in Parratt, op.cit. p.179.

<sup>134</sup> *Eastern panorama*, September, 1997. p.37.

the Zo tribes moved across the rugged hills and come into contact with the peoples of Bengal and Assam, they were called KUKI. They were known by this name (Kuki) until the early 1870s, when another name, Lushai, was added by the British.

Mangkhosat Kipgen observed that “due to the clan and family feuds prevalent among them during the pre-British days, outside observer tended to regard the different clans as distinct people. Also as the big tribe occupying a large tract of hills, touching the plains of both Burma and then undivided India, they were known by the dominant peoples of both countries. While the Burmese called them “CHIN” or “KHYAN”, the Bengalis and others in India called them “KUKI”, with a variety of spelling. The British, the common rulers of both nations, combined the two names into KUKI-CHIN. They were known thus until the early 1870s when the third name for them, Lushai, was added to confound confusion. From that time onwards the people who lived in the hills between the plains of Burma and India (now also Bangladesh) and South-ward from the Naga Hills to the Arakan Zoma in Burma were variously called CHINS, KUKIS and LUSHAI”.<sup>135</sup>

Here it must be mentioned that it was the British administrators and military officers who first made the Zo people known to the outside world and were largely responsible for the problems that the Zo people face in terms of identity such as Chin, Kuki, Lushai etc. These were the imposed names given to the Zo people. Because of this, their common sense of identity has been weakened. In fact, this is also responsible for the conflict among them. Another factor could perhaps be the lack of communication among different clans due to scattered villages. The natural result was that each locality or village developed its own dialect, manner, customs and culture. Feelings of the former close relationship among the different clans no longer exist. So, clan loyalties completely displaced their tribal loyalties. As such they began treating each other as their enemies. Vumson, a Zo historian of Burma, comments the relationship among the Zo groups as:

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<sup>135</sup> Mangkhosat Kipgen, *The Growth of Christianity in Mizoram from 1894-1954 with special reference to the role of the Zo Culture*, Unpublished D.Th. Thesis, Unite Theological College, 1992. pp.30-31.

It is very likely that during settlement in the Chindwin valley the Zo people led a peaceful life without tribal conflicts. Tribes in themselves are often a product of warfare among the people, which among the Zo began after their migration to the hills. The rugged terrain and each migratory group's suspicions of others led to limited contact with one another, thereby developing different dialects and different habits.<sup>136</sup>

This was further illustrated in the writing of L.Keivom's "Zo Reunification Process". Here he also stated that:

It was during the Chin Hills settlement that the linear strata became more defined and clanism became more emphasized as each clan and sub-clan moved and settled in groups thereby subsequently resulting in the formation of a new tribes and sub-tribes. In this way, the Zo group of tribes, clans and sub-clans speaking varied Zo dialects were born. As they spread out over different hills, clan by clan, they become more and more isolated from each other and their loyalty concentrated more and more on their respective clans. In this way they became fiercely insular, loyal to their clan only and fought each other to gain supremacy over others as well as to defend their lands and honour from intrusion by others...<sup>137</sup>

This indeed forms the historical context both for the current unity movements, and the disputes among the Zo dialect-clans related to their political divisions today. Thus widely scattered and isolated from each other, living in different districts, states and even countries, and above all due to the passage of time the Zo people developed primary identities based on clan and dialect rather than their common origins. Despite the efforts to unify the tribes under a common name, the clan identities have become stronger, which have been given organized shape. Just before India's independence, Mr. Zavum of the Thadou clan organized a meeting of most of Zo tribes in Manipur. The purpose of the meeting was to become acquainted with one another and to discuss common problems to be faced with the change of power from the British to the Indian.

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<sup>136</sup> Vumson, op.cit. p.47.

<sup>137</sup> L. Keivom, Zo Reunification Process in (ed.) Priyadarshni (alias Tingneihohi) M. Gangte, *Why Must We Be Mizo?*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati:Delhi, 2006. p.141.

The meeting was not successful as some leaders left because Mr. Zavum insisted that the Thadou dialect be used as a medium of discussion. He asserted that the Thadou were the real “Kuki” and that their dialect should be used as a common language (Lingua-franca). The leader who walked away from the meeting formed an organization called Khulmi National Union under the leadership of Teba Kilong in 1946 and invited into it all people who share the legend of originating from the cave at CHINLUNG. This organization was formed basically to counter the Thadou domination and who are opposed to the term Kuki as their identity.<sup>138</sup> This was basically formed to oppose the name ‘Kuki’ because the Thadou speaking groups regard this name as their own. Further, it was even noted that some of the Thadou leaders used the word ‘*Kuki Siki*’, ‘*Kuki Makhai*’ (quarter Kuki, half Kuki respectively) to mean other tribes other than the Thadous.<sup>139</sup> The Khulmi National Union was joined by all Zo clans including a handful from the Thadou clan. However, this organization did not last long since the members form their own respective organizations based on clan and dialect.

The Khul National Union emerged as a very popular political organization in the 1948 election to Manipur Legislative Assembly by sending up to 7 (seven) members including a minister viz., Dr. Damjakhai, Dr. Kampu, T.C.Tiankham, Tuljachin, Teba Kilong (Forest Minister), Mono Monsang, Holkhopau Mate to the Manipur Assembly. However it could not sustain the popular support for long as it lacked efficient leadership with appropriate vision.<sup>140</sup>

Ranjit Singh, in his study under the sub-title ‘Thadou-Kuki Controversy’ states that while the Thadou groups claim that the Thadou language solely belongs to them, their cognates tribes (here, he meant to say the Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Simte etc.) opposed it by claiming that the language (Thadou language) is not the exclusive possession of the Thadou alone. It is as much as theirs, and therefore, should be called ‘Kuki language’.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Dr. H. Kamkhenthang, Zoumi Nam Sunga Pawl Min a Ki Demtuahna, *Phatuamngaihna*, YPA, Lamka Block, Churachandpur, 1999. p.16.

<sup>139</sup> in Rev. S. Prim Vaiphei, *Who We Are/ Who Are We?* in *In Search of Identity*, Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, March 1986. p.22.

<sup>140</sup> S. Prim Vaiphei, quoted in Singh Ranjit R.K., op.cit. p.11.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.* p.4.



Here, he seems to justify it by stating that the Government of Manipur issued an order (Government of Manipur, Secretariat: Education Department, Order No. 17/1/72-SE, dated 22-3-1977) to the effect that Thadou language be read up to Primary stage in school.<sup>142</sup> This was, according to him, contrasted by the other groups. He further explain that the Government of Manipur, conceding the counterclaim of the other groups, issued another order (dated 3-1-81) replaced the term Thadou for Kuki.<sup>143</sup> It has to be noted here that, as mentioned before, the Khulmi National Union was formed in 1946 to counter the Thadou domination. It is basically formed by the groups who cannot accept the imposition of the Thadou language against their own. Secondly, these new nomenclatures like 'Khulmi', 'Tribal League', 'Tukbem Sawm', etc. were disposed to oppose the name 'Kuki' because the Thadou speaking group regard this name 'Kuki' as their own.<sup>144</sup> Thus, it is clear that there was no reason for the other groups to protest against the Government Order of 1977. Paul Brass observes, "The process of creating communities from ethnic groups involves the selection of particular dialect... from a variety of available alternative."<sup>145</sup> Secondly, contrary to Singh's interpretation where he points to the tension as a recent phenomenon, the tension have started way back prior to independence. Singh has misinterpreted it in both the context. However, he is right in saying that the Government Order of 1981 where the 'Thadou' language is replaced by the term 'Kuki' has done more harm than good. A Pandora box had been opened for all concerned.<sup>146</sup>

The ascendancy of the dialect-clan based identity over the tribal identity among the ZOs is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than at LAMKA, the name of the headquarters of the Churachandpur district of Manipur. Lamka is home to different Zo ethnic groups. In spite of the small size of the town, it is reputed to be "the smallest town with the most numerous national president in North East India." In it, one finds the Headquarters of such organizations as the Kuki National Organisation (KNA), the Paite National Council (PNC), the Hmar National Union (HNU), the Simte National Council

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<sup>142</sup> in T.S. Gangte, *The Kukis of Manipur: A Historical Analysis*, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 1993 quoted in Singh Ranjit R.K., *ibid.* p.4.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> in Rev. S. Prim Vaiphei, *op.cit.* p.22.

<sup>145</sup> Paul R. Brass, *op.cit.*, p.25

<sup>146</sup> Gangte, quoted in Singh Ranjit R.K., *op.cit.* p.4

(SNC), the Vaiphei National Organisation (VNO), the Gangte Tribes' Union (GTU), the Mizo Convention (MC), the Tedim-Chin Union (TCU), the United Jomi Organisation (UJO), the Guite National Organisation (GNO) etc. There are also some 30 (thirty) daily, weekly or monthly papers and magazines, containing secular and ecclesiastical news and articles, in different Zo dialects, published in the district.<sup>147</sup>

Various linguistic based identities such as the Paite, Hmar, Simte, Jou, Vaiphei, Gangte, Kom, Tiddim, etc. formed an ethnic based organization to preserve their own identity. Such example are the Paite National Council (PNC, 1949), the Vaiphei National Organisation (VNO, 1944), the Hmar Association (1945), the Kuki National Assembly (1947), the United Zou Organisation (1948), the Mizo Union (Manipur, 1948), etc.

The Paite National Council (PNC) was formed to preserve Paite cultural identity. It was formed in Tangnuam Village, Churachandpur on June 27, 1949 with T. Thangkhai and Pauzamawi as General President and Secretary respectively.<sup>148</sup> In 1952, the PNC put Mr. Thangkhai, a Church leader, as a candidate for the Manipur Legislature. But his candidacy was rejected by the returning officer. Since Paite was not mentioned as a Scheduled Tribe, Thangkhai need to declare himself as Lushai, Kuki or Naga to qualify. In 1955, the Paite therefore urged that they be included in the Scheduled Tribe list. The request was granted. The Vaiphei seeing the success of the Paite in listing themselves a Scheduled Tribe also demanded and were successful.

The Kuki National Assembly (KNA), in 1969, advocates a Kuki state within India. The General Secretary, Ngokholet Ngailut made a motion to revive the demand saying that the Kuki were landless, and that their interests had been ignored and neglected. They received no consideration, even in the administrative division of Manipur.

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<sup>147</sup> *Zomi Laizom*, Vol.I, No.2, April 1994. pp.15-18.

<sup>148</sup> Douthuang Valte, *Khantawn Hinna*, Churachandpur, 1987, p-32. The political participation of Paite community will be discussed in details in the next chapter.

This trend, away from the common identity, was further promoted by constitutional changes. The Constitution (First Amendment) Act, 1951, under Article 342 of the Constitution of India included in its classification of the tribe of Manipur “Any Kuki Tribe” and “Any Lushai Tribe”. Under pressure from various tribal groups, as mentioned above, changes were made. So, the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes Order (Amendment) Act of 1956 changed the Original classifications by specifically mentioning tribes and clans. Continuing the trend, the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Amendment) Act of 1976 names more than 50 (fifty) Zo sub-tribes and clans.

#### Impacts:

The above dialect-clan based division have great impact on the whole socio-political environment of the Zo people. It seems they are ready to suffer the consequences of not having a common generic name of their own. Their sense of common tribal identity has been weakened. In lieu of the tribal names that other have attempted to impose on them, they have preferred to use their clan names, thus, contributing to a loss of a sense of tribal identity. Nationalist feeling i.e. clan-dialect chauvinism among them seems very high and they wage tribal literary polemic against each other by their publications.

This division penetrated even into the Ecclesiastical sphere of the society. It can be seen that even text as important as the Bible has become subject to this linguistic chauvinism.<sup>149</sup> The division of the Zo people geographically, administratively and ecclesiastically and the consequent strengthening of linguistic identities at the expense of Zo identity led to conflicts in which the translation of the Bible often become an important issue. Bible translation was both a symptom of disunity and a cause of it. Questions about dialectical translations of the Bible certainly become important factors in the division and disintegration of the Zo people rather than becoming a unifying and

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<sup>149</sup> Khupzagou, *A Critical Historical Study of Bible Translations Among the Zo People in North East India* (Undated). p.95.

integrating element as it had been among other tribes in the North East. This was further illustrated by the disintegration of the North East India General Mission (NEIGM), which was the parent body of most of the established Churches like the Presbytery, Baptists and Evangelical Congregation Groups due to politics within the Executive Boards.<sup>150</sup>

The fact that there has been no significant movement among Zo- Christians to produce a common version of the Bible for all suggests that the pan-Zo movement with its political agenda transcending dialect clan has not penetrated very far into the consciousness of the clan-based church leadership or to the grass roots level of the people.<sup>151</sup> The problems that have been associated with the translation of the Bible among the Zo people demonstrate that the movement is towards increasing fragmentation. It provides very little evidence that the Zo people themselves have any interest in developing a unitary tribal identity.

### **Search for Identity:**

The tribal communities which are apparently reconciled to ethnic designations such as Chin or Kuki in fact wanted to break free from these group names. As noted earlier, these terms are the inventions of others that they used to designate certain identity to the tribal communities. And this has contributed to the prevailing confusion in Manipur about finding a common name which would represent the entire Zo people and form their identity. Kuki is not acceptable to most. In Manipur, the Paite, Hmar, Vaiphei, Simte etc. regard the Thadou speakers as Kuki. By Mizo we mean the Lushai. The non-Lushai speakers are not integrated to the Mizo as the non-Paite speakers in Manipur resent the use of the term Chin. The Hmar who were regarded as the Old Kukis were reluctant to join the Kuki National Assembly, as they do not feel themselves to be Kukis.

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<sup>150</sup> Khupzagou, Bible Translation and Zo Disunity, in *Zolengthe Magazine*, Vol.III, All Zomi Students' Association (ALZOSA), Shillong (Undated).pp.68-74.

<sup>151</sup> However, there was one notable phase where some section of Church leaders initiated a consultative meeting under the name of Kuki-Chin in 1981. It was called Kuki-Chin Baptist Leaders Consultation which was held at the Kuki Baptist Convention Office, Imphal Manipur on November 9, 1981. It will be discuss later.

The Thadou, who in 1942 denied calling themselves as Kukis, today accepted Kuki as their recognized name. Chin was a word used by the tribes, such as Paite, Pawi, Tedim, Vaiphei, Simte, because of their affinity to the people in Chin Hills. This can be best illustrated from the fact that the Paite National Council (PNC) under the leadership of Pu T. Goukhenpau submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India in 1960 demanding the formation of CHINLAND comprising all Chin (Zo) inhabited areas in India, Burma and East Pakistan (Bangladesh). The memorandum seeks to justify that “all these are similar linguistically, culturally, physically and traditionally.” Further, in the memorandum, it stated that “Chin” comprises of 30 (thirty) different tribes.<sup>152</sup> Again the Thadou and Jou rejected “Chin” as a name, as they do not call themselves ‘Chin’.<sup>153</sup>

While on the one hand the exogenously attributed identity designation has been a vital factor that weakened the collective sense of ethnic belonging, there has also been initiatives from within to integrate the divided community. The contention between the Kuki National Organisation and Young Mizo Association (YMA) is yet another case in point that demonstrates the complexities involved in the whole issue. YMA, the influential social body too works for the integration of all the tribes belonging to Chin-Kuki-Mizo family. The process of integration actually began on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1999 when the Gangte Youth Association merged with the YMA in a high profile function attended by a senior cabinet colleague of Zoramthanga and State’s Home Minister Tawnluia and opening up a branch in Churachandpur, Manipur. It was initiated by the influential Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) based in Aizawl. According to Home Minister of Mizoram, as stated in *The Poknapham*, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1999, it was a case of ‘moral integration’ not a case of ‘political merger’.<sup>154</sup> From the other side, S. Gangte, the general secretary of the Gangte People Council (GPC) terms the merger as “an anthropological and not political”. He further stated that the “merger does not pose any threats to our

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<sup>152</sup> the memorandum is in a booklet form, titled as RE-UNIFICATION OF THE CHIN PEOPLE OF INDIA AND BURMA UNDER ONE COUNTRY as in K.N. Zalam, *Zomi Political Movement in Zomi Namni Golder Jubilee Souvenir*, 1948-1998, Evening Post publication, Ciimnuai, 17 February 1998. pp.3-4.

<sup>153</sup> see R.K. Ranjit Singh, op.cit.pp.1-3.

<sup>154</sup> see R.K. Ranjit Singh., Ethnicity Among the Small Tribal Groups of Manipur-An Anthropological Analysis in (ed.) Indira Barua, Sarthak Sengupta, Dutta Das Deepanjana, *Ethnic Groups, Cultural Continuities and Social Change in North East India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2002. pp.61-62.

identities”.<sup>155</sup> Some prominent members of the Gangte family like the former Lok Sabha member Kim Gangte were critical of the move and termed it as ‘irrelevant’. The Kuki National Organisation has also sent a letter to Zoramthanga, the then chief minister of Mizoram, objecting to the merger. With this whole episode, P.Gangte’s election as the President of the Kuki-Innpi, the socio-cultural organisation of the Kukis, was challenged by the section of the Kukis on the ground that he being a Gangte is more a ‘Mizo’ than ‘Kuki’. The issue was taken up by a Kuki Lok Sabha MP from Manipur, Holkhomang Haokip, who went to the extent of writing a letter to P.D. Shenoy, the Secretary of the then newly created Department of Development of North East Region (dated 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2002) that the Department ‘should not entertain P.Gangte as President of Kuki Innpi, Manipur as he being a Mizo does not represent the Kukis.’

In a desperate search for a name acceptable to all the Zo tribes of Manipur, Zo students for example; studying in Shillong formed an organization called the “Eimi Organisation” or “Our People’s Organisation” in 1970. The idea was that all Zo students could join without having to bear the name of a specific tribe. This name may or may not be acceptable to all as a nomenclature. But they reveal clear evidence that there has been a strong desire for unity and unification among the educated circle.

From some sections of the Church leaders too, they initiate a consultation in the name of Kuki-Chin Baptist Union in 1981.<sup>156</sup> The main ideas behind these consultative body meetings are ‘for eradicating the existing barriers among the clans’ and pulling their resources for religious purposes.<sup>157</sup> The complexity of a common identity and a search for one acceptable nomenclature is also reflected in the second consultation meet held at Motbung on June 6, 1982. In the meeting, the discussion was held under the title: “*Who Are We and Our Common Identity*”.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Khelem Thokcham, “Mizo-Gangte Merger,” in North East Sun, June 15-30, 1999, Vol. 4, No. 22, p.11. also see, P T Hitson Jusho, *Politics of Ethnicity in North East India: with Special Reference to Manipur*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2004. p.41.

<sup>156</sup> Kamkhenthang, Rev. Serto Romeo Vaiphei, Rev. Dr.Hawlngam Haokip, *In Search Of Identity*, Kuki-Chin Baptist Union, March 1986. p-v.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.* p-iv.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.* p-viii.

Efforts are still continuing to develop unity among the Zo tribes. They are gaining ground through Organisation like the Zomi National Congress (ZNC), Zo Re-unification Organisation (ZORO), Zomi Re-unification Organisation (ZRO), All Zomi Students' Association (ALZOSA), etc.

It was in 21<sup>st</sup> January 1972 the Zomi National Congress (ZNC) came into being at Daijang, a small hamlet near Lamka town in Manipur. With the founding father Pu T. Gougin, the ZNC's ultimate goal is the unification and political emancipation of the Zomis. The ZNC is instrumental to the birth of Zo Re-Unification Organisation (ZORO)-the largest forum for Zo People's Re-Unification Movement today.<sup>159</sup> The first World Zomi Convention was held at the Indo-Burma border town of Champhai in Mizoram from 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>th</sup> May, 1988. It issued a historic declaration on the question of ethnic identity as follows-

We, the people of Zo ethnic group, inhabitants of the highlands in the CHIN HILLS and Arakans of Burma, the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, the MIZORAM state and adjoining hill areas of India are descendents of one ancestor. Our language, our culture and tradition and no less our social and customary practices are clear evidences of the Ethnological facts. Further, our historical records, and footprints both written and unwritten in the sands of time testify to the truth of our common ancestry.<sup>160</sup>

Another important political organization called Zomi Re-Unification Organisation (ZRO) came into being at Phupian, Kachin State of Myanmar in 1993. It sought to unite all the Zomis under one common platform as the founding President points out: "A land or people which were once a Union need to be re-unified...A broken nation need to be patched up. Hence, re-unification...The big task of re-unifying the Zomis and the land they occupied thereof is the main aim of this organization."<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.* p4.

<sup>160</sup> Champhai Convention (First World Zomi Convention), by ZORO, Aizawl, 1988. See *Zo Hnam Aw*, Vol. 1, No.1, January 2001.

<sup>161</sup> quoted from K.N.Zalam, *op.cit.* p.5.

All efforts to replace names like Kuki-Chin given by outsiders with the common name are representative of movements to develop a tribal identity as distinct from clan identity. That such movement has come up only illustrate the seriousness of the clan division that has taken place. It also indicates that the efforts to establish a tribal identity which transcends that of the clan has not yet receive widespread support. It can indeed be best summed up by quoting Vumson's comments on the bewildering social and political situation among the Zo people of Manipur. "No matter how hard Zo clans try to unite, they seem to have difficulty in adjusting to names which do not reflect their particular clan perspective."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Vumson, op.cit., p-309. The complexity and seriousness of the clan divisions is also manifested in the electoral politics among the Zo people. For further details, see Chapter IV under the sub-title "*Participation of Paites in Electoral Politics*".



## Chapter IV

### **Ethnic Identity, Electoral Processes and Participation**

In the previous chapter, we had discussed the politicization and emerged conflicts between the Kuki and Zomi ethnic groups. Here an attempt is made to look at the larger issues, such as electoral politics in the state of Manipur and later discuss the political participation and voting behaviour of Paite tribe, which is among the Zo ethnic group to make the picture clear. We will also try to discuss the tribe's nature and prospects as it serves as a window through which one can see the larger realities (the changing socio-economic and political relationship of the concerned communities) in the light of 1997 Kuki-Zomi conflict. However, the purpose, here is not to go into the conflict discourse, but to confine the discussion on the issues and ideas involved in the conflict and how it fed into the process of electoral mobilization in Churachandpur, which ultimately resulted in the assertion of ethnic identity.

#### I

Manipur, one among the 'seven sister' states,<sup>163</sup> has experienced sustained conflicts. This has mostly been along ethnic lines and has led to sustained violence and law and order breakdown. In media circles and no doubt the policy circles, it has been considered an extreme case of breakdown, even by North-eastern standards.<sup>164</sup>

Like most of the states in Northeast India, Manipur is multi-ethnic in make-up. It is a composite state; much like the Indian Union itself. It has long, porous international borders, and lies on the cross-border drugs and small arms trade routes that hook up to international markets. Manipur also has a similar economic situation, with a poor resources base, inadequate physical and social infrastructure and rising unemployment.

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<sup>163</sup> Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Tripura.

<sup>164</sup> 'Violence in the rise in Northeast: Manipur the worst sufferer', Times of India (Guwahati) 5 June 2003, quoting Ministry of Home Affairs, GOI, Annual Report 2002-2003.

Then the question is why do Manipur experience the political turmoil and breakdown with such intensity as compare to other North Eastern states?

One would like to argue in this chapter that the most significant explanation may lie in the state and its relationship with society. We do not however deny that part of the answer may also lie in the manner of political mobilization and consequent elite contestations in the state. The process of state making, the social forces that state-making leaders contend with, the strategies they employed to confront these forces, the outcome of these contests and their implications for the state's autonomy and its relationship with minority communities are dynamic and crucial for understanding the situation. It is to the conditions that may have enhanced or limit state power, the compulsions of political actors that led to processes fostering inclusive or fragmented identities and the resultant capacity of the state to behave autonomously or otherwise in response to community-based demands that need to be focus on.

Central to our study over state-society relations is the issue of state power: where it lies, how it is grounded, and what social forces shape it; and whether those forces constrain and compromise state power or augment or reinforce it. State power has a bearing on the state's autonomy and its capacity to govern. Equally, it impacts on the state's ability to manage conflicts. Understanding difference in state capacity and autonomy may thus benefit from exploring the nature of state power. Any analysis of state power itself needs to begin with an understanding of the historical emergence and crystallization of the state and the various struggles that have happened between state-making leaders and their opponents over social control. State-making leaders face opposition from entrenched social forces who seek to provide alternative sources of authority. The outcome of these contests determines whether state-making leaders have been able to incorporate those social forces into the state's structure, or if they exist outside, continuing to act as alternative centers of power. These determine state power. Therefore it is important to explore state making historically.

Equally important is the need to understand the particular strategies that state-making leaders have employed to respond to social forces. In their struggle over authority, state-making leaders and social forces that confront them have frequently politicized ethnic identities to gain advantage. Political parties, community elites and public organizations have been the most active in these struggles over power and authority. But the basis and manner of identity mobilization can be very different; it can be narrow, confined to the dominant community while excluding the others or it can be inclusive, taking different communities along. The form of mobilization would undoubtedly depend on cultural affinities, but also on leadership strategies and choice. Important is the effect that the particular form of mobilization has upon inter-community dynamics as well as on the state's capacity to govern. Where mobilization is inclusive and participatory, the state should be in a better position to respond to minority demands and take on board their concerns. Narrow identity mobilization engenders counter mobilization by excluded groups. It also limits the state's autonomy and its capacity to govern and uphold the rule of law, which in turn contributes to conflicts and violence.

### **Elite strategies and identity mobilization:**

#### *Competitive mobilizations in Manipur*

Political awakening in the valley of Manipur began with a clutch of small and recipient parties making demands on the Maharaja for political rights, in part inspired by the Congress-led independence movement in colonial India.<sup>165</sup> The adoption of a full-fledged democratic constitutional system after Indian Independence in 1947 set the stage for the emergence of several political parties both at national as well as regional level. The nature of the party system has been changing continuously because of both the split in the existing party and the emergence of new parties.<sup>166</sup> The Maharaja sought to respond to this challenge by trying to co-opt these voices. He promoted the Nikhil

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<sup>165</sup> It is widely accepted that most of the political parties in post Independence India were formed by the splinter groups of the Indian National Congress. See also M Suresh Kumar, "Role of Political parties in Manipur Politics", *South Asia Politics*, March 2007 Vol.5 No.11. pp.27-29.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha(NMHM), a politico-cultural organization, as a tool for this mobilization. The new intelligentsia of the state, educated in Hindu traditions and practices, formed its core. But the Maharaja-controlled mobilization experiment found itself being challenged by leaders like Hijam Irabot. Persons like Irabot, H. Angou Singh etc. who got western education very much resented the religious exploitation by the Brahmins and the Maharaja. It is said that the NMHM was first a social organization. But after the Chinga session held in 1938 it became the first political party in Manipur with Hijam Irabot as its President. Though NMHM was made to assume a less sectarian title and agenda, its composition remained restrictive.<sup>167</sup> In 1946, Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha (NMM) and other minor parties coalesced into the Manipur State Congress, which was to dominate politics in the state in the early post merger phase. The composition and outlook of the State Congress remained on the whole narrow, there being little representation from the tribal hill communities.

In the Hills, it was the chiefs' conclaves and elite groups that brought political awakening. Dr. Rosiem Pudaite, for instance, traced the formation of Kuki National Assembly (KNA) as far as to the formation of Kukis Chiefs Association which was formed in 1936.<sup>168</sup> It can be said that the party (KNA) has no deep rooted historical basis. The reason is obvious. The hill areas of Manipur did not feel the impact of direct British rule and that is why political consciousness came late in these areas.<sup>169</sup> Social exclusion of the tribal communities in the early years of the twentieth century had led to their welcoming Christian missionaries in their midst. The latter brought education and a new worldview.<sup>170</sup> The immediate impact of the British withdrawal "was the emergence of democratic institutions the logical culmination of which was the creation of an articulate and effective political elite who use politics as a principal mode of finding solution to

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<sup>167</sup> It was renamed Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha(NMM) and sought to speak for all communities.

<sup>168</sup> The primary objective of the Association was to press the government for the abolition of the *Pothang* system (forced labour) and against the Meitei Lambus (hill peons) which has greatly undermined the social and political status of the Chiefs. The Kuki National Assembly, which was officially established in 24 October 1946 was one of the earliest political organization in the state. The Assembly was, from its formation, dominated by the Thadou chiefs. See Dr. Rosiem Pudaite, op.cit., pp.94-98.

<sup>169</sup> Lal Dena, *Political Development in the Hill-A Rapid Survey in Colonial Perspective*, JNU Centre, Imphal.

<sup>170</sup> Lal Dena, *British Policy towards Manipur 1891-1919*, Imphal: Directorate of Welfare of Tribals, Government of Manipur, 1984.p.41.

their many problems”.<sup>171</sup> In the early years of the post-colonial state making, Manipur’s tribal communities saw an opportunity to demand political dispensations of their own, separate from the valley-led one. They saw demands for tribal states in neighbouring states as encouraging signs for their project. Significantly, the Manipur State Constitution enacted by the Maharaja in 1948 did attempt to take tribal concerns and their aspirations seriously. It put in place a system of representation for tribal communities not only in the elected house but also in the cabinet.<sup>172</sup> However, the state’s merger in 1949 and its being given a ‘part c’ status may have put an end to that experiment.<sup>173</sup> In the process to “integrate” the country’s tribal population, the tribal areas of North East India were placed under direct jurisdiction of the central government. This has also to do with the central government’s attitude towards the state government. As it is clearly stated, “Since the central leadership concluded that the state governments had limited political skills, sensitivity, and force to cope with the problem, the delicate task of dealing with the tribes was made the responsibility of the Home Ministry of the central government.”<sup>174</sup> The central government created a reserved “scheduled tribes” (ST) constituency in an effort to assure representation of tribal peoples in the state assemblies and in the central government.<sup>175</sup>

By the time the elections to the newly established Advisory Council were held in 1952, rising political aspirations among different groups may have engendered a number of ethnic political parties. In 4<sup>th</sup> October, 1946, there was an all party meeting to discuss the changing social and political situation. However, at the end, it was only the Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha (NMM) and Praja Sangh who resolved to form the Manipur State Congress Party. Irabot Singh, who resigned earlier from NMM was considered a reactionist and members present in the meeting opposed his presence. Later he and his

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<sup>171</sup> Proceeding of the seminar by K.S.Singh, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Simla in *Tribal Situation in India*, Vol.13.XIV.

<sup>172</sup> T.C. Tiangkham, a tribal leader for example, was the first Speaker in the House of Manipur after Indian Independence. See also Manipur State Constitution Act 1948. Manipur State Archives.

<sup>173</sup> This is related to the policy of the India’s nationalist leaders to “integrate” the country’s tribal populations into the national politics. The policy further targeted to end their ‘isolation’ and to eliminate secessionist, separatist, an loyalist politics. For further details see Myran Weiner and John Osgood Field, *op.cit.* pp.82-85.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* p.83.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

party men walked out of the meeting before it had ended. Manipur Praja Sangh was formed in 21<sup>st</sup> August 1946. The fundamental aims and objectives of the party was-

1. attainment of independence
2. abolition of feudal system
3. establishment of responsible government and
4. Introduction of adult franchise.<sup>176</sup>

The dominant and purportedly secular party- the Manipur State Congress- was itself weak, and as some commentaries stated, the reason could be partly due to its derivative character and also on account of the institutional characteristics of the party in the centre. The congress was therefore unable to dominate politics in these turbulent days. It was ethnic parties that began to fill the gap. Take the example of election results in 1952 that demonstrated the strength of identity politics, when Congress could win only 10 of the 30 seats. Independent candidates, and those representing ethnic parties, won 17. Over a number of decades a Meitei middle class had been growing. However, it was also during these times that the presence of a large number of non-locals holding government jobs and controlling trade and commerce were also felt.<sup>177</sup> Lack of access to opportunities might have led this section, made up mostly of educated youth, to politicize their identity and mobilize support for a Meitei state-building project. For instance, the Pan Manipuri Youth League (PMYL), the first of such groups in the Valley, emerged in the early 1960s. The state Congress Party's institutional weaknesses were to prove useful to PMYL and the sentiments it represented, when a breakaway faction of the Congress formed the Manipur Peoples' Party (MPP) in 1969. It began demanding 'Manipur for Manipuris'.

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<sup>176</sup> Cited in Suresh Kumar, *op.cit.* p.30.

<sup>177</sup> The situation for these can be trace back to the British period. It was the Britisher who encouraged the Marwari traders, giving them special privilege, including residence in the British Reserve. As Parratt has noted, "The 'Reserve' in the heart of Imphal came under direct British jurisdiction. This comprised, besides the Kangla, the old palace complex seized after the war of 1981 and made into a cantonment, a substantial area. It was here that most of the Marwari merchants and other Indians lived and traded, being for all intents and purposes under British protection. See John Parratt,*op.cit.* pp.11-15.

In the Hills, not all but it was traditional authorities that were behind the formation of ethnic parties like the Kuki National Assembly (KNA). These developments gave a jump-start to ethnic politics in the state especially among the Zo community. Chaube has observed that “the Chief-centered Kuki society is much more riven than the Naga and less privileged group specially those under the Thadou chiefs”.<sup>178</sup> The Khulmi National Union (KNU) was born out of the womb of KNA in 1946.<sup>179</sup> The Union was against the dominations of one tribe against the other which they see against the KNA which had an attitude of upholding the status of only the Thadou chiefs at the cost of the others.<sup>180</sup> The Union was also “against any movement that might threaten the integrity of Manipur hills and plains”.<sup>181</sup> A survey of elections in the early years of Manipur’s political history demonstrates the evolving crisis. Political parties frequently employed ethnic appeals to mobilize their constituencies. MPP and other parties raised the issues of maintaining integrity of the state’s borders, advancement of the Manipuri (Meitei) language and script and allowing Meiteis to acquire property in the hills. Naga Integration Committee, a hill based party, demanded integration of all Naga areas of Manipur with Nagaland state.<sup>182</sup> The demand for integration with Mizoram is also prominent among the Zo ethnic groups.<sup>183</sup> State election results show how these messages were connected with the electorate (see Table 4.1).<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> S. Chaube, *Hill Politics in North-East India*, Orient Longman, New Delhi. 1973.p.194.

<sup>179</sup> Practically in its very inception the KNA was headed by the Thadous. As a result the party took no time to become a Thadou-based organization. The community characteristic had crystallised around the party and the eventual consequence was the coming out of many splinter groups from the Paite, Hmar, Simte Kom, Gangte, Vaiphei, Zou etc. Also see Chapter III under the title “*Dialect-Clan based Identity Formation*”.

<sup>180</sup> Dr. Rosiem Pudaite, op.cit. pp.99-100.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.,p-100.

<sup>182</sup> Party manifesto, Indian National Congress (INC). MPP, Ireipok Lasihem quoted in R P Singh, *Electoral Politics in Manipur*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing. 1981.

<sup>183</sup> As mentioned before, with the state’s merger in 1949 and being given a ‘part c’ status, there was a rise of identity politics. The Paites, of one the Zo ethnic group were closely associated with the KNU in which one of the Union candidate T.C. Tiangkham belonged to their community. With the KNU became inactive due to assertions of each member tribal identity, the Paite National Council was formed on the 27 June 1949 with Gouhau and Vungkhawm as the President and Secretary respectively.. The Council later in 1957, submitted a memorandum of the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru for the re-unification of all the Zo inhabited areas.

<sup>184</sup> From 1952 to 1967, elections were held for the state Territorial Council. In 1972, Manipur Assembly was set up with 60 members.

Table VI: Party-wise position in state assembly, Manipur

	Total seat	Congress	Other National	Regional	Ethnic	Independent
1967	30	16	5	-	-	9
1972	60	17	9	15	-	19
1974	60	13	8	20	14	5
1980	60	13	22	4	2	19
1984	60	30	5	3	1	21
1990	60	24	18	9	3	-
1995	60	22	12	21	2	3
2000	60	11	14	34	-	1
2002	60	20	12	28	-	-

Source: Election Commission of India (<http://www.eci.gov.in/ElectionResults/>)

While the Congress party has mostly been the dominant one in the state assembly and has formed the government on most occasions, the most interesting aspect of the election results in Manipur has been the fragmented mandate given to political leaders by the people and the presence of ‘independent candidates’ and those representing parties with narrow constituencies.<sup>185</sup> Independent’ candidates have been a big force, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. They have been prime targets for parties seeking to form the government, but which lacked a clear majority. Many of these candidates came from hill constituencies, though the valley too had its fair share. Independent candidates perhaps represent local/community interests or those unmediated by state-wide political parties. This is confirmed by the shift, from the 1990s, in the number of independent candidates in the state assembly with a parallel increase in the position of regional and ethnic parties. Kuki National Assembly (KNA), Manipur Hills Union (MHU) and Naga National Party (NNP), all hill-based organizations, have had some modest successes in mobilizing their constituencies, limited on account of the small size of constituencies

<sup>185</sup> The voting for the National party like the Congress is low as there is high level of cohesion among the tribal and for that matter the Meitei political parties. But it is true the central government has succeeded in “integrating” the tribes of this region through a structural rearrangement of power rather than through co-opting tribal leaders into the national Congress Party. As in Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field, op.cit. p.116.



they created. On the other hand it was the Manipur Peoples' Party (MPP) in the 1990s followed by the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) that gained advantages at the cost of national parties. While these parties sought to appeal to all constituencies, and even managed a small presence in the hills, their outlook was essentially valley-based. All these tendencies fed into government instability and social conflicts.<sup>186</sup> The increasing politicization of ethnicity in the state has been reflected in the policies and agenda of all political parties. Today they all incorporate agendas and promises that are identity-based in nature.<sup>187</sup> Bhagat Oinam makes it clear in his paper:

The crisis that the state faces, and also elsewhere, where the problems of identities based on ethnicity and language, and religion at the secondary level, appear to be priority areas of concerns, is because it has failed to address the roots of these "assertions of exclusivity". These assertions have turned so strong that these have led to community-based conflicts which not only influence all collective (including state) activities and decisions, but also themselves get transformed as the only end which all constituted praxis must aim at.<sup>188</sup>

Mobilization of identity by political parties has been paralleled by the growth of, and increasing space occupied by, ethnic associations and community groups. Student and women's group as well as tribal organizations have been particularly active here. Meira Paibi, a Meitei women's network, has a long tradition of activism going back to early twentieth century colonial times. Similar women's groups are active in the hills. Youth and student organizations like the All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU), All Naga Students' Association Manipur (ANSAM), All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) and the Zomi Student's Federation (ZSF), as well as the Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO) play leading roles in campaigning for their community's political

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<sup>186</sup> Since 1972, when Manipur became a state, there have been 18 changes of government. 1990s, the decade with the worst ethnic violence in the state- Naga-Kuki, Meitei-Muslim and Kuki-Zomi Clashes- witnesses frequent change of the party in power.

<sup>187</sup> The Congress party won the 2002 Assembly elections promising to protect the territorial integrity of the state (Congress Manifesto, 2002 Elections). The Federal Party of Manipur, the principal opposition in the current Assembly, in a similar appeal to identity sentiments, promised 'to secure for this united ancient state, a rightful and dignified place in the Republic of India' (The Federal Agenda: 2002, Federal Party of Manipur, Imphal)

<sup>188</sup> Bhagat Oinam, Manipur Assembly Election: Manifestation of Growing Crisis, *EPW*, July 6, 2002. pp.2683-2684.

demands. Tribal associations such as the Tangkhul Naga Long (TKL), Zeliangrong Union (ZU), Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), Paite National Council (PNC) etc. even enjoy legal authority among their communities. The authority these organizations occupy is an outcome of the state's inability to incorporate these social forces in its state structure, thus leaving them with a large social role within their communities.

Thus one can say that particularistic organizations have gained the upper hand in social control at the cost of state organizations. Today many 'parallel authorities', reflecting these non-state forces, have risen to take up issues of public concerns. Populist actions by these groups and poor capacity of state agencies have led to large sections of people actively seeking intervention of these 'parallel authorities' for solutions to their problems. The multiplicity of 'authorities', and the alliances that political parties have forged with them, facilitates conflicting mobilization. The state's own weaknesses and its poor claim over authority have prevented its power from being fully grounded. As will be seen in the next section, its own actions have contributed to the cycle of mobilization and counter-mobilization.

#### State Autonomy and Capacity:

##### *Manipur's 'limited' state*

Historically Manipur often reflects a specifically Meitei perspective, rather than a pan-Manipuri one.<sup>189</sup> The *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, which is the court chronicle of the Meitei dynasties located in the present day Imphal district of Manipur also reflect the same paradigm. *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, though contains many references to the people in the hills who are called today as 'Naga' or 'Kuki' its focus was firmly on the exploits of the Meitei Kings.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> See John Parratt, op.cit.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

Mobilization of the Meitei by the state's dominant state-making leaders has had consequences for the large non- Meitei population. They have complained about state institutions being partisan. Tribal organizations believe they have been excluded and that the state government has not been fair in distribution of resources to their areas. The poor conditions of educational and health services, adverse economic conditions and poor infrastructure in these areas have often been the source of tribal complaints and their consequent anti-state mobilization. Often these complaints have resonated with findings of the government itself.<sup>191</sup>

Aggravating the situation is the perception among tribal communities of poor investment in hill areas, poor implementation of development programmes and absence of basic infrastructure. The Hills make up some 9/10ths of the total area of the state. Tribal communities, who exclusively inhabit them, constitute 37 percent of the state's total population. A survey of budget allocations for hill districts in fiscal 2004-05 throws up some interesting figures: only 26 percent of the total budget of the Education Department was allocated for the five hill districts. It wasn't any better in other departments: 25 percent of the Health department's budget and 22 percent of the budget of the Public Works Department's (PWD), the agency responsible for roads and other works. In the other key departments of social welfare and agriculture, the allocation was 14 percent and 12 percent respectively.<sup>192</sup> The outcome of low levels of investment in the Hills has been along predictable lines. Four out of five hill districts figure at the bottom of the heap on the human development index.<sup>193</sup> These districts also have a larger proportion of the poor than their valley counterparts.<sup>194</sup>

Tribe organizations see most of these problems arising out of the state government's concentrating political powers with the dominant group in the Plain and their reluctance to share power with other communities who lives in the Hills. Although

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<sup>191</sup> Statistical Tables of Manipur: Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur, 2004.

<sup>192</sup> Finance Department, Government of Manipur, 2004.

<sup>193</sup> Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur, Human Development Series 2003.

<sup>194</sup> 19.33% in Imphal, 26.24% in Bishnupur and 24.39% in Thoubal, all valley districts. For the hills: 40% in Churachandpur, 44.4% in Ukhrul, 42% in Chandel, 51.3% in Senapati and 54.5% in Tamenglong (Estimates of the Proportion of Poor in Manipur: NSS 55<sup>th</sup> Round, 1999-2000).

administrative powers have been devolved to local bodies in valley districts, complaints have been voiced about how there has been a gradual disempowerment of elected local bodies in the hills. Elections to local bodies in valley districts have been conducted regularly, while their charter of administrative authority and their resource base has been expanded.<sup>195</sup> There has been little of that in the hills. Elections to ADCs set up in 1973, under the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act 1971, have not been held since 1990.<sup>196</sup> The state government has since directly controlled them. Village Authorities, set up under provisions of Manipur Village Authorities (in the Hill Areas) Act 1956, have similarly remained a damp squib. Set up on the lines of traditional village councils, they have little power to implement development projects and are generally sidelined by the bureaucratic machinery. Elections to them have been irregular and they have mostly been captured by powerful local elites. Governance in the hills has in effect, seen a movement towards greater disempowerment. It has reverted to direct administration under state bureaucracy. Inadequate access to jobs, poor functioning of state institutions in the hills and reluctance of the state to share power with local communities in hill districts may have fed into mounting tribal alienation. Moved by their apparent neglect, tribal leaders and organizations have frequently resorted to protests and strikes.

One of the many interesting findings is that the state government's response to these grievances has been less than robust. It has mostly dithered, tried to buy time and sought short-term compromises. In most cases, much of this inertia could be the results of pressures on the state from Meitei civil society groups. To support this argument, it is the Meitei associations that have been vocal in opposing tribal demands. Citing existing legislation that benefits tribal communities, these associations question the need for additional safeguards. Meitei groups have been resentful of reservations for tribal communities in jobs within the central public sector, claiming that opportunities for educated Meitei youth are limited. They have also demanded that existing land laws in

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<sup>195</sup> 'Cabinet Clears Devolution of Power to Panchayati Raj', *The Imphal Free Press*, 20 September 2005.

<sup>196</sup> ADCs in Manipur were established under the 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the constitution, unlike those in Mizoram (and other Northeast states) under the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule. While the latter have extensive legislative, executive and judicial powers and secure sources of finance, 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule ADCs have little autonomy. Manipur's tribal leaders have been demanding conversion of their ADCs to 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule status and have, since 1990, been boycotting ADC elections to press their demands.

the state under the MLR&LR Act 1960 be extended to Hills areas, to relieve some of the pressure on land in the valley. They argue that while there are large tracts of unutilized land in Hill districts, cultivable land in the Valley is scarce. Meitei groups have also opposed tribal demands for conversion of ADCs to 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule status, citing the dangers to Manipur's 'territorial integrity' due to possible creation of 'states within state'.<sup>197</sup> Mainstream political leaders have tended to go along with these interpretations, reaffirming Meitei fears.<sup>198</sup> The state's perceived inaction on tribal grievances and Meitei civil society's opposition to their demands may have further led to tribal alienation. Of late, tribe-based organizations have increasingly begun raising demands for division of the state and separate administrative units for themselves.<sup>199</sup> Thus, one can say that with rising socio-economic challenges, the cycle of conflicts has become unending.

## II

### **Political Implication:**

#### *With Special Reference to the Zo ethnic group*

In the Indian context, the electoral process is indeed a pervasive one. It extends from the lowest to the highest level of political life and has the potential to determine the character of political leadership and institutions. It also takes in its stride the social order, at almost every level and, at least to some extent, involves people who are generally at the periphery of democratic politics in the country.<sup>200</sup> Hence, election has proved to be powerful instruments of mass education and political socialization. Elections have also been a major agency for recruitment of elites belonging to middle as well as lower class who are not educated, more rural and locally based in politics. Therefore this also serves as a vehicle for bringing the traditional elite in to the political system, increasingly at all

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<sup>197</sup> *Sangai Express* (Imphal), 31 October 2002.

<sup>198</sup> R.K.Ranbir, Ex-Chief Minister, recently warned of loss of territorial integrity of the state if 6<sup>th</sup> schedule demand was conceded (*The Imphal Free Press*, 2 November 2002)

<sup>199</sup> The Nagas are intensifying their demands for Greater Nagaland while various Zo ethnic groups made a demands varying from Greater Mizoram to more autonomy within the state.

<sup>200</sup> Norman D.Palmer, *Elections and Political Development*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., Delhi 1976. pp.1-19.

levels, most particularly at the grassroots. It is through them that interaction between tradition and modernity takes place in the political arena.

Elections are events involving individual and collective decisions which get directly influenced by the total political and social processes. They open up a channel between the leader and the masses; between the individual and the government. They are also major instruments of political socialization and political participation.<sup>201</sup>

The relationship between elections and political parties is a close one in almost every type of political system. During elections, parties and their politics are most prominently in display.

Thus, as David Butler has observed, “an election provides an unrivalled opportunity to examine the organization, the personnel and the politics of the parties,”<sup>202</sup> which are the main agencies for organizing, for providing political direction to the electorate and for political choices.

Political Participation of the Zo ethnic group before Independence:

*With special reference to the Paite community*

Prior to the coming of the British, the Zo people had no political system in which the masses could participate in the decision making process. Each Zo village was an independent political entity, ruled over by hereditary chiefs. The chief was the only source of authority and his power was absolute. The village chief was assisted by a group of nobles called, *Hausa Upa* who were appointed by the chief himself. As the chief was the appointing authority of the nobles, the power to dismiss them was also with the chief. Because of this power, no one dares to go against his will. This was the nature of political system of the Zo people before the advent of the British.

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<sup>201</sup> *ibid.* p.1.

<sup>202</sup> David E. Butler, and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: Forces shaping electoral choice*, New York, St. Martin's Press 1969, Chapter 11 and 12.

During the British rule, although the Zo people in the Indo-Burma (Myanmar) border areas still had hereditary chief, the chief no longer enjoyed sovereign power over his land and subjects. However, the level of political participation among the masses was still near zero as the British administrations had no interest in the socio-economic and political development of the masses.

Politically, it has to be noted that there were no educated tribals as such who could understand and engaged themselves in the political process at the national level, not to mention the state level, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Rebellion movements against the British by these so-called tribes did “remained outside the mainstream of all-India nationalist politics.”<sup>203</sup> It has to be noted further that in language, religion, social structure, cultural outlook, and their self-consciousness and identity they are apart from the larger societies in which they live. They have tended to take a separate political path, but they are too small to achieve a wholly separate political existence.<sup>204</sup>

#### *Political Participation after Independence:*

India's attainment of political independence in 1947; and its adoptions of democratic political system, the Zo masses along with the rest of the countrymen began to enjoy their democratic right to participate in politics by voting, contesting in an election and campaigning for a particular candidate or a particular political party: and aligning themselves with one or the other political party or group. Even before the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union in 1949, the Zo people did participated, as mentioned earlier, in the political processes of the then princely state of Manipur in one way or the other. The Paites, one of the major communities of the Zo ethnic group in Manipur for instance, were represented by Mr. Tualchin Tombing and T.C. Tiankham under the aegis of Khulmi Union in the then Territorial council from Tipaimukh and Thanlon constituencies respectively and the latter became the first speaker of Manipur.

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<sup>203</sup> Myron Weiner and John Osgood Field, op.cit. pp.81-82.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. p.106.

Before the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union, the Zo people did obviously participated in the political processes at the state level, though their participation as a mass was yet very low. It can be ascribed to the absence of political organization (which took interest in electoral politics) of their own to develop their political consciousness. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1952, 1957, 1962, the Outer Manipur seat has always gone to the Congress.<sup>205</sup> In 1967 and 1971 (mid-term) elections the Outer Manipur seat went to an Independent and a Congressman respectively. Paokai Haokip, a KNA man, became M.P. consecutively once as an independent and again with the Congress ticket. In the 1977 and 1980 Lok Sabha elections Congress won the outer seat. Except in 1952 when five local parties with the KNA from the hill areas fought the election (without securing any seat) in the subsequent Lok Sabha elections there was no participation of any local party at all.

In 1972 Assembly elections of Manipur, the Mizo Integration Council and the Kuki National Assembly were the worst-hit. In the mid-term Assembly poll in 1974, out of the total seats of twenty in the hill areas the Manipur Hill Union scored the highest by bagging twelve seats and made the best impression in the hill areas.<sup>206</sup> The Congress and the Independent got four and two seats respectively. The KNA got only two seats.

Thus, the participation of the hill parties in the national election was almost nil except in 1952 when the Thadou candidate contested as a KNA candidate and was defeated. In representing an 'ethnic sub-culture', it in fact let loose the parochial forces. Even it could not stand as a major and a single political unit of the non-Naga hill tribes in Manipur. This is also true for all the other organizations who claim to represent all the ZO people. However, the KNA is the only party in the hills of Manipur with a record for its consistency.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Manipur Lok Shaba constituency has two seats, divided in two-Outer Manipur and Inner Manipur. The Outer Manipur constituted all the five hill districts and is reserved for the ST.

<sup>206</sup> Manipur Hill Union was formed in 1973 under the leadership of Yangmasho Shaiza. It will subsequently be discuss in this chapter whenever necessary.

<sup>207</sup> See M Suresh Kumar, Role of Political Parties in Manipur Politics, *South Asia Politics*, March 2007.



When, in the 15<sup>th</sup> October 1949 Manipur was merged with Indian Union and became a part and parcel of Indian Dominion, things have changed altogether as the Indian democratic system opens a wider chance of political participation for the masses. The Zo groups being given the needed freedom, freedom began to realize the necessity of having organization of their own in the social and political arena to develop political consciousness and to work for social upliftment of the Zo ethnic groups. As mentioned before in Chapter III, Mizo Union, Kuki National Assembly, Khulmi Union etc. were among the first Political Party for the Zo ethnic groups.<sup>208</sup> Although some sections of Paite community in Mizoram joined the Mizo Union, the Paites in Manipur did not have any connection with the Union. The Khulmi Union however had more attachment with the Paite community in Manipur. The Khulmi Union however did not last long because of differences among the leaders. This further fragmented the already existing differences among Zo community in pursuing their Political goal. The Paites for example formed the Paite National Council on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1949 at Tangnuam village near Lamka (CCPur) town which played a vital role in the participation of Paite masses in politics. Each and every member of Paites in Manipur was/is a member of the newly formed organization which acts as a platform organization for the Paites in Manipur in the field of politics. This organization instilled in the mind of every Paites the belief that the defeat of a candidate from a Paite community in an election means the defeat of Paite community as a whole. As a result, every Paite is expected to cast his/her vote in favour of a candidate belonging to Paite community as voting against a Paite candidate amounts to betrayal of Paite community as a whole. In case there are more than one constituency, majority of Paite voters are expected to cast their votes in favour of a candidate put up by PNC if the Council officially put up a candidate. As John Khatthang Ngaihte puts it, commenting on the continuous success of Territorial Council and Members of Legislative Assembly elections in Thanlon Sub-division of Churachandpur District, “respecting the Party Policy (of PNC) and its functioning by each and every village help us to preserve our people and

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<sup>208</sup> However, in Manipur Kuki National Assembly is the only political party in the hill areas recognized by the Election Commission.

our identity. This unity among ourselves helps us to retain our people's *Palai* (representative) in our area".<sup>209</sup>

Participation after the Attainment of Statehood:

With the attainment of full fledged statehood by Manipur in 1971, Autonomous District Councils were introduced for the administration of the hill areas of Manipur including the Zo dominated Churachandpur district under Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Council Act 1971 giving a wider chance of political participation for the Zos and other hill tribes of Manipur. Election for the membership of Manipur Legislative Assembly and membership of District Council which were being held at the interval of five years open the way for participation in the electoral politics of the state thereby bringing the people closer to politics.

#### *Participation of Paites in Electoral Politics*

The first election for the membership of District Council was held in 1973 and the Paite Community was represented by four members. They are-

1. T. Goukhenpau from Tuivai Constituency
2. T. Phungzathang from Ngazam Constituency
3. Thangkhum Valte from Lamka Constituency
4. Dougin, PNC support from Thanlon Constituency.

In the 1974 Manipur State Legislative Assembly election, Mr. N. Gouzagin was elected from Thanlon Assembly Constituency and became a cabinet Minister. In 1980, T. Phungzathang and K. Vungzalian were elected from Thanlon and Churachanpur Assembly Constituencies respectively and both were given the post of Ministers of state. In the 1984 Assembly election however, only T. Phungzathang represented Paite community. In 1988 Assembly election too only T. Phungzathang got elected from Paite community. In 1990 and 1995 Assembly election, the Paites captured two seats. In the

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<sup>209</sup> John Khatthang Ngaihte, Hanship Mite leh Tulai Politics, *Lungleenvumpi* (undated). p.113.

1990 election, T. Phungzathang and V. Hangkhanlian were elected from Thanlon and Churachandpur Constituency respectively and in 1995, T. Phungzathang lost to Mr. Songchinkhup in Thanlon Constituency who is also a Paite while V. Hangkhanlian retained his seat by defeating K. Vungzalian. In 1980 Parliamentary election Mr. N. Gouzagin, a prominent member of the Paite community was elected from Manipur Outer parliamentary Constituency (Lok Sabha) in Congress (I) ticket.

It was in the year 1973, during the time of N. Gouzagin as a General President of PNC that MANIPUR HILLS UNION was formed and became prominent under the leadership of (L) Yangmasho Shaiza. The 1974 General Election, out of 20 MLA seats reserved for the Hill areas, 12 were captured by the Manipur Hills Union. Although PNC as a party did not enroll itself to the Manipur Hills Union, the party gave a strong support especially in Thanlon Assembly Constituency, Singngat Assembly Constituency and Churachandpur Assembly Constituency where N.Gouzagin, T. Gougin and Haokholal Thangjom got elected. It is interesting to note, however, that the success of each individual candidates did not attribute to the Party they belong but to tribal loyalties.<sup>210</sup> During the tenure of Md. Alimuddin Ministry, N. Gouzagin holds the post of Deputy Chief Minister.<sup>211</sup> However, the Hills Union did not last long and follow the same fate as that of the Khulmi Union. It was during this time and later on, the Paite community still clings on to PNC and support the candidates put up by PNC in Municipal Development Council (MDC) and Assembly Elections.

With the formation of Zomi National Congress (ZNC) under the leadership of T. Gougin and S. Thangkhingin Ngaihte, also mentioned in Chapter III, the movement among the Zo ethnic group again began to have a mass appeal. There was mass

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<sup>210</sup> See S.K. Chaube, *Electoral Politics in Northeast India*, University Press,(India) 1985. p.105.

<sup>211</sup> During this period, MHU-MPP were in alliance (one contested seats in Hill areas and the other concentrated in the Plain areas) and both were contested for 56 seats in total where as the Socialist Party headed by Rishang Keishing( a Tangkhul Naga) and the Kuki National Assembly contested for 18 and 12 respectively. It has to be noted that MHU leader Shaiza and Rishang Keishing (both Naga) were traditional rival in politics. The Socialist Party and KNA had only pocketed only two seats each. However, the MHU-MPP alliance was successful winning 32 out of 56 seats contested. However, the MHU-MPP Ministry was short lived because of ambitious leadership of both the Parties and also by defection. For details, see S.K. Chaube, pp.104-106.

recruitment of youth volunteers from almost every Zo villages, especially in Churachandpur district of Manipur. They call for “ZOGAM UNION TERRITORY” and independent administration for the Zomi.<sup>212</sup> However, quite contrary to peoples’ hopes and expectations, they lost the Assembly Elections in Thanlon Constituency area. The most interesting finding is that although the ZNC stands for all the Zo ethnic groups transcending the dialectical-clan based identity, they lost the elections in Thanlon Constituency which is an area dominated by cent percent Zomi in which majority were from Paite community. John Khatthang Ngaihte has rightly pointed out that “the people were more strongly attached to PNC and since the ZNC were competing side by side without any formal understanding with the former, they lost the election.”<sup>213</sup> The complexity of these issues did not end here. Another interesting point that needs to be noted is that- in Paite National Council Constitutions, it is clearly written that the aim and objective of the PNC is for Zomi Re-Unification.<sup>214</sup> Awnzagen further stated that although nomenclature like Mizo, Kuki, Chikim, Khul etc. used to be attractive options, the Paite consider the nomenclature Zomi as the most appropriate. Thus, the complexity on issues of identity is unending. This example clearly shows that the Paites, and as a matter of fact, all the various Zo people are not willing to compromise with their dialectic based identity with something else although it may stand for their common purposes.

#### Voting Behaviour of Zo voters:

Voting, which is a collective event in total political process, is considered, a symbol of willingness to participate in the political process of the country and to accept the decision arrived at by majority simple, extra ordinary, or anonymous by participants. The model code of conduct strictly forbid appeal to voters on the basis of religion, race, caste, language, etc, but the voting behaviour in India is very much influenced by these factors.<sup>215</sup> Though caste system does not exist in tribal society in Manipur, dialectical-

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<sup>212</sup> John Khatthang Ngaihte, *op.cit.* p.114.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* p.114.

<sup>214</sup> cited in T. Awnzagen. A Debate on Paite Literature Policy, *Siamsinpawlp* Annual Magazine, 1993, Vol.30, p80. Also see *Paite Tribe Council Ki-ukna Dan: 11vei Puahphatna 2004*, Paite Tribe Council(HG.), Lamka, 2004. p-ix.

<sup>215</sup> In Chinkholian Guite, *op.cit.*, p.116.

clanist feeling dominated the tribal society dividing each tribe vertically and horizontally. This feeling makes its appearance during election to members of Legislative Assembly among the hill tribes of Manipur in general and the Zo voters are conditioned by this dialectical-clanist feeling, which sometime even threatened the unity within the Zo society. This is true not only in tribal society but also in every constituency in Manipur state irrespective of *category* one belongs to. A survey conducted by Bhagat Oinam makes an interesting finding; in the survey it is mentioned that 68 percent electors opted for the individual candidate over the Party, a small 1 percent accepted money from the candidates, 8.7 percent were undecided.

Table VII: Important Factors While Voting\*

	Valid Percentage
Valid	5.7
Others	
Money	1.0
Both money and candidate	2.7
Candidate	68.8
Party	13.1
Don't Know	8.7
Total	100.0

\* cited in Bhagat Oinam's "Manipur Assembly Election: Manifestation of Growing Crisis". *EPW*, July 6, 2002

It would be proper to mention how far this survey is authentic or to what extend the survey is conducted could not be ascertained. However, it rightly reflects, at the least, the situations and conditions of the voting behaviour of the people of Manipur as a whole, not to mention the Zo people.

As we have seen, Political Parties frequently employed ethnic appeals to mobilize their constituencies. Thus, the main cause of 1997 conflict between the two

ethnic groups (Kuki and Zomi) is also political in nature. Other socio-economic issues are contributing factors that were systematically articulated for political gains (to win the election).

It is true that a majority of both the ethnic groups lead a life of poor subsistence. Despite of the special schemes and programmes launched by the government for the upliftment of the deprived sections little has changed. Here both groups battle over limited local resources. On the other hand comparatively few Zomis have done well. They have gain in strength and significant changes occurred in their status,<sup>216</sup> particularly among the new generation, who are better educated, politically conscious and upwardly mobile. Interestingly the local political office (power) and economy of the district has been in the hands of Zomi groups for the past many years. This growing socio-economic change coupled with power at various levels was challenged by both the Kukis and elite groups before and during the 1997 conflict. While the Zomi groups perceived gradual erosion in their old status quo, the Kuki on the other hand felt threatened. The Zomis expressed considerable anguish over the growing influence of Kuki group thus feeling that they are also deprived with none bothering of their problems. The fact that neither the mainstream political party nor both the groups representatives had taken up their cause added to their woes.

In such a situation the relationship between the Kukis and the Zomis ethnic groups came under severe strain with the tension becoming more visible among the upwardly mobile Zomi elites and newly emerging aggressive Kukis that ultimately led to violent clashes and loss of lives. Interestingly, the tensions were used quite manipulatively by the members of different political parties.<sup>217</sup> As elections were around the corner, conflict generated polarization and the memories of the clash played a significant role translating it into a positive political mobilization. Obviously the elections brought such tensions into shaper focus.

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<sup>216</sup> see chapter III for more details.

<sup>217</sup> The then Opposition leader R.K. Ranbir blamed the then Chief Minister Rishang Keishing of sticking to power by setting one community against the other. See *Frontline*, August 8, 1997. p-54. Also see *Eastern Panorama*, September, 1997. p.33.

## Conclusion

The conflict between the Zomi and Kuki in the wake of 1997, has been a good point to understand the complex dynamics of modernization and development upon these social groups and in mutual interactions. The impact of both modern static structures and also the conscious agency of modernizing elite need mention. The modern political institutions and processes such as ADCs, Community Development programmes, Universal Adult Franchise, Elections, etc. have influenced the modernization of the communities in question.

The importance of recognitions guaranteed by the Constitution of India among different Zo groups in Manipur is paramount over the place where they are located. They would rather identify themselves with their 'recognised' Tribe identity than their Zo identity and even more so against the fealty to the State. Further, on the questions of appropriate political behaviour, the responses are more on ethnic lines; that is, they regard their identity affiliation more than their Zo identity.<sup>218</sup> Behaviour based on ethnicity is strongly felt and often accompanied by hostility toward the 'others'. In short, social and political behavior based on tribes/ethnic is normatively sanctioned.

In such division among the Zo people, all social and political events have ethnic consequences. Conflicts among different Zo ethnic groups is thus at the centre of politics. This conflicts and divisions among the Zo people pose a serious threat to the cohesion of their relations among themselves and also a peaceful relationship with other ethnic groups within the state. These states of affairs also strain the bonds that sustain their oneness with their own ethnic groups living in the neighbouring states.

Protective discrimination like reservation in jobs, seats in legislature and welfare schemes have benefited at least a miniscule section among the community concerned. The unequal development of these ethnic groups has given rise to real or perceived

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<sup>218</sup> See Chapter IV under the title "Participation of Paites in Electoral Politics"

feelings of relative deprivation. This in turn has given rise to conflicts even among these oppressed sections.

The deeper, independent causes of their growing conflicts within the district are the increasing struggle for power, strife over issue of status, economic resources. It is also the failure of the state institutions, I am convinced, to provide a systematic arena for bargaining and failure of the state to control the violence of the socially powerful against the weak.

The pre-political relationship of the two ethnic communities was more or less good. The 1997 ethnic conflict has taken on more of a politically manufactured quality than in the past. Although ethnic violence are still common, it is clear that even here political elite are quite capable of pushing the issue in the direction of violence and riots.

The advent of Colonialism and Christianity in *Zo land* and its 'transformation' halted the gradual amalgamation and homogenization of the people into greater Zo community that was taking place in the pre-colonial period. But it was yet to emerge as a 'stable' group.<sup>219</sup> The colonial transformation affected the aspirations and identity of the nascent Zo nationality. The transformation led to the emergence of distinct class which comprised various elements viz., intellectuals, politicians, ethnic representatives etc. Ethnic and cultural affiliations and common aspirations and opposition brought them together. The non-Thadou speaking middle class of the so-called Chin-Kuki group grew in constant conflict with their Thadou speaking counterpart. It had to clash perpetually on all fronts- economic, political, social and ideological. There is a possibility as Paul Brass has stated that nation is created by the transformation of ethnic groups into formation and its transformation into nationalism can be reversible due to elite competition and internal division and contradiction.<sup>220</sup> This appears to be quite true.

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<sup>219</sup> Rise of consciousness and political aspiration were out of question at this stage of Zo nationality formation, as these are associated with a nationality only in a capitalist milieu. See Irfan Habib, *Interpreting Indian History*, Shillong 1986. pp.44-45.

<sup>220</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1991.



The Zomi ethnic middle class, like the other classes was concerned and affected by the social issues or reality of the day. However, it took upon itself the task of leading the development of the Zomi nationality. It successfully worked for the reinstatement of ZO as their generic name and tried to demolish the theory that all the ZO people were the so-called KUKI. Since they could not succeed in the absence of control over the state affairs, the Zomi ethnic middle class chose the alternative of raising awareness of the ZOMI regarding the socio-political environment.

The Zomi ethnic middle class thus converted the process of the formation and development of the Zomi nationality into a movement. Since the fate of the Zomi nationality was linked with the Kuki of Manipur the ethnic conflict became an integral part of the nationality movement.

The displacement of large number of Thadou speaking Kuki ethnic group into Churachandpur district in the early 1990s changed the ethno-demographic character of the society. Social fusion gave way to social distance. Displacement had a two-fold impact on the Zomi nationality formation. Firstly, it threatened to relegate the Zomi ethnic group into a minority in the district and secondly, it intensifies the ethnic conflict, spreading it from underground movement to the common people.

In the new Zo society ethnic divisions arose. The societal bi-ethnicity affected the Zo nationality formation. Firstly, it posed a serious challenge to the aspirations of the Zomi to be a 'uni-ethnic' area. Secondly, it threatened the political aspirations of the emerging Zomi nationality. Thirdly, the permanent presence of the displaced people impeded the development of Zomi ethnic movement.

The tensions between the two ethnic groups and the strains of Zo nationality formation were manifested in the political field too. The conflict between the interests and aspirations of the two groups spilled over to electoral politics. In the political structure where numbers could make or break a group, both the groups tried to get hold of the maximum legislative post in the district by asserting the ethnic identity in electoral

politics. Their efforts intensified the existing conflict between the Kuki and Zomi ethnic group.

The Kuki-Zomi ethnic conflict, thus, was an integral part of the process of development of the Zo nationality.

The rise and development of the ethnic conflict in Churachandpur district of Manipur had Zo nationality formation as its backdrop. Either of these was not an isolated process. In fact, the ethnic conflict and Zo nationality formation were inextricable parts of the same process- the development of the Zo nationality.

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